



"I encourage all the women groups to diversify their economic activities when they start to get some income."

Luwedde Jane Francis,
leader of the Agalya Awamu
Mushroom group

RECENT HAPPENINGS: FIRST PEER LEARNING EXCHANGE

"Agalya Awamu." Loosely translated as "we eat together," these words spoken by Luwedde Jane Francis served as inspiration for Women First to coordinate its first-ever learning exchange in August. The sentiment extends beyond eating; it is the belief that women are stronger as a collective, and that when ideas are shared, great things happen.

The learning exchange between Women in Action for Community Empowerment (WACE), Awake Foundation for Women and Girls, and Community Women Enterprise Network (CWEN), came together after a peer learning convening visit in East Africa in March, where the partners met one another, most of them for the first time.

Luwedde Jane Francis, pictured above, offered insight into her experience as a woman in the mushroom growing business. "My group dries our mushrooms to fetch higher processes, we also have a food seasoning from mushrooms and other healthy herbs and fruit juice," she said. In addition to sharing more about her business and expertise with other women, the learning exchange empowered Jane Francis to expand her horizons to not be solely dependent upon mushroom growing for her income.

These face-to-face interactions reaffirm the value of the work the Women First team and grantee partners do on a daily basis, and underscore the value of Capacity Building as part of the long-term support model employed by Women First.



THADHANI FOUNDATION

Women First is thrilled to announce its partnership with The Mulchand and Parpati Thadhani Foundation through a generous multi-year gift to support our grantee organizations in India. With a focus on organizations that foster economic empowerment for women, this partnership is the first step in establishing the Thadhani and Ramesh C. Prabhu Community Resilience Fund, which will directly impact nearly 10,000 women, girls, and trans people in India. We are incredibly grateful to Anita Thomas and Jackie Shapiro for their introductions in establishing this meaningful relationship. Sajni Thadhani was born in India, where she lived until her mid-twenties before coming to the United States in 1970. After experiencing gender inequality in nearly all aspects of her life, Sajni made the decision to pursue a career in social work, with a focus on helping others and improving quality of life for marginalized groups.

As she poignantly said in the 2010 World Summit on Human Rights, "Collective and universal understanding that all humans are equal, must be the foundation of any work that we do." Women First is grateful for the support of The Mulchand and Parpati Thadhani Foundation and is honored to continue Sajni's legacy and fight for women's economic empowerment through our unique grantmaking model, which provides multi-year financial support and organizational resources to ensure long-term success for grantee partners.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Women First's commitment to being a learning organization helps us actively create, capture, transfer, and mobilize knowledge, enabling us to adapt to an ever-changing global environment. It allows our team to adapt to change more easily by instilling an ongoing improvement mindset, encouraging shared ownership for projects, and shared accountability for the projects' results. Over the summer and fall, as we executed on our new strategy to grow both deep and wide, we worked on several initiatives that will greatly enhance our overall operations. We are also exploring our current staff and governance structures to ensure that their size, leadership, and composition are appropriate to steer the organization towards a sustainable future to advance our mission.

We were thrilled to receive the remainders of very generous bequests from the Estate of Virginia Maynard (thanks to Fay Kittelson for serving as executor) and the Estate of Eva Reiman. If you would like to learn more about leaving a lasting legacy for women's economic empowerment through a planned gift to Women First, please contact Lili Leonard at lleonard@womenfirstfund.org.

As always, we are so grateful for the unwavering support of our donors, who make our work possible!

STAFF INTROS

Women First believes in the values of diversity, equity and inclusion, and we held onto that belief as we looked to hire culturally competent staff. Over the last several months, we have welcomed five colleagues to the Women First family:



Winnie Watera
Program Officer (East Africa)
Based in: Kampala, Uganda

Winnie manages our East Africa portfolio of partners – a high-impact group – and provides comprehensive support for their Women First-funded Economic Empowerment programs. Winnie supports the implementation of our grant-making program through identifying candidates, reviewing grant proposals, and recommending adjustments to program strategies.



Lili Leonard
Director of Advancement
Based in: Washington, D.C.

Lili is responsible for all fundraising and development initiatives for Women First. She engages with donors to keep them apprised of the impact of their support, and works to find new supporters whose philanthropic goals are in alignment with Women First's work to ensure long-term success for our organization.



Aditi Padiyar
Program Officer (South Asia)
Based in: Delhi, India

Aditi manages our South Asia portfolio of partners, which currently includes partners based in India. She will play an essential role in scoping and planning for Women First's expansion in South Asia, as well as supporting the implementation of our grantmaking program.



Olive Nazziwa
Program Associate
Based in: Kampala, Uganda

Olive works closely with our East Africa and South Asia portfolio of partners. She leads in identifying potential candidates, conducting due diligence, reviewing grant proposals and reports, and carries out both onsite and virtual check-ins.



Mabel Kirabo
Capacity Building Officer
Based in: Kampala, Uganda

Mabel is responsible for the capacity strengthening component of Women First's partnership model, helping to develop and implement a cohesive, targeted strategy and set of activities for our grantee partners.

Women First grantee partners live and work in some of the most difficult environments on earth — communities where COVID-19 is only one of many life-threatening issues. And yet, less than 2% of donor funding reaches the grassroots groups we partner with, despite evidence showing that the mobilization of these groups has a more direct influence on positive change to society than almost any other factor.

Learn more about how you can help Women First continue to support our grantee partners and the women, girls, and trans people they serve:

www.womenfirstfund.org/donate

All donations are fully tax-deductible by United States Federal Law. EIN: 23-7068080.