HIGH-LEVEL CONSULTATIVE FORUM ON THE PROTECTION OF WIDOWED PERSONS RIGHTS IN KENYA.

VENUE: KENYA SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT



DATE: MAY 12-14, 2025

INTRODUCTION

The **High-Level Consultative Forum on the Protection of Widowed Persons' Rights in Kenya** was held from **12 to 14 May 2025 at the Kenya School of Government (KSG)**. The three-day forum brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including government representatives, state institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, legal practitioners, community leaders, faith-based organizations, and representatives of widowed persons from different regions of Kenya.

The forum provided an important platform for stakeholders to deliberate on the legal, social, economic, cultural, and psychosocial challenges affecting widowed persons in Kenya. It sought to amplify the voices and lived experiences of widowed persons, identify gaps in existing legal and policy frameworks, examine barriers to access to justice and economic opportunities, and develop practical recommendations for strengthening their protection, inclusion, and empowerment.

The forum further aimed to promote multi-sectoral collaboration and generate a shared framework for advocacy and policy engagement. A key outcome of the forum was the development and validation of a **Widowed Persons Issues Communiqué**, which consolidated the key issues, recommendations, and proposed actions arising from the three days of deliberations.

DAY ONE- 12TH MAY 2025

INTRODUCTION

The High-Level Consultative Forum on the Protection of Widowed Persons' Rights in Kenya, held at the Kenya School of Government (KSG), brought together a diverse assembly of stakeholders government representatives, civil society organizations, legal experts, community leaders, and grassroots voices to engage in meaningful dialogue and collective reflection on the lived realities of widowed persons in Kenya. Opening with the National and East African Community Anthems, followed by powerful remarks and a moving documentary by Come Together Widows and Orphans Organization (CTWOO), the forum set a deeply reflective and action-oriented tone. With the overarching goal of developing a joint communiqué that articulates practical strategies, policy recommendations, and inclusive frameworks, the event served as a timely and transformative platform to advance the protection, empowerment, and dignity of widowed persons a call to reimagine justice and social equity through the lens of those too often overlooked.

LIVED EXPERIENCES

Ms. Slyvia A. Ogolla



Sylvia Ogolla- Narrating her story on widowhood

In a powerful moment of truth and resilience, Sylvia A. Ogolla, a widow and Chapter Leader from the Nyanza Region, shared her deeply moving journey of loss, abandonment, and eventual restoration. Following the death of her husband, Sylvia faced intense cultural discrimination subjected to degrading widow "cleansing" rituals and coerced into widow inheritance. Stripped of her dignity and denied her matrimonial rights, she was forcefully evicted by her in-laws and, with her children, found temporary refuge in the cover of banana plantations. Despite seeking help from local authorities without success, hope emerged when she crossed paths with Come Together Widows and Orphans Organization (CTWOO), who provided her with critical legal, psychosocial, and emotional support. Today, Sylvia stands not only as a survivor but as a powerful advocate for the rights and dignity of widowed women in Kenya.

Ms. Prudence Kai



Prudance Kai- Coast Region Chapter Leader, narrating her story on widowhood

With quiet strength and unwavering determination, Ms. Prudence Kai, a widow and Coast Region Chapter Leader, shared her profound journey through widowhood marked by stigma and false accusations. Following the sudden loss of her husband, she was wrongfully blamed for his death a painful experience that could have silenced her. Instead, she chose resilience over despair. Refusing to let the weight of societal judgment define her, Ms. Kai channeled her pain into purpose by founding Hopes and Dreams, a community-based organization that now champions the rights and well-being of widows in her region. Through advocacy, peer support, and empowerment initiatives, her organization continues to restore hope and dignity to women navigating similar paths of loss and injustice. In closing, Ms. Kai extended a warm invitation to all stakeholders to join widows and community champions in commemorating International Widows Day, scheduled to take place in Kilifi County from 21st to 23rd June 2025 a collective moment to honor widows' resilience and reaffirm national commitment to their protection and inclusion.

WELCOME REMARKS

Dr. Dianah Kamande



Dr. Dianah Kamande, HSC- Founder & Executive Director CTWOO, giving her Opening/Welcoming Remarks

In her heartfelt opening remarks, Dr. Dianah Kamande, Founder and Director of Come Together Widows and Orphans Organization (CTWOO), shared the powerful story behind the birth of the organization an initiative inspired by her own journey as a young widow navigating pain, injustice, and the struggle for dignity. She reflected on how her personal experience became the foundation for a national movement advocating for the rights and empowerment of widows across Kenya. Dr. Kamande warmly welcomed all stakeholders to the forum, emphasizing the importance of collective action in shaping inclusive policies and systems. She also took the opportunity to announce and invite all present to the upcoming International Widows Day celebrations, scheduled for 21st to 23rd June 2025 in Kilifi County, and with deep gratitude and hope, she officially declared the forum open.

SPEECHES

Janet Ngombalu



Ms. Janet Ngombalu- Country Director, Christian Aid, giving her speech on the High-Level Event

In her impactful address, Ms. Janet Ngombalu, Country Director of Christian Aid Kenya, underscored the urgent need to safeguard the rights and dignity of widowed persons, who remain among the most marginalized and vulnerable in society. She emphasized that the fight against discrimination, social exclusion, and gender-based injustices faced by widows must be a shared responsibility. Calling for unity and sustained collaboration, Ms. Ngombalu encouraged all stakeholders to stand in solidarity holding each other's hands to build a just and inclusive society where widowed persons are not only protected but empowered to live with dignity, voice, and purpose. Her message was both a call to action and a reaffirmation of hope.

Madam Josphine



Madam Josphine- KSG, giving her speech on the High-Level Event

Delivering remarks on behalf of Prof. Nura Mohammed, Director General of the Kenya School of Government (KSG), Madam Josephine warmly welcomed all stakeholders to the institution, expressing KSG's delight in hosting such a significant and timely forum within their grounds. She highlighted KSG's commitment to fostering inclusive governance through policy-driven training and capacity-building programs, particularly in areas related to gender equality, leadership, and social development. Madam Josephine emphasized that it is through such strategic partnerships like the one with CTWOO that KSG seeks to actively contribute to the fight against discrimination and injustice faced by widowed persons. She concluded by inviting further collaborations that align with KSG's mandate, reaffirming their openness to work with diverse stakeholders in promoting dignity, empowerment, and social transformation for all.

Dr. Ann Nderitu



Dr. Ann Nderitu- Office of the Registrar of Political Parties, giving her speech

Dr. Ann Nderitu, from the Office of the Registrar of Political Parties, delivered a powerful message on the importance of inclusive political participation as a pathway to transformative change. She emphasized that for policies protecting the rights of widowed persons to be effectively implemented, more women especially widows must be supported and encouraged to pursue leadership positions at all levels of governance. Dr. Nderitu highlighted that representation matters, and when women are at the decision-making table, the lived realities of vulnerable groups are more likely to shape policy and legislative priorities. She passionately urged women to not only vie for leadership roles but also to stand in solidarity by voting for and uplifting fellow women leaders, fostering a more gender-responsive and inclusive political landscape.

Hon. Rehema Jaldesa



Hon. Rehema Jaldesa- NGEC, giving her speech

Hon. Rehema Jadesa, Chairperson of the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), emphasized the urgent need for policy alignment to address the unique challenges facing widowed persons in Kenya. She advocated for the development of a comprehensive national policy framework that specifically recognizes and protects the rights of widows, acknowledging them as a critical part of the broader special interest groups. Hon. Jadesa underscored the importance of improving access to justice for widowed persons by proposing the establishment of county-level justice desks tailored to their needs. She also called for community-based civic education targeting chiefs, elders, and local leaders to sensitize them on the legal rights and dignity of widowed persons many of whom continue to face stigma, discrimination, and exclusion. Her remarks were a call to action for multi-level engagement to ensure that no widow is left behind in the country's development and justice agenda.

Hon. Dr. Otiende Amollo



Hon. Dr. Otiende Amollo- MP Rarieda, giving his speech

Hon. Dr. Otiende Amollo, Member of Parliament for Rarieda and a committed advocate for the rights of widowed persons, delivered a compelling address emphasizing the need to dismantle systemic barriers rooted in culture and legal inaccessibility. He highlighted his grassroots initiative, "Ondoa Nyasi", which has so far empowered over 110 widows by addressing harmful cultural practices and streamlining succession processes to restore their dignity and economic independence. Hon. Amollo also underscored the instrumental role of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in establishing 37 functional courtrooms across the region spaces where widows can now access timely and just legal redress. Through strategic support of SACCOs, he has further promoted economic empowerment and collective resilience among widows. He reaffirmed his unwavering commitment to championing legislative and policy interventions at the national level to ensure that the voices and rights of widowed persons are not only heard but protected under the law.

Hon. Hannah Wendo Cheptumo



Hon. Hannah Wendo Cheptumo- CS for Gender, Culture and the Arts, giving her opening speech

Hon. Ms. Hannah Wendo Cheptumo, Cabinet Secretary for Gender, Culture, and the Arts, delivered a heartfelt and empowering address as she officially opened the High-Level Consultative Forum on the Protection of Widowed Persons' Rights in Kenya. Speaking from a place of lived experience as a widow, she acknowledged the deep emotional, social, and economic challenges that many widowed persons especially women face across the country. Her words resonated deeply as she reaffirmed the government's commitment to creating an enabling environment that protects and uplifts widows. She emphasized that the "Dhamini Mjane" loan under the Women Enterprise Fund should give first priority to widows, empowering them economically and restoring their dignity. To enhance access to services, she encouraged all widows to utilize the Ministry's toll-free line, "1195", for support and guidance. Her presence and message set a powerful tone for the forum, grounding it in both policy intent and personal conviction.

OVERVIEW AND LEGAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

Ms. Pauline Kiteng'e



Ms. Pauline Kitenge- Advocate, High Court of Kenya, presenting on the Overview and Legal Policy Framework

Ms. Pauline Kiteng'e, Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, provided a powerful legal perspective during her session on "Widows' Rights in Kenya: Current Landscape, Gaps, and Challenges." She emphasized the urgent need for structured political inclusion and robust legal protection of widowed persons, pointing out that despite the existence of progressive provisions within the Constitution of Kenya and various statutes, there is still no specific legal framework that holistically addresses the unique realities of widowed individuals. Ms. Kiteng'e highlighted that succession laws and cultural practices remain significant barriers, often leaving widows vulnerable to dispossession, discrimination, and abuse. She introduced the Widowed Persons Issues Communiqué as a timely step toward consolidating policy and legal advocacy, calling for reforms that bridge the gaps and align with both constitutional values and human dignity. Her remarks underscored the critical importance of legal awareness, access to justice, and policy formulation that affirms and safeguards the rights of widowed persons in Kenya.

Lady Justice Hannah Okwenga



Lady Justice Hannah Okwenga- Judiciary of Kenya, presenting on the Overview and Legal Policy Frame work

Lady Justice Hannah Okwenga of the Judiciary of Kenya delivered a powerful address, affirming her steadfast commitment to advocating for the rights of widows across the country. She underscored the critical need for continuous sensitization on laws relating to widows and orphans, with a particular focus on matrimonial property rights and the undue burden placed on widows to prove the validity of their marriages in order to access justice. Justice Okwenga highlighted the promise of the 2010 Constitution of Kenya, especially its gender equality provisions, as a transformative tool for addressing historical injustices faced by widowed persons. She emphasized the importance of creating widespread legal awareness at the grassroots level, ensuring that widows understand their rights and are empowered to claim them. Her call to action encouraged stakeholders to work collaboratively in building a justice system that is inclusive, rights-based, and responsive to the lived realities of widows in Kenya.

PANEL 1: LEGAL AND POLICY GAPS



Ms. Ann, Ms. Doreen, Ms. Mercine, Mr. Martin & Ms. Tracey- Panelists on Legal and Policy Gaps

Panel 1 focused on the Legal and Policy Gaps Affecting Widowed Persons and was moderated by **Ms. Ann Anyango,** Senior Legal Officer at the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC). The session featured diverse perspectives from experienced panelists. **Ms. Doreen Kimathi**, a widow and Nairobi County Chapter Leader, highlighted the difficulty widows face in accessing legal representation and the challenge of reconciling customary practices with human rights standards. **Ms. Mercine**, Women Land Rights Advisor at the Kenya Land Alliance, discussed barriers widows face in accessing, using, and managing property, emphasizing how costly and complex the succession process is, particularly due to limited legal knowledge. **Mr. Martin Pepela**, Assistant Director of Research at the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), addressed the impact of harmful cultural norms, gender-based violence, and the discriminatory use of civil and customary law. **Ms. Tracey Lichuma**, an advocate with FIDA Kenya, stressed the widespread lack of awareness about widows' rights and the power of mobilized communities to challenge unjust traditions and raise legal consciousness at the grassroots.

PANEL 2: VIOLENCE AGAINST WIDOWED PERSONS IN KENYA



Ms. Purity, Ms. Mary, Mr. Kenneth, Mr. Wilson & Ms. Sylvia- Panelists on Violence against Widowed Persons in Kenya

Panel 2: Violence Against Widowed Persons in Kenya was expertly moderated by **Ms. Purity Osumba**, Programme Officer for Gender Justice at Christian Aid. The panel brought together voices from various sectors committed to protection and justice. **Ms. Mary Wanjiru**, GBV Analyst at UN Women, **Kenneth Bundi Mbaya**, Assistant Director Anti-FGM, **Wilson Owino Opudo**, Public Health Manager (Protection/SRH/GBV), and **Ms. Sylvia Ogola**, a widow representative from the Nyanza region, shared powerful insights. The discussion emphasized the urgent need for grassroots-level legal implementation to protect widows from violence and abuse. Key strategies proposed included training chiefs and local leaders on the rights of widowed persons, harmonizing customary and statutory laws, promoting gender-sensitive dispute resolution mechanisms, and actively engaging faith and cultural leaders. The panel also called for the empowerment of widows through affirmative action funds, psychosocial support, and inclusion in decision-making processes. The DAPS framework (Dignity, Access, Participation, and Safety) was highlighted as essential in ensuring holistic protection. Additional recommendations included strengthening policy implementation through legal aid clinics, enhancing service delivery such as cash transfer programs, and instituting community-based protection mechanisms. The session concluded with a collective call for inclusive policy reforms and sustained community engagement to eliminate violence and promote justice for widowed persons across Kenya.

DAY TWO- 13TH MAY 2025

INTRODUCTION

The second day of the forum shifted the focus from the legal and protection dimensions discussed on Day One to economic empowerment, social protection, government responsibility, civil society advocacy, and evidence-based policy development.

The day's sessions provided an opportunity for participants to examine the socioeconomic realities of widowed persons, identify systemic barriers affecting their participation in development programmes, and explore practical approaches to strengthening government and civil society responses.

PANEL ONE: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND DATA-DRIVEN POLICY

Moderator: Ms. Mitchelle Katete, Programme Officer – County Support, Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development (CCGD)

The session examined the **socioeconomic realities of widowed persons, economic vulnerability, access to livelihood opportunities, social protection, and the role of data in informing evidence-based policy and programming**.

The discussion highlighted the following key areas:

- **Economic vulnerability and livelihood resilience:** The panel emphasized the need to strengthen the economic resilience of widowed persons by promoting access to sustainable livelihood opportunities, skills development, entrepreneurship, and financial resources.
- **Impact of gender-based violence on economic empowerment:** Participants discussed how gender-based violence affects women's physical and mental wellbeing, productivity, income, and long-term economic security, thereby creating additional barriers to economic empowerment.
- **Evidence-based policy and data:** The importance of collecting, analysing, and documenting **accurate and disaggregated data** on widowed persons was emphasized. Such data was identified as critical for informing policy development, programme design, resource allocation, and targeted interventions. The documentation of lived experiences was also highlighted as an important source of evidence for advocacy and policy reform.
- **Social protection and coordinated support:** The panel highlighted the multidimensional needs of widowed persons, including **psychosocial support, education assistance, social protection, and economic empowerment**. The need for coordinated support structures at the grassroots level was emphasized to ensure that widowed persons can access multiple services through an integrated approach.
- **Cash transfers and social protection programmes:** Discussions highlighted the importance of strengthening the inclusion of vulnerable widowed households in existing social protection programmes and improving mechanisms for identifying and reaching eligible beneficiaries.
- **Village Savings and Loan Schemes and mentorship:** The panel recognized **Village Savings and Loan Schemes (VSLS)**, mentorship, and other community-based economic initiatives as important mechanisms for strengthening financial resilience and supporting widowed persons to develop sustainable livelihoods.
- **Access to affirmative action funds and economic opportunities:** Participants discussed the need to improve widowed persons' access to existing government empowerment programmes, including affirmative action funds, as well as opportunities in **cross-border trade, digital marketing, agriculture, and other income-generating activities**.

- **Financial literacy and access to information:** Limited awareness of available government programmes and economic opportunities was identified as a significant barrier. The panel therefore emphasized the need for **financial literacy, public sensitization, accessible information, and capacity building** to enable widowed persons to effectively utilize available opportunities.
- **Multi-stakeholder collaboration:** The importance of stronger collaboration among **government institutions, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, development partners, and private sector actors** was emphasized to improve service delivery and expand economic opportunities for widowed persons.
- **Policy and institutional support:** The panel called for deliberate policy advocacy and stronger institutional mechanisms to ensure that the specific needs of widowed persons are adequately recognized and addressed within national and county development, economic empowerment, and social protection frameworks.

Overall, the session underscored that economic empowerment of widowed persons requires an integrated approach that combines access to financial resources, skills development, social protection, reliable data, information, psychosocial support, and stronger institutional and community-level coordination.

Key issues emerging from the session included:

- Limited access to economic opportunities among widowed persons;
- The need for targeted social protection interventions;
- Inadequate access to information on government empowerment programmes;
- The importance of financial literacy and entrepreneurship development;
- The need for accurate and disaggregated data on widowed persons;
- Strengthened coordination among government, CSOs, FBOs, and CBOs; and
- Greater use of evidence and lived experiences in policy development.

PANEL TWO: WIDOWS' EXPERIENCES AND SYSTEMIC GAPS

The session examined the lived experiences of widowed persons and the structural, cultural, social, and economic barriers that continue to affect their rights, wellbeing, and access to opportunities and services.

The key areas discussed included:

- **Economic vulnerability and livelihood resilience:** The session highlighted the importance of supporting widowed persons to strengthen their livelihoods, access economic opportunities, and rebuild their confidence and self-reliance.
- **Inheritance and property rights:** Participants discussed challenges relating to inheritance, ownership and control of property, livestock, and other family resources, particularly within communities where customary practices may limit widows' rights.
- **Harmful cultural practices and discrimination:** The session highlighted the persistence of harmful cultural norms, harassment, discrimination, and social exclusion affecting widowed persons. Concerns were also raised regarding the vulnerability of children of widows to practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy.
- **Community awareness and social norms:** The importance of community sensitization, awareness creation, and capacity building was emphasized as a means of challenging

discriminatory practices and promoting respect for the rights and dignity of widowed persons.

- **Leadership and representation:** The session underscored the need for increased participation and representation of women in local leadership and decision-making structures to strengthen community-level responses to issues affecting widows and their families.
- **Institutional recognition and protection mechanisms:** Participants called for stronger institutional mechanisms to address widow-related concerns, provide appropriate support, and ensure effective protection of the rights and welfare of widowed persons.
- **Legal awareness and empowerment:** The importance of equipping widowed persons with knowledge of their legal and human rights was emphasized, particularly in relation to property, inheritance, access to justice, and protection from discrimination and harmful practices.

Overall, the session demonstrated that addressing the challenges faced by widowed persons requires an integrated approach combining economic empowerment, legal awareness, community sensitization, leadership development, protection mechanisms, and stronger institutional support.

PANEL THREE: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE AND RESPONSIBILITY

The session examined the role and responsibility of government in strengthening the protection, inclusion, and wellbeing of widowed persons through accessible public services, social protection, economic empowerment, and justice mechanisms.

The key areas discussed included:

- **Government–community–CSO collaboration:** The importance of coordinated efforts among government institutions, communities, and civil society organizations was emphasized to ensure that interventions addressing the needs of widowed persons are responsive, accessible, and sustainable.
- **Public awareness and information dissemination:** Participants emphasized the need for increased public sensitization on widows' rights, available government programmes, and support services through community barazas, mass media, and national and county-level information and policy dissemination mechanisms.
- **Social protection and economic empowerment:** Existing government initiatives, including cash transfer programmes and affirmative action funds such as the Uwezo Fund and Women Enterprise Fund, were discussed as important mechanisms for supporting vulnerable households and promoting economic inclusion.
- **Accessibility of government programmes:** The session highlighted the need to simplify application and access procedures for government funds and programmes. Financial assistance should also be complemented by capacity building, mentorship, skills development, and appropriate start-up support.
- **Property, succession, and co-ownership rights:** Participants emphasized the importance of increasing awareness among women on property ownership, co-ownership, succession planning, and related legal rights to reduce disputes and strengthen protection of family interests following the death of a spouse.
- **Access to justice:** The need for justice systems to be simplified, accessible, timely, and responsive to the circumstances of widowed persons was emphasized. Participants also

highlighted the importance of addressing stigma and other barriers that may discourage widows from seeking justice.

- **Gender-responsive justice mechanisms:** The session discussed the value of mediation and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, where appropriate, alongside stronger implementation of laws relating to sexual and gender-based violence, succession, and other forms of rights violations.
- **Data and evidence for policy development:** The importance of accurate, reliable, and disaggregated data on widowed persons was emphasized to strengthen evidence-based policymaking, planning, resource allocation, and monitoring of government interventions.
- **Access to legal representation:** The need to strengthen access to affordable and pro bono legal services was discussed, including mechanisms for improving coordination and availability of legal assistance at regional and community levels.

Overall, the session emphasized the need for **stronger government accountability, accessible social protection and economic empowerment programmes, effective justice mechanisms, reliable data, public awareness, and coordinated institutional responses** to address the challenges facing widowed persons.

PANEL FOUR: ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN ADVOCATING FOR WIDOWS' RIGHTS

The session examined the role of civil society organizations in advancing the rights of widowed persons through advocacy, legal empowerment, economic inclusion, community engagement, evidence generation, and policy reform.

The key areas discussed included:

- **Human rights and policy frameworks:** The session highlighted the relevance of regional and international human rights frameworks, including the Maputo Protocol, in strengthening the protection of widows' rights and promoting alignment of national policies and laws with applicable human rights standards.
- **Legal and policy reform:** Participants emphasized the need to review and strengthen legal and policy frameworks, particularly in relation to succession, property rights, and discriminatory practices affecting widowed persons.
- **Legal empowerment and access to information:** The importance of equipping widows with legal knowledge, practical skills, and information on available services and opportunities was emphasized as a means of strengthening their ability to claim and exercise their rights.
- **Sustainable economic empowerment:** The session underscored the importance of linking financial support with financial literacy, entrepreneurship development, vocational skills, and access to capital to promote sustainable livelihoods and reduce economic dependency.
- **Skills development and livelihood opportunities:** Participants highlighted the role of TVET institutions and community-based skills development initiatives in expanding livelihood opportunities for widowed persons.
- **Community and household engagement:** The importance of involving men, families, community leaders, and other stakeholders was emphasized in promoting shared responsibility and addressing social and cultural norms that contribute to discrimination against widows.

- **Supportive services and care mechanisms:** The establishment of community-based care and support mechanisms was highlighted as an approach to enabling women to participate in economic activities while accessing essential services.
- **Evidence generation, documentation, and monitoring:** The session emphasized the need for continuous documentation of experiences, interventions, outcomes, and emerging issues to strengthen advocacy, measure progress, and inform policy and programming.
- **Sustainable and long-term interventions:** Participants stressed the importance of moving beyond short-term or event-based interventions towards sustained programmes that address the underlying social, economic, legal, and cultural factors affecting widowed persons.
- **Partnerships and coordination:** Stronger collaboration among CSOs, government institutions, communities, development partners, and other stakeholders was identified as essential for improving the scale, sustainability, and effectiveness of interventions.

Overall, the session underscored the role of civil society organizations in **advancing legal and policy reform, strengthening community awareness, supporting economic empowerment, generating evidence, monitoring implementation, and facilitating coordinated action to promote the rights and wellbeing of widowed persons**.

GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND COMMUNIQUÉ DRAFTING

The afternoon session provided participants with an opportunity to consolidate the issues and recommendations emerging from the forum through structured group discussions.

Participants were divided into **five thematic groups**, each focusing on one of the major areas discussed during the forum:

1. **Legal and Policy Gaps**
2. **Violence Against Widowed Persons in Kenya**
3. **Economic Empowerment and Social Protection**
4. **Government Response and Accountability**
5. **Role of Civil Society Organizations in Advocating for Widows' Rights**

Each group examined the assigned thematic area, identified key challenges, and developed recommendations and proposed actions.

The groups subsequently presented their findings to the plenary. The recommendations were reviewed and consolidated to inform the development of the **Widowed Persons Issues Communiqué**.

The communiqué brought together the collective concerns, proposed interventions, and priority actions identified throughout the first two days of the forum. It was intended to provide a common advocacy and policy reference document for stakeholders working towards improved protection, inclusion, and empowerment of widowed persons in Kenya.

DAY THREE- 14TH MAY 2025

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Titus Wairate



Mr. Titus Wairate- MC, welcoming all the stakeholders for the events of the day

Mr. Titus Wairate, the Master of Ceremony for the high-level event, warmly welcomed all stakeholders present, including government representatives, development partners, civil society actors, community leaders, and widowed persons themselves. With enthusiasm and grace, he acknowledged the importance of the gathering and the shared commitment to advancing the rights, dignity, and protection of widowed persons across Kenya. He set a positive and purposeful tone for the day, encouraging all participants to remain actively engaged, collaborative, and open-minded as they journeyed through the rich agenda of discussions, reflections, and commitments that aimed to foster inclusion, justice, and sustainable solutions for widows.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Ms. Catherine Wanjiru Muthiani



Ms. Catherine Wanjiru Muthiani- Counselling Psychologist, presenting on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

During the session on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Ms. Catherine Wanjiru Muthiani, a seasoned counselling psychologist from Support for Addiction and Treatment in Africa, delivered a powerful presentation centered on building resilience among widows. She emphasized the need to move from mere awareness to actionable support, addressing mental health challenges experienced by widowed persons across social, psychosocial, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Ms. Muthiani introduced the TEBO framework Thinking, Emotions, Behavior, and Overall Wellbeing as a lens to understand mental health disorders commonly affecting widows, including depression, loss, and grief, often exacerbated by substance abuse as a coping mechanism. She sensitively unpacked the layered struggles widows face such as loneliness, financial insecurity, societal expectations, identity crises, and dissociation. As a path toward healing, she recommended effective coping strategies, including Psychological First Aid, spiritual meditation, and prayer, underscoring the importance of holistic and culturally responsive mental health interventions that restore dignity and foster resilience among widowed persons.

COMMUNIQUE VALIDATION

Ms. Pauline Kiteng'e



Ms. Pauline Kitenge- Advocate, High Court of Kenya, presenting on Communique Validation

In leading the final validation and endorsement of the communiqué, Ms. Pauline Kiteng'e, Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, provided a comprehensive reflection on the multifaceted challenges facing widowed persons in Kenya. She underscored the persistent economic struggles, cultural barriers, legal hurdles, and social exclusion that continue to marginalize widows. She cited gaps in the Law of Succession and the Marriage Act, as well as the low levels of awareness and inadequate training among the public regarding the rights of widows. Emphasizing the urgent need for transformative action, she proposed key interventions such as the review and amendment of existing laws, including the GBV and Disinheritance Acts, and the establishment of a specific legal framework to protect widowed persons. Ms. Kiteng'e called for strengthened administrative mechanisms, widespread public awareness campaigns, and the engagement of religious and community leaders to dismantle harmful practices like cleansing rituals. She further advocated for increased access to justice through paralegal networks, social protection through cash transfers, and targeted support for the children of widowed persons. Highlighting the importance of economic empowerment and inclusive development, she stressed the need to eliminate widow exclusion from affirmative action programs like the Women Enterprise Fund, while promoting reserved quotas and activating strategic initiatives such as Dhamini Mjane. Finally, she emphasized the need for the communiqué to be structured clearly, with defined recipients for implementation, and to serve as a meaningful tool in amplifying the voices of widows and advancing their dignity and rights.

CLOSING REMARKS

Pastor Apolo



Pr. Apollo- Giving his Closing Remarks

In his heartfelt closing remarks, Pastor Apolo, a widower, reminded participants that the journey of widowhood is not only a woman's burden, but also deeply affects men though society often overlooks this reality. He emphasized that losing a spouse is a profound disruption to family life, and while many believe that men are naturally resilient and can seamlessly take over all responsibilities, this is often far from the truth. Pastor Apolo candidly shared that there are critical caregiving and emotional roles within the family that men struggle to fulfill alone. He called for

greater inclusivity in widowhood conversations and urged stakeholders to consider the psychosocial and emotional needs of widowers as well, fostering a compassionate and gender-responsive approach in community development and family support systems.

Dr. Dianah Kamande



Dr. Dianah Kamande, HSC- Founder & CEO CTWOO, giving her Closing Remarks

In her closing remarks, Dr. Dianah Kamande, CEO and Executive Director of Come Together Widows and Orphans Organization, expressed deep gratitude to all stakeholders for their valuable time, commitment, and contributions throughout the event. She acknowledged the critical role each participant played in shaping meaningful dialogue around the rights and wellbeing of widowed persons. Dr. Kamande emphasized that the insights, partnerships, and collective actions born out of the discussions will not be in vain, but will drive tangible, positive change in the lives of widows across the country. She reaffirmed the organization's dedication to translating these deliberations into impactful programs and policies, and called for continued collaboration to ensure widows are not only seen and heard, but empowered and included in every aspect of community development.

Ms. Janet Ngombalu



Ms. Janet Ngombalu- Country Director, Christian Aid, giving her Closing Remarks

Ms. Janet Ngombalu, Country Director of Christian Aid International, expressed her deep appreciation for the active participation and meaningful dialogue demonstrated by all attendees throughout the event. She acknowledged the critical importance of the discussions in advancing the rights and well-being of widowed persons, emphasizing that the collective efforts of stakeholders are essential to creating lasting change. Ms. Ngombalu encouraged continued collaboration and commitment to empowering widows, ensuring their inclusion in all development initiatives, and strengthening policy implementation for their protection and social-economic advancement. She concluded by thanking everyone for their dedication and reaffirmed Christian Aid's commitment to supporting these vital efforts.

Commissioner Dr. Margaret Karungaru



Commissioner, Dr. Margaret Karungaru- MBS, NGEC, giving her Closing Remarks for the Event

Commissioner Dr. Margaret Karungaru, MBS, of the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC), shared a heartfelt testimony as a widow, highlighting the profound challenges widows face, including issues of inheritance, loss of dignity, and violations of their human rights. She emphasized that this event serves as a crucial roadmap for coordinated action to support widowed persons. Dr. Karungaru underscored the importance of making widows visible within the national gender framework to ensure they receive dedicated leadership and effective coordination. She concluded by officially closing the forum, affirming a shared commitment to advancing the rights and welfare of widowed persons through inclusive and sustained efforts.

KEY THEMES AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Across the three days, several common themes emerged from the presentations, testimonies, panel discussions, and group work.

1. **Legal and Policy Protection**
   Participants identified gaps in the implementation of existing laws and policies and called for stronger legal and policy mechanisms specifically addressing the circumstances of widowed persons.
2. **Access to Justice**
   Limited access to legal information, legal representation, affordable legal services, and timely justice processes was identified as a significant challenge. Strengthening legal aid, paralegal services, alternative dispute resolution, and community-level legal awareness was emphasized.
3. **Economic Empowerment and Social Protection**
   Economic vulnerability was identified as a major concern affecting widowed persons. Participants emphasized the need for improved access to affirmative action funds, entrepreneurship opportunities, skills development, financial literacy, social protection, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.
4. **Harmful Cultural Practices and Discrimination**
   Participants highlighted the continued impact of harmful cultural practices, stigma, discrimination, and exclusion on widowed persons. Community sensitization and engagement with traditional, cultural, religious, and local leaders were identified as important strategies for promoting social transformation.
5. **Violence and Protection**
   The forum highlighted the vulnerability of widowed persons to gender-based violence, economic abuse, property-related violence, and other forms of exploitation. Strengthened community protection mechanisms and responsive service delivery were identified as necessary interventions.
6. **Data and Evidence**

The importance of reliable, accurate, and disaggregated data on widowed persons was emphasized. Participants noted that better data would support evidence-based programming, policy formulation, resource allocation, and monitoring of interventions.

7. **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support**
   The forum recognized grief, social isolation, financial stress, stigma, and changes in family roles as important psychosocial concerns. Participants emphasized the need to integrate counselling and psychosocial support into programmes serving widowed persons.
8. **Participation and Representation**
   Participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that widowed persons, particularly women, are meaningfully represented in leadership, governance, policy development, and decision-making processes affecting their lives.
9. **Multi-Sectoral Collaboration**
   The forum consistently highlighted the importance of collaboration between government institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, communities, faith-based organizations, legal practitioners, and widowed persons themselves.

OUTCOMES OF THE FORUM

The three-day forum resulted in several important outcomes:

- Increased dialogue and awareness among stakeholders on the rights and lived experiences of widowed persons.
- Greater visibility of the legal, social, economic, cultural, and psychosocial challenges affecting widowed persons.
- Strengthened engagement between government institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, legal practitioners, and representatives of widowed persons.
- Identification of key gaps in legal protection, access to justice, social protection, economic empowerment, data, and service delivery.
- Development and validation of a **Widowed Persons Issues Communiqué** capturing priority recommendations and proposed actions.
- Identification of areas requiring continued advocacy, policy engagement, institutional coordination, and community-level intervention.
- Reinforcement of the importance of placing widowed persons at the centre of programmes and policies intended to address their rights and welfare.

CONCLUSION

The **High-Level Consultative Forum on the Protection of Widowed Persons' Rights in Kenya**, held from **12 to 14 May 2025 at the Kenya School of Government**, provided an important platform for stakeholders to collectively examine the multifaceted challenges affecting widowed persons and identify practical areas for action.

The three-day engagement brought together lived experiences, legal and policy perspectives, government responses, civil society interventions, economic empowerment strategies, psychosocial considerations, and community-level experiences. The discussions demonstrated that the challenges

affecting widowed persons are interconnected and require coordinated responses across legal, social, economic, cultural, institutional, and psychosocial dimensions.

A key outcome of the forum was the development and validation of the **Widowed Persons Issues Communiqué**, which consolidates the priorities and recommendations emerging from the consultations. The communiqué provides a framework for continued advocacy, policy engagement, stakeholder coordination, and accountability.

The forum therefore marked an important step towards strengthening the recognition, protection, participation, and empowerment of widowed persons in Kenya. Moving forward, sustained collaboration among government institutions, civil society organizations, development partners, communities, and widowed persons will be essential in translating the commitments and recommendations generated during the forum into practical and measurable action.





