

# Legal Assistance Centre

## Making human rights real since 1988

### How one woman's journey strengthened the rights of all mothers in Namibia

Anna (not her real name) was in the midst of labour when she was asked to sign a form. She thought it was to give consent for a Caesarean section. In fact, when she woke up again, **she had been sterilised**. Anna found out only when seeking birth control some six weeks after the birth of her baby.

**The Legal Assistance Centre investigated** and found that state hospitals commonly sterilised women diagnosed with HIV. Although these women would never be mothers again, we **helped bring court applications to seek compensation**, in an effort to publicise the trend and acknowledge their voices and pain.

**The Court agreed that these women had been sterilised without proper consent**, although it could not be categorically linked to their HIV status. Following the hearing, **nurses at Namibia's state hospitals are no longer allowed to solicit consent from patients in labour: A doctor must now ensure informed consent**. The case was widely reported in Africa and the U.K.



Public outcry demanding the end of forced sterilizations: a rally we organised in conjunction with the Southern African Litigation Centre and the Namibian Women's Health Network in 2011

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supporting and holding government accountable  
for the basic rights of its people

