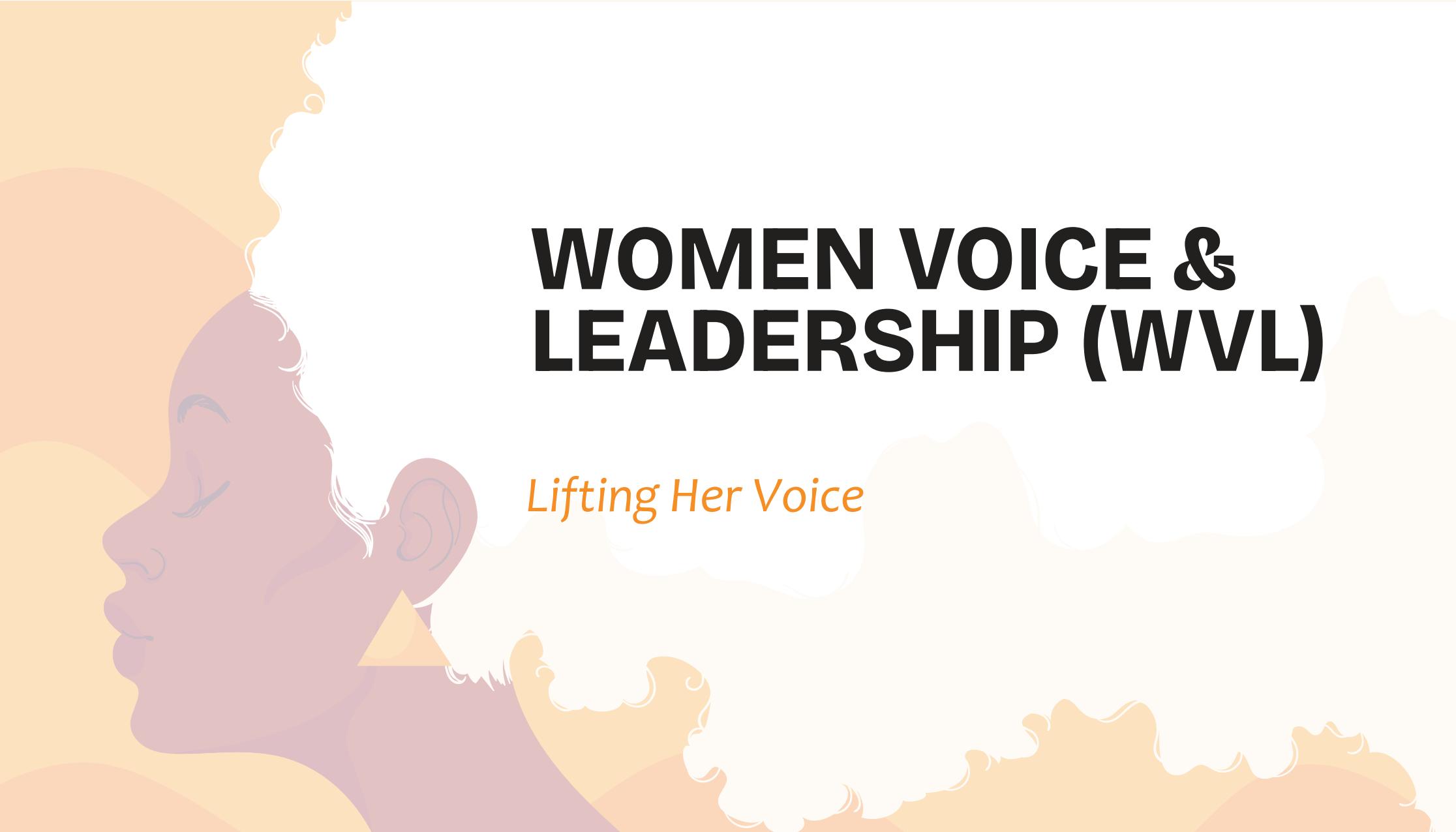




Changing You, Transforming All!

WOMEN VOICE & LEADERSHIP (WVL)

Lifting Her Voice



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

- CBO - Community Bases Organisation
- CRAWN TRUST - Community Advocacy and Awareness Trust
- CREAW - Centre for Rights, Education and Awareness
- CSO – Civil Society Organisation
- FGM – Female Genital Mutilation
- FIAP - Feminist International Assistance Policy
- GAC – Global Affairs Canada
- GBV – Gender Based Violence
- ODA – Official Development Assistance
- SGBV – Sexual Gender Based Violence
- UAF – Urgent Action Fund
- WRO – Women's Rights Organisation
- WVL – Women Voice and Leadership



Wangeci Wachira

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CREAW

Executive Director Foreward

It is no secret that women's rights organisations are highly impactful as they are firmly rooted in the communities, can quickly support the most vulnerable in times of crisis and create lasting change for women and girls. However, funding for women's rights organisations has only accounted for 0.13% of total development assistance (ODA) and only 0.4% of it is gender-related aid.

This is nowhere near enough to support meaningful or sustainable change which has left women's rights organisations especially nascent ones severely underfunded. Which is why it gave me so much joy to see these grassroots women's rights organisations who had benefited from funding grow and understand how to utilise their own voices to articulate challenges and present local solutions for their communities.

The WVL intervention is therefore designed to respond to the challenges faced by women's rights organisations especially nascent/grassroots in their efforts to eliminate discrimination, reduce gender based violence, push for reforms through policy and legislation, increase access to essential services and commodities and positively shift harmful social beliefs and practices.

Over the last six years, CRAW has provided demonstrable evidence of its capability to effectively manage sub-granting to 25 grassroots nascent women's rights organisations. This has been done through the provision

of multiple layers of funding and tailored capacity strengthening support to these organizations. These organizations are firmly rooted in our communities and are focused on real issues ranging from gender based violence and FGM, climate change, women economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and their contribution to social justice.

Our capacity institution strengthening model therefore responds to needs and priorities identified by women's rights organizations. Some of the support has focused on putting in place institutional policies (finance, human resources, safe guarding), Board development, resource mobilization, office establishment just to mention a few.

It has been a profound joy watching these women lead their institutions, the confidence has translated to growth of organisations, responded to the needs of the communities, attracted more funding from development partners and made strategic partnerships that have propelled the WRO's. This is evidence that we made the right choice to invest in women and young girls.

We have made great strides, but we still need to increase support and more investments through flexible core funding to women's rights organisations and movements especially the grassroots women rights organisations to directly sustain and strengthen women-led solutions.

Aluta Continua!!!!

Introduction

Women Voice and Leadership (WVL) - Kenya Program Overview

The Women Voice and Leadership (WVL) - Kenya program represents a bold and transformative initiative aimed at advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls across the country. Supported by the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada (GAC), this five-year program is firmly rooted in the Canada Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), which places gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the forefront of global development, humanitarian efforts, peacebuilding, and security strategies.

WVL program rests on the belief that the full realization of women's and girls' rights in Kenya can only be achieved through the attainment of gender equality. This vision is underpinned by the fact that Grassroot women and youth led organisations who would otherwise be considered too small or risky have strong links with the community, are able to reach remote areas and most marginalised in the community thus ensuring no one is left behind.

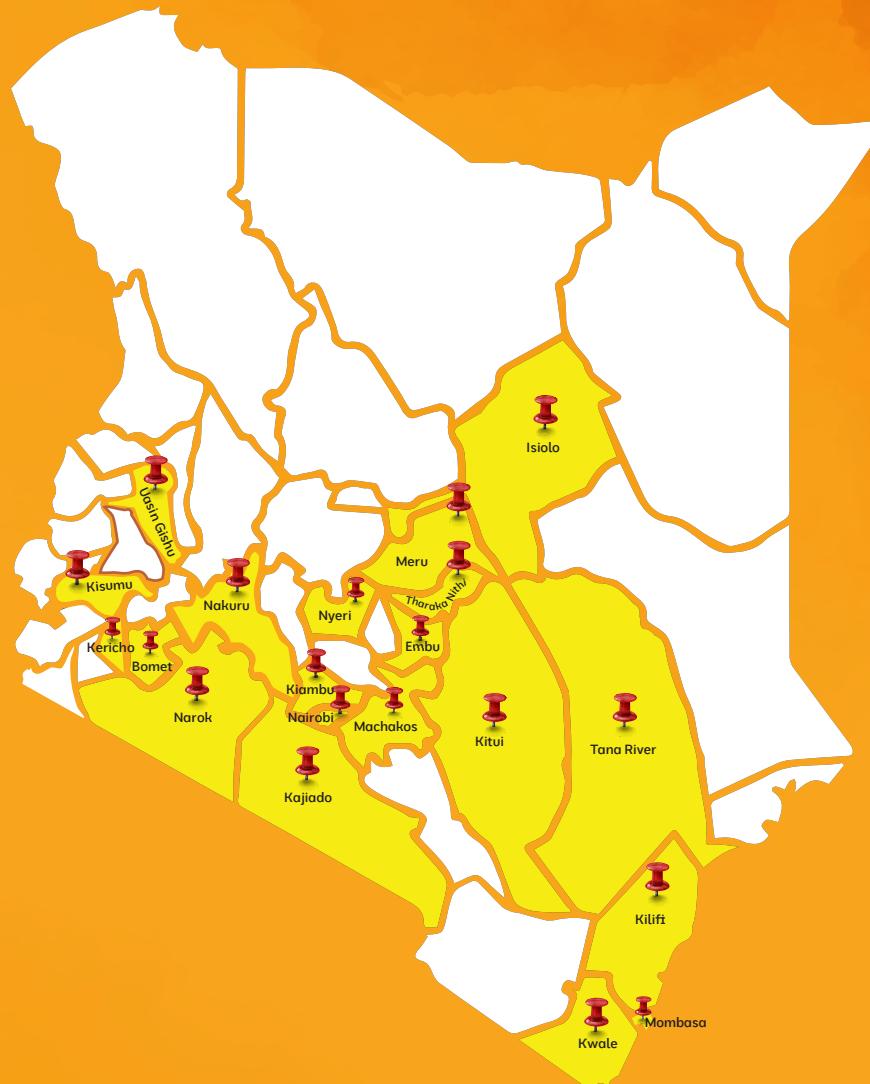
In Kenya, the WVL program is implemented by CARE-Kenya in collaboration with key partners including the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), URAIA, CRAWN Trust, and the Urgent Action Fund. Together, these partners work to ensure the program's goals are achieved effectively and sustainably. The WVL - Kenya program provides multi-year grants to 50 women's rights organizations, empowering them to plan and execute long-term strategies for gender equality. Additionally, the program places significant emphasis on building the institutional capacity of WROs, ensuring they possess the necessary tools, knowledge, and resources to thrive and create lasting change.

Central to the strategies of many women is the unique ability to support, mobilise and inspire fellow women as well as seek to establish long term solutions to the challenges they face. This has been demonstrated by the women and young women leaders as they implemented the WVL Project which provided a platform to enhance their leadership skills, as they steered their teams towards implementing initiatives on gender equality and gender justice in their communities.

In this publication, we spotlight the leadership journeys of 25 Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) that have been supported by CREAW under the WVL program. Each of these women leaders have grown into a driving force for change, tackling some of the most pressing issues facing women and girls today—ranging from gender-based violence and economic inequality to reproductive health rights and political participation. As you explore the pages of this book, you will encounter the diverse and dynamic approaches these women have employed to empower women and girls. Their journeys are marked by resilience, creativity, and an unwavering commitment to justice and equity.

The impact of their work extends beyond the individual lives they touch; it resonates across the nation, contributing to a broader movement that seeks to reshape Kenya into a society where every woman and girl can realize her full potential. We invite you to be inspired by their stories, to learn from their experiences, and to join us in celebrating their achievements.

Counties of Implementation





Mohammed Nassur

Founder & Executive Director - SUPERB CBO

"Trust in your abilities, speak up boldly, and believe in the importance of your voice."

Coming from the Nubian community, one of Kenya's most marginalized people, sparked my deep commitment to championing women's and girls' rights and promoting gender equality. Many face intersecting barriers—culture, religion, ethnicity, class, gender, and education—that hinders their progress. These challenges denied them fundamental human rights, limiting their full potential.

My passion for women's and girls' empowerment led me to fight period poverty in Kenya, a cause close to my heart due to personal experiences. Lack of access to quality menstrual products and reproductive health information increases vulnerabilities, leading to violence and inequality.

Inspired by these struggles, I founded SUPERB CBO, a grassroots feminist organization. Our mission is to dismantle oppressive power structures and create an inclusive society that empowers women and girls in

development. Early in my leadership journey, a lack of mentorship hindered my clarity and effectiveness, especially as a minority young woman. Securing the WVL multi-year grant in 2020 had a huge impact, connecting me with remarkable women whose mentorship and inspiration shaped me into a strong, pan-African feminist leader unafraid to challenge systemic barriers.

An effective leader motivates others towards shared goals. I've nurtured this by providing technical support and mentorship to my team, fostering their growth and development of SUPERB to effectively serve the girls and young women of Kibra. My passion drives me to amplify authentic voices, challenging systems that suppress women and girls' potential.

My advice to aspiring women leaders is simple: trust in your abilities, speak up boldly, and believe in the importance of your voice. Self-confidence is key to overcoming obstacles and achieving success.





Nimah N'zani Kassim

**Founder & Executive Director - The Hijabi
Mentorship Program**

*"Do not be afraid to challenge the status quo and
remember that your voice is powerful"*

A pivotal moment that shaped my path to leadership occurred in 2018, just before I founded The Hijabi Mentorship Program (THMP). While in campus, I was actively involved in a Youtube project focused on amplifying the voices of marginalized women in conservative communities.

During this time, a woman from my community shared her story of resilience. She spoke of enduring sexual abuse by a family member, being forced into an early marriage with an older man to secure a dowry for her family's home, and nearly losing her life during childbirth due to complications. Her story was filled with bitterness toward our community, its values, and its culture.

It was at that moment that I understood the true essence of leadership—not just in addressing these painful realities but in taking action to create change. This experience ignited my desire to highlight the beauty of our culture while confronting the harmful practices that are often overlooked.

It inspired me to establish THMP, where I launched programs to mentor young women and youth, guiding them through the challenges of societal expectations while empowering them to pursue their goals.

The success of these initiatives reinforced my commitment to leading by example, ensuring that every woman knows her voice is powerful and

important. One of the biggest challenges I faced on my journey to leadership was confronting deeply ingrained harmful cultures and traditions that consistently undermined women.

In my community, women were often silenced, their potential overshadowed by societal expectations that limited their roles and opportunities. Overcoming this required immense resilience and a commitment to challenging these norms. The WVL program has supported young girls and women to have a safe space to voice their injustices, seek justice, learn while also allowing the youth to influence and sit in decision making spaces.

Throughout my journey, I've confronted gender-related challenges that often sought to diminish my voice and leadership potential. In a community where women's roles were restricted by harmful traditions, I recognized the need to challenge these biases head-on. Through Hijabi, I've created opportunities for women to break free from these limitations, providing mentorship and fostering a supportive network. My advice to aspiring women leaders is to remain steadfast in their convictions.

Do not be afraid to challenge the status quo and remember that your voice is powerful. Surround yourself with allies who believe in your vision and keep pushing forward.



Susan Mitei

Founder - Longisa Beacon of Hope

"Do not be afraid to challenge the status quo and decision-making and resource allocation"

My journey into leadership was shaped by a life-changing event in Bomet East, where I worked as a teacher.

In 2012, I heard screams outside my house which were coming from hundreds of residents protesting the arrest of women circumcisers in the community. I reached out to the police and assisted in providing information on the organisers who were later arrested. This incident made me realize how deeply ingrained certain harmful cultural practices were in the community.

Growing up in a different area where Female Genital Mutilation was unheard of and being raised in a Christian family that opposed such practices, I was inspired to start Longisa Beacon of Hope to advocate against FGM. Starting anti-FGM campaigns was challenging. I faced resistance from local leaders who prioritized votes over fighting FGM, and even some women leaders who felt threatened by the campaign.

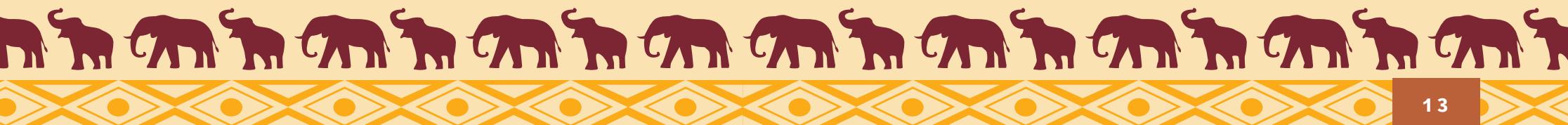
The community's male-dominated and patriarchal nature made it difficult to address injustices against women. However, my confidence and passion drove me to tackle these societal issues head-on. Losing my

sister to intimate partner violence during COVID-19 was a devastating blow. It made me question the purpose of my campaigns against sexual and gender-based violence. Despite this, I eventually found strength in the belief that my sister's death should not be in vain, and I continued my efforts against SGBV.

WVL program provided the necessary resources that motivated the team and designed more effective programs to support the women and girls in the community to identify and address these barriers. We have made significant progress through making the community aware of the need to look at boys and girls equality as well as provide access to education.

Moving forward, I have focused on team building and collaboration, aiming to inspire and coach those around me. We must stop SGBV against all sexes, properly value women's work, and provide equal job opportunities.

Lastly, we need more women in power to participate in decision-making and resource allocation. Women can indeed change the world.





Dorris Achieng

Founder & Executive Director - Smart Ladies

"Nothing for us, without us."

As a survivor of forced sex work during my teenage years and an active sex worker for the past 20 years, I have experienced first hand the health, legal, emotional, and psychological challenges that sex workers encounter.

In 2015 when Nakuru County was gripped by a wave of targeted killings of sex workers, and I could no longer remain silent. It was a crisis that demanded action and forced me to stand for my community. This led me to the birth of Smart Ladies, a grassroots women rights organization dedicated to the safety, security, and empowerment of sex workers in Nakuru County.

However, this path has had its fair share of challenges. I have had to navigate a patriarchal society that abhors female leadership. As sex workers are often ostracized and demeaned, I was seen as a social misfit fighting for the rights of others like me. Gender-based violence

remains a pervasive threat, and our champions frequently become targets, their voices stifled by systemic attacks. We often brace ourselves against public defamation and relentless cyberbullying, which strain our relationships with family and friends.

Through the WVL program and CREA give us funding that enabled us to develop critical partnerships that support and grow the women in our line of work. I am encouraged to see the impact of our work as cases of gender-based violence has significantly dropped, we have better engagement with law enforcement and health providers.

My leadership is anchored in the principles of inclusivity and empowerment. I live by the belief that nothing should be done for us without us. By empowering sex workers to reclaim their voices and assert their power, we are rewriting our story and shaping a future where our dignity and rights are upheld.





Maureen Nadupoi

C.E.O - African Women Agenda for Resilience and Development in SDGs Network (AWARD)

"I believe we can build a future where women are not just participants but leaders, shaping the destiny of our communities and our world."

As the CEO of African Women Agenda my commitment to championing girls' and women's rights in Maasai land runs deep. As a young and passionate leader, I've seen firsthand the incredible strength and resilience of women in my community, and I am determined to empower them to reach their full potential.

Growing up, I witnessed the challenges women faced, from limited opportunities to societal norms that stifled their voices. These experiences pushed me to make a difference. I began my journey by supporting Self Help groups, working closely with women to inspire and encourage their income-generating activities. Seeing these women gain financial independence and confidence has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my work.

I believe in the power of education, mentorship and advocacy to create change. By partnering with churches and schools, I have helped establish children's rights clubs, which actively work to discourage harmful practices like FGM and early marriages.

Together, we've run campaigns across Kajiado East, raising awareness and promoting the rights of girls to live free from fear and oppression. But what good is all this if we cannot care for the earth we live in.

That's why I am passionate about environmental conservation and most importantly igniting the same sense of care in our young children. In 2023 alone we planted over 1,000 trees in schools fostering a sense of responsibility for our planet among the younger generation.

I've learned that support, both within and outside the workplace, is crucial for building confidence, self-worth, and resilience. Networking, sharing experiences, and having good allies, mentors, and leaders have significantly influenced my development, creating opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise.

Leadership should be encouraged from an early stage in one's career, not just in senior positions. It's clear that society, organizations, and individuals benefit from encouraging more women into leadership roles. There's ample data and research showing the benefits of increased equality in representation.

We must proactively involve ourselves and our colleagues in progressing these initiatives and programs that support and develop women in leadership such as the WVL program which provided a platform for our organisation to be in spaces and opened up funding opportunities. I believe we can build a future where women are not just participants but leaders, shaping the destiny of our communities and our world.



Christine Rashid

Team Leader - Strategic Community Development (SCDO)

"Leadership is not about exerting power but about listening, learning, and growing with others."

I'm Christine Rashid, a 26-year-old team leader at Strategic Community Development (SCDO). Our organization was established in 2015 and has been fully operational since 2019, we are based in Mombasa and serves the Mombasa, Kwale, and Kilifi counties where our main focus is dedication is towards advocating for the rights of women, youth, and children.

My journey into leadership has been far from easy. I grew up in a male-dominated environment where leadership was often seen as a male privilege, and women were expected to take on only "menial jobs". Even at a young age, I was aware of the discrimination towards women and girls. Two incidents profoundly shaped my leadership journey. The first occurred when I was thirteen, witnessing an unlawful demolition of homes without understanding its implications.

The second happened when I was nineteen, and it became a turning point. Seeing the helplessness of children and women during the demolition spurred me to act. I confronted those responsible, determined not to stand by in silence. My family, especially my mother and brothers, has been incredibly supportive, reinforcing my belief that I was destined for this role despite community skepticism about my age and gender. This skepticism motivated me to challenge the status quo and pursue my dream of becoming a prominent female leader in my community.

Journey of leadership as a young woman comes with its own set of challenges. I often encounter prejudice and occasionally face inappropriate advances, which can be mentally taxing. Balancing personal and professional life is another hurdle, but I've learned to take breaks when needed and stay true to my values. Integrity is paramount for me; I refuse to compromise my principles for favors or success.

Leadership requires setting a strong example, embracing continuous learning, and being open to others' perspectives. Heading the team that implemented WVL program has sharpened my leadership skills and I've found that negotiation, understanding, as well as treating others fairly are crucial traits. Leadership is not about exerting power but about listening, learning, and growing with others.

Women face many barriers, including entrenched gender norms, and change is a gradual process. It's essential for us to believe in ourselves and pursue our goals not to please society but to fulfill our own aspirations. By stepping up, challenging norms, and supporting each other, women can become effective leaders. Rather than letting challenges hold us back, we should let them motivate us to keep moving forward.



Santa Kagendo

**Co - Founder - Youth and Women
Advocacy Network**

"Never let anyone or any circumstance dim your light"

Leadership is more than just holding a position; it is a journey to inspire others to become their best selves. My leadership journey began at a young age, while I was still in school. At 19, I was elected as the president of the Youth Action Movement (YAM-Kenya) Meru chapter, marking the start of my journey in coordinating young advocates for change. Leading others who were often older than me was challenging, as many looked down on me due to my age. Despite these difficulties, I maintained a positive attitude and continued to learn.

At 23, I was elected to represent young people nationally within the network, a pivotal moment in my leadership path. This role allowed me to sit on the national board alongside experienced professionals who mentored me. My confidence grew, and I pursued various courses to develop my skills further. I then had the opportunity to represent young people in the Youth in Action movement (Y-Act) on the national board.

As my influence expanded, I joined the Young Women Christian Association, where I was elected to the board as a youth representative. Eventually, I became the branch chairperson at 30, the youngest to hold this position nationally. The most significant lesson I learned in my leadership journey is the value of mentorship. The guidance I received from older mentors taught me a lot about servant leadership. Inspired by my experiences,

I founded the Youth and Women Advocacy Network (YWAN) in 2018, creating a platform to mentor young people into leadership roles and advocates of change. We got our first grant from CREAW under the WVL program, which came with financial and capacity building resources. This has supported YWAN to run initiatives with the youth to champion gender equality in Meru County. YWAN currently works with Government and Non-Governmental organisations.

Establishing an organization brought both blessings and challenges, including limited resources, which made it difficult to sustain programs. This struggle motivated me to continue mobilizing resources. It was particularly challenging to speak about preventing gender-based violence as a survivor myself. However, I refused to let this define me or limit my potential.

In 2023, I was honored as a Devolution Warrior under the Nyati category, recognizing individuals or institutions that have provided consistent and effective guidance on devolution with advanced access to information and knowledge management. This award was a proud moment in my life, affirming my resilience and determination.

My message to other young women leaders is to remain resilient and never let anyone or any circumstance dim your light.



Carol Wanjugu

Program Manager - LEHA Self Help Group

"Leaders should hold themselves accountable for their actions"

Thika, a town located in one of the sub-counties of Kiambu, is characterized by a conservative, religious, and cultural community. This environment oppresses the rural LBQ (Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer) and NB (Non-binary) community, depriving them of information and services essential for their development and well-being. This is despite the Kenyan constitution guaranteeing every citizen the highest attainable health services. The criminalization of this community, which carries a penalty of up to 14 years in jail, further denies them justice and fosters a climate of fear. This extends to human rights defenders like me, who risk arrest while fighting for equal rights for queer people in our community.

In response to these challenges, my friends and I founded the LEHA Self Help Group to empower our community members to fight for a dignified life as equal Kenyans. The WVL program was a much needed boost as it provided the resources both financial and capacity strengthening that has helped us design more informed initiatives and support mechanisms to vulnerable groups.

On my journey to leadership, I faced significant challenges that tested my resolve. One major hurdle was self-doubt and imposter syndrome, leading me to question my skills and experience. To overcome this, I sought mentorship from seasoned leaders, who provided valuable insights and encouragement. I built my confidence by setting small, achievable goals and celebrating each accomplishment. Navigating conflicts and building cohesive teams was another challenge.

In a diverse workplace, conflicting personalities and priorities can lead to tension. I addressed this by prioritizing open communication and active listening, fostering an environment where team members felt heard and respected.

Adapting to change and uncertainty was an ongoing challenge. In today's fast-paced world, unexpected disruptions are inevitable. I cultivated resilience and flexibility, viewing change as an opportunity for growth. I encouraged a culture of innovation and experimentation within my team, empowering individuals to adapt quickly and creatively to new challenges. As an effective leader, it's essential to have a clear vision of the future and articulate it compellingly to inspire others.

Strong communication skills, active listening, clear speaking, and conveying messages effectively are crucial. Integrity is key to earning trust through honesty, transparency, and ethical behavior. Flexibility and open-mindedness are necessary to navigate change and adapt strategies to evolving circumstances.

Leaders should hold themselves accountable for their actions, ensuring alignment with goals and commitments, and demonstrate resilience, optimism, and proactive problem-solving. Empowering team members by delegating authority, providing support and resources, and encouraging autonomy and initiative is vital for effective leadership.



Naiyan Kiplagat

**Founder & Executive Director - Paran
Women Group**

"Effective leadership is defined by transparency, accountability, empathy, and resilience"

In 2005, I founded a small local women's group with just 25 members, driven by my determination to improve the lives of indigenous women and girls in my community. The severe impacts of land degradation due to climate change, which significantly affected our land-dependent community, spurred me to action. I collaborated with like-minded local women to empower and build our capacity to implement meaningful change.

Today, I am the founder and director of the Paran Women's Group, a community-based organization that serves as an umbrella for 64 different self-help groups, encompassing over 3,600 indigenous women. This work is deeply personal and intricately connected with my professional endeavors. The most significant challenge I face is navigating the strong cultural belief systems of the Maasai and Ogiek indigenous peoples of Kenya. Discussing sensitive topics like female genital mutilation, early marriages, and gender-based violence requires patience and cultural sensitivity.

Empowering the women in these communities is essential for shifting harmful cultural norms. By acting as a role model and listening to their voices, I motivate women to pursue education and autonomy. My journey to leadership has been shaped by my active participation in local, national, and international trainings. WVL program provided an opportunity to connect with local movements on climate change and the intersection with women. Connecting with indigenous movements worldwide has helped me understand the shared social, political, economic, and

environmental challenges faced by indigenous women. Collaborating with local and county governments to implement policies that support indigenous peoples has further strengthened my ability to enact practical change.

I believe effective leadership is defined by transparency, accountability, empathy, and resilience. I strive to embody these qualities in my daily roles at the Paran Women's Group. Open communication fosters transparency, while listening with intent and empathy strengthens our connections. Organizational management is vital for productivity, especially given the number of groups we work with. Overcoming relentless socio-cultural, economic, and logistical challenges has cultivated a deep sense of resilience in me. Leading with kindness, I hope to inspire and empower women, ensuring that indigenous women's voices are not only heard but also listened to.

Addressing and overcoming gender-related challenges has been possible through the support and validation of a community of like-minded women. Sharing experiences in safe, open spaces that foster respect has been vital for my strength and for aspiring women. Building alliances and engaging in feminist collectives embody the unity needed to tackle the climate crisis. The WVL program funding has supported women to be in the forefront of tackling climate change crisis and we understood the effect it has on harmful systemic norms and roles. My advice is to always collaborate, listen, share, and support the women around you.



Ruth Kathombi

Team Leader - Savana Kitui CBO

"Self-awareness is key to overcoming biases"

My leadership journey began early during my pre-primary school years when my teacher entrusted me with organizing my peers into lines and identifying class troublemakers. This early experience as a servant leader laid the foundation for my subsequent roles in primary school, high school, community settings, university, and now as a professional at Savana Kitui CBO.

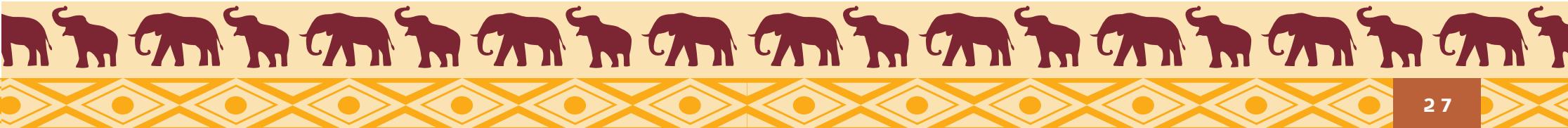
The WVL program has played a big role in empowering me throughout this journey. It has provided me with essential leadership skills, resources, and a supportive network that have significantly contributed to my growth and effectiveness as a leader. Through the program, I have gained valuable knowledge and practical tools that have enhanced my ability to lead with confidence and impact.

Overcoming gender bias has been my greatest challenge. The WVL program has equipped Savana Kitui with up to date and relevant information on various thematic areas to design effective initiatives and make strategic decisions to address the existing bias in our community. This has provided an enabling environment to advocate for realisation of girls and women's rights and amplify the voices of marginalized groups with

dignity and strength. Throughout my leadership journey, possessing the right attitude, knowledge, and skills including effective communication, social sensitivity, and attention to detail has enabled me to connect effectively with diverse groups. As a Programs Lead, accountability and teamwork are central to successfully implementing projects and ensuring program success.

Women often encounter unique barriers in their professional journeys. I have navigated gender biases by cultivating self-awareness and embracing my leadership style whether as a servant leader, coach, or in other capacities. This approach has empowered me to overcome biases effectively.

Self-awareness is key to overcoming biases. Identify your leadership style early on and leverage it to navigate your journey confidently. Whether you choose to lead as a servant, coach, or in another style, aligning with your authentic self will empower you to succeed in leadership roles. The WVL program offers invaluable support and resources that can significantly aid in this process, helping aspiring women leaders to overcome obstacles and thrive.





Caroline Rucah Mwochi

**Founder and Executive Director - Western
Kenya LBQT Feminist Forum (WKLFF)**

"Together, we can shatter glass ceilings and pave the way for a more equitable future."

I was born and raised in a ghetto, a predominantly Muslim neighbourhood where oppression, patriarchy, and sexism were rampant. From an early age, I realized the need to change this narrative. I became active in the estate youth group, organized young women and mothers, and encouraged them to assert control over their bodies. Becoming a mother at a young age myself, I understood the struggles these women faced intimately.

In 2012, I joined the queer movement as an accountant, while grappling with my own sexuality and still largely in the closet. The LGBTIQ+ organizations I worked with primarily focused on GBMSMs and HIV programs, leaving a significant gap for people like me. As a queer person assigned female at birth, I felt unfulfilled and recognized the need for more inclusive programming. I decided to step up and lead, leveraging my unique perspective and access to these opportunities.

As a pansexual non-binary person, I have faced additional layers of stigma and discrimination. My advocacy highlighted how all my intersecting identities contributed to the oppression I experienced. Despite these challenges, I passionately fight for the rights of my community, envisioning a world where everyone lives freely, with dignity and rights, embracing their diversities. My faith has been a cornerstone of my advocacy. I believe that religion has often been used as a tool of oppression against people like me. The merciful God I believe in created me as

I am, and I aim to use my faith to challenge and disrupt harmful discourses that propagate homophobia and sexism. As a parent, my ultimate motivation is to create a safer and better future for my children. They have faced profiling, eviction, and threats, including physical attacks at gunpoint, due to my sexual orientation, gender identity, and activism. Protecting them from the trauma they've endured drives my relentless pursuit of equality and justice.

My journey from observer to leader has been transformative. Overcoming deeply ingrained cultural norms that perpetuated GBV and navigating the complexities of advocating for gender equality in a patriarchal society posed significant hurdles. The WVL program has enabled us to continue advocating for rights of the most marginalised, provided a safe space to speak out and an opportunity to interact with other partners as we promote inclusivity for all.

For me, effective leadership is defined by empathy, resilience, and the ability to inspire and empower others. By demonstrating empathy, resilience, and a commitment to uplifting others, I have fostered trust, built strong relationships, and created positive change within my community. My advice to aspiring women leaders is to cultivate resilience, seek support networks, and boldly assert their worth. Together, by standing united and unapologetically embracing our capabilities, we can shatter glass ceilings and pave the way for a more equitable future.



Faith Kiema

**Founder and Executive Director - Kitui
Women In Development (KWID)**

"Remember to stay resilient and focused on your goals"

Years ago, a position for chief opened in my community, and I was excited to apply because I felt that I was qualified for the role. However, my marital status was considered a problem since the community believed that only married individuals could handle domestic issues well. Despite my qualifications, I wasn't allowed to submit my application because of this belief.

As both a biological and adoptive parent, I fought against these outdated norms and the patriarchal system. I worked hard to empower myself socially and economically, proving that my worth was not tied to my marital status. This experience taught me resilience, empathy, and determination—qualities that have been crucial in my leadership.

Believing in myself and trusting the process has been key. Gaining more knowledge and skills related to my passions has helped me make better decisions and excel in my field. I've shared what I've learned to help others and become more resourceful.

I've also worked hard to be genuine and true to myself, knowing that insincerity can harm relationships. Continuous learning has helped me adapt and improve as a leader. None of this would have been possible without the support of the WVL program whose resources built and strengthened my capabilities and that of my team. The program also

provided a space for KWID to respond to the needs of the community as we created awareness on the rights of women and girls to counter the current existing bias and retrogressive social norms. Self-belief is also essential for good leadership. It builds confidence and resilience and helps inspire others. Prayer has also been important for me, providing guidance, strength, and a sense of purpose. It helps me make decisions that align with my values and the greater good.

Good leadership involves advocating for yourself, clearly communicating your skills and goals, and seeking growth opportunities. Building a network of peers, mentors, and allies offers support and new opportunities. Strengthening your personal skills and knowledge boosts confidence and helps you face challenges. Overcoming stereotypes and biases is also important for seizing opportunities.

For aspiring female leaders facing similar challenges, remember to stay resilient and focused on your goals. Setbacks are temporary, and perseverance is crucial for long-term success. Align your vision with your values to stay on track and overcome obstacles.

Be authentic and assertive in sharing your ideas and opinions. Look for role models in your field for inspiration and guidance. Lastly, support and uplift other women to build a strong, supportive network.



Lucy Nkatha

Founder and Executive Director - Kiengu Women Challenged to Challenge CBO

"Be a pillar for others, but also have a pillar to lean on when things get tough"

My journey to leadership started when I moved my hairdressing shop near the District Officer's office the previous day. As I started working on my first client around 10:00 AM, I noticed a crowd escorting a young girl, about 10 years old, to the administration police. When I inquired, I was told the girl had been defiled by an old man the previous night. A bystander casually commented, "This is going nowhere. The police will be bribed and the man will go scot-free as usual."

That statement broke my heart. I couldn't stand the thought of such a young girl being denied justice. I forgot about my customer and decided to accompany the girl to the station. Putting on a brave face, I told the police officer that I needed to be with the girl during her statement writing. When he asked who I was to her, I claimed she was my niece. She recorded her statement, we went to the hospital and later to the children's office, where we found a safe shelter for her.

The community nicknamed me Mama Yao, meaning "the mother of them all." At the office, I became a volunteer children's officer. As a volunteer children's officer, I began visiting parents of children with disabilities, convincing them to send their kids to school. We formed a disability support group, but men dominated leadership roles and excluded women from decision-making.

Determined to change this, we championed the rights of women with disabilities and formed a group specifically for women and girls with disabilities. The WVL program helped us gain legitimacy and continue championing for the rights of women and girls with disabilities. For instance it has led to creating strategic partnerships that has birthed initiatives such as schools in Igeme Central constituency ensuring that all schools and health facilities are disability friendly.

Understanding the male-dominated society was challenging, we sought partnerships for capacity building in order to deliver better. We focused on collaborating with other human rights defenders to learn from and support each other.

My advice to aspiring leaders is that even when families don't believe in women's leadership, believe in yourself. Fly with the few who believe in you, avoid unhealthy competition, support and build the capacity of upcoming women leaders. Be a pillar for others, but also have a pillar to lean on when things get tough. Build networks, know your allies, and plan strategically.

Embrace growth and learning, taking leadership courses whenever possible. Nurture your character, ensure you have the support of local leaders, and have invisible soldiers on standby.



Wanjiru Mburu

**Programs Coordinator - Isiolo Women
Against Sexual and Gender Based
Violence (WASGBV)**

"Embrace your uniqueness, never letting gender stereotypes hinder you"

My journey to leadership has been shaped by experiences that shaped my dedication to supporting women. As an educator and human rights defender in Isiolo County, I have tirelessly challenged violence against women and advocated for economic justice.

My participation in the Ms. President program allowed me to showcase the power of women in leadership, inspiring others to increase political representation. Receiving the YALI Fellowship further solidified my commitment to civic leadership and shaping a more equitable world.

Leveraging my skills as a technologist, I address the digital gender gap, empowering women through education and technology. One of the biggest challenges I faced on my journey to leadership was the lack of belief and support from my family and friends. Though not everything was successful, I learned invaluable lessons along the way, shaping how I approach challenges and decisions.

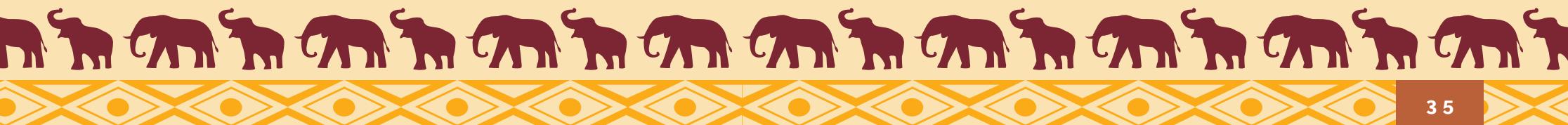
My unwavering determination and self-belief have propelled me forward, inspiring others to pursue their dreams despite the obstacles. Effective leadership is shaped by qualities such as empathy, resilience, adaptability, and vision.

By leading with empathy, I connect with people on a deeper level, fostering trust and collaboration.

Throughout my journey, I've encountered and overcome gender-based barriers by asserting my worth, amplifying my voice, and forging supportive networks. By refusing to be sidelined or underestimated, I've demonstrated my capabilities and earned respect in male-dominated spaces.

WVL program provided resources in funds, access to relevant knowledge and technical support that was provided by CREA W which helped me and the organisation to navigate and challenge social norms. One of our biggest wins have been seeing the women we work with gain confidence, sign up for adult school to gain basic literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge , starting businesses and being champions of ending FGM.

My advice to aspiring women leaders is simple: believe in your abilities, speak up, and surround yourself with support. Embrace your uniqueness, never letting gender stereotypes hinder you. Together, let's overcome these challenges and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable world for future generations of women leaders.





Sister Jane Kailu

Team Leader - Good Shepherd Empowerment Program

"Practice resilience, leverage your strengths, and serve others."

During my time as a Catholic nun, I've witnessed an increase in gender-based violence (GBV), which has deeply troubled me. Guided by our fourth vow of zeal, I felt compelled to confront this social issue rather than watch it continue unchecked.

Determined to make a difference, I reached out to government officials, church leaders, and other key players in the field to raise awareness about GBV. This increased the platforms and avenues to address this pervasive issue of violence. Though I faced challenges, the encouragement from advocates and supporters outweighed the obstacles. The support from friends, colleagues, and supporters has been a tremendous source of strength and motivation. It may not always be available, but when it is, it provides a powerful boost.

My path to leadership has been shaped by confronting stereotypes and cultural expectations that often portray leadership traits as masculine and unfit for women.

The social structures, designed by men for men, tend to perpetuate existing power dynamics, even when women step into leadership roles. Despite these challenges, believing in my inherent abilities has allowed me to grow as a leader. Effective leadership encompasses traits such as

innovation, a desire to learn, vision, resilience, passion, active listening, accountability, communication skills, empathy, and the ability to empower others.

Leadership is not just an innate trait but something that develops through continuous growth and adaptation. I am grateful to the Women Voice and Leadership (WVL) program for guiding me on this path that enabled the institutions to set up spaces for young mothers to learn crucial skills for their survival, and opportunity to earn to a livelihood their young families.

I actively challenge oppressive cultural practices in a patriarchal society that perpetuates gender stereotypes. Education has been crucial in developing my leadership skills and mentoring others, which has positively influenced my team's dynamics and performance. I am committed to understanding and addressing the root causes of gender inequality and challenging discrimination.

To aspiring women leaders: practice resilience, leverage your strengths, and serve others. Stay true to yourself and seek out supportive groups—strength lies in unity.



Eve Mvera

Co - Founder and Chairperson - Fimbo Youth Initiative

"Surround yourself with supportive allies and never doubt your capabilities."

My path into leadership, particularly in advocating for women's and girls' issues and gender equality, was highly influenced by personal experiences that started a deep desire to make a difference. Growing up with a mother who had a disability, I witnessed firsthand the challenges and injustices she faced, as well as those endured by other women in similar situations.

At the age of 14, I experienced the tragic loss of a childhood friend due to teenage pregnancy and childbirth complications. Reflecting on how her life could have been different if she had received proper support pushed me to be a voice for the voiceless. In the end this led me to pursue a career in journalism. In 2015, driven by this passion, a few friends and I co-founded the Fimbo Youth Initiative. Our mission was clear: to advocate for social justice for girls, young people, and women, focusing on democratic governance, socio-economic empowerment, and combating violence against girls and women.

Another pivotal moment in my journey came in 2017 when I was selected for the prestigious Mandela Washington Fellowship. This transformative experience allowed me to study Civic Leadership at Indiana University in the United States. The fellowship broadened my perspective, sharpened my leadership skills, expanded my network, and strengthened my

commitment to social justice, gender equality, and the rights of those facing poverty and exclusion in Kilifi and beyond.

Building an organization from scratch comes with its fair share of challenges including securing funding, mobilizing resources, and understanding the complexities of running a grassroots movement. Through the financial and skilling support from the WVL program we managed to grow Fimbo Youth Initiative into a thriving organization that continues to make a positive impact in our community.

I believe effective leadership is characterized by resilience, persistence, and strategic thinking. Facing challenges head-on, learning from setbacks, and adapting strategies for success have helped me develop these qualities.

My advice to aspiring women leaders is to stay confident, seek mentorship, and actively support other women. Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth, leverage your unique perspectives, and advocate for gender equality. Surround yourself with supportive allies and never doubt your capabilities. With determination and resilience, women can break barriers and thrive as impactful leaders.



Ruth Wangui

Programs Manager - BLINK

"Cultivate resilience, seek support from allies and mentors, and never compromise on your worth or capabilities"

One experience that shaped my path to leadership was witnessing the double discrimination faced by women with disabilities. While volunteering and working with BLINK, I met women like Lucy Maingi, who not only faced physical or cognitive challenges but also dealt with societal prejudices because of their gender. Seeing their struggles to access opportunities and resources due to both their disability and gender bias deeply affected me. It made me realize the urgent need for advocacy and support.

This experience inspired me to challenge systemic injustices as well as champion inclusivity and equality for women with disabilities, not only in Machakos but also in Kitui and Makueni counties. As a director working with this community, I am committed to dismantling barriers, fostering empowerment, and creating a more equitable society where every woman, regardless of her abilities, receives the respect, opportunities, and support she deserves.

Some of the challenges I faced on my journey to leadership included overcoming self-doubt, navigating societal biases, and managing resistance to change. I addressed self-doubt by building confidence through continuous learning and seeking mentorship. To tackle biases, I advocated for inclusivity and challenged

stereotypes through education and awareness campaigns. Managing resistance to change involved championing open communication, building consensus, and leading by example. Fostering a supportive network and leveraging diverse perspectives have been instrumental in overcoming obstacles and forging ahead on the path to leadership.

Effective leadership in my field requires empathy, inclusivity, and advocacy. Cultivating these traits involved actively listening to the needs and experiences of women with disabilities, amplifying their voices, and fostering a supportive environment. I prioritize building trust and collaboration, empowering individuals to contribute with their unique perspectives and talents. The above traits were sharpened as we implemented the WVL program, that boosted our confidence and allowed us to continue supporting women and girls living with disability.

Navigating gender-related challenges in my leadership journey involves recognizing the intersecting barriers faced by women with disabilities. My advice to aspiring women leaders in similar circumstances is to cultivate resilience, seek support from allies and mentors, and never compromise on their worth or capabilities. By embracing their unique strengths and perspectives, they can challenge stereotypes, break barriers, and pave the way for greater inclusivity and equality in leadership roles.



Catherine Kimaren Mootian

**Co - Founder and Executive Director -
AfyAfrika**

"Seek out supportive networks, remain steadfast in your convictions, and never underestimate the power of your voice and actions"

Leadership is deeply rooted in my personal experiences. I grew up in the Maasai community of Narok County in Kenya and despite coming from a well-educated family my sister and I were forced to undergo Female Genital Mutilation/Cut (FGM/C) at the age of twelve, a practice deeply entrenched in our community.

The pain and trauma of this experience ignited a determination in me to ensure that no other girl or woman would have to endure such suffering. My first act of defiance was rescuing my youngest sister from the same fate, a bold move that went against our father's wishes and the community's expectations of obedience from daughters.

One of the biggest challenges I faced on my journey to leadership was standing up against deeply ingrained cultural practices and family expectations. Overcoming this required immense courage and determination.

Successfully managing to rescue my sister, who is now an advocate of the High Court, marked an important moment in my life, reinforcing my commitment to fighting against FGM/C and other forms of violence against women and girls. Effective leadership is defined by qualities such as resilience, empathy, and a commitment to justice.

I have cultivated these traits through personal experiences and professional efforts, particularly through working with AfyAfrika, which my sister and I are the co-founder. AfyAfrika has made significant strides in reducing the prevalence of FGM in Kenya, showcasing the impact of steadfast leadership and activism.

Women often face unique barriers and biases in their professional journeys, and my experience is no different from them. I encountered resistance from my own family and community, which traditionally placed little value on the voices of women and girls. To overcome these gender-related challenges, I relied on the support of like-minded individuals and organizations.

My participation in WVL program was instrumental in my healing journey and becoming a better leader which has translated to our commitment to designing initiatives that are community centred and informed to end FGM/C. My advice for aspiring women leaders is to seek out supportive networks, remain steadfast in their convictions, and never underestimate the power of their voice and actions.

My story is a testament to the transformative power of personal resolve and the impact one individual can have in the fight for justice and equality.



Immaculate Kathomi

Co - Founder - Educate a Rural Girl CBO

"True leadership stems from authenticity and staying true to your values and your people."

My journey to leadership started while pursuing my master's degree in statistics. Coming from a humble village background and achieving such a high level of education in a male-dominated field surpassed my initial expectations. This achievement was not just a personal victory but a realization of the potential for other girls and women like me.

This realization sparked a deep sense of responsibility. I knew that many girls from similar backgrounds had their educational journeys cut short by socio-economic barriers, including period poverty. Motivated by my own educational success and driven to change this narrative, I co-founded Educate A Rural Girl Community Based Organisation (CBO) in 2019.

The organization became a platform to encourage girls to explore and achieve their full potential. With the support from CREA W under the WVL program we focused on breaking cycle of misinformation and stigma surrounding menstruation, providing dignity kits, and advocating for menstrual education. We also encouraged girls and young women to pursue their studies to completion not just as a strategy to become a leader but as a pivot for them to thrive in all spheres of their lives.

One of the greatest challenges I faced was the fear of the unknown, particularly societal perceptions of outspoken women. This fear of public scrutiny and misunderstanding was a significant barrier to stepping into

a leadership role and advocating for menstrual education and gender equality. To overcome this, I focused on building a strong, supportive community around Educate A Rural Girl.

Dedication is indeed a cornerstone of effective leadership. It reflects a leader's commitment to their cause and their willingness to sacrifice personal time and resources to achieve organizational goals. My dedication to Educate A Rural Girl has manifested in countless hours spent fund-raising, organizing workshops, and mentoring, often without immediate reward.

This steadfast commitment has not only fueled the organization's activities but also inspired team members and volunteers to invest deeply in our mission. By modeling dedication, I've nurtured a culture of perseverance and passion, which has been vital in driving our initiatives forward and making a lasting impact on the community.

In my journey with Educate A Rural Girl, I've drawn significant inspiration from trailblazing women leaders such as Wangeci Wachira of CREA W, Wanjiru Kamau founder of Akili Dada and other influential women in politics. My advice to aspiring women leaders is to embrace individuality, even if it means being imperfect. True leadership stems from authenticity and staying true to your values and your people.



Helda Elsy

Founder and Executive Director - Women Empowerment CBO (WIMA)

"Challenge gender bias directly through conversations, policies, and actions, to create a more inclusive and equitable work environment. "

My journey to leadership has not been without its challenges. One of the most significant obstacles I've faced is gender bias. We needed an avenue to advocate for myself and other women so we formed the WIMA CBO, a women's group that has sought for allies who champion gender based violence in Kilifi.

As we continued engaging with other partners, we got funds from CREA through WVL program that have supported WIMA to grow and educate women and girls on their rights to reduce incidences of GBV and teenage pregnancies in Kilifi County. It has also given us an opportunity to network with other women rights organisations, government and other relevant stakeholders that has enabled us to work across the county with a priority of reducing teenage pregnancies.

Balancing work and personal life was yet another challenge. Managing the demands of my professional responsibilities while being a mother required careful planning and setting clear boundaries. Prioritizing tasks and learning to delegate effectively allowed me to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Throughout these challenges, I have remained committed to my leadership philosophy, which includes having a clear vision, articulating ideas, listening actively, and fostering open and transparent communication

within my team. I believe in acting with honesty, fairness, and ethical behavior, being flexible and adaptive to change, making informed and timely decisions, and promoting collaboration and teamwork.

To address and overcome gender-related challenges, I have sought mentorship and support networks. Connecting with mentors and joining networks has provided me with invaluable guidance, advice, and encouragement from those who have navigated similar challenges. Advocating for myself has been crucial in ensuring fair recognition and opportunities.

I also make it a point to challenge gender bias directly through conversations, policies, and actions, creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment. Building alliances with men and women who support gender equality has amplified our efforts to address systemic challenges. I encourage women to feel empowered to negotiate for fair compensation, promotions, and opportunities while recognizing and challenging the gender biases that influence these negotiations.

By leading by example, I strive to serve as a role model, paving the way for others and advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels.



Eunice Soi

Founder and Chairperson - Chepngobob Women Group

"Leaders should strive for transparency, ensure alignment with organizational goals, and lead by example with vision and integrity. "

I come from a society that has long struggled to recognize the capabilities of women and girls. Growing up, women were often viewed as inferior, with little value placed on educating girls. Instead, girls were reduced to commodities for marriage, with their futures limited to early motherhood after undergoing harmful practices like female genital mutilation (FGM). This societal view stifled many girls' dreams and potential.

I was affected by these discriminatory practices until I decided to act. I rallied my friends and supportive community members to challenge and change the oppressive system that held so many girls back. This effort led to the formation of the Chepngobob Women Group, which serves as a platform to support vulnerable women and girls.

Founding and leading this feminist group has been a challenging journey. The community still holds onto harmful beliefs and practices, such as FGM and early marriages, which undermine girls' rights and education. Our efforts to fight these practices were met with resistance, even from our own families. However, our dedication and persistence has brought about significant positive change.

We are grateful to programs like WVL program for their support, which has been crucial in overcoming financial barriers and advancing our mission. Leadership has taught me that challenges are crucial for growth. Initially, we faced hostility and rejection, and securing funding for our activities was difficult. Early on, we struggled with

limited membership and capacity, as many potential members faced family opposition and societal skepticism.

My leadership philosophy emphasizes teamwork and empathy. A good leader must harness the strengths of their team, listen actively, and understand the organization's needs for effective decision-making. Creativity, humility, and clear communication are essential. Leaders should strive for transparency, ensure alignment with organizational goals, and lead by example with vision and integrity.

Our efforts have successfully educated the community on gender rights and reporting mechanisms, creating a more supportive environment. We've provided academic sponsorship to young girls, helping many achieve their dreams and become valuable community members. By partnering with other organizations, we've enhanced education programs and enforced gender rights laws.

Training Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) champions among students has empowered them to advocate for their rights and protect themselves from discrimination. Parents are now more informed about their children's rights and the importance of equal education. Additionally, our projects supporting young mothers have helped combat poverty and vulnerability. I am proud of the progress we have made and look forward to achieving even more milestones in the future.



Zeinab Duresa

Chairperson - Mororo Interfaith CBO

"Believe in yourself and stand firm on what you are pushing on"

Women in Tana River County face numerous barriers, including traditional systems that devalue their place in society, lack of educational opportunities, forced child marriages, and limited economic participation. Being a vocal leader in a male-centric community has not been without challenges. Women's voices are often ignored, and in my fight against FGM and other gender-discriminatory practices, I have faced confrontation from some men.

Through my journey, I realized that leadership doesn't necessarily require formal education; it requires a genuine desire to help vulnerable community members. It was in interacting with residents and understanding the urgent need for new leadership in advocating for women's voices and leadership that I accepted the role of chairperson for Mororo Interfaith CBO.

The WVL program resources gave us an opportunity to address the needs of the organisation as well as the community specifically women and girls. It also helped us to demonstrate to the girls that women can be good effective leaders and problem solvers.

Effective leadership, in my opinion, involves staying focused on your goals. Throughout my journey, I have remained steadfast in advocating for women's rights. A good leader should be organized; I always start my day knowing my schedule, which helps prevent procrastination. Being principled is also essential. In Tana River, I have had to stand firm, especially in cases of gender-based violence where clan elders prefer to 'solve it the community way.' I consistently oppose this to ensure that victims receive justice.

I encourage aspiring women leaders to believe in themselves and stand firm in what they are pushing on. We need more women leaders to represent and advocate for the issues that women and girls face and continue to deal with.



Lydia Nyakeru

**Founder and Executive Director - Elimisha
Vijana Initiative**

"Stay true to your values, maintain confidence in your abilities, and persevere in pursuing your goals."

During the initial stages of planning the Women's Voice Leadership Program, the country went into lockdown due to COVID-19. This significantly shaped my path to leadership. As I began to conceptualize the program, I realized the importance of creating a safe and inclusive space where women could freely express themselves, share their experiences, and develop their leadership skills.

Through the application I did for WVL program, we successfully secured the funds that were critical during the pandemic, that saw a surge in GBV incidences. The resources provided the organisation with opportunities to work with other partners in addressing GBV and supporting young mothers who were experiencing stigma from the society. Today we have a good network of young mothers who offer peer to peer support to each other and are at the forefront to supporting other young girls and championing gender equality.

Like many leaders, I experienced moments of self-doubt, particularly when faced with challenges or setbacks, not to mention the prolonged pandemic. To overcome this, I practiced self-compassion, sought support from mentors and peers, and focused on my strengths and past accomplishments.

In today's fast-paced and dynamic world, effective leaders must be adaptable and responsive to change. They embrace innovation, encourage experimentation, and adjust their approach as needed to navigate

challenges and seize opportunities. Leaders with high emotional intelligence can better understand and manage their own emotions and those of others. I have cultivated effective leadership traits by prioritizing self-awareness, continuous learning, and empathy.

I have actively sought feedback to understand my strengths and areas for growth, allowing me to adapt and improve over time. By setting a clear vision, communicating openly, and empowering my team, I have fostered collaboration and innovation. I embraced challenges with resilience and courage, using setbacks as opportunities for growth. Through mentorship and coaching, I have supported the development of others, nurturing a culture of trust and respect. I strive to lead by example, embodying integrity, compassion, and a commitment to excellence.

For aspiring women leaders facing similar obstacles, I would advise them to prioritize self-belief and resilience. Seek mentorship and build supportive networks to navigate challenges. Embrace opportunities for skill development and continuous learning. Advocate for yourself and others, challenge biases, and champion diversity and inclusion.

Remember, setbacks are part of the journey and use them as opportunities for growth. Stay true to your values, maintain confidence in your abilities, and persevere in pursuing your goals.



Caroline Rotich

Founder and Executive Director - Kerio Rights CBO

"By standing united and unapologetically embracing our capabilities, we can shatter glass ceilings and pave the way for a more equitable future"

Born in the early 80s as the fifth child in a polygamous family of ten, I grew up amidst the harsh reality of Gender Based Violence (GBV), witnessing my own mother endure its cruel grip.

In 2010, I secured a job as a project coordinator for SGBV, driven by my early experiences in championing the rights of women and girls. Each case I encountered deepened my resolve, propelling me to seek further education in leadership abroad.

Fast forward to 2021, armed with newfound skills and unwavering determination, I founded the Kerio Rights community-based organization committed to combating GBV and promoting gender equality in Uasin-Gishu County.

From the words spoken to me as a child to the actions I take today, my journey from observer to leader has been transformative. It is a journey rooted in empathy, fueled by a desire to break the cycle of silence, and dedicated to creating a brighter future for all.

On my journey to leadership, one of the biggest challenges I faced was overcoming the deeply ingrained cultural norms that perpetuated Gender Based Violence (GBV) in my community.

The WVL program came at a time when there was a shift happening in my community where women were writing their own narrative on gender inequality and the role women play in championing for equality and equity. Funding from WVL provided women with an opportunity to develop their own agency and develop community driven initiatives that promote gender equality.

Also, navigating the complexities of advocating for gender equality in a patriarchal society posed significant hurdles. To overcome these challenges, We utilised a multi-faceted approach, which included education, advocacy, and community engagement. By raising awareness, building alliances, and empowering individuals to challenge societal norms, I was able to make meaningful strides towards addressing GBV and promoting gender equality.

In my view, effective leadership is defined by empathy, resilience, and the ability to inspire and empower others. Throughout my journey, I have cultivated these qualities by actively listening to the needs of those I serve, remaining steadfast in the face of adversity, and leading by example. By demonstrating empathy, resilience, and a commitment to uplifting others, I have fostered trust, built strong relationships, and created positive change within my community. These qualities have been instrumental in guiding my leadership approach and shaping my impact on the lives of women, girls, and marginalized communities.

In my professional journey, I have confronted gender-related challenges head-on by advocating for gender equality, challenging stereotypes, and fostering inclusive environments. By amplifying the voices of women, supporting mentorship programs, and advocating for policies that promote gender parity, I have worked to dismantle systemic barriers.

My advice to aspiring women leaders is to cultivate resilience, seek support networks, and boldly assert their worth. Together, by standing united and unapologetically embracing our capabilities, we can shatter glass ceilings and pave the way for a more equitable future.



Kelly Rwigi

Founder and Executive Director- Enlightened Generation International

"True effective leadership comes from listening to the team and acting on what best serves the cause."

I have several pivotal moments that really defined my leadership . The first was being highlighted on the famous Citizen TV program for the Mwanamke Bomba in 2021 for exceptional community service and being a foster mom to many children.

This moment made me realise I could do much more for my community. The second one was getting the Head of states commendation from H.E Uhuru Kenyatta during covid times for standing with the community and fighting the then escalating cases of GBV .

The third was being appointed as the Chief Officer children ,Gender and social services Tharaka Nithi county a position that I attribute to the WVL program. It is from this support from the project that I was able to expand my community service and enhanced my leadership skills. It also gave me the leverage and competitive muscle to go through very rigorous interview.

The final one was also a recognition by the President of Kenya William Ruto during Mashujaa day 2023 for exemplary community service that encouraged me to keep fighting for women and children.

For challenges, dealing with male chauvinism has been common but it required careful navigation through appropriate channels, ensuring that issues are addressed effectively. Another significant challenge has been the lack of civic education on human rights and reporting procedures.

To counter this, we have utilized available platforms, including churches, mosques, and public events, to disseminate crucial information. WVL program provided the resources that has supported provide a platform for youth in Tharaka Nithi to learn, speak freely about their challenges and find solutions collectively.

As a leader, I've come to understand that being a team player is essential. Working in harmony with my team has allowed us to achieve much more than we could individually, as everyone brings unique strengths to the table. Accountability has also been a cornerstone of my leadership approach.

By being transparent and responsible, especially in handling resources, I've built trust with our partners, ensuring that reports are always presented on time. Additionally, I value the importance of being a good listener. While many leaders might be eager to voice their own opinions, I've learned that true effective leadership comes from listening to the team and acting on what best serves the organization.

My advice on aspiring women is to stay on top of the tide . It will never be easy being a woman leader but if you are empowered enough you can stand strong and empowered. I would advise women to keep learning as much as they can because an empowered woman will not be easily pulled down.

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