

April 2021 Sustained Grantee Spotlight: Women's Microfinance Initiative

The pandemic is continuing its impact on global gender equality, even as the immediate health effects are slowly getting under control throughout the world.

Unfortunately, school closures in Uganda and Kenya that were needed to stem the spread of COVID-19 have left some girls behind. Women's Microfinance Initiative reports that as schools have reopened, thousands of students have not returned, particularly teen girls. Contributing to this are an increase in pregnancies among unmarried teenage girls in rural areas, along with the economic impact of the pandemic – reduced household income, the need for students to work, and the inability of parents to be able to afford school fees, uniforms, or PPE. These problems compound each other and can ultimately deny girls the right to thrive.

In response, WMI resumed its loan issuance program in October, following a six-month halt. The program keeps women-owned businesses operating and reduces the risk that progress for these communities is lost.

The sustained grant from Together Women Rise supports WMI's efforts to create system change. That starts with women like Namono, a strong, motivated entrepreneur who sees even a rainy day as an opportunity. Namono owns a second-hand clothing business. When a group meeting gets caught in a rainstorm, she is there with jackets to sell. After becoming a widow in 1996, Namono struggled to support herself and five children on the small coffee plantation left by her husband. The clothing business helped increase her income and support her family. A 300,000-shilling loan from WMI gave her the boost needed to expand her business. All her children can go to school, and she can afford things – like milk for tea – that were out of reach before her business grew.

The road ahead is a tough one, but progress delayed by the pandemic can be changed by this collective work.