



# Sharing Opportunities with Women NEWSLETTER

## NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN GUATEMALA

SowHope continually looks for new local leaders, found through trusted sources. A SowHope team recently had the opportunity to visit Guatemala with a good friend of SowHope, Bev Abma. Bev has visited over 90 countries, traveling extensively in the developing world. She also volunteers for SowHope, helping out at almost every mailing and even recruiting 3-5 neighbors each time. So, when Bev approached Mary Dailey Brown with the idea of visiting Guatemala and introducing her to potential partners, Mary was interested.



*A woman showcases her coffee plants for SowHope, helping out at almost every mailing and even recruiting 3-5 neighbors each time. So, when Bev approached Mary Dailey Brown with the idea of visiting Guatemala and introducing her to potential partners, Mary was interested.*

Mary and SowHope Board Vice Chair Beth Leeson traveled with Bev to Guatemala in late January. Bev introduced them to exceptional organizational leaders, who in turn took them to visit indigenous women's groups. The SowHope team met with and observed groups at different stages of organization for their collective best interests. Some were informally formed, learning how to operate as a group. Others were formed into cooperatives with distinct rules and goals. The highest level, and most sophisticated group, was a cooperative that joined together to become a federation. At that level, they had real economic power due to the sheer number of products they produced.



*Bev (left), Mary (middle), Beth (right), and friends*

A theme of conversation was the lingering pain of a 30-year civil war. It left far-reaching negative effects, especially on the indigenous population. Another topic brought up during the meetings was the "machismo" attitude of many men in the country – an attitude that holds women back from achieving their potential. We hope to impact this through future partnership in Guatemala. To learn more about the trip, go to [www.sowhope.org/videos](http://www.sowhope.org/videos).

### HONOR A WOMAN BRUNCH



JW Marriott, Margaux, Grand Rapids, MI  
**Sunday, May 7, 2023 11AM-1PM**

Visit [sowhope.org/hawb2023](http://sowhope.org/hawb2023) to buy tickets and for more info

## SOUTH SUDAN

In 2021, extreme floods displaced an estimated 386,000 people in South Sudan. Some of these Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were resettled by the government in a town near one of our project leaders, Rhoda. "We heard the outcry from the IDP women," says Rhoda, "They had virtually no way



*Rachel telling her story*

of making money and were using a traditional mortar to grind their food." Many of the women were living on rations provided by relief organizations, eating only one meal a day and sometimes not at all. Women were unable to pay for their children's school fees and many were dying because of the lack of funds for necessary medications. Something needed to be done.

With input from the women, Rhoda came up with a solution that would not only feed their families, but provide them with an opportunity to make a sustainable income. So Rhoda applied for a grain grinding mill project. She teaches the women how to use the mill so that they can grind their food more efficiently. In addition, she provides microloans so that the women can start their own small businesses, grinding food for others and taking surpluses to the markets in the cities.

Though the project started with 25 women, five hundred women have benefited in one year from the mill! One woman, Rachel, expresses her gratitude, "My heart is bursting with joy of rising hope again, out from the depression of poverty. My whole family is eating two meals a day, my 7 children are now going to school, and I am able to pay medication fees for myself and my children."

Thank you for supporting projects like these in South Sudan.

## Save the Date!

SowHope's Annual Fundraising Gala will be held on Friday, September 29, 2023 at the **Pinnacle Center in Hudsonville, MI.**

We will be streaming the Gala LIVE online!

It's never too early to secure your corporate or table sponsorships. Please contact Aaron Hoxworth: [aaron@sowhope.org](mailto:aaron@sowhope.org) | 616-433-1575



## 2023 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION



From left to right holding the banner: Board Vice Chair Beth Leeson, Philomena, Board Member Christie Unakalamba, Shelley, Mary, & Board Chair Mita Fitzjohn.

Forty-five degrees and sunny, a perfect winter day. March 8th, 2023, marked the first ever International Women's Day (IWD) march in the history of Grand Rapids, Michigan. This event was hosted by SowHope. "International Women's Day is not very well known in the United States," said Mary Dailey Brown, President & CEO of SowHope, "and we wanted to stand with the rest of the world and celebrate the achievements of women. We tried to make it a fun, unifying event for Grand Rapids." IWD is celebrated as a global holiday, especially in developing nations. It is common practice for entire communities to celebrate in the streets with parades, dancing, food, and music. This is the atmosphere that SowHope wanted to joyfully recreate.

The inaugural event attracted over 100 people to Rosa Parks Circle to take part in the festivities. Almost everyone wore bright purple SowHope-branded beanie hats to celebrate the occasion. Kicking off the event, Mary presented awards of achievement to two local women leaders for their incredible contributions to the West Michigan community. Grand Valley State University President (GVSU) Philomena Mantella was awarded for her cultural achievements, including becoming the first woman president of GVSU. Shelley Irwin was presented the social achievement award for her contributions to the public space, hosting interviews and presiding over local events for over 20 years.

After the award ceremony, the main event began. The crowd, led by Mary, the award recipients, and SowHope Board Members, marched one mile around Grand Rapids, cheering and waving flags all along the way. Every quarter mile, "pump-up" stations



Volunteers handing out cupcakes to attendees.

were set up to keep the celebration going as music played and the crowd danced. Participants were greeted by smiling volunteers with cupcakes and hot cocoa upon completing the march.

The event was well-received by the community, including the City of Grand Rapids Office of Special Events and Downtown Grand Rapids, INC., both of which were main sponsors of the event. "The public had nothing but good things to say about today," said SowHope Administrative Director Aaron Hoxworth, "It was wonderful to see people from all over West Michigan come to celebrate the achievements of women and the work that SowHope is doing around the world." *Photos by Alex Comben.*

## IN LOVING MEMORY

Beloved SowHope Board member and Program Team member, Danny L. Balfour, peacefully passed away on Wednesday, March 22nd, 2023 at the age of 67. Danny graduated with a B.A. from Michigan State University and then earned a Ph.D. at Florida State University. A professor at Grand Valley State University for over 25 years, he was a longtime director of its School of Public, Non-Profit, and Health Administration, author of several renowned books, and editor of important journals in his field. Outside of his academic life, Danny was an avid golfer and tennis player, a lover of sharing good food and



drink with friends and family.

Featured in the SowHope 2023 Winter Newsletter, Dan had an important and lasting impact on the organization. He served as the Capstone professor at GVSU to a half-dozen SowHope personnel, including Mary Dailey Brown, one former Board President, other board members, and current and former staff. He was an active advocate and fundraiser for SowHope's work. His understanding, critical thinking, and lively spirit will be missed. Our deepest sympathies to his wife, Mayumi, and son, Trevor.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Mita Fitzjohn - Chairperson  
Dr. Danny Balfour  
Leecie Brown

Lizbeth Leeson - Vice Chairperson  
Dr. Robert Cunningham  
Fridah Kanini

Benjamin Borisch - Treasurer  
Alfred Longtin  
Kathleen Muedder

Doreen Mangrum - Secretary  
Lauren Spangler  
Christie Unakalamba