

Women urged to register customary marriages as soon as possible

During Women's Month, ProBono.Org held its annual Women's Day Focus Event, where members of the legal profession offered *pro bono* legal assistance to women. The event was held at the Women's Jail Atrium at Constitution Hill.

Head of the family law division at ProBono.Org, Sharon Pillay, said that those who attended were assisted with legal advice on matters relating to deceased estates, divorces, primary residence, care and contact of children, maintenance, medical negligence, evictions and motor vehicle collisions.

The guest speaker at the event was the director of the National Movement of Rural Women, Likhapha Mbatha, who gave a talk on customary law.

Ms Pillay said that Ms Mbatha spoke about the problems that arise because of non-registration of customary marriages, which should be registered as soon after the marriage as possible. 'Frequently people only try and register their marriages after their spouse has died. Evidence of a customary marriage has to be produced in order for it to be registered. However, registration so many years after the marriage is difficult to prove and the Department of Home Affairs is not equipped to make a proper inquiry. A common problem that affects rural women is found when their urban spouse remarries in an urban area. On the death of the man, the urban wife reports the death and inserts herself as executor and her family as the heirs. Sometimes this takes place without the rural woman even knowing her husband has died,' Ms Pillay said.



Director of the National Movement of Rural Women, Likhapha Mbatha, giving the keynote address at the ProBono.Org Women's Day Focus Event.

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