

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Are you a widow? Do you know a widow who needs help? Do you need to know more about your rights as a widow? Are you in need of general counseling after the death of a husband? Are you finding it hard to make ends meet after the death of your spouse?

There are places you can visit and you'll be given the support that can make a difference

- **Human Development Initiative**
8, Fola Agoro Street, Shomolu
Lagos State
- **Widows in Development**
42, Opebi Road, Ikeja
Lagos State
- **Society for Women Development and Empowerment of Nigeria (SWODEN)**
Plot 2 Badawa New layout
P.O. Box 2240, Kano State
- **International Federation of Women Lawyers**
14, Makoko Road, Yaba, Lagos
or all FIDA offices Nationwide
- **Widow Support Centre**
1, Afinni Street, Masha,
Surulere, Lagos State
- **Widows Concern (WICON)**
Chinwuba House, Ndikellionwu,
Orumba North LGA P. O. Box 1132 Awka,
Anambra State
- **Widows Development Organisation**
29, Abakiliki Road, GRA,
Enugu
- **Widows Association of Nigeria**
c/o Ministry of Women Affairs and
Youth Development,
Marine Base
Port Harcourt, Rivers State

Now that you know more about widows, join the cause. Pass this brochure to someone who needs it. Better still, watch "Till Death Do Us Part" and get copies for your family and friends. Because when it comes to change, no effort is too small.

WHOWE ARE

This plea for widows is a message from CFC, an NGO committed to raising Africans' Awareness on environment and development issues to create the positive change needed to improve the state of the continent. The plight of three widows from the Eastern part of Nigeria in the film "Till Death Do Us Part" is part of this commitment. The film is produced by CFC and the Television Trust for the Environment with funding from the European Union.

For copies of the film and the film guide, contact,



Communicating for Change

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Sources: 1. Nwadinobi E., *Widowhood in Nigeria: The case of four Eastern States, 1995*
2. Otaluka A. O. *The Rights of Widows in Nigeria: 1992* 3. Owen, M, *The World of the Widow: 1994* 4. Sotade N., "Pray Never to be a Widow" *The Guardian*, June 4, 1997

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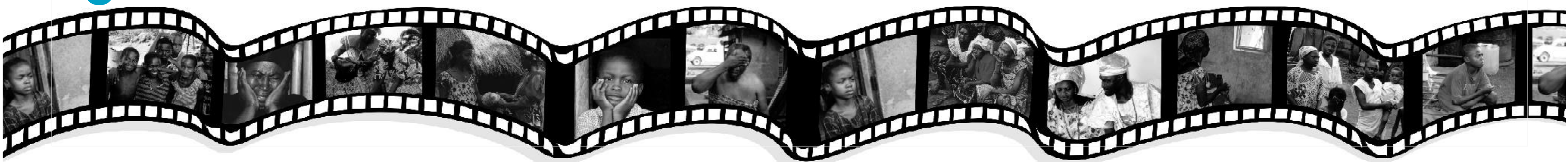
The Truth About WIDOWHOOD in Nigeria

Through the ages, the status of women has been a source of concern. In Africa, especially Nigeria, women experience inequalities in their social, political, economic and cultural lives. However, more than these, they are very likely to spend much of their lives as a widow, in often-terrible circumstances. The need to increase awareness of widowhood problems and solutions in Nigeria is the purpose for the 30-minute documentary "Till Death Do Us Part".

Even if you do not get to see this touching film, why not open this brochure, and learn how you can make a difference.

It is not always the case that widows in developing countries are supported by their extended families, or by adult sons, quickly remarried to a kin member or that they are mostly elderly women cared for in the community.

-Empowering Widows in Development



PROBLEMS

- **CONFINEMENT:** The widow is not allowed to fetch water, cook or go to the market. This period can last up to a year and the widow is forced to depend on others.
- **DEFACEMENT:** This includes hair scraping. It is intended to make the woman unattractive since the hair is said to be the woman's crowning glory.
- **DISINHERITANCE:** This denies the wife the right to inherit or own property. In-laws force the widow out of her home, leaving her with no means of shelter or support for herself and her children.
- **MOURNING PERIOD:** The widow is forced to wear black or white and is made to go through routine crying, whether or not she feels like it.
- **RITUAL CLEANSING:** This is done to supposedly sever the link between the living and the dead. The widow washes in the stream, her mourning clothes are burnt and she is forced to walk back home naked.
- **DETHRONEMENT:** By making the widow sit on the floor or mat, this is to emphasize her apparent fall in status.
- **OSTRACISM:** The widow is seen as defiled and capable of defiling others. She may not be touched or receive a handshake. In some cases, her hands are padded.
Other harmful traditional practices include enforced silence, sleeping on the floor, feeding from dirty dishes, forced nakedness and disinheritance. In extreme cases, the widow is forced to drink the water from which her husband's body had been washed to prove she did not kill him.

CONSEQUENCES

The various traditional rites on widows lead to;

- Diseases such as scabies and typhoid
- Food poisoning
- Homelessness
- Malnourishment
- Stiffness of body from lack of movement
- General stress which might lead to hypertension, stroke and sudden death

Apart from these physical problems, these terrible acts also make widows prone to;

- Depression
- Numbness
- Increased feelings of emptiness
- Financial hardship
- Inability to care for children
- Loss of self worth/confidence

Indeed all the above problems lead to the added financial burden of hospitalization of the widows in many cases.

Widows are frequently evicted from homes, lose custody of children to relatives and lack any right to inherit their late husband's property or land.

Child marriage, polygamy, the wide age gap between husbands and their wives, and the increasing scourge of diseases like AIDS, has increased the numbers of widows, especially young widows

- Margaret Owen

CALL TO ACTION!

All these can change when;

- Each and everyone understand that the power to make a difference lies in our hands. Statistics show that we will know, be related to, or be a widow ourselves, at one time or the other.
- Women join hands to insist on their rights. Indeed many of these practices are perpetrated by women on women. This should stop.
- Women are better educated concerning their basic human rights.
- Men are encouraged to write wills that state clearly how their property should be shared in the event of death. The will can also absolve a widow from harmful traditional practices.
- Everyone, especially men, should make efforts to update their employment, insurance and other relevant records to reflect their spouse as their next-of-kin.
- Governments should encourage advocacy force to promote the status of widows.

However you can also make a change by:

- Lending financial and moral support to a widow
- Writing a letter to your Local Government Council and your representative at the National Assembly on the need to change harmful traditional widowhood practices
- Sponsoring the education of a widow's child and being a mentor to the child
- Empowering widows through training and education if you are a corporate body

It is essential that the plight of Widows be addressed because widowhood runs across race, class, culture, education etc. it is a frightening plight which can befall any married woman.

- Helen Ogunwuniju

