



GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT: MAD SISTERS Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya

What the women of Women First grantee partner MAD Sisters want is simple: a better future for their daughters. They know what faces their girls as they grow into adolescence and young adulthood in Kibera, Africa's largest urban slum. A lack of economic opportunity spins a continuous spiral of dependency, violence, teen pregnancy, early marriage, and school drop-out. Sometimes, young women and girls are forced to trade sex in exchange for basic necessities such as food and sanitary towels. Predictably, these challenges have worsened since the onset of the pandemic.



"We believe that strong girls are bedrock to strong communities and that young women and girls, given opportunity, have the capacity and willpower to do anything to change their circumstances."

MAD Sisters provides a safe community and learning space for women and girls to go in Kibera and receive training in financial literacy and work readiness skills. After months of training, they then can go on to join savings groups and receive seed funding to grow their small businesses so that they can eventually become financially independent.

The lockdowns that came along with the global pandemic caused many of the women working with MAD Sisters to lose their income, access to food, clean water, and basic necessities. Women First stepped in to provide emergency funding which helped the group address these critical and essential needs while maintaining their training programs for local young women.

Looking optimistically to the future, MAD Sisters continues to provide financial literacy and job readiness skills to young women, giving them the ability to dream of a better life. Women First is proud to partner with these young women and can't wait to see how their business endeavors flourish.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **March 14-25: United Nation's CSW66**

Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes and women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work are the themes for this year's CSW.

- **March 24, 10AM ET: Women First Hosted CSW66 Panel Discussion**

"Innovative Climate Resilience Strategies and Women's Economic Empowerment"

This event will bring together a panel of women leaders from the Global South who will discuss how their economic empowerment initiatives are preparing their communities for adapting and mitigating the worst effects of climate change. The panel will be followed by multi-stakeholder interactive sessions to discuss the role of funders, impact investors, international organizations, and the private sector in creating structures that are conducive to women's sustainable economic growth. **All are invited to attend. To register, please visit www.womenfirstfund.org/new-events.**

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

At the start of 2021, I began to hold regular strategic conversations with our team (both Board and staff), to create a list of the most important issues regarding Women First's organizational and programmatic growth trajectory.

The progress made for women, girls, and trans people in recent decades have already begun to slide back dangerously, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic and its political and economic repercussions. We at Women First believe in our program model and the unique value we bring to our landscape and feel both a responsibility and an opportunity to reach a wider group of organizations – fully investing in their sustainability, especially at this pivotal moment in history.

In December, this commitment translated into Women First's Board pledging to maximize our impact and leading the way during a time of great need for women's grassroots organizations. This promise will be fulfilled by allocating greater resources from our endowment to address entrenched social issues, grow both deep and wide programmatically, and invest in our own infrastructure to attract new and larger funders and strategic partners.

In summary, this is a unique moment in time to reflect on our privilege and consider our community and what it needs. Our future holds exciting opportunities to expand to different geographies and interconnected topics that support Women's Economic Empowerment. The journey of our grantee partners and of Women First is an impressive story of honoring our collective learning, embracing change, and committing to global gender equity as a fundamental human right. Together, we will create even greater impact!

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: JACKIE SHAHZADI

Jackie Shahzadi has been involved with Women First for almost three decades - overseeing numerous phases of change and expansion throughout her tenure.

Jackie's passion for empowering women and girls partly stems from her time as a teacher and women's university professor prior to and during the Iranian Revolution, where she witnessed the retraction of women's rights and progress firsthand. Originally from Connecticut, Jackie lived in Tehran with her husband and two children in the 1960's and 1970's. She and her family evacuated and settled in California where she accepted a PhD scholarship at the University of Southern California. After earning her PhD in education, Jackie went on to continue her career as a director of programs at the Braille Institute and later the University of Phoenix.



Drawing from her own lifelong passion for equality, Jackie proudly served as both a Women First Board and Committee member. Over the years Jackie has served with and admired many women, including multiple Board Presidents who led Women First to create positive change for women and girls globally. Some of Jackie's most memorable moments include group trips to India and Rwanda where she and other Women First board members met with grantee partners.

Jackie understands the importance of funding grassroots organizations - where women can lead change in their communities and support is leveraged effectively. She is excited for Women First to continue its great legacy of empowering women and girls well into the future.

Women First is proud to have Jackie as a longtime supporter and Board member. Jackie, along with many other incredible women, are the foremothers of Women First and we are thankful for their years of thoughtful leadership and passion for women's equality - without women like Jackie, Women First would not be where we are today.

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.

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