



# WHITAKER PEACE & DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE Newsletter Fall 2024



**FOREWORD FROM EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR CAROLINE DESCOMBRIS**



**EFFORTS TO SUPPORT SUDANESE REFUGEES  
IN KIRYANDONGO, UGANDA**



**EXPLORE WPDI'S LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS  
ACROSS THE WORLD**



**VOICES OF IMPACT SERIES:  
DANY PÉREZ CRUZ**



**ADVANCING ADVOCACY  
EFFORTS IN SOUTH SUDAN**



# Foreword

WPMI Executive Director, Caroline Descombris

Dear WPMI friends,

2024 has been a year of ambitious yet challenging initiatives for WPMI. Geopolitical upheaval in Sudan, causing a surge of refugees into South Sudan and Uganda, has emphasized the critical role of our peace development programs in maintaining stability in fragile regions. Reflecting on the local impact of these events strengthens our belief in the effectiveness and sustainability of our participative peacebuilding approach. We extend heartfelt thanks to our partners for their continued support, which makes our work possible.

With their support and the dedication of our teams, we've expanded our programs to new regions, empowered underprivileged communities, and advanced initiatives supporting women's socio-economic independence. For instance, we launched a new initiative in Uganda in collaboration with UN Women and Norway, assisting two refugee settlements in Adjumani. In South Sudan, we introduced the Women's Livelihood Program, reinforcing our commitment to gender equality and economic empowerment.

Business and entrepreneurship remain central to our peacebuilding strategy. In 2023, we created 320 businesses, bringing our total to 727 since 2017, with an impressive 94% survival rate for WPMI SMEs. These businesses provide sustainable economic foundations that transform communities and support lasting peace.

This year also saw the much-anticipated "Faces of Hope" Gala in September, New York City. The event honored our Youth Peacemakers, celebrated shared achievements, and renewed our collective commitment to peace and development.

Peace is precious, requiring nurturing and strong socio-economic foundations to endure. This is WPMI's mission, and we strive daily to achieve it. We are pleased to share our latest achievements in this update and invite you to join us on our global peace journey.

In Peace,

Caroline Descombris  
WPMI Executive Director





## **WPDI Efforts to Support Incoming Refugees from Sudan**

As the crisis in Sudan continues to force thousands people to flee their homes, WPDI is on the ground in Uganda, providing vital support to these refugees. Our efforts at the **Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement** are undertaken in synergy with those of our partners - the Office of the Prime Minister and the UN - to offer **immediate relief** and **long-term solutions**, helping refugees rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

### **Comprehensive Training Programs**

At the heart of our response is the Community Learning Center (CLC) in Kiryandongo provides refugees a safe space for learning. The training courses we offer - Peace and Conflict Resolution Education, Vocational Trainings, Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) and English language courses as well as other programs are tailored to the needs and aspirations of the residents. These programs are crucial for helping refugees navigate their new environment and access opportunities for personal and economic growth.





*"The Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, which hosts over 111,000 refugees, including approximately 31,500 from Sudan, faces significant challenges. Our FAL and English training programs are designed to address these challenges by providing essential language skills that facilitate integration into the host community. We currently have 458 refugees enrolled, 72 of whom have completed Level I, and the rest are progressing through Levels II and III. These courses improve communication, enhance employability, and enable refugees to participate more fully in their new society."*

**Patrick Owiny, WPDI Program Coordinator at the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement in Uganda**

Our collaboration with the **Office of the Prime Minister** is instrumental in the success of our programs. **Milly Nancy**, Refugee Welfare Committee Chairperson III, emphasizes:

*"WPDI's training initiatives have been transformative for the refugee community. By addressing language barriers and providing essential skills, WPDI has enabled refugees to engage more actively in community life. The support from WPDI has also strengthened our efforts to promote peaceful coexistence and social integration."*

## Support for Vulnerable Groups

WPDI prioritizes women and youth, some of the most vulnerable groups in the refugee settlement. Our programs provide targeted support for these groups through training in entrepreneurship, small grants, business development and conflict resolution education. This approach has led to the establishment of numerous small businesses within the settlement, creating economic opportunities and fostering a sense of empowerment among the refugee community.





## Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs

Recognizing the psychological impact of displacement, WPDI also provides trauma healing and psychosocial support. Our programs help refugees manage post-traumatic stress and integrate into their new surroundings. To date, over 1,200 Sudanese individuals have benefited from our trauma healing services, which are essential for their recovery and well-being.



## Advocacy and Community Dialogues

WPDI actively engages refugees through **advocacy campaigns** and **community dialogues**. These initiatives provide refugees a platform to voice their concerns and contribute to community decision-making. WPDI helps refugees to advocate for their needs and to participate meaningfully in their new communities by providing them a platform that serves to establish their presence in the public space as stakeholders in the life of the settlement.

Additionally, we organize training workshops in Conflict Resolution to community leaders, which is key for helping them better address the conflict that arise among their constituents, while helping them to improve their capacity to navigate the institutional environment of the settlement.



## Looking Ahead: Building a Sustainable Future in Kiryandongo

As we reflect on WPDI's impactful initiatives in the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, we remain committed to enhancing the lives of over 111,000 refugees from South Sudan and surrounding regions. Our recent projects, such as the playground and IT Lab at the Community Learning Center (CLC), exemplify our dedication to creating inclusive spaces that address the community's diverse needs. We aim to expand access to education and skills development, further empowering residents through in-person and online training opportunities.

Since 2020, we have equipped over 450 refugees with essential language skills through Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) and English programs, laying a solid foundation for self-sufficiency.

In the coming months, WPDI plans to enhance our monthly Peace Engagement Days, which foster unity between refugees and host communities through sports and cultural performances. These events are vital for promoting understanding and reducing conflict.

Our goal is to expand these gatherings, creating more opportunities for dialogue and collaboration. By prioritizing education, mental health, and sustainable livelihoods, WPDI is committed to providing immediate relief and building a resilient foundation for a peaceful future in Kiryandongo.

As we look ahead, our ongoing efforts will adapt to meet the community's evolving needs, ensuring that together, we pave the way for sustainable development and lasting peace.







## Peace and Prosperity Go Hand in Hand: Explore WPI Milestones in Economic Empowerment

WPI's Livelihood Initiative drives economic empowerment across **five countries** and **three continents**. This year, we've solidified our position as a catalyst for sustainable development, demonstrating the transformative power of vocational training and entrepreneurship in some of the world's most vulnerable communities.

WPI's Livelihoods Initiative goes beyond economic support; it's a transformative movement that is redefining local economies and helping communities break free from cycles of poverty and conflict. With every new business and every job created, we are paving the way for a future where peace and prosperity go hand in hand.



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Women Livelihood Program

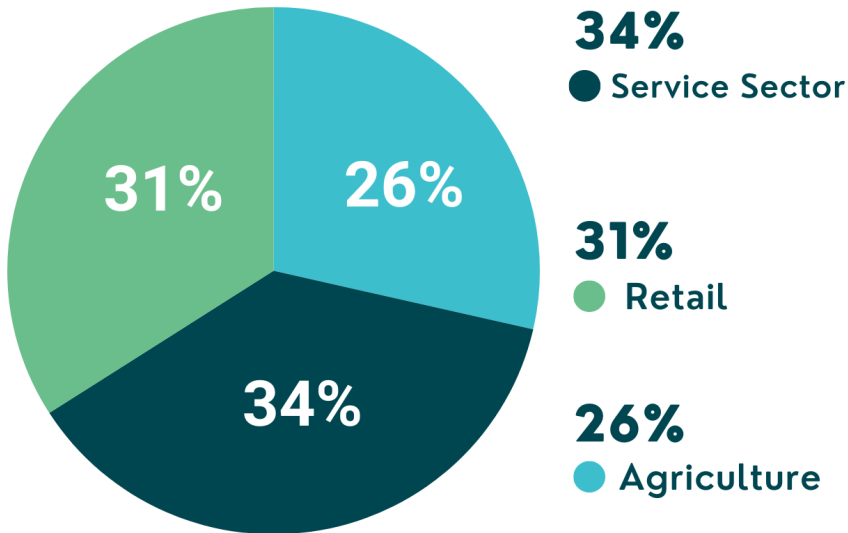
WORLD PEACE & DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE | L'OREAL UNILEVER WOMEN | UN-PAIDIAS | RCS



## A GLOBAL SURGE IN BUSINESS CREATION

WPDI's latest impact is nothing short of groundbreaking. In 2023, our efforts led to the creation of **320 new local businesses** across Africa, Latin America, and Europe—bringing the total to **727 active businesses worldwide**. This remarkable growth reflects our strategic focus on equipping individuals.

## A DIVERSE ECOSYSTEM OF SUCCESS







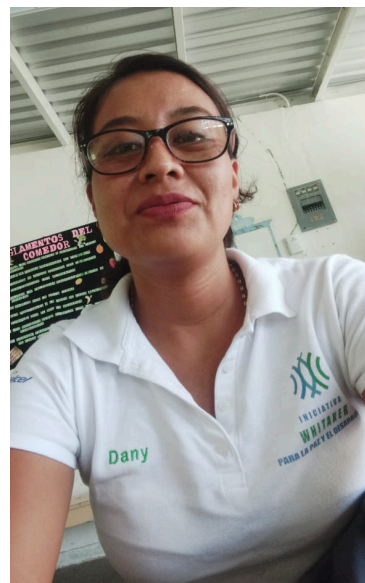
## Introducing the "Voices of Impact" Series

*Empowering Changemakers Shaping Communities and Driving Transformation*

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In our ongoing commitment to fostering peace and development, the **"Voices of Impact"** series celebrates the extraordinary individuals, who are true changemakers. These remarkable individuals drive WPDI's mission, hailing from diverse backgrounds and bringing unique stories. We share their journeys through written interviews, showcasing how they spearhead peacebuilding efforts, establish groundbreaking social enterprises, and make impactful contributions that embody WPDI's mission.

In this edition, we highlight the inspiring journey of **Dany Pérez Cruz, a Tzeltal Indigenous woman from Petlalcingo**, Chiapas. Through her work with WPDI, she has become a leader, educator, and entrepreneur, using her voice and skills to make a profound impact on her community.



## ***Here is Dany's story in her own words:***

**Interviewer:** "Can you tell us about your journey and how you initially became involved with WPDI?"

**Dany Pérez Cruz:** "I am a Tzeltal indigenous woman, and before I met WPDI, I collaborated with an organization in my community and was part of an art and culture collective. I knew nothing about peace and conflict, and what was happening around me seemed normal. I lived in fear of expressing myself and being heard. In 2018, I began my journey with WPDI as a Peacemaker. It was a challenge and a new experience that allowed me to teach more young people in my community about positive conflict resolution through theater. This work has allowed us to share this knowledge with other municipalities, impacting young people and even children."

**Interviewer:** "How has your involvement with WPDI affected your life and your community?"

**Dany Pérez Cruz:** "Currently, I continue disseminating small drops of learning to achieve a change in both my personal life and society. I am infinitely grateful to WPDI because they gave me the necessary tools to learn to be a leader, work collectively, create alliances, and share experiences. WPDI supported me with knowledge and seed capital to create my own social enterprise for making soaps, sweets, and artisanal chocolates based on honey. The project, integrated by 8 Tzeltal women, even included an apiary with 20 beehives."

**Interviewer:** "What challenges have you faced with your social enterprise, and how have you managed them?"

**Dany Pérez Cruz:** "Unfortunately, the project is not currently functioning as Petlalcingo ceased to be a safe place, and crime has worsened. Leaving my home and community has been a difficult process, but thanks to WPDI's support, I have been able to handle things more calmly. In these difficult moments, I realize that this is when I need to contribute the most to my community, and I know that at some point, I will resume my work within it."

**Interviewer:** "Looking back, what do you feel has been the most significant impact of your work with WPDI?"

**Dany Pérez Cruz:** "The positive impact on my community. The training that WPDI has given me, has been greatly useful in improving my personal life and the lives of many young people in my community."





## Advancing Advocacy Efforts in South Sudan

### *Strengthening Communities to Build Lasting Peace in South Sudan*

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Amid South Sudan's emergence as the world's youngest nation, facing significant geopolitical challenges and a history of conflict and instability, the WPDI plays a vital role in peacebuilding. The tireless dedication of the WPDI Staff in fostering dialogue and promoting peace has earned high praise from key figures in the region. **Hon. Gerald Francis, Minister of Peacebuilding for Central Equatoria State (CES)**, acknowledged WPDI's impact, stating:

*"WPDI has consistently demonstrated exceptional dedication to fostering peace in South Sudan. Their initiatives have created a platform for meaningful dialogue and have been instrumental in addressing long-standing conflicts. Their advocacy and work on the ground are invaluable to our collective efforts for peace."*



## Facilitating Crucial Dialogues

WPDI's advocacy efforts have been pivotal in addressing critical issues in South Sudan, such as land disputes in Juba. Through our facilitation of community dialogues, WPDI has brought together diverse stakeholders, including parliamentarians and local leaders, to confront these challenges. **Hon. Mary Sadia, a Member of Parliament in the CES Transitional Legislative Assembly**, emphasized the transformative effect of WPDI's advocacy, remarking:

*"The dialogue organized by WPDI was a turning point for our community. The governor of CES took immediate action, issuing a directive to halt land grabbing in response to the issues raised. WPDI's advocacy was pivotal in catalyzing this significant step towards justice."*

## Building Capacity for Peace

WPDI's efforts also focus on strengthening the capacity of local leaders and stakeholders in conflict resolution and governance. WPDI empowers parliament members, community leaders, and government officials to address conflicts more effectively by providing essential tools and training. **James Wani Dumo, Director of the State Ministry of Peacebuilding**, highlighted the value of this capacity-building initiative, stating:

*"WPDI's training on conflict resolution provided us with crucial insights and practical strategies. The comprehensive approach in these sessions has greatly enhanced our ability to address conflicts and promote peace within our communities."*







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## Thank you to our partners!

As we reflect on the progress and challenges of 2024 so far, we are deeply grateful for the continued support of our partners around the world.

Thanks to their unwavering commitment to peacebuilding, WPDI has been able to reach new regions, support vulnerable communities, and help create sustainable livelihoods through entrepreneurship.

Their partnership is vital to our success, and together, we are building lasting foundations for peace and a brighter future for those we serve. We thank them for standing with us.

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