

**United Nations Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women
Contribution by: Widows and Orphans Ministry (WOM, Ghana)
Betty Ayagiba, National Director**

The Widows and Orphans Ministry (WOM) is a local NGO that has been fighting for the past 12 years to address the numerous problems of widows which include negative traditional practices against widows.

Through JICA, research was done on inheritance and came out with issues that causes poverty among widows. Recommendations were made for W.O.M. to work with chiefs, elders, opinion leaders and group leaders to reduce the violence against widows. A workshop was organised, and with this new trend, we made a head way.

Government has established institutions, like WAJU and CHRAJ to help solve the problems of women and children. Even though they have helped solving some problems of widows, by court, we recommend the procedure that was a result of the JICA research.

The new procedure was used with the people who matter that were called to the workshop. Some of the widows shared their experiences they go through after the death of their husbands. To mention a few: stripping the widow naked and wearing leaves; bathing her before the crowd, giving her concoctions which is the burnt leaves of another widow worn during her husband's funeral; and, sacking the widow from the husband's house. The entire village now confess whether they are good or bad practices and if they are not good, what changes should be made.

Policies are now made by the people and a resolution taken with immediate effect to affect the changes. This took place in a village called Kongo, a suburb of Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The result from the meeting were astounding and new resolutions were made: widows are able to wear a cloth during their husband's funeral; no more drinks or concoctions are forced on widows; nickers can be used during the bathing; and, boys are to be trained in cooking.

The legal system is at times not good in solving some problems. One widow had her room with all her belongings burnt just because she refused to marry the late husband's junior brother. She was threatened that if she reported the burning to the WOM office she would worsen her situation. We had this news from outsiders.

If funds are released to NGOs we recommend the new method as described above in combating violence against widows is better than the former methods.