

WIDOW CHAMPION

A film by Zippy Kimundu



KEY IMAGES

95 minutes // Luo, Swahili, English // 2025

<https://widowchampion.com/>



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WIDOW CHAMPION | LOGLINE & SYNOPSIS



LOGLINE

Thrown off her land by her in-laws, a resilient Kenyan widow transforms into a fierce advocate for women's land rights in a highly patriarchal community. Rodah spearheads a courageous movement, rallying fellow widows to reclaim their rightful property. Amidst the clash of tradition and progress, her narrative unfolds, depicting the tension between an ingrained culture and a rapidly evolving world.

SYNOPSIS

"Because I passed through this before, I can tell them there is still a future, there is still life, this is what I did and look where I am now." – Rodah Nafula, *Widow Champion*

Thrown off their land and out of their homes, widows in rural Kenya are forced to live destitute with their children in markets or under trees. In Kenya, wives often live on the same compound with their husband's families, and culture dictates that when your husband dies, you must be inherited by one of your husband's brothers to be 'cleansed' and remain part of the family - even with the high rate of HIV in this region. More women are beginning to shun this practice, and are bearing the consequences.

Rodah Nafula suffered the consequences after her husband died 15 years ago, and her in-laws threw her and her three children off the land. After seven years living at the village market under inhumane conditions, Rodah connected with a local NGO, which helped her win back her land through a new community-based mediation program. Rodah then trained to be a “Widow Champion” to help others.

Rodah is the narrative throughline of our film. Everyday, she deals with another widow, another threat, another in-law - all part of the story, as we walk with her through these different spaces. We will follow the case of Mary Atieno for over four years, the passage of time marked by the cycle of rice planting and harvesting.

In an immersive, fly-on-the-wall approach, we’ll interweave Mary’s story with other dramatic and emotional moments from other widows’ stories, to show how prevalent and complex the problem is, with Rodah as our lead.. We’ll also film Rodah as a mother to five children.

WIDOW CHAMPION | FILM PARTICIPANTS



Rodah Nafula Wekesa is the “Widow Champion” of our title. Kicked off her land by her in-laws when her husband died, she fought back, and through community mediation, eventually got her land back. Now she fights for other widows, guiding them through a unique community mediation process, and giving them the tools and the confidence to not give up. A mother of five children, she also inspires her children, hoping they will go to college, something she was not able to do.

Mary Atieno Ragen is one of the widows working with Rodah to try and get her land back and her house rebuilt. We follow her case for four years, as it takes many twists and turns.

Theresa Atieno Chacha is another widow Rodah is trying to help secure land and her title deed for. She helps Teresa confront a very angry brother-in-law, and with the elders eventually comes to an agreement.

Luo Council of Elders – This is the group that Rodah works with through a community mediation process, to help families reach agreement on land disputes, and have peace.

WIDOW CHAMPION | DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



Growing up, I came to understand three things - not because anyone said them out loud, but because they were simply part of life; Deep respect for your elders, Deep connection to your ancestral land and the quiet truth that, while men carried the big sticks, it was the women who held the family together.

In Kenya, especially in the rural areas, the issue of land is crucial as people depend on it to earn a living, and to feed and take care of their families. Gains have been made to increase legal protections for women to use, own and inherit land, yet entrenched social norms in communities like Rodah's often trump the law of the land.

And so, in 2019 when I heard about what was happening with the widows in Kisumu and then met Rodah, we quickly bonded over the work that I was doing around Land Rights -

and my personal experience as a teenager, when our family home was burnt down and we were kicked off our land due to politically-charged unrests.

Over the past 6 years, I've spent a lot of time with Rodah, building mutual trust, which has enabled us to evolve an immersive verite style that Rodah has come to trust, as we cover hundreds of miles to meet the other widows seeking her help. The problem of women being denied land rights takes many forms all over the world, and the story of these communities coming together for a solution can be a model for the country and for the rest of the world

As a Kenyan filmmaker whose stories have often been told from the outside, I believe in telling stories from under-represented communities who are doing extraordinary things for themselves. I follow these trend-setters, so that their stories become a catalyst for change and give agency to fellow women.

Rodah is one of tens of thousands of women in Kenya, and millions more in more than 100 countries around the world, who have had their land rights attacked, denied or taken away from them. Even though she faces her own challenges, she keeps going, standing up for herself and other widows, every step of the way.

'Widow Champion' has been described as an experimental court drama that is dramatic, human, loving and stirring enough to open hearts in Kenya and around the globe. For me, Widow Champion is as personal as it is universal – a story and a film that are intricately linked to wherever women's land rights have been and continue to be denied in many forms.

- Zippy Kimundu

FILM TEAM



ZIPPY KIMUNDU | DIRECTOR/PRODUCER:

Zippy is an award-winning Kenyan filmmaker who has been working in the global industry for nearly two decades. She holds a Masters in Fine Arts from New York University and has worked globally in over 20 countries. Among other notable films, she co-directed a short Documentary, 'a fork, a spoon & a KNIGHT' with renowned Director Mira Nair, and was the Assistant Editor on the Disney Film 'Queen of Katwe'. Her debut Feature Documentary that she co-produced and co-directed, 'Our Land, Our Freedom' had its world Premiere at IDFA

in 2023 and continues to create Impact across continents. Zippy is the Creative Lead at <https://www.terracekilifi.com> Art Space and Residency, a Film Educator for teenage refugee girls at <https://www.illtellyoumystory.com/> and founder of www.afrofilmsinternational.com, a creative collective working to ignite socio-political consciousness and action, across continents.



HEATHER COURTNEY | PRODUCER:

Heather is an Emmy-winning filmmaker, and a Guggenheim, Sundance, and Fulbright fellow. Her film WHERE SOLDIERS COME FROM (Director/Producer) was broadcast on the PBS series POV, and won an Emmy, an Independent Spirit Award, and a SXSW Jury Award, among others. Her latest feature documentary as a director, BREAKING THE NEWS, premiered at Tribeca Film Festival in 2023 and had its broadcast and streaming premiere on PBS' Independent Lens in February 2024.

She co-directed and produced a Ford-funded feature documentary on DACA students, called THE UNAFRAID, which was broadcast on the national PBS series America ReFramed. Her earlier films include LETTERS FROM THE OTHER SIDE (supported by a Fulbright) and LOS TRABAJADORES (IDA Award, SXSW Audience Award, and Indie Lens broadcast). Prior to receiving her MFA in Film, Heather spent eight years writing and photographing for the United Nations and several relief agencies, including in the Rwandan refugee camps after the 1994 genocide there.



FRANKI ASHIRUKA | EDITOR:

Franki is an award-winning film and TV editor with over 28 years experience in the local and international film industry, working in Kenya, Rwanda, New Zealand, UK and USA.

Franki's career began in Kenya in the 90's working on feature length documentaries, drama series' and TV commercials. She then relocated to New Zealand where she worked at Eyeworks Touchdown, specializing in reality and unscripted television formats such as My House My Castle, The Chair and Treasure Island, all produced for international sale. Franki is now the Founder, CEO and lead editor of Africa Post Office, a post production company based at The Village Creative, Nairobi, the first of

its kind in East Africa. Some of Franki's rich profile of work includes the 3-time Best Editing award for Netflix short film Poacher (Director Tom Whitworth), Best Documentary Film The Last Fight (Jackie Lebo), Best TV Show 'Tales from The Bush Larder' produced for Fox international Channels, The Great Kenyan Bake-Off adopted from the BBC series The Great British Bake-Off, Sony's Lion's Den TV Series - an adaptation of ABC's Shark Tank, a six part African original Netflix drama series Country Queen (Good Karma Fiction), feature length film Disconnect also on Netflix (directed by Kenya's Tosh Gitonga_Nairobi Half life), and the newly released documentary feature Our Land, Our Freedom (Zippy Kimundu & Meena Nanji).



JORDANA BERG | EDITOR:

Jordana Berg has been working as a film editor for over 30 years. During this time she was primarily collaborating with Eduardo Coutinho, considered the most important Brazilian filmmaker of the 20th century.

Other filmmakers with whom she has worked include the Oscar Nominee Petra Costa, the Oscar winner Megan Mylan, Zippy Kimundu, Nathan Grossman, Silvio Tandler, José Joffily, Eduardo Escorel, Zippy Nyaruri and Flavia Castro.

She has taught masterclasses in Canada, France, the US, Argentina and Uruguay, Mexico, Bosnia. She was also a mentor in rough cut laboratories.

She is member of the ROUGHCUTSERVICE.COM, consulting on film projects all over the world.

Jordana is fluent in Portuguese, English, French, Spanish and Hebrew and has high communications skills of Italian and German. Today she is editing documentaries in Sweden, Kenya, Uruguay, Argentina and Mexico.



STEVE RUIYI | DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:

Steve has worked for over 10 years as a Director of Photography/Cameraman on television shows, documentaries and feature films. He has shot numerous Documentaries in Kenya, South Africa, Mozambique, Senegal, Zambia, Brazil, Rwanda, Uganda and Swaziland including: Our Land, Our Freedom (2023), and UN Free and Equal (2018- 2019), Permanent Persistent Poison for the World Wildlife fund (2018 and 2016) Wash for BBC media action (2017), The Last Warriors-produced by Made in Copenhagen (2016), Train to Win by Sport Brand Australia (2012) , among others.

Steve has also shot Documentaries for: AWID, USAID, Save the Children, British Council, Safaricom and Standard Chartered Bank. He has been the DP on numerous T.V shows, including, Popo, a television drama, commissioned by Zuku 2015, and Parasites, television drama, Mnet, 2012-2014. Steve was the DP on the interactive action Film ‘Simiyu Samurai’ a Kenyan film which won 5 Kalasha Awards in 2013 and 2014.

PRESS:

<https://insessionfilm.com/eight-cant-miss-titles-from-the-2025-tribeca-festival-lineup/>

‘.....triumphant and uniquely human character study that is as much a machine of empathy as it is one of justice.’

https://www.femalegazefilmclub.com/filmreviews/tribeca-film-festival-2025-review-widow-champion?fbclid=PAQ0xDSwKxv2NleHRuA2FibQIxMQABpwyQ-aZYCxL9omes6kt20aHS1sRyno_EOBuBRoJdh05BUdwfyNStweyFZQBe_aem_nFaC5y2UvYNE0RA_7DkFHw

‘....The humanity at the center of this film shines from its first frame, and never really fades, even in the most harrowing moments.’

<https://www.sinemafocus.com/widow-champion-tribeca-review-patient-precise-and-piercing/>

...‘Widow Champion’ Is Patient, Precise and Piercing..’

<https://www.rogerebert.com/festivals/tribeca-film-festival-2025-the-documentaries>

‘...Of all the documentaries that I saw (at Tribeca), there were three that really stood out for me and which you should put on your radar. ‘

<https://blackgirlnerds.com/tribeca-2025-review-zippy-kimundus-widow-champion-explores-resilience-in-the-face-of-patriarchal-norms-in-kenya/>

‘...Kimundu’s filming approach highlights the heart and humanity of Rodah’s cause, as well as the documentary as a whole’

<https://oddcritic.com/tribeca-what-films-to-fest/>

...*Widow Champion* is another strong and interesting documentary playing at Tribeca this year....

<https://chicagocrusader.com/tribeca-pick-widow-championlooks-out-for-kenyas-disenfranchised-widows/>

... “Westerners could learn a lot from Rodah and her restorative approach to justice that restores peace in homes and her community,”

<https://filmmakermagazine.com/131078-dc-dox-2025/>

...Kimundu wins access to remarkable scenes of traditional village mediators intervening—successfully!—in bitter family feuds.’

INTERVIEWS:

THE FEMALE GAZE: <https://www.hammertonail.com/interviews/widow-champion/>

THE ROLLING TAPE:

<https://therollingtape.com/tribeca-2025-interview-with-widow-champion-2025-director-zippy-kimundu/>

HAMMER TO NAIL: <https://www.hammertonail.com/interviews/widow-champion/>

WIDOW CHAMPION Credits

IN MEMORY OF

FRANKI ASHIRUKA

MARY ATIENO

DICKSON OKWARO

JOHN & SERAH KIMUNDU

FEATURING:

WIDOW CHAMPION

RODAH NAFULA WEKESA

DIRECTOR

ZIPPY KIMUNDU

PRODUCERS

HEATHER COURTNEY
ZIPPY KIMUNDU

EDITORS

FRANKI ASHIRUKA
JORDANA BERG
SÉRGIO BLOCH

CINEMATOGRAPHY

STEVE RUIYI
ZIPPY KIMUNDU

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Polycarp “Winyo” Shipton

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REUBEN ONDOLA ODAGO

RODAH'S CHILDREN

DIANA ACHIENG OWINO
SUE ATIENO OWINO
AMOS OPIYO OWINO
ANDREW ODONGO OWINO
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