



NEWS RELEASE

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OPPORTUNITY INTERNATIONAL ANNOUNCES 2019 WeGO AWARDS WINNERS

CHICAGO – November 5, 2019 – For decades, Opportunity International has worked to give women living in developing countries equal opportunities to improve their lives and create a bright future for their children. We see—over and over—that when women are given an opportunity, they have the power to transform their families, communities, and the world. In this spirit, Opportunity announces My Choices’ “Operation Peacemaker” project as the winner of the 2019 Women and Girls Opportunity (WeGO) Awards.

Now in its second year, the WeGO awards were designed to celebrate and promote innovations in economic empowerment for women and girls as an essential part of ending extreme poverty. The program honors staff and clients in Africa, Asia, and Latin America who work selflessly in challenging environments and calls attention to groundbreaking work that deserves expansion and replication.

From an impressive pool of submissions from around the world, a panel of 45 women came together to discuss the projects in depth before submitting rating score sheets to narrow the field down to three finalists. These accomplished women dove into the details and merits of each submission as they related to the value of technology, scalability, sustainability, the need to include men in social change, the challenge of focusing on the next generation, and more.

Opportunity is thrilled to announce the winners:

- **First place (\$5,000 award):** One of Opportunity’s partners in India, My Choices, runs the “Operation Peacemaker” project, which trains young women on issues of domestic violence and provides survivors with shelter, legal aid, counseling, and vocational training to launch businesses and support themselves in their new life. Opportunity’s local financial institution partners have joined My Choices’ efforts to support these women in their journey toward self-sufficiency. Since 2012, Operation PeaceMaker has opened five support centers and trained 215 PeaceMakers. The program recently launched PeaceChampion, focused on getting young men on college campuses to be allies in eliminating violence against women and girls.
- **Second place (\$2,500 award):** Opportunity Savings and Loans Ghana’s Kayayei project provides vocational training and income-earning opportunities to vulnerable young women working as water porters in the country’s major urban areas. Many girls and young women living in extreme poverty in the northern regions of Ghana migrate to cities so they can send money home to their families. Too often these women become vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Opportunity Ghana has worked with these young women since 2015, starting them with tailored vocational training followed by business skills, financial knowledge, and physical supplies to start their own small businesses. By earning a safe income, many can move closer to their families. This program’s goal is to enroll 1,500 women in the span of two years.

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- **Third place (\$1,000):** Opportunity Bank of Uganda’s project to provide economic opportunities for families of children with disabilities includes addressing the schooling needs of children with disabilities, the income needs of their parents, and local stigmas against the disabled. In Uganda, 91% of school-aged children with disabilities are not enrolled in primary education. The lack of enrollment is a combination of social stigma, lack of accessible facilities, and family economic limitations. The project specifically reaches out to parents of children with disabilities and offers them the training and financial tools to boost family income and break down cultural barriers. Opportunity also works with local governments and education leaders to address issues of stigma and physical access in schools.

“It is an honor to bear witness to what these incredible women are doing to empower other women and girls in their communities. Opportunity International is committed to supporting and bringing awareness to the powerful work these programs are doing to bring long-term, sustainable change to lift women and girls out of poverty,” said Lana Reda, Opportunity’s Chief Philanthropy Officer. “We’d like to give a special thank you to Muffy MacMillan, Opportunity’s Global Ambassador for Women and Girls and Chair of the WeGO Awards, and to Julia Wade for generously funding the prizes and execution of the program.”

ABOUT OPPORTUNITY INTERNATIONAL

Opportunity International is a global microfinance non-profit committed to ending extreme poverty and promoting quality education for families in need. Since 1971, Opportunity has helped millions of families work their way out of poverty by providing financial resources, training, and delivering ongoing support to start small businesses, earn living wages, and feed their families. The organization provides loans to families seeking tuition and educators who want to improve local schools to get more children into better quality schools. In 2018, Opportunity International issued \$1.9 billion in loans, reaching nearly 10 million clients in 24 countries, and helped fund 6,343 schools serving 1.8 million children. Discover more at opportunity.org or join the conversation on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/opportunity.org) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/opportunity.org).

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