

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION^{Review}

What's Next
Women Climate Leaders
By Michael Seo

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WHAT'S NEXT

NEW APPROACHES TO SOCIAL CHANGE

WCCI staff host a women-only community dialogue session in the Tororo District of Uganda, in 2020.

ENVIRONMENT

Women Climate Leaders

BY MICHAEL SEO

According to the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world must reduce global emissions by 45 percent to reach the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. However, the 2020 Paris Agreement national pledges to reduce global emissions by 2030 will achieve only a 1 percent reduction if they are met—a far cry from the needed 45 percent.

The government sector's inadequate efforts to address climate change have spurred nonprofits like the emerging network Women's Climate Centers International (WCCI) to take charge.

The mission of WCCI, founded in 2019 by an intercontinental team of activists from the United States and Africa, is to educate and train women to develop indigenous expertise and leadership in the areas of conservation, ecological restoration, and climate advocacy within the larger endeavor of establishing a network of centers. Led by women, these centers aim to build the capacities of local communities to fulfill their own climate change needs and to serve as hubs for scientific research and indigenous knowledge sharing.

WCCI's focus on women, and specifically women in rural areas, is intentional. More than 400 million women globally work in agriculture. Yet, despite

making up an estimated 43 percent of the world's agricultural labor force, women constitute less than 20 percent of the world's landholders, in part due to legal restrictions. No wonder more than 50 percent of women live in extreme poverty and are disproportionately affected by extreme weather events, which include the loss of agricultural productivity and destruction of life and property—all of which stem from the climate crisis.



“It’s no secret that women in rural areas are underresourced in climate technologies and underrepresented in the climate discussion,” WCCI cofounder Tracy Mann says, which is why the network intends to create “a nexus of women climate leaders and collective climate efforts.”

WCCI emerged from women's conversations about climate change beginning nearly a decade ago, in 2011, when Hajra Mukasa and Godliver Businge from Uganda, and Rose Wamala and Rosemary Atieno from

Kenya, met during their fellowships at the Global Women's Water Initiative (GWWI). In 2017, GWWI Executive Director Gemma Bulos introduced the group to Sarah Diefendorf, executive director of the Environmental Finance Center West (EFCWest), who joined as a founding member and then introduced them to Mann in 2018. Mann founded the US nonprofit Climate Wise Women in 2009 with Constance Okollet, from Uganda, who became WCCI's final founder.

In 2019, Mann secured funding from the Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF) for a

retreat in Kampala, Uganda, for the entire collective to meet and develop the action plan for WCCI's launch. CJRF Director Heather McGray explains that their investment in the network aligns with their own mission to help women, youth, and indigenous people adapt to climate change: “What we felt was special about the WCCI is that it is a sisterhood of women [rather than] a single entrepreneur.”

The action plan called for the establishment of WCCI's first climate center, scheduled to open

in the Tororo District, Uganda, in December 2021. The team is already at work figuring out how their mission will translate into action inside the center. WCCI staff facilitated a series of dialogues with more than 1,000 Tororo District residents to build community awareness and solicit feedback for setting the agenda.

The Tororo community has asked for their site to include a youth activities center, as well as a tree-sapling nursery and land for biointensive farming, which offer employment and on-the-job training.

Plantings commenced as soon as the purchase of the land

was finalized in early 2020. The first season of produce was sold in December 2020 directly from the land site of the center, as well as in local markets. The sales revenue covered the costs of seeds and labor. The first sale of saplings is scheduled for May 2021. In addition to these income-generating activities, WCCI is funded by the CJRF and individual donors but also generates operating income from environmental consultation contracts with organizations such as the International Institute for

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Black Lives Matter cofounder Alicia Garza has launched the Black Futures Lab with the intention of building the political power of the Black community.

Sustainable Development and the World Resources Institute.

“We see ourselves as facilitators,” Mukasa says of WCCI’s role. “With the community leaders, we survey the community to identify and prioritize areas of need, which guide our [work].”

The founders feel they have already achieved some success with the groundbreaking for the center’s construction and the programs they implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. WCCI aims to launch two more centers, a second in Uganda and one in Kenya, by 2027, with the goal of establishing a broader network of female African climate activists. ■

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The Black Mandate

BY JAMILAH KING

In 2018, progressives were still reeling from the once unfathomable reality of a Donald Trump presidency. But it was at that time that Alicia Garza decided to bank on hope. She founded the Black Futures Lab to center the political needs and demands of Black people.

“If we’ve learned anything from [the 2016] election, it’s that Black folks drive the progressive political power in this country, but rarely benefit from the fruits of our labor,” Garza said in a 2018 statement released upon the Lab’s launch.

The longtime Bay Area-based organizer gained international prominence with the Black Lives Matter movement but wanted

to more directly account for the policy needs of Black communities. In 2014, Garza was instrumental in turning public anger sparked by police shootings of unarmed Black people into a global network of Black-led organizations. Activism based on outrage at the status quo certainly had its place. But it also took its toll. Burnout was high, energy was low, and hope for actual structural change could be fleeting.

The Black Futures Lab aims to work with advocacy groups and lawmakers to advance local, state, and federal policies that support Black communities. But its actual goal is much broader: It focuses on the nascent horizon, where Black people could not just fight for a world free of police violence and equitable opportunities but go that one step further and see it, hear it, and plan it. To imagine this world, Garza and her small staff of half a dozen embarked on an ambitious plan to ask Black people directly about what they had and what they wanted. They called this the Black Census Project.

Although they are not connected to the US Census, the Black Census Project had a similar goal of trying to capture the reality of everyday Black life in 2018. While falling short of their initial goal of 200,000 responses, the 30,000 responses that they did amass were instructive. Aided by progressive think tank Demos and the research firm SocioAnalytica, they released their findings in 2019. One of the takeaways was that Black people were highly engaged voters who were deeply committed to finding solutions

for their community’s deepest problems. They were just too often ignored by people—most often white—who had the power to change anything.

Those initial findings paved the way for the work that followed. Overall, 52 percent of respondents said that politicians do not care about Black people, but that didn’t stop their political participation. In total, nearly three in four respondents said they had voted in the 2016 presidential election, 40 percent reported helping to register voters, and 6 in 10 Black women reported being politically engaged. Since the 2020 presidential election, the Black Futures Lab has been working closely with a network of advocacy groups and legislators to help shape a national racial justice agenda on expanding voting rights and combating voter suppression efforts.

The Lab is fiscally sponsored by the Chinese Progressive Association, a longtime tenants’ and workers’ rights group based in San Francisco. Its initial work was funded by nearly a dozen foundations, including the Akonadi, Carnegie, and NoVo foundations. In November of 2020, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation awarded the group \$925,000 to further its work.

In February, as America reeled from a series of compounding disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic and deadly winter storms across much of the southern United States, the Black Futures Lab released a plan called the Black Mandate. The plan focused on how to address the concomitant



crises facing Black America, including ongoing white supremacist violence, the unequal physical and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and water and power outages due to frigid temperatures across much of the South. That plan includes expanded Social Security payments, debt relief, equitable COVID-19 vaccine distribution, and putting a halt to deportations. The plan also calls for monthly direct payments to households reeling from the pandemic.

“The Black Mandate represents the first steps our leaders must take to begin to make good on their promise to deliver progress,” Black Futures Lab Political Director Keauna Gregory says.

The Black Futures Lab’s optimism also finds its expression in its persistent focus on joy. Arts and culture are key to its engagement with Black communities across the United States, and throughout the pandemic the group has hosted