

# Gender survey to assess effects of customary laws on women



The Namibia Development Trust (NDT), in association with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and other non-governmental organisations, is doing a survey about the effects of customary laws on women.

Ms Albertina Shipepe of the NDT elaborated on the nature, problems and progress of the survey. The aim of the survey was to assess the legal and socio-economic status of women in Namibia, she said.

Upon completion the survey will have covered the Owambo, Kavango and Herero regions as women in these regions, especially, have to cope with problems related to traditional rules.

There was a big difference between the written laws and

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the laws commonly used in the rural areas, Albertina said.

Although women and men should be equal before the law, women in the above mentioned regions did not have the same legal status as men, she added. Albertina argued that the lack of access to information that could change their situation, further aggravated the women's situation.

The survey started in September 1992 and is estimated to run until 1994.

Altogether 1 800 women will be interviewed in each region. Fieldworkers are going from house to house and interview all the women they find there.

Limited access to education, the lack of primary health care facilities, a high child mortality rate, and the fact that women are unable to make informed choices on family planning methods have been identified as major issues of concern so far.

One of the main problems experienced by the fieldworkers was that people thought they represented political parties. Albertina said this was understandable in a country where the needs of black people (and black women in particular) had been ignored by the former government.

People's views and opinions have commonly been sought only at times when their votes were needed, she added. This caused people to be suspicious of anyone seeking information from, or showing an interest in them, Albertina said.

Other problems involved complaints by men on why only women were interviewed, and also the difficulty of gaining the cooperation of some headmen in some communities. This resulted in the progress of the survey being delayed.

## D I C T I O N A R Y

**Customary law:** - Law in accordance with a particular established way of behaving.

**Aggravated:** - making a bad situation worse.

**Sought:** - Past tense of seek; meaning search.

**Suspicious:** - Indicating distrust.