



Enabling Widows to have a Brighter and Fairer Future

No 33

Summer 2018

International Widows' Day 23 June 2018

As you know, 23 June was designated International Widows' Day by the UN General Assembly in 2010.

According to UN Women's 2018 report,

[Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), nearly 1 in 10 of the estimated 258 million widows globally live in extreme poverty – with little or no input to policies impacting their survival.

Read more here:

[UN news on International Widows' Day](#)

Widowhood at the 38th Session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva

WPD with WUNRN, Dr Lori Post, Dr Mohindar Watson on child widows, Silvia Perl-Levin on older widows, Julia Wu of the Global Fund for Widows, and other speakers addressing widowhood issues, held a very successful meeting at the 38th Session of the Human Rights Council, on **21 June 2018** in the Palais des Nations, Geneva.

In addition, we showed a ground-breaking Video presentation by Rosaline Orwa, Founding Director of the [@RonaFoundation](#), which champions the protection of widows' rights in Kenya (we had showed this also at the UN Women LNBO meeting and WPD parallel event at CSW 62 in March 2018). Rosaline spoke bravely and candidly about degrading in-mourning rites such as ritual cleansing by unprotected sex.

We called for the UN to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Widowhood, and a CEDAW General Rapporteur and a Resolution.

Our next most important meeting will be our presentation to CEDAW on 16 July in Geneva. And we are working with MEPs to present to the EU Parliament in late autumn.

At WPD we are now focusing on the SDGs and the 2030 agenda, PSVi, 1325 and VAWG.

Margaret Owen, OBE
Trustee/Founder/Director of Widows Through Peace & Democracy (WPD)
<http://www.widowsforpeace.org>

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WRI on Voice of Islam

To mark International Widows' Day, Faiza Mirza, Executive Producer of the Drive Time Show invited WRI to talk about our work on www.voiceofislam.co.uk and publicise the plight of widows worldwide. Trustee Lynn Everson highlighted child widows and our WRI event on 4/9/18.

The audio from the programme is on our website here: [radio interview](#)

More reports from CSW62

CSW62 Side & Parallel Events on Widowhood in Rural Areas

"At times a widow becomes part of her husband's estate."

Two links to YouTube videos from CSW62: [Widowhood: Economic Empowerment, Poverty Eradication, and Achieving the SDGs](#) and

[CSW 62 Parallel Event - Global Fund For Widows, Widows Development Organization, Guild of Service, Zarin Hainsworth of Widows Rights International, and CTWOO](#)

"In some countries, children are married even before they are born."

On the Agreed Conclusions from CSW62:

The Global Fund for Widows is delighted to share with you a milestone victory in our collective advocacy efforts for Widows around the world, as "Widows" are formally acknowledged in the final CSW62 Agreed Conclusions for the first time in history. While the reference to "Widows," in preambular clause 40, is in the context of "older women," we are extremely grateful that our government partners have collaborated and committed to acknowledging widowhood in general through ensuring its appearance in the

text. We hope that this is the beginning of the mainstreaming of this root source of intergenerational poverty.

We thank The Honorable Dr. Maya Morsy, President of Egypt's National Council of Women, The Honorable Dr. Jean Kalilani, Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare of Malawi, and The Honorable Dr. Margaret Kobia, Minister of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs of Kenya, and the The Honorable Mrs. Ghania Eddalia, Minister of National Solidarity, Family, and Women's Affairs of Algeria for their visionary and intrepid co-sponsorship of this language.

We are greatly indebted to the Permanent Missions of Egypt, HE Ambassador Mohamed Edrees, Deputy Permanent Representative Mohamed Gad, and First Secretary Fatma Abdelkawy for proposing and defending widowhood in the text.

A special note of gratitude to the good people, government and Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom including First Secretary Aaron Holtz, for being a leader in recognizing, supporting, and funding the issue of Widowhood.

We are also grateful to the Permanent Mission of Malawi, including Deputy Permanent Representative Lot Dzonzi and Counsellor Loyce Merrick for their support of widowhood at the CSW.

This is an important step in legitimizing the cause of widowhood in the eyes of the world, and opens a path for us to begin work with the CEDAW, HRC, and our respective governments.

Heather Ibrahim-Leathers, CFA
President, Global Fund for Widows
www.globalfundforwidows.org

CSW62 Widowhood Parallel Event

This paper was presented by Ferdous Ara Begum at the CSW Parallel event on the Theme "RURAL OLDER WOMEN/WIDOWS: BEYOND POVERTY AND VIOLENCE: PROGRAMS/POLICIES"

Empowerment of rural older women and widows and access to technology and basic human rights

At the very outset I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me in this very important discussion session.

The UN Secretary-General in his Message on International Women's Day 2018, said 'Women's empowerment is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Investing in women is the most effective way to lift communities and even countries. Women's participation makes peace agreements stronger, societies more resilient and economies more vigorous.'

But it is evident that in the Asian economy in both urban and rural areas, women are fewer both in the formal and informal employment sectors. Women also tend to be paid less than men for the same work or work of equal value. Moreover, gender-based discrimination in employment throughout their life has a cumulative impact in old age, forcing older women and widows to face disproportionately lower incomes and pensions, or even no pension, compared with men.

The population remains predominantly rural in most of the Asian and African regions and the majority of them are women - including older women and disabled women.

In Bangladesh, rural women/widows play a significantly important role towards bringing change in the social fabric and achieving a self-sustained economy through the use of micro finance and the micro entrepreneurship mechanism. But

limited access to credit, healthcare, education and gender based violence are among the many challenges they face in their day-to-day life. Empowering them is essential, not only for the well-being of rural communities, but also for overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural workforce.

It is also true that many older women/widow provide care for the family of their migrant children, or sometimes the sole caregivers of their dependent young children, spouses or elderly parents or relatives. The financial and emotional cost of this unpaid work and support are rarely recognised. Women's unpaid work at home or in the agricultural sector also needs to be recognised and valued.

There are four occupational groups of informal workers, such as domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors and waste pickers, which may be defined as the most important pattern and source of income for poor rural women, older women and widows of all ages. Domestic workers who are mostly rural poor women, provide essential services such as cleaning, cooking, childcare and gardening in other peoples' homes. But they are mostly excluded from social security schemes and collective bargaining processes in many countries and the regulatory framework for domestic workers in most countries fails to provide sufficient workplace protection.

Home-based workers, mostly micro entrepreneurs, produce goods or services for the market from within or around their homes. Home-based work represents a significant share of rural and urban employment, especially for women in many countries. Income from these workers provides crucial support to their households, although they face a range of vulnerabilities, including: inadequate market facilities, instability and insecurity of work, unsafe working conditions, low

earnings and lack of collateral-free loan facilities.

To accommodate more rural women and widows in the workforce, appropriate fiscal measures, budget allocation, proper planning and gender based policies are necessary. These include: access to discrimination and barrier-free training and credit facilities, access to land and inheritances, markets and seed money. Besides, part-time work and a flexible retirement age may be introduced and the wage-pay-gap need to be reduced, so as to protect women's - as well as older women's - rights to continue their work as they wish to and to accumulate pension benefits, where applicable, on an equal level with men.

Balancing work and family responsibilities, sharing domestic work, technology based job opportunities, where physical labour is less required and above all ensuring an environment free from violence and discrimination at home and at work are important for the larger participation of women in the workforce.

In most of Asian society older people are unable to work due to sight problems. Low-cost cataract operations could bring them back to the workforce again and thus help them to maintain their dignity and economic sustainability.

The increasing demand for care services has been driven by changing demographics, which need a clear and appropriate policy support. When the Governments of receiving countries realize this reality and act accordingly they will help maintain the workforce in this sector. Bangladesh has witnessed a substantial increase in female employment in labour-intensive export-oriented industries, especially the readymade garment sector since 1990.

The composition, quality and participation of the workforce depends on the socio-economic and cultural background of the country, the gender and poverty line

distribution of the workforce, their skills and educational background and above all on the interaction between the demand and supply side of the labour force. However, challenges relating to different wages based on gender and other aspects of compliance with labour standards, e.g., working hours, health & safety in the work place, collective bargaining and child care facilities still remain a barrier.

Under-employment and unemployment among young and older people (men and women) are very common due to the lack of job opportunities or a lack of skills, training and experience plus a stereotyped attitude towards age and gender.

Fiscal choices for the investment in skill-building, training and technological advancement, and collateral-free microcredit are necessary to enhance the shrinking workforce. There is a rapid expansion of micro-finance in rural areas in Asian society, supported women's employment in the poultry and livestock sector.

As for example, in rural Bangladesh and in many other Asian countries traditional birth attendants (TBAs) are still active. They perform almost 88% of deliveries occurring at home.

These TBAs are mostly older women. They may be trained as skilled birth attendants for safe delivery and quality care in pregnancy and childbirth for women, and could fulfil the need to provide a low cost medical service to pregnant women in rural areas. These policy measures could also help older women maintain their professional skills.

The role of migration in addressing perceived imbalances in population structures brought about by population ageing, which arises from declining fertility and mortality is very important in the ageing Asian society.

To compensate for the shortfall of labour, many Asian countries are welcoming the migrant work force. But unfortunately most of the receiving countries do not have appropriate laws or bilateral agreements with the sending countries to safeguard the safety, security and human rights of migrant labour. Women migrant workers fall victim to gender-based violence during transit or in the destination country.

Over the years, the increasing demand for social care services and the cost of providing these services has prompted a series of political and policy debates. The migrant work force in this sector is predominantly female and migrant women who are low paid with low status so are not protected by domestic legal support.

In the USA and other Western countries, as the demand for long-term care continues to grow, societies are facing a shortage of care workers. The role of care-giving in these countries has increasingly been filled by immigrants. But today's hard-line attitudes towards immigration by these Governments may create difficulty and imbalance in this sector.

Many Sri Lankan, Filipino or Bangladeshi women migrant workers who provide care services face difficulties in the destination countries.

Fiscal measures and coordinated policy adaptations and informed choices by the Governments and society based on a life course approach and free from age and gender based discrimination may help to maintain a steady and productive workforce for the continuous development of the country, which may also ensure stability and social inclusion for all ages in the ageing Asian society.

Governments are predicting a significant expansion in the older population so they must create job opportunities for older workers as greater numbers of mature women and men will be needed in the labour force to meet the needs of our ageing population.

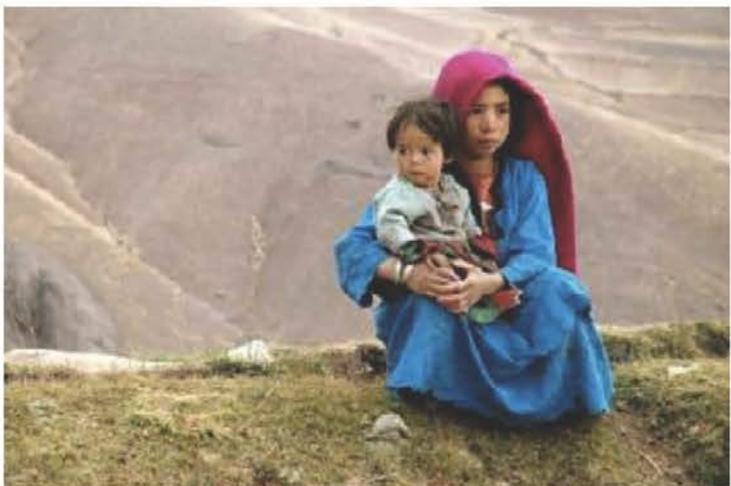


Ferdous Ara Begum (pictured 2nd from left)
Member, Board of Trustees, HelpAge International
Former Member of the UN CEDAW Committee

Bangladesh has witnessed a substantial increase in female employment in labour-intensive export-oriented industries.

Tuesday 4 September
11.00- 13.00
Committee Room 2A
House of Lords
please allow time for security

Photos: WUNRN, Oberon's Grove, The Indian Express



WRI:Child widows and young widows

Chair: Baroness Anelay

Speakers:

Caroline Ford, CEO Consortium for Street Children

Matt Jackson, Director, UK Office, UNFPA

Zarin Hainsworth OBE - Chair WRI

Heather Ibrahim-Leathers, CFA - President, Global Fund for Widows

Lucy Jenkins - NAWO YWA

Ella Nielsen - NAWO YWA

Bella Brown - NAWO YWA

rsvp: administrator@widowsrights.org



Widowhood in all its forms has huge implications for women and children the world over. One area that is rarely discussed is child widows. The increase in child marriage has led to an increase in child and young widows.

This interactive panel of experts, activists and young women, will highlight the challenges, share best practice & possible solutions. There will be time for discussions and a section to glean top key actions for dissemination and implementation.



WIDOWS
DEVELOPMENT
ORGANISATION

ROZARIA
MEMORIAL TRUST



NAWO
Connecting Women

About Widows Rights International

Widows' Rights International supports organisations in sub-Saharan Africa working for social justice and human rights for widows.

WRI promotes: right to keep their home and property, right to inheritance, land ownership and possession, right to keep their children, right to not be forcibly married to deceased husband's kin, and the right to work outside the home.

WRI works: to promote the recognition of widows' specific vulnerability, to combat negative social attitudes which lead to isolation, exploitation and poverty, to bring these practices to an end.

WRI mobilises action through:

International organisations, national governments, legal and other civil society organisations.



@WidowsRI



@Widows.Rights.International

Widows Rights International
Wixamtree
Sand Lane
Northill
SG18 9AD
UK

Ideas? Suggestions? Comments? Contributions?

If you have comments, suggestions, interesting stories, ideas, or concerns please e-mail us at:

administrator@widowsrights.org

WRI's goals

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.

HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

There are three pathways for you to make a difference.

1. Become a member of the WRI network.

If you belong to a women's group or are a human rights activist, legal professional, journalist, academic or are working for a NGO and are interested in challenging traditional harmful practices and abuse of widows, or providing services for widows and their children, please join our network.

2. Send us information about widows challenging mistreatment, changes in the law or cases of widows affected by harmful cultural or traditional practices.

3. Make a donation. Please [click here](#).