



Small Grants. Local Action. Better Lives.

The Update

An International Fund for Women and Girls

JANUARY 2017



New Beginnings for Former Bonded Laborers

RESULTS

\$245,750

awarded to one-year grantees in the June 2015-2016 cycle

36

projects in 21 countries

Over 50,000

women and girls positively impacted

VGIF projects change lives:

Zambia

62 women and girls now computer-literate and employable

India

500 girls educated on reproductive rights to better care for and protect their bodies

Uganda

265 female refugees trained to defend human rights and gained access to free legal aid

Guatemala

25 women educated to combat sexism in the media create radio programming on women's rights

CALENDAR

Jan 21, 2017 - Women's March in NYC

Feb 7, 2017 - VGIF Young Professionals Meeting

Mar 8, 2017 - International Women's Day

Mar 13-24, 2017 - VGIF delegation attends UN Commission on the Status of Women

Apr 27-29, 2017 - VGIF Board & Annual Meetings; select new grantees

Two weeks before VGIF met Kasthuri, she jumped into a well near her home in an attempt to end her life. For years she had worked 12-hour shifts at a silver factory in unsafe and squalid conditions. After work, she would return home to care for her husband and sons, along with all the household duties. Kasthuri's husband wasn't working and spent most of her small earnings on alcohol, putting the family's welfare at risk.

Kasthuri was not making enough to support her family and was desperate to raise her income, but she was unable to leave the silver factory. She owed them a debt—what's known as bonded labor, a system designed to exploit women like Kasthuri who have few economic options and little formal education.

After VGIF partnered with Rural Women Development Trust (RWDT), Kasthuri's life looks very different from the day she was rescued from the well. VGIF granted \$6,200 to help support Kasthuri and over 100 female bonded laborers find economic stability, psycho-social support, and legal assistance. These women began the project as the most marginalized members of society, and left as some of its most admired leaders.



Participants work together to make coir rope to sell

Having been taught how to make coir rope and work with other former bonded laborers in an organized women's group, Kasthuri has entered a stable and lucrative market and strategically negotiates prices and budgets for business. She is also empowered as a peer leader having been elected president of her women's group.

Kasthuri's wages have more than tripled since VGIF helped her leave the silver factory, and she manages them carefully thanks to training in financial literacy. Now when Kasthuri leaves work she deposits her earnings in a local bank where the family is saving enough money to purchase land to build a home. Her husband, who used to refuse to allow her to control her own wages, now trusts her with management of the family's finances.

When asked about the changes in her life, Kasthuri said, "I am now living with dignity. All are showing me respect, even those who looked down on me before."



"My life has been changed with the support of VGIF, and I am so thankful."

KASTHURI

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: Maggie Ford



A bright and ambitious high school student, Maggie Ford sat in her guidance counselor's office and was told "women don't go to college." That galvanized her interest in women's education equity. A Bachelor's and two graduate degrees later, she decisively proved the guidance counselor wrong. The belief that women's empowerment should—and could—be more effective led her to VGIF. Maggie was recruited from the Board of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Educational Foundation to serve on VGIF's committees. Since that time, her vast experience in higher education, strategic planning, and fundraising has been integral to moving the organization forward. In her current role as Convener of the Project Grants Committee, Maggie focuses on capturing the impact of VGIF's grantmaking. "The breadth of what we have done is very important, but now we have an opportunity to tell our story and show impact," says Maggie. "VGIF can make true changes in someone's life—that's what this work is all about. Very little money in the hands of the right women...and it works!"

One way to get involved with VGIF is to read grant applications as a VGIF Previewer. **Marissa Keegan-Hanney** said of her experience:

"I just wanted to send a quick note to say THANK YOU for including me in the grant review process for VGIF. I absolutely loved the experience—I was blown away by so many of the grantee submissions and I am so honored that I was able to assist with such an important task."

→ To find out more, contact info@vgif.org

VGIF Welcomes New Executive Director

The VGIF Board of Directors has named Emily Forhman its new Executive Director. "With Emily as Executive Director, VGIF is looking to the future and will begin 2017 with a leader who has a passion for our mission, who will proactively build on our progress to-date, and help us create a unifying vision for our future," said Board President Jeri Rhodes. With over 20 years of international and domestic non-profit experience, Emily has focused her work on the well-being of children and has a passion for helping elevate women's and girls' status around the world.

EMILY'S CORNER

For VGIF it's a new year, a new staff and office, and a renewed effort to make a difference in the lives of girls and women around the globe. With over 550 initiatives in 94 countries, VGIF funds grassroots projects that are imagined, designed, and driven by those whose lives are most affected by inequality—women and girls themselves. I am honored to partner with a dedicated and committed Board of Directors and staff to help VGIF amplify its effectiveness and reach.



"Supporting women's causes plays a critical role in strengthening and building thriving communities."

EMILY FORHMAN,
VGIF's new Executive Director



Yes, You CAN Make a Difference...

Help us build a world that supports the rights of women and girls globally. In countries where there are no safety nets, your support can make an enormous difference. \$1 generates over \$150 in services and a gift of only \$50 (the price of a dinner out) can literally change lives. Today, more than ever, women and girls must come together to demand equal rights to be safe, empowered, and heard. Join with us to make this happen. Send your donation to: VGIF (The Update), 11 Broadway, Suite 510, New York, NY 10004 or go online to: www.vgif.org.



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2015 Annual Report Addendum: Please join us in thanking 2015 contributors not listed in the report: Helen Dunsmore, \$1,000 to \$1,999 Ambassador Level; Claire Stein, \$500 - 999 category; Dr. Janet Warren and Denise O'Donnell, \$100 to \$249 category; and Evelyn Gaw, \$99 and below category. VGIF values each contribution, which support our vital mission.