



# iZōsh® International Spring Newsletter

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 iZōsh Chapters have granted **1,018 women** a total of **\$344,424 in micro loans!**

## A Note from the iZōsh International President

Earlier this month, we celebrated International Women’s Day (March 8). Naming days such as this help us pause and remember women who are living in extreme poverty. We pause to celebrate their stories of bravery and perseverance, despite challenge.

We are also reminded of the women who live in cultures where FGM (female genital mutilation) is still prevalent– a challenge often seen in combination with extreme poverty. Over the years, iZōsh Chapters have educated themselves by going deeper on the topic of FGM with expert speakers such as Margo Day, Supporter of World Vision, CEO and Co-Founder of the Mekuno Project, and Jacqueline Ogega, Ph.D., World Vision Senior Director for Gender Equality & Social Inclusion.

Engaging with the stories of women living in cultures where FGM is still practiced helps us better understand our need to unite as women and support each other. Jackie Ogega’s memoir, [Home is Us](#), tells us her mother’s story of how she protected herself and her daughters from harm. Her book has been recommended by iZōsh International, and discussed during iZōsh Chapter Events.

iZōsh International also recommends the award-winning short film, *Messania’s Story*, in which a woman shares her journey from a young girl, through her adulthood, and now as a grandmother. Messania powerfully explains how the pervasive practice of cutting can be halted.

iZōsh Chapters believe in the power of connecting, learning, giving and celebrating. We truly believe that microloans can empower women living in extreme poverty and that economic empowerment is part of the solution to end FGM!

Gratefully,  
Robin Phillips, President  
iZōsh International





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## Meet our newest board member!

Katie Glupker is new to the iZosh International board, but not new to our work. She previously served with the Ann Arbor Chapter and we are so excited to now have her expertise on the iZosh International team. In her own words:

“I’m thrilled and honored to join the board of iZosh International. I care deeply about Chapter Events and connecting local women to our global sisters who are lifting themselves, their families, and their communities out of extreme poverty.”

## Scan the QR code to watch Messania’s Story

Messania, a survivor of FGM, tells her story of finding the determination to escape abuse, challenge harmful cultural norms, and sing a new song of freedom for girls everywhere.



## Spring 2024 iZosh Chapter Events

Mark your calendars to participate in an iZosh Chapter Event!

### Friday, April 26: Birmingham, MI

Join iZosh Birmingham to learn from guest speaker Jennifer Cummings, Managing Director of The Mandate, an organization breaking the stronghold of poverty globally by providing basic care, education, and commerce.

Email [izosh.birmingham@gmail.com](mailto:izosh.birmingham@gmail.com) for more information about this hybrid Birmingham Event.

You can learn more about the Birmingham Chapter on their website: <https://www.lcr.church/izosh/>

### Monday, May 6: Maine

iZosh Maine’s spring event speaker is Florence Reed, founder of Sustainable Harvest. International. She’s a remarkable example of what a woman with an idea can create to benefit many.

Email [izoshmaine@gmail.com](mailto:izoshmaine@gmail.com) for more information about the Maine Chapter Events.

### In Focus: Ending FGM & Child Marriage

This blog highlights the work of World Vision, one of the organizations we work alongside as we support women in extreme poverty. The information, photo and story is shared with permission and can be found in the [January 2024 edition of the World Vision Strong Women Strong World Newsletter](#).

Each year on February 6, we acknowledge the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a day to raise awareness in order to combat the practice. It's also a day where we celebrate the progress made toward the elimination of the harmful traditional practices holding girls back from reaching their full potential.

In Kenya, female genital mutilation — which is mostly carried out on girls ages 10 to 14 — is often a precursor to child marriage. This harmful practice can have devastating physical and psychological effects that impact a girl's health, education, marriage, and future. And it's illegal.

Although considerable progress has been made toward ending child marriage globally, about 650 million of the world's girls and women alive today were married in childhood. Every minute, 22 girls under the age of 18 are married\*, and this number is rising as families in extreme poverty see few options besides the bride price they can get for their daughters.

“Child marriage is a global issue that affects millions of girls every year, robbing them of their chance at an education, threatening their health and safety, and locking them into a cycle of poverty. And at the current rate of progress, it will be 300 years before child marriage is eradicated. But change is possible in our lifetime,” says Melinda French Gates.

We strongly agree that change is possible. Together, we can help communities end FGM and child marriage in our lifetime.

\*Data Source: UNICEF



### Peninah's Story

When Peninah was a girl in Kenya, the rites of FGM were a celebration — the trauma and lifelong harm it caused girls was never considered. She was 'cut' at the age of 12, and she remembers feeling that she was now a woman. Soon after, she was married and had four children of her own. One of her children is now sponsored through World Vision. Information sessions held by World Vision staff helped members of Peninah's community learn about the harm caused by FGM and child marriage.

Over time, she started to challenge the long-held cultural mindsets she was raised with. She began to see that these traditional practices were damaging girls' well-being and was convinced they should be stopped. She became a community health volunteer and began advocating for the end of FGM and child marriage — speaking with community leaders and holding information sessions at the local school to tell others about girls' rights, the dangers of FGM and child marriage, and how to help stop them by reporting cases to the authorities.

Peninah has become a trusted friend and advocate for local girls, and she has stepped in in several cases to prevent them from becoming victims of these practices.



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## What Does Potential Look Like?

Written by Amy Kuhl, iZōsh Intl Media Manager

What is our potential? What is it we were made to accomplish and become? I hope that when you think about this question, it stirs in you dreams and possibilities that make you come alive!

What can we become? What would the world be like if we were all able to fulfill our potential as women, mothers, daughters, entrepreneurs? Asked another way, What does potential look like?

This question was posed at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries which took place in Doha in March, 2023. We all have potential, right? But what does that mean?

To have potential is defined as having “the necessary ability or qualities to become successful or useful in the future” (Collins Dictionary). Another dictionary, Oxford, defines potential as “having or showing the capacity to become or develop into something in the future.”

Capacity, ability and qualities are indicators of potential. But what potential looks like, according to the United National (UN), is hope and opportunity.

“Unfortunately, what is possible is all too often dictated not by the capacity, ability, or qualities of an individual, but by systems and access... When potential and opportunity are not aligned, the world suffers for it.”

Another way to look at potential is to look at what is possible. Unfortunately, what is possible is all too often dictated not by the capacity, ability, or qualities of an individual, but by systems and access. What is possible hinges heavily on whether or not the systems in place are designed in your favor or not. What is possible is dictated by what you have access to. When potential and opportunity are not aligned, the world suffers.

There are so many more questions we could ask. How is it decided who gets access to opportunity? Who in the world is ensuring potential is realized with access to things like education or business loans? The systems of the world are not always fair.

As a result of the United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, The Doha Programme of Action was created. This document outlines six key focus areas which are believed will “accelerate attainment of the sustainable development goals.”

Interestingly enough, the first key focus area is “Investing in people in least developed countries: eradicating poverty and building capacity to leave no one behind.” This is followed by other key focus areas including “supporting structural transformation as a driver of prosperity,” and “mobilizing international solidarity.”

Sub-points under the key focus areas further define the strategies that need to be implemented to achieve the sustainable development goals. Five out of the six focus areas include “expanding women’s access... to economic opportunities” as a means by which to accelerate development and help individuals, communities, and nations reach their potential.

The work of iZōsh: Women Investing In Women® so beautifully supports what the world leaders in development have discovered will lead to sustainable positive change. We invest in people—focusing on women living in extreme poverty who experience barriers to living to their full potential.

At an iZōsh Event, each microloan funded for a woman living in extreme poverty carries with it hope and opportunity. Hope for a better future. Opportunity for a woman to discover and develop her abilities and achieve her dreams.

**The microloans we fund help fuel a more hopeful and opportunity-filled world. This is what potential looks like.**



## Celebrating our Fall 2023 iZōsh Chapter Events

Our fall 2023 iZōsh Chapter Events were ushered in with bell-clad Rwandan dancers and a powerful story told by a Rwandan basket weaver in Maine. iZōsh Birmingham hosted a reflective and empowering event where women were encouraged to look deeper within themselves to discover and embrace their unique gifts.

### Gather & Give

In total, 88 women attended the Maine and Birmingham, MI Fall iZōsh Chapter Events. Between the two events, \$14,665 in dues and contributions was collected and then given out in real time to 35 women entrepreneurs living in extreme poverty!

### Learn

The speaker for the October 23rd Maine Chapter Event was Rwandan sweetgrass artist Ange Muhorakeye. Born in Burundi in a refugee camp after her family fled the civil war in Rwanda, Ange returned to her village at age eight. It was there that she learned the intricacies of weaving baskets, a skill and tradition that has shaped her cultural identity. Ange shared stories and photos of the people she is working to support back in Rwanda, beginning and ending the time with traditional dancing.

iZōsh Birmingham’s speaker, Jessie Forster, Community Organizer, Faith Leader, and Attorney, walked women through her three steps to move from feelings of being overwhelmed by the pain and suffering in the world to action! She encouraged women to embrace their unique gifts and take deliberate steps forward, no matter how seemingly small.

### Celebrate

What a joy to have the opportunity to gather, give, learn, and celebrate— all with the shared goal of empowering women! We are so grateful for the women who bravely stand up to share their stories, who dare to engage with the world in meaningful ways, and grateful for the many women who are taking steps to empower women across the world through microloans.

## Celebrating new milestones!



iZōsh Chapters hit a new milestone in 2023: we have given over 1,000 grants to support women living in extreme poverty across the world!