

FULL GALA REMARKS

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[DAISY OWOMUGASHO](#)

[COUNTRY DIRECTOR, UGANDA](#)

Whenever I state The Hunger Project's mission, people always want to know whether they've heard me correctly. 'Ending hunger and poverty?' they ask. 'Worldwide?' The next thing they want to know is, 'How?'

I know, our mission is bold. I fully understand the challenge, with 21% of Ugandans still lacking access to clean water and 20% still living below the [poverty line](#). But the fact is, The Hunger Project's ability to chart a course to make our mission real in Uganda, and wherever we work, is unique. It is special.

Our approach to ending hunger and poverty in Africa is also unique and special, you might even say it's holistic. I give you as an example the story of Ms. Irene Namigadde. Irene is a 36-year-old widow, raising 5 children. She is a resident of Kiboga community in Uganda in what we call an epicenter.

Before joining the epicenter, Irene was growing food crops — cassava, beans and sweet potatoes. She was managing to grow barely enough to feed the family of six and earning herself about \$260 per year. In 2002, The Hunger Project came to her community to offer a training — this training transformed her mindset. She found her voice as a woman and from that day on she became an active partner in ending hunger — an active partner to every Hunger Project investor around the world.

Since then, she has learned how to harvest water for irrigation. She has established a commercial kitchen garden and she offers her garden as a demonstration to other women farmers. Four years ago, she went through The Hunger Project's functional adult literacy program. She learned to read and write, took a microfinance loan and she started a pig farm. She sold so many piglets for such a profit that she was able to reinvest and she bought a plot of land for dairy farming. And, as an additional source of income, in January 2016 she started a retail shop.

Thanks to the example of Ms. Namigadde, we see that instead of attempting to solve just one issue — just farming or just water — for hunger and poverty to truly and sustainably end, a multitude of problems must be solved — all at once! This means water, sanitation, literacy,

microfinance, nutrition, women's empowerment, better farming techniques, medical care all of it — all at once!

This is what The Hunger Project does — communities cannot get this anywhere else. We are able to address this whole nest of issues because we invest in people – we truly partner with the people. I have a passion for working with our rural partners — I like listening to the voices of the grassroots people and I like doing whatever it takes to support them to take a stand in ending their own hunger.

And what motivates me most is that I can be counted on to help transform someone's life.

I want you to know that: Irene has tripled her income – she currently earns 6 times Uganda's national average. And, importantly, Irene wants you to know this: she's been able to educate all of her children in other words The Hunger Project has truly changed her life.

[SAMUEL AFRANE](#) [COUNTRY DIRECTOR, GHANA](#)

Dear friends. I grew up among 15 siblings. We lived in a hamlet in the middle of a cocoa farm. In those days the early 1960s we wrapped our breakfast in leaves and ate while we ran the many miles to elementary school. We were very poor but we were happy and we excelled at school.

Twice I took the test for entry into Secondary School and I passed but there wasn't any money for me to go so I had to leave school at the age of 16. I took some menial jobs and while I worked, I kept thinking and I began to feel an internal drive telling me to be of service.

With the generosity of a local couple who offered me a scholarship I went on to a four-year Teacher Training College. From there I took it upon myself to earn a Bachelor's degree and then a Masters in Development Policy and Planning.

Of the 15 of us, I was the only one who went beyond elementary school.

When I see the people in our rural epicenters I see that same spirit the same story playing out over and over again. Now through the Hunger Project communities in Ghana we see a nearly 70% increase in attendance at secondary school.

I feel consumed by a passion to bring hope to rural girls and boys like me all through the inspiration, aspiration and opportunity that The Hunger Project brings.

My love for our Hunger Project hinges on the fact that we do not take the pride of development away from the people. Our honouring of human dignity turns people living in abject hunger and dehumanizing conditions into key resources for ending their own hunger and that of many others.

When I was a child, and sometimes even today, I sing to myself — I sing hymns like Land of Our Birth We Pledge to Thee by Rudyard Kipling. Sometimes while singing I find myself crying and I am strengthened internally.

Every day I feel inspired I feel inspired to serve and to create opportunities for the development of our village partners because I see the great talents that are in them unearthed and their tremendous potential awakened.

Through the lens of The Hunger Project, we see that people everywhere all have extraordinary potential. My greatest joy in life is supporting others and that is why The Hunger Project is my home.

[LORENA VÁZQUEZ ORDAZ](#)
[COUNTRY DIRECTOR, MEXICO](#)

To my mind every day is an opportunity — an opportunity to apply whatever energy, leadership, passion and commitment I have whatever I am for this purpose: to see my country Mexico free from hunger and poverty and in peace.

I am constantly inspired by the vision of rural women and girls becoming powerful, productive and self-reliant inspired to keep going even when things get tough.

And here's an example I would like to tell you the story of Mercedes. Mercedes is a 46-year-old mother of five living in the community of Bayalemó in the state of Chiapas. She is an indigenous woman from the Tzotzil nation one of the most traditional indigenous groups.

Mercedes is an artisan. She makes traditional woven fabrics and is a member of her local fabric-making guild. During her Guild's General Assembly Mercedes was nominated to serve as a member of her cooperative's board then to her utter surprise she was elected as the President of the Board. As astonished as she was by this vote of confidence she was gripped with doubt. Mercedes even attempted to reject the nomination thinking that "surely, someone else would be a better leader than I."

You see typically women from the indigenous communities of rural Chiapas do not participate in any decision-making bodies. Their voices are hardly ever heard. They do not assume leadership positions. They often say, "It's too hard We can't do it It's a waste of time to even try."

The Hunger Project-Mexico works with indigenous women to expand their vision of themselves. What we do is open up their willingness to participate in leadership. We strengthen their leadership skills. And above all we are very patient. We understand and respect the community's pace rather than imposing ours. We don't do the development for them we do it with them.

In the end Mercedes accepted her role as president of her cooperative and was a very successful.

Now what did that look like?

She stepped into this position as an expression of her stand for women and girls. She took that stand so that they could see themselves taking leadership roles. The following year when new guild elections were held for the first time younger women were nominated and for the very first time – they said yes. Mercedes stands to inspire younger women to have their voices heard and to encourage them to leave their fears behind and to stand up for their own rights.

[BADIUL MAJUMDAR](#) [COUNTRY DIRECTOR, BANGLADESH](#)

In my country Bangladesh women and girls face a disproportionate level of poverty. They are largely excluded from society and they face brutal discrimination. 59% of marriages in Bangladesh are child marriages where the brides are younger than 18.

For me, the unleashing of the human spirit so that the ordinary people — particularly women and girls — can become authors of their own future – that is what gets me out of bed every morning. Unleashing of the human spirit requires changing mindsets so that people know that they themselves are the leaders of their own development.

This is Lila Rani Das. Lila is a 49 year old widow with two young boys. She took shelter in her parents' home after being driven out of her in-laws home following her husband's death. She was devastated. She felt hopeless.

In 2001, she took The Hunger Project's animator's training. And she became an activist.

The training gave her the determination to stand on her own feet. And she is now a self-reliant person.

She moved 31 other women into action and formed a financial self-help group which has now collectively saved nearly half a million taka – or roughly five times the average annual income of a person in Bangladesh. The members have been borrowing and using money from this fund to improve their lives.

Lila Rani Das now leads an association of 13 self-help groups within her community – through this role, she takes a stand – every day — for leadership and self-reliance.

What does Lila Rani's story mean, when multiplied all across Bangladesh, by our 275,000 volunteers? It means this:

Stands like Lila's mean that hunger as a society wide problem in Bangladesh has nearly come to an end.

According to the World Bank, Bangladesh's poverty rate fell from 82% in 1972, to 19% in 2010, and then it fell *again* to 14% in 2016.

Our Hunger Project has played a central role in this remarkable achievement. With this success at our backs, we have now embarked on achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – to make sure this new Bangladesh is sustainable — and we are confident that by the year 2030 we will indeed get there.

[ROWLANDS KAOTCHA](#) [COUNTRY DIRECTOR, MALAWI](#)

Back when I was a teenager I nearly dropped out of secondary school because my parents could not afford to buy me the black shoes that my school required. It wasn't out of misplaced priorities it was because they couldn't afford it. Every time I was chased out of class I used to go to my room bury my head in my pillow and cry.

I was angry and I vowed that not one of my younger siblings or the children I would one day have would go through what I was going through then. And from that moment on this became my primary motivation.

But then one day after I graduated from college, I had a heart to heart talk with my mother. For the first time my mother told me about the day she gave birth to me. She described how while in the throws of labor she walked to the nearest hospital a distance of over 10 miles. She described those 10 miles – as vividly as if it were that day in 1974 all over again.

A lot of women told her that she wouldn't make it.

You see, many women have to stay in their home village to deliver their children without any medical help. The result is heartbreaking all too often either the mother or the baby or even both are lost during childbirth.

My Mum then said, "I vowed to brave the distance. Three times along the way I nearly gave up. Somehow I kept on until we got to the hospital very late at night, and after an hour of serious pain I heard the nurse say to me ma'am you now have a brand new baby boy."

I didn't understand why my mum was telling me this story. I looked her straight in the eye and I asked, "Why are you telling me this now?" She said "I want you to be aware of this reality."

That was the day I realized that my earlier vow my earlier motivation to not have any one of my children experience what I had experienced wasn't enough.

I realized that my first motivation was based on my own personal success. It was based on ego. I wanted to be successful so my children would not go through what I went through in secondary school. That day with my mum I found a new motivation.

On that day, I took a stand.

I told my mum "If the next part of my life will ensure that the real life situation of mothers is improved and they do not have to walk the same distance you walked then I want you to know that wherever you will be that I am doing that, in honor of your bravery and in honor of your love for me."

I stand for dignity.

I stand for a life of value. A life that is not only fulfilling but also a life that gives value to someone else's life. And for 17 years now, The Hunger Project has given me that opportunity.

And for that I thank you. Very very much.