



widow



Global Fund for Widows

Land Rights and Widowhood

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Land Rights, Widowhood, and Economic Growth

The Global Fund for Widows

The Global Fund for Widows' data shows that **48% of the women who owned or had access to land suffered land grabbing after their husband's passing or absence**. When dispossessed, widows and their children lose their livelihoods and become destitute.

Land ownership rights represent a key intersecting issue with widowhood and economic growth. **Despite producing more than 50 percent of the food grown worldwide, women in half the world are still denied equal land and property rights**. In many regions, women can only access land through their spouses or male family members. And, when losing them, they lose everything. This instability drives substantial economic consequences and represents a major deterrent to economic growth.

Several formal, customary, and societal norms contribute to widows' land dispossession:

1. **Legal barriers for women to access, own and administer assets.** In many countries, women do not have the same legal rights as men to own assets. Hence, once their husband is deceased, they lose the right to access and work the land they have taken care of for years and, therefore, their livelihood.
1. **Legal barriers for women to inherit from their spouses.** Even when women are legally allowed to own assets, one of the few options they have to do so is through inheritance. However, a quarter of the countries in the world still have discriminatory inheritance rights laws for surviving female spouses. Often, widows cannot access the inheritance, and their assets will go to their in-laws.
1. **Marriage certification.** Even where equal inheritance laws exist, many widows cannot prove the existence of their marriage as they were married through informal marriage rituals and are unaware of the importance of legally registering their marriage. They are, therefore, not legally entitled to any inheritance.
1. **Cultural and societal norms.** In recent years, national governments have made commendable efforts to approve equal ownership, inheritance, and marriage policies in their countries. Unfortunately, these laws are yet to be reflected in the reality of the day-to-day lives of citizens. In most countries, it is still believed that women and men have fundamentally different roles and that it is men who should own and control the land. Moreover, more than 90% of the widows that GFW interviewed admitted that they were unaware of their rights and new legislation.

Global Fund for Widows served as subject matter experts on **UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/252 "Addressing the Situation of Widows."** Among other recommendations, we included:

1. Eliminate any barriers, legal inconsistencies, and discriminatory policies and laws, where they exist, that impede the rights of all women, including widows, to access to, use, ownership of and control over land, property, and inheritance rights.
1. Take appropriate measures to establish domestic processes for registering and recognizing all marriages, following domestic legislation and justice systems, while eliminating child, early and forced marriage.
1. Ensure that widows have full access to inheritance and social protection as well as legal support, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities, and health-care services, including mental health.

Moreover, we encourage national governments to:

1. Develop **digital property records**.
2. Include **women on land deeds**.
3. Consider mandatory **joint titling for married couples and lower property taxes for joint or female owners**.
4. Engage in **awareness campaigns** on female property ownership rights, marriage registration, inheritance laws, and gender role deconstruction.

About the Global Fund for Widows

The Global Fund for Widows is dedicated to empowering widows and female heads of households to overcome dispossession and poverty through skills-based training, job creation, and micro-finance. Ultimately, our goal is to help widows achieve financial stability, self-sufficiency, and, importantly, become role models within their families and community.

Upon the death of their spouse, a widow is at risk of experiencing three main types of human rights violations: disinheritance, discrimination, and harmful practices. These violations endured by widows in some parts of the world are directly linked to widowhood and poverty (SDG 1) but are also indirectly linked to most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Due to the cascading impacts on the widow and her children, they will often experience challenges such as accessing education, healthcare, nutrition, and justice.

Global Fund for Widows maintains that we cannot achieve the SDGs of the Agenda 2030 without securing the rights of widows.