



Pinseemisjonen

Norwegian Pentecostal Mission



FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

10815 WIDOWS PROJECT



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AUGUST 2022

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AI	- Appreciative Inquiry
AIDS	- Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CEC	- County Executive Committee
CIDP	- County Integrated Development Plan
COVID – 19	- Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSOs	- Civil Society Organizations
DAC	- Development Assistance Committee
EAT	- Empowerment Assessment Tool
FGDs	- Focus Group Discussions
FGM	- Female Genital Mutilation
FPFK	- Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya
HIV	- Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HTP	- Harmful Traditional Practices
IGAs	- Income Generating Activities
KIIs	- Key Informant Interviews
NPM	- Norwegian Pentecostal Mission
OECD	- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SMART	- Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound
VSLAs	- Village Savings and Loans Associations

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Evaluation team acknowledges and highly appreciates the invaluable support it received during this process from Dorothy Mugah – Project Leader, Festus Mukoya – Social Ministry Coordinator and other FPFK staff who were involved in the evaluation process in one way or the other. Your guidance, input and support were instrumental in facilitating the process of this evaluation.

Our utmost gratitude goes to all the FPFK partners that we interacted with during this exercise, including County government representatives and CSOs representatives. We greatly appreciate the participation of Project Advisory Committee members; their responses have been very useful in guiding current issues and possible future directions.

Special gratitude is extended to all the community members across the two project areas who participated in key informant interviews and Focus Groups Discussions. Information gathered from these groups forms the basis for our conclusions and recommendations. Most importantly, we wish to thank local project facilitators who were very instrumental in the implementation of the project their participation and inputs were very useful.

A team of enumerators demonstrated discipline and determination in the process of induction and actual data collection. The contributions have been very instrumental in this process. Finally, we wish to recognize financial support from DIGNI through Norwegian Pentecostal Mission (NPM) that have enabled effective implementation of the project which has made contribution towards ensuring that widows in Nyambare area are empowered to live in dignity and freedom.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) is a national umbrella organization for a wide network of evangelical churches registered in Kenya. It operates in 31 regions in Kenya and has over 1400 churches tied to the organization, with a combined membership of over 300,000 persons. FPFK runs various development projects in different thematic areas of focus including Youth empowerment; Gender and Environment; Anti FGM advocacy; Peace (which include the Peace and rights project, Pokot Turkana community resilience Project and Kilgoris Peace Project), Humanitarian relief; Environment and livelihood; widows' empowerment, Orphans and Excluded out-of-school Children Advocacy; Livelihood; Early warning and Early Response System support by University Of Oslo (offering technical support and clouding services) and Strategic functions project.

The Widows project operates in Siaya County, where women's rights are violated by being forced into widowhood traditions like widow cleansing and forced inheritance. Other than the women's rights violations through the traditional rituals, the widows also face other challenges like property confiscation, discrimination, extreme poverty, single handed parenting, denied freedom of expression and even movement, psychosocial distress, etc.

The Widows project period is 5 years from 2017-2021 with an additional one-year extension to 2022 due to the impact of COVID-19. The project works in the 2 sub-counties/locations, Usonga and West Ugenya in Alego Usonga and Ugenya sub counties with a combined total of 120 villages. The project has an overall objective of ensuring that widows in Nyambare area are empowered to live indignity and freedom and this is to be achieved through three specific objectives:

- i. To increase knowledge and skills for widows' self-advocacy towards their freedom from harmful cultural practices.
- ii. To contribute towards the establishment of support systems that enhance the welfare and cultural freedom of widows
- iii. To contribute towards improving policy environment favourable for widows' freedom from harmful cultural practices

The purpose for this evaluation was to assess the performance of the project in the last 5 years and draw lessons and best practices to inform future programming. This evaluation has generated data that will form the basis for the design and planning of the new phase. The evaluation has extracted lessons and best practices from the assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, coherence, and sustainability of the project. The evaluation also provides clear

recommendations for stakeholders to promote long term impact to beneficiaries and sustainability of project outcomes.

Evaluation methodology and approach

The evaluation team developed and employed an array of practical and participatory tools during the evaluation. This is because the assignment required a lot of information and knowledge to be generated for analysis. The process involved use of participatory methodologies at various levels as well as application of semi structured tools such as key informant interview guides, focus group discussion guides and Empowerment Assessment Tool (EAT) as well as review of secondary data. Quantitative data was generated from periodic reports as well as other secondary sources. This was backed up with qualitative data that was collected through FGDs and KIIs under relevant themes and variables. This informed presentation of findings and interpretation of the evaluation. Draft report was subjected to validation process with FPFK management, Widows Project staff as well as partners for feedback and finalization.

Key findings

The evaluation indicates that widows project has been relevant and timely in responding to cultural norms affecting widows in Siaya County. The project work with the marginalized communities especially widows at the grassroots level in projecting the voice of these communities through local established groups was found to be consistent with FPFK Mission. Review of progress reports and interviews during the evaluation provide evidence that the project has to a greater extent reached the widows who are adversely affected and “crippled” by culture and traditional practices associated with widowhood. As such, the project has bridged the gap in the social wellbeing of widows in Siaya County which is wanting due to lack of targeted sustainable interventions and policy gaps.

Across the project outcomes, the project has to a greater extent contributed to increased knowledge and skills for widows’ self-advocacy towards their freedom from harmful cultural practices. For instance, review of progress on indicators provide evidence that 386 targeted widows are able to demonstrate knowledge in advocacy, 371 widows in the project are able to claim their rights, 378 widows are championing for their rights and for other widows, and 446 religious leaders, elders and youth respect widows. Whereas majority of target widows reported increased level of knowledge and skills in advocacy through various trainings they have gone through, this is only limited to local level advocacy. Most of the widows have not been involved in advocacy issues at county level.

With regard to support systems that enhance the welfare and cultural freedom of widows, 341 widows are accessing and benefiting from the established Legal

support system, 322 widows are accessing and benefiting from the psychosocial support system and 323 widows are accessing and benefiting from the established economic support system. The project also built capacity of 20 widows as paralegals and provided enabling environment for linkages with local administration. Through these initiatives, several widows have been able to access and benefit from established legal support system especially on cases around property inheritance. Widows have been given opportunities to participate in legal activities including being part of key community decision organs such as village elders, *nyumba kumi* and other leadership structures within the community. The project has also provided economic empowerment through which widows' groups have established VSLAs and other small IGAs and this has contributed to improved access and benefits from such established economic support system.

In contributing towards improved policy environment favorable for widows' freedom from harmful cultural practices, the project has made some efforts that enable widows to have increased awareness of their rights based on basic human rights and through that they have been empowered to claim their rights. For instance, 214 widows are using policies and laws to claim their rights, 21 legal referrals have been made and 272 widows are accessing county government services. However, it is worth noting that the existing policies target vulnerable groups with no particular reference to widows and this therefore hinders widows to have strong voice in order to demand for their rights. Based on their awareness of particular provisions of the law that provide environment for widows to claim their rights, they have utilized such opportunities especially on issues around property entitlements.

Whereas efforts have been made to sensitize project participants on relevant policies, existing mechanisms seem not to be accessed by the widows as there is poor flow of information from the government on any policy issues concerning welfare of widows. It also worth noting that effective advocacy would benefit from county level engagement beyond the two project areas as efforts at local level may not be sufficient to generate strong voices for county level engagement. While the project targeted to influence development of widows' social protection policy, this is yet to be realized as the discussion was still ongoing at the time of evaluation which would see enactment of the policy by Siaya County Assembly.

Based on project design, achievement of project objectives can be attributed to a number of factors including, working with local community and church structures, project advisory committee, involvement of project volunteers, and joint development and implementation of project work plans. However, there are factors that hindered full realization of project outcomes, including; (i) Long and dynamic process of advocacy around widows' issues; (ii) Strong cultural barriers that take long to break; (iii) General elections of 2017 and instability that followed slowed the inception phase but efforts were made to make up for the lost time; and (iv)

COVID-19 also hindered effective implementation of activities in 2020 and part of 2021.

While the project is targeting widows from West Ugenya and Usonga, there have been evidence of multiplier effects in which widows who are not members have been assisted by the group. Furthermore, the members have also provided support to widows outside the project target areas. This provides opportunity for expansion. Efforts towards empowering the widows to advocate for their rights and champion rights of other have earned them recognition within the community to the extent that some widows have been selected in local administration in order to undertake dispute resolution especially on issues affecting widows.

The strategies and approaches employed especially capacity building, socio-economic empowerment, and local level advocacy have been effective in ensuring effective implementation. The three outcomes have provided integrated approach to empowerment of the project participants especially widows, even though more need to be done regarding policy framework. At the time of evaluation, implementation and absorption rate were at optimum level with few activities being implemented as the project comes to an end.

The project design has put in place various strategies that would ensure continuation when the project comes to an end. For instance, capacity building component of the project has led to more widows knowing their rights and this has enabled them to not only defend themselves but also champion the rights of others. Trained paralegals have also enhanced local level referral mechanisms that will continue beyond project period especially if refresher trainings can be organized.

Finally, FPFK through the local and regional church structure as well as working with local community structures and CSOs have established strong partnership with potential of bringing change at local level. The project has empowered target widows to have a strong voice which has enabled them engage at local level to address issues affecting them as well as champion the rights of other widows. In addition, involvement of in-laws and youths has laid enough ground and enabling environment for engagement by target widows. However, there is need to invest in capacity strengthening of the groups in order to ensure effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the evaluation indicates that there's still increasing need as cultural practices are still deeply rooted in Siaya county, in order to remain relevant to the existing situation, FPFK should consider;

- i. Scale up of similar interventions beyond the current project area(s) in order to ensure that more widows are reached;
- ii. Extend sensitization and trainings of other community gate keepers such as cultural and religious leaders as a step towards sustainable interventions;
- iii. Consider another category of widows who can act as ambassadors and paralegals so as to address increasing pressing needs of widows while also engaging with other local actors;
- iv. Possible partnerships in order to address social changes through relevant county legislations.

In order to increase knowledge and skills for widows' self-advocacy towards their freedom from harmful cultural practices;

- i. There's need to support county widows' network in order to have a strong voice to champion widows' rights as well as engage in active local and county level advocacy;
- ii. Further sensitization of more religious and cultural leaders as well as youth, as allies in local level advocacy.

Support systems that enhance the welfare and cultural freedom of widows can be enhanced through;

- i. Provision refresher trainings (and trainings of new members) on legal issues and establish motivation mechanisms for the trained paralegals;
- ii. Establishment of linkage among groups providing psychosocial support so as to act as a critical mass and effectiveness in providing PSS to widows beyond group membership;
- iii. Provision of more trainings on business development/management and seed fund to support new IGAs established by the groups; and
- iv. Linkage of registered widows' groups/VSLAs with identified/friendly MFIs for provision of loans at affordable rates.

In contributing towards improving policy environment favorable for widows' freedom from harmful cultural practices, the following suggestions are worth considering;

- i. Advocate for transparency in targeting widows through existing social protection mechanisms;
- ii. FPFK/Widows project to explore key advocacy and policy spaces at county level in pushing for relevant legislations towards widows;
- iii. FPFK should continue with efforts that have been initiated with the Siaya County assembly towards establishing social protection mechanism for widows;

- iv. Push for county by-laws that allocate some portion of employment opportunities for widows in order to provide means of livelihoods for women beyond existing cash transfers and local level economic opportunities;
- v. Focus on the following advocacy and policy priorities; plug into Rona Foundation's initiative to lobby for development and enactment of widows' charter, enactment and adoption of social protection policy for widows, and participation in the development of new County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) III.

In order to ensure broader project effectiveness, the following considerations are worth noting;

- i. Enhance staffing by recruiting staff with requisite technical capacity to support the Project Leader, for a start project officer and driver who double up to support administrative functions will add value in realizing project delivery and effectiveness;
- ii. Monitoring and evaluation function needs to be enhanced through regular follow up and support to ensure that particular aspects of monitoring, evaluation and learning of the project are up to date;
- iii. FPFK/Widows project needs to allocate adequate resources for advocacy and related activities, considering that the process is long and dynamic while involving various stakeholders along the way.

For project efficiency, the following suggestions are worth considering;

- i. Build the capacity of advisory committee to continue executing its oversight role effectively;
- ii. Consider reviewing mobile payment mechanism to the local beneficiaries while considering their prevailing circumstances;
- iii. Consider evaluating effectiveness of current payment system in light of different dynamics in which the project operates, with regard to procurement of services;
- iv. Increased capacity and resources for county level advocacy will be necessary in order to sustain the gains made;
- v. Need for joint project and finance teams to ensure timely analysis of implementation and absorption/burn rate for timely decision making;
- vi. Staffing needs to be addressed while considering technical and advocacy capacity as well as consideration of driver/administrative function in order to ensure effective project delivery;
- vii. FPFK/Widows project needs to be deliberate to focus on using M&E for learning and accountability as well as advocacy for the project.

For project sustainability, FPFK should consider the following;

- i. Need to integrate strong institutional capacity strengthening of the groups by ensuring systems and processes are put in place for sustainability;
- ii. Need to invest time and financial resources in existing strategies from the onset;
- iii. Continue sensitizing various stakeholders to ensure community transformation towards widows' issues.

For civil society strengthening, especially at community level;

- i. There's need to review/develop partnership strategy to ensure effective collaboration, coordination, communication, etc for effective advocacy and policy engagement with regard to widows;
- ii. There's need to invest resources for institutional capacity strengthening of the established widows' groups, for instance support development of strategic plan and other policies to ensure legitimacy and capacity to attract local level/devolved funds as well as opportunities for partnership with relevant actors at county level;
- iii. More capacity is required for county level engagement.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) is a national umbrella organization for a wide network of evangelical churches registered in Kenya. It operates in 31 regions in Kenya and has over 1400 churches tied to the organization, with a combined membership of over 300,000 persons. FPFK runs various development projects in different thematic areas of focus including Youth empowerment; Gender and Environment; Anti FGM advocacy; Peace (which include the Peace and rights project, Pokot Turkana community resilience Project and Kilgoris Peace Project), Humanitarian relief; Environment and livelihood; widows' empowerment, Orphans and Excluded out-of-school Children Advocacy; Livelihood; Early warning and Early Response System support by University Of Oslo (offering technical support and clouding services) and Strategic functions project.

The Widows project operates in Siaya County, where women's rights are violated by being forced into widowhood traditions like widow cleansing and forced inheritance. Other than the women's rights violations through the traditional rituals, the widows also face other challenges like property confiscation, discrimination, extreme poverty, single handed parenting, denied freedom of expression and even movement, psychosocial distress, etc.

The project targets the widows in 2 sub-counties within Siaya County which are, Alego Usonga, and Ugenya sub-Counties but specifically in Usonga and West Ugenya Wards or locations. The project whose overall objective is to empower the widows to live in dignity and freedom from the harmful traditional practices, has the widows as the main target group as the name suggests, but also targets other community members.

The Widows Project adopts the training seminars and workshops strategy to strengthen the widows' capacity to be able to resist rights violations and social abuse and in turn stand up for others. The widows are further capacitated on legal rights, psychosocial healing and economic productivity. Other than the widows, the project also targets the youth, the local administrators, the religious leaders, the cultural elders and the in-laws..

The Widows project period is 5 years from 2017-2021 with an additional one-year extension to 2022 due to the impact of COVID-19. The project works in the 2 sub-counties/locations, Usonga and West Ugenya in Alego Usonga and Ugenya sub-counties with a combined total of 120 villages. The project has an overall objective of ensuring that widows in Nyambare area are empowered to live indignity and freedom and this is to be achieved through three specific objectives:

- i. To increase knowledge and skills for widows' self-advocacy towards their freedom from harmful cultural practices.
- ii. To contribute towards the establishment of support systems that enhance the welfare and cultural freedom of widows

iii.To contribute towards improving policy environment favourable for widows' freedom from harmful cultural practices

1.2 Purpose of Assignment

The purpose for this evaluation was to assess the performance of the project in the last 5 years and draw lessons and best practices to inform future programming. This evaluation has generated data that will form the basis for the design and planning of the new phase. The evaluation has extracted lessons and best practices from the assessment of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, coherence, and sustainability of the project. The evaluation also provides clear recommendations for stakeholders to promote long term impact to beneficiaries and sustainability of project outcomes.

When assessing the level of empowerment of the target groups, the Digni's Empowerment Assessment Tool (EAT) has been used across evaluation criteria. Considering the three dimensions of empowerment in the Digni Empowerment Assessment Tool, the evaluation provides an analysis of the extent to which the project has been able to empower the target groups, especially widows.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Evaluation Scope and Key Questions

The OECD-DAC Criteria for evaluation of organizations was applied to review the project while integrating Digni's Empowerment Assessment across the various target groups. Therefore, this evaluation was guided by the following evaluation questions under each specific objective:

1. Assess the relevance of the project focus, target group, strategies, theory of change and draw relevant lessons.
 - i. To what extent was the project relevant in addressing the needs of the project participants?
 - ii. Did the project select and reach the right project participants?
 - iii. To what extent was the project relevant to county, national and international strategic and legal instruments?
 - iv. Were the theory of change and strategies appropriate to the needs of the participants?
 - v. What empowerment aspects (EAT) can be detected through assessment of project relevance?
 - vi. What key lessons, best practices and recommendations can be drawn from the relevance of the project?
2. Determine the effectiveness of the project intervention with the view of drawing lessons and best practices
 - i. To what extent were the project's objectives achieved?
 - ii. What internal factors influenced the achievement of the project objectives (indication of strengths and weaknesses related to capacity of organization and project team, planning and management, monitoring and evaluation systems, communication, etc)?
 - iii. What external factors (cultural/religious//political context, environmental challenges, gender, partnerships initiated, etc.) influenced the achievement of the project objectives?
 - iv. Were there any positive and negative unintended project results?
 - v. Apply Empowerment assessment tool (EAT) tenets to determine the achievement of project outcomes
 - vi. What key lessons, best practices and recommendations can be drawn from this subsection?
3. Appraise organizational and strategic efficiency and the project partnership approach (including management structures, communications, feedback and relationships) to staff, church, community involvement and advocacy in relation to the project's achievements with the view of drawing best practices and lessons.
 - i. Looking specifically at project management (project cycle, staffing, tasks and responsibility of the various stakeholders, the project Advisory committee), were the resources and inputs efficiently used to achieve results?
 - ii. Was the project implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives?

- iii. Were activities implemented as planned and within the budget?
 - iv. Was FPFK able to set SMART goals and navigate within the frameworks of the available resources like time, money and human capacity/competence?
 - v. How has monitoring of progress and achievements been done for learning and accountability, and used to influence project implementation?
 - vi. Apply Empowerment assessment tool (EAT) tenets to determine the achievement of efficiency of the project
 - vii. What significant lessons, best practices and recommendations can be picked from the cost efficiency of the project?
4. Examine the best practices and lessons learned from the process of managing project risks and sustainability.
- i. To what extent will the benefits of the project continue after donor funding ceases?
 - ii. What are the major factors which influences the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the project?
 - iii. What risks pose the greatest threat to the sustenance of the project outcomes? How is the project working around their mitigation?
 - iv. Apply Empowerment assessment tool (EAT) tenets to determine the achievement of sustainability
 - v. What important lessons, best practices and recommendations can be drawn from the risks and sustainability management of the project?
5. Assess the degree to which the project has contributed to strengthening civil society.
- i. Assess whether society is characterized by a strong civil society engagement for change
 - ii. Assess whether there is a high degree of organization in the target groups
 - iii. Assess whether the beneficiaries can identify and solve their challenges together
 - iv. Assess whether the project provides equal opportunities for women and men
6. Provide concrete recommendations:

Based on the findings and conclusions of the questions above:

- i. Draw recommendations that can be applied in improving programming for similar interventions.
 - ii. Determine lessons, strategies or practices from the project that need further research and development
7. Assess and document the following end of project period outcome indicators as are mandatorily expected in the Global Results Framework.
- i. Outcome results on how communities and/or community-based organizations are solving local challenges using own resources.
 - ii. How local communities have been able to lift social restrictions facing women and girls.
 - iii. How local communities are able to advocate their interests in public decision-making bodies.

- iv. Number of communities/villages and estimated population denouncing harmful practices.
- v. How religious/traditional leaders/norms/customs have been utilized mobilized to combat widows' rights violations
- vi. How discriminatory practices/systems against minorities have changed

2.2 Approach

This was a cross sectional descriptive participatory evaluation employing mixed method approaches. Purposive sampling of respondent was done for qualitative data collection, and this included target community representatives from the two regions as well as stakeholders actively engaged in the project. Quantitative data was gathered from desk review and progress reports.

2.3 Data Collection Methods

Systematic desk review: A systematic review and literature search were used to collect information from project implementation plan, PPFK strategic plan, and annual progress reports. The aim was to gather information and data to supplement qualitative interviews.

Quantitative data collection: Quantitative data was collected mainly from desk review to assess project performance against results indicators.

Focus Group Discussions: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with a sample of beneficiaries and groups/committees to seek their perspectives on the impact of the project. FGD participants were drawn from established groups and committees from the two project areas, targeting a total of 137 respondents.



Figure 1: FGD with Sifuyo West Widows Group

Figure 2: FGD with cultural leaders in Usonga

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Interview guides were designed and administered to stakeholders who have been involved in the project in one way or another. A total of 8 interviews were conducted targeting local administration (chiefs and assistant chiefs), county government representatives, and partner organizations. The aim was to assess participant understanding and awareness of

the changes which have occurred as a result of project implementation. In this regard, key informant interviews provided in-depth information on the *relevance, effectiveness, sustainability* and *impact* of the project in relation to its objectives. Key informant interviews also provided information on post project knowledge, project strengths and challenges in relation to various social, cultural and economic factors that enabled and/or constrained the achievement of project results.

Empowerment Assessment Tool (EAT): Digni Empowerment Assessment Tool was administered to widows' groups to determine the change among the beneficiaries. With regard to assessing the degree to which the project has contributed to strengthening civil society, the evaluation team focused on the following: Assess whether society is characterized by a strong civil society engagement for change; Assess whether there is a high degree of organization in the target groups; Assess whether the local communities are able to identify and solve their challenges together; and assess whether communities provide equal opportunities for women and men. When measuring change in empowerment, efforts have been made to investigate and assess all three empowerment dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. Analysis from empowerment assessment has been presented under the findings and integrated across relevant sections.



Figure 3: Empowerment Assessment of Riwrwok e teko Widows Group

Joint staff project review: A review of project performance was done through Appreciative Inquiry (AI) involving Project Advisory Committee, Staff and volunteers. This provided an in-depth reflection on project design and implementation as well as enablers. A total of 9 project team members participated in the review session.



Figure 4: Project Review with FPFK Staff and Advisory Committee in Nyambare Project Office

2.4 Research plan and processes

Pre-testing of data collection tools: The data collection tools were developed, reviewed and pre-tested. The pre-testing was meant to serve two purposes. The primary purpose was to focus on the content of the questionnaire to ensure the reliability and practicability of the instrument. The second purpose was to focus on the average time taken and the capability of the enumerator to administer the questionnaire to the respondent. This also helped on the logistical arrangements including the desired number of interviews.

Mobilization of the research participants: The government and community structures, staff and relevant persons to the project were effectively and proactively involved to support in the mobilization.

2.5 Data management

Data cleaning: Data was cleaned in two phases. The first cleaning was done immediately from the field where the data collection tools were edited on a daily basis. The tools were sorted out according to their categories. The questionnaires were checked for completeness, clarity and the right coding. The second phase of cleaning was done after populating quantitative data.

Data analysis and reporting: Qualitative data from the key informant interviews and review of documents was coded and analyzed by outcomes. This data was then synthesized for reporting. Quantitative data gathered from project output reports during the project implementation was analyzed in Excel using descriptive statistics. FPFK project team provided valuable contextual insights into explaining the findings. These have been consolidated into draft and final report.

3.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS

In this report, findings are presented along thematic areas central to the project focus namely relevance, effectiveness including achievement of specific objectives, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Under the section on achievement of objectives, the areas covered are based on the project outcomes.

3.1 Relevance

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 Widows project has therefore been relevant and timely in responding to such cultural norms.

The widows project work with the marginalized communities especially widows at the grassroots level in projecting the voice of these communities through local established groups was found to be consistent with FPFK Mission, which is *"...meet the spiritual, Economic and Social needs of the people through Evangelism, Education, Training and Social-Economic activities based on Christian values"*.

Responding to community identified needs; the project was initiated by Free Pentecostal Fellowship in Kenya (FPFK) in conjunction with the Luo community in Nyambare area based on lessons drawn from HIV/AIDS project that had been operational for the past 15 years. Reports from the local and regional church levels in Nyambare pointed to the escalating challenges of widowhood with a majority of them critical, lacking essential basic services as they suffer from physical and emotional distress. Cultural pressure on widows and their children increasingly caused untold suffering that most of them shy away from openly talking about or confronting. It is on this basis that FPFK initiated this project which has shifted focus from the HIV/AIDS and health (although also known to plague widows a lot in the county) to adopt the human rights approach to build the widows capacity to resist harmful cultural practices which undermine the dignity of widows.

Review of progress reports and interviews during the evaluation provide evidence that the project has to a greater extent reached the widows who are adversely affected and "crippled" by culture and traditional practices associated with widowhood. As such, the project has bridged the gap in the social wellbeing of widows in Siaya County which is wanting due to lack of targeted sustainable interventions and policy gaps.

The targeting of project participants was based on the needs of widows considering sociocultural challenges propagated by their in-laws and local cultural systems and structures that obstruct them from fully participating in socio-economic and political

development. It is therefore imperative to note that the project focused on interventions that would enable widows enjoy their rights and rise economically to sustain their households.

The project's theory of change and strategies remain appropriate to the needs of the participants, especially widows. The evaluation indicates significant contribution towards individual and community changes, with regard to skills, knowledge and access to rights as well as economic opportunities. However, project's contribution towards social change is yet to be realized as this is a long process.

The project has empowered target widows who were harassed and denied even the most basic of rights. The evaluation reveals that the target widows are now empowered and recognize their rights and entitlements, a demonstration of **Power within**.

"After the death of my husband, one of my in-laws wanted to disinherit me of my husband's property especially the land. But as project participant, I was trained and knew my rights so I took the issue to the local chief and the land was returned to me. Nowadays, I am given opportunity to give opinions in family matters and I am respected by my in-laws;" A member of Nyandheho Widows Group in Usonga narrated

According to the County Director for Gender and Social Services, the widows project as a breakthrough considering reduced number of cases they used to handle of abuse and maltreatment from in-laws and community at large. He went further to mention that cases of HIV (no statistics provided) and forced wife inheritance have gone down,

"Widows have a choice on whether or not they should be inherited after husbands' death".

Similar sentiments emerged from another participant during FGD with Jiwruok e Teko Widows Group in West Ugenya,

"My husband died and did not pay my dowry and I did not even pour soil on his grave because of that. Later after being empowered and knowing my rights I gathered resources, took my in-laws to pay my own dowry for the sake of the children. I also did not have a house and chose a husband for myself who built a house for me. I am very comfortable with my children in my new hom"

3.2 Effectiveness

3.2.1 Project performance

Outcome 1: Increased knowledge and skills for widows' self-advocacy towards their freedom from harmful cultural practices

According to review of progress reports, more focus was on building capacity of project beneficiaries on; widows rights and responsibilities, inheritance and sexual rights, harmful cultural practices affecting widows, and widows' property and

succession rights. Additionally, sensitization forums for widows, affected youths, local administrators and religious leaders were conducted on the rights and freedoms of widows.

Over the project period, a cumulative 386 widows were able to demonstrate knowledge in advocacy against the overall target of 342. It is also worth noting that 371 widows are claiming their rights against the set target of 213, this is great step by the project towards empowering the widows to live in dignity and freedom, considering that at baseline only 6 widows were reported to be able to claim their rights.

Another achievement reported under this outcome is that a total of 378 are able to stand up for not only themselves but also for other widows thereby demonstrating the fact that their capacity has been built with the needed knowledge. This change is attributed to capacity building interventions of the project that focused on increasing widows' knowledge. The project has also contributed to 446 religious leaders, cultural elders, the youth and now the in-laws respecting the widows after the sensitization and dialogue forums over the implementation period. Table 3.1 provides summary performance on outcome 1 of the project.

Table 3.1: Project performance against Outcome 1 indicators

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Achievements	Comments
Outcome 1: Increased knowledge and skills for widows' self-advocacy towards their freedom from harmful cultural practices				
Number of targeted widows demonstrating knowledge in advocacy	23	342	386	Overall target surpassed
Number of widows in the project claiming their rights	6	213	371	Overall target surpassed
Number of widows championing for their rights and for other widows	23	342	378	Overall target surpassed
Number of religious leaders, elders, youth and in-laws respecting widows	13	169	446	Baseline and overall target values not clear from the project documents

As a result of the above achievements, the project to a greater extent has contributed to increased knowledge and skills for widows' self-advocacy towards their freedom from harmful cultural practices. Whereas majority of target widows reported increased level of knowledge and skills in advocacy through various

trainings they have gone through, this is only limited to local level advocacy. Most of the widows have not been involved in advocacy issues at county level.

Interviews also indicated that widows' capacity to claim their rights has increased compared to the situation at the beginning of the project. Furthermore, the widows have extended their reach in order to champion the rights of other widows in the community. The project has also led to recognition of the widows not only as champions but also as ambassadors, which is a **demonstration of Power to** as it emerged from one of the discussions. A member of Project Advisory Committee reported having come to the aid of a widow who was even being barred from burying her husband after she was disinherited of her late husband's property. With her intervention the widow was allowed to bury her husband and property returned. The youth who were perpetrating the vice were taken to police cells, today the widow is grateful.

By involving key gate keepers like the religious and cultural leaders, there has been a sense of respect to widows in the community. The same respect is accorded by youths considering that most of the youths involved in the project are children of the widows and through the project, they have seen how the project has impacted positively on them.

Outcome 2: Established support systems that enhance the welfare and cultural freedom of widows

While Kenya has ratified gender equality legislation, women's social and economic status continues to be defined by lack of information and traditional practices. The Constitution in the Bill of Rights guarantees equality of the sexes and freedom from discrimination. It protects women from harmful traditional practices (HTP), early marriages, widow cleansing, forced eviction, female genital mutilation, widow inheritance and dispossession of land. It allows ownership and protection of property by both sexes without discrimination. However, traditions, customs, and lack of knowledge regarding these laws prevents them being enforced. Unable to afford lawyers and ignored by authorities, women's rights are routinely violated.

In response to this and in the context of Siaya County, the project focused on legal support system, psychosocial support system and economic support system. Based on review of project reports, 341 widows were able to benefit from the legal support system and this has been felt by the communities where the widows live. This has led to reduction of cases in rights violation among the widows first due to collective voices and action by the groups of widows and secondly as a result of the relentlessness with which they pursue justice for their fellow widow.

According to project reports, 322 widows have been able to benefit from the established psychosocial support system over the project period. The psychosocial support system has served to enhance the widows' psychological healing which has been a needed factor in the total freedom. During one of the learning exchange

visits, one of the widows who was only a few months into widowhood when the project began its operations said,

"I was at the point of losing my mind and completely lost because no one gave me the widowhood script and I was all alone. Life only began to make sense to me when I found myself among the group of widows who were gathered by the project; some of whom came from my village while others from the neighboring villages and far off in Usonga location. Even before the project organized for us the psychosocial support clinics, I was already being encouraged by the fact that i was never alone in the widowhood journey. Because of the sharing sessions we had before we started our meetings, I felt the load of defeat leave me and today i am so grateful to the project. I listened to fellow widows talk about the things they go through and what they do to stay strong and these encouraged me to soldier on as I also picked one or two things which worked for someone in tough times. Later on we got the privilege to have one of us in our group who was trained on counselling by the project who was always within reach any day one wanted someone to talk to before the meeting day who was so instrumental as she had the skills of a counsellor."

With regard to access to economic support system, 323 projects beneficiaries benefited from the established economic support system. This is attributed to the trainings which targeted all the 13 groups and have since exposed the widows to a wide range of information on the opportunities and linkages available for women in the county. As a result, there is eventual sprout of Income Generating Activities (IGAs) in 7 groups. Among the 7 groups, 2 groups each received KShs 100,000 from the Women Enterprise Funds to boost their groups funds for loaning and savings while Life in Christ Widows Group received a charcoal briquette making machine from the Siaya County Members of parliament's wives' women's empowerment Initiative. **Table 3.2** presents project performance against outcome 2 indicators.

Table 3.2: Project performance against Outcome 2 indicators

Indicators	Baseline	Targets	Achievements	Comments
Outcome 2: Established support systems that enhance the welfare and cultural freedom of widows				
The number of widows accessing and benefiting from the established Legal support system	0	244	341	Overall target surpassed
The number of widows accessing and benefiting from the psychosocial support system	0	253	322	Overall target surpassed

The number of widows accessing and benefiting from the established economic support system	0	205	323	Overall target surpassed

The project had built capacity of 20 widows as paralegals and provided enabling environment for linkages with local administration. Through these initiatives, several widows have been able to access and benefit from established legal support system especially on cases around property inheritance. Widows have been given opportunities to participate in legal activities including being part of key community decision making organs; village elders, *nyumba kumi* administrators and other leadership structures within the community.

As a result of both social and economic empowerment, three widows; Sophie Awino Odhiambo of Jiwruok e Teko –West Ugenya, Penina Achieng Otieno of Mine Nyale Widows Group – West Ugenya and Hellen Otieno and Monica of Usonga have been appointed as Village Elders with a mandate of addressing widows’ issues among other tasks. Hellen says,

“ We are respected and members of the community prefer to be handled by us more than even the chief.”

As direct project beneficiaries, target widows have not only been able to access and benefit from the Psychosocial support system but they have also extended their support to new widows and this is a **demonstration of power with.**

Beyond the direct beneficiaries, members of Nyandheho widows group provide psychosocial counselling to new widows and encourage them that they are not alone. As such, the group is recognized in the community as they also sensitize other widows who are not necessarily members of the group.

The project has provided economic empowerment through which widows’ groups have established VSLAs and other small IGAs and this has contributed to improved access and benefits from such established economic support system. According to the interviews, widows were so desperate and spent most of their time mourning but now they are doing table banking; lending money to members and repaying back. They are poultry farming, doing other small businesses towards economic empowerment.

“Our children can now go to school like the others and even our dressing has changed. We look like women of dignity and people are surprised since they thought our cases were forgotten...wan mond Ruoth (we are wives of the King).” Jackline Otieno, Head of Nyumba Kumi in Sifuyo from Jiwruok e Teko Widows group further said;

"...I can now budget with whatever little I Have and achieve whatever I desire".

Outcome 3: Improved policy environment favorable for widows' freedom from harmful cultural practices

Recognizing the need for policy frameworks focusing on widows' freedom from harmful cultural practices in Siaya County, the project has slowly worked on improving the policy environment by empowering the beneficiaries with knowledge on citizen participation to enhance their participation in the county governments' open forums for soliciting the public's views to enable planning and budgeting and eventually auditing the same.

With specific focus on widows, the project was to influence in drafting of one or two social protection policies addressing the plight of the widows in Siaya County in order to improve the policy environment for the widows to be able to advocate for their freedom from harmful/traditional practices. It is worth noting that although there is no policy directly addressing widows' issues currently, efforts have been made to sensitize target groups on other relevant existing policies. So far, a total of 214 widows are now using the county policies available for generally all the county's citizens to claim their rights after the awareness workshops that the project conducted which was an eye opener to the widows.

Some of the policies the widows used to claim their rights are the Agriculture sector policy. All the widows recognize the importance of livestock keeping and crop production as major contributors to food security, poverty reduction through employment creation and value addition, growing food crops like maize, sorghum, beans, cassava and sweet potatoes while some engage in sugarcane and groundnuts farming as cash crops.

The widows have also recognized the education bursary funds act and currently using it. For instance, in 2021, 73 more widows from both project locations were reported to have applied and received school fees bursaries from the county. Efforts made towards sensitization on the relevant policies have to a greater extent contributed to greater awareness among project participants and actions are being taken as it merged that,

"Since 2020 when the project started the awareness workshops on citizen participation at county level, I have never missed any citizen participation forum and again I have been applying for the bursaries for my children and i have always been surprised that so the only thing anyone interested needs to do is to follow the instructions, attach all the requirements and beat the application deadline!"

With regard to referral mechanisms established during the project implementation, 21 cases have now been referred to other actors through the paralegals' efforts also owed to the actively functioning legal support system. Considering the project engagement with local administration, most of the cases were resolved at local level and just a few were taken up by police.

Whereas there is no social protection policy addressing the widows plight in place, there is a draft of the Widows' Social Protection Policy which was done in 2020 but is yet to be enacted by the county assembly. So far the project has been lobbying

for its enactment and adoption by the Siaya County Assembly. As part of the process, the County Executive Committee (CEC) Gender as well as Education have been engaged with positive response and it is hoped that they will own and support the process. The Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) from the two project locations had also been engaged with good progress and committed their support for and even allocate funds for the same. With the gains made, it is hoped that enactment and adoption will contribute towards improved policy environment to empowering the widows to live in dignity and freedom.

Regarding access to government services, the project has recorded improvement in the number of the beneficiaries accessing the Government's services and protection from completely none (0) at the beginning to 272 widows now accessing the services available at the County government. This is also owed to the sensitization workshops which the project facilitated. For instance, in 2020 shortly after training the beneficiaries on Advocacy Mary Adhola who was recently widowed set off to have her departed husband's death certificate but the service center attendant there insisted that she pays Ksh. 1000/- before that could be done. Her story is that of a widow who learnt her rights in line with what is already in place and government services available for the county citizens.

"I remembered the facilitator warning the participants during the training that the death certificate is free of charge and is a same day service at the nearby service center even as the lady persisted. When I reminded that the service should be free she rudely asked me to go back home and come back only when I have the Ksh. 1000/-. I left as if obeying her orders but scrolled my phone in search of the contacts that we were given during Advocacy training, of County Authorities who we were told will act swiftly if such cases are reported to them and made a call to the County's Commissioner to whom i reported the situation. Immediately she asked me to go to her office where after listening to me she got hold of my hand and led the way to the service center where I was denied the service. When we got to the same desk, she asked the attendant why she is asking for payment of services which are supposed to be offered for free but she did not have an answer and only fumbled. There and then she told her to prepare the death certificate within only ten minutes and give it to me. And lo and behold she did! Mary added as she finished. "I left there with my late husband's death certificate!"

Table 3.3: Project performance against Outcome 3 indicators

Indicator	Baseline	Target	Achievements	Comment
Outcome 3: Improved policy environment favorable for widows' freedom from harmful cultural practices				
Number of widows using policies and laws to claim their rights	0	254	214	Below target
Number of legal referrals	0	210	21	Below target
Social protection policy and law in place	0		0	Not yet achieved

Number of widows accessing county government services and protection	0		272	Target value not available for reference.
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In contributing towards improved policy environment favorable for widows’ freedom from harmful cultural practices, the project has made some efforts that enable widows to have increased awareness of their rights based on basic human rights and through that they have been empowered to claim their rights. However, it is worth noting that the existing policies target vulnerable groups with no particular reference to widows and this therefore hinders widows from having a strong voice for demanding their rights. Based on their awareness of particular provisions of the law that provide environment for widows to claim their rights, they have utilized such opportunities especially on issues around property entitlements.

Widows are now able to utilize local legal referral mechanisms to access their rights and entitlement. Furthermore, the local government has recognized and works hand in hand with representatives of the widows’ groups. For instance, the sub-locational committee whose head is the assistant chief has incorporated a representative from the widows to solve legal issues and refer to high levels only when necessary. Through the representation, they have established local systems to address widow rights up to the chief’s office.

Whereas efforts have been made to sensitize project participants on relevant policies, existing mechanisms seem not to be accessed by the widows as there is poor flow of information from the government on any policy issues concerning welfare of widows. The County Director of Gender and Social Services attested to this as she said,

"There are still policy gaps on these special groups; widows, widowers, youth and people living with disabilities. A lot of concentration has however been placed on Women and youth without placing a finger on these special groups, widows included".

It also worth noting that effective advocacy would benefit from county level engagement beyond the two project areas as efforts at local level may not be sufficient to generate strong voices for county level engagement.

Level of access to county government resources and services is minimal and this stands out as a gray area that has not been explored. Evidently, widows have remained a marginalized group even in some government systems. There is so much on addressing their needs at policy level but very little on the ground.

3.2.2 Project enablers and disablers

Based on project design, achievement of project objectives can be attributed to a number of factors, first, working with local community and church structures that provide supportive environment for local implementation of activities. Secondly, project advisory committee which provides oversight that ensures regular checks on project implementation. However, more capacity needs to be built to ensure that the advisory role is effectively executed.

Thirdly despite inadequate staffing with required expertise, involvement of project volunteers has been useful especially in community mobilization and local level implementation. However, there's clear need for staffing with requisite skills, knowledge and experience in order to effectively support the Project Leader so as to execute both strategic and technical demands of the project.

Fourth, it emerged that work plans have jointly been developed to provide clear focus and timelines for the activities to be implemented. These have provided opportunity to follow through planned activities and monitor the level of implementation. Linked to the work plans are project budgets that were also reviewed and monitored to assess burn rate on regular basis.

Fifth, it is worth noting that whereas there's M&E mechanism provided for in the project document, the extent to which the project has benefited from M&E function and support is limited. At community level, the volunteers have been able to conduct monitoring visits and document progress on regular basis.

Sixth, there's also evidence that across target project areas, level of trust has been enhanced as a result of closeness with the community and there are signs of communication and feedback mechanism. This has resulted into ownership of the project as well as providing opportunity for project participants to be involved effectively in the project.

While there is enabling environment for the project, it is worth noting that focus on widows requires a lot of cultural and religious support and there have been some positive steps towards this. During project period, other factors hindered full realization of project outcomes, including; (i) Long and dynamic process of advocacy around widows' issues; (ii) Strong cultural barriers that take long to break; (ii) General elections of 2017 and instability that followed slowed the inception phase but efforts were made to make up for the lost time; and (iv) COVID-19 also hindered effective implementation of activities in 2020 and part of 2021.

3.2.3 Unintended results

While the project is targeting widows from West Ugenya and Usonga, there have been evidences of spillover effect in which widows who are not members have been

assisted by those from the widows' groups. Furthermore, the members have also provided support to widows outside the project target areas. This provides opportunity for expansion.

Efforts towards empowering the widows to advocate for their rights and champion rights of other have earned them recognition within the community to the extent that some widows have been selected in local administration in order to undertake dispute resolution especially on issues affecting widows. This has therefore lifted women to participate in local leadership and governance; this was not earlier anticipated but has to a greater extent contributed to more role for the target widows at local level.

As a result of the project, the level of empowerment exhibited by the widows has had some negative perception by some actors as they are viewed as over empowered. For instance, the acting County Director for Gender, Sports and Social Services feels that

"They are over-empowered by the project making them self-centered and this has become a threat to men and other community members."

This was not really the intention of the project.

Whereas the project provided economic support, the empowerment component has enabled the widows to tap into other economic opportunities beyond the project especially from devolved funds like Women Enterprise Fund, Member of Parliament's wives' initiatives. This has contributed to economic empowerment of the widows, though a lot still needs to be done to support more widows.

3.3 Efficiency

The evaluation sought to analyze organizational and strategic efficiency of the project with the view of drawing best practices and lessons. According to documents reviewed and interviews conducted, FPFK has employed approaches that also respond to the needs and priorities identified before project inception.

Review of project documents indicate that resources and inputs have been used to achieve project results, overall project management principles have been followed and project Advisory Committee has played its role in providing oversight at local level. However, staffing of the project would have been improved so as to realize its full potential.

Regarding transport reimbursements to project participants, the online payment method is apparently is not appreciated by the target community as their little transport allowance has not only reduced but also takes too long to be sent to their phone lines which may in the long run affect their commitment to the project and involvement into the project's activities in future. This may ultimately affect local level implementation, if timely communication is not done.

Whereas internal financial management processes were not within the scope of the evaluation, personal observation has showed how the current payment system may hinder prompt response to field operations especially with regard to procurement of short-term services during field work.

The strategies and approaches employed especially capacity building, socio-economic empowerment, and local level advocacy have been effective in ensuring effective implementation. The three outcomes have provided integrated approach to empowerment of the project participants especially widows, even though more need to be done regarding policy framework.

At the time of evaluation, implementation and absorption rate were at optimum level with few activities being implemented as the project comes to an end. It was reported that the remaining activities will be implemented before the end of the current phase. Regarding project resources, the assessment established that the project design was responsive to the needs of the target group. Furthermore, the objectives and activities were relevant and well planned within available resources. However, staffing still remains and issue worth considering in the next phase.

Whereas planning and implementation were well outlined, it is worth noting that monitoring of progress and achievements has been limited to regular and conventional function with limited focus on learning and accountability, and used to influence project implementation and more so in generating evidence for local level advocacy.

3.4 Risks and sustainability

The project design has put in place various strategies that would ensure continuation when the project comes to an end. For instance, capacity building component of the project has led to more widows knowing their rights and this has enabled them to not only defend themselves but also champion the rights of others. Trained paralegals have also enhanced local level referral mechanisms that will continue beyond project period especially if refresher trainings can be organized.

The project has supported target groups to establish VSLAs that has led to IGAs by the groups with the potential of continuing beyond project funding. Evidence indicates that through merry-go-rounds and IGAs established by the widows, they have been able to support school fees for their children besides providing means of livelihoods for their families. However, the stage at which the groups are will still require additional funds to enable them move to another level in enhancing their means of livelihoods.

For sustainability to be integrated in future projects, proper exit strategy is important though this takes time to put in place for local communities as the project target group. From the assessment, local target communities at various levels have commitment to the project. As such systems and processes for exit

strategy if put in place and community structures empowered from the onset then steps towards sustainability will be realized.

Overall, the project still seems relevant to the needs of the community especially widows. However, cultural issues are still an issue worth paying attention to as they pose the greatest threat to the sustenance of the project outcomes and the efforts put in place are a good starting point.

3.5 Civil Society Strengthening

FPFK through the local and regional church structure as well as working with local community structures and CSOs have established strong partnership with potential to bring change at local level. The project has empowered target participants to have a strong voice which has enabled them engage at local level to address issues affecting them as well as champion the rights of other widows. In addition, involvement of in-laws and youths has laid enough ground and enabling environment for engagement by target group. However, there is need to invest in capacity strengthening of the groups in order to ensure effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

The project has supported 13 widows groups and has potential for establishing more should there be an opportunity. Within the established widows' groups, there is degree of organization in the target groups as the participants have put in place initial structures to enable them operate at local level.

With regard to capacity of project participants to solve their challenges, the project has provided empowerment opportunity and the groups have stronger voice to address their challenges at local level. The widows have learnt the; right to live, right of choice, and right to social protection and others. The widows have gained a voice to defend themselves during the challenges.

."One of our members was beaten up by the brother in-law who keep making advances at her towards sexual harassment and we went there under the leadership of our able chair Penina who is also a village elder and sat them down and resolved their issue. Since then peace has prevailed." Domtila of Mine Nyalo widows' group in Ugenya West Ward recounted.

Finally, the project to some extent has given equal opportunities for women and men. Whereas the primary target are women, other key categories of participants have been involved i.e. in-laws, youth, religious and cultural leaders. By involving other categories of stakeholders beyond widows, there has been enabling environment through the project can thrive.

Table 3.4: Empowerment Assessment Table

		Degree and level of empowerment				
Thematic areas of result		Level 1: Output Individual or community	Level 2: Output Individual or community	Level 3: Outcome Individual or community	Level 4: Outcome Community and/or society	Level 5: Impact Community/ society/ structural
	Strengthening civil society			X	X	
	Knowledge and skills for widows' self-advocacy	X	X	X	X	
	Establishment of support systems		X	X	X	
	Improving policy environment			X	X	X
	Gender equality		X	X	X	X
	Total assessment of the project	X	XXX	XXXXX	XXXXX	XX

3.6 Lessons Learned

Community structures: By working through local community structures in Usonga and West Ugenya, the project has ensured ownership at local level. The project has supported establishment of 13 widows groups besides working with groups of cultural leaders, in-laws and youths. The groups have coordinated to ensure effective implementation to ensure holistic approach in dealing with issues that emerge in the community especially those affecting widows.

Trainings and local capacity building: The trainings that have been conducted targeting various categories of beneficiaries have been very useful in improving knowledge and skills. Working with paralegals has been effective in that trained paralegals are able to reach out to the community members and enhance referral mechanisms at local level hence this has great multiplier effect.

Project Advisory Committee: The project advisory committee drawn from the two project communities and represent various categories are volunteers most of whom were involved at project inception. The committee provide linkage with communities besides oversight to the project implementation.

Livelihoods initiatives by widows: As a result of the entrepreneurship and the economic empowerment thematic trainings conducted by the project, the widows initiated VSLAs and IGAs. This has to a greater extent addressed economic challenges facing the widows while also ensuring dignified life for the widows. The widows are now able to cater for their immediate needs as they embrace empowerment among themselves. These initiatives will go a long way in ensuring economic empowerment of the widows and their families.

Working with religious leaders: FPFK has played an important role in promoting psychosocial support while working with other churches within the project target. The churches have organized joint events while working with local administration and this has been very effective in addressing the widows' spiritual and psychosocial plights. .

Working with cultural leaders, in-laws and youth: Role of cultural leaders is critical considering the social cultural issues affecting the widows and their involvement in the project has to a larger extent provided enabling environment for the project execution. Secondly, working with group of in-laws has to a greater extent provided opportunity for "men as actors" in the project considering their place in the society with regard to the plight of widows and this has seen the role of in-laws as change makers in the project.

Partnership with government agencies: The project has brought together various stakeholders and more so working with government structures at county and local level. This ensures alignment with existing policies and effective coordination with government organs on issues affecting widows. The current working arrangement provides are steps towards the right direction and likely to yield good results for the project in providing an enabling environment for the initial engagements on widows' social protection policy whose adoption and enactment by the Siaya County Assembly is underway.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

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 evaluation established that widows project has been relevant and timely in responding to such cultural norms. The project work with the marginalized communities especially widows at the grassroots level in projecting the voice of these communities through local established groups was found to be consistent with FPFK Mission.

Across the project outcomes, the project has to a greater extent contributed to increased knowledge and skills for widows' self-advocacy towards their freedom from harmful cultural practices. Whereas majority of target widows reported increased level of knowledge and skills in advocacy through various trainings they have gone through, this is only limited to local level advocacy. Most of the widows have not been involved in advocacy issues at county level. The project has also provided economic empowerment through which widows' groups have established VSLAs and other small IGAs and this has contributed to improved access and benefits from such established economic support system.

In contributing towards improved policy environment favorable for widows' freedom from harmful cultural practices, the project has made some efforts that enable widows to have increased awareness of their rights based on basic human rights and through that they have been empowered to claim their rights. However, it is worth noting that the existing policies target vulnerable groups with no particular reference to widows and this therefore impedes the widows from having a strong voice in order to demand for their rights. Based on their awareness of particular provisions of the law that provide environment for widows to claim their rights, they have utilized such opportunities especially on issues around property entitlements.

Whereas efforts have been made to sensitize project participants on relevant policies, existing mechanisms seem not to be accessed by the widows as there is poor flow of information from the government on any policy issues concerning welfare of widows. It also worth noting that effective advocacy would benefit from county level engagement beyond the two project areas as efforts at local level may not be sufficient to generate strong voices for county level engagement. While the project targeted to influence development of widows' social protection policy, this is yet to be realized as the discussion was still ongoing at the time of evaluation which would see the proposal's adoption and eventually enactment of the policy by Siaya County Assembly.

The strategies and approaches employed especially capacity building, socio-economic empowerment, and local level advocacy have been effective in ensuring effective implementation. The three outcomes have provided integrated approach to empowerment of the project participants especially widows, even though more needs to be done regarding policy framework. The project design has put in place various strategies that would ensure continuation when the project comes to an end. Finally, FPFK through the local and regional church structure as well as working with local community structures and CSOs have established strong partnership with potential of bringing change at local level.

4.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings, the evaluation indicates that there's still increasing need as cultural practices are still deeply rooted in Siaya county, in order to remain relevant to the existing situation, FPFK should consider;

- i. Scale up of similar interventions beyond the current project area(s) in order to ensure that more widows are reached;
- ii. Extend sensitization and trainings of other community gate keepers such as cultural and religious leaders as a step towards sustainable interventions;
- iii. Consider another category of widows who can act as ambassadors and paralegals so as to address increasing pressing needs of widows while also engaging with other local actors;
- iv. Possible partnerships in order to address social changes through relevant county legislations.

In order to increase knowledge and skills for widows' self-advocacy towards their freedom from harmful cultural practices;

- i. There's need to support county widows' network in order to have a strong voice to champion widows' rights as well as engage in active local and county level advocacy;
- ii. Further sensitization of more religious and cultural leaders as well as youth, as allies in local level advocacy.

Support systems that enhance the welfare and cultural freedom of widows can be enhanced through;

- i. Provision refresher trainings (and trainings of new members) on legal issues and establish motivation mechanisms for the trained paralegals;
- ii. Establishment of linkage among groups providing psychosocial support so as to act as a critical mass and effectiveness in providing PSS to widows beyond group membership;
- iii. Provision of more trainings on business development/management and seed fund to support new IGAs established by the groups; and
- iv. Linkage of registered widows' groups/VSLAs with identified/friendly MFIs for provision of loans at affordable rates.

In contributing towards improving policy environment favorable for widows' freedom from harmful cultural practices, the following suggestions are worth considering;

- i. Advocate for transparency in targeting widows through existing social protection mechanisms;
- ii. FPFK/Widows project to explore key advocacy and policy spaces at county level in pushing for relevant legislations towards widows;
- iii. FPFK should continue with efforts that have been initiated with the Siaya County assembly towards establishing social protection mechanism for widows;
- iv. Push for county by-laws that allocate some portion of employment opportunities for widows in order to provide means of livelihoods for women beyond existing cash transfers and local level economic opportunities;
- v. Focus on the following advocacy and policy priorities; development and enactment of widows charter, enactment and adoption of social protection policy for widows, and participation in the development of new County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs) III.

In order to ensure broader project effectiveness, the following considerations are worth noting;

- i. Enhance staffing by recruiting staff with requisite technical capacity to support the Project Leaders, for a start project officer and driver who double up to support administrative functions will add value in realizing project delivery and effectiveness;
- ii. Monitoring and evaluation function needs to be enhanced through regular follow up and support to ensure that particular aspects of monitoring, evaluation and learning of the project are up to date;
- iii. FPFK/Widows project needs to allocate adequate resources for advocacy considering that the process is long and dynamic while involving various stakeholders along the way.

For project efficiency, the following suggestions are worth considering;

- i. Build the capacity of advisory committee to continue executing its oversight role effectively;
- ii. Consider reviewing mobile payment mechanism to the local beneficiaries while considering their prevailing circumstances;
- iii. Consider evaluating effectiveness of current payment system in light of different dynamics in which the project operates, with regard to procurement of services;
- iv. Increased capacity and resources for county level advocacy will be necessary in order to sustain the gains made;
- v. Need for joint project and finance teams to ensure timely analysis of implementation and absorption/burn rate for timely decision making;

- vi. Staffing needs to be addressed while considering technical and advocacy capacity as well as consideration of driver/administrative function in order to ensure effective project delivery;
- vii. FPFK/Widows project needs to be deliberate to focus on using M&E for learning and accountability as well as advocacy for the project.

For project sustainability, FPFK should consider the following;

- i. Need to integrate strong institutional capacity strengthening of the groups by ensuring systems and processes are put in place for sustainability;
- ii. Need to invest time and resources for existing strategy from the onset;
- iii. Continue sensitizing various stakeholders to ensure community transformation towards widows' issues.

For civil society strengthening, especially at community level;

- i. There's need to review/develop partnership strategy to ensure effective collaboration, coordination, communication, etc for effective advocacy and policy engagement with regard to widows;
- ii. There's need to invest resources for institutional capacity strengthening of the widows' groups, for instance support development of strategic plan and other policies to ensure legitimacy and capacity to attract local level/devolved funds as well as opportunities for partnership with relevant at county level;
- iii. More capacity is required for county level engagement.

ANNEXES



Annex 1 - 10815
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Annex 2 - Data
Collection Tools.docx