

## Chapter 2

# Impact of educational attainment and own income of widows on consequence of de-humanizing widowhood practices in Enugu State, South East, Nigeria

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## 1.0 Introduction

Widowhood is a global experience that often brings distinct challenges, especially in cultures where social norms and traditions heavily influence expectations (Fasanmi & Ayivor, 2021; Moloi, 2022). In regions like Enugu State, located in Nigeria's South East, widows frequently encounter degrading customs and societal stigma after losing their spouses. These practices, deeply embedded in cultural traditions, often lead to the marginalization and isolation of widows, stripping them of their rights and dignity. The well-being of widows is significantly shaped by factors such as their level of education and personal income. Education is widely acknowledged as a critical factor in determining socio-economic status and empowerment, influencing individuals' perspectives, values, and actions. Likewise, personal income is vital in establishing financial independence and enabling widows to participate actively in decision-making processes (Peña-Longobardo, Rodríguez-Sánchez & Oliva-Moreno, 2021; Yang, 2021). In Enugu State, the interplay between education, income, and widowhood customs creates a complex dynamic that warrants in-depth analysis (Mohammed, 2018; Olutumise et al., 2023). Although education and income have the potential to empower widows to resist discriminatory practices and enhance their socio-economic standing, the degree to which these factors alleviate the effects of harmful widowhood traditions remains insufficiently studied. This research aims to address this gap by exploring how educational attainment and personal income influence the outcomes of dehumanizing widowhood practices in Enugu State. By analyzing the experiences of widows in relation to their education and income levels, the study seeks to uncover strategies for leveraging these factors to empower widows and reduce the negative impacts of widowhood practices.

## 1.1 Literature Review

Widowhood in Nigeria is frequently associated with traditional customs and practices that can be degrading and discriminatory toward widows (Idoniboyeobu & Obiechina, 2018; Shahin, 2022). These traditions, deeply ingrained in cultural norms, often negatively affect widows' well-being and socio-economic standing. Examining the role of education and personal income in alleviating the effects of these practices is essential for empowering widows and advancing gender equality. Widowhood customs in Nigeria differ significantly across ethnic groups and regions, but common practices include shaving the widow's hair, wearing black mourning attire, and imposing restrictions on social interactions (Mabunda & Ross, 2023; Nhlapho, 2022; Obielosi & Okeyi, 2023). In certain communities, widows may also be required to undergo rituals such as cleansing ceremonies or forced remarriage. Widows in Nigeria often face dehumanizing treatment, including the denial of inheritance and property rights, forced remarriage, social ostracism, and isolation (Bassey & Utulu, 2023; Eche, 2020; Ugwu et al., 2020; Umeh et al., 2021). These practices can leave widows financially vulnerable and reliant on others, further deepening their marginalization and discrimination. Feminist theory and empowerment theory offer useful frameworks for analyzing how education and personal income influence widows' experiences. Feminist theory highlights the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment, while empowerment theory explores how individuals gain control over their lives and surroundings.

Education has been proven to empower widows by increasing their awareness of their rights, enhancing their decision-making abilities, and improving their economic opportunities (Habib et al., 2019; Kabeer, 2018). Educated widows are more likely to stand up for their rights and resist harmful traditions, reducing their susceptibility to exploitation. Similarly, personal income provides widows with financial independence, improving their living conditions and social standing. Economically self-sufficient widows are less dependent on others, reducing their risk of financial abuse. Numerous studies have investigated the effects of education and personal income on widows in Nigeria. For instance, Okoye and Onyeneje (2017) found that widows with higher education levels were more likely to oppose harmful widowhood practices. Similarly, Nwadinigwe (2015) discovered that economically independent widows were less likely to face forced remarriage (Odewale, 2017; Okonkwo, 2018; Oparaduru, 2017). Research conducted in Enugu State, South-East Nigeria, has also explored how education and income influence widows' experiences of degrading practices, offering valuable insights into how these factors can empower widows and reduce the negative impacts of widowhood traditions. Key findings from previous studies include Okoye and Onyeneje's (2017) research, which highlighted that educated widows were more aware of their rights

and better equipped to resist pressure from family and community members. Nwadinigwe's (2015) study emphasized that financial independence enabled widows to avoid practices like forced remarriage and make autonomous decisions about their lives (Lopata, 2017; Muomah et al., 2021; Yoosefi Lebni et al., 2020). Okafor and Eze (2019) found that widows with higher education and income levels were better positioned to navigate widowhood challenges and resist discrimination (Odubajo, 2023; Osmani, Matlabi, & Rezaei, 2018; Lloyd-Sherlock, Corso, & Minicuci, 2015). Additionally, Ugwu and Okoye's (2016) study revealed that economically independent and educated widows were less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety related to widowhood (Samuel et al., 2019; Ukeachusim et al., 2023).

Overall, research consistently demonstrates that education and personal income are critical in reducing the adverse effects of degrading widowhood practices in Enugu State and beyond (Nwaoga et al., 2021; Nwokike, Ezeabii, & Jim, 2018; Ugwu et al., 2020). These findings underscore the importance of empowering widows through education and financial independence to promote gender equality and safeguard their rights. By enhancing widows' economic and social empowerment, these factors can significantly improve their well-being and protect them from harmful traditions.

## 1.2 Research Gap

Although numerous studies have explored the effects of education and personal income on widows' experiences of degrading widowhood practices in Enugu State, South-East Nigeria, significant gaps remain in the existing literature that call for further investigation. These gaps include the following:

Many current studies have predominantly examined the individual effects of education and income on widows without considering how gender, class, and ethnicity intersect to influence their experiences. Future research could investigate how these overlapping identities shape widows' encounters with harmful practices and their capacity to challenge them. Most existing research on this topic has been cross-sectional, offering only a momentary glimpse into widows' lives. Longitudinal studies tracking widows over extended periods could yield deeper insights into the lasting effects of education and income on their well-being and empowerment. Additionally, while some studies have touched on policy implications, there is a need for more research explicitly focused on actionable policy recommendations. Future investigations could explore how governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders can promote widows' education and economic independence to counteract the effects of dehumanizing practices. The majority of studies have concentrated on widows within

Enugu State, South-East Nigeria. Comparative research analyzing widows' experiences across different Nigerian regions or other countries could offer a broader perspective on how education and income influence widowhood practices. Furthermore, many existing studies have relied heavily on quantitative methods to measure the impact of education and income. Qualitative approaches that delve into widows' personal stories and lived experiences could provide richer insights into the complex factors shaping their encounters with degrading practices.

While current research has shed valuable light on the role of education and income in mitigating the challenges faced by widows in Enugu State, several gaps remain unaddressed. Future studies that tackle these gaps could enhance our understanding of the obstacles widows face and inform more effective strategies to support them. By addressing these areas, researchers can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to empowering widows and combating harmful widowhood practices.

## **2.0 Research Methodology -Study Design**

This research involved a survey approach in eliciting information from widows. The survey used a structured questionnaire administered to widows sampled from affiliate organizations in the study area.

### **2.1 Area of Study**

This research was conducted in Enugu State, one of Nigeria's 36 states, located within the region predominantly inhabited by the Ibo people, the country's third-largest ethnic group. The primary native language spoken in the state is Igbo. According to the 2006 national census, the population of women in Enugu State slightly exceeds that of men, with 1,624,202 males compared to 1,635,096 females, resulting in a sex ratio of 99.5 males for every 100 females (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2007).

### **2.2 Sampling Technique**

The research adopted a multi-step random sampling approach, structured in the following manner: In the first stage, the three geo-political zones (GPZs)—Enugu North, Enugu East, and Enugu West—were designated as the primary sampling units. During the second stage, institutions where widows are actively involved, either socially or economically, were identified within each GPZ. These institutions encompassed churches, hospitals, widowhood support groups, and community women's gatherings. From these, the most active and inclusive organization in each GPZ was selected. Specifically, market women and women's meetings were chosen from Enugu North, widow associations from Enugu

East, and a church along with a general hospital from Enugu West. In the final stage, a random selection of 100 widows was made from the chosen institutions.

### 2.3 Data Collection:

Socio-economic information was gathered through a carefully designed questionnaire, which was administered by interviewers. The process was supported by a team of six trained enumerators, consisting of two employees from local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), one school teacher, one records officer, and two widows affiliated with widow support groups. The primary data collected focused on the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of the selected widows.

### 2.4 Data Analysis:

To address the first objective, dehumanizing widowhood practices reported by respondents were identified and categorized based on their occurrence in the present time. These were then compared with findings from earlier studies conducted 5–10 years prior to determine their persistence in 2010. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, were utilized to outline the demographic profiles of the respondents and to group them according to their perspectives on key issues. For the second objective, it was established that a significant outcome of all dehumanizing widowhood practices (DWPs) is the prevalence of poverty among widows. Poverty, as defined by the World Bank (1986), is measured monetarily as living on less than one US dollar per day. Those classified as poor lack sufficient resources to meet their basic needs for a healthy life, experiencing relative deprivation and limited access to income and wealth within their communities. Building on this understanding, further analysis was conducted using the poverty gap (\*Pg) as a metric to quantify the extent of deprivation faced by these widows. The poverty gap was determined as follows:

$$* P_g = (P_L - Y_A) \text{-----} (1)$$

Where

**P<sub>L</sub>**= Poverty line of Widows (mean income of all sampled poor widows living below one US dollar daily).

**Y<sub>A</sub>**= Income of identified widows

These were subjected to a truncated multiple linear regression models specified as follows:

$$Y_i = a + \beta X_1 + K X_2 + e_i \text{-----} (2)$$

Where:

$Y_i$  = Poverty gap of widow (N'000);

$a$  = Regression constant;

$\beta$  = Education parameter estimate;

$X_1$  = Number of years of formal education (Years);

$K$  = Own funds spent parameter estimate;

$X_2$  = Amount of own funds spent annually (N'000);

$e_i$  = residual error term.

Four functional forms namely linear, exponential, semi-log and double-log were tried. The functional form that gave the best fit to the data on the basis of R-square and conformation of parameter estimates to *a priori* expectation was chosen and used for further analysis.

1. Linear-  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + e$

2. Exponential –  $\text{Log } Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + e$

3. Semi-Log –  $Y = \text{Log } \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{log } X_1 + \beta_2 \text{log } X_2 + e$

4. Double-Logarithmic Function (Cobb Douglas):  $\text{Log } Y = \text{Log } \beta_0 + \text{log } \beta_1 \text{Log } X_1 + \beta_2 \text{Log } X_2 + e_i$  The parameter estimate was tested at 5 percent alpha level of probability for statistical significance using t-statistical table.

5. The sign on the significant statistical parameters indicated the direction of or type of impact on the variable(s).

## 2.5 Limitations and Issues for Further Research

The primary limitation of the study was its time constraints, which led to the collection of one-time, cross-sectional data. Enugu State represents just one of the five southeastern states where dehumanizing widowhood practices (DWPs) are widespread. If time, funding, and other logistical challenges allow, future research could expand to include panel data gathered across all five major Igbo states: Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo, and Abia.

## 3.0 Results and discussion

Section 3.1 outlines the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. Section 3.2 provides responses to the research questions, while Section 3.3 examines the impacts of discriminatory widowhood practices (DWPs) on widows. All findings were presented in tabular form and analyzed in detail. Table 1 highlights the identified DWPs in Enugu

State. The most prevalent practices include solitary confinement (77.8%), head shaving (70.0%), and the requirement to wear mourning attire (62.2%). Other practices include mandating widows to sit on the floor, reported by 24.4% of respondents, and the expectation to remarry their brother-in-law, noted by 3.3%. Additionally, 1.1% of respondents mentioned cases where widows were compelled to sleep beside their deceased husband's body.

### 3.0 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Widows

The socio-demographic information encompassed details such as the age distribution of widows, their educational attainment, the duration of their marriages prior to becoming widowed, the ages of their children, their occupations, and their monthly earnings.

#### 3.1 Age and Time

Tables 1, 2 and 3 distributed the widows by age, age of marriage and their children's age.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Widows by age (years) in Enugu State, 2010

Widows Age (Yrs)	Frequency n=90	Percentage (%)
Less than 25	2	2.2
26-30	5	5.6
30-34	6	6.7
35-39	10	11.1
36-40	7	7.8
40-44	60	66.7
Total	90	100.00

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 1, shows that more than half of the widows were aged between 40-44 years. As few as 2.2% of the widows were aged less than 25 years. Cumulatively, all widows involved in the study were within the active workforce age bracket. These widows earn some level of income for themselves and supported their households.

**Table 2:** Widows age at marriage

<b>Age of widows at marriage (years)</b>	<b>Frequency n=90</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
15-20	53	58.9
21-25	26	28.9
26 and above	11	12.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 2, showed that a good proportion of the widows got married at an early age of their lives. Getting married at the tender ages of between 15 and 20 years suggests that many of them had not taken to any careers in life and were simply housewives, who depended mainly on their husbands before the demise of the latter.

**Table 3:** Distribution of Widows by Age brackets of their children

<b>Children's Age Group (years)</b>	<b>Frequency n=90</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
0 -18 years (School Age Dependants)	72	80.0
19 years and above (Adults)	18	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 3 shows that most of the respondent's children were aged below 18 years and therefore were of school age and dependants. Only a relatively low proportion (20.0%) was adults of at least 19 years of age. This suggests that only few widows received financial support from their children and had the burden of fending for their well-being especially payment of school fees and feeding.



**Table 4:** Distribution of widows by Number of years widowed and Number of years married before Husband’s death

<b>Number of Years Widowed</b>	<b>Frequency n=90</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Less than 1	6	6.7
1 to 4	27	30.0
5 to 9	16	17.8
10 and above	41	45.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>

  

<b>Number of years married before widowed</b>	<b>Frequency n=90</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1 to 5	15	16.7
5 to 9	67	74.4
10 and above	8	8.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 4 shows that nearly half of the respondents (45.6%) had been widowed for at least 10 years., Some 30.0% had been widowed for 1-4 years, while others have been widowed for 5-9years and a small proportion were widowed for less than one year. Furthermore, table 4, shows that most of the marriages lasted for a short period of 5-9 years, others lasted for a shorter period of 1-5 years, while a small proportion were married for 10 years and above. Short periods in marriages before widowhood could suggest two things (1) that the young widows married far older men; or (2) that young men in the area had mysterious early deaths or died of accidents or other emergencies.

### 3.2 Educational Attainment:

This refers to the highest level of formal education attained by the surveyed widows. Table 5 shows widows distributed by their educational attainment in Enugu. Table 5, indicate that one third of the widows (38.9%) had primary education. Primary education could be between six to eight years of formal education. About the same proportion of the widows had secondary or basic education and just few (2.2%) had tertiary education. Tertiary

educated widows are the only group that could boast of a career and since this group was so few, the table suggests that majority of the widows had no careers.

**Table 5:** Distribution of widows by their level of educational attainment

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Frequency n=90</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
No Schooling	20	22.2
Primary School	35	38.9
Secondary/Commercial School	33	36.7
Tertiary (Higher Level) Education	2	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field survey, 2010

**Table 6:** Distribution of respondents by community setting or place of residence

<b>Place of Residence</b>	<b>Frequency n=90</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Rural	63	70.0
Semi-urban	22	24.4
Urban	5	5.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 6 reveals that more than half of the respondents live in rural areas within Enugu state; while a good proportion lived in semi-urban areas within 20km radius of Enugu town; and only very few of the respondents live in Enugu city. Irrespective of where the widows resided, all activities related to and emanating from bereavement are usually agreed and implemented in the village homes.

**Table 7: Widows Occupation**

<b>Widow Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency n=88</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Government work	20	22.2
Private business	56	63.2
Social worker	4	4.4
Unemployed	10	11.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 7 shows that most of the widows were engaged in private businesses (petty trading, manual processing of food and micro-scale farming), some were government workers, and a good proportion (11.1%) was unemployed. Relatively, the widows serving the government were few (4.4%) and are social workers working as NGOs or church workers in the area.

**Table 8: Current DWPs in Enugu State**

<b>Current Dehumanizing Widowhood Practices in Enugu State</b>	<b>Yes n</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Solitary Confinement	70	77.8
Shaving of Hair	63	70.0
Wearing Mourning Cloths	56	62.2
Sitting on the Floor	22	24.4
Asked to Marry Brother in-law	3	3.3
Asked to sleep with husband's corpse	1	1.1
No Practice	7	7.8

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 8 further showed that most common of the identified 6 DWPs amongst the widows was solitary confinement. This confinement is usually between one to six months; shaving

of hair and wearing of mourning cloths lasts for between 6 months to one year. During this mourning period, the widow is required to sit on the floor.

### **3.3 Consequences of DWPs (Poverty)**

2010+ Per capita income of the very poor to indigent was below one US dollar per day. One major consequence of the DWP was poverty, when widows are dehumanized and deprived of their husband's properties;

Table 9, shows that 90% of all the widows interviewed were poor, earning monthly income of between (N1000 to N30,000; \$6.00 to \$67.55), while 10% were barely able to earn N60,000 to N90,000, (\$405.55-\$608.10),

Table 10 showed that the semi-logarithmic functional form gave the best fit to the data and was used for further analysis. The functional form explained up to 58.1% variation in the poverty gap of widows explained by their level of income. The model showed a highly significant ( $p=0.001$ ) negative relationship between poverty gap and widows own income as shown by the t ratio of -10.188. This means that as a widow's own income increases, her poverty gap reduces. By this finding only hypothesis (2) was accepted at this alpha level of probability. Hypothesis (1) was rejected as education had no impact on widow's level of poverty.

**Table 9:** Widows' monthly income (Denominated in Nigerian Naira)

<b>Widows Monthly Income</b>	<b>Mid Income</b>	<b>Frequency n=90</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>	<b>1 USD Equiv (\$)*</b>	<b>WB Poverty Index</b>
<1000 (indigent)	500	11	12.2	3.38	<\$1
2000-10000 (extremely poor)	4,000	19	21.1	27.03	<\$1
10000-30000 (very Poor)	10,000	51	56.7	67.57	<\$1
30000-60000 ( average)	15,000	7	7.8	101.35	<\$1
60000 and above (just average)	30,000	2	2.2	above 101.35	>\$1

\* The monthly mid-income value divided by USD dollar rate against the Nigeria Naira as at July 30th, 2010

**Table 10:** Regression estimates of relationship of poverty gap to educational attainment and own income of widows in Enugu State, 2010

Variable	Functional Forms			
	Linear	Exponential	Semi-log	Double-Log
<b>Constant</b>	1378.53 (1.692)*	3.431 (43.468)***	-32943.1 (-8.989)	-0.55 (-0.940)
<b>X1 (Educational Level)</b>	0.237 (2.666)**	0.131 -1.262	0.106 -1.485	0.114 -1.295
<b>X2 (Widows Own Income)</b>	0.487 (5.477)***	0.404 (3.900)***	-0.729 (-10.188)***	-0.625 (-7.100)**
<b>R-Square</b>	0.321	0.187	0.581	0.419
<b>F-Ratio</b>	20.599	8.728	60.326	27.349

Source: Field Survey, 2010: Dependent variable =Y=Poverty gap

\* Significant at 10.0% alpha level

\*\* Significant at 5.0% alpha level

\*\*\*Significant at 1.0% alpha level

**Table 11: Perceived sources of support by widows**

Sources of support to the widows	Yes		No		Total
	n	%	n	%	
Friends' Assistance	39	43.3	51	56.7	90
Family's Assistance	43	47.8	47	52.2	90
Husband's Family Assistance	14	15.6	76	84.4	90
NGO's Assistance	8	8.9	82	91.1	90
Church Assistance	30	33.3	60	66.7	90
Nobody Assists	10	11.1	80	88.9	90

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 11; reveal that nearly all the widows received help from more than one source. As much as 11.1% of the widows indicated that they did not receive support from any of the 5 sources of support expected. Most of the widows received support from their maternal family including children, followed by friends, the church, husband's family and only 8.9% from NGOs which was quite surprising due to the huge donor funding usually earmarked by donor agencies for gender- related issues. The fact that they also submitted to the infliction of the DWPs did not also earn them the expected support from the in-laws, which make it even more imperative for the widow to challenge these DWPs

#### 4.0 Recommendations

Develop educational initiatives specifically designed for widows, emphasizing foundational literacy, vocational training, and financial literacy. These programs should be affordable, easily accessible, and adaptable to accommodate the diverse responsibilities of widows. Introduce economic empowerment projects, including microfinance schemes, cooperative groups, and skill development workshops, with a focus on equipping widows with the tools and knowledge necessary to achieve financial independence. Strengthen the enforcement of current laws safeguarding widows' rights and advocate for new legislation to address existing shortcomings in protection. Offer legal aid and support to widows experiencing discrimination or mistreatment.

Organize community awareness campaigns to educate the public about widows' rights and the harmful effects of degrading practices. Involve local leaders, religious organizations, and traditional authorities in these efforts to foster broader acceptance and change. Ensure widows have access to affordable healthcare, including mental health services, and enhance their access to essential social services such as housing, transportation, and childcare to ease their daily challenges. Partner with government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local community groups to design and execute targeted interventions for widows, leveraging combined resources and expertise for greater effectiveness. Carry out research to identify the unique challenges widows face in Enugu State and evaluate the effectiveness of implemented interventions. Use these insights to guide the creation of policies and programs. Leverage information and communication technology (ICT) to provide widows with access to information, resources, and support networks, such as online learning platforms, digital literacy training, and virtual communities. Design culturally appropriate interventions that respect local traditions and customs, collaborating with community leaders and elders to ensure these efforts are embraced and supported. Empower widows by building their capacity to advocate for their rights and seize available opportunities. Offer training in leadership, negotiation, and advocacy to enable them to assert their rights and combat discriminatory practices. The successful implementation of these recommendations demands collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, community leaders, and other stakeholders. By addressing the influence of education and personal income on widows, we can mitigate the effects of dehumanizing widowhood practices and advance gender equality and women's empowerment in Enugu State, South East Nigeria.

## 5.0 Conclusion

In summary, the influence of education and personal income on widows in Enugu State, South East Nigeria, is significant and complex. Education equips widows with knowledge of their rights, strengthens their ability to make decisions, and enhances their economic opportunities. Likewise, personal income grants widows financial autonomy, better living conditions, and greater social acceptance. These factors are vital in reducing the adverse effects of degrading widowhood practices, such as the loss of property and inheritance rights, forced remarriage, social exclusion, and stigmatization. By empowering widows through education and financial independence, we can enable them to challenge and overcome these harmful traditions, ultimately improving their quality of life. Nevertheless, there remain gaps in current research and persistent challenges that require attention. These include the need for more studies on the overlapping identities of widows, a lack of long-term research, and insufficient focus on policy-related outcomes. Bridging these gaps demands a collaborative effort involving government bodies, NGOs,



community leaders, and other key stakeholders. By adopting the recommendations proposed in this report, we can take meaningful steps toward alleviating the effects of dehumanizing widowhood practices and advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Enugu State, South East Nigeria. It is crucial to continue prioritizing the rights and well-being of widows, ensuring they have access to education, economic opportunities, and support systems that enable them to live dignified and fulfilling lives.

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