

Together Women Rise
Interim Progress Report – August 2021

1. Please Provide the following information:

- a. **Organization Name:** Women’s Microfinance Initiative
- b. **Project Title:** Empowering Village Women through Business Ownership
- c. **Grant Amount:** \$75,000 over three years; \$75,000 paid.
- d. **Contact Name:** Robyn G. Nietert, President
- e. **Contact Address:** P.O. Box 485, Cabin John, MD 20818

2. Recap briefly what outcomes the project was designed to achieve.

WMI’s goal is to expand financial access for rural women. WMI’s basic program is a two-year cycle of four consecutive, 6-month term loans of up to \$250, with training and support, for village women in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania who are "un-bankable." The loan program is accessible and accommodating for rural women, many of whom are illiterate, and to whom we teach basic numeracy. It operates from rural offices, near where the women live and work, with additional facilities located in outlying villages to make loan issuance and repayment logistically feasible for busy village women who are wives, mothers, and entrepreneurs.

Our programmatic goals with respect to the DFW/Rise grant are as follows:

A. Assist 340 Women with Loans and Training Annually (Rise-\$15,000): WMI makes loans from both “recycled” dollars in its various loan funds and from new grants to the various loan funds. Once the funds are pooled, a loan may be made to a woman receiving her first loan or a woman receiving a follow up loan. Each woman may receive 4 successively higher loans before she graduates, and certain of our best borrowers are then eligible for alumni or jumbo loans. Once a woman makes her final loan payment after two years in the program, her repaid loan money is recycled into a loan to a new borrower. Because funds are pooled and recycled, it is not possible to track the source of a particular loan dollar, but the total number of new borrowers, loans issued, and active borrowers can be seen on the chart appended to this report.

During the term of the DFW/Rise grant, we made the following loans with newly granted loan funds. In 2019, we assisted a total of 673 new borrowers with loans and training; **110 were funded by Rise with \$14,862 in new loan capital.** In 2020, we assisted a total of 511 new women with new loans and training; **130 were funded by Rise with \$16,000 in new loan capital.** In 2021 (to date), we assisted a total of 573 new women with loans and training; **109 were funded by Rise with \$15,000 in new loan capital.** It should be noted that the number of women the grant funded each year varied due to differing initial loan amounts among our hubs and changing currency conversion rates.

B. Three Office/Meeting Pavilions (Rise -\$6,000 Annually): Our plan was to allocate \$6,000 of the annual grant for the construction of new office/meeting pavilions. We identified three locations that needed such facilities and developed them as follows: In 2019, we built an office/meeting building and a 3-stance latrine in Mutufu, one of our Buyobo, Uganda sub-hubs. In 2020, we built a meeting pavilion in Gombe, Uganda, (funded by the delayed grant in 2021). In 2021, we have already started construction on a pavilion in Kyibboko, Uganda, to be completed in late August. The office/pavilions cost between \$21,622 and \$30,833, depending upon the size of the facility and the difficulty of reaching and excavating the location.

C. Technology Upgrades (Rise-\$2,000 annually). In 2019, we purchased a better router (\$378) and custom software (\$1,600) to help with the bank reconciliation process for our largest hub in Buyobo, Uganda. The software improves bank reconciliation accuracy and saves our local bookkeeping team a significant number of hours in manual labor each month. In 2020, we spent \$1,670 on security cameras to cover our loan collection center; \$487 on a computer for our assistant finance manager, and \$597 on a new digital camera. In 2021, we spent \$417 on maintenance/upgrades for the security camera system and \$1,585 on an alarm system for our main building. The security cameras and alarms were installed at the request of PostBank Uganda, which comes to the village bi-weekly to provide an array of mobile banking services.

D. Program Support Projects (Rise-\$2,000 annually). In 2019 and 2020, we directed \$2,000 in Rise grant monies to expand a Girls Empowerment Group we help sponsor in Kabale, Uganda to include a seventh school. The programs highlight healthy behaviors and health issues among 7th grade girls as well as entrepreneurial projects to earn spending money. In 2021, we directed \$2,000 of our grant to assist in the development of a maternity wing at the health clinic located at our large loan hub in Buseesa village in southwestern Uganda. Our loan program operates in conjunction with a school and health clinic run by our partner Buseesa Community Development Centre (BCDC).

The chart on page 7 shows the allocation and actual dollars spent from the DFW/Rise grant. In most cases, the DFW/Rise funds were matched with other fundraising or grants (especially for building construction).

3. Has funding changed for this project? For example, have you received unexpected funding from another source?

Funding has not changed. WMI met its budget and fundraising goals for 2019-2021 (to date). We generally allocated the grant as originally planned, using other sources for interim funding due to the deferment of part of the 2020 grant. We were also able to leverage DFW/Rise dollars against other fundraising.

4. Is your organization or project situation different than presented in the approved proposal? For example, new executive director, significant project staffing changes or NGO affiliation, loss of large funding, or other significant changes.

We have not had, nor foresee, any significant changes to our approved project.

5. Have the number of beneficiaries changed? To report this please refer to the original numbers in your grant proposal under *Number of women and girls Directly Impacted and population Indirectly Impacted*.

No significant changes. The beneficiaries are shown in Question 1 and in the chart on page 8.

6. What challenges are you facing as you move forward with this project? How are you approaching these challenges?

When we applied for the grant, we acknowledged that our biggest program risk (besides political instability) is loan defaults, given we are lending to poor rural women with no borrowing history and no physical collateral. With careful vetting of our borrowers, our default rate remained steady, at a low 2-3% for years. We have been able to replenish any losses to the loan funds internally through the interest income earned on the loans. However, our current challenge is COVID-19. As soon as the COVID lockdown began, our loan hubs met to develop crisis operating budgets. We reworked the budgets, which are funded by interest payments on the loans, assuming that loan collections might be delayed for some time due to the lockdown. We slashed all discretionary spending and reduced stipends.

In 2020, the actual impact of COVID in our rural program areas was slight, mainly transmitted by truck drivers along main trade routes. Currently, the Delta Variant is spreading rapidly across East Africa and reported deaths are rising significantly in the cities. Uganda has used all its vaccine and is desperate to get more.

The more direct impact of COVID was the lockdowns and the closing of the open-air markets in both 2020 and 2021. Because of the interruption to normal business operations, many of our borrowers are doing limited business or have had to put their commercial activities on hold. We are working with our borrowers to restructure loans, extend repayments, perhaps combining them with the new loans to provide the seed capital for women to restart their businesses – especially agricultural businesses where inventory that was not sold may have been lost due to spoilage.

Some loans had to be written off, and WMI was fortunate to receive \$50,000 in special COVID Relief grants that enabled us to “top up” the loans funds, provide COVID PPE supplies, and some food relief. We have also adopted other measures to support the women and their families during this difficult time. We continue to provide loans because our goal is for the ladies to stay in business, and we intend to help them pick up the pieces of their economic lives as the pandemic eases. Without our loans our borrowers would quickly

descend back into the poverty that we have worked so diligently the past 14 years to eliminate. It will take some time to fully understand the economic toll COVID has taken on East Africa.

7. Have you revised your original objectives since the project began? If so, why? What are your new objectives?

No change.

8. What progress have you made toward achieving your objectives? Please address each stated objective.

Sustained Improvement in Household Living Standards – We continue to measure changes in living standards through quarterly surveying. Each year we complete an annual Factbook, and this year’s virtual summer interns will complete the 2021 analysis from their homes by Labor Day. The 2020 Factbook can be found at WMI-2020-Factbook.pdf (wmionline.org)

The WMI loan program levels the playing field and gives women the opportunity to build a business that can generate income to improve household living standards. Year after year the loan program achieves impressive results!

- Incomes increase 100 - 400% after first 6 months
- Savings increase by 500%
- Women prioritize spending their income on education, food, and healthcare for their families
- 88% of women in malarial areas buy more mosquito nets
- 75% of women report improved reading, writing or arithmetic skills



Empowering Village Women through the Delivery of Training in Life-time Skills – Before the loans are issued, the borrowers attend a two-day training session to learn business

practices, basic accounting and record keeping. They role play and plan marketing strategies. Because many of our borrowers cannot read or write, we use non-traditional training techniques that we learned in a UN Train the Trainer program, to which we added material specific to the way women live and do business in rural East Africa. Our trainers and staff are almost all primary school teachers and are very skilled in communicating the information to the borrowers.



Develop Human Capacity and Physical Infrastructure – In addition to building human capacity, we also build meeting pavilions, offices and other physical structures. Often, when we open a new hub location, our trainers conduct the loan training under the nearest tree. Loan collections take place there as well, but over time it becomes inconvenient and often unsafe. To address this issue, the women borrowers find and pay for a plot of land and WMI provides the construction funding for a meeting pavilion or building. Because the women pay for the land, they feel a sense of ownership of the building and will keep it well-maintained. The meeting pavilions provide a safe place for the women to meet and make loan repayments and become an important community resource. In addition to the pavilion, we build a minimum three-stance latrine building to improve sanitation.

In 2020, we constructed a meeting building in our Gombe sub-hub, pictured below.



We are now constructing our latest office/meeting pavilion in Kyibboko, Uganda, with an anticipated date for completion at the end of August. Below is a picture of the construction site.



Provide Sustainable Program Service – Our Microfinance Program was designed to be sustainable. COVID is a challenge, but we met expectations by scaling back operations as necessary to run cash-flow positive. Based on our 14-year record we can say it is sustainable both in theory and in practice. Every project we start is designed to be sustainable. Any new money we request is for expansion loan capital or a new infrastructure project, such as a meeting pavilion, and not for operations funding.

9. Do you anticipate any difficulties in completing your project in the timeframe outlined in your proposal?

No. All DFW/Rise grant funds have now been expended as shown above. We will continue to report on our program in the remaining interim and final progress reports due in 2022.

Financial Report

Women's Microfinance Initiative Dining for Women Grant Planned v. Actual Spending as of 7/31/2021											
	DFW Plan 2019	DFW Plan 2020	DFW Plan 2021	WMI Total Actual 2019	WMI Total Actual 2020	WMI Total Actual 2021	Allocated to DFW Actual 2019	Allocated to DFW Actual 2020	Allocated to DFW Actual 2021	Total For Grant 2019-2021	
Loans											
Buyobo (Uganda) Loans	\$ 10,000	\$ 8,000	\$ 8,000	\$ 10,808	\$ 8,333	\$ 19,263	\$ 10,808	\$ 8,333	\$ 10,000	\$ 29,141	
Buyobo Alumnae Loans	\$ 5,000	\$ 4,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 4,054	\$ 4,167	\$ 5,556	\$ 4,054	\$ 4,167	\$ 2,500	\$ 10,721	
Oiti (Maasai Mara) Loans	\$	\$ 3,000	\$	\$	\$ 3,500	\$	\$	\$ 2,500	\$	\$ 2,500	
Kyegegwa (Uganda) Loans	\$	\$	\$ 2,000	\$	\$	\$ 2,500	\$	\$	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500	
Building											
Mutufu Pavilion + Latrine	\$ 6,000	\$	\$	\$ 21,622	\$ 30,833	\$ 25,715	\$ 6,160	\$	\$ 10,000	\$ 6,160	
Gombe Pavilion + Latrine	\$	\$ 6,000	\$ 6,000	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$ 6,000	\$ 6,000	
Kyiboko Pavilion + Latrine	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	
Training/Program Support Projects											
Rukundo Girls Empowerment	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 4,000	\$	\$ 5,000	\$ 2,000	\$	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	
BCDC Support Project (Maternity Wing)	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	
Technology											
Computer Equip/Software	\$ 2,000	\$	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,978	\$ 2,750	\$ 2,002	\$ 1,978	\$	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,978	
Camera Equip/Alarm System	\$	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	
TOTAL	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	\$ 42,462	\$ 49,583	\$ 60,035	\$ 25,000	\$ 15,000	\$ 35,000	\$ 75,000	

Note: The \$10,000 remaining from the Year 2 grant was allocated to the Gombe, Uganda Pavilion, built Fall 2020

Women's Microfinance Initiative - Loan Program Activity
As of June 2021

	2008-2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020**	2021
	5,654	8,124	10,306	12,632	15,144	17,603	19,545	20,502
	5,654	2,470	2,182	2,326	2,512	2,459	1,942	957
	16,164	22,931	29,593	37,646	44,984	54,706	62,310	65,433
	16,164	6,767	6,662	8,053	7,338	9,722	7,604	3,123
	\$2,411,583	\$3,302,043	\$4,116,259	\$5,085,306	\$5,982,301	\$7,148,599	\$8,101,744	\$8,362,007
	\$2,411,583	\$890,460	\$814,216	\$969,047	\$896,995	\$1,166,298	\$953,145	\$260,264
	\$150	\$144	\$139	\$135	\$133	\$131	\$130	\$128
	3,289	4,162	4,434	5,191	5,727	7,389	7,136	3,725
	1,939	2,979	3,759	5,099	5,979	7,118	8,208	6,260
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cant inflation in local currencies since 2008, reducing the USD value of the loans.
 COVID Pandemic.