

Overview

Widows Rights International (WRI) is a long established organisation fighting for the rights of widows all over the world. We have recently concentrated on sub-Saharan Africa. Conflict, disease and early marriage have increased the number of widows across the globe with young women and girls becoming widows as well as women throughout the life cycle. In addition to those women whose husbands have died, there is an ever increasing number of women who are heading households due to conflict and migration, where the situation of their husbands is unknown and they are de facto widows.

In no country are widows and widowers treated equally but only in some regions do widows have to tolerate the acceptance of the abuse of widows at both local and national levels. The belief in the natural inferiority of women contributes to this, but so also does the perversion of inhumane and degrading practices which have grown up in very different economic and political conditions around the globe.

Widows are organising to break the silence but they need support. Provision of information is critical. As a UK registered charity, Widows Rights International (WRI) has provided support through its website, newsletter and network of local widows groups, concerned lawyers and human right activists. It shares information on successful strategies and tactics that have enabled widows to challenge their despoilment and win court cases, to ensure that their governments translate international human rights commitments into legislation, and to see that legislation is implemented at the grassroots level. However there is still much work to be done as abusive widowhood practices are still deeply embedded in many cultures.

WRI is the leading source of information on widows. We compile the stories of widows and the organisations that help them. We are seeking to increase our data base of organisations and individuals working for widows and female headed households, together with their stories of overcoming the challenges that face them in addition to the case studies of legal victories. This web-based and interactive platform will enable greater exchange of vital information for all those concerned with challenging the abuse of widows.

WRI disseminates this information through our regular newsletter and we seek to increase this information flow by seeking out new sources of information as well as intensifying our use of media and social media.

We have recently concentrated on sub-Saharan Africa because of the intense abuse of widows includes degrading and harmful mourning rites. These harmful practices are not only in direct contravention of international agreements, such as CEDAW, and national legislation based on such agreements but with the HIV/Aids pandemic, are also a considerable threat to national health.

WRI has been involved in the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Committee on the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. We have organised delegations to attend these UN processes and have organised events to raise awareness of the plight of widows but also to celebrate their achievements. We have enabled widows and representatives of organisations working for widows from Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Algeria, Iraq, Kurdistan, Sudan, Egypt, Nepal to attend CSW to have a voice at the UN. We continue to seek to provide opportunities for widows themselves to speak out about their concerns and their achievements. We continue to work to influence policy at the international level in regard to widows. Within the framework of Agenda 2030 and the concept of "leave no one behind" we are working to raise awareness of the importance of "last woman first" and were co-founders of the Global Alliance for Last Woman First, as widows the world over are the poorest and most discriminated against. WRI has been involved in raising awareness on the issue of widows in the UK and has held several briefings for parliamentarians in the Houses of Parliament, both Commons and Lords. We seek to continue and expand this work. We are planning events with think tanks in the UK and working with Commonwealth partners. WRI recently provided a "lunch and learn" for DFID personnel to increase awareness of the situation of widows worldwide.

WRI has undertaken research on the situation of widows and we seek to increase this research in order to gain valuable data to influence policy.

WRI has been very successful in fundraising for widows organisations. Women of Purpose is a successful organisation in Uganda which has grown in strength and reach since the seed funding provided by WRI. This is one example of the many organisations helping thousands of women and girls that WRI has enabled. We seek to expand this fund raising work to assist those organisations too small and under-resourced to achieve success to raise funds on their own. The aim is to accompany them until they become social enterprises developing a sustainable fiscal strategy.

Our goals are to:

- Support the international campaign to end harmful cultural practices which ignore the human rights of widows and lead to their dire poverty and social exclusion.
- Raise awareness and understanding of the discrimination and violence encountered by widows in many countries.
- Continue to advocate for widows' rights to be integrated into the human rights agendas of national and international agencies.
- Promote the emergence of a vibrant and informed network of community based groups, widows' groups, NGOs, lawyers and human rights activists working on widowhood issues.