ALISON WRIGHT

GRIT AND GRACE, WOMEN AT WORK

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"When you empower a woman, you empower a nation." – Proverb

Kadatu, Fruit Vendor in Port Loko, Sierra Leone (2014)

From India to Africa, tea fields to technology, women are the resilient hard-working backbones of their communities. These images showcase the inspirational stories of remarkable women at work in developing countries whose perseverance is often overlooked. Many of these women live in post-conflict or hard-to-reach areas, yet these images illuminate their shared determination to create better sustainable futures for their families through their creativity, ingenuity, and drive. These women from Africa, Asia, and Latin America share experiences of how they have risen above their circumstances to empower themselves through their tenacity and resiliency. This project also celebrates the individuals and grassroots organizations that are committed to finding creative solutions to the challenges that these women face through all aspects of work in their global communities.

These are more than images of women just toiling in the fields in rural areas. On average, women make up just over 40 percent of the global agricultural labor force, yet they own less than 20 percent of the land. Many have joined co-ops to learn the skills of building their business from kitchen garden to profitable business. Microloans and mobile money are taking women to another level. By starting their own businesses, women are able to open bank accounts and take control of their own money. In many of these war-torn countries—especially the Congo, where a women is raped each minute of every day—nearly every woman has suffered some unspeakable atrocity. The numeracy, literacy, and job training programs offered to these women gives them usable work skills. This in turn offers them not only a sense of financial stability but a sense of self worth through like-minded community. Ask any of them why they do these jobs, and they will say it's for the education and betterment of their children. Women in these countries are always going to be the ones to figure it out for their families.

By creating awareness of the struggles and successes of these women, we can not only help better their circumstances but learn and be inspired by their determination and inner strength. Empowering women not only benefits their immediate family—it benefits their whole village, their nation, and our world.

— Alison Wright

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Hawa, Shop Vendor in Monrovia, Liberia (2014)

Hawa Edwards accessed a small loan from a microfinance program to build her general store business in Monrovia, Liberia. She makes about $100 per month and uses the profits to support her family.

Angela, Trash-Picker in Granada, Nicaragua (2012)

Women who are widowed or abandoned by their husbands and fathers are left with little recourse to care for their families in Nicaragua. These single women and young girls sort through one of the largest garbage dumps in Central America, searching for recycling that will bring them a dollar a day as a means to support their families.

Selem, Garment Factory in Sidi Aïch, Tunisia (2017)

Selem sews in a garment factory in the economically challenged town of Sidi Aich. Of the six countries involved with the Arab Spring protests of the early 2010's, only Tunisia has embraced democracy. Recent acts of terrorism in this country have halted its thriving tourism industry, creating a drastic downturn in the economy. Jobs have become scarce, especially for young girls in already low-income areas, which has created a gateway for ISIS and terrorism recruitment. The situation has become so dire that the government has enforced a ban on women under the age of 30 flying alone. Marn-Tex, the factory shown here, is a supplier to Benetton and was started by a Hedia, a local woman determined to eradicate this recruitment crisis. There are about 120 workers here, about 100 of whom are women. Most of the workers make about 400 dinar ($160) a month.

Cooking class, in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (2014)

One woman is raped every minute in the DRC. These atrocious attacks are an ongoing "weapon of war" committed by rebels and even local police and militants. The numeracy, literacy, and job training programs offered by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Women for Women helps train these women with usable work skills. This offers them not only a sense of financial stability but a sense of empowerment through like-minded community. Here, women share the Belgian waffles that they just learned to make in a cooking class. When asked how they can possibly effuse so much joy after enduring such atrocities, they reply, "It's the work—it brings us a sense of purpose, community, belonging, and safety."

Kamala, Motorcycle Mechanic in Dang, Nepal (2016)

In the western Dang District of Nepal, The Nepal Youth Foundation (NYF) has helped to eradicate the centuries-old practice known as *Kamlari*, in which Tharu girls are sold into servitude or bonded labor. The foundation gave piglets to families so they could sell the piglets at the end of the year instead of their daughters—a telling statement as to what a girl is worth in this country. These girls are now free, getting educated and working in jobs that give them financial independence and self-respect. Kamala Chaudhary, 22, worked as a *Kamlari* for six years and was freed 11 years ago. She managed to go to school, then do automobile training. With a $300 loan from NYF, she was able to open her own automobile mechanics shop.

Carolina, Hairdresser in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (2014)

Carolina Ndaki started Celina Hair Salon with help from a $150 microfinance loan and named the salon after her daughter. After nine years of regular customers, she was able get a $900 loan and grow her business. These small loans help women to work, become entrepreneurs, and elevate themselves from poverty to help support their families.

Sujo, Garment Factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh (2017)

Thousands of women like Sujo migrate from rural villages to work in the 5,000 garment factories in the city of Dhaka. Since the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in 2013, managers have been under pressure to create safer conditions for their workers, including fire safety and health care. This factory supplies clothing chains like H&M, Zara, and Marks & Spencer. Sujo earns about $100 a month working as a sewing machine operator. She is recently married, and her husband also works here.

Nilar, Plastic Rope Factory in Taungoo, Myanmar (2016)

Daw Khin Nilar Htun makes plastic rope in Bago. She used to work in a factory that used a machine to make twine. She designed a modification that allowed the machine to make a thicker rope, and her husband and cousin welded the remodeled machine together. She makes about 70 bunches a day, each bunch with ten ropes. Her husband helps by selling rope and clay pots in the market, making about $2 to $5 a day. Nilar works about 7.5 hours a day but has to hire some help as she also cooks, cleans, and takes care of their five children, ages 4–24. She accessed a loan of $500 from BRAC and was able to open a small restaurant. She and her husband make about $55 a day. Their goal is to educate their children. One of their daughters is now an engineer, and another is a nurse.

Brothel in Mumbai, India (2018)

These three women share a room in the red light district where they live and work. Sarita has lived in this brothel for 20 years, working as a sex worker. One of her regular customers became her "husband," a common practice among sex workers here in which women are dedicated only to individual men. Anju also lives here as a sex worker, and Parvati lives under her bed. Parvati has two sons, both drug addicts, and she works in this industry to support them. Many women who end up here have been sold by husbands or hustlers, drugged, or tricked with the promise of a legitimate job. These women make a couple of dollars per client, often sending whatever money they make home to support their families. Their names have been changed for their protection.

Hisae, "Ama" Free-Divers, "Sea Women," in Osatu, Mie Prefecture, Japan (2016)

It is considered that the Japanese practice of *ama* (traditional free-diving) has been passed down through female generations for about 2,000 years. These women collect seaweed, conch, lobster, abalone and shellfish. They became more in demand with the discovery of the cultured pearl in 1893, giving them the name "*ama* pearl divers." In the early morning hours, these women, who until recently wore only a loincloth, apply oil and warm themselves by the fire in the warming hut to prepare for a day of diving in frigid waters. The men drive the boats and help haul the catch, but the women are considered to be better divers due to the distribution of their fat and their ability to hold their breath. Most of the women remaining in this job are now well into their 70s and are thought to live longer due to their diving training and disciplines. Hisae Okano, shown here, is 75. As third-generation divers, these women are probably the last. The younger women in the village don't want to pursue this profession and have moved to the cities to find more modern occupations.

Pa Pa, Laundress in Yangon, Myanmar (2016)

Pa Pa Phyo Swe works doing laundry by hand for a local university in Yangon. Kyaw Kyaw watches as his wife washes. He likes her working and the extra income it brings in. He works as an electrician, and together they make about $200 a month. Pa Pa was able to procure a small loan and would like to buy a washing machine with it.

Ayem, Baker in Bago, Myanmar (2016)

Khin New Ayem is a baker in Bago. Her posture shows how the work is taking a toll. Her whole family helps run the business. Her husband runs deliveries on his motorbike and truck. Ayem used to run a small home-based bakery business, but she accessed a microloan from BRAC for $150 two years ago, then another $1,500 that helped her grow her business. She nets about $700 a month, and with that, she pays her staff of twelve and supports her three children.

Agricultural Farmers in Mafinda, Sierra Leone (2014)

This swampland is managed by a group of women in Mafinda. Each woman has her own plot of land, but they have learned the power of working together. Each one receives training, seeds, and fertilizers from the international NGO BRAC, and together they grow corn, peppers, and tomatoes to sell in the market. In developing countries, 43 percent of agricultural workers are women, but they often lack rights to the land; have limited access to water, fertilizer, seeds, credit, and training; and spend more time on unpaid work than rural men or urban men and women do. It is estimated that if women farmers had access to the same resources as men, there could be 150 million fewer hungry people in the world.

Paruti, Dalit "Untouchable" Hindu Street Sweeper in Jhenaidah, Bangladesh (2017)

Paruti is a Dalit Hindu, the untouchable caste, working as street sweeper. There are about 5.5 million Dalit across the country. They are considered the most neglected caste in their society, living together in slums and working mostly as street sweepers and toilet cleaners. Paruti makes about 2500 Bangladesh TK a month, or $25. She has four children. Her husband is also a sweeper.

Emma Toe, Chicken Farmer in Buchanan, Liberia (2014)

Emma Toe has joined a poultry project that teaches women how to raise chickens and build their own chicken coops. With the money Emma makes from selling the eggs and chickens, she is able to send her five children to school.

Mary, Goat-Herder in Juba, South Sudan (2014)

Mary Sebit is shown here with her mother, Regina Pont (left), at their home in Juba. They live together with Mary's five children and her policeman husband. They have established their lives in a newly created country riddled by ongoing conflict, and so the women look to support their families through home-based income-generating projects such as sewing and raising animals. BRAC helps Mary raise mature goats that produce babies, which she sells for about $125 each. She uses the money to send her children to school.

Helena, Agricultural Co-op Farmer in Morogoro, Tanzania (2012)

In Tanzania, women like Helena Maroda have joined co-ops to learn the skills of building a business from a kitchen garden to a profitable enterprise. Helena works in a Tanzanian cornfield that serves as a demonstration plot to teach others how to grow corn more successfully. Eight other women collectively work the roughly eight acres of land. Increasing women's access to land, livestock, education, financial services, technology, and rural employment will boost their productivity and generate gains in terms of agricultural production, food security, and social welfare. Closing the gender gap in agricultural inputs alone could lift 100–150 million people out of hunger.

Theresa, Doctor in Gbarnga, Liberia (2014)

Patience receives her three-month Depo-Provera contraceptive shot from Theresa Gloli, a trained midwife and nurse in Liberia. Theresa manages a family planning health clinic that she sets up in the middle of the market in Gbarnga every Friday, knowing that it's the busiest day of the week for women to shop. In *The Moment of Lift*, Melinda Gates writes, "When women are able to time and space their pregnancies, they're more likely to advance their education, earn an income, raise healthy children, and have the time and money to give each child the food, care, and education to thrive... In fact, no country in the last fifty years has emerged from poverty without expanding access to contraceptives.... Contraceptives are the greatest life-saving, poverty-ending, women-empowering innovation ever created."

Police Officers in Bamiyan, Afghanistan (2007)

Women police officers are shown here in training practice at a shooting range in Bamiyan. Today, women compromise 70 percent of Bamiyan's police force, an unusual statistic for this country. Since the start of the Taliban's rule, women working outside the home has become rare in Afghanistan. According to World Bank figures, female labor force participation rate is at 19 percent, startlingly low compared to Western countries, where 50–60 percent is typical. These Bamiyan policewomen play a pivotal role in reducing violence against women, giving security and confidence to female victims of human rights violations.

Guadalupe, Coffee Farmer in Matagalpa, Nicaragua (2012)

Coffee is one of the world's most highly-traded commodities, and since it came to Nicaragua in the mid-1800s, it has played a significant role in the country's economy and environment. Due to their strained economic conditions, women are more likely to be hired to work on the country's 40,000 coffee plantations, as they are willing to accept lower wages than men. In Nicaragua, women undertake 70 percent of the work in the industry but own just 23 percent of the land, facilities, and products.

Crispina, Ceramic Potter in Oaxaca, Mexico (2019)

Crispina Lopez Garcia, age 72, makes traditional black pottery in a small studio in back of her home. She learned this from her mother, and it's been passed on for generations. Each pot is made by hand. She is a widow; sometimes her son helps her, but he's mostly away, working in the city. With a small loan from an international nonprofit, Pro Mujer, Crispina was able to buy more supplies and grow her business.

Nyunt, Guitar Factory in Yangon, Myanmar (2016)

Daw Nyunt Nyunt Yee runs a guitar-building shop in Yangon, thanks to a loan she accessed for supplies. The air is thick and smells of chemicals as the heavy varnish, paint, and glue are heated over a fire in a room with no ventilation. The room crowded with about sixteen workers, who can make about 200 guitars a week. The dealer pays about $15 a piece. Nyunt makes about $400 per week take-home pay, which helps support her 8-year-old child, a student.

Gbongar, Plastic Goods Vendor in Monrovia, Liberia (2014)

Gbongar Kamara accessed a loan from a microfinance program, run by an NGO called BRAC, which allowed her to start selling plastic goods in the Red Hill market in Monrovia, Liberia. Women here meet in weekly groups to repay their loans, and if one can't pay back her loan that week, the other women will chip in and help her. Gbongar is proud that her business is doing well; she makes about $300 per month.

Dativa, Brick-Maker in Kayonza, Rwanda (2014)

Women's livelihoods provide much more than financial gain. Work can offer women a sense of place, purpose, and community, especially in war-torn countries. Rwanda has been struggling to rebuild itself since the end of its horrific period of genocide, and working together is a part of that healing process. These women earn a penny for each brick they make in this factory.

Ishimalanga, Fisher-Woman in Lake Tanganyika, Democratic Republic of the Congo (2014)

Women and young girls in the DRC find themselves most vulnerable to sexual assault when performing the necessary but isolating chores of gathering wood and water in the forest for their families. Often they become impregnated and are then abandoned by their husbands and families. Ishimalanga Nabugamba suffered physical abuse, lost most of her family members, and lost all of her property during the war. Women for Women has helped train thousands of women in this area through work skills programs that help them regain their dignity. The women gain financial stability and a sense of community via microloans and a "merry-go-round program" in which women pool their money and take turns accessing the pot at the end of the month. Ishimalanga, shown here with her fishing boat on Lake Tanganyika, bought a large fishing net with her proceeds. She learned to fish here and intends to pass this skill on to her children. She now has a sense of purpose and hope in her life.

Doris, Mother in Buchanan, Liberia (2014)

Doris Wemyou is pregnant with her fifth child. She receives prenatal care from a community healthcare worker to ensure that she and her children remain healthy. These healthcare workers are women who often volunteer their time. They will walk miles to rural villages such as this one to help deliver babies and ensure that women and children receive healthcare they wouldn't otherwise obtain. This photograph was taken at the cusp of the Ebola pandemic, and no one had any idea what a lifeline health care would actually become.

Kadatu, Fruit Vendor in Port Loko, Sierra Leone (2014)

Kadatu Kamara makes about $40 a month selling mangos in the rural village of Port Loko. Seventy percent of women in Sierra Leone live on less than one dollar a day. Women like Kadatu earn very little, because they depend on unstable seasonal trades.

Student at School in Juba, South Sudan (2014)

Poverty remains the most important factor for determining whether a girl can access an education. Ask any woman in any of these countries why she's laboring with such intensity, and she will tell you that it's to send her children to school, especially her girls. Every one of these women hopes that her daughter will be educated and have a better life than she does. According to UNESCO estimates, 130 million girls between the age of 6 and 17 are out of school, and 15 million girls of primary-school age—half of them in sub-Saharan Africa—will never enter a classroom. Better educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labor market, earn higher incomes, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and provide better health care and education for their children. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and nations out of poverty.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Please support and donate to organizations that are empowering women with jobs. Here are a few that have been represented in this exhibit:

BRAC is creating opportunities in the areas of human rights & social empowerment, education & health, livelihood, and environmental & disaster preparedness around the world.
http://www.brac.net

PRO MUJER is a nonprofit development organization that provides financial inclusion, health, and education programs to low-income women in Latin America.
https://promujer.org

UN WOMEN
https://www.unwomen.org/en

WOMEN FOR WOMEN
https://www.womenforwomen.org

GLOBAL FUND FOR WOMEN
https://www.globalfundforwomen.org

FINCA
https://finca.org

ARUNA
Aruna works to ensure lifelong freedom through sustainable employment for sexually-enslaved women in India. https://arunaproject.com

USAID
https://www.usaid.gov

NEPAL YOUTH FOUNDATION
https://www.nepalyouthfoundation.org

SNV Netherlands Developmental Organization
https://www.ifpri.org/donor/snv-netherlands-development-organisation

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