



Hon. James Orengo,
The Governor, Siaya County
P.O. Box 803 – 40600
Siaya, Kenya
Email: info@siaya.co.ke

16th September, 2022

Dear Governor,

**RE: MEMO FOR ADOPTION OF WIDOW CHARTER TO PROTECT WIDOW RIGHTS
IN SIAYA COUNTY**

As a **Widow's Human Rights Organization**, Rona Foundation is pleased to forward to you the Memo to the proposed widow's charter submitted to the clerk of count, which is a call to action for the County Government towards championing for protection and advancement of the rights of widowed persons within Siaya County.

The Memo aligns the content of the Charter to the mandates of the County Government, and clarifies the specific steps towards responding to the demands of Siaya Widows.

As a revolutionary senior counsel with a worldview on Human Rights Activism we are confident and counting on your support for liberation of thousands widows in Siaya County of whom **8000 shared their lived experiences and stories to inform the drafting of this charter** through Rona Foundation and her networks in the last decade.


Widows congratulate you as the 2nd Governor of Siaya County!

And propose your office in the immediate – establish a **13 member widows technical working committee** to oversee and provide technical support for the establishment of the directorate of widowed persons and the disbursement of the **Inua Mama – our proposed governor's signature project** that speaks to your campaign call of *Mine Wetona*, and aligns to your Manifesto pledge on Women Empowerment.

We believe, this will demonstrate the philosophy of '*dhako wadwa*' as a call and commitment to the advancement of the rights of women, in particular widows - following your [public announcement](#) on the adoption of the charter during the International Widows Day held on 23rd June in Siaya.

Rona appreciate your support this far, as we look forward to a continued cordial engagement every step of the journey to empower and improve widow livelihoods of our beloved Siaya County.

Yours Sincerely,


Roseline Orwa
Director, Rona Foundation
Tel: 0723 238812

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TO: THE GOVERNOR, SIAYA COUNTY.

DATE: 16th September, 2022

RE: PROTECTION OF WIDOW RIGHTS IN SIAYA COUNTY.

Executive Summary

Attitudes to, and treatment of widows vary from relatively mild indifference and social exclusion to extreme mental, physical torture and sexual abuse. Widows exist as an isolated social group that is almost invisible and voiceless. A continually growing research globally and locally over the past 3 years by the *Mjane Kwanza* project under Rona Foundation in Siaya has interacted with over 8000 widow across the Six sub counties of Siaya. It recognized that widows are adversely affected and “crippled” by culture and traditional practices associated with widowhood. **The social wellbeing of widows in Siaya county is wanting due to lack of targeted sustainable interventions and policy gaps.**

In several communities in Kenya, the vernacular words used for widows are derogatory. In Siaya county we innocently say *Chi Liel (wife of the grave) completely oblivious of the impact of this eternal association with death and the dead while still alive!* Across ethnic groups widows are systematically and routinely vilified, regarded as the real cause of their husbands' deaths and perceived as ill omens that being bad luck to the late husband's family. It is with this background that majority of widows are subjected to harmful traditional practices that violate their rights.

In most villages in Siaya widows are stereotyped as being evil, symbols of bad luck and consequently, the **social attitude obstructs them from fully participating in socio-economic and political development.** It is therefore imperative that interventions & policies are put in place to enable widows enjoy their rights and rise economically to sustain their households.

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 espouses non-discrimination both in letter and spirit by outlawing all forms of discrimination that may be founded on race, gender, religious, political inclination, or age. Widows continue to be harassed and denied even the most basic of rights. **The society in Siaya has continually condoned the maltreatment of widows and hidden it behind the veil of sacred cultural norms.**

The County Government of Siaya has the duty to mainstream widow concerns by identifying and mending the loopholes in the law as it is and enforcing the existing laws and policies in the areas of social equality, inheritance, and property ownership. Among the key responses is through

legislation by way of outlawing hitherto culturally accepted practices as stipulated in just **adopted UN widowhood resolution**, a global policy instrument that Kenya is mandated to implement.

The identifiable practices include:-

- **Coerced harmful cultural practices** that widows are often subjected to. Such practises including: **Widow cleansing: including sexual cleansing, shaving of head and private parts, immobility and temporary marriage clothed as the institution of “Tero”**.
- **Property Disinheritance; daughter disinheritance and denial of the status of Next of kin upon demise of the spouse.**
- **Omission to address the low economic status of rural and peri-urban poor widows who happen to be caregivers to vulnerable members of the society i.e elderly and children thereby exacerbating their poverty levels.**
- **Other subtle forms of Widow Abuses such as name calling and accusations of husband killing that promote stigma and discrimination of widows.**

We hereby unequivocally demand that:

1. The County Assembly of Siaya **adapts into law and implements the widows charter to legislate a Widow’s Protection Bill** that will make the violation of Widows rights unlawful.
2. The County Government of Siaya, through its Public Service Board to **facilitate the establishment of the Directorate of Widowed Persons within the department of Gender & Social Services** to address policies, strategies, and implementation mechanisms including frameworks and formulated schemes to enable widows access resources and support on priority to attain UN Sustainable Development Goals, more specifically Goal No. 5.
3. The Governor’s office **to establish a widows technical working committee** to oversee and provide technical support for the establishment of the directorate of widowed persons in the development of policy frameworks for widow centred interventions within three months of this Memo.
4. The budget committee, **to incorporate the proposed widows policy and its programming frameworks** into the ongoing county integrated development plan (CIDP) and into all other budget process for widow aware budgeting.

We finally reiterate that indeed all women and men are equal, and it is the obligation of the leadership of Siaya County to ensure that all its citizens enjoy their rights as guaranteed in the constitution of Kenya 2010.

CC: The Speaker, County Assembly of Siaya
The Clerk, County Assembly of Siaya.
The CEC, Education, Youth Affairs, Gender and Social Services.
The Director, Education, Youth Affairs, Gender and Social Services.
The MCA, South Sakwa
The MCA, South East Alego
The MCA, West Bondo

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