



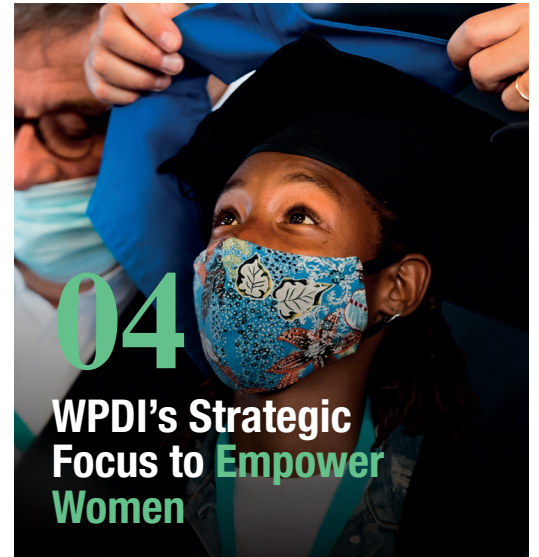
WHITAKER PEACE & DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

# Newsletter Spring 2022



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# Foreword

**Caroline DESCOMBRIS**

*Executive Director of WPDJ*

This newsletter covers the first months of 2022, a period in which our most notable action consisted in ensuring that **WPDJ is more and more recognized for the relevance of its mandate and the effectiveness of its actions.**

**Heightening our visibility and credibility in the peace and development community is indeed critical to increase the scope of our partnerships** and, subsequently, our ability to serve beneficiary communities.

Visibility is also key to highlight the efforts carried by everyone at WPDJ – from our CEO, who was graced with the **2022 International Peace Honors prize in February**, down to our trainees, whose graduation ceremonies we conceive of as opportunities to showcase their talent and boost their self-confidence. **This is to repeat that empowerment is the current that flows across all our programs.**

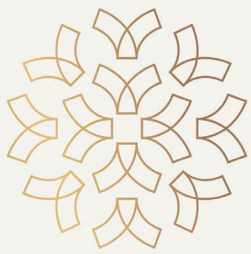
It is in this perspective that we took the opportunity of International Women's Day on March 8 to officially **announce our move to prioritize women as part of our global strategy along with youths.**

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment had always been central to our work and years on the ground taught us that **our efforts in this regard needed to be more strategically aligned and oriented.**

**This refining of our priorities will allow us to better foster gender equality through our programs in the field as well as our advocacy work at large.**

Ten years into our establishment in 2012, such a strategic development captures the lessons we draw from past action and signal **our ambition to ceaselessly ensure that our organization can meet the present and emerging challenges faced by conflict-affected and fragile communities.**

This is the dynamic that we want to celebrate this anniversary year, which will be crowned by **a Gala-Dinner event that we will hold in September** to shed light on our results and, above all, the many children, youths and women who participate in our programs every day.



# International Peace Honors

PRESENTED By PEACETECH LAB



## Forest Whitaker receives the International Peace Honors Prize

Last February, our President and Founder, **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.

Through WPDI, Forest Whitaker **has developed educational programs** in Africa and the Americas to provide educational tools and economic opportunities to young men and women in areas marked by exclusion, violence and armed conflict.

**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, celebrating people who “make philanthropy and humanitarian service a hallmark of their lives, to advance humanity and our planet.”**

The President and CEO of PeaceTech Lab Sheldon Himelfarb, described Forest Whitaker as **“an extraordinary change agent in the peacebuilding field... Transforming communities from within, putting peace at the center of his youth leadership programs — these are inspirational to us all. And we hear his voice — so true and so powerful — on behalf of the voiceless. It’s a great honor for us to recognize Forest for all that he has done.”**

**“I have witnessed change in the most unlikely places and have seen communities healing and transforming together,”** said Forest Whitaker.

***“Change for the better is possible even in the most difficult times and in the face of the greatest obstacles. I am hopeful and optimistic for the future and will continue to promote education, peace and reconciliation.”***







# WPDI's Strategic Focus to Empower Women

As fragile communities can regain their resilience capacity only if women are supported and empowered, **WPDI's new strategy for the next 10 years will place a stronger focus on promoting women's rights and creating opportunities for them to thrive.**

In all the places where WPDI initiated programs with a focus on training and supporting young people, we were nevertheless confronted with the constant fact that conflict and poverty had **disproportionate impacts** not just on marginalized youths but also on **underprivileged women**, who systemically suffered from discriminations and gender-based violence.

These problems were so organic that **our programs naturally developed a strong focus on women's rights and potential, reaching an average of 45% of women among our beneficiaries**, bearing in mind that, in many of the places where we work, women face immense difficulties to carry out activities non related to domestic chores.

In our ten years of operation, from South Africa to South Sudan, we have learned a lot – firstly that, in vulnerable and marginalized places, women, just like youths, have a potential that cannot be ignored if we are to help their communities become more resilient, peaceful, and prosperous. **Empowered women are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, our new strategy for the next ten years focuses on women not just as beneficiaries, but also as assets.** We will thrive to provide them with opportunities, opportunities to take part in peace processes; opportunities to create businesses; or opportunities to talk to governments and world leaders.

**With women as a priority group, our action for gender equality and women's empowerment will be more focused and more effective.**

We are already reaching out to existing and new partners to raise the profile and scope of our programs to promote **women's livelihoods or to ensure that schools offer more enabling environments for girls and adolescents.** And we are convinced that, by listening even more to their voices, **we will, in the years to come, develop new and even more ambitious ideas for programs to help women from underprivileged backgrounds make a difference.** •







# International Women's Day celebrations

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, the world commemorated **International Women's Day**. The day was an opportunity to celebrate the social, cultural, economic, and political achievements of women across the globe. Celebrating women's achievements in a number of different sectors is essential for increasing visibility, and **creating a more equal, less gender-biased world**.

## SOUTH AFRICA

WPTDI South Africa organized an event at the Community Learning Center in Bridgetown, which brought together women from various Cape Flats communities. The theme for the day was **"Break the Bias"**.

Many of the women in attendance work in Cape Flats communities, and are therefore no strangers to the **daily challenges facing women in the locality**.

The day was focused on **celebrating the women for their contribution to society** as well as **acknowledging that we have a long way to go in terms of seeing equality** for women in South Africa.

As a country who faces alarmingly high levels of Gender-Based Violence, the day was also used to **remember those who had lost their lives to violence**. It was an opportunity to bring together a group of dynamic women who are all in some way making a difference in their communities.

*"Thank you, Whitaker Peace and Development Initiative, for bringing all of us together today. Thank you for the phenomenal work that you do in our communities. As women we are resilient and today, we commemorate the sacrifices of the women who came before us and recognize the work of the women who are now working for change. I am grateful to be surrounded by so many inspiring women today. Let us continue to uplift and inspire one another."*

**Gharunisa Cassiem**, Cape Flats, South Africa

## UGANDA

Our WPTDI team at the Kiyandongo Refugee Camp in Uganda organized a Peace Engagement day celebration. This is one of the **core activities in peace building that brings all refugees and host communities together** to share cultural performances, drama presentations, demonstrating peace values and sustainable, peaceful development initiatives. Such events are unifying, and encourage peace building with beneficiaries that come to dance and release stress and mix with other tribes to **strengthen peaceful co-existence amongst themselves and community in general**.

## MEXICO

In Tijuana, Mexico, our WPTDI program coordinator, Tanya Mota, spoke to 36 women (victims of violence) from the Cerro Colorado community about **prevention of violence, the types of violence covered by Mexican law and how it can be prevented**.

The leader of the community, Blanca Pedraza, introduced WPTDI to the attendees.

**The women expressed their fear of financial independence and different instances of psychological and physical violence they have suffered or continue to suffer.**

Tanya spoke about our CRE training and how peace can be created even in the most vulnerable of situations. ●





# HQ Field Visit in Uganda and South Sudan

After two years of travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, WPDI's Paris-based Executive Director **Caroline Descombris** was thrilled to visit our field offices in Uganda and South Sudan again.

She started her journey by visiting the most recent Community Learning Center (CLC), **in the Karamoja Sub-Region, Uganda**. As it was launched during the pandemic, Caroline Descombris never had a chance to visit the place and meet the teams and partners in person.

There, she celebrated the **graduation of 160 trainees** who completed their vocational trainings in Business & Entrepreneurship, Conflict Resolution Education, ICT and Arts & Crafts.

**The Executive Director also visited our centers in Gulu, in the Acholi Sub-Region and, and in the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement.**

**She met with many entrepreneurs** who received training and grants from WPDI, and are now backstopped by our experts.

In the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, Caroline Descombris attended a **graduation ceremony to celebrate the training of 120 women who are now launching their cooperative businesses.**

UNHCR and OPM (the Office of the Prime Minister) shared their very positive feedback on our work in the

settlement. A UNHCR representative said, during the graduation ceremony: ***"Since WPDI arrived in the settlement with peacebuilding programs, I can see a great unity that didn't exist before, especially with all tribes working and playing sports together. It wouldn't have been possible without the peaceful coexistence program and training of WPDI."***

Caroline Descombris continued her field visit to South Sudan where she visited **our CLCs in Juba and Torit**. She traveled to **Torit in the Eastern Equatoria State** with our partner the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, who has supported our programs since 2019 and expanded it in 2022. ●





1. Dominic Lomera's farm visit, Torit, South Sudan
2. Evelyn Laruni, Uganda Country Coordinator (L) with Caroline Descombris, Executive Director (R)
3. Secondary School visit in the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, Uganda
4. Emmanuel Gore's Grocery Shop visit, Juba, South Sudan
5. Graduation ceremony in Moroto, Uganda
6. Arts & Crafts training in Gulu, Uganda



10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY



# A Tale of Peace

September 20, NYC

Hosted by Gayle King

## WPDI's 10-year anniversary Gala

On September 20, 2022, taking opportunity of the International Day of Peace and the United Nations General Assembly, **WPDI will hold a gala Dinner and Auction to celebrate ten years of sparking peace from the grassroots.**

**WPDI's 10-year anniversary Gala "A Tale of Peace" is about the stories of unknown heroes who fight for peace and development in some of the most difficult and dangerous places around the world.**

Participants in the event will have the opportunity to discover **unique tales of undeterred hope and contribute to transform narratives in vulnerable communities in Africa, North America, and Europe.**

The Gala will feature a VIP reception, a sumptuous dinner, and an incredible evening program with presentations of

success stories and amazing performances by internationally acclaimed artists. **The evening will culminate in a live auction.**

Proceeds of WPDI's 10-year anniversary Gala "A Tale of Peace" **will help us continue to empower people from underprivileged places**, providing them with education, trainings, and resources to develop projects of their own, especially small businesses. •

More info:

[www.wpdi.org/gala-2022/](http://www.wpdi.org/gala-2022/) or [gala@wpdi.org](mailto:gala@wpdi.org)



# WPDI 10 years of achievements


**121** 

schools hosting our Peace Education program

**71,700** pupils & students trained

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

**265**  businesses are currently supported

 **44%** of our beneficiaries are women

 **14** Community Learning Centers

**28,000** participants in our community dialogues

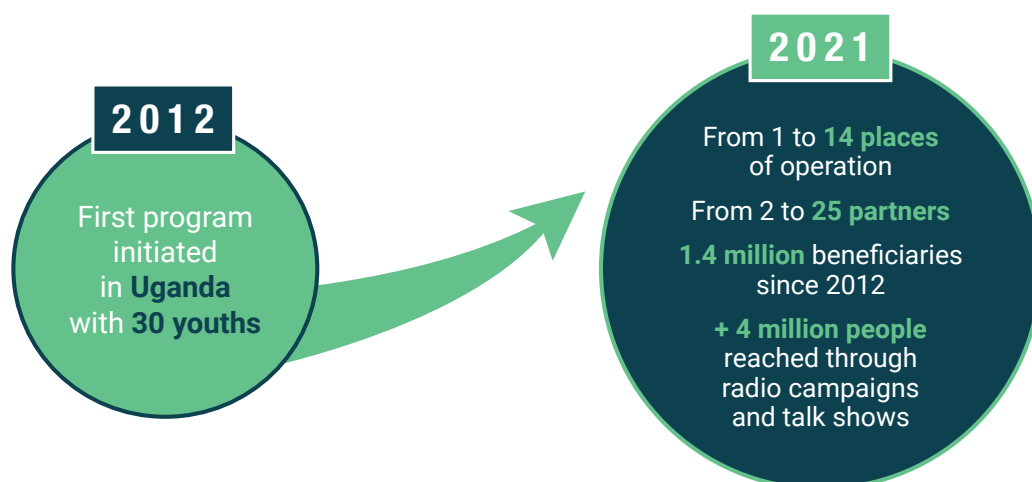
**2,193**  community leaders trained in mediation & peacebuilding

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

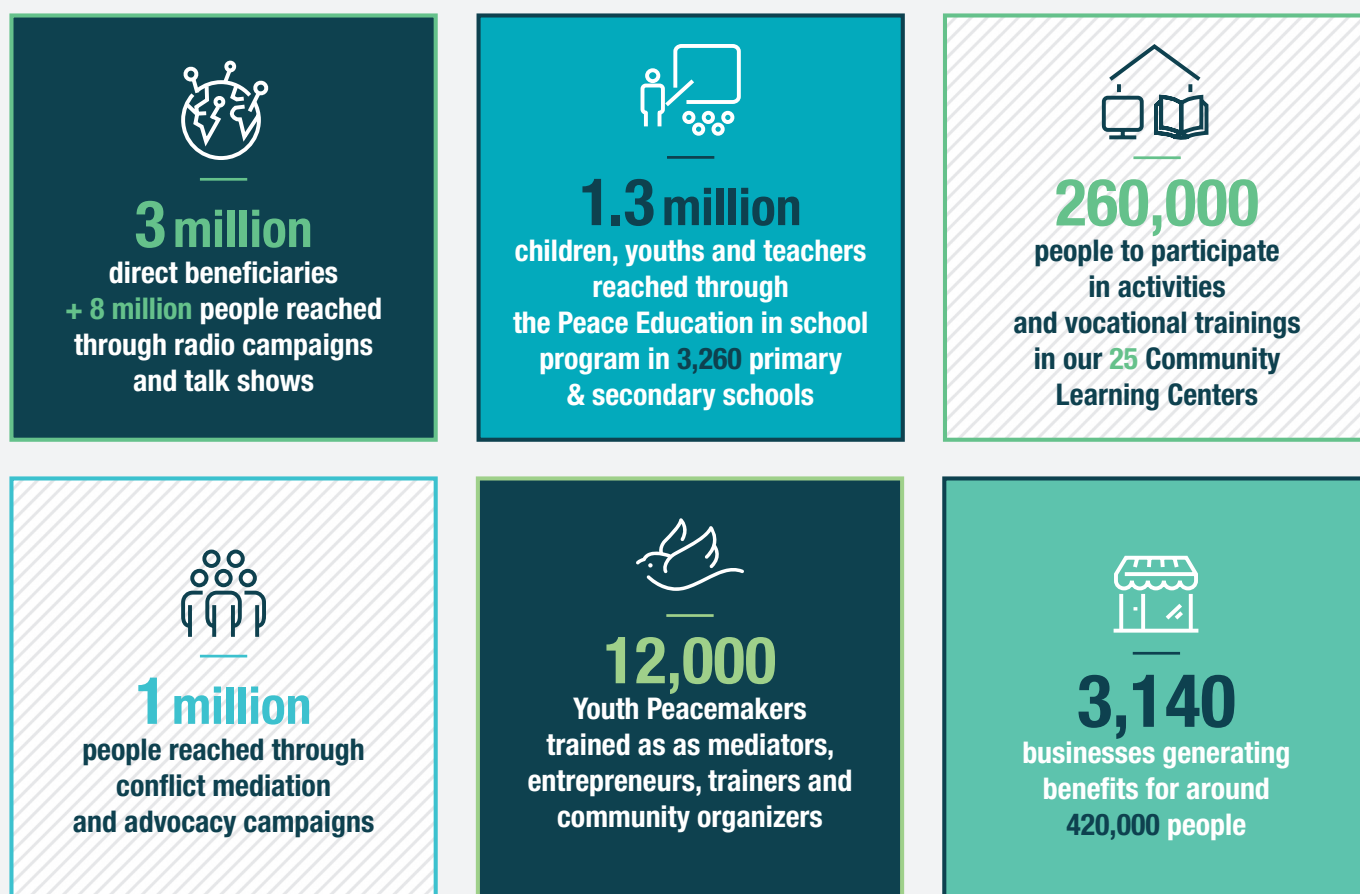
**3,975,000** light touched beneficiaries from radio talk shows



# 10 years of implementation



## Our ambition for the next decade



**Click the link below  
[www.wpdi.org/donate](http://www.wpdi.org/donate)  
to support WPD!**

**[www.wpdi.org](http://www.wpdi.org)**



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