



# WHITAKER PEACE & DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE Newsletter Spring 2026



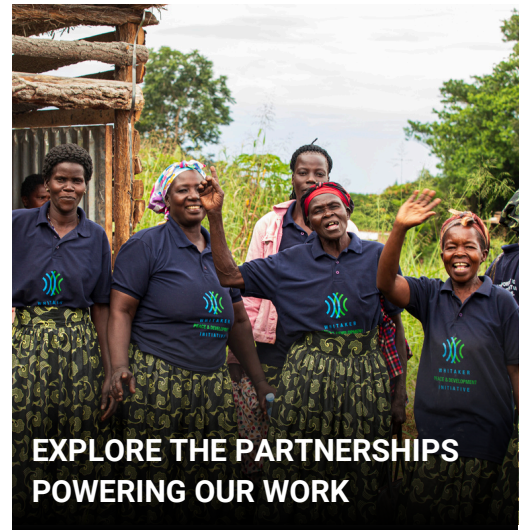
**FOREWORD FROM WPDl'S  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



**TRANSFORMING CHALLENGES INTO CHANGE:  
2025 ANNUAL REPORT**



**SAVE THE DATE: RISE AS ONE GALA,  
CELEBRATING 14 YEARS OF PEACEBUILDING**



**EXPLORE THE PARTNERSHIPS  
POWERING OUR WORK**



**MEET FATOUMATA SOUANE'S  
VISION: MADOUINETTE**



**MEET WPDl'S NEW BOARD  
MEMBERS**



# Foreword

**Caroline Descombris**  
WPDI Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Last year was marked by profound challenges. Across the regions where WPDI works, communities faced ongoing conflict, economic uncertainty, and deepening inequalities. Yet, as we end spring 2026, we are reminded that even in difficult times, renewal remains possible.

Throughout 2025, WPDI reached more than 178,000 people across Africa, North America, and Europe, supporting young people and women as they strengthened livelihoods, developed new skills, and led change within their communities. It was also a year that demanded perseverance. Reduced resources required difficult decisions, constant adaptation, and an unwavering focus on sustaining support where it was needed most.

As we reflected on the past year and prepared WPDI's 2025 Annual Report, our teams continued to show dedication. Across countries, colleagues worked tirelessly not only to implement initiatives, but also to document a year defined by resilience, elevate community voices, and bring this report to life.

**Their efforts reflect the heart of WPDI's mission: investing in people and in the belief that lasting peace is built through opportunity, dignity, and local leadership.**

The stories featured in this Spring Newsletter, including Evelyn's in Uganda and Fatoumata's in France, are powerful reminders of what becomes possible when individuals are given the tools, mentorship, and support to shape their own futures. These stories are not only examples of personal transformation, but reflections of the strength, leadership, and determination that already exist within communities around the world.

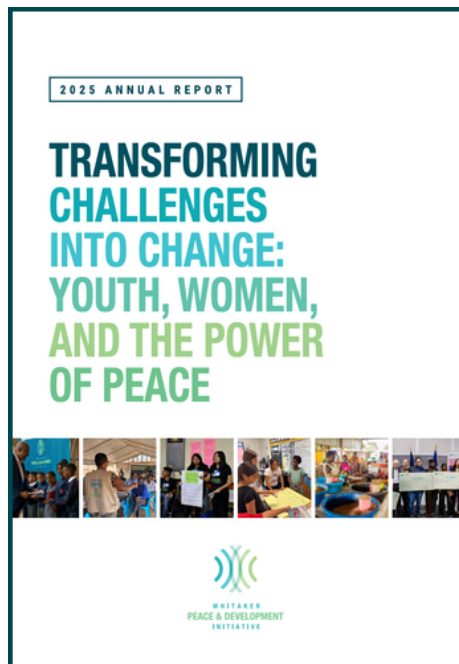
Across all of our programs, one truth continues to guide our work: peace depends on opportunity. When individuals are empowered to lead, create, and build sustainable futures, entire communities are strengthened alongside them.

Together with our partners, supporters, and communities, we remain committed to advancing solutions that foster resilience, expand opportunity, and help build lasting peace.

*With hope for what lies ahead, and continued commitment to peace,*

**Caroline Descombris**  
Executive Director  
The Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative

# 2025 Annual Report: Transforming **Challenges** Into **Change**



Our **Annual Report** offers a compelling look at a year defined by resilience, adaptation, and community-led impact. In a global context marked by growing instability, WPDI's work continues to demonstrate that peace is built from the ground up, through access to skills, opportunity, and support.

In 2025, WPDI reached more than 178,000 people across Africa, North America, and Europe, advancing its integrated approach across peacebuilding, livelihoods, health and well-being, and sports. By connecting these pillars, WPDI ensures that individuals are not only equipped to navigate challenges but to transform them into opportunities for growth and stability.

Beyond the data, the report also reflects the process behind capturing this impact and the teams who make it possible.

As Nina de Selding, WPDI's Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, shares:

*"Much of putting together the Annual Report is tracing the work across countries to find key highlights of the team's success. The process is great to understand the impact of WPDI beyond the numbers. Seeing the same activity implemented in different countries really shows the scale of our impact and how they can be adapted to best fit local contexts and communities."*



## Impact Beyond Numbers.

Thumeka Madadasana is a WPDI Youth Peacemaker from Cape Town, South Africa, working directly with young people and schools through Conflict Resolution Education programming.

*"Before this training, we were unaware of our rights and responsibilities. It was painful to realize our potential. The training has enabled us to understand our roles within the community and the legislative process. We now know how to facilitate peace and development."*

## What's inside the 2025 Report?

- 178,026 beneficiaries reached across Africa, North America, and Europe, reflecting WPDI's global reach and locally rooted approach.
- Over 1,300 Youth Peacemakers trained, reaching more than 54,000 individuals through grassroots peacebuilding and community-led initiatives.
- 210 new small businesses were launched, with 1,140 local businesses now supported by WPDI.
- 140 schools engaged in peace education programs, equipping students, teachers, and administrators with practical tools in conflict resolution.
- Expanded mental health and trauma-informed services, supporting thousands of participants in strengthening resilience and well-being.
- 34,107 visits to Community Learning Centers, providing access to digital tools, training, and community-driven learning spaces.
- Recognition of WPDI's connectivity initiatives with the "Changing Lives" Award at the AfricaTech Festival, highlighting innovation in expanding access to opportunity.
- 96.4% of community leaders say WPDI is making a lasting impact in their communities.

It is through this lens that the report brings forward not only results, but the individuals and communities driving change every day.

[Explore the full 2025 Annual Report](#) to discover the stories, partnerships, and impact shaping WPDI's work around the world



## Watch Peace in Action

We invite you to watch our Annual Report video for a visual reflection of WPDI's work and impact throughout the past year.



# Introducing **Global Voices.** **Shared Humanity**



We're proud to launch **Global Voices. Shared Humanity.**, a new podcast series led by our founder and CEO, Forest Whitaker, that brings forward the voices of change makers working at the forefront of peacebuilding at WPDI. Through personal conversations and lived experiences, the series highlights the challenges communities face and the solutions being built from within.

In the first episode, Forest sits down with Evelyn Laruni, WPDI Uganda's Country Coordinator, for a powerful conversation on resilience, leadership, and the realities that shape a lifelong commitment to peace. Originally from Northern Uganda, Evelyn's early experiences growing up during conflict profoundly influenced her path.

Over more than 17 years in peacebuilding and development, she has risen through the ranks at WPDI to lead the organization's work in Uganda, advancing programs that support youth, women, and communities in building sustainable livelihoods and lasting peace.

Evelyn's journey is a powerful reflection of what this series seeks to elevate: voices rooted in lived experience, leading change within their own communities. Her story, shaped by resilience and driven by purpose, embodies WPDI's belief that peace is built from within.

Listen to the first episode of [Global Voices. Shared Humanity.](#) to hear Evelyn's story in her own words and explore how leaders like her are transforming challenges into lasting impact:



## Transforming Pain into **Hope.**

Within the episode, Evelyn reflects on her work and what continues to inspire her:

*"What gives me hope is seeing the impact of our programs. When I visit projects, I see smiles on people's faces. This shows that we have been able to transform pain into hope."*

# Meet Fatoumata Souane's Vision: **Madoudinette**



At WPDI France, women's entrepreneurship is rooted in training, mentorship, and pathways to opportunity. Through our Women's Livelihood Program, entrepreneurs are equipped with the tools to transform ideas into sustainable businesses. Fatoumata Souane is one of those entrepreneurs.

A mother of five based in Aubervilliers, Fatoumata developed the idea for Madoudinette after struggling to find baby food that reflected her daughter's tastes and met her standards. What began as a personal need has grown into a business concept centered on organic, halal baby foods inspired by African cuisine. As part of WPDI France's Women's Livelihood program at the Community Learning Center, Fatoumata strengthened her project through business training, mentorship, and pitch preparation. In February, she was recognized as one of the winners of WPDI's Business Plan Competition, announced during the Forum Emploi & Entrepreneuriat pour Toutes in Saint-Ouen, where 12 entrepreneurs received seed funding and ongoing support. Her journey has continued to gain momentum. With a growing online community and national visibility following her €20,000 win on the YouTube pitch competition "Qui mise sur moi?" ("Who's betting on me?"),

Fatoumata is now working on developing her business, with a focus on fundraising and transitioning to professional production. Fatoumata's story reflects the strength of WPDI's integrated approach: combining skills training, mentorship, and access to opportunity to support women in building businesses that are both economically viable and socially impactful. Through Madoudinette, Fatoumata's vision continues to take shape, rooted in culture, community, and innovation.



Turning ideas into **lasting opportunities.**

Elaia Guecamburu, who co-leads WPDI France's entrepreneurship program shared this while reflecting on Fatoumata's journey:

*"WPDI's training is about more than entrepreneurship. It's about helping women recognize the value of their ideas, strengthen their confidence, and access the support needed to turn those ideas into lasting opportunities."*

# Welcoming **New Voices** to the WPDJ Board



We believe that peace is built through sustained commitment, local leadership, and the power of communities to shape their own futures. As our work continues to grow across regions and sectors, we are proud to welcome two new members to our Board of Directors whose leadership and experience will help strengthen this vision.

*Meet our new board members!*

## **Beatrice Vestberg, Former Marketing Executive**

Beatrice brings over 20 years of international experience in marketing, communications, and global partnerships. Having lived and worked across Europe and Latin America, and now based in New York City, she has led global campaigns at Ericsson and Business Sweden, including contributions to initiatives like the Volvo Ocean Race. Beyond her corporate career, Beatrice has served on boards in sports and education and is engaged in civic initiatives such as Global Citizen. At WPDJ, she will support partner engagement, fundraising, and global events to help expand our impact.

## **José Placido, Chief Executive Officer of BNP Paribas USA and Corporate and Institutional Banking Americas**

José brings over 30 years of experience in global financial services. He has held senior leadership roles at BNP Paribas and Royal Bank of Canada, with expertise in global markets, institutional services, and client development. His experience in international finance and governance will support WPDJ in strengthening partnerships and scaling its impact.

We are proud to welcome Beatrice and José to the WPDJ Board and grateful for the continued leadership and commitment of our entire Board of Directors.



## **Supporting Community- led Initiatives**

José's decision to join WPDJ reflects a shared commitment to advancing opportunity and supporting community-driven change:

*"I joined the WPDJ Board because I deeply believe in its mission to empower young people to drive change in their own communities. BNP Paribas has been a long-standing partner of WPDJ, grounded in our shared commitment to social inclusion and development. I am looking forward to building on WPDJ's programs around the world, supporting community-led initiatives that foster resilience and lasting peace."*

# Building **Peace** Through **Partnership**



At a time when conflict, inequality, and economic instability continue to affect communities around the world, the need for locally driven, sustainable solutions has never been more pressing. Across the regions where WPMI works, communities are navigating complex and evolving challenges: making long-term investment more critical than ever.

At WPMI, partnerships are at the heart of these long-term solutions. In 2026, we are proud to build on these collaborations with a group of committed partners whose support reflects a shared belief in the power of community-led change.

## Continued Commitment Across Regions

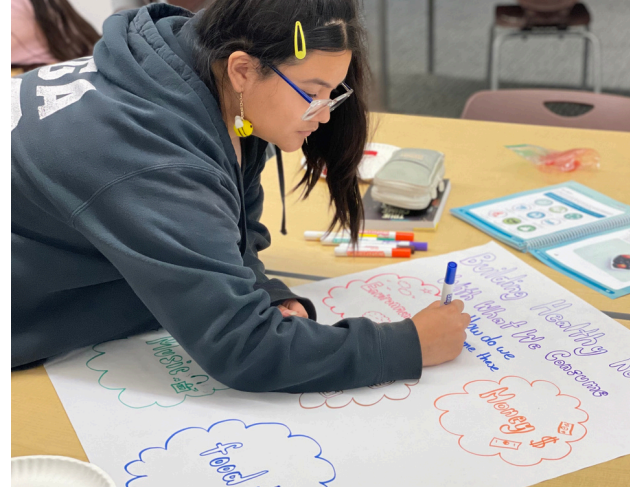
- In **France**, we renewed our collaboration with the BNP Paribas Foundation and BNP Paribas Wealth Management, alongside support from A.A. Ulmann, and launched a new partnership through the European Union's CONNECT initiative. Through its Community Learning Center in Seine-Saint-Denis, WPMI France equips youth and vulnerable populations with business, digital, and leadership skills to foster inclusive, resilient communities.
- In **South Sudan**, we continued our partnership with SkinnyDipped, supporting women's livelihoods through entrepreneurship training and business development opportunities that foster long-term economic independence.
- In **Mexico**, we renewed our collaboration with the Telmex Foundation, which supports WPMI's full programming, including peacebuilding and vocational training in business and ICT, equipping young people and entrepreneurs with the skills to thrive.

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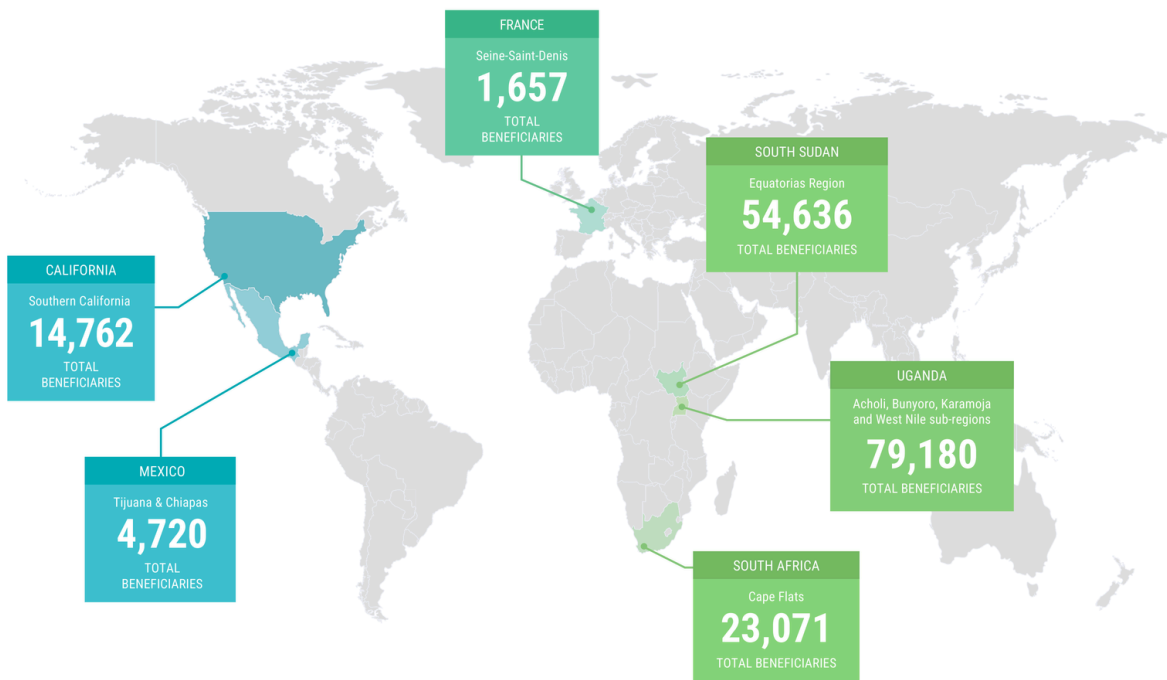
Lasting change happens when **solutions are co-created.**

While reflecting on the importance of long-term collaboration in our annual report, Forest Whitaker emphasized that meaningful change is only possible through partnerships grounded in shared purpose and community leadership.

*“Lasting change happens when solutions are co-created with the people who will carry them forward.”*



- In the **United States**, we continue our partnership with BMO, supporting the Domestic Harmonizer Program, which equips students, educators, and families with conflict resolution and social-emotional learning tools to strengthen communication, address the root causes of conflict, and build more supportive school communities.
- In **Uganda**, we are grateful for the continued support of the Swedish Postcode Lottery Foundation and a long-standing anonymous partner foundation, supporting peacebuilding and development initiative for local communities and refugees in northern Uganda.
- Across the **United States, Uganda, and South Africa**, our partnership with the Oprah Winfrey Charitable Foundation supports the mental health and psychosocial well-being of young people and women.
- Finally, **global support** from the People's Postcode Lottery and Verizon continues to play a vital role in sustaining WPMI's programs across multiple regions, enabling flexible funding that strengthens impact where it is needed most.



## Building Forward, Together

These renewed partnerships reflect more than continued funding; they represent trust and a shared commitment to building a more peaceful world. Together, we are investing in local leadership, expanding opportunity, and ensuring that communities have the tools and support needed to shape their own futures.



# RISE AS ONE

EMPOWERING CHAMPIONS OF PEACE

WPD GALA

## HONORING 14 YEARS OF **IMPACT**

SEPTEMBER 25, 2026  
Gotham Hall • New York City

WPD will host its “Rise as One” Gala Dinner and Auction at Gotham Hall in New York City, in celebration of the International Day of Peace and alongside the United Nations General Assembly.

Marking 14 years of action for peace, the Gala will bring together partners, supporters, and friends of WPD for an evening that reflects the core of its mission. Through powerful storytelling, a curated exposition, and live performance, the program will highlight the work of youth peacebuilders and communities across Africa, North America, and Europe.

Proceeds from the evening will directly support WPD’s programs in conflict-affected and vulnerable communities, including skills training, trauma-informed healing, mentorship, and entrepreneurship support. These initiatives equip individuals with the tools to build sustainable livelihoods and contribute to long-term peace in their communities.



This year’s theme, “Rise as One, Empowering Champions of Peace”, reflects the collective impact made possible through partnership. It is an opportunity to come together, strengthen connections, and invest in solutions that create lasting change.

To learn more about the Gala and explore sponsorship opportunities, visit WPD’s [2026 Gala page](#) or revisit highlights from the [WPD Faces of Hope Gala](#).



Part of a  
**Collective  
Movement.**

Elaine Weidman  
Grunewald, tenured  
Board Member and  
Head of WPD’s Gala  
Committee, shared:

*“Participating in the gala isn’t just about an event. It’s about being part of a collective movement. It’s about supporting peace and dignity, and helping to sustain it. We hope all our existing and new partners will take part.”*



**W H I T A K E R**  
**PEACE & DEVELOPMENT**  
**I N I T I A T I V E**

Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative  
17777 Center Court Drive N. Suite 600.  
Cerritos, CA 90703

[wpdi.org](http://wpdi.org)  
[info@wpdi.org](mailto:info@wpdi.org)