

Global Fund for Widows

Commission on the Status of Women – 68th Session

Side Event Concept Note

Widowhood, Self-determination, and Equality:

Financial Empowerment of Widows as a Tool to Eradicate Poverty



The Global Fund for Widows respectfully requests **the Republic of Poland** to host a Side Event on Widowhood at the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. In hosting a Side Event, **the Republic of Poland** will indicate being one of the leading nations to recognize the importance of addressing the issue of widowhood and call for necessary and appropriate social protections. With this, **the Republic of Poland** will not only legitimize the centrality that widowhood has with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Still, it will also have the opportunity to share best practices in pioneering social protection policies.

Introduction & Our Work

Global Fund for Widows is a nonprofit organization with Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC dedicated to empowering widows and female heads of household for the past 15 years.

The widows in our network are enabled to overcome poverty through skills-based training, job creation, and access to capital. We aim to help widows achieve financial stability, self-sufficiency, and economic empowerment and assist them as they become role models to their children and others. In addition to successfully economically empowering 26,000 widows, GFW and its partners have successfully lobbied several governments to change laws to better protect widows' rights. GFW is based in New York City and conducts advocacy at the United Nations. We have had the opportunity to champion and serve as subject matter experts on UN General Assembly resolution AR 76/252, "Addressing the Situation of Widows," and participating in the Security Council Arria Formula Meeting, "Closing the Protection Gap for Widows in Conflict and Post-Conflict Settings."

Addressing widowhood is critical to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Disinheritance, Discrimination, and Harmful Practices endured by widows in some parts of the world directly link widowhood and poverty (SDG 1). However, it's also directly and indirectly linked to most Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Global Fund for Widows maintains that we CANNOT achieve the SDGs of the Agenda 2030 without securing the rights of 300 million widows.



GFW's self-sufficient
widow and
entrepreneur

AMAL PROJECT, EGYPT

Suggested event

Topic of discussion

Widowhood, Self-determination, and Equality:

Financial Empowerment of Widows as a Tool to Eradicate Poverty

Widowhood is a pivotal gender issue that affects over 300 million women and 500 million of their children worldwide. However, it still remains disregarded, neglected, and silenced. When a woman becomes a widow, she is labeled with a strong cultural bias and often suffers due to traditional practices, norms, and rituals. And so widows become subject to a dual form of marginalization, both as a woman and a widow. Consequently, they are subjected to loss of income, status, and opportunities, primarily stemming from traditional behaviors or customary laws that protect and enhance practices such as disinheritance. Unequal inheritance rights foster socio-economic barriers that lead to women's financial exclusion

and nurture the poverty cycle. These encourage different forms of discrimination, such as stereotypes, prejudices, and harmful traditional practices that leave severe consequences for the widows and the communities themselves.

Financial empowerment is an imperative tool for the economic empowerment of widows, the empowerment of all women and girls, and the socio-economic development of a community. The ability of widows to save, invest, and access credit significantly impacts long-term poverty reduction. However, it is common for widows to be denied access to bank accounts, credit, or legal protection, which altogether leads to a significant socio-economic degradation that affects their children and future generations.

In many cases, the community surrounding a widow prevents access to financial services or even neglects gendered economic empowerment. Additionally, it is common for women to be excluded from information-sharing institutions, such as credit bureaus and registries, thus reducing their credit histories and precluding access to financial services even more. As a consequence of neglecting financial growth to a significant part of the workforce, the entire community is affected, decelerating economic development and enhancing long-term poverty levels.

This promotes gender-abusive behaviors, enhances illiteracy, and nurtures the poverty cycle. It also pressures women into taking alternative solutions that often lead to outcomes such as human trafficking or child marriage, which thoroughly fosters the widowhood problem. According to UN Women, there are over 1.9 million child widows, along with those unreported.

Therefore, financial empowerment is not only about access to financial services but also about social integration. Allowing widows to participate in the economy actively contributes to their social inclusion, promoting gender equality and breaking down cultural and social barriers.

Financial inclusion of widows means economic empowerment, social inclusion, gender equality, sustainable development, and the economic proliferation of a community. Ensuring widows' access to financial services is a fundamental right and the only path to achieving the 2030 Development Goals.

Nevertheless, how can we achieve gender equality and reach the SDGs when millions of widows still have no access to financial services or socio-economic protection against those who marginalize and abuse them? How can widows achieve self-determination and become heads of households in a context that outshines, restricts, and holds them back?

Panel composition

Panelists will discuss the issue of widowhood and underscore the link between financial empowerment, widowhood, disinheritance, and poverty.

We expect to have panelists from Kenya, India, South Africa, Costa Rica, and Sierra Leone to discuss the various programs within their countries and what is needed to ensure the stability of widows around the world.

Suggested co-sponsors

Potential co-sponsors for this side event could be:

- Permanent Mission of the Republic of Sierra Leone to the UN
- Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the UN

- Permanent Mission of the Republic of South Africa to the UN
- Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya to the UN
- Permanent Mission of the Republic of India to the UN

Expected Outcomes

Our panel will offer evidence of the importance of developing access to finance for widows worldwide. We expect to generate an outcome report that will be globally disseminated and shared with various Missions from member states. We expect governments to acknowledge and be receptive to our recommendations.

We appreciate your cooperation in helping GFW address this problem and welcome you into being one of the leading nations to call for necessary and appropriate financial inclusion.