IRC-Cameroon’s Women Community Paralegals

Why a women community paralegals program in Cameroon?
A program justified by

**NEEDS**
- General lack of information and awareness around rights; particularly for women and HLP rights.
- Women and marginalized population have no means to seek access to their rights.

**CONTEXT**
- Lack of access, trust and understanding towards formal justice. Formal justice not very protective of women rights.
- Major use of traditional and informal law, usually harmful for women.

**PROGRAM SET UP**
- GBV & Prot team working in the same area for years.
- No local legal partner identified in the hard to reach/remote areas and none able to be present daily for a long period of time.

**VALUES & VISION**
- Develop a community-driven and -owned approach for legal programming.
- Ensure a sustainable approach to legal aid in the community.
- Support a transformative/social norm shifting agenda.
How was the women community paralegal program built?
1. Select legal thematic & the paralegal

ACCESS TO DOCUMENTATION

- Less sensitive thematic in this context
- Huge needs
- Added value of a community-based approach to advance the rights in this field
- Showcase that women can speak up for everyone in the community, not only “women talking to and about women-related matters”

HLP FOR WOMEN

- Primary needs identified resulting in inequal access to rights for women increasing vulnerability
- Complicated thematic where traditional law and formal law share space
- Added value of community-based approach in a space largely dominated by tradition and social norms

GBV

- Primarily identified as most sensitive thematic but huge needs
- Cooperation with WPE team and needs expressed by WPE team
- Some issue (i.e: early marriage) would need a more informal & prevention approach
Developing paralegal manual and training

**ToT format**

The manual is build as a training manual but talk to IRC legal team who will mainly use it to provide the law training to paralegals.

**Skills and competencies**

Key skills are essential for paralegals to make sure they are also briefed on techniques and methodologies. And to be viewed and trained as professional.

**Law training curriculum**

Must be based on a preliminary in-depth legal analysis & legal research. It includes not only the law but also practices, jurisprudence. Many times the laws are old, not used in reality.

**Phased approach**

Like the approach the manual has been phased with different level of paralegals. Each module will then be transformed into ‘easy to read’ 2pager to build an accessible ‘manual’/training material for paralegals.
Result, success and challenges of the paralegal program
Legal awareness: 57,660
- On civil documentation
- On HLP
- On GBV

Legal assistance: 1415 cases
Legal counselling: 920 cases

835 referral
- 65 GBV referral towards PAF program
- 810 person accessing civil documentation (H/F)
- Acces a la terre

Mediation et advocacy
- Identify needs for civil doc at administrative level
- Participation in local dispute resolution
- Contact with Wakil (traditional justice actor)-support mediation

Support Women voice & challenge partia rcial social norms

% LEGAL ASSISTANCE PER SEX

- Men: 57%
- Women: 43%
Challenges & Ambitions

New way towards localization & partnership

Challenges at community level
- Lack of equipment, material
- Behavioral change – Facing resistant particularly regarding women’s right

Challenges at technical level
- Want to expand their knowledge on other legal thematic (child protection; resources denial;...)
- Want to have more link and capacities to engage with formal justice

Challenges at the organizational/system level
- Fundraising: hybrid approach between conflict and development
- Facing/fighting ‘assumptions’: « informal justice if harmful for GBV survivors so we should avoid it »

Ambitions & Vision: a new way towards localization & partnership
- Support the 50 women paralegal network in becoming an association
- Support/train at org & admin level (new competencies & staffing ?)