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**Left:** Feminist Approach to Technology of India trained girls in computer, internet, and camera skills and raised awareness of women's rights.

## SUSTAINING WOMEN'S RIGHTS THROUGH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT GRANTS

**VGIF grantees work in diverse settings and focus on issues within very different contexts.** But within this diversity, several trends have emerged in VGIF grantmaking that speak to the priorities that local women leaders have identified in their communities. Over the past several years, one major trend has been the steady focus on projects that increase women's economic opportunities. From 2009 through the 2013–2014 grant year, women's economic development and empowerment received the most funding with over 50 percent of projects focusing on this topic area. The strategies used — from vocational training to developing cooperative businesses — worked towards the goal of improving women's economic status but also served as catalysts for developing women's leadership, galvanizing women and community members around advocacy campaigns, and engaging women and girls in broader

discussions about their rights. Projects focusing on women's income generation often proved to have broader, positive outcomes within the target communities.

Over the past 46 years, close to 300 VGIF grantees have implemented projects that fall under the topic area of "economic development and empowerment." These are projects aimed at helping women gain critical skills in small business development, marketing, and money management, along with vocational skills for income generation. Among the 2015–2016 grantees, 19 out of the 36 projects approved for funding include strong economic development components.

According to the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID), "There is mounting evidence that women's ability to enjoy their human rights and pull themselves out of poverty is integrally linked to their economic empowerment."<sup>1</sup> As a project VGIF-funded in Ghana in 2013

stated, "[in the communities where we worked], male participants attributed a high level of abuse of women to their low financial [status], thus calling for economic empowerment of women." The group decided to address women's economic empowerment as an important means to address women's rights more broadly.

"[My] business, though small, has helped me gain status in the family as I am now able to contribute earnings and pay school fees for my children," says Sofia, a member of Tuinuane Women's Group (TUWOG) in Tanzania, a 2010 VGIF grantee. Sofia and other members of TUWOG received training in vocational skills and small business management, and several have been able to start earning income. The Project Director explained that the women participants have gained respect, not only in their families but in the society as well. Despite

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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



The Board of VGIF is in the process of creating a new strategic plan for the next three to five years. As the planning committee and conveners of the Board work to articulate goals and our vision for the future, I am reminded of the aspiration of our last strategic plan: VGIF will be a leading authority on small grant funding to empower women and girls around the world. If not already there, we are certainly making progress to becoming that organization.

This update reports on the impact of our grant-making in improving the economic circumstances of communities, led by women who are willing to push themselves so their families and their communities will have better lives. While VGIF has always had enriching and productive relationships with our grantees, it is a joy to be able to hear their voices reflecting their own pride of accomplishment. The staff has done a terrific job collecting and reflecting on the conversations and the grant reports they receive and sharing those comments with us.

In 2013, the Board voted to become a governing Board and to hire professional staff. With an effective staff in place, the Board has been able to focus on clarifying our purpose and intent for grants making. Maggie Ford, Vice President of our Project Grants Committee, led her committee and staff through a vigorous examination of over seventy seven grant making “policies,” both formal and informal, that had evolved over several years. With the time and energy devoted to that clarification, we have a more robust process in place and a wider understanding at the Board level of our focus as a grant making organization. This, too, is a step toward our aspiration.

We are currently planning for our mid-year meeting in October. This year, we will be “on the road”. Our meeting October 23–25 will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota and we look forward to meeting our members and donors from that region. For more information, please contact the VGIF office.



**Jeri Rhodes**  
President

## It Happened at the Board Meeting

April 2015

VGIF Board and Committee members came together with general members for the Board & Annual Meetings in New York City from April 24–25, 2015. **The Board awarded 36 one-year grants to projects in 22 countries** for the 2015–2016 cycle. (Please see insert for a complete list of new projects.) **The Board also approved second and third year funding for five continuing multiyear grantees.**

**Four new members were voted onto the Board of Directors during the VGIF Annual Meeting:** Myrna Brown, North Carolina, USA; Karen McKee, Virginia, USA; Julie Pennington, Florida, USA; and Anita Thomas, New Jersey, USA. The board also expressed their thanks to Carrie Gallagher and Shirley Randell for their service to VGIF, as they completed their terms with the Board.

Board Member and Development Committee convener, Florine Swanson, presided over VGIF’s **annual Major Donor Recognition Ceremony**. We were thrilled to recognize the generosity of 31 members who donated \$1,000 or more in 2014. We are grateful for their very generous support of VGIF’s work to empower women and girls around the globe.

## Personal Impact of Project Sponsorship

Denis and Myrna Brown were the first to sponsor a VGIF project, providing funding for the project Medicine for Mali during 2014–2015. And it was a very positive experience for the sponsors. Myrna writes:

**“Medicine for Mali addressed an important aspect of health care, that of prenatal care and child bearing, where there was a highly demonstrated need. The project involved teaching better practices to local village**

**midwives by a Registered Nurse. This is an issue and a geographic area that is close to our hearts so my husband and I volunteered to fund it for the full year. At Christmas we received inspiring stories from Medicine for Mali participants and staff, giving us the perfect opportunity to share with family and friends about VGIF and its effectiveness. We will fund another project related to healthcare this year.”**



INDIA

## Promoting Education for Women and Girls to End Child Marriage

In India, the *Campaign against child betrothal, teen marriages, motherhood & widowhood in K Naikken community* through the Snekithi Charitable Trust trained women and girls as human rights volunteers to sensitize community members on the importance of girls staying in school and ending child betrothals. One participant, who was married at five years old, saw parallels between the trainings and her own experience, especially after learning about the increased risk of birth defects when a woman gives birth at an early age. Due to this awareness, she is determined that her daughters will not be married before the age of 18. She says, **“I will provide them with a decent education to grow talented and make their own life decisions.”**



UKRAINE

## Clean Water Access to Enhance Maternal & Child Health

“MAMA-86-Kirovograd”, a regional branch of the Ukrainian National

Environmental NGO (UNENGO)’s *Accessible Drinking Water as a Guarantee of a Healthy Nation* project installed a filtration system and distributed water analysis kits to enhance fresh water access at the local maternity and children’s ward hospital. Community members were also educated on water-related illnesses. Local women also received advocacy trainings so they can advocate for future environmental enhancements in their community and beyond. Over 3,000 women benefitted from the various project components by learning to install and maintain the filtration system, educating fellow community members on health risks, and through advocacy trainings. As one participant said, **“Together we have become the driving force that will help change lives in our village.”**



GHANA

## Motivating Teenaged Girls through STEM Education

Transform Ghana’s *Empowering Girls through Internet Education* project educated teenaged girls on using the internet to advance their learning of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) subjects. During a midyear call with VGIF staff, Catherine (Project Director) explained the community support for the project; **“Ninety percent of mothers have no skills in technology, science, or math and have never had access to computers or internet, but they make sure that their girl children attend all the trainings.”** Participants were

equally excited about trainings. Mercy, a 14-year-old, says, **“This experience has been a motivation, fantastic and faith-strengthening that has renewed my hope in education.”** Mercy wants to pursue a Computer Engineering career and strives to be a positive role model for other Ghanaian girls.



PERU

## Breaking the Cycle of Domestic Violence

Now in its third and final year of multiyear funding, RECARE is strengthening its domestic violence awareness raising and economic empowerment programs to sustain operations after the funding period ends. Women in RECARE shelters learn production design and marketing skills to sell goods at local markets to become economically self-sufficient, thereby eliminating their fiscal dependence on abusive partners. While at the market, they also educate community members, especially women and girls, on domestic violence. RECARE human rights advocates distribute written materials, and hold lectures and workshops, to further raise awareness of domestic violence. RECARE tells us that approximately 20–25 women are served at the shelter on a monthly basis for a total of 300–500 women each year.

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challenges, they dream of expanding their businesses.

Another former VGIF grantee, Northern Friends for Development (NFD), implemented a project in Ghana in 2011 to help young women become independent earners — a project they have continued after VGIF funding ended. Madam Christina, a trainer, explains that the project has “helped in unearthing potentials of the young girls” and provides the opportunity they need in order to change their own lives. A former participant, Gloria, tells us, “The training given to me at NFD has really had a tremendous impact on my life. Thanks to the programme, I’m now gainfully employed and able to take care of my needs and that of my younger siblings. I no longer have to rely on my parents financially, and that for me is life changing.”

VGIF has heard similar stories from our grantees worldwide, from an indigenous women’s weaving cooperative in the Philippines to vocational skills training in Pakistan. As we continue to build upon the systems in place for monitoring and evaluation, and stronger grantmaking, we look forward to learning more about the long term impact of these important projects.

<sup>1</sup> Association of Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), “Women’s Rights and Economic Change” 2004.

## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**We have just ended our most recent grantmaking period by awarding 36 new one-year grants, an exciting conclusion to a thorough, multi-step process.** A look behind the scenes at this process shows how much goes into selecting the best projects for funding. Applicants begin by submitting a Letter of Intent, which helps determine what groups should be invited to complete full applications. That is followed by a first review (or previewing) of all applications to identify the strongest ones. We then conduct a thorough due diligence process with all applicants and end with a final review of the top applications. This is how we get to the final list of grants that goes to the Board for approval. And so another group of inspiring projects begin their work in communities around the globe.

While VGIF staff members handle several aspects of this process, it is to a great extent carried out by a group of dedicated volunteers. The previewing step is done by both staff and ‘previewers’, a group of volunteers who are selected based on their specific knowledge and expertise in topic areas, familiarity with geographic areas, and/or knowledge of languages.

And the final selection is entirely managed by a committee of the Board — also all volunteers.

During the past year, the Board committee played a dual role; both reviewing grant applications, as usual, while also updating and improving the tools and procedures for grant review. This has resulted in a stronger, clearer and easier-to-use process, which will benefit VGIF both right away and as we increase our grantmaking going forward.

Thank you to everyone who served as VGIF previewers and on the Project Grants Committee during 2014–2015.



**Elisabet Eklind**  
Executive Director

### YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

**VGIF has launched a Young Professional Network in New York City.**

Having met twice, most recently in March 2015 during the UN’s Commission on the Status of Women, the network’s leadership team is finalizing their schedule of fundraising and networking events through 2015. If you are interested in learning more or starting a network in your area, please contact VGIF at [info@vgif.org](mailto:info@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 VGIF’s board meetings. The next meeting will be held October 23–25, 2015 in Minneapolis, MN.

### 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.

For all volunteer matters, please contact [info@vgif.org](mailto:info@vgif.org).



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## ONE-YEAR GRANT HIGHLIGHTS: 2015–16



Photo credit: COMPPA

GUATEMALA & HONDURAS

### **COMPPA: Comunicadoras y Comunicadores Populares por la Autonomia**

**“Our Voices, our airwaves: strengthening women in community radio”**

COMPPA’s two-country project, taking place in Guatemala and Honduras, aims to increase indigenous women’s participation and leadership in community radio and broaden the dissemination of information on issues faced by indigenous, campesina and Garifuna women through workshops, publications, and trainings in public radio. Participants will gain important skills they will apply to ensure that their voices are heard over the airwaves and in print.



Photo credit: MikonoYetu

TANZANIA

### **Mikono Yetu Centre for Creativity and Innovation**

**“Giving rural women voices in natural resource management and climate change mitigation”**

In Tanzania, Mikono Yetu plans to increase the community’s awareness of women’s roles in natural resource management. They will also train women in leadership skills so that they can engage in important discussions about community resources. And, the project will engage women in the planting of trees to increase water conservation and firewood access.



Photo credit: Rural Organization for Social Education

INDIA

### **Rural Organization for Social Education (ROSE)** **“Food, Nutrition, Health and Livelihood Security of 100 resource-poor women farmers of Pudukottai”**

In India, ROSE will train women in eco-friendly and sustainable farming to increase their access to nutritious and balanced diets. Women and their households will directly benefit from the project with additional positive health and nutrition benefits being shared throughout the community.

## NEW ONE-YEAR GRANTS: 2015–2016

### **Albanian Society in Development**

**“Women versus Breast Cancer”** *Albania*

### **Tinku Kamayu**

**“Indigenous women artisans and social inclusion”** *Argentina*

### **Asociación Yo No Fui**

**“Empowering imprisoned women: training in the trades and arts”** *Argentina*

### **Inter-Confessional AIDS Network (INTERNAP) Women Cameroon**

**“Reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS and child marriage on women and girls in Cameroon”** *Cameroon*

### **Lazarus Group of Hope Cameroon**

**“Scaling up community-based training and employment placement for disabled women in the center region”** *Cameroon*

### **Vocational Training Center for Youth in Distress**

**“Community training projects of feminine struggle for 80 family women and girls victim of sexual violence”** *Democratic Republic of Congo*

### **AVEVENA RDCongo**

**“Alternatives and Horizons for young girl ex-combatants, Phase 2”** *Democratic Republic of Congo*

**Life Care Foundation, The Gambia**

“Establishment of a skill-training center in Kanifing for women” *Gambia*

**Transform Ghana NGO**

“Empowering girls through internet education” *Ghana*

**COMPPA Comunicadores y Comunicadores Populares por la Autonomia**

“Our Voices, our airwaves: strengthening women in community radio” *Guatemala and Honduras*

**Rural Women Development Trust**

“Skills training to released women bonded laborers in coir-making activities for sustainable income” *India*

**Ford Trust**

“Skill training on jute-based products for poor and marginalised adolescent girls and young women” *India*

**Women and Child Development Charitable Trust**

“Sexual, reproductive health and rights education for adolescent girls” *India*

**Rural Organization for Social Education (ROSE)**

“Food, nutrition, health and livelihood security of 100 resource-poor women farmers of Podukottai” *India*

**Ufanisi Women Group**

“Empowering 40 young mothers in Kisiwa location through greenhouse farming” *Kenya*

**Help Empower Kenya**

“Capacity building for social and educational empowerment of girls in Kisii County” *Kenya*

**New Jerusalem Women Group**

“Water and sanitation for two rural local girls’ schools” *Kenya*

**The Gleamer**

“Health and water sanitation and hygiene for vulnerable women and children” *Kenya*

**Covenant Foundation for Girls**

“Meet their needs through food security and promoting girls education” *Liberia*

**COVAM/Comunicacion en Valores y Apoyo a la Mujer**

“Empowering troubled teenagers in the juvenile detention center for girls in Mexico City” *Mexico*

**FUPROSOMUNIC Solar Foundation for Nicaraguan Women**

“Bio-intensive organic garden and training in bio-intensive techniques” *Nicaragua*

**Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nigeria (WEAN)**

“Grooming girls for leadership roles through life skills training and mentoring” *Nigeria*

**LEAP (Learn-Empower-Act-Promote)**

“Women workers economic empowerment through literacy and leadership” *Pakistan*

**Kid At Home`**

“Support against AIDS for imprisoned women” *Rwanda*

**Community Rights and Development Initiative Sierra Leone (CRADI-SL)**

“Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls through strengthening community action” *Sierra Leone*

**Forum for Community Change and Development (FOFCOD)**

“Empowering Young Women through ICT and life skills in South Sudan” *South Sudan*

**MikonoYetu Centre for Creativity and Innovation**

“Giving rural women voice in natural resource management and climate change mitigation” *Tanzania*

**Maganjo Farmers Association (MAFA)**

“Increase incomes and nutrition to 100 rural HIV infected women through high value mushroom growing” *Uganda*

**Wobulenzi Youth Association**

“Empowering 100 female youth refugees to provide protection services” *Uganda*

**Onai Community Group**

“Improving nutrition and drug adherence among women living with HIV/AIDS in Masaka District” *Uganda*

**Women Empowerment and Livelihood Links (WELL)**

“Soap for livelihood” *Uganda*

**Hoima Blind Women Association**

“Vegetable production project for blind women” *Uganda*

**Bakashana**

“Computer and technology training for women and girls based on health and life skills” *Zambia*

**Rural Women and Children Legal Resources Trust (RWCLT)**

“Empowerment of rural women and girls against gender based violence (GBV)” *Zimbabwe*

**Ebenezer**

“Women’s and girls’ empowerment and livelihood project” *Zimbabwe*

**Zubo Trust**

“Simatelele women fish ponds” *Zimbabwe*