

10 years of WPD



*“Ten years ago, we proposed that everyday people
could be empowered to take the lead
with peacebuilding, community building,
and social entrepreneurship.*

*Today, we can say with certainty:
It can be done.”*

Forest Whitaker



WHITAKER
PEACE & DEVELOPMENT
INITIATIVE



Foreword

Caroline DESCOMBRIS
Executive Director of WPDI

As 2022 closes and a new chapter begins for WPDI, I cannot but contemplate the past ten years with wonder. **WPDI was started from nothing more than a dream that Forest Whitaker had of taking his commitment for peace and reconciliation a step further**, going beyond his already demanding and necessary mission as an advocate for UNESCO. The beginnings were modest, with programs in two countries, the United States, Forest's birthplace, and Uganda, a country where his encounter with former child soldiers transformed his outlook, not just on what could be done to promote peace, but also what he could do as an individual. Quickly, we also established ourselves in Mexico, where we have learned so much from the dynamism of our youths, notably in 2017, when a major earthquake hit their country and they rushed to rescue victims and assist families – an approach we would replicate at a wider scale during the COVID-19 pandemic. On such occasions, the earthquake, the pandemics and many other crises, we have measured how their capacity for leadership and initiative had impressed everyone on the ground.

It comes as no surprise that some of our youths would eventually conquer elected and official positions or be approached to represent their community, or even their county. This is to say that **the success of WPDI is rooted in the capacity of our youths and women to reach out to local stakeholders and gain their trust**. It is indeed to my amazement that we would go to places that had a reputation of being very difficult to navigate, but that we never failed to meet people with an indefatigable will to improve the lives of their fellow citizens.

This we experienced in particular in South Sudan in 2016, when the violence of combat reached a boiling point. These were hours of profound anguish, as no news would filter through to us from the country. We had barely any news of our staff and none of the Youths Peacemakers. In the end, we were blessed that no one got hurt. However, the risks of our endeavor were manifest, leading us to question the relevance of our project. But we could not pull out. We were not allowed to give up on the young women and men we had trained to promote

peace. **They had strived to maintain peace in their villages, they had brokered ceasefires, they had protected people from tribes that they had been taught to detest ever since they were children**. To them, the real work was only just beginning. We had to stay – and did stay.

This crisis is probably one of the most momentous turning points in the life of WPDI, because, even in the face of a grave situation, **our peacemakers had vindicated our philosophy that vulnerable youths and women should have a role in promoting peace and reconciliation**. It is therefore through the myriads of initiatives by our youth and women volunteers that WPDI has grown into an organization that today operates across nine countries, reaching between 200 and 400,000 people every year, a result that we aim to double over the next decade, at the end of which we hope to have reached 3 million people.

In this newsletter, you will find, packed within a few pages, a broad picture of both the results and the path of WPDI. We could not feature everything, nor everyone, of course, and in particular the dozens of staff and the thousands of youths and women who, belying fatality, toil every day to make peace happen. I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart. In writing these words, I would like also to evoke the memory of Cissy, who was taken from us by illness this year. Cissy Namatovu was on the first cohort of Peacemakers trained in Uganda ([see page 9](#)). I have known her for the ten years of WPDI's existence. A radiant presence, she was one of the very first youths to develop a social business through us – a hair salon doubling as a hairdressing school.

This newsletter celebrates our ten years of action, and I would like to dedicate it to Cissy, for who she was and what she accomplished, as well as for her capacity to hope, which inspired us and shall inspire us as we strive in the coming years to better ourselves on the long road to peace and reconciliation.

10 years of implementation

WPDI is a non-governmental organization with an international scope and reach, **founded by artist, social activist and UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace, Forest Whitaker, in 2012.**

We develop and implement programs **promoting sustainable peace and development** in countries and sub-regions affected by conflict and poverty.

We build the capacity for resilience of young men and women by empowering them **to become peacemakers, trainers, leaders and entrepreneurs in their communities.**

Once trapped in cycles of poverty, marginalization, and violence they then become actors for change who can support their communities in facing shocks and catastrophes in an autonomous and sustainable way.



WPDI is present in various different places where conflict happens in various different ways. Yet, be they located in developed countries, like the United States and Mexico, countries with a violent past, like South Africa or Uganda, or countries affected by tribal conflicts, like Cameroon or South Sudan, those countries are host to communities where young people and women face immense challenges to become who they want to be. This, we believe, is a source of chronic fragility that negatively affects these places, irrespective of whether they are situated in a rich or developing country. Our action in all these countries is based on the principle, namely that youths and women must be trusted with tools and resources for social transformation if their communities are to commit to a path of peace, sustainability and resilience. This is our strategy – which we implement differently in each country, taking into account the very different realities that our beneficiaries face.

*We empower people
living in vulnerable
and fragile areas
to become our partners
in helping their
communities transform
into more secure,
productive and
sustainable places.*



PRIORITY GROUPS

Women & Youth



12 UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS ARE PURSUED BY WPDI PROGRAMS



THE BIGGER PICTURE

Every day, the grassroots work of our teams and volunteers
contribute to our greater goals of:

Empowering **youths**
as **changemakers**

Fostering
gender equality

Bringing **quality education**
to those left behind

Promoting peace as
a responsibility shared by all

Improving livelihoods
for underprivileged people
Addressing the **global**
refugee crisis

Improving **access to Information and**
Communications Technology

Helping communities
respond to Covid-19

A Model Based on Youth & Women Partnership & Leadership

We empower young people and women participating in our programs with a wide array of tools to **engineer peace** as citizens and to create economic opportunities for themselves and their communities.

THROUGH OUR SDG-GEARED PROGRAMS, WE:

- **Train, mentor, and support a new generation of peacebuilders and entrepreneurs**, including youths living in conflict-affected areas, refugees, former child soldiers, and vulnerable women, among others;
- **Provide free access to knowledge**, skills, and connectivity in remote and underserved areas through a network of Community Learning Centers (CLCs), where community members can enroll in Citizenship Education courses in Conflict Resolution, Mediation, and Human Rights as well as vocational trainings in Business & Entrepreneurship, Arts & Crafts, and Information & Communications Technology;
- **Offer free online educational and vocational resources** to a wide array of trainees, including children, teachers, and professionals;
- **Incubate local small businesses**, providing youths and vulnerable people with funds and backstopping support through our Business Bootcamp program;
- **Conduct Community Dialogues to help mediate conflicts among ethnic or armed groups** and to raise awareness amongst local citizens about key issues pertaining to peace and human rights in their daily environments;
- **Foster a culture of peace in primary and middle schools** through programs focusing on conflict resolution education, peer mediation, and restorative justice, which aim to mobilize both students and teachers;
- **Provide healthcare services** related to Trauma Healing and Awareness as well as Sexual and Reproductive Health;
- **Promote peace through sports and cinema.**

10 years of achievements



121

**schools hosting our
Peace Education
program**



14 Community
Learning Centers

28,000

**participants
in our community
dialogues**

71,700 pupils
& students trained

200,000
direct participants
in activities &
training in our CLCs



2,193

**community leaders
trained in mediation
& peacebuilding**



265
businesses
are currently supported

1.4 million

**people reached
directly by WPDI
activities & campaigns**



44%
of our beneficiaries
are women



3,975,000

**light touched
beneficiaries from
radio talk shows**

What local stakeholders say about WPD

“WPD is doing very commendable work which is positively impacting the lives of our community members, especially youths.”

Body Michael,
Commissioner of Maridi County,
Western Equatoria State of South Sudan

In our 2021 survey, 97% of the 200+ local stakeholders who responded said that WPD programs had a positive or very positive impact on the community



“Thank you for providing free computer training to the persons with disabilities and those seeking employment in our community”

Fierosa van Rooi,
Community Development Practitioner,
Association for the Physically Disabled,
Cape Town, South Africa

In 2017, right before our Youth Peacemakers started working in the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, the Office of the Prime Minister would record three to five weekly incidents of violence among tribes residing in the settlement. However, they have recorded only three incidents since January 2018.

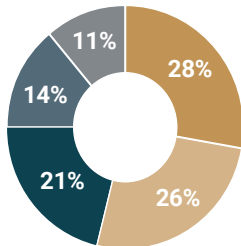
“This is amazing news for the communities living within and around the settlement. This means that a foundation of lasting peace is being laid. Building upon this foundation, the businesses that we have started incubating will contribute to making those communities resilient and hopeful for the present and the future.”

Feedback recorded by WPD field staff
from the Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda



A real impact on people's lives

Feedback from our trainees*
6 months after their time with us



28%
of former trainees
are pursuing further
studies, outside WPDI

21%
of former trainees
saw their income
increase

26%
of former trainees
created a business

14%
of former trainees
found a job

(11% of former trainees replied "None of the above")

*2,000+ former trainees



"I have enjoyed the training very much. I know more effective techniques to resolve external conflicts, and serve as a mediator in those circumstances. I am even able to resolve my own conflicts seeking peace within myself using meditation among other techniques. The most important thing is to have the power to make a positive impact on other people's lives."

Isabella Nuñez, Tijuana, Mexico



"Joining the tailoring and garment cutting class has been a blessing and eye opener for me. I have learned to work with people and share ideas, created friendships, and, most of all, I gained the skills and knowledge. Now I can earn a little money and I hope in the future when I get my own sewing machine, I will be fully independent and support my family. Thank you WPDI."

Apiyo Jackline, Acholi Sub-region, Uganda



99%
of our trainees say that
the training changed their life

Meet our Youth Peacemakers

They are the true engine of WPDI. Young women, young men from underprivileged and underserved communities that have been plagued by years, sometimes decades, of marginalization, poverty, armed violence, and conflict. But they never cowered before adversity. Their dreams of improving life in their communities led them to WPDI. We gave them skills and resources, nurturing their self-confidence and trust in better futures for their fellow citizens. **As mediators, entrepreneurs, trainers, and grassroots leaders, they work every day to make their communities more resilient, peaceful and prosperous.** Their individual stories tell us about their personal courage and dedication; but they tell us about something bigger, also: they reveal this universal truth that everyone can play a part in transforming the world – one initiative at a time.



SOUTH AFRICA

Khadija Mayman

Khadija was born in the Cape Flats, South Africa, within Bonteheuwel, an area plagued by high rates of school dropouts, youth unemployment and gang violence. She has always sought to work for the community and became a founding member of the Bonteheuwel Youth Movement Against Violence even before she joined WPDI as a Youth Peacemaker. Her energy and talent impressed us so much that we eventually enrolled her among our staff as trainer and spokesperson.



SOUTH SUDAN

Nandega Magdalena Lokorov

One of the first youths to join our Leadership program in Eastern Equatoria, South Sudan, Magdalena is a determined Youth Peacemaker who became a midwife committed to saving women's and infants' lives. She is an exceptional mediator who made the news for helping resolve a longterm, violent conflict between two tribes. Magdalena is also a charismatic speaker who addressed UN platforms to alert world leaders to the fate of her fellow South Sudanese citizens.



UGANDA

Duerel Olanya

Because his childhood was engulfed by civil war, Duerel chose to never let adversity get in the way of his ambition to make his community more peaceful and prosperous. This dream led him to WPDI. "Joining WPDI has been one of the most important things that happened to me. They have taught me a lot and helped me become an educator, an entrepreneur – a leader." Today, Duerel continues to have a lasting impact on the lives of the hundreds of youths he has trained in conflict resolution and entrepreneurship – the beginning of highly promising journey.



SOUTH SUDAN

Emad Rajab Said

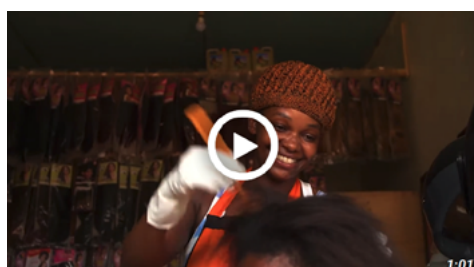
Rajab, a radiant youth from South Sudan has been living in the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement in Uganda for years, where he joined our Youth Peacemaker program. His unique capacity to handle conflicts quickly set him apart, leading us to trust him with components of our programs in Kiryandongo, including the management of our Peace Through Sports program or the tutoring of fellow young refugees enrolled in program on global history led by Princeton University.



UGANDA

Cissy Joy Namatovu

After studying to become a teacher, Cissy joined WPDI in 2012, expanding her skillset and her unique perspective on how to achieve social transformation. The teacher and the entrepreneur in her were able to coalesce, leading to her opening a hair salon that doubled as a vocational center for hairdressing and cosmetology. To this day, Cissy has trained dozens of young women at her shop, creating opportunities for them to find jobs and improve their livelihoods.



MEXICO

Víctor Sántiz Garcia

"Being a young leader represents an opportunity to serve as an agent of change." This is the motto of Víctor, who after joining WPDI, launched the Production of Healthy and Nutritious Food Initiative with a fellow peacemaker, which benefits 300 indigenous families and received national and international awards. Moving forward, he launched a community learning center on our behalf in his hometown of Mitontic, Mexico, to reach even more people.



2022: A year of celebrations



In February, Forest Whitaker was honored to receive the 2022 International Peace Honors prize presented by PeaceTech Lab for his continued efforts to empower young people across the globe to become peacemakers and agents of change in their communities. The International Peace Honors aims to pay tribute to the work of global leaders in compassion, innovation, and change-making to advance peace, prosperity, and justice around the world.

In May 2022, Forest Whitaker was the guest of honor at the Opening of the 75th Cannes Film Festival in France. This prestigious award from one of the most prominent institutions in the world of cinema came in recognition of his exceptional career as artist and producer as well as his unwavering commitment to humanitarian issues and social justice.



On September 19, in New York City, Forest Whitaker received the Global Citizen Award from the Atlantic Council. The distinction was bestowed on Mr. Whitaker in recognition for providing thousands of young women and men in conflict zones with crucial educational and economic tools to become mediators and community builders.

On September 20 in New York City, Forest Whitaker held "A Tale of Peace", a gala dinner and auction aimed to mark the 10th anniversary of WPDI. The rich program of the evening featured interventions by leaders in the peace and development world, artistic performances as well as sessions featuring young women and men from WPDI, who are the core of its action.



On November 3rd, Forest Whitaker was honored by the UN Foundation with the 2022 SDG Vanguard Award in recognition of his pioneering leadership on peace and justice. Khadija Mayman, a Youth Peacemaker and trainer at WPDI in Cape Town, South Africa, received the award on his behalf from the hands of Hans Vestberg, CEO of Verizon and long-time Board member of WPDI.

What's next?

With over **800,000 people reached** in the last five years alone and more than **1.4 million people since 2012, we have been able to help dozens of communities on their path to peace**, by mobilizing children, youth and women as stakeholders who are both native to their communities and nonetheless open to new perspectives and ideas.

Taking lessons from these achievements and maintaining our drive **for innovation and transformation**, our ambition for the coming decade is to reach over **3 million people directly across Africa, the Americas and Europe**, building on our experience and opening new avenues for our activities.

Our ambition for the next decade



3 million
direct beneficiaries
+ 8 million people reached
through radio campaigns
and talk shows



1.3 million
children, youths and teachers
reached through the Peace
Education in school program
in **3,260** primary
& secondary schools



260,000
people to participate
in activities and
vocational trainings
in our **25** Community
Learning Centers



1 million
people reached through
conflict mediation
and advocacy campaigns



12,000
Youth Peacemakers
trained as mediators,
entrepreneurs, trainers and
community organizers



3,140
businesses generating benefits
for around **420,000** people

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