

64th Commission on the Status of Women – CSW64

In adopting the 2030 Agenda, Member States made a pledge to leave no one behind in their implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This requires consistent international agreement and action.

Widows and half-widows, where the husbands have disappeared, are consistently left behind.

For many people a “widow” means someone of mature years, but in reality among the approximately 300 million widows worldwide many are still children aged between 10 and 13.

Millions of widows suffer poverty, abuse, neglect and persecution: a “social death”. This excludes them from society, renders them invisible and unable to contribute to the economy, and means they are omitted from national statistics.

Widows are affected by all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and have much to contribute. Given support, widows can raise the economic status of their immediate and wider societies, becoming active agents of positive change within their communities. Through our work with partners particularly in East Africa, we have found that with only small amounts of seed funding, widows have been able to have their own socio economic projects which enabled them to feed, house, clothe their children and send them to school; with an education the children can break out of poverty. Elsewhere, similar projects have enabled widows to set up food shops, make jewellery, sell their home-grown fruit and export textiles. An entire community benefits if widows are given the support to use their amazing skills and talents. They are net contributors to society and should not be viewed as a burden.

At a debate in the UK House of Lords on 19 June 2019, Baroness Sugg (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development) said that widows are often seen as passive victims whereas in fact they are “the backbone of their communities.” She added that we must ensure widows are not “trapped in a cage of poverty and stigma.” However, in order to be helped they need to be visible, which they currently are not.

Widows’ Rights International, together with the Global Alliance of widows organisations, and all those working on widow’s rights, urges the 64th Commission on the Status of Women to work with civil society, especially in obtaining disaggregated data on the numbers and status of widows. We also seek the recognition of widows as actively contributing to their communities.

Further to the UN theme: The Future We Want, the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism, we urge States Parties to break the cycle of poverty by taking robust measures to enable and support widows. Widows and half-widows have lost their husbands but should not lose their own lives. It is way past time to stop their invisibility.

Graduate Women International
Global Fund for Widows
National Alliance of Women’s Organizations
Mothers Union



Enabling widows to have a brighter - and fairer - future

The Tandem Project

Make Mothers Matter

Guild of Service

Widows for peace through democracy

International Federation of Business and Professional Women

Gray Panthers

National Board of Catholic Women of England and Wales