



## Creating Innovative Organizations

“My life was full of obstacles, difficulties, disappointments and stress as I was born with cerebral palsy in Armenia. However, due to my great willpower, industriousness, and optimistic character I have been very successful in my life.

Before I participated in the Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability

in the U.S., I was very shy. I had never traveled alone. After I returned to Armenia from WILD, I wanted to change everything. As that desire grew and thanks to a grant from the Global Fund for Women, I took the first steps to found my own organization.

My NGO is the only organization in Armenia working to protect the rights of young women with disabilities and promote their participation as leaders and active citizens.

We are filling a gap and we have achieved recognition and strong support from the local and international community in a short amount of time. We formed a network of disability organizations. We translated the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) into Armenian. We also started a committee with the Mayor to improve accessibility in our city.

The diverse trainings at WILD helped me to become self-confident, self-reliant and to be proud of who I am. I want to address all disabled women around the world: do not despair and be sure of yourselves. Let us join together so we can fight for our rights!”

► **Karine Grigoryan**  
WILD Alumna from Armenia



## Changing the World Through Education

“I was born in Cambodia and contracted Polio at nine months old. Even at a young age I dreamt of

becoming a leader for people with disabilities, an instructor at the university, traveling to different countries, and living independently.

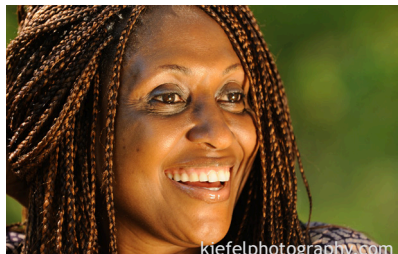
I faced many challenges in my life -- struggling to gain an education, participating in social activities, and looking for jobs. When I was in my fourth year of university, I chose to go into the teaching field, but I was rejected because it was deemed that a person with a physical disability would not be an appropriate role model for students. This hurt deeply, but despite this discrimination, I was determined to achieve my goal.

I developed my leadership skills through international experiences, starting with the WILD program. I looked to women with disabilities in other countries as my role models. I also had friends, colleagues, and family, all who encouraged me to pursue my dreams. The most exciting achievement was when I was awarded a scholarship to pursue a Masters of social work in the United States.

When I returned to Cambodia after graduation, my dream came true. I became an instructor at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. I serve as a role model for my students; demonstrating that disability is not a barrier for persons with disabilities to obtain higher education.

Today, I am a woman in power and a woman with confidence. The WILD program gave me the confidence I needed to do my work.”

► **Kanika Nguon**  
WILD Alumna from Cambodia



## Realizing the Right to Sexual and Reproductive health

“ In Nigeria, my culture places so much emphasis on the physical beauty of girls and women. As a polio survivor, I know that this notion causes most women and girls with disabilities to perceive their bodies as being unattractive and unacceptable. In turn, women and girls with disabilities treat their bodies with less value, which of course has serious implications for their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

After I returned home from WILD, I went “WILD” in Nigeria. The lack of concern about the failure to include women with disabilities in reproductive health programs in my community created a burning desire within me to devote my time to this issue. I founded the Family Centered Initiative for Challenged Persons.

We started by making a series of advocacy visits to development agencies involved in health and reproductive rights issues. We produced comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information in accessible formats, such as braille. Our sisters now have better access to information and are able to make informed decisions and better choices concerning their health and rights.

I have gained more confidence and strength to continue my advocacy work. I dream of one day becoming a Parliamentarian who will be able to influence laws and policies, so that I can positively affect the lives of people with disabilities. I dream of a time when women and girls with disabilities will not be addressed by the barriers they face because of a disability, but by their accomplishments in their various fields and communities.”

► Ekaete Umoh  
WILD Alumna from Nigeria



## Mentoring the Next Generation of Women Leaders

“ I was born with a visual disability and became totally blind by the age of 28. Over the course of my life I developed a strong desire to contribute to my country and strengthen the disability movement in Peru.

After returning home from WILD, I was very inspired and empowered to do many things. Being in contact with women with disabilities from other countries, who have rich and varied experiences, gave me new energy and motivated me to achieve my dreams. My proudest achievement was the formation of an association of women with all kinds of disabilities called MUSAS - Women Who Inspire Change.

We began by engaging in activities to make a presence in the women's movement. Today MUSAS is recognized by government and civil society for our successful advocacy on enforcement of the rights of people with disabilities. We address discrimination, violence, poverty and lack of employment opportunities.

Participating in WILD inspired me to make this dream happen. To ensure my organization endures and grows, I have also worked to mentor and develop the leadership skills of young women with disabilities. Recently, I passed on the responsibility to the next generation of young women who have accepted the challenge of leading the organization.”

► Madezha Cepeda  
WILD Alumna from Peru



## Advancing Disability Rights through the Arts

“ I was the only child in my Mongolian elementary school who was losing her

hearing. At first I was considered disruptive and someone who should be sent home, but gradually my teachers realized I could study just as well as my classmates. Today, if I compare myself to them, I'm living better than most.

My first job was working as a photographer for the Mongolian National Federation of Disabled People. We worked to assist people with disabilities to obtain low-interest loans, learn computer skills, and do web design. When I applied for the WILD program, I dreamt that I would one day establish my own disability related culture center.

After I returned home from WILD, I became very active. I began studying sign languages in both Mongolian and English and became known as a leader in the Mongolian Deaf community. I continued my education at the local university and eventually completed my master's degree in cultural studies.

I am proud to say my WILD dream finally did come true. I recently founded the Cultural Center for the Deaf in Mongolia. We organize activities for people who are Deaf and with other types of disabilities, such as the cultural fair and meeting for International Women's Day every year.

I am grateful for all the experiences and friendships I gained from WILD. The WILD program made me understand that I am a strong, powerful woman with disability.”

► Dulamsuren Jigjid  
WILD Alumna from Mongolia