

# Improving Women's Rights in Swaziland

Update: April 2016

## Project Overview

The 'Improving Women's Rights in Swaziland' initiative is an ambitious four-year (2012-2016) project, funded by the UK's Big Lottery Fund. The project is now in its fourth and final year of implementation.

ACTSA is working in partnership with the Foundation for Social and Economic Justice (FSEJ) and implementing activities through, and with the support of, the Swaziland Rural Women's Assembly (SRWA). FSEJ and SRWA are both based in Manzini, Swaziland.

The project's intended outcomes have been defined as follows:

- Individual and collective empowerment of Swazi women contributes to their increased participation in local and national decision making which leads to improvements in the lives of Swazi women.
- Swazi women's rights are promoted, leading to current laws on their rights being effectively implemented; discrimination is reduced, and there is dialogue between government and civil society including consideration of new laws on women's rights.
- The Swazi women's rights movement grows; it is coordinated, self-sustaining and well governed and contributes to the achievement of increased rights for Swazi women.



Figure 1: Swaziland, a small, landlocked country, with borders to South Africa and Mozambique.

## Swaziland

- Africa's last remaining absolute monarchy;
- Population of 1.25 million people (70% living under the poverty line);
- Highest HIV rate in the world (26% amongst 15-49 year olds);
- Ongoing human rights violations including restrictions on the participation of political parties in the democratic process; a weakened judiciary; and limited women's rights.

## Project Successes

- The project has reached over 21,316 women through its activities;
- There are now 72 active peer educators who conduct door-to-door home visits, and civic education workshops in rural communities;
- Each year over 2,000 women have attended public meetings;
- The 'Progressive Women's Charter' was published in March, 2016.
- In 2015, an MP lobbying event was considered ground-breaking with 25 MPs pledging support to SRWA and the project;
- M&E has shown an increasing number of women reporting to have knowledge of rights and committed to sharing it and feeling less isolated;
- SRWA has grown to 4,820 members, including 560 paying members.



Photo 1: The Project Coordinator, Bonsile Mamba.



Photo 2: SRWA members distributing the Progressive Women's Charter in the Lubombo region.

## Challenges

- It is a continuously difficult climate for women and any organisation working on human rights due to extreme political sensitivity;
- Traditional structures, particularly in rural communities, continue to challenge the peer educators and project activities;
- The project continues to struggle to mobilise women in deeply rural areas, and those who work in the textile industry.

## Conclusions

We are pleased with the project's successes over the past three years. While recognising the challenges, we believe that this project, in its final year, will continue to empower Swazi women, promote their rights, and continue the growth of the women's rights movement in Swaziland.

In 2016, the project's activities will focus on organisational development of SRWA and FSEJ. Further, ACTSA will continue to support both organisations in pursuing further funding opportunities and ensuring that plans are in place for beyond the project's scope. It is vital that this important work continues and is sustained.

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