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Left: NATCAZ of Zimbabwe is training local women in textile production and tie dying to increase their economic sustainability.

CSW59: A REFLECTION ON BEIJING+20

Twenty VGIF delegates including board members, interns, staff members, and former/current grantees, will participate in the 59th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59) at the United Nations, March 9 – 20, 2015. This year CSW promises to be a powerful event, featuring a review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action drafted in 1995 and a focus on the current challenges and opportunities in gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Beijing Platform for Action and the twelve Areas of Critical Concern represent the most robust and progressive blueprint for advancing women’s rights to date and have contributed to significant changes in the lives of women and girls worldwide.

Prior to CSW59, VGIF submitted an official statement to the United Nations to help inform high level discussions about the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The VGIF

statement was based on the direct feedback and ideas from current and recent grantees, which they provided through an online survey. This allowed VGIF to make sure the voices of current and former grantees — women leaders working on the Beijing Critical Areas of Concern locally — are heard in discussions about women’s rights and gender equality at the UN. The views of grassroots groups are often excluded from this space and VGIF has the unique opportunity to bring the voices of local women leaders to the discussions.

Through the survey, VGIF grantees identified the top three Critical Areas of Concern facing women and girls in their communities.

- Women and Poverty
- Education and Training of Women
- Women in Power and Decision Making

Women and Poverty was identified

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Margret Joeji
Project Coordinator, Light Trust

VGIF Parallel Event at CSW59

Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action: Learning from Leaders on the Ground

Friday, March 13, 2015
2:30–4:00 PM
Church Center for the United Nations
777 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017

Featuring Margret Joeji, Project Coordinator of VGIF grantee, Light Trust – India. Ms Joeji specializes in human rights education and monitoring, specifically relating to women’s rights in rural areas of India.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Participation in the annual events of Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at the United Nations is always an important and exciting aspect of our work at VGIF. Efforts to develop our statement for CSW began last summer when the staff surveyed our grantees about their priorities. The result is a powerful statement of the needs of women, based on the perspective of our grantees. The VGIF UN committee and staff have added a significant dimension to our work of supporting women who are trying to make life better for their families and communities.

For many members of VGIF, CSW provides an opportunity to meet women from all over the world doing

similar work to improve the lives of women and girls. As always a lot of energy is generated as we participate in a broad spectrum of side events and parallel events on issues that affect women. VGIF will once again host a parallel event, highlighting one of our projects and local leadership roles of women. I look forward to seeing many of you at these events.

We had such a good time at our 45th anniversary luncheon in New York, meeting old and new friends, as a result we are looking for new ways to reach out and meet more of our members. This year, we will introduce Margret Joeji, our visiting VGIF grantee, to members and friends in Maryland and New York. I look forward to other opportunities to personally share our work with you.

Jeri Rhodes
President

VGIF 45th Anniversary Luncheon

New York City, October 24, 2014

Many thanks to all those who supported VGIF's 45th Anniversary Celebration.



Clockwise from left: Eileen Menton, Jeri Rhodes, Barbara Carey, and Virginia Maynard with Fay Kittelson; Mary McGovern and Elisabet Eklind greet guests; Johanna Sterbin, Virginia Maynard, and Jane Quaye; Abigail Disney.



It Happened at the Board Meeting

October 2014

Board and committee members gathered in New York City in late October to celebrate **VGIF's 45th Anniversary** and to attend the **bi-annual board meeting**. The meeting included the approval of VGIF's new mission and vision statements.

New Mission Statement:

VGIF provides grants globally to fund locally generated projects that advance the rights of women and girls.

New Vision Statement:

VGIF envisions a world where gender equality prevails and where women and girls can access or create opportunities for themselves and the greater community.

Two new multi-year grants

were approved for the 2014-2017 grant cycle. **Rural Women's Empowerment and Development Organization (RUWEDO) in Kenya** will build awareness around human rights and gender-based violence, boost participants' income generating capacities, and improve household nutrition. **Let Little Children Come to Me (LLCCM) in Rwanda** will enhance the income generating capacities of widows in Rugobagoba/Kamonyi Southern Province through beekeeping trainings and by exposing participants to topics on reproductive health, entrepreneurship and small business management.



NIGERIA Finding Individual Voices and a Collective Trade

“VGIF was the first organization to give us the opportunity to embark on a project of our own. That was so exciting for us.”

– Busayo Obisakin, Project Director

The Women Inspiration Development Center has completed the first stage of its *Street Girls Empowerment and Vocational Program*. The initial six months included an empowerment program focused on various areas of life: emotions, relationships, sexuality, money, work, body, and spirituality to help participants form their own opinions on these matters and be responsible for themselves. After completing the empowerment workshop series, a participant said, **“I am so happy that I have attended this workshop, my life after this workshop cannot remain the same I know that for sure. I will be ruling now, I will not be ruled over again.”**

The next step was a vocational tie-dye fabric production training that started in September 2014 and, at a later point, participants will develop marketing strategies to launch their own tie-dye business.

“There are so many NGOs, and there are some that have a lot of money, and a lot of people like donors giving millions of dollars, but that money does not always go to the right people. But when you work with the grassroots people, you can be assured that it is.”

Rose Wamalwa, Women in Water and Natural Resources Conservation (WWNRC), Kenya



INDIA Advocating for Family Rights Every Step of the Way

League for Integration Growth of Hill Tribe Trust (Light Trust) is in the first year of a multi-year grant. Through their project, which links human rights, reproductive health, and nutrition education with income generating opportunities, they assisted the Harini family in a number of different ways. Light Trust intervened to release parents, Netaji and Vasuki, from bonded labor and facilitated a reunion with their children. Vasuki Harimi and her daughter are fully aware of their civil and human rights after attending a sensitization camp and they were also educated on reproductive health. Vasuki participated in livelihood training and is now stitching women’s and children’s clothing to earn a supplementary income. The daughter, who initially dropped out of school, was encouraged to resume her studies and says **“I want to become a District Collector. I and our entire family got a new life for which we owe our life to VGIF and Light Trust.”**



NEPAL Education for All Generations

“I have to be able to sign while receiving the old age allowance because I really feel shy to give them my thumb print instead of signature” says Mana Maya, a 75-year-old widow, (pictured above). This is why she attends literacy classes through Educate the Children, Inc.’s project *Women’s Empowerment in Rural Nepal*. Educate the Children provides basic literacy and numeracy training to improve Thami women’s education levels to increase their participation in the economy. Training began in November 2014 with the goal of directly benefitting 900 women and girls by the project’s end in May 2015.

Upcoming Events

March 9–20, 2015

CSW59 (Commission on the Status of Women)
United Nations
New York City

March 13, 2015

VGIF Parallel Event at CSW59
United Nations
New York City

April 25, 2015

Annual and Board Meetings
The Hispanic Center
New York City

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as the most critical area for improvement by VGIF grantees. They expressed specific needs for improvement, such as the creation of “policy and program actions that will improve women’s access to secure livelihoods and economic resources.”

Education and Training of Women

was also one of the top three priorities. Respondents were clear that “education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate in the development process.” The third critical area highlighted by grantees as most important was **Women in Power and Decision Making**, stressing that women-led organizations at the grassroots level are most capable of motivating women and girls to improve their own lives and communities and need to be supported in those efforts.

CSW59 will be an important opportunity for VGIF board, staff, volunteers and grantees to both network with other women’s groups and to have access to the higher level discussions at the UN. As VGIF representatives, we will also share our own learning and in turn learn from other groups. And, as always, we will surely come away inspired by the hard work being done by so many amazing women from around the globe.

For more information on VGIF’s parallel event or CSW statement, please email vgif@vgif.org.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



I am excited to share with you a recent highlight from our efforts to grow and strengthen the VGIF grant-making. Around December – January each year, we receive mid-year reports from our grantees. This year we also piloted one-on-one calls with the grantee project directors, as a complement to the written reports. The intent was to gain a better understanding of how grantees work, to learn more about their local circumstances, and to build stronger relationships between VGIF and the grantees.

The mid-year calls have been a very positive experience for both parties.

The project directors have been eager to tell us about the creative ways in which they have overcome challenges and the positive outcomes — intended and unintended — that have resulted from their projects. This is invaluable information that will help inform our grantmaking, evaluation and grantee support going forward.

Thank you to the 2014–2015 VGIF grantees who participated in these conversations. We continue to be inspired and impressed by your work and accomplishments.

Elisabet Eklind

Elisabet Eklind
Executive Director

PLANNED GIVING

“VGIF is close to my heart and being president was one of the best things that happened in my life. Being active in VGIF was the first time in my life I truly considered the status of women, particularly internationally. The project proposals were an ‘eye opener’ to me, as I had been so isolated in corporate life. Identifying VGIF in my will allows me to give back to something that has been of great value to me.”

Virginia Maynard, VGIF President (1987–1993)

Is VGIF already in your will? Let us know.

Do you want to learn more about planned giving? Please contact us.

vgif@vgif.org

Get involved

Please like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/vgif.org](https://www.facebook.com/vgif.org) and follow us on Twitter @VGIF.

As a member, you can attend the board meetings in New York City. The next meeting will be held on Saturday, April 25, 2015.

Want to volunteer with us?

There are a variety of ways to volunteer for VGIF; making presentations, holding small fundraisers, assisting with various projects, and serving on committees and the board itself.

For all volunteer matters, please contact vgif@vgif.org.



**Changing lives,
one community at a time.**

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