



Empowering Female Survivors of War and Conflict

It was nighttime in Nigeria when Kangyang Grace Davoli heard gunshots right outside her home. Community members weren't strangers to violence, as a continuous ethnic conflict divided herders and farmers. After Kangyang's husband went outside to investigate the situation, she told her six children to go as well and hide in the bushes since their home didn't have a secure door. It was too late, though. The gunmen were already inside, and she witnessed the murder of her husband and children.

Now alone, Kangyang needed support – mentally and financially. Through her community, Kangyang learned about Women for Women International and how the organization had helped other female survivors of conflict develop valuable life skills that empowered them to move forward.

“For Kangyang and women like her who have survived the unimaginable, our program is a lifeline,” says Laurie Adams, chief executive officer of Women for Women International. “It equips them with income-generation skills and tools, but also gives them a support system by connecting them to other women in their communities.”

During her time in the yearlong program, Kangyang has learned an array of professional skills, which she wants to apply toward starting her own business centered around chickens. Kangyang has been saving the \$10 monthly stipend provided to her by Women for Women International so she can put the money toward her business goals.

For the past 25 years, Women for Women International has made it its mission to ensure that women in war-torn and conflict-ridden countries aren't forgotten.

Since the organization was founded by then-23-year-old Zainab Salbi, its specialized program has changed the lives of Kangyang and more than 479,000 other marginalized women. It not only provides them with a safe space, but also strengthens these women socially and economically.

“During this program, we provide participants with health services, counseling, vocational training and business skills so that they may learn the tools necessary to provide for themselves and their families,” says Adams. “By working in groups of 25, these women build important community networks of support that allow them to save money, start businesses, and heal together with other women who understand the trauma they have endured.”

The organization is currently working in 10 countries: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina,



Members of a women's cooperative made by graduates of Women for Women International pose for a picture in their field.

PHOTO CREDIT: SERRAH GALOS

the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kosovo, Iraq, Jordan, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, and South Sudan.

To understand and track the effects of their program, Women for Women International conducts three surveys with all participants. These are deployed at the time participants join, after they complete the program, and then two years after their graduation.

“The results we have are incredible,” says Adams. “For example, in Nigeria, women's savings more than triple upon graduation. In DRC, we see a 61%



Laurie Adams meets a graduate of Women for Women International's program in Rwanda.

PHOTO CREDIT: ALEX INPAGHAWIRY

decrease in food insecurity. In Rwanda, we see a 56% increase in savings by graduation.”

While the organization focuses a majority of its efforts on supporting women, it has also been engaging men as advocates and allies since 2002 when they first piloted a program in Nigeria. Since then, they have been able to educate nearly 26,000 men in six countries about women's rights and how to support and empower women.

“The program is tailored to each community we serve, so in Afghanistan it is deeply rooted in

Islamic knowledge in support of women's rights, and in the DRC it is focused on fighting violence against women,” says Adams.

“We've seen promising results from this program. For example, across our men's engagement activities in Afghanistan, DRC, and Nigeria, men were 80% more active in supporting women's rights at graduation compared to enrollment. In Afghanistan, 39% of male graduates reported having taken action to share information with their community about the effects of violence against women, compared to only 15% at enrollment.”

Empowering women is critical not just in helping them gain confidence to use the valuable skills they've learned to help themselves, but also to help their community.

“They become voices for progress and change in their communities,” says Adams. “In particular, we are proud to report that 210 women graduates won seats in Rwanda's local elections that took place in February and March 2016. There isn't a day when I am not inspired by what the women we've served are able to accomplish.”

Women for Women International also runs a sponsorship program that allows anyone to “Sponsor a Sister” for \$35 a month. This donation supports a “sister” through the organization's transformative training program.

“Our sponsorship program is unique because you not only get to support a woman directly, but also exchange letters with her and track her progress through the program,” says Adams. “It is one of the most fulfilling ways to give back. I recently received a letter from my own 'sister' who lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo and felt incredibly moved.” •

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