



Women Inspired NEWSLETTER

FROM GRAVEL TO GRATITUDE



Woman demonstrates stone breaking

Women around the world have the worst jobs. In Sierra Leone, women work 8 hours a day and make ten cents an hour breaking stones into gravel. Most women are widows with children and the wages they earn barely give them and their children enough to survive day to day.

Stone breaking is a dangerous way to earn a living. Many women are often injured and suffer from muscle pain every day because of the demanding work. The women report that they spend most of their hard-earned money on pain medication. And not only are the women at risk, but their children also suffer. Since the women do not have people to care for their young children, they must bring them to the site where they break stone.

After seeing how the women were suffering and had no one to help them, three leaders, Masire, Aminata, and Adamsay, wanted to do something to change the situation. They dreamed of creating small business training and microfinance projects to bring hope and greater income security to the women. After meeting with the leaders and talking to the women stone breakers, SowHope funded three microfinance projects among the group, providing opportunities to more than 300 women in the form of microfinance groups to help them start meaningful business projects to achieve economic success.

The impact is great as the women have been able to stop stone breaking and begin safer income-generating activities like roadside food vending, petty trading, farming, and opening beauty salons. This has enabled them to earn enough to feed their children every day and send their children to school instead of to the market to sell goods. Also, through this project, women are receiving training each week on how to run successful businesses and save money.

Our partners dream of reaching many more women from this initial groups' loan repayment. With your help, these dreams can become reality.

REQUISITE RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC DISASTER IN RURAL BANGLADESH

Over the past 20 years, our partner in Bangladesh, Nelson, conducted successful SowHope-funded projects which have helped more than 10,000 women become microfinance entrepreneurs. Unfortunately, due to the long-lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall inflation rate in Bangladesh jumped to



Women learning to weave

7.56% since July of 2022 while food inflation rose to 9.74% over the same time period. This is causing much hardship, especially for rural people.

As a response, Nelson requested funding for a 3-year microfinance project, targeting rural areas of Bangladesh that are populated by mainly minority and indigenous groups who were untouched by the 20-year economic boom, yet have suffered greatly through current economic challenges. The goal is to start 72 small groups totaling 1,000 women. This project creates loan accessibility for undertaking any Income Generating Activity (IGA), such as agriculture and livestock rearing, fish farming, producing and selling locally sourced products in various economic sectors, among others.

Besides bringing women together as part of a weekly support group, the project provides training in mother and child healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, gender equality, human rights, women's leadership, personal potential, and good business practices. Economic empowerment comes through a weekly savings program which creates ownership in the group and each woman's own personal savings. For many, this is the first time they have ever been able to make and save money. The economic boost gained by the women from their IGAs increases their household assets, giving them more importance in their families as well as a better stand in society. Thanks to your generosity, the project has so far been highly successful. We hope, with your continued generosity, it will be supported through 2025.

SOWHOPE
EXISTS

TO INSPIRE
WOMEN AROUND
THE WORLD
BY PROMOTING
WELLNESS,
EDUCATION, AND
ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITIES

Your donations help women like these in Sierra Leone. To donate, visit www.sowhope.org/donate.

Become A SowHope Star

You can change the future for women in poverty. Consider becoming a monthly donor to SowHope. Call 616-433-1575 or go to www.sowhope.org/donate for giving options.

SOWHOPE HIRES PROGRAM DIRECTOR, DR. SYLVIA TSITSI JUTA



Dr. Sylvia Tsitsi Juta

Dr. Sylvia Tsitsi Juta's involvement with SowHope started all the way back in 2007, just over a year after the organization was founded. Working as a high school teacher in Zimbabwe, Sylvia had come to the U.S. to further her education, obtaining a master's degree in Public Administration at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) and eventually a PhD in Public Administration at Western Michigan University. Sylvia met SowHope CEO

Mary Dailey Brown while taking a class together at GVSU, both pursuing the same degree. "I was very impressed with the work Mary was doing," says Sylvia, "Especially SowHope's strategy to reach out to the poor. I had just come to the U.S. from Zimbabwe, and I knew that SowHope would make an impact, especially in Africa." Sylvia would soon join the board and eventually become a part-time employee for SowHope, overseeing the projects and communication with partners. During her time in the states, she taught at GVSU and Trine University. She headed her own business in the U.S. as a financial planner and tax preparer. Sylvia met her husband, Papa Njai, in the U.S. and eventually moved with him back to his home country of Sierra Leone in 2017. Through her life changes, she always kept tabs on SowHope, and SowHope kept tabs on her.

In 2019, SowHope began working with Sylvia as reference to meet trusted partners who were helping women in Sierra Leone. With Sylvia's help as a reference and project leader, SowHope has been able to impact nearly 1,000 women in 10 projects over

4 years in the country. In early 2023, SowHope knew that Sylvia would be a great fit to join the team. So, when Mary reached out about the position, Sylvia was ecstatic. "To get an opportunity to inspire women is what motivates me to work at SowHope," she says, "Visiting the partners is the best part of my job. I enjoy seeing the impact that SowHope has on women and their families. I am also moved by Mary and Doug (husband of Mary and co-founder of SowHope), their story and the passion of the whole team at SowHope." Sylvia's first responsibility was to plan and lead a trip to Zimbabwe to meet several local leaders. She was a natural and the trip was fruitful. SowHope funded 5 small economic projects and plan to do more in the future.

Sylvia cares deeply about the work of SowHope. She knows that each of SowHope's program areas - wellness, education, and economic opportunities - are equally important. "(All three) give holistic support to the women. In Africa, I see a lot of women who work very hard every day, but because they are illiterate, they do not achieve much. When they become literate, they take their businesses to another level. And wellness is important for everyone to succeed." She also believes that, for women, being financially independent is key. "Being independent brings freedom and protection from many harmful cultural practices. When you have a means to take care of yourself and your family, you have dignity and respect."

Outside of her new duties at SowHope, Sylvia works as a lecturer at Milton Margai Technical University in Sierra Leone. She loves dancing and running marathons (though not as much as she used to). She is married to Papa and has one handsome and smart son, Alhaji Njai. She is also a minister of the Word. She enjoys teaching the Bible and helping people to transform their lives through the Word of God.

Welcome to the team, Sylvia. We are incredibly fortunate to have you on board!

2023 SOWHOPE GALA: DO SOMETHING FOR CHANGE

On Friday, September 29th, SowHope is hosting its annual fundraising gala at The Pinnacle Center in Hudsonville, Michigan, beginning at 6:30pm. Join us as we explore the incredible change that our partners are making in their communities and how you, too, are harbingers of change. Please consider asking your friends and family to attend this year's gala, whether you are West Michigan locals or somewhere else!

For those who are not able to attend in person, SowHope will livestream the event, beginning at 7:30pm at www.sowhope.org.

Please consider sponsoring a table of 8 in your name, or honor someone you admire, at one of four levels:

1. **\$5,000 Platinum Level**
2. **\$2,500 Gold Level**
3. **\$1,000 Green Level**
4. **\$500 Purple Level**

Register today at www.sowhope.org/gala2023. See you there!

FREE LEGACY & RETIREMENT GIVING ADVICE FOR SOWHOPE DONORS

SowHope Board Member Al Longtin, a financial professional and the CEO and Founder of Longtin Family Companies, is offering an incredible service to SowHope donors, free of charge. If you're inclined to being generous in retirement or want to plan out your giving legacy, Al is taking individual appointments to discuss your giving strategy. He will help you get down in the weeds of the decision-making process for no fee. There are many creative ways to combine our gifts within retirements or estate objectives that typically result in SowHope, or other organizations, receiving dollars that would normally go to the government.

Even if you currently work with a financial advisor or haven't had time to consider your late-in-life financial goals, this service is for you. If you're interested, please email aaron@sowhope.org or call the SowHope office at 616-433-1575 in order to get started.



*SowHope Board
Member Al Longtin*

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