



**BEYOND APPLAUSE:
HEROINES OF
HEALTH 2021**

**Celebrating exceptional female
leadership and campaigning for
gender equity**

IT IS TIME TO BUILD A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR WOMEN HEALTH WORKERS. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.

Women health and care workers have been characterized as heroines for remaining on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic but the pandemic has shone a harsh light on the gender inequities in the health and care workforce that disadvantage women workers and at the same time, undermine health systems and global health security.

It is projected that by 2030, there will be a global shortage of 40 million health workers. We know that 70% of that workforce is women, and yet, only 25% of senior roles are held by women. We truly are at a tipping point in the health workforce crisis as we hear alarming reports of women healthcare workers leaving their roles due to harassment, low pay and low status. We cannot continue as we are.

A new social contract is needed now to retain women in the health workforce and attract more women to fill the millions of vacant jobs in the sector.

Women want the means - decent work, safety, dignity, fair pay and equal leadership - to do their jobs better and deliver stronger health outcomes for everyone. That new social contract will form the solid foundation for vaccinating the world, saving lives now and building back better and achieving global health security.



The Heroines of Health Awards brings together exceptional female leadership in health. Since the Awards began in 2017, we have built a community of inspirational change-makers from across the world who are recognized for their outstanding contributions. The Heroines of Health 2021 are no exception! From this year's Awardees you will hear stories of personal triumph, of relentless commitment to decent and respectful care, and above all, of dedication to strive for better for the people they serve. We would like to thank you for being with us today, to amplify the stories of leadership and to mobilise together for change.

Now, more than ever, we must celebrate the achievements and leadership of women in health, in all walks of life, to elevate the status of women leaders and call on decisive action for gender equity in global health. I would like to applaud all women health workers across the world who have grappled with the most challenging of obstacles in recent times to bring health to their communities. It is especially important to recognize women health workers who are providing care in fragile settings.

Women in Global Health stands with you. We will continue to advocate for a new, gender equal social contract for women in the health and care sector until it becomes a reality. We would like to thank our sponsorship partner The Johnson & Johnson Foundation and all the partners that submitted nominations and our promoting partner for their support and commitment to Women in Global Health.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roopa Dhatt".

Dr. Roopa Dhatt
Executive Director & Co-Founder,
Women in Global Health

ABOUT HEROINES OF HEALTH

The Heroines of Health Awards began in 2017 to amplify the platform for women's contributions to health, which are immense, but go largely unrecognized. Women deliver health, men lead it.

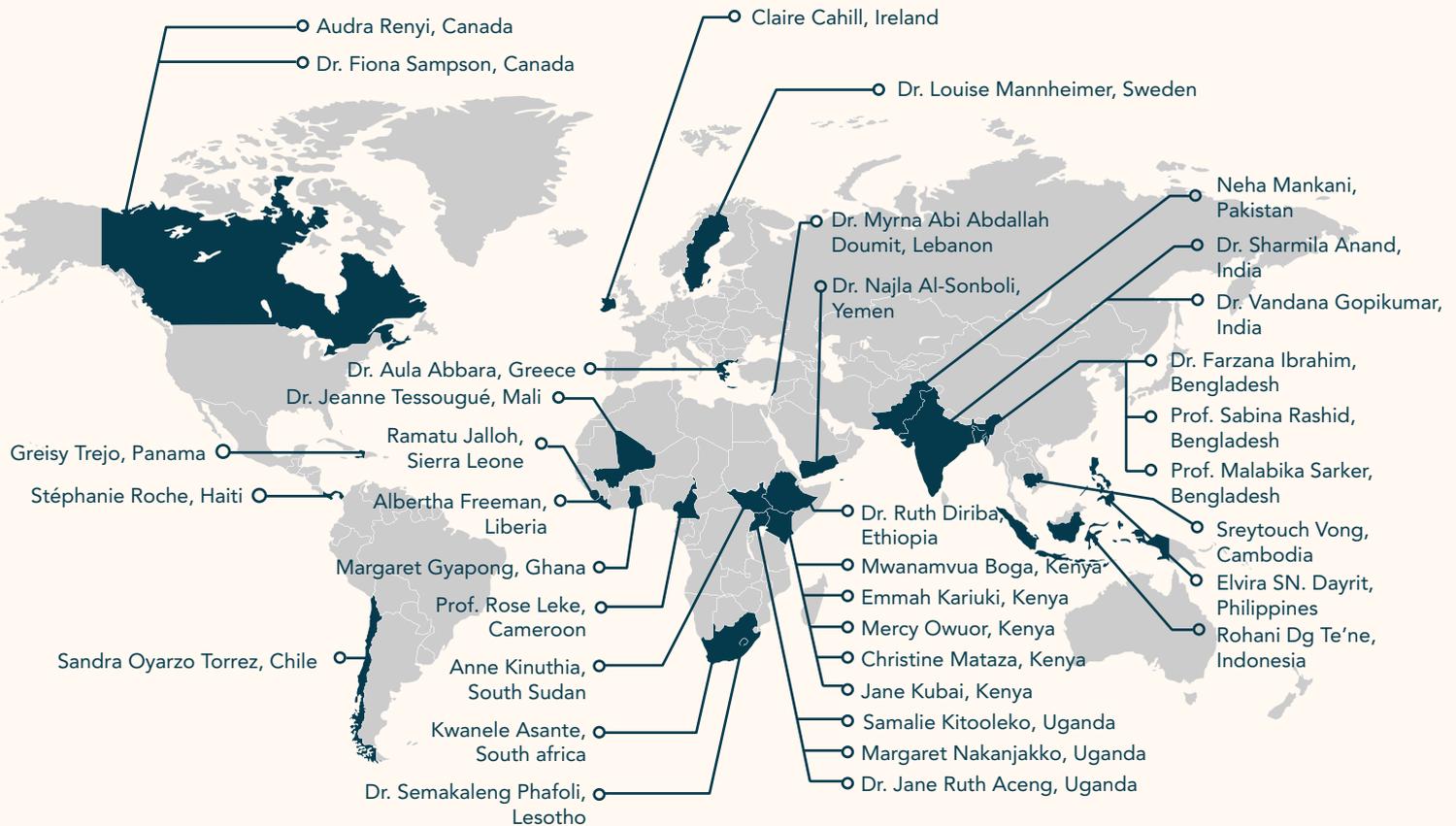
Inspired by the wealth of talent of women working in health, Women in Global Health launched this one of a kind recognition that brings women from all walks and backgrounds to be celebrated and provides them a platform to voice their greatest concerns to global leaders, to transform our societies to be more gender equitable in health.

To date, Women in Global Health have recognized 36 inspirational leaders as Heroines of Health from all over the world. Each Heroine has made outstanding contributions to health, and to the campaign for gender equity in global health.

The stories of the Heroines of Health are available at www.womeningh.org/HeroinesofHealth

Contact info@womeningh.org

#HeroinesofHealth



ANNOUNCING THE HEROINES OF HEALTH 2021



Dr. Ruth Diriba

Dr. Vandana Gopikumar



Dr. Myrna Abi Abdallah Doumit



Ramatu Jalloh



Neha Mankani



Jane Kubai



Greisy Trejo



Dr. Ruth Diriba

Age: 28

Occupation: General Practitioner

Country: Ethiopia

Nominated by: Last Mile Health



PUTTING WOMEN AT THE HEART OF HEALTH CARE

Ruth Diriba will never forget the patient who taught her the fight for healthcare is tied up in our fight for gender equality. The patient was a pregnant woman, who was forced to walk for days while in labour to reach the hospital where Ruth was working as a medical intern. The woman suffered irreversible damage but survived. Her baby died; it was the third time in a row that her pregnancy had ended in the death of her child.

Determined to learn how to prevent such fatal complications, Ruth went to work in the rural Sidama region at the Leku Primary Hospital. For two years she struggled to care for her patients – many of them wounded in internal conflict - without electricity or running water, often without food or medical supplies, cut off from the referral system by closed roads.

Ruth saw a lot of trauma, but she came through these difficulties to head up efforts ensuring quality care at the hospital. She developed trainings for colleagues in providing reproductive health services. She designed labour and abortion wards which would protect a woman's privacy. She created a child-friendly paediatric ward. Above all she saw the importance of policy decision and systems building, and so she joined the Ethiopian Public Health Institute where she provided training on mental and psychosocial health for colleagues working with Internally Displaced People (IDPs).

When COVID-19 hit she became a focal point for community engagement at the National

Emergency Operation Centre. She conducted campaigns, led community engagement and developed digital education content for health workers as part of Ethiopia's response to the pandemic.

Women health care workers, Ruth believes, are the beating heart of any health system. Ethiopia's Health Extension Workers are mostly women, and she has pioneered digitized in-service trainings to support them, starting with reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health. She now works for Last Mile Health in Ethiopia as Technical Advisor, working with the Ministry of Health to respond to COVID-19 and strengthen the health system for the long-term.

She is also leading the organization's gender mainstreaming and social inclusion programme in Ethiopia, working in partnerships with the Ministry of Health to close the gender gap in digital literacy. 'Health for all cannot be achieved without gender equity' she says.

Dr. Vandana Gopikumar

Age: 50

Occupation: Mental Health Champion

Country: India

Nominated by: Grand Challenges
Canada

CHALLENGING STIGMA, CHANGING THINKING

Vandana Gopikumar has been reaching the most difficult to reach, women who are homeless and with mental ill-health.

Of all the vulnerable people hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, women with mental ill-health, who may also spiral down into a state of homelessness as a result of abject poverty, have been amongst the hardest hit. In India, and globally, limited options are available for this vulnerable group resulting in neglect, abuse, long term incarceration and early mortality.

'Our responses to these women range from sympathy and the wish to help, to revulsion and fear,' says Vandana. 'Yet when we address the root causes – such as poverty, conflict, disasters, domestic violence – we can dramatically change their prospects, enabling them to return to their communities, to hold down jobs, to live with dignity and respect.'

Vandana and her partner, Vaishnavi, set up **The Banyan** to confront the stigma and challenge of mental health head on, not only supporting

those in need but simultaneously educating communities and breaking down barriers. Led in part by women with lived experiences of mental health challenges who have been supported by The Banyan in the past, they provide safe spaces, employment opportunities, mental health support and basic care. This model is not only more just than the institutional alternative, it is more effective – and at a fraction of the cost. The Banyan now serves a population of over 1 million, and is expanding to 10 states of India and into Sri Lanka, working alongside local governments and partners.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, The Banyan have stepped up their work to provide oxygen, to deliver medications and meal kits, and provide safe spaces, while continuing to support women in need with their unique housing and mental health model.



Dr. Myrna Abi Abdallah Doumit

Age: 55

Occupation: Nurse

Country: Lebanon

Nominated by: the International Council of Nurses

LEADING THE NURSES OF LEBANON

On August 4th, 2020, a massive explosion ripped through Beirut's docks, killing 217 people and injuring thousands more. It was a disaster which called for an extraordinary response and it was Doctor Myrna Doumit who led the nurses of Lebanon as they stepped up to the challenge – and made sure their contribution was recognised.

These same nurses were on the verge of going on strike. Often unpaid, their working conditions had long been unsafe and unsustainable - and then the COVID-19 pandemic ramped up the crisis. Lebanon's nurses had won the support of doctors and other health professionals in taking this unprecedented stand for their rights.

But when the explosion happened the nurses – uniquely resilient after 40 years of war - came out in full force to help the injured and dying. Under Myrna's strategic leadership, nurses gave their all – sometimes their own blood, sometimes their own lives. Five nurses died and many more were seriously injured while on duty.

Myrna went to every major hospital in Beirut to coordinate the response. Three major hospitals had been destroyed and the remainder were flooded with casualties. Medicines and supplies had been destroyed. Nurses were suturing wounds and providing emergency treatments on the streets.

In the aftermath of the blast Myrna went on to lead Lebanon's COVID-19 relief efforts, organising national infection control and prevention measures, including paid leave and hotel accommodation where nurses who were infected could isolate. The Order of Nurses had trained nurses on COVID-19 before any case was recorded in the country, and as the President of the Order, Myrna was involved with the national emergency committee for COVID-19 from day one.

At the same time Myrna used media channels to shed light on the huge contribution made by nurses during the pandemic, engaging the people of Lebanon, empowering nurses and raising their voices. Her persistence and passion in creating strategic alliances and speaking up for nurses has not only given them much needed practical and psychological support, it has been a game changer in how nurses are perceived and valued.

Ramatu Jalloh



Age: 38

Occupation: Community Health Worker

Country: Sierra Leone

Nominated by: Partners In Health

PROTECTING THE HEALTH WORKERS WHO PROTECT US ALL

Ramatu Jalloh, 38, from Sierra Leone, has put frontline health workers front and centre on the world stage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

‘I’m ready for the fight,’ says Ramatu Jalloh, an inspirational Community Health Worker (CHW) from Sierra Leone. ‘People are scared, but we are there on the front line, making sure they have the right information to prevent (COVID-19).’

Ramatu has 12 years of experience as a frontline health worker in Sierra Leone and Nigeria. She and the 10 CHWs whom she supervises are committed to reaching the unreachable. ‘No matter how high a mountain,’ she says, ‘it will never stop our CHWs from reaching the sick. But what we need is PPE. What we need is support from around the world’.

Ramatu has won that support. In 2020 at the Skoll World Forum, she described her own battle with HIV and called for protection for

all frontline health workers, especially those who are immunocompromised. ‘When you protect a CHW, you are protecting the nation,’ she said, because ‘we are the link between the community and the health facility’. Her passionate advocacy led to the COVID-19 Action Fund for Africa which has so far raised nearly \$USD 20 million to provide over 100 million pieces of PPE to hundreds of thousands of frontline health workers worldwide.

Ramatu has inspired a growing network of CHW advocates from around the globe who watch her speeches and see how advocacy by CHWs for CHWs can be a true catalyst for change. Her message is ‘you must never allow your status to handle you. Instead, be the first to handle your status because health is everyone’s right.’

Neha Mankani

Age: 35

Occupation: Midwife

Country: Pakistan

Nominated by: The International Confederation of Midwives



MAKING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

It was while working as a midwife in a Karachi Hospital that Neha Mankani realized that relatively small sums of money could make the difference between life and death for so many of the women she cared for:

“Many a time, I saw someone crying outside the labour room because they had run out of cash to pay for (life-saving) blood. I often meet people who are in very desperate situations because of unanticipated emergencies.’

Once when a newborn was very sick she asked a grandmother to urgently take a sample of a baby’s blood to be tested. ‘When she told me she would try to arrange the money overnight I decided an emergency fund needed to be in place.’ Neha sent out a Facebook message, which went viral and she received enough donations to set up the rapid response ‘Mama Baby Fund’ which helped 150 families at the hospital with emergency needs within its first six months and has since supported 20,000 families to provide emergency maternal and neonatal health financing since it began in 2015.

Now Neha – a graduate of the ICM Young Leaders’ Programme – heads the Karachi chapter of the Midwifery Association of Pakistan. She and her fellow midwives face many challenges with high maternal death rates and low-quality training. Pakistani midwives often lack not only skills but experience and confidence. She works with the Indus Hospital and Health Network where she is setting up and managing Midwife Led Models of Care at Primary Care Settings around the country. One of the initiatives she worked on with the network was to set up a mentoring initiative to ‘buddy’ new midwives with their seniors, building the skills of midwife

graduates to cope with obstetric emergencies, while also learning financial literacy and respectful maternity care.

‘A big part of our role as midwives is to provide compassionate care during this difficult stage of their lives when they face not only physical but emotional challenges.’

The results of the initiative are clear to see. Two years on and midwife graduates of the programme now have better skills and more confidence, partly gained from using innovative training tools such as podcasts in local languages which have been developed by Neha. They are also being sought after to lead other maternal and newborn health initiatives in both the private and public health sectors. Meanwhile women are enjoying better access to services in the region, including Pakistan’s first mobile boat clinic which provides them with antenatal care onboard.

Neha now regularly participates in global webinars and events to voice the many issues women are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic. She is a powerful and articulate advocate for the pivotal role of midwives in women’s lives during the pandemic and beyond: “The first woman who delivered at our midwife-led unit was on her 9th pregnancy. Many of her babies had not survived and it was the first time she had had access to quality maternal health care”.

Jane Kubai

Age: 27

Occupation: Theatre Assistant

Country: Kenya

Nominated by: Amref Health Africa



FOLLOWING HER DREAMS AGAINST THE ODDS

At the age of 11 Jane Kubai's father told her it was time to leave school, be circumcised (FGM) and get married. So she ran away from home and a priest helped her find a job as a maid.

'I told him please, I want to go back to school and achieve my dream to become a doctor, so he sponsored me until I reached secondary school.'

After a few years Jane had to drop out, to get a job and support her elderly parents and siblings. Yet she never gave up her dream. Working for five years as a security guard at Consolata Hospital in Nyeri County, her empathy and intelligence shone through: *'I know the pain of the patients and their visitors,' she says. 'We talk, we pray, I encourage and console them.'*

Amref colleagues spotted her talents and trained her in COVID-19 prevention and management. She began to educate communities and patients on how to prevent COVID-19, tackling

fears about the vaccine and giving them life-saving information.

Jane took a Basic Life Support certificate and – in her lunch break - started working on the wards. *'But I was most interested in Theatre'* she says. *'I wanted to care for the patients after their operations.'* With her savings she became a part-time student at Mary Lonela Consolata Medical College to pursue a Certificate in Theatre Technology.

Jane has now graduated and works at Sisto Mazoldi Hospital in Rongai, Nakuru as a Theatre Assistant. But she still aims to continue with education so that she can achieve her lifelong dream and become a surgeon.

Greisy Trejo

Age: 42

Occupation: Nurse

Country: Based in Panama

Nominated by: the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



THE SURVIVOR TURNED CHAMPION OF MENTAL HEALTH FOR ALL

Greisy Trejo, a 42 year-old nurse from IFRC American Regional Office in Panama, has drawn on painful experiences of her own to become a fervent champion for others who are vulnerable.

Born in Caracas, Venezuela, she overcame poverty and inequality to train as a community-based health carer. Then in 2010, gender-based violence, widowhood and her son's attempted kidnapping forced her to leave Venezuela to start a new life in Spain.

Here she continued helping the most vulnerable as a Red Cross volunteer. She then became a staff member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), where she is pioneering the drive in the Americas Region for more comprehensive mental health care as part of Universal Health Coverage.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Greisy has led a historic transformation of the Red Cross to provide more inclusive mental health services for people across the Americas - especially indigenous people, migrants, LGBTQ people, and those who are victims of violence or

isolation. Peer support work; the exchange of experiences; using tech solutions to reach those in need of care; new training content and innovative methodologies – all are a part of her legacy.

Greisy continues to work tirelessly to promote a culture of peace, inclusion, equality, and resilience, especially for children. So far, she has supported the training of more than 150 teachers in mental health and psychosocial support. As a result, more than 3,000 children are now better equipped to cope with the distressing impacts of the pandemic.

'The new generation is more aware of the importance of mental health,' says Greisy. 'They can transform how the world sees this essential part of our wellbeing.'



**WE SHOW SOLIDARITY TO ALL THE WOMEN WORKING IN
HEALTH IN CONFLICT AND FRAGILE STATES.**

**THEY DEMONSTRATE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP THRIVES EVEN IN
EXTREMELY DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, AS THEY RISE TO PUT
THEIR COMMUNITIES FIRST.**





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WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK OUR PARTNERS FOR SUPPORTING THE EVENT AND NOMINATING EXCEPTIONAL LEADERS FOR THE BEYOND APPLAUSE: HEROINES OF HEALTH 2021 AWARDS



WITH THANKS TO OUR SPONSOR:



FOUNDATION

**ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE HEROINES OF HEALTH BY NIKITA ABUYA
DESIGN BY MARIE PREVOT**