

## ***Widows in Ogooma (with reference to Agoe Stella's story)***

Ogooma is a parish in Ngero Sub County, Kumi district. The village is still characterized with huts as homes and the widows here are really suffering. To make it worse, there is no group or organization in place to support and protect them from the persecution that comes from losing a husband. As Touch ministries, we realized that most of the children sponsored and recruited have widowed mothers. But their level of vulnerability is alarming. They face problems like;

Being rejected by their in-laws and denied rights.

They have huge burden of responsibility. This is worse when she is left with no property and yet with so many children.

They suffer Psychological torture and stress. This is even worse when a widow agrees to get married to her husband's younger brother. ***Traditional fact.*** When a married man dies, his younger brother or relative has the right to marry his wife and fulfill her needs as a wife. In most cases it is arranged and forced. The motive is to maintain the family heritage. But this can also happen when the both of them agree to the marriage. The women agree to this because they need someone to take care of her children and her as well.

Widows are highly dependent. This is due to the fact that most of them ignored personal economic activities and left it all to their husbands. Also, the girl child is denied education. So they remain with nothing especially when their husband's property is grabbed by her in-laws and they have no skills.

They are disrespected and mistreated by their in-laws. Especially when she discovers that she is pregnant for her late husband weeks after his death. In cases like this, her in-laws reject her and her child and also reclaim all the property put in as bride price for her. They even reach the extent of taking away what is left for her by her husband. ***And so many more...***

***Here is a story of Agoe Stella. A mother of two children that are fully sponsored by TOUCH ministries.***

Stella is a widow living with HIV/AIDS. She has 7 children in total. 5 girls and 2 boys. 2 of her children are fully sponsored by TOUCH ministries. They are; Itipe Janet Florence 10 yrs old, and Anyait Mercy 7 years old. Stella's oldest daughter managed to sit for her S4 exams; Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) exams, but could not pick her results due to the lack of money to clear her fees balance at school. She's now at home with one child of her own.

Stella lost her husband in 2017. This was the beginning of sorrow in her life. She was left with nothing but two old huts. She has been isolated and neglected by her husband's family. The cows that belonged to her husband were sold off by his brothers in order to build her a house, but the money never reached her fully. It is believed that the in-laws used the money to construct his home. She was only left with the house almost done. Since she was left with nothing, she has to manage two small huts to accommodate her and her children plus her grandchild. Stella left one hut for her 7 children to sleep in.

**Guess what!** She shares a hut with her chickens and turkeys. In the same hut, is where utensils and water is stored? Yes. It is also the kitchen. The sanitation is really terrible to the core. On top of that, she has to keep calm and balance herself for her medicine to be effective. It is really rough for her.

The only solution for this would be for her to complete her house but it's just stuck there. Stella gets emotional support from her friends and TOUCH ministries community church. Her cries to God will surely be answered. So far, TOUCH fully sponsors two of her children and she is very grateful.



*The turkeys feel free to move in and out of Stella's room.*



*In this picture, we can see her mosquito net, food stored and a drum. We can also see bird droppings. This is where she sleeps. It is also the same place where food is stored and cooked. Stella is here and that is her mattress.*





*This is the house that Stella almost finished. But the construction paused due to limited funds.*



*The chickens are hatching their eggs in Stella's room. And, the spot where she cooks from with the utensils in the back.*



*The picture above is where her 7 children sleep, it's a grass thatched house.*

### ***Why are widows in Ogooma suffering?***

It is so sad that most of the widows in this village go through this trauma. And there is no group or association that supports them in the area. The TOUCH community church set up a women's group. But they benefit little from it because they don't have a livelihood project to support their group. The widows run for help in TOUCH ministries, but not all can be saved by it. And others just drown in their problems not knowing who to seek help from or even their rights.

Imagine what widows from a polygamous marriage go through. Complete torture and pain. Because the in-laws end up accepting the first wife and reject the rest.

This is because most women live as housewives and do not engage in personal income generating activities, but rather, in the husband's property and livelihood. The fact that they live in the same compound with their in-laws makes it even harder.

Women are excluded from anything concerning property ownership. To make it even worse, it leaves them with absolutely nothing.

### ***What can be done?***

Well, services to protect widows can be extended to the parish in order to: Create public awareness on widows' rights and suffering. They could hold seminars and campaigns in support of widows.

Meetings can be held with the local leaders to protect the widows.

We can utilize the availability of religious institutions that could set up groups and meetings to support the widows emotionally and socially by providing counsel and words of encouragement. The cell group ministry could set up special programs to address issues concerning widows. They could also warn married couples to prepare for the future which is unknown. The couples should also be taught to write wills.

We can also observe the role of the Non-Governmental Organizations in this matter. They could help set up seminars and workshops to train widows and women. They could be equipped with skills and knowledge to overcome effects of rejection and how they can get back on their feet for the sake of their children's joy and her peace of mind.

And lastly, widows can be taught their rights and what to do when they are abused. They can also be told of where to seek help and the procedures.



*Itipe Janet Florence & Anyait Mercy*



*Playing with friends*

Kaladi Peace T