



Message from Roseline Orwa, Founder and Director of Rona Foundation

Dear friends of Rona,

2018-2019 have been transformative and successful years in our fight for the human rights for widows in Kenya. As a reader of this report, you are part of our struggle and for your contribution, in whatever form, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

In this period we have seen a break-through in our activities to empower marginalized widows and create awareness and advocacy for Widow Human Rights.

We more than doubled the number of widow groups in 2019 and with over 8.000 women impacted we continue to see the scalability of our approach of setting up widow-self-help groups through “training the trainers”. In addition to providing paralegal trainings, paralegal emergency desks and establishing widow self-help groups Rona serves vulnerable women in an additional way we introduced in 2019.

I am proud to announce that **since 2019 we successfully provide micro-financing** to select widow groups and women. Our widow group structures provide an excellent context to administer micro-financing and provides great promise in empowering widows to lift themselves out of extreme poverty. See [here](#) for more info.

We reached millions of people through mass media coverage changing cultural perceptions and raising the widow human rights issue. See [here](#) for more info.

Further the ongoing **expansions of our Rona Centre in 2018/19 are nothing short of exciting**, taking us further on our journey to provide basic care to people to a community living in extreme poverty. For example we **increased our provision of urgently needed health care services** to annually over 600 HIV impacted women, men and orphans. Further with the invaluable support of our friends in Seattle **we built a multi-purpose community hall** that is used as a School, and to host workshops, widow meetings and community engagements. See [here](#) for more info.

Lastly we took an important step into **further professionalizing and growing our organizational structures, by starting to pay salaries** to select staff. With our second seed grant from ForumSyd we now have 3 of our 13 staff on salary through this grant. The rest are paid from my tailoring business and other fundraising initiatives when resources allow.

With this momentum I am looking on 2020 with the goal of achieving even more. We have **immediate and long term needs** ranging from urgent school fees for orphans to logistics and admin costs to continue our widow empowerment operations, with only one active grant currently. We rely on more than half of our resources to come from individual donations

I am counting on you not to let our women down and let's give these kids an education!

Thank you for standing with me and thousands of vulnerable women and for spreading your love and kindness to the needy children we are raising! And Congratulations to us all! We won the Legacy Award from Modern Widows Club, as a Global Cultural Influencer 2019.

We stand with you all in prayer as the world fights the COVID-19 pandemic. We shall win!

Blessings

Roseline Orwa

Report on the Activities and Achievements of the Rona Foundation

(Dec 2018-2019)



Empower Marginalized and Destitute Widows

Objective: Achieve widow-empowerment through paralegal training, psycho-social support and establishing widow self-help groups

Rona created 29 new widow groups in 2019, and currently supports a network of about 8,000 widows in Siaya County most of them clustered in over 60 registered and weekly active widow groups. These groups are the key ingredient in turning around the life of the impacted women.

Held 25[1] sensitization forums and widows cafes in 2019 with 100-300 women per forum. Here the women opened up about the abuse that has been inflicted on them, engage in loss and grief sharing and receive support, as well as discuss the progress of their groups.

Train the Trainer life skill and paralegal trainings:

Held 22[2] trainings that are geared towards imparting selected widows and widow leaders with skills in grief counselling, positive living, widow rights and laws of succession. The participants were trained as Trainers of Trainers (TOTs) so that they are able to deliver the training to other widow groups.

Monitoring of paralegal desks in 2019: The paralegal desks are the outcome of the aforementioned trainings. One trained widow is engaged by the project to man the desk through 'haki forms', a reporting tool on sgbvs and widow abuse. The widow leaders receive reports of widow abuses, incidences of violations and gender based violence (SGBV) in the target locations.

These incidences are recorded and legitimate cases forwarded to the authorities for judicial intervention. 1] 10 held by Rona Foundation staff and 15 held by the trainers enabled by Rona 2] 9 held by Rona Foundation staff and 13 held by the trainers enabled by Rona

Objective: Achieve economic-empowerment of widows through micro finance administered through widow groups

In 2019 Rona introduced micro-financing to empower widows on their way towards a dignified independent life



At Rona we believe that in order to help marginalized women we cannot stop at socio-cultural support. Economic empowerment is required to turn around the life of a widow. We administer micro-financing either through our established Rona Widow Groups all over the country or to individuals in Nairobi's Kibera slum through our Inua Mjane project.

In 2018-2019 Rona funded over 40 widow groups ranging from 20 USD to 250 USD, disbursing a sum of total of 2,000USD. Through this program a total of about 3000 widows were impacted. Our “match the funds” approach ensures buy-in and business skill provision.

For this each applying group has to collect initial funds from their own members to start their business activities with. In this phase Rona provides crucial financial and business literacy training. Once the group can show successful activities the Rona Foundation matches whatever funds they have collected to that point. Usually it takes four to six months before a group has shown sufficient skill to qualify for the matching of the funds. Based on current activity we can already see that the wealth of the groups currently stands at about 5,000 USD and growing through.

We further provided micro finance 16 individual widows in Nairobi's Kibera slum. Rona piloted Inua Mjane in October 2019 in Kibera slums, a micro credit facility available to an individual widow guaranteed by their solidarity group to cover start up, and/or deal with unforeseen business challenges. **The loans range from 5USD to 500 USD.** Of these women six were new start-ups, 12 existing entrepreneurs.

Create Awareness and Advocacy for Widow Human Rights

Changing community attitudes and behaviour around SGBV and widow cleansing!

To prevent SGBVs (Sexual Gender Based Violence) and widow cleansing. Rona started the 'Mjane Kwanza' project in 2019, which now impacts over 5000 widows, and 3 million community members, runs to June 2020. The program works to change attitudes and behaviour of both men and women; wins over male champions, duty bearers, youth, widow leaders, as well as other community stakeholders to ensure change of abusive cultural practices and enables community action teams to lobby for policy creation on widow cleansing and an alternative widow cleansing ceremony. Rona was awarded a grant by Forum Syd in 2019 to implement this one year project that aims to empower both men and women to prevent and respond against sexual gender based violence and widow cleansing in Siaya county.



Media Outreach: Changing cultural perceptions and raising the female human rights issue

Significant media outreach was achieved in 2018/19 to increase awareness on widow abuse and change cultural perceptions of marginalized widows. A breakthrough was for example the 45 minute documentary for Maisha Magic East aired on BSTV that reached over 30 million viewers across several countries in East Africa. In addition 8 local radio programs reached over 3 million listeners on each show, together over 24 million people reached. On social media 500 articles and 12 videos were posted and globally a documentary by Atlantic Philanthropies is yet to be released.

Protecting young girls from becoming vulnerable

Many of the impacted widows today married at a young age and have not completed high school education. To protect the next generation we launched a mentorship program for girls to talk to the girls about reproductive health, healthy relationship dynamics and support them with school fees for secondary school education. Currently enrolled are 40 high potential girls. The project aims to have a scholarship wing in 2020. Given the overwhelmingly positive response, we aim to increase the scope at the neighboring schools.

Lobbying for global policy review on widowhood matters!

Lobbied & organized online campaigns and media campaigns and mentored rural widowed women to speak out in local radio stations in order to create awareness to outlaw "widow cleansing practices".

In 2019 the Kenyan ministry of labour and social protection is currently in the process of developing family protection and promotion laws for forgotten citizens, and Rona Foundation, is representing widows, orphans and street families in the technical working group for the policy development.

Rona joined other INGOs to participate in 2 at the UN, Geneva and in UE Parliament, Brussels; as well as a research study to develop a practical guidance on supporting Child widows globally; titled ‘Widows in Crisis & Conflict Panel – UN Human Rights Council 42.

Rona’s founder, Roseline Orwa, joined other INGOs to present a paper titled ‘Widows of all ages: Discrimination and Abuse. What Can the EU Do?’ at the European Parliament in Brussels. Rona Foundation presented a video evidence that is being used currently to advocate for the right of widows of all ages, as well as those in Crisis and Conflict.

Winning males as champions for social change!

It is vital to include male community members into the dialogue on widow abuse and Rona conducted a one year research project on SGBVs and Widow Cleansing, including the role of male stakeholders and duty bearers. What does it take for these to be protectors, not perpetrators in Siaya? The program was funded by the LSE-Atlantic Fellows Program.

This research project empowered, changed attitudes and behaviour, transforming it to an ongoing project in the larger Siaya by Rona.

The Rona Centre: Providing basic-care to marginalized communities

Our Rona Centre at the lakeshore village of Wagoma, Bondo is further expanding, providing 29 resident orphans with a home and basic care. To the wider community it provides a nursery school and healthcare services providing basic treatments. Further the centre executes a range of farming and livestock cultivation for income generation, and a model as a social enterprise, with a vision to having cottages for eco-tourism to host workshops, mission teams and local partners by 2021.

We constructed a multi-purpose community hall in 2019

Through the generosity of our cherished friends in Seattle, USA and Canada in partnership with Serving Others Worldwide. Rona hosted an amazing team of 20 who built a school/ multipurpose hall for us. These wonderful friends gave their time and resources, and showed us what love and service to God is, by the sweat of their own hands in the scorching African sun, built us a school/multipurpose hall. Thank you so much!

The facility is used as an early childhood school and has a growing population of 30 ECD children and with 2 teachers. The facility is also used to host workshops, widow meetings and community engagements. Our dream for the school is to upgrade to an Academy offering quality education by 2025. We also aim to start a design and tailoring school, Computer packages and IT literacy classes by Oct 2020.



Rona Clinic Expansion Plans

We provided over 600 HIV impacted women, men and orphans annually with urgently needed health care services.

We acquired an extra acre piece of land aimed towards expanding our clinic to a full dispensary/hospital at Rona Centre. Subject to availability of resources, we aim to expand Rona clinic by 2022, and further provide urgently needed comprehensive health services to the local community, and the surrounding islands as a social enterprise.



We support 29 resident vulnerable children at Rona Centre. 16 children in Secondary school, 13 in primary school; and over 150 OVCs others by tailoring and donating uniforms, weekend feeding, deworming and providing other basic health needs. Orphan education, care and support remains our most challenging and overwhelming need.

In 2018-19 We provided 4 basic widow houses to destitute widows

Most rural widows live in undignified housing structures in abject poverty. Over the last 8 years we build over 52 widow houses and received funding for 3 widow houses sponsored by Modern Widows Club, MN Chapter and friends of MWC in Dec. 2019.

Due to our lean approach where the community comes together to build as much as possible by themselves a dignified house costs around 650 USD.

We began planting perennial crops, and have since planted over 30 assorted fruit trees, papaya, mangoes, oranges, lemons, bananas. The orchard is at the infant stages as we aim to create sustainable income by 2021 from the harvests, as well as own consumptions.

We constructed one boat, that is hired to youth, and supplies the Rona Centre with fish for the children consumptions, and brings a monthly income of 15-30USD per month.

In 2019 the Farm cooperative provides food security for 50 widows and over 27 resident orphans orphans at Rona Centre, and over 150 OVCs in the community, many of whom are positively with HIV and require special diet.

Medical support for over 600 HIV impacted women, men and orphans, from the local community and the Rona Clinic, annually.

Activities Planned for 2020

Establishment of an SMS platform: The platform has two purposes. Firstly allow women to contact a widow leader in their region that will assist with the case of abuse and connect them to help, e.g. police, the church or local community leaders. Secondly we seek to gain currently missing data on the frequency and exact nature of widow abuse in Kenya and its regional forms in order to lobby more effectively and improve our local services. Launch planned for May 2020 subject to availability of resources.

Establishment of community action teams:

To further lower SGBV violence and widow cleansing a team will be setup to collate data collection, and reporting SGBVs and widow cleansing. The action teams will also act as referral systems where widows can report their cases

The community teams will be constituted in 3 locations with a total of 36 members in Siaya county. The members will be drawn from the widow leaders, men, male champions and duty bearers to be moral duty advocates. It will form the technical working group to develop a 'widowhood bill' to outlaw harmful cultural practices meted on women only when they lose their husbands, as well as develop an alternative non sexual widow cleansing ceremony.

Immediate and long term needs

For our work we rely for over 55% on private donations. We urgently need your support! Our needs range from School fees for the Orphans and young girls to logistics and admin costs of running our widow empowerment programs to extending our Rona Centre.

Transportation & logistics remain our greatest challenge to date as our existing motorcycle is over used on impassable roads. Looking at school fees for the orphans that Rona cares for coming up in January 2020, I am again forced to look for supporters. With ever more focus on education, I am counting on you to keep the 50 children in school, of whom 26 are total orphans, resident at Rona Centre.



Roseline Orwa

Founder/Director

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