Award Recipient Narratives/Stories By Category

Community Category

Melina Giselle Barabas

Country: Argentina

Ms. Barabas is a social worker and community leader with extensive experience in social intervention, public policy, and grassroots organization and has focused her career on supporting vulnerable populations, particularly women in building sustainable livelihoods. In five years, she has built and sustained a community network, bringing together over 300 entrepreneurs of whom approximately 90% are women. Many of the women have achieved sustainable economic independence which have enabled at least 10 women to leave abusive relationships. Of particular note, in building this network, Ms. Barabas has promoted the legal process of formalization of their entrepreneurial initiatives. This has improved their economic activity and transformed their social identity and standing within their communities as legitimate business entrepreneurs. Her approach combines economic empowerment with social transformation, addressing structural barriers and fostering long-term autonomy. She continues to show how sustained, community-based actions can generate deep and lasting change in the lives of women.

Daniel Odongo

Country: Kenya

Daniel Odongo is the Founder and Executive Director of Lifeguard Kenya, a community-based organization established in 2018 to protect vulnerable women and children in Nairobi's informal settlements. His work responds to sexual and gender-based violence by improving access to protection, justice, psychosocial support, and sustainable livelihoods.

Under his leadership, Lifeguard Kenya provides legal awareness, mediation, and alternative dispute resolution through a community paralegal centre, while connecting survivors to shelters, medical care, counseling, and other essential services through established referral pathways.

A central focus of Mr. Odongo's leadership is women's economic empowerment. Through the Linda Mama Program, Lifeguard Kenya equips women survivors with marketable skills, financial knowledge, and opportunities to build sustainable livelihoods. To date, the organization has trained 430 women and facilitated market linkages with private-sector actors, local businesses, and community stakeholders, helping participants translate their skills into income-generating opportunities.

To strengthen financial independence and resilience, the program also promotes savings and access to credit through Voluntary Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). Participants have established 10 VSLA groups, enabling women to save regularly, access small loans, invest in businesses, and strengthen their financial decision-making. Many participants have subsequently launched small enterprises.

Through this integrated approach, Mr. Odongo works to ensure that survivors are not only protected from violence but also equipped with the economic resources and opportunities needed to rebuild their lives with greater independence and dignity.

Dr Asha Mohini Ram

Country: Australia

Dr. Asha Mohini Ram is a highly experienced Cosmetic Physician, entrepreneur, and business leader who has been at the forefront of cosmetic medicine and phlebology in Tasmania for over three decades. A medical graduate of the University of Tasmania, she has built a distinguished career that integrates clinical excellence, education, and enterprise across healthcare, aesthetics, and social impact initiatives.

Dr. Ram is a co-founder of HOPE AID UNITE, working in collaboration with UNHCR to bring private-sector expertise, resources, and innovative solutions to humanitarian crises, with a particular focus on displaced women and children.

She is also an active leader and member of Giving Women; a network of women committed to creating lasting social change for vulnerable girls and women worldwide. Through their expertise, networks, and resources, members provide organizations with practical support to strengthen their capacity, resilience, and impact.

Dr. Ram believes that meaningful philanthropy goes beyond financial support. By combining knowledge, skills, resources, and collective action, she is committed to helping create sustainable and lasting change for those most in need.

Peggie Wells – The Wells Center for Women in Transition
Country: USA

Peggie Wells, MSW, LCSWA, CTP, MDIV, is the Executive Director and founder of The Wells Center for Women in Transition in 2015, a nonprofit providing safe, supportive housing and services for women exiting incarceration. The center assists dozens of women each year, with some initiatives explicitly supporting up to 50 formerly incarcerated women at a time.

The Wells Center, Inc. established CATCH (Changing Attitudes to Change Habits) to help women transition from incarceration to mainstream society. CATCH uses an interactive approach addressing behavior, mental health, and trauma needs. It begins in the Forsyth County Jail with a study of 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. It continues with Trauma Informed therapy, pastoral care counseling, mentorship, and peer support. Next is the Post-release Community Day Treatment, where women continue treatment, coaching, and support. For women exiting prison or another county jail and residents of Forsyth County, the program begins here with the same training, treatment, and support as in the pre-release program.

The Well of Healing Transitional Home provides a safe refuge for women in the CATCH program who need a place to heal and separation from outside influences. Women can stay up to 2 years to rebuild relationships and transition back into the community. The center focuses on trauma healing, offering a 7-week evidenced-based Trauma Informed course and Psycho-trauma Therapy. Community volunteer mentors support inmates by engaging and rebuilding positive relationships. Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT) a cognitive-behavioral therapy, aims to improve moral reasoning, decision-making, and behavior.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (Stephen R. Covey) as 7-week course teaches the importance of character and making the right choices.

Women in the peer group support program are challenged and encouraged by other women who have overcome the mental and psychological forces tied to trauma. Building life skills focus, includes financial literacy, employment training, and permanent housing assistance.

The Wells Center supports women transitioning from incarceration to mainstream society with the tools and training for success. The center has received grants from Truliant Foundation and Winston Salem Women's Fund.

Education Category

Dr Queensley Chukwudum
Country: Nigeria

Dr. Queensley Chukwudum has made a sustained and measurable contribution to the economic empowerment of women through education-centered initiatives that expand access to learning, build financial capability, and open pathways to income generation. Her work shows that education is not only a tool for knowledge acquisition, but also a direct route to women's economic advancement.

Through her "I am a STEM advocate" initiative, Dr. Chukwudum reached more than 2,500 secondary school girls across Nigeria. Importantly, the program did not stop at inspiring girls to enter science, it also equipped them with financial literacy for STEM education success, including how to save for textbooks, laptops and other materials, and how to prepare grant applications, needed to sustain learning and career opportunities. In this way, she helps girls link education to long-term economic independence and career paths. With support from the Committee for women in Mathematics, International Mathematical Union, she also co-organized work-life balance programs with online mentoring workshops for over 170 African women mathematicians.

Dr. Chukwudum co-founded Small Pocket Money (SPM), an innovative platform (now defunct) to support over 2,000 college students, 60% of whom were female, promote their own micro-businesses across campuses. An SPM trade exposition featured exhibits—predominantly of female students— and demonstrated how Dr. Chukwudum's initiative created real income opportunities for young women.

As further evidence of her commitment to mentorship and higher education, Dr. Chukwudum successfully guided 2 female students to win small research grants and publish their research findings. She also initiated innovative women-led disability and STEM projects from Kenya and the UK that strengthens opportunities for both academic progression and future employability. In addition, Dr. Chukwudum has provided short and long-term employment for 14 women in businesses she personally directs, thereby helping them to fund their children's schooling and improve household stability.

The work of Dr. Chukwudum stands out because it connects education, skills, and livelihood in practical ways.

Maynard "HipHop MD" Okereke

Country: USA

Maynard "HipHop MD" Okereke is committed to expanding educational and economic opportunities for women, girls, and underrepresented communities through STEM education. Through his Hip Hop Science platform, national speaking engagements, educational programming, media appearances, podcasts, and social media, he reaches hundreds of thousands of students annually and connects STEM with inspiration, representation, and possibility.

As a Black engineer who experienced discrimination and skepticism during his own career, Maynard transformed those experiences into a mission: to ensure that girls and students of color can see themselves in STEM careers and envision themselves as future scientists, engineers, innovators, and leaders. His presentations encourage young women to pursue fields traditionally dominated by men and give students the confidence to believe they belong.

Through partnerships with schools, universities, NASA, Microsoft, Blue Origin, and educational organizations, Maynard has influenced students across the United States and internationally. His reach spans K–12 classrooms through higher education, with female students often identifying his message as motivation to continue pursuing STEM degrees.

Maynard's impact extends beyond inspiration. By promoting representation, STEM education, and access to high-opportunity careers, he is helping create pathways toward economic mobility and independence for women and girls.

His leadership, advocacy, and visibility continue to inspire the next generation to pursue STEM, challenge barriers, and become innovators who will help shape the future.

Dr Ally Zlater
Country: Scotland

After surviving a decade-long eating disorder and chronic illness, Dr. Ally Zlatar transformed her personal experiences into a global platform for change. Recognizing how art helped her find her voice and communicate experiences that words could not, she founded The Starving Artist to empower others through creative expression.

Since 2017, Dr. Zlatar's work has reached more than 100,000 people across 30+ countries through over 50 workshops, exhibitions, artist talks, and educational programs. A central focus of her work is empowering women and girls to share their lived experiences, develop creative skills, and build sustainable professional pathways within the arts.

Her projects have provided women with platforms to address gender equality, health, migration, and gender-based violence. Exhibitions including the Women's Exhibition with Her Period Dignity in Thailand, The Meeting Point: Examining Female Migration Experiences, and Break the Silence to End the Violence have amplified women's voices and used artistic storytelling to raise awareness and empower survivors.

Beyond creative expression, Dr. Zlatar equips emerging female artists with practical skills to exhibit their work, communicate their stories publicly, and generate income from their creative practice. Through The Starving Artist Publishing Studio, she amplifies marginalized writers while directing profits to the creatives themselves. Her digital reflection resources have also reached more than 25,000 people globally.

By combining creativity with mentorship, visibility, and economic opportunity, Dr. Zlatar demonstrates how the arts can become a powerful pathway for women's empowerment, leadership, and financial independence.

Entrepreneur Category

Busi Faulkner
Country: Australia

Busi Faulkner is an entrepreneur and business leader whose journey reflects the power of courage, resilience and creating opportunities for others. Based in Brisbane, Australia, she has spent more than a decade building businesses across healthcare and property while championing women's empowerment, workforce development and meaningful community impact.

As the founder of Home Care Nurses Australia, Busi transformed a vision for accessible, compassionate care into a multimillion-dollar enterprise that has created employment opportunities for more than 200 healthcare professionals. Her journey has required navigating the complexities of a highly regulated industry, building strong systems and teams, and continuing to lead through the challenges that come with entrepreneurship and growth.

Today, Busi is taking that journey global through Home Care Nurses America, laying the foundations for expansion into the United States and demonstrating what is possible when women think beyond borders and pursue ambitious goals.

Her entrepreneurial interests also extend into property. Through Villa Luxury Letting and her work as a property developer and investor, Busi acquires, renovates and repositions properties into premium, income-generating assets.

Central to Busi's story is her belief that success becomes more meaningful when it creates opportunities for others. She is passionate about encouraging women to recognize their potential, build financial independence and have the confidence to lead, invest and create businesses of their own.

Her achievements have been recognized by Women Changing the World Awards and FCEM. In 2025, she received the FCEM Inspiring Entrepreneur Award and the Lorraine Martin AO Award.

Busi continues to build with purpose—using entrepreneurship as a platform to empower women, create employment and leave a lasting impact across communities and generations.

Esperanza Guzman

Country: Honduras

Ms. Guzman is a psychologist, sexologist and the founder and director of PSIQUE CIAP, a mental health clinic in northern Honduras. She founded the clinic at the age of 28 only a few years after obtaining her educational degrees. The clinic is working to make low-cost mental healthcare available in one community especially supporting women and other vulnerable populations affected by poverty, marginalization, and violence. Honduras has one of the highest homicide rates worldwide, as well as one of the highest rates of femicide, with over 90% impunity for perpetrators.

In just four years, the clinic has supported over 300 patients and reached over 700 youth and educators through workshop programs. She runs programs for women who have experienced sexual violence and domestic violence combining therapy with access to legal advice, training in self-defense. The first edition of this program engaged ten women over three months and resulted in several being able to leave their abusive situations.

She is working toward building a sustainable financial model that combines paid care with social projects that ensure access for low resource individuals, and communities. Her outreach also involves appearing on local TV to share her knowledge and the help available with a broad audience. Individuals who are mentally healthy are key to vital economic communities.

Kiran Shahbaz

Country: Canada

Kiran Shahbaz built a business where commercial success and social impact are genuinely the same thing. Through Goodwork, she exclusively recruits women from emerging economies across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America and places them in remote roles with employers across North America, Australia, and Europe -- creating financial independence for women who previously had no comparable pathway.

The magnitude of impact is concrete. Since 2021, Goodwork has placed approximately 500 women across 24 countries, maintained a 93% one-year retention rate, and processed over $2.75M CAD in payroll. In 2025, the business turned profitable with a 15.8% net margin, growing revenue from $184K to $468K CAD — more than 2.5x year-on-year — while remaining fully bootstrapped with no external funding.

What makes Kiran's story particularly compelling is that Goodwork was not her first act of service - it was the vehicle her life was building toward. After her Master's degree, she volunteered in a refugee camp in West Africa, working directly with displaced communities. Back in Canada, she spent three years doing community development work on a First Nations reserve in Alberta. A physical illness forced a career change and led her to entrepreneurship -- but the mission never changed. Goodwork is how she found a way to do community development at scale.

Her early venture GrowWell Ventures was selected for Google's NEXT accelerator in Toronto -- one of thirteen startups chosen from a competitive pool. Every hire Kiran makes is both a commercial outcome and a life changed. It is exactly why she deserves this recognition.

Mutiat Oladejo

Country: Nigeria

Mutiat Oladejo is an author, researcher, entrepreneur, and advocate for women's empowerment in Africa. For over two decades, her work has focused on advancing women's participation in economic livelihoods, agriculture, education, enterprise, and public life. Her research and consultancy experience have enabled her to translate knowledge into practical initiatives that expand opportunities for underserved women.

In 2017, Mutiat founded Reamsworth Empowerment Centre (ReamsEC), a women-led and women-focused organization supporting women and youth in rural Nigerian communities and cottage industries. With a predominantly female Board of Governors, ReamsEC combines nonbank microfinance with enterprise development support to strengthen women-owned businesses, promote financial inclusion, and improve livelihoods.

Mutiat's experience as a serial entrepreneur—including publishing, educational resources, food processing, and garment and textile retail—shaped her understanding of the challenges women face in building sustainable enterprises. She believes that entrepreneurship thrives through networks, collaboration, innovation, and access to appropriate financial and business support.

Through ReamsEC, she has championed practical empowerment initiatives. In 2021, the Centre convened 100 women in Taiwo Olobi community to increase awareness of empowerment opportunities and enterprise support systems. In 2024, it provided Adire tie-dye vocational training for 20 women in Payiloku village, encouraging skills development and entrepreneurship. Since 2025, ReamsEC has expanded its emphasis on microfinance, savings, and business development, including loans through its Agbeloba Food Processing Loan Plan.

Mutiat's work demonstrates a sustained commitment to equipping women with the knowledge, skills, finance, and enterprise support needed to build resilient livelihoods and contribute to their communities.

Munju Ara Parvin

Country: Bangladesh

Ms. Parvin is a grassroots woman leader and cooperative entrepreneur from rural Bangladesh. She grew up in extreme poverty and was married off at 15 to improve the family finances. In 2012, she was one of 14 very poor women to join the Raiganj cooperative under the umbrella of Good Neighbors Bangladesh. She learned skills that enabled her to earn and began saving and participating in the Village Development Committee. Her natural leadership potential was recognized, and in 2013 she became a facilitator. In 2023, she was elected as the Chairperson of the Cooperative Management Committee. Today she leads a thriving cooperative of 2,076 women members. Under her leadership the cooperative increased net profits over 50% since 2023. The cooperative maintains a 99.82% loan repayment rate. Each year 62% of profits are directly distributed among the members and 10% is allocated to a Community Development Fund supporting local social welfare initiatives.

She has been instrumental in turning the cooperative from a simple savings and loan group into a women-led social enterprise, operating three businesses. The cooperative is working toward building strong women-owned businesses with wider market access and long-term sustainability.

Ms. Parvin has championed digital transparency and accountability by introducing Co-op 360 Software mobile applications, and SMS based financial communication systems. In 2024 she received the national Joyeeta Award for her leadership and social work. Four other women from the cooperative have also received Joyeeta Awards in addition to the cooperative having received many awards including the Divisional Best Cooperative Award in 2025.

Non-Profit/NGO Category

Kehkashan Basu

Country: Canada

Kehkashan Basu is being recognized for her extraordinary leadership in advancing the economic empowerment of women and girls through education, clean energy, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods across vulnerable communities globally. As the Founder-President of Green Hope Foundation, UN-accredited NGO operating in 29 countries, Kehkashan has directly impacted over half a million people through grassroots programs rooted in sustainability, equity, and inclusive economies. Her work recognizes that women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty, climate change, lack of education, unsafe water, and food insecurity, and addresses these interconnected challenges through practical, community-driven solutions.

Through the Academy of Hope for Women and Girls in Bangladesh, a solar-powered school and vocational training centre, girls receive education during the day while women gain sewing and livelihood skills in the evenings. In the 16 villages connected to Green Hope Foundation's education programs, child marriage rates have declined by 65% over the past five years.

Kehkashan has also led the installation of solar-powered STEM labs for girls in India and Liberia, where 70% of participating girls are now employed, helping them break cycles of poverty and exploitation. Through agrivoltaics initiatives in Bangladesh, India, Canada, and Liberia, 18,200 women farmers resumed climate-smart agriculture, contributing to a 90% decline in malnutrition among women and girls and a 75% increase in girls returning to education. She has led the installation of solar-powered water purification systems in Cambodia and Kiribati that have provided clean drinking water to 3,750 people, reduced waterborne diseases by 50%, and increased school attendance to 90%, particularly benefiting women and girls who previously spent hours collecting unsafe water.

Her globally recognized leadership has earned numerous honours, including Canada's Meritorious Service Medal, Forbes 30 Under 30, Spirit of the United Nations Award, Emirates Energy Award, and Canada's Top 100 Most Powerful Women.

Diana Butler

Country: Australia

Founded by Diana Butler OAM, Care for Africa builds sustainable, self-sufficient communities through an integrated model combining clean water, health, education, and women's enterprise. Delivered one community at a time, these interconnected programs create a lasting foundation for change.

Under Diana's leadership, supported by Tanzanian Country Manager Abdallah Obedi, Care for Africa has installed 22 water bores providing safe, clean drinking water; built five school sanitation blocks; developed a visiting health specialist program addressing critical healthcare gaps in Tarime; established a community primary school and English-medium early learning centre; and provided more than 5 million breakfasts to school children. More than 250 specialist volunteers have also worked in Tarime, strengthening local capacity and sharing skills with community leaders and professionals.

Women's empowerment is central to this model. Care for Africa has established four thriving women's enterprises producing school uniforms, soap, washable sanitary products, and grain for the breakfast program across nine government schools. By creating enterprise opportunities for women while supporting essential community services, the model links women's participation and economic opportunity with broader community development.

Aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and international best practice, Care for Africa addresses water, health, education, and women's enterprise together rather than in isolation. This integrated approach strengthens local capacity and creates the foundations for healthier, more resilient and increasingly self-sufficient communities, with women playing a vital role in sustaining change.

Diana's humanitarian work has been recognized with the Tasmanian Telstra Business Women's Community and Government Award (2012), appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia (2016), a Paul Harris Fellowship, the 2021 University of Tasmania International Alumni Award, and induction into the Tasmanian Nurses Honour Roll. Diana continues to serve her local community as After-Hours Nurse Manager at the Launceston General Hospital.

Funmi Falana

Country: Nigeria

Ms. Falana is a Senior Advocate of Nigeria and a partner at the legal chambers of Falana & Falana. She has devoted decades of her professional work to dismantling structural barriers that limit a woman's access to justice, dignity, safety, and economic opportunity.

Through her leadership and work at Women Empowerment and Legal Aid (WELA) the organization has provided to hundreds of women across Nigeria critical legal support and advocacy for women facing domestic violence, disinheritance, discrimination, and institutional injustice.

She successfully legally challenged "Regulation 124" of the Nigerian Police regulations. This was a discriminatory provision that required female police officers to obtain permission to marry; a restriction never imposed on their male counterparts. By legally overturning this policy, she helped to remove a deeply entrenched institutional barrier that undermined women's autonomy and professional advancement. The significance of this ruling affirmed the principle that women deserve equal treatment, dignity, and freedom within public institutions and the workforce. Her advocacy recognizes the critical relationship between legal protection and economic empowerment.

Ms. Falana has a deep commitment to legal education and public awareness. In collaboration with the Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation she worked to simplify the laws addressing domestic violence ensuring the laws were explained in plain English, had visual illustrations, and available in Yoruba translations for grassroots communities. This initiative empowered women with knowledge and resources to seek legal protection and assert their rights. Legal literacy became a practical instrument of empowerment.

Additionally, she has worked for prison reforms to protect the dignity of vulnerable women detainees and their children and she provides scholarships for female students and mentors emerging female professionals.

The impact of her work is measured in the number of lives restored, creation of opportunities for women and the number of barriers dismantled.

Sessinou Louis Houngnibo

Country: Republic Of Benin

Throughout his career, the awardee has used art, digital technology, and social innovation as levers for economic transformation and the promotion of women's leadership in Benin.

Mr. Houngnibo has worked with women and youth since 2010 through the creative arts. He is currently (since approximately 2021), the Executive Director of EMAA-providing training and integration programs aimed at women where more than 300 women have been trained in audio visual, visual and the decorative arts.

He has demonstrated the ability to design, secure funding for, and implement high impact social projects that promote women's professional and entrepreneurial integration. As the executive director of EMAA (Ecole de Metiers d'Arts et de l'Artisanat) he supports women from disadvantaged backgrounds in entering income-generating professions, including those in traditional male dominated sectors.

His approach of combining practical training, entrepreneurial guidance, and social support, contributes directly and sustainably to women's economic empowerment.

Dr Emmanuel Ande Ivorgba

Country: Nigeria

Since 2017, Dr. Emmanuel Ande Ivorgba, through The Emmanuel Ivorgba Center, has directly empowered more than 1,500 Christian and Muslim women across Plateau, Benue, and Taraba States in Nigeria—communities significantly affected by poverty, violent conflict, and social instability.

The Center advances women's economic empowerment by providing practical livelihood and entrepreneurial skills, including tailoring, agriculture, small-business management, financial planning, and business development. Programs begin with assessments of participants' skills and needs, followed by tailored development plans, hands-on training, mentorship, and soft-skills development. Women are also supported in developing viable business plans and identifying opportunities to access funding.

Through these interventions, participants have strengthened their capacity to earn sustainable incomes, support their households, establish small businesses, and participate more actively in their local economies. The Center estimates that its programs have contributed to a 30% increase in women's economic participation, while participants have reported improvements in household income, financial independence, confidence, and social standing.

The Center also supports educational opportunities and mentorship for girls in Plateau State, helping address barriers to quality education and contributing to longer-term efforts to reduce poverty and gender inequality.

Importantly, women's empowerment is integrated with peacebuilding and social inclusion. By bringing Christian and Muslim women together for training, economic cooperation, and community engagement, the initiative strengthens relationships across religious and social divides.

Dr. Ivorgba's approach demonstrates how livelihood development, entrepreneurship, education, mentorship, and interfaith cooperation can collectively strengthen women's economic independence, social resilience, and capacity to contribute to peaceful and sustainable communities across Nigeria.

Bia Kern

Country: Brazil

For nearly two decades, Bia Kern has challenged women's exclusion from Brazil's construction industry. In 2006, she founded Instituto Mulher em Construção (IMEC) in Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul, to equip women in vulnerable situations with skilled-trade training, economic independence, and opportunities in a traditionally male-dominated sector.

Since then, IMEC has trained more than 10,000 women across Brazil. Participants have entered the formal labor market, launched microbusinesses, increased their incomes, reduced their reliance on government assistance, and gained skills to improve their homes and communities.

When catastrophic floods devastated Rio Grande do Sul in 2024, Bia launched Regenera RS, enabling affected women to develop practical construction skills and help repair their own flood-damaged homes. The initiative turned recovery into a pathway to resilience and independence.

Today, Bia leads an organization with more than 40 employees and continues advocating for women's economic empowerment and gender equity. She works with companies, policymakers, industry leaders, and the public to remove barriers to women's participation in construction and promote more inclusive workplaces.

Through IMEC, Bia has transformed a bold idea into measurable impact: providing women with skills and economic agency so they can reshape their lives, families, and communities. She is helping build a more equitable Brazil—one trained woman at a time.

Victor Kuringi

Country: Papua New Guinea

Victor Kuringi advances women's economic empowerment and inclusive, community-driven development in Papua New Guinea through his leadership at Stretim Ples Foundation. His work creates pathways for women to develop skills, access income opportunities, strengthen their safety, and participate more fully in economic and community life.

Through gender-inclusive employment and training initiatives, particularly in environmental conservation and reforestation, Victor has helped expand opportunities for women and girls, who represent approximately 60% of program participants. These initiatives provide practical skills, income-generating opportunities, and meaningful roles in large-scale environmental restoration efforts.

His leadership also supports safe houses and awareness programs for women affected by gender-based violence. By strengthening pathways to safety and recovery, these programs help survivors regain stability and reconnect with education, employment, and community life—important foundations for long-term economic independence.

Victor's impact extends across Papua New Guinea, including the Highlands Region, Bougainville, and Oro Province. Infrastructure initiatives under his leadership—including roads, water systems, and community facilities—further support women by improving access to markets, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, particularly in rural communities.

Through this integrated approach, Victor demonstrates how community infrastructure, environmental action, and gender-responsive programming can work together to strengthen women's economic participation, resilience, and long-term wellbeing across Papua New Guinea.

Nisha Mandani

Country: Usa

Nisha Mandani has demonstrated exceptional leadership in advancing women's economic empowerment, making it the central organizing principle of Our Aim Foundation's (OAF) work. Since 2008, under her leadership, OAF's Women Empowerment Program has directly empowered more than one million women across Pakistan, Malawi, Bangladesh, Lebanon, the United States and India.

What distinguishes Nisha's contribution is her ability to take economic opportunity to women in some of the world's most underserved and challenging environments. She expanded OAF's work to refugee settlements in Lebanon in 2017 and, during the Rohingya crisis in 2018, brought vocational skills training directly into displacement camps in Bangladesh. In 2019, she established the Holistic Community Centre in Tongozola, Malawi, creating a permanent facility designed to remove barriers that prevent women from earning sustainable livelihoods. Her work subsequently expanded through skills programs in India and, most recently, artisan enterprise development in Gilgit-Baltistan and public-sector vocational partnerships in Punjab, Pakistan.

The impact is both measurable and sustainable. OAF's tailoring and vocational programs have benefited more than 200,000 women, while computer literacy and skills training have reached over 10,000 beneficiaries. Program monitoring records improvements ranging from 10% to 40%. Complementing these initiatives, OAF has adopted seven schools across Pakistan, India and Malawi, providing free education—primarily to girls—and nutritious meals that also support economically marginalized families.

From refugee camps and remote mountain communities to rural villages, Nisha has built a model that transforms skills into livelihoods and opportunity into greater economic independence for women.

Dr Elerod Morris Ii

Country: USA

Founded in 2015 by Dr. Elerod Morris II, Bee Geek Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing digital literacy, STEM education, and technology workforce development throughout the Piedmont Triad. Through innovative programs and hands-on training, Bee Geek equips underserved youth, adults, veterans, and families with the technical skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to succeed in an increasingly digital world.

At the heart of this mission is Girl-Code®, an innovative mentorship and technology development program created to empower high school girls—particularly those facing social, economic, and educational barriers—to see themselves as future leaders, innovators, and problem-solvers.

Girl-Code® combines technology and STEM education with one-on-one mentorship, seminars, scholarships, internships, and exposure to accomplished women. Participants develop practical skills while building confidence, leadership abilities, professional networks, and a stronger vision for their futures.

Although more girls are exploring technology careers, significant disparities remain in representation, pay equity, leadership opportunities, access to mentorship, and resources. Girl-Code® works to close these gaps by giving young women access to the skills, relationships, and opportunities necessary to compete and thrive.

Through Girl-Code®, Bee Geek is building more than technology skills—it is developing a diverse pipeline of empowered young women prepared to pursue higher education, enter competitive careers, lead within the technology sector, and create positive change in their communities. By investing in girls today, Girl-Code® helps cultivate the innovators, entrepreneurs, mentors, and women leaders of tomorrow.

Diane Nifasha

Country: Australia

Founder and CEO Diane Nifasha, KAZE Hope Alliance Foundation (KHAF) since January 2024, is being recognized for outstanding contribution to women's economic empowerment, social inclusion, and community development in Rwanda and internationally, including Australia.

Through education, vocational training, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, mentorship, and leadership programs, KHAF has supported hundreds of women and girls, particularly those experiencing poverty, unemployment, family violence, discrimination, and social exclusion.

KHAF focuses on creating sustainable pathways to economic independence by equipping women with practical skills, confidence, and opportunities to generate income and improve their livelihoods. Its work strengthens families, promotes women's leadership, and helps build safer, more inclusive, and resilient communities.

Through advocacy, partnerships, and community-based initiatives, KHAF continues to expand its impact and inspire women to become entrepreneurs, leaders, and agents of change. Since December 2025, Diane is also a Specialist Family Violence team leader with VincentCare Victoria delivering case management services across a wide range of portfolios similar to the KHAF efforts, but in the Colac area.

For the dedication, compassion, and measurable contribution to empowering women and vulnerable communities in Rwanda and Australia, Diane Nifasha, KAZE HOPE ALLIANCE FOUNDATION is highly deserving of recognition.

Elektra Lagos Ruiz

Country: Begium

Since 2018, Elektra Lagos has transformed forced displacement into a platform for women's economic empowerment, dignity, and leadership. As Director of the International Network of Human Rights Europe (RIDHE), headquartered in Brussels with a strong presence across Latin America and the Caribbean, she has developed regional programs that expand access to education, economic opportunity, and protection for displaced women.

Drawing on her own experience of exile, Elektra has championed RIDHE's Education in Emergency model, which has provided 400 higher-education scholarships to young migrant and refugee women and supported 220 women in completing technical and workforce training in Costa Rica.

These programs combine university scholarships with market-oriented training in fields such as gastronomy, baking, tailoring, food handling, English, and elderly care, creating practical pathways to financial independence. Among technical training graduates, 45.7% (101 women) secured employment, while 37% (81 women) launched businesses or became self-employed.

Initiatives including Women Who Transform and Women Talent Scholarships have expanded opportunities for women historically excluded from formal labor markets, including rural campesina, Miskita Indigenous, and mestiza women displaced from Nicaragua.

Under Elektra's leadership, education has become a pathway not only to employment, but also to economic autonomy, family resilience, psychosocial recovery, and leadership. Through RIDHE, she is building a regional model that enables displaced women to move beyond survival and become leaders, entrepreneurs, income earners, and agents of economic recovery in their communities.

Arnaud Tougma

Country: Burkina Faso

Arnaud Tougma and Planète Enfants & Développement are transforming childcare in Burkina Faso into a powerful engine for women's economic empowerment. Their pioneering model addresses two interconnected barriers: the lack of affordable, quality childcare that prevents many mothers from working, and the limited opportunities for women to access dignified, sustainable employment.

By establishing a professional Childminder vocational pathway, the initiative equips women with recognized early-childhood-care skills and the entrepreneurial support needed to create home-based daycare centers or secure employment in affordable nurseries. Importantly, Arnaud has also engaged families and communities—including husbands—to challenge social norms that can restrict women's participation in economic life.

The results are tangible: 300 women have been professionally trained, 140 have launched daycare centers, and 153 sustainable jobs have been created in the Early Childhood Development sector. Among active beneficiaries, 78% now make a significant contribution to their household income. Their services also provide more than 600 children each year with safe, nurturing and stimulating care.

By professionalizing childcare, the initiative creates a multiplier effect: women gain skills, income, entrepreneurship opportunities and greater economic agency, while affordable childcare enables other mothers to pursue their own livelihoods. With government recognition and replication in Togo, the model demonstrates how investing in women as childcare professionals can strengthen families, communities and the next generation.

Catharina Van Den Bosch

Country: Ethiopia

Catharina van den Bosch has dedicated two decades of leadership in Ethiopia to restoring the dignity, independence, and economic security of vulnerable women through Abraham's Oasis. Her approach recognizes that lasting empowerment requires more than immediate assistance: women need psychological healing, practical skills, economic opportunities, and the confidence to rebuild their own futures.

Under Catharina's leadership, 2,365 vulnerable women have received business and entrepreneurial skills training, enabling them to pursue income-generating activities, establish small enterprises, and move toward financial self-reliance. Her programs combine business development and financial skills with practical livelihood support, helping women become economically independent and better able to provide for their children and families.

Equally significant is her work with survivors of trauma, abuse, violence, and conflict. Through the safe-house and rehabilitation programs she established, 1,497 women have received holistic rehabilitation and vocational support, providing a pathway from severe vulnerability toward recovery, dignity, and independent living.

Her model is deliberately holistic: counselling and psychosocial rehabilitation address trauma; vocational and business training build capability; and economic empowerment gives women the means to sustain their recovery. Abraham's Oasis also works at community level on prevention, awareness, and strengthening local structures so that the benefits extend beyond individual women to their families and communities.

Catharina's contribution demonstrates a powerful principle: when women are given safety, skills, resources, and opportunity, empowerment becomes sustainable—and its impact extends across families and communities.

Danni Washington
Country: USA

Danni Washington is committed to empowering women and girls through education, STEM engagement, environmental leadership, and representation in media. As an internationally recognized science communicator, television host, author, and ocean advocate, Danni has dedicated her career to creating pathways for young women to pursue careers that lead to economic independence and leadership opportunities.

As the first African American woman to host her own nationally syndicated science television series, Xploration Nature Knows Best, Danni has broken barriers while serving as a visible role model for girls who have historically been underrepresented in STEM fields. Through her nonprofit organization, Big Blue & You, she has inspired thousands of students across the United States and internationally through hands-on environmental education, conservation initiatives, and science outreach programs.

One of Danni's most impactful initiatives is the Mocha Mermaid Movement, a global platform she created to increase diversity in marine science, ocean conservation, and outdoor exploration. Through social media campaigns, public speaking, educational programming, and mentorship opportunities, the Mocha Mermaid Movement has reached tens of thousands of women and girls worldwide, encouraging them to pursue careers in science, conservation, technology, and environmental leadership.

Danni's influence extends from local communities to national and international audiences. She has spoken at major conferences, educational summits, environmental forums, and youth leadership events while collaborating with organizations dedicated to advancing equity and inclusion in STEM. Her work has been recognized by numerous educational, scientific, and environmental organizations for its impact on expanding opportunities for women and girls.

By combining education, mentorship, media, and advocacy, Danni Washington continues to empower the next generation of female leaders. Her efforts help young women gain the knowledge, confidence, and skills necessary to pursue meaningful careers, achieve economic independence, and create positive change within their communities and around the world.

The Shalom Project NC – Flourish
Country: USA

The Shalom Project, a 501c3 non-profit organization since 2006, has grown from its early days serving the West Salem neighborhood of Winston-Salem to the organization it is today. In addition to efforts to assist with the basic needs of medical care, clothing and food, The Shalom Project also oversees long term initiatives to engage with and involve the community in the efforts to reduce poverty and improve the city and communities. The mission is to serve and support those in the community who have been systematically disenfranchised and oppressed. It is achieved through outreach programming, education, and advocacy.

A cornerstone program is Flourish. Flourish is a one-year financial education and holistic wellness program designed to support women with low income to achieve financial self-sufficiency. It serves as one of The Shalom Project's key efforts to confront the root causes of economic disparity. It's holistic and evidence-based approach addresses the most significant factors of economic mobility. It is open to women aged 18-65 with low income who want to achieve financial self-sufficiency and it pairs them with "Companions" for weekly support.

Flourish's curriculum focuses on financial, mental health, social capital, and other obstacles to achieving financial stability. It offers weekly education sessions, mental health education, career development, physical health, and more. Participants also receive a free laptop, mental health counseling, free childcare and a savings match program. A

second cohort, Florecer, serves Spanish-speaking Latina women in Forsyth County. The Shalom Project – Flourish and Florecer provide specific attention to women's economic empowerment.

Corporate Initiatives Category

Kristen Coakley

Country: UAE

Kristen Coakley is a globally recognized HR and people strategy leader whose commitment to women's empowerment has been a defining thread throughout her 20+ year international career across Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Middle East.

As Learning & Talent Partner MEA at Clyde & Co and Partner at Fluid Moves International, Kristen has coached and developed more than 1,500 executives, directors, and high-potential leaders. A significant focus of her work is advancing women into senior roles, equipping them with the confidence, skills, and support to navigate barriers, amplify their voices, and lead with impact.

Since 2020, Kristen has served on the Leadership Board of Ellevate Network Dubai as Co-President. Leading a team of up to 11 executives, she has helped design and deliver more than 150 events spanning leadership, negotiation, financial literacy, health and wellbeing, and career development. Under her leadership, the Dubai community has grown to 190 active members, creating a powerful peer network founded on collaboration rather than competition. Kristen has also facilitated multiple #IamRemarkable workshops, a program developed by Google to address barriers to self-promotion and has championed International Women's Day initiatives across multiple platforms.

Her advocacy extends to women facing profound barriers to opportunity. Through her partnership with Victory Afghanistan, Kristen has delivered career workshops and helped create mentoring, internship, and employment pathways for Afghan women rebuilding their professional lives, benefiting more than 30 women. She has also contributed to the REACH women's mentorship program, supporting women through pivotal career transitions.

Across corporate leadership, community building, mentoring, and advocacy, Kristen's work is united by one purpose: creating the conditions for women to recognize their value, access opportunity, and progress into positions where they can lead, influence, and thrive.

Sidra Ghani

Country: UAE

Sidra Ghani is building a growing ecosystem for women's economic empowerment across Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Recognizing a gap in structured career support for women in the region, she founded EmpowHer, a platform focused on professional development, career progression, and greater access to mentorship and networks.

She designed and piloted EmpowHer's mentorship program, providing one-to-one mentoring, career guidance, and confidence-building support to four Saudi women. The successful pilot has created a foundation for scale, with targets of 25–40 women mentored in Year 1 and 100–150 by Year 3, alongside a long-term ambition to support women at university, early-career, and leadership stages.

Sidra also launched Connected Mornings, a networking and community initiative designed to help corporate women step back from demanding careers, reconnect, and build meaningful professional relationships. Since launching in November 2025, four events have brought women together across industries, with a women's retreat in Saudi Arabia now being developed to deepen the community.

Her impact also extends into professional leadership. As Vice President of the Middle East & Africa Compliance Association, she advocates for greater female representation in compliance and governance leadership. Through speaking engagements, networking platforms, and professional development initiatives, she has delivered six events promoting women's advancement across the MENA region.

From grassroots mentoring to regional advocacy, Sidra is building the community, guidance, visibility, and professional networks that enable women to progress, lead, and contribute more fully to the region's economic future.

Isabella Ghassemi-Smith – Aurora Tech Award

Country: UAE

The Aurora Tech Award is the only global startup award dedicated exclusively to women founders building in emerging markets, directly tackling the persistent gender funding gap in technology and entrepreneurship. Less than 2% of global venture capital funding goes to women-led start-ups. Aurora actively redirects capital, investor attention, and global visibility toward high-potential female entrepreneurs driving innovation in underserved regions. Winners receive up to $85,000 in non-dilutive funding enabling them to scale their businesses without giving up equity or ownership.

Aurora is led by Isabella Ghassemi-Smith. Through Aurora, Ms. Ghassemi-Smith has built a globally recognized award. Since launching in 2021 with 116 applicants, the program has expanded to more than 3400 applicants in 2026 with finalists and winners across the world. The international reach demonstrates Aurora's role in strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems across multiple regions.

Aurora works with 40+ venture capital partners to identify and support high potential founders across MEN, Africa, Latin America and Asia. Under Ms. Ghassemi-Smith's leadership, Aurora has grown into a 20,000+ strong community and become a recognized signal quality within emerging market eco-systems.

Leticia Martelli

Country: Brazil

Letícia Martelli is creating tangible pathways to women's economic empowerment by helping female legal professionals gain the skills, confidence, and international qualifications needed to access higher-paying careers, leadership opportunities, and global markets.

A Brazilian attorney, legal educator, entrepreneur, and founder of LM Legal Coach, Letícia has built her work around a critical professional opportunity: international legal knowledge and English-language proficiency can expand career mobility and earning potential. Through specialized education in Legal English, Common Law, legal translation, international legal communication, and professional development, she equips women to compete more effectively in an increasingly global profession.

Her impact is both practical and personal. In 2022, Letícia awarded a full scholarship to a female attorney for her 60-hour Introduction to Common Law and Legal English course. The recipient subsequently advanced her career and now works at a prestigious Brazilian law firm recognized for its top-tier practice. In 2025, Letícia provided 22 hours of specialized instruction at a significantly reduced rate to support another Brazilian female attorney pursuing admission to the New York Bar—an important step toward expanding her international career opportunities and earning potential.

Letícia multiplies this impact through education and public engagement. She has delivered 14 speaking engagements across Brazil, Portugal, and the United States, reaching attorneys, law firm partners, educators, students, and emerging professionals through organizations and events including FENALAW, UCLA School of Law, Opice Blum Academy, and the International Bar Association.

By turning knowledge into opportunity, Letícia enables women to strengthen their professional independence, increase their economic potential, and pursue careers without geographic boundaries. Her work exemplifies the TIAW World of Difference Award's purpose: empowering women with the tools and opportunities to achieve lasting economic advancement.

Despo Michaelides

Country: UAE

Despo Michaelides has dedicated her career to advancing women's economic empowerment across Africa, the GCC, Central Asia, Europe, and Asia, turning advocacy into measurable progress.

She increased female representation to 30% in Nigeria and helped break significant workplace barriers in Saudi Arabia, including establishing the Kingdom's first female sales call centre and pioneering senior female appointments.

At AXA Gulf/GIG Gulf, Despo helped achieve 49% female representation, ensured women comprised at least half of succession and technical talent pools, and increased female Executive Committee representation from 10% to 50% within two years. She also addressed legacy pay disparities, strengthened maternity and workplace protections, and helped increase women's board representation to 25%.

Her impact multiplies through others: she has coached and mentored nearly 500 women, many progressing to senior leadership, including CEO level.

Through corporate leadership, mentorship, advisory roles, and support for girls' education, Despo has consistently transformed opportunity into lasting advancement for women.

Serviço Nacional De Aprendizagem Industrial De Minas Gerais (Senai Mg)

Country: Brazil

This corporate training initiative is an outstanding example of what can be achieved through vocational education connected directly to employment, income generation and access to strategic industrial careers.

In 2025, the initiative enrolled 2,628 women in 114 professional training courses across 21 municipalities in Minas Gerais, Brazil. These women gained access to technical qualifications that increased their employability and opened pathways into sectors historically less accessible to women.

By linking education, industry partnerships and inclusion, Senai Minas Gerais has transformed professional training into a concrete pathway for women's economic mobility.

Public Service Category

Dr Sumaya Al Blooshi

Country: UAE

Dr. Sumaya Al Blooshi is an Emirati gamechanger whose career has been dedicated to advancing women's economic empowerment by transforming the status, visibility, and leadership pathways of the nursing profession across the UAE and the region.

As President of the Emirates Nursing Association and lead of the taskforce for the Cabinet Initiative on the Attractiveness of the Nursing Profession since 2015, Dr. Sumaya has spent more than a decade helping professionalize and elevate nursing—a profession predominantly represented by women—into a respected, sustainable career with meaningful opportunities for advancement. Through her leadership of the UAE's National Nursing and Midwifery Strategy, she has helped shape the policies, professional standards, education pathways, and leadership infrastructure that enable thousands of women to build skilled and rewarding careers.

As Director of Nursing at Emirates Health Services and Honorary Associate Professor at MBRU, Dr Sumaya uniquely bridges frontline practice, education, policy, and governance. Her own journey from staff nurse and nurse supervisor to Department Head and Director of Nursing exemplifies the professional progression she now champions for the next generation of women in healthcare.

Her influence extends beyond the UAE. She has served as a Board Member of the International Council of Nurses since 2022 and contributes to regional and international nursing and midwifery committees. In 2022, she was inducted as a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

Her achievements have been recognized through numerous honors, including the Emirates Pride Medal, Community Service Medal, Best Government Communication Campaign promoting the nursing profession, Pioneer Nurse Global Health Pioneer Award, and the Emirates Women Award for Leadership in 2023.

Through policy, education, mentorship, and advocacy, Dr. Sumaya has helped transform not only a profession, but the possibilities available to the women within it—creating stronger pathways to economic participation, professional recognition, and leadership.

Arianna Stephany Burgos Carrera

Country: Ecuador

As Director General of Ecuador's Instituto Nacional de Economía Popular y Solidaria (IEPS), Arianna Burgos Carrera advances women's economic empowerment within the Popular and Solidarity Economy (EPS), where women make up more than 65% of participating organizations and individual enterprises.

Under her leadership, national initiatives have expanded women's access to skills, financing, and markets. More than 13,500 women have strengthened their organizational, administrative, and technical capacities, while over 5,000 have received support to develop business plans and access financing. Approximately 8,000 women from more than 430 organizations have also gained opportunities to position their products in new markets, strengthening incomes and local economic resilience.

Women represent 70% of beneficiaries of the PROFECPIAM program, reaching nearly 2,500 entrepreneurs. Through "Mi Tienda del Nuevo Ecuador," 400 small businesses have been strengthened, 75% of them led by women.

Arianna’s commitment to women entrepreneurs also extends beyond public service. In 2019, she launched “Emprendiendo Juntas” (Starting Up Together), a training and mentoring initiative that has supported more than 5,000 women in developing business skills and building sustainable livelihoods.

Together, these efforts are helping women transform entrepreneurship into greater economic independence, employment, and community resilience. Women-led enterprises within Ecuador’s solidarity economy generate an estimated 33,500 jobs, highlighting women’s important contribution to inclusive and sustainable economic development.