

Beyond Their Circumstances

Stories of young women taking charge
of their futures

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Introduction

Friend,

More than 80 percent of young people support women’s equality with men, according to a recent survey of youth worldwide by IYF and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Gender equality is Sustainable Development Goal #5 and one of the biggest imperatives for the 21st century, but it involves much more than answering a question on a survey. Unlike any other SDG, realizing equality means changing both the world around us and the landscape within us.

In this ebook, we introduce you to 12 young women—and one young man—who are making their own opportunities and driving change in a dozen countries. This collection of posts originally published on the IYF blog also includes critical lessons we have learned about supporting women’s economic success, whether on a construction site, in an office, at a marketplace, or as the head of a business. Examining young women’s leadership, technical and vocational education, entrepreneurship, and life skills training, this ebook offers insight into the realities of young women around the world and opportunities for continued progress.

Here, young leaders share their perspective on being women working to accomplish seemingly impossible goals. You’ll learn from social entrepreneur Mowmita in Bangladesh about the pushback she has experienced because of her gender and how persistence has fueled her success. You will also meet women owners of small and microenterprises, including Fortune in Zimbabwe, whose training has supported her in exceeding her own expectations and achieving economic independence.

We also know that technical and vocational education prepares women for jobs that tend to pay better and offer more long-term career growth. As young women like Linnet in Kenya and

Raquel in Mexico gain the skills to pursue jobs in construction or automotive repair, we must impel and help employers to become more women-friendly. At the same time, we must support these young pioneers to internally fortify themselves for the inevitable challenges that lie ahead.

In every field, young women benefit from life skills training that boosts self-confidence, goal-setting, and conflict management. This learning prepares them for success in their personal and professional lives, including enabling someone like 18-year-old Lutfiati in Indonesia to prove skeptical employers wrong about hiring youth.

These young women, like countless others, are making a conscious choice to move beyond their circumstances and their pasts. As one young Algerian put it, “We’re learning to not make excuses, but to make a plan.” Visit the IYF blog to read even more stories of how young women—and men—are positive forces for change and growth in their communities.

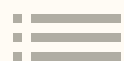
We are honored and delighted to share this ebook with you. These stories are like a sneak peek into a future world with equality—a world that young people are creating right now.

Warm regards,

Ritu Sharma

Director, Global Center for Gender and Youth

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FOUNDATION



LEADERSHIP

Women, Don't Apologize for Being Strong

By Lisa Jones

MARCH 8, 2016

When I first heard Nafula speak about her work, I was struck by the confidence, conviction, and authority of her words. As someone who feels more comfortable expressing herself with a pen and paper than in front of a crowd, I was in awe of her ability to powerfully advocate for gender equality—connecting emotions with data and linking personal experiences with the everyday reality of millions.

My team at YouthActionNet® selected Nafula Wafula as a 2015 Laureate Global Fellow for her work in empowering youth to fight gender-based violence in Kenya, a country where one in four women ages 15 to 19 reports losing her virginity by force. “We work to change mentalities, behaviors, and policies,” says Nafula, founder of SEMA, meaning “speak out” in Swahili.

SEMA has trained more than 5,000 youth from secondary schools and universities to fight gender-based violence. These mobilizers, as SEMA calls them, are equipped to host informative workshops and events, and



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other: fear and shame.”

they also staff ‘gender desks’ in communities ranging from slums to universities, where victims can report abuse and get the help they need.

As I spent the training week alongside Nafula and 19 other change-makers, I had the chance to better understand the origin of her ineffable conviction. I learned there was a time when she did not feel as hopeful or strong.

“As I young woman, I had grown to embrace two emotions above any other: fear and shame.”

Nafula bravely shared that she is a survivor of gender-based violence herself, and has navigated an arduous journey to become a woman with the strength to empower others. She says she decided to rebel and break cultural taboos that discourage dialogue on these issues.

The confidence Nafula transmits is the physical manifestation of the responsibility she has taken on to empower other survivors whose voices have been silenced. Every time she speaks about her work, she knows the stakes are high, as if each opportunity is a chance to protect one more person from gender-based violence. And it is.

“If I want to see a world where girls are speaking out, where women are respected and not abused, then I have to be that change,” she explains in a leadership lessons interview. “That’s what keeps me going.”

For Nafula, and thousands of other young people leading social change ventures around the world, being a social entrepreneur is not a career; it’s a way of life. From speaking up against gender stereotypes in everyday conversation to seeking out opportunities to incorporate men and boys in the fight against gender-based violence, Nafula is an advocate from the moment her feet hit the floor each morning. For example, I wasn’t surprised when I saw her Facebook post celebrating how she convinced a

national newspaper to formally apologize and publish her response after they distributed a story condoning sexual violence.

But her success doesn’t mean there aren’t still moments of doubt. “Each morning, I look in the mirror, and I remind myself, Don’t apologize for being strong.”

This is a message Nafula shares often in her workshops—not because she has mastered it herself, but because she hopes that the more women she can get to repeat it, the less and less it will need to be said.

Today, on International Women’s Day, we are called to raise awareness about the inequality faced by half the world’s population—whether that’s a pay gap, respect gap, or gap in health and safety. But as a team member of an initiative that has supported hundreds of young female leaders over the past 15 years, I also feel compelled to take

“If I want to see a world where **girls are speaking out**, where **women are respected** and not abused, then I have to **be that change.**”

this day to celebrate the innovative steps our youth have already taken to shape a more just future.

I am fortunate to have the opportunity to learn and grow alongside strong women leaders supported by YouthActionNet, like Nafula, Queen, Carolina, and Peggy. Each has taught me something new about what it means to stand up for your beliefs, pursue your passions, and help others along the way. By sharing their stories, I hope to increase awareness for how each of us—regardless of gender—has a role to play in creating a world where we all see potential when looking in the mirror.

Lisa Jones is a Program Manager for IYF’s YouthActionNet initiative.

Photo by Leonardo Párraga, 2015 Laureate Global Fellow

Young Leaders Connect in Fight Against Gender-Based Violence

By Kim R. McCormick

JANUARY 7, 2016

The three don't seem like they met only days before. The way Ayaz, Nafula, and Queen are quick to hug and tease one another, I'd think these young leaders were longtime friends. But, really, they only just found one another when they reached Washington, DC, for the week-long YouthActionNet® Laureate Global Fellows retreat.

Ayaz Hassan, Nafula Wafula, and Queen Kgeresi got along immediately not only because they'd found in YouthActionNet a community of passionate and dynamic young people, but also because these three are working to combat the same multifaceted global problem: gender-based violence (GBV). Each is drawing from his or her own knowledge, skills, and background to empower women with renewed dignity, confidence, and options.

In an estimate that's conservative compared to some national polls, the United Nations reports that, on average globally, 1 in 3 women experiences physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. This frightening and deplorable statistic is compounded by the fact that less than 40



“It’s like *I’m* talking!”
says Ayaz. “We have
the same problem.”

percent of women who experience violence seek any form of help.

In response to local need in Iraq, Ayaz started Asuda’s Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Women’s Protection Project, which works to protect the personal rights of women from Kurd and Syrian refugee communities. Within Strategic Applications International

in Kenya, Nafula founded SEMA, whose strategy includes pairing high school students with university student mentors, facilitating development of an app for reporting GBV, and training thousands of youth about GBV and gender quality. In Botswana, Queen drew on her own background as a counselor to create The Dream Hub, which has reached hundreds of women with psychological support, counseling, and job skills training.

Even for the two young women from Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 2,000 miles normally lie between them. Despite geographic distance and cultural differences, Ayaz, Nafula, and Queen share the same passion—and, more frequently than not, confront very similar and inexcusable challenges.

When Ayaz mentions a mural project, Nafula chimes in and excitedly describes something similar her organization is working on, called Talking Walls. Before commissioning local young artists, they consult with youth in slums to choose relevant subject matter. “For example, they pointed out that there are no street lights, so when girls go out at night to use the toilet, they’re getting attacked,” says Nafula, describing the inspiration for one mural.

It’s Ayaz’s turn to interject. Leaning forward in his seat, with a hand reaching across the table to Nafula, he says, “It’s like I’m talking! We have the same problem.”

As the conversation goes on, each briefly offers the story of his or her personal encounter with GBV, experiences that at different points they’ve hidden from those closest to them. Queen says she told her parents within the last few years. Nafula explains that her family had only very recently learned of her attack because she had told her sister, who told her parents. Ayaz says he has never discussed his childhood assault with his parents, even though he describes them as open-minded and accepting. “You are so ashamed,” says Queen, “you want to believe that it didn’t happen.”

Hearing their experiences, I ask how they think they were able to move forward and reach their leadership positions. Queen says that, for her, a mentor at her

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university and a psychologist helped her heal. In contrast, Nafula says she did only a few days of mandatory counseling. “My work is my therapy,” she says, as Ayaz nods in understanding.

With their personal strength and individual skillsets, these three are uniquely equipped to support others for whom gender-based violence has been a tragic reality. While it’s unsettling and frustrating to know that the same crimes are perpetrated and the same challenges persist across continents, young leaders like Ayaz, Nafula, and Queen offer hope for change. And knowing that they’ve found one another makes me even more hopeful.

Kim R. McCormick is IYF’s Editorial Manager.

Young Women Leaders Share Challenges Beyond Glass Ceiling

Sheila Kinkade

SEPTEMBER 29, 2015

A wealth of data compiled by the [No Ceilings](#) campaign reflects significant gains—and gaps—in the status of women and girls over the last two decades. One of the persistent challenges cited is a [dearth in women executives](#).

Over the last 15 years, IYF's [YouthActionNet®](#) initiative has trained and supported over 1,330 young social entrepreneurs in 90 countries. In 2014, only a third of applicants to its [Laureate Global Fellows](#) program were women; the same holds true for its [local fellowship programs across Africa](#). The reasons for this imbalance are many and complex and include limited educational opportunities for young women in many countries and societal norms that emphasize their role in caretaking over risk-taking.

As important as whether women achieve leadership roles is what happens when they get there. Many of YouthActionNet's female fellows continue to encounter gender biases that hinder their progress in achieving important goals. Among the obstacles they cite is being



“When I started my organization ... people didn’t expect a woman to be anything else but a wife and mother.”

recognized—and heard—by male decision-makers in their countries, despite their having earned numerous accolades abroad. The experience of four of these young women is captured in a new [Leadership Lessons](#) video series.

“When I started my organization, most of the time people didn’t expect a woman to be anything else but a wife and mother,” recalls [Mowmita Basak Mow](#), Founder

and President of the Center for Leadership Assistance and Promotion (CLAP) Foundation, which equips young volunteers with the skills needed to build a more inclusive Bangladesh. “They couldn’t see women as leaders.”

Today, four years after launching CLAP, Mowmita has achieved an impressive track record—mobilizing and training more than 900 youth to volunteer with marginalized populations, while advocating for the rights of the transgender minority in Bangladesh. Earlier this year, the 24-year-old was awarded a prestigious Asia Foundation Development Fellowship; yet, despite her accomplishments, Mowmita continues to encounter resistance, particularly among male authority figures.

“Most of the time I feel like I’m not being taken seriously,” she shares in a video interview, Changing Perceptions of Women Leaders. “I’m often asked to bring my male team members ... to talk about certain things.” The best way to be heard, she advises, is to generate results and communicate these via the media and other channels.

For Mariana Gonzalez, earning a degree in engineering offered little help in gaining respect within a male-dominated field. As Co-founder of Iluméxico, Mariana helped to build—and scale—a social enterprise that now provides solar energy to remote rural

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communities in 11 Mexican states benefiting more than 13,500 people. Success aside, she faced an uphill climb to earn the respect of men in positions of authority. When she met with government officials, their response was often, ‘You’re the one who’s presenting? You’re not with someone else?’

In Being a Woman in a Man’s Profession, Mariana counsels women leaders to continue ‘showing up’ and to make your voice heard. Even if decision-makers don’t appear to be listening at the time, chances are your message is getting through. “They’re going to notice you’re important,” she affirms.

These young women leaders emphasize the importance of relationship building, patience, and persistence in gaining trust and respect among male gatekeepers and decision-makers. By modeling new forms of leadership, they’re paving the way for their younger peers to express their voices, creativity, and compassion as social innovators.

Sheila Kinkade is IYF’s Director of Storytelling.

In Palestine, A Young Woman Channels Her Skills to Help Others

Sheila Kinkade

APRIL 14, 2015

Manal Abu Ali graduated from the Arab American University of Jenin with a major in Management Information Systems; yet like thousands of her peers, she realized that her years of study offered no guarantee of a job. Roughly 44 percent of young Palestinians are unemployed, half of whom hold university degrees.

Her determination lead the 22-year-old to enroll in the Youth Earn project offered through Partners for Sustainable Development with support from the International Youth Foundation (IYF). Through the program, she benefited from life skills instruction based on IYF's Passport to Success® curriculum, along with training in entrepreneurship and how to develop a community service project. The experience equipped Manal with the knowledge and skills she needed to pursue her passion.

"On a personal level, it [the training] gave me the confidence I needed to be more social and outspoken," she says. "Professionally, the training challenged my thoughts,



“On a personal level, it [the training] gave me the confidence I needed to be more social and outspoken.”

and allowed me to tap into my creativity.” Although currently employed part-time at an electronics store, Manal is driven to provide other youth in her community with opportunities to gain the skills she learned.

To reach her goal, in late 2014, Manal, along with 20 other youth, launched a new social enterprise, the Palestinian Entrepreneurship and Creativity Women’s

Organization (PECWO). Its goal: to train women with the skills needed to enter the labor market and channel their abilities and entrepreneurial spirit into money-making ideas for a better livelihood. The organization currently engages 100 volunteers, who network with partners, provide trainings and support, and organize events and activities. PECWO conducts roughly 10 activities per month in Jenin and surrounding communities through partnerships with 20 local businesses and NGOs. To date, the organization has leveraged 60,000 NIS from local organizations and businesses in addition to securing a fully-furnished, free-of-charge office space.

So far, 50 youth have benefited from PECWO activities, with an additional 35 young people being trained in partnership with Palestinian Vision (PalVision or "Ru'ya") through its Find a Job is a Job program. PECWO also facilitated paid internships with Ru'ya for 10 youth and partners with local organizations to organize events where youth can promote their homemade products and contract their peers to help out in areas like marketing.

Manal and the PECWO team seek to address the high rate of unemployment among Palestinian youth through strengthening their skills and connecting them to opportunities. "I know how hard it is to find a job and I know what the labor market requires," says Manal. "By establishing PECWO, I created an opportunity for myself

"I know how hard it is to find a job and I know what the labor market requires. By establishing PECWO, I created an opportunity for myself and others not only to volunteer, but to share the skills we gained for the benefit of our community."

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Manal is one of 839 youth to benefit from entrepreneurship training through IYF's Youth Entrepreneurship Development initiative, supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission to the West Bank and Gaza.

TECHNICAL & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

3 Lessons for Increasing & Sustaining Women's Participation in Vocational Training

Amanda Ortega

SEPTEMBER 1, 2016

"I never thought I could work as a mechanic, especially not on such large trucks!" says 21-year-old Raquel in Mexico. Trained in a traditionally male trade, this EquipYouth (EY) graduate is working at Grupo Raga, a network of tire and service centers, and thriving.

Getting Raquel and other young women to train for jobs in the industrial sector was not easy, but it was a key goal of EY in Mexico and Peru. Supported by the Caterpillar's philanthropic organization, Caterpillar Foundation, EY is a NEO-associated project that provides life and technical skills training to vulnerable youth.

Through our partners CONALEP Nuevo Leon and Tecsup, participants are prepared for jobs in Mexico and Peru's growing industrial sectors, including manufacturing, production, and energy.

Despite a higher earning and promotion potential in these fields, we found that young women in Monterrey and Lima were not accessing these jobs. In fact, they were up to three times more likely to be unemployed



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than their male peers. EY sought to bridge this gap, but along the way we encountered plenty of additional barriers that prevented young women from accessing and completing training. Below are three of our many lessons learned and key examples of how we addressed the challenges that arose:

1. Understand young women's different motivations and incentives for joining an employability program.

Low-income young women have many reasons for seeking training that leads to a job, and many factors—including pressure on their time due to household responsibilities and a lack of information—can deter their enrollment. Young women want to feel they are investing their limited time in a way that allows them to reach their individual goals.

For example, in Peru we learned that young women 18 to 22 who were not mothers were interested in finding a short-term job that would allow them to save money to eventually pursue higher education. Meanwhile, young women who were mothers or were older than 22 sought a career-launching job with flexible hours that would enable them to support their families. Wanting to appeal to both groups, EY was marketed through both lenses, focusing on one over another depending on the recruitment site. For the latter group of women, we highlighted the more technical training courses, like warehouse management or mechanics, due to their higher wages, growth potential, and flexible hours. For all recruitment, we shared examples of project alumni who had progressed through each path, the varied training schedules, and the financial assistance provided for meals and transportation, and we reviewed the overall benefits of post-training employment.

“I feel more confident, I have a skill I never thought possible, and I can even repair my own newly bought car—without anyone’s help—thanks to the training and my job.”

2. Define strategies to address the external constraints faced by young women.

A significant constraint for young women in Mexico and Peru was a lack of support from their spouses or family, whether financially, emotionally, or practically, in terms of responsibilities. This isolation caused women to ultimately not enroll in the program or to drop out prematurely.

In Mexico, we had several occasions where a young woman was interested in pursuing a career in electricity or automotive mechanics, but her spouse or family forbade her. They based those decisions on a perception of these trades as “men’s work” and that a job would take away from

the woman’s household work. In the effort to mitigate this lack of support, EY Mexico began inviting family members to orientation sessions to share more information about the program and ease anxieties, raise awareness about the economic gains of working in this sector and having an additional breadwinner in the household, and highlight past female participant success stories to show how women can thrive in these roles.

3. Create support networks that include men and provide role models for young women participants.

Role models influence young women’s career aspirations, career choice, and attitudes towards jobs and

help fight self-imposed stereotypes. Meanwhile, fostering strong support networks among the participants can help young women overcome challenges during training or on the job and encourage their retention in a program.

In Peru, the majority of the youth came from single-income households where the father or another male relative was the head of household and where there were few examples of adult women with full-time formal sector jobs. In addition to having female teachers facilitate the male-dominated technical courses, EY Peru provided individualized mentorship to advise young women on how to navigate their home life and work life. Training cohorts were mixed gender, and each group formed close bonds through organized soccer and volleyball events and peer-to-peer tutoring. EY then placed two or three youth at each company, meaning they had one another to lean on and were able to coordinate travel. This support network was especially key for young women placed in largely male companies, because the young men from EY had become their allies.

There is still plenty more to do to encourage young women to seize opportunities in the industrial sector. From Raquel's experience, we know these jobs can boost a young woman's resilience and independence; change

her view of what she can do; and contribute to reshaping norms around "women's work." The successful mechanic says, "I feel more confident, I have a skill I never thought possible, and I can even repair my own newly bought car—without anyone's help—thanks to the training and my job."

Amanda Ortega is Program Manager, Latin America & the Caribbean.

In Kenya, The Woman Who Plans to be Foreman

Elizabeth Wanja

JUNE 13, 2016

As I watched Linnet go from mixing sand, cement, and water as an assistant mason to setting large metal bars as a steel fixer, I witnessed her breaking down the barriers that confine women to traditional roles. This 23-year-old in a hard hat recently graduated from IYF's Sport for Kenyan Youth Employment (SKYE) initiative and now draws an income that makes her the family breadwinner.

Linnet found her way into the construction sector in a less than obvious way: by following her love of soccer, or football as we call it in Kenya. When Linnet moved to Nairobi, she proudly joined a football team operated by IYF partner Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA). That's where she heard about SKYE, which with partner Barclays Bank PLC delivers sport-based work readiness training and uses an on-the-job model to equip youth with nationally in-demand skills.

Construction is a growing field in Kenya, but employers struggle to find skilled workers. Many women seem apathetic to the opportunities it presents. While most of



“I have always been self-motivated and didn’t feel the need to listen to what other ladies said.”

Linnet’s friends were reluctant to get involved with SKYE, she was among the first to sign up. “I have always been self-motivated and didn’t feel the need to listen to what other ladies said about construction sites,” Linnet says. “These women tell me the work is more suitable for men because it involves carrying heavy construction materials such as stones and cement and also climbing tall buildings.”

The way Linnet took advantage of the opportunity to train in a promising sector, even though it's one dominated by men, made me think of something the SKYE trainees repeated during their graduation. Sisi ma youths hatuchagui job, skills na opportunity ndizo tunakosa translates from Swahili to mean "as youths, we are not choosy in pursuing jobs, we only lack skills and opportunities."

A key component of SKYE is Passport to Success®, which provides young people with critical life skills such as teamwork and time management. For this initiative, lessons have been adapted for MYSA to teach using soccer tenets and the soccer field, to make the learning more engaging. Ultimately, what participants learn on the pitch prepares them to excel in the construction jobs they're training for with IYF's other SKYE partner, Arc Skills.

"The industry requires traits such as how to communicate, manage your anger, and best work as a team," says Linnet. "Without proper time management and commitment, it would be quite hard to retain a job at a site." Linnet says her newly sharpened life skills played a major role in securing her current placement and keeping it for the past two months. She says she's more confident and resilient in her approach to life and work after SKYE.

Although Linnet says she never considered a career in the sector when she was growing up, the hands-on

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experience through SKYE has catalyzed her passion.

"I am proud to have a skill that is a source of my livelihood, because most of the young women only engage in collecting firewood and fetching water, among other roles with no financial compensation," she says.

Linnet earns a weekly wage of 2,100 Kenyan shillings, which is roughly the national average income. It covers her basic needs, and she sends the rest of her earnings to her three brothers and a sister in her hometown, Machakos, an agriculture-based community southeast of Nairobi.

Now, Linnet plans to train to become a foreman. Recognizing the many opportunities the construction industry offers, she also intends to mentor and motivate

other young unemployed women to consider working in the sector. The rarely smiling young woman confesses with a haughty laughter that she can only see herself growing in the construction industry.

Elizabeth Wanja is Project Manager, SKYE.

Proving Technical Training Isn't Just for Men

Ekaterina Prokofyevna Boyko

NOVEMBER 24, 2015

The United Nations recently released The World's Women 2015, a statistics-based publication with a chapter dedicated to women's education. As summarized in this infographic, women are “clearly underrepresented in fields related to science, engineering, manufacturing, and construction.” This post was written by a young woman who participated in the first phase of our EquipYouth initiative, through which we've been working to connect young people around the world with critical technical and life skills training.

My name is Ekaterina, I'm from Russia, and I've always dreamed of getting a technical education. When I started to look for the right training facility, I visited numerous open houses. Finally I chose Professional College № 89 (later renamed “Water Resources College”). I chose to train to be an operator of processing pumps and compressors.

At the beginning, I didn't know much about this profession, and I thought it was just for men. But when



“At the beginning, I didn't know much about this profession, and I thought it was just for men.”

our studies started, there were more young women than young men in our group. As I learned more, I started to understand how interesting this job is and how relevant it is for St. Petersburg.

I was taught by very skilled teachers, who conducted classes through EquipYouth. We had specialized computer classes, where we made calculations and

mockups, and we visited a pumping plant that is equipped with the latest technology and supports life-sustaining activities in St. Petersburg.

I also represented my college in professional skills competitions in the field of water supply and disposal, and I won various prizes thanks to the technical skills I developed during the EquipYouth lessons. At the end of the academic year we were sent for hands-on training as interns at the water supply and waste water treatment plant. It was my first experience working as a team member, and I had a chance to apply other skills I developed thanks to EquipYouth.

After the internship, I graduated with honors and I was offered a job as the 3rd class pump station operator at the water supply and waste water treatment plant. Then, I entered the State Architecture and Construction University, studying to become a Water Supply and Water Disposal Engineer. I have participated in additional skill competitions, including winning first prize for “The Best Pump Equipment Operator.”

Everything I have reached so far would not have been impossible without the skills and knowledge that I developed participating in EquipYouth. And I am not going to stop where I am now.

Ekaterina Prokofyevna Boyko is an EquipYouth beneficiary.

“Everything I have reached so far would not have been impossible without the **skills and knowledge that I developed** participating in EquipYouth.”

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

3 Lessons for Fostering the Growth of Young Women Entrepreneurs

Joel Adriance

MARCH 17, 2016

At first glance, exceptional data can often appear quite ordinary.

For example, in 2015, slightly more young women than men applied to our national YouthActionNet® institute in Mexico, Premio UVM para el Desarrollo Social. To be specific, 51 percent of the 174 fellowship applications we received came from 18 to 29-year-old women entrepreneurs who founded social ventures that are taking on significant challenges across Mexico in areas like health, education, and the environment.

This figure, collected as part of YouthActionNet's efforts to gather and share high-quality data, takes on new meaning when we place it in context. In 2015, about 40 percent of applications to our YouthActionNet institutes in Chile, Peru, Costa Rica, and Honduras came from young women. Our Laureate Global Fellowship, which draws candidates from over 90 countries around the world, received 32 percent of its 2015 applications from young women. In the same period, young women



Women in Europe and Latin America make up just 29 and 15 percent of entrepreneurs, respectively.

comprised an average of just 21 percent of applicants to our institutes in Africa.

These figures reflect a larger trend. According to a report from the European Parliament and another from the MIF and Ernst & Young, women in Europe and Latin America make up just 29 and 15 percent of entrepreneurs, respectively. These figures highlight how rare it is to have a

majority of young women entrepreneurs in any pool.

So, what might have caused such an exceptional result in our Mexico case? Are there lessons we can learn about how to foster the growth of young women entrepreneurs?

After digging deeper into the data on our 2015 Mexican application pool and consulting our Mexican program staff, partners, and alumni, I can offer three preliminary observations:

1. It's still not easy.

When I shared this data with women leaders and entrepreneurs in Mexico, the most common response I received was a mixture of surprise and skepticism. They shared stories about how challenging it's been for them to launch their ventures, and statistics on how far Mexico still has to go in its fight for gender equity.

Responses to a question in our 2015 national fellowship application, which asked applicants to qualify the level of support that their venture had received from community institutions, reaffirmed this perception. Whereas 55 percent of male applicants signaled that they had received either "some support" or "a lot of support" from these institutions, 57 percent of female applicants signaled that they had received either "no support" or "little support." The key takeaway for me is that even where we see some measure of success, there is still a great need for dedicated work to reverse structural

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inequities, change cultural norms, and support the resilience and perseverance of woman entrepreneurs.

2. There's a rising tide.

While my local experts had difficulty pinpointing specific policies or programs that they could link to this outcome, they did observe how Mexico has changed in larger ways in the last 20 to 30 years in terms of opportunities and roles for women. One example is the near gender parity that now exists with regards to women's participation in higher education. Another is the ways in which high rates of male migration have led to

new roles and responsibilities for women, particularly in rural communities.

When we look at the data in our 2015 application pool, we see very similar levels of educational attainment between male and female applicants, and no significant differences between the issue areas that their projects address. These similarities seem to indicate that, as more opportunities open up to women in a society, there may be a corresponding positive shift in the number of women who see entrepreneurship as a viable role or activity.

3. Good mentors are critical.

One of the few questions that produced a significant difference in responses between our 2015 men and women candidates in Mexico asked about the factors that had motivated them to launch their social ventures. It turned out that women were much more likely than men (a +25 percentage point difference) to talk about the inspiration they had received from a mentor or leader. For initiatives like YouthActionNet, where mentoring is one of our core intervention strategies, this result seems to reinforce the critical role that good mentors can play in helping more young women become entrepreneurs.

Special thanks to Sandra Herrera, Mariana Gonzalez, and Catalina Ruiz-Navarro for their insights on women and entrepreneurship in Mexico.

Joel Adriance is Director of Training & Learning, YouthActionNet.

As more opportunities open up to women in a society, there may be a corresponding positive shift in the number of women who see entrepreneurship as a viable role or activity.

Telling a New Story of Zimbabwe's Youth

Sheila Kinkade

FEBRUARY 25, 2015

Growing up as a young girl in Zimbabwe, Fortune Sazola got the impression women weren't meant to be entrepreneurs. Now a successful poultry farmer, Fortune and the Zimbabwe:Works (Z:W) program that helped her identify and reach her goals, are dispelling popular stereotypes of what the nation's youth can achieve. Through Z:W, Fortune received life skills and entrepreneurship training, along with access to financing, to start her business. She is one of more than 8,500 youth reached through the IYF program—so far.

Initially funded through its first phase by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Z:W offers unemployed youth, ages 16 to 35, a menu of options, including life skills training, entrepreneurship development, access to finance, and civic leadership opportunities. Recognizing that there is no magic bullet in solving the nation's youth livelihood needs, the program pursues an integrated, holistic approach firmly rooted in developing the capacity of local partners to deliver services.



“As a girl child, I did not think I would be able to set up an income-generating project. I thought this was for men and boys only.”

Now entering a second phase, the program has brought together USAID, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the Embassy of Sweden in a dynamic partnership to expand these services to thousands more young Zimbabweans. Over the next three years, IYF and its partners will provide increased economic opportunities for youth—with a particular focus on young Zimbabwean women—by creating improved pathways for young people to get

jobs, access financial services, and start their own enterprises.

In the video below, watch as Fortune and Talent Tapera, another Z:W graduate, now successfully employed, share what they have achieved through the program.



“This kind of agribusiness is truly transformational for me and my family. I can feed my two children and pay school fees for them. I have even bought a car which I also use for delivering chickens to butcheries and other customers.”

How This Young Entrepreneur Revived Her Family Business

Sheila Kinkade

SEPTEMBER 22, 2015

When she was a young girl, Pratibha Shrivastav and her family moved to Delhi from their home in rural India. Living in the city gave her the opportunity to become the first member of her family to graduate from secondary school, but it took a toll on the family's source of income, her father's leather crafting business.

"I used to tutor other students and run errands for neighbors," says Pratibha, 23, of her efforts to contribute to her family's livelihood. While training to become a clothing designer, she realized her talents would be best spent reviving her father's struggling business.

With support from [Young Entrepreneurs \(YE\)](#)—an initiative of IYF and [The MasterCard Center for Inclusive Growth](#)—Pratibha did just that. In addition to receiving one of the over 500 loans disbursed through YE, Pratibha worked closely with a mentor to rebuild, rebrand, and redesign her family's business.

Over the last three years, YE has provided 1,100 youth, ages 15 to 29, in Delhi and Mumbai with life skills, business,



and financial training, along with mentoring and access to finance to launch or expand small businesses.

"Young Entrepreneurs honed my potential and taught me to encourage potential in others," she says. "I no longer dream, but can see our business doing well."

Hear more of her story in the new video [Young Entrepreneurs: They Call Me Pratibha](#).

LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

What Do Algerian Young Women & Oprah Have in Common?

Linda Wafi

JANUARY 5, 2016

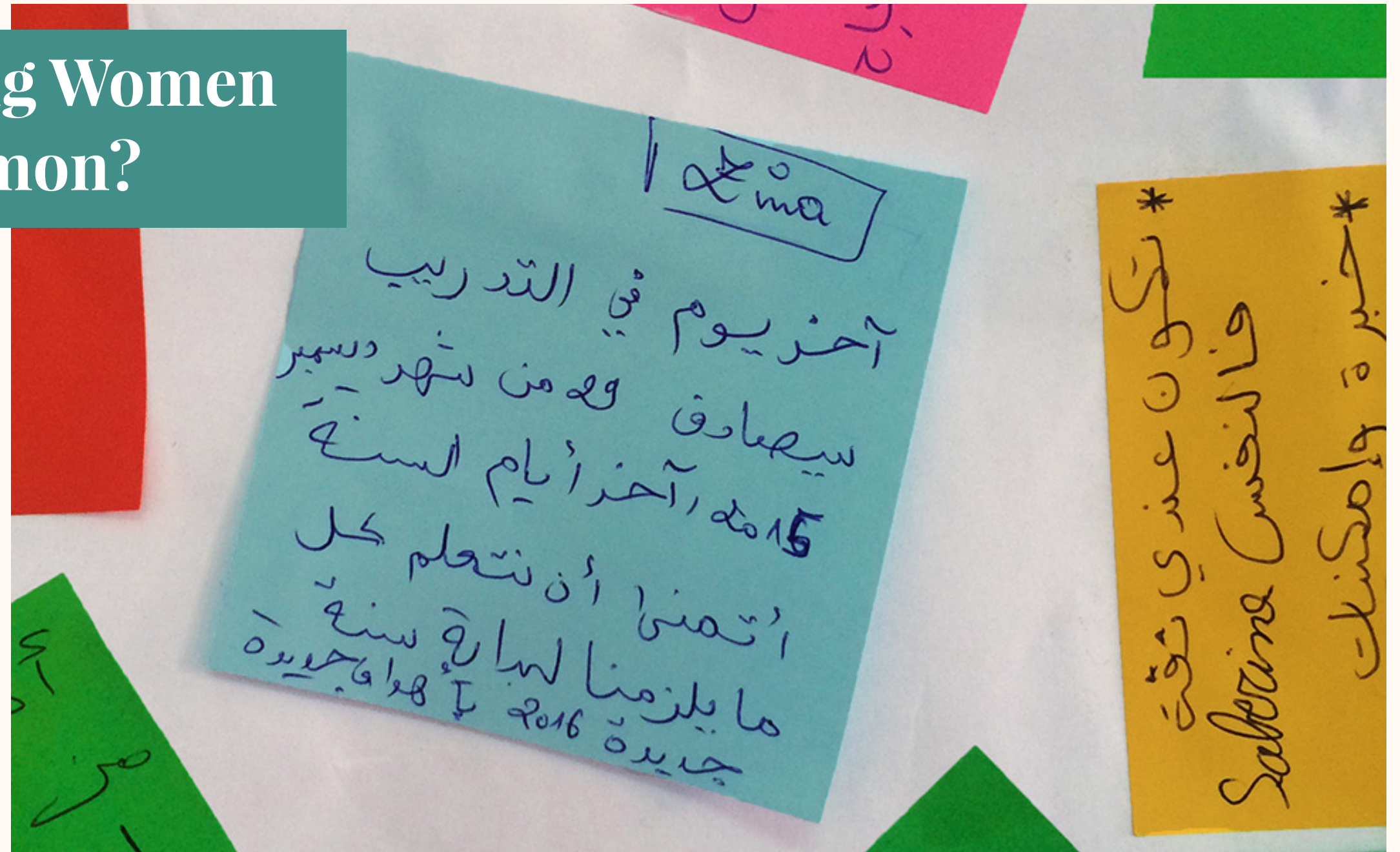
"She grew up in poverty, just like me!"

"She faced a lot of personal challenges when she was younger, just like me!"

"She had to believe in herself even when she had no one to believe in her, just like me!"

Not exactly the topic of discussion you'd expect to hear youth discuss at a correctional facility, yet a group of young women participating in a life skills workshop continue to list all the things that they have in common with one of the world's most successful media moguls. We are in the western Algerian city of Oran, attending a Passport to Success® (PTS) workshop organized by IYF and local implementing partner Association Santé Sidi El-Houari (SDH).

While PTS is usually used to help young job seekers develop positive life and work-readiness competencies, here this group of young women is using the curriculum to develop skills that can help them regain confidence in themselves and rebuild their lives. The class includes



“She faced a lot of personal challenges when she was younger, just like me!”

women as young as 15 who have a history of drug abuse or involvement with gangs or who have who fled their homes and feel they don't belong anywhere. The PTS training is the first personal development programming the facility is offering.

Today's lesson is “Developing a Life Plan,” which is proving to be very appropriate for these young women,

who had almost lost all hope in a second chance at life. The participants go through a series of interactive activities to learn about the different stages of setting goals and developing a plan to achieve them, and then they regroup and discuss the challenges and the best ways to overcome them.

“We keep bringing up Oprah because everyone knows how successful she is, but she is also someone who faced a lot of obstacles both personally and professionally,” says one of the participants. “Through this workshop we’re learning to not make excuses but to make a plan, and the world is full of examples of people who were able to overcome adversities and rebuild their lives,” she adds.

This training is part of the IDMAJ initiative in Algeria, which aims to expand opportunities for young Algerians in employment, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement. Through four implementing partners, IDMAJ has reached 800 youth in disadvantaged communities in remote parts of the country, including the underserved highlands and Saharan regions. Now, within this correctional facility in Oran, IYF is able to reach vulnerable youth who are usually unable to re-integrate in society or the job market because the stigma they face and their inability to access training such as PTS.

Sitting here with these young women and hearing about their plans, the setting becomes less relevant, and I

“Through this workshop we’re learning
**to not make excuses but to make a
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feel as if we’re in a school or college classroom where people discuss life goals. The day wraps up with an activity where everyone writes her goal on sticky note that will remain on display until the end of the course.

The sticky notes read “I want to become a trainer and inspire other youth,” “I hope I will successfully complete this training and get my certificate,” and “I hope to be successful in life.”

After the class breaks, I talk to Zina, the SDH PTS trainer who lives nearby and had the idea of approaching the facility about offering the training. “I would walk by all the time, and I was curious what kind of support these women were getting,” she says.

Zina remains hopeful about the future of her students, as she calls them. “They are very resilient, and with this training they have gained a lot of confidence.” As she points to the sticky notes, she reads her own: “Our last day of training coincides with New Year’s Eve. I’m confident we have all learned a lot for a great start of the new year!”

Linda Wafi is Program Manager, Middle East & North Africa.

In Indonesia, Employers Gain New Perspective on Hiring Youth

Sheila Kinkade

SEPTEMBER 20, 2016

Like many young Indonesians looking for jobs, 18-year-old Lutfiati Rachmania Zaeni faced two challenges. First, she lacked workplace skills; second, she faced the commonly held belief among employers that people her age can't be trusted to act responsibly.

Through [EquipYouth \(EY\)](#), a joint initiative of IYF and Caterpillar's philanthropic organization, the [Caterpillar Foundation](#), Lutfiati found solutions to both these challenges. Currently active in seven countries, EY equips young people with market-relevant life and technical skills training, internships, on-the-job learning, and job placement assistance.

After Lutfiati completed her 30-hour training, delivered at her school through local partner [Indonesia Business Links](#), she received support in securing a job. Now a therapy assistant at Health&Life, a healing clinic in the booming industrial city of Batam, Lutfiati helps others while generating much-needed income.



She credits IYF's [Passport to Success®](#) life skills training with enabling her to exceed employer expectations. "The program helped me to be more confident, think positively, manage conflict, and be responsible," Lutfiati says. It also strengthened her communication and listening skills, which she says are particularly useful in her work with the elderly and others struggling with illness.

Merry Lisanty, Manager of Health&Life, admits she had never hired anyone under the age of 20 because of the

perceived risk they might not be responsible or manage their time well. In Lutfiati, she found a young woman who is humble, passionate about serving others, and who relates well to the center's clients.

Since 2012, [EY](#) has impacted the lives of more than 10,000 youth like Lutfiati in 14 countries.

[Watch the video](#) to learn more about EY's approach and Lutfiati's new role.

Young Women’s Empowerment in Senegal Through Life Skills

Kim R. McCormick
JULY 14, 2015

Meet Fatmata and Fatou, two young women in different parts of Senegal, who’ve both learned valuable life skills by participating in Passport to Success® training under YouthMap Casamance.

Fatmata, 16, left school a year ago when she became pregnant, and she’s unable to re-enroll. “This initiative has been a godsend,” she says, having gained confidence, learned about health practices and how to avoid unplanned pregnancy, and found direction through the training. “Today my ambition is to change my peers’ bad behavior. When I see a girl who is about to make a mistake, I try to raise her awareness of the situation or call on someone else who is more qualified to counsel her.”

Fatou’s mother points out that the life skills training benefits families, too. “Before the training, I was not satisfied with her behavior,” she says. “She has become more responsible. I have much more confidence in her.”



“These lessons reflect many of the behaviors and ways of living that we value here in Africa, in our families, but at some point we stopped passing them on,” says PTS facilitator Samboudiang Kambaye. “Young people [who] have come into the program rebuild themselves and also the African family.”

Watch Fatmata’s video.



Watch Fatou’s video.





Visit the IYF blog to read even more stories of how young women and men are positive forces for change and growth in their communities.