GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT:
GOLDEN WOMEN VISION, UGANDA

For decades, members of the brutal militia, The Lord's Resistance Army, waged a war on the people of Gulu, Uganda. Tens of thousands of people were mutilated and murdered, women were forced into sexual slavery, and children were abducted and forced to commit atrocities. In its wake, the war left behind many widows and orphans, each of them with their own story of unimaginable loss. One such story was Sylvia Acan’s, who witnessed her father being murdered and lost her sister to the insurgency. At 17, she was raped, forced to marry her rapist and have his child. When the war ended, she found herself alone with six children and no means of income. She met other women who, like her, wanted to recover from the unspeakable horrors they had experienced. Together, they formed the community organization Golden Women Vision to provide economic skill development, shelter for women and children survivors of domestic abuse, and access to legal and medical assistance.

When the Women First team met our new grantee partners Golden Women Vision for the first time, the trauma and painful memories these women carried with them was clear to see. What was also evident was the hope. Through Women First’s funding, which gave them the flexibility to spend the dollars on organizational development and programmatic expenses, as well as access to our Capacity Building program, enabling them to develop a customized and long-term support plan they are now on their way to establishing their own collective business. Not only will this help them realize their dream of economic independence, but it will also create a safe space, where they can find community, self-confidence, and the time to recover from their traumatic histories. Women First is proud to be an early funder and partner of these resilient, strong women who refuse to allow the violence to continue and are using their empowerment as a vehicle for a peaceful and prosperous future.

At Women First, we believe that economic empowerment led by and for women is the key to gender equity. Our grantee partners work on a range of activities, from learning life skills, job skills and entrepreneurship, to building community support.

If you’re wondering how that works, we trust our grantees. We don’t go in with all the answers. We work as partners. We provide guidance, resources, and expertise to help them survive and grow.

Here are a few things you may not know about Women First:

• 80% of our current grantee partners receive their first funds from us
• 95% of our current grantee partners have severely limited access to funding (<$50,000 a year)
• 25% of our grants are going to organizations established less than 5 years ago

As you saw in our December mailing, Women First recently awarded opportunity grants to its first cohort of 20 grantee partners. You can read more about each of them, and our additional pilot grantee partners, on our new website: www.womenfirstfund.org.
What is the Monitoring & Evaluation Process at Women First?

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) at Women First is guided by a desire to better support our grantee partners in strengthening and delivering on their mission to promote women’s economic empowerment. Our MEL approach is grounded in our Theory of Change, that partnering long-term to support organization-driven capacity-building will promote stronger and more sustainable grassroots women-led organizations, and will accelerate their efforts to promote economic empowerment for women.

Women First engages closely with its grantee partners when it comes to MEL, as we see it as an opportunity for growth for many of these organizations. In addition to asking grantees to select from a menu of core indicators aligned with programmatic efforts, we also assess organizational strengthening in a few ways. The first is by developing a grassroots organizational capacity assessment tool (GrOCAT), which is administered to grantees throughout the partnership. Another is by asking grantees to develop and report progress against individualized milestones that are aligned with their own unique plans to build organizational capacity.

Board Member Spotlight: Christine Schmitz

Christine Schmitz joined Women First back in 1986 after being introduced to the organization through a member of AAUW. Our former Board President, Eileen Menton, asked Christine to join the Board, and because of her background in finance, she joined the Finance and Investment Committee, eventually becoming the Treasurer of Women First - her current position. Christine’s philanthropic involvement began in her early years giving back to the church and supporting local organizations in Maryland.

What attracted her to Women First was connecting with women on a global scale and knowing that her contribution could have even greater impact overseas. Christine talked to us about the great pleasure she receives from helping others, and as a financial professional, she wants people to know that charitable giving doesn’t have to be a complex process.

Christine is most excited about Women First’s new, transformational grant making model and extended partnership with our grantees. She is looking forward to seeing the data that will come from our monitoring and evaluation methods to prove our impact. Christine spoke to us about the other Women First Board members, “who bring so much knowledge to the table,” and how being on the Board offers her the opportunity to learn from such an interesting mix of women she might not otherwise interact with in her daily life. Christine’s term as Treasurer will end in 2020, but she promises to keep connected to Women First, which holds a place close to her heart. Christine lives with her husband, Bob, of 25 years and is the proud stepmother of daughter, Jenny. Many of you have seen Bob at Women First events over the years. Fun fact: Christine is a trained classic soprano singer, as well as a CPA!

U N I T E D N A T I O N S CSW64

Women First has been in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2005 and will be participating in the 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) that is planned to take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 9 to 20 March 2020, which will be a critical moment to work for increased global efforts and dedicated resources to accelerate achievement of gender equality. Women First will be organizing a small gathering for our delegates and other strategic partners during this event.