HEROINES OF HEALTH

CELEBRATING WOMEN ADVANCING HEALTH IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AND BEYOND

MAY 19, 2019
RECOGNITION MATTERS
Women's contributions in global health are essential to building a better world.

Women make up 70 percent of the global health workforce and contribute nearly $3 trillion to the health and social sector. They are the leaders and drivers of health in their communities, and without them, universal health coverage (UHC) will not be possible. Far too often their life-saving contributions go unrecognized and their inspiring stories stay untold. We at Women in Global Health want to change that.

Today, alongside the 72nd World Health Assembly, and with support from Johnson & Johnson, Medtronic Foundation, Pathfinder International, and in partnership with the United Nations Foundation, Women in Global Health is thrilled to recognize and celebrate influential and passionate women leaders in global health—and their stories—at our 3rd annual Heroines of Health Reception and Gala. The Heroines of Health honor aims to raise the profiles of women leaders in global health and provide a platform for them among key global health decision makers.

Recognition and profile-raising of female leaders in global health is a key priority of Women in Global Health and our partners. With the support of influential health leaders like you, we believe we can drive necessary change for gender equity matters and positively influence local, regional, and global health policies related to UHC. Aligned with our community’s shared commitment to UHC, these extraordinary women are advancing health for all through dedicated efforts to strengthen community health and/or the community health workforce. I am excited for you to hear and share their stories, as they shape the future of global health.

Thank you for joining us today to recognize these remarkable women and their achievements. We’re honored to celebrate their achievements with you and hope to inspire lasting change with their stories.

Warmly,

Dr. Roopa Dhatt
Executive Director & Co-Founder,
Women in Global Health
MINISTER DR. JANE RUTH ACENG
Minister of Health, Uganda
COUNTRY: Uganda
NOMINATED BY: Pathfinder International
TWITTER: @JaneRuth_Aceng

ABOUT HER WORK
As the Minister of Health in Uganda, Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng’s has long championed the improvement of community health outcomes as a key ingredient for universal health coverage. Prior to becoming the Minister of Health, Dr. Aceng was the Director of General Health Services, promoting community health with this national platform. Currently, Dr. Aceng is also assessing the Village Health Team (VHT) Porgram, where she applies evidence-based practices to drive policy change and influence health outcomes. Her involvement in high-level meetings, advocacy, and technical conventions have demonstrated Uganda’s continued commitment to primary health care. These cumulative efforts give Dr. Aceng a solid plan of tackling healthcare from both research and clinical perspectives to ensure that no one is left behind.

HER PRINCIPLES
"I would love to see a transformed health system where everybody gets quality healthcare but where we also have comprehensive health coverage for everyone. It is painful to see women, children, and adolescents dying needlessly from preventable causes, and I am very glad that my government is set out to address this issue."
ABOUT HER WORK
A midwife for 27 years, Ms. Oyarzo Torres has dedicated herself to primary health care (PHC) and UHC through her work with communities across Latin and Central America, advocating for sexual and reproductive health rights and championing gender equality. As a teacher, educationalist, and advocate for sexual and reproductive rights, Ms. Oyarzo Torres has trained thousands of midwives and developed curricula that focus on centering communities and working in low-resource settings. She has also paved the way for midwifery regulation in Latin America. As the President of the Association of Midwives of Chile, Ms. Oyarzo Torres advocated to defend women’s right to access legal abortion in three circumstances (pregnancy by rape, foetal infeasibility, and risk to mother’s life), and contributed to policy and legislation changes in Mexico for midwifery regulation. She believes that being a midwife is the highest honor, as she can accompany other women during an incredible life experience. Ms. Oyarzo Torres stays true to her passion: empowering women to make their own choices about their bodies and their lives.

WHAT INSPIRES HER
“My personal reward from being a midwife is seeing the smiles of women when they have made their own decisions, hearing their dreams, and holding their trust.”
**DR. FARZANA IBRAHIM**

Plastic Surgeon & Professor
BIRDEM General Hospital

**COUNTRY:** Bangladesh  
**NOMINATED BY:** ReSurge International

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**ABOUT HER WORK**

Dr. Farzana Ibrahim is one of the first female reconstructive plastic surgeons in Bangladesh, and received her MBBS from Bangladesh Medical College with residencies in both general and plastic surgery at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. As a young medical intern in Dhaka, Dr. Ibrahim saw one patient that changed the course of her life: a female professor at a local university with advanced breast cancer, who did not feel comfortable with being examined by a male doctor due to societal backlash. Saddened and alarmed, Dr. Ibrahim decided to devote her career to removing the socio-cultural barriers that prevented women from receiving the compassionate care they needed. Today, she is the assistant professor, associate director, and plastic surgeon at the Bangladesh Institute of Research and Rehabilitation in Diabetes, Endocrine, and Metabolic Disorders (BIRDEM) General Hospital, an institution established by her grandfather. Since 2006, Dr. Ibrahim has been a partner surgeon for ReSurge International, providing free reconstructive surgery for women who cannot pay for services. As one of the 2018 Pioneering Women of Reconstructive Surgery Leadership Program, Dr. Ibrahim continues her grandfather’s legacy in providing care for all.

**OVERCOMING HER CHALLENGES**

“The common assumption is that woman are soft, can’t handle critical situations, and can’t take pressure and make tough decisions. But now, I am driven by one thought—I can and I will.’
Ms. Freeman was inspired to study nursing by her desire to serve her fellow Liberians. After graduating from her nursing degree with honors, Ms. Freeman admirably chose a difficult position as her first assignment—to serve as a Community Health Services Supervisor (CHSS), the nurse cadre that oversees community health workers in Liberia’s national community health program. In her role as a CHSS, she strengthens and supports Liberia’s critical health workforce through mentoring, coaching, and supervising community health workers (CHWs), who provide PHC services to the most vulnerable populations in the country. Her supportive supervision allows the CHWs to thrive and ultimately advance Liberia’s UHC aims. Ms. Freeman’s work is both challenging and fulfilling—she chose this position to gain insight on how patients behave in their communities before coming to the clinic. This intimate knowledge and connection to the community enables her to better provide healthcare, focusing on promoting health behaviors and preventative services at the community level and thus strengthening the continuum of care at the facility level.

ON GENDER EQUITY

"Learning to ride the motorbike transformed the way I thought about gender equity. Before, I had this belief that only a man could ride the motorbike. But when I got the community health job, the only means of supervising community health workers was to ride a motorbike. I am happy to report that I now ride a motorbike as much as a man can. I always have this saying in mind: 'Never let your dream die because of obstacles in your way. Work hard; doors will open.'"
STÉPHANIE ROCHE
Nurse Midwife & Head of Maternity Unit at Marigot Health Center
COUNTRY: Haiti
NOMINATED BY: UNFPA, Johnson & Johnson

ABOUT HER WORK
As the head of the maternity unit in Marigot, Haiti, midwife Stéphanie Roche’s success in preventing maternal mortality is well known throughout the Marigot area. Initially a nurse, Ms. Roche chose become a midwife in 2011 in order to evolve in a specific field by drawing on her ability and knowledge to serve women, known as “poto mitan,” or the central pillars in Haitian society, in their day-to-day lives. Her rigor, dexterity, and passion propelled her to be responsible for the Marigot maternity unit. Ms. Roche believes that the midwifery profession is unique. In her daily work, She strives to ensure the best care for pregnant women and women of childbearing age, provide medical and psychological support to pregnant women, and conduct sensitization sessions for community health workers. Ms. Roche believes that by bringing together similar contributions from other health professionals who share this same ideals, Haiti and other countries will be able to make a leap forward in health for the benefit of women and newborns.

WHAT INSPIRES HER
“To see a woman give life and help her do it is something extraordinary. What I like most is having the opportunity to educate women, to talk to them, to teach them things that can lead to a change in behavior.”
ABOUT HER WORK

Combating impunity and strengthening accountability is personal for Dr. Fiona Sampson. Born a thalidomide victim, Dr. Sampson developed an early appreciation of battling stigmatization, discrimination, and inequality. Her personal experiences inform her daily work as a human rights lawyer with a PhD in women’s equality law and a highly respected advocate for the rights of survivors of sexual violence in Canada and abroad. Dr. Sampson is the founder and CEO of Equality Effect, an international network of human rights advocates working collaboratively to ensure governments in Commonwealth countries uphold, enforce, and protect the rights of women and girls. She is most known for leading Equality Effect’s “160 Girls Project,” a ground-breaking initiative that won a landmark legal victory in Kenya’s High Court in 2013, when Kenyan law enforcement officials were ordered to investigate and prosecute 160 rapes. In June 2017, the United Nations recognized the Equality Effect’s “160 Girls Project” as a best practice to advance women’s rights and women’s empowerment. Dr. Sampson hopes to not only draw attention to the rampant and often silent sexual violence epidemic, but also to emphasize the crucial connection between health, rape, and the law.

OVERCOMING HER CHALLENGES

"I was pretty much motivated to challenge injustice from the time that I was able to speak. I think I was maybe DNA-programmed to challenge negative experiences of discrimination."
DR. JEANNE TESSOUGUÉ
Chief of Party, HRH 2030

COUNTRY: Mali
NOMINATED BY: IntraHealth International & Frontline Health Workers Coalition
TWITTER: @JeanneAmadiguin

ABOUT HER WORK

With more than thirteen years of experience in strengthening health systems, Dr. Jeanne Tessougué plays a critical role in advancing both UHC and gender equality by aligning health workers with health systems. She is currently the chief of party of IntraHealth’s USAID/Mali Human Resources for Health Strengthening Activity. Her work focuses on managing the implementation, design, and monitoring and evaluation of health programs using a participatory community approach to reduce maternal, newborn, and infant mortality. Before joining IntraHealth, Dr. Tessougué was the director of the Sexual/Reproductive Health and Family Planning Department at Population Services International-Mali and previously worked for the University of Montreal Department of Public Health on maternal death audits at the community and district level. She has worked with SamuSocial International on the rehabilitation of street children and youth and with UNFPA as a Reproductive Health/Family Planning Manager. Dr. Tessougué applies health economics knowledge to advocating for human resources allocation in health. Her support for civil engagement and public-private partnerships promotes integrated family planning and reproductive health services in both rural and urban environments.

HER PRINCIPLES

“No woman should die while giving birth and every child has the right to fully enjoy his childhood. So, as women, let us actively engage at all levels for sustainable change in our health systems to promote equality of opportunity, our own development, and that of the communities we serve.”
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womeningh.org/get-involved
Contact us at: info@womeningh.org
IN MEMORIAM

To Samya Stumo, a Women in Global Health team member, whose indomitable passion for global health and authentic desire to serve communities will always be remembered.

To all global health workers and leaders lost this year. Their enduring bravery and resilience in forging a better world lives on.