

# Women Lead the Way Transcript

Samuel Lawrence Foundation

*First Fridays*

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**Grace Chalmers:** [00:01:21] Welcome to everyone tuning in to join us for the March edition of the Samuel Lawrence Foundation's First Fridays series, and Happy Women's History Month to you all. My name is Grace Chalmers, and I'm the Program Manager here at the Samuel Lawrence Foundation. SLF advances impactful programs at the intersection of science, arts, and education in order to find solutions to our planet's greatest challenges—from nuclear safety all the way through to climate change. We host our First Friday shows every month to showcase the incredible people, ideas, and projects that are advancing that mission and making a positive difference in the world. For today's edition of First Fridays, we've assembled a phenomenal panel of women who are truly shaping the future. I'm going to turn this over to our moderator, the CEO of Brooklyn Story Lab, Lance Gould, to introduce our wonderful panel of speakers. Lance, over to you.

**Lance Gould:** [00:02:13] Thank you, Grace, and welcome to all. We're living in a precarious era, one defined in the last half decade by a poly crisis. Most concerning of which has been the three C's Covid, climate and conflict. And much of the worst elements of these crises have been exacerbated by male leadership. As the global climate gets increasingly worse, it's worth noting that the international climate conferences that could have more impact are dominated by men, like the UN cop conferences, where the heads of state of almost 200 countries are signatories to consequential treaties, and the number of them that are women are in the single digits. And as noted in an op-ed by Margot Wallström, Sweden's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, there were 130 international peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2014, and women were signatories to just 13 of those. Meanwhile, on the other side of the coin, the most compelling leadership in the handling of all of these crises has come from women. New Zealand's Jacinda Ardern won much praise throughout the world for her handling of the Covid emergency in her country, and women leadership in the climate space has been brilliant, notably by Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Mottley and former President of Ireland Mary Robinson. For this episode of the Samuel Lawrence

Foundation's First Fridays video podcast, we've assembled a panel of women leaders because they have answers and solutions as to how to move forward in a new way, with an emphasis on sensible solutions and not the grandstanding of so many current leaders. We'll hear from panelists who have a focus on educating the next generation of women, making sure they have a seat at the table, which will be better for our global economy, our global society, and for our planet. Women will lead the way. So joining us today, we have Anne Wadsworth, Founder and Executive Director of Girls Education Collaborative, which has a focus on Tanzania. Janna Salokangas was one of two women from Finland who co-founded Mission Impact Academy, with an eye on leveling the playing field for women in the jobs of the future, such as in AI. Melissa Simms, a lawyer in Illinois who is using the legal system to hold the fossil fuel industries worst offenders accountable. And Nyaradzo Hoto, one of the officers leading Akashinga, Zimbabwe's all woman ranger unit and Akashinga biodiversity officer. Welcome to all. Each of our guests today has a unique vision and approach to navigating some of the biggest challenges we're facing as a planet, and is embracing the ideals of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, a blueprint for making sure that no one on the planet is left behind by 2030. First, we'd love to hear a little more about each of the initiatives with which each panelist is involved, and then learn more about some granular ideas that each has come across in their work.

**Lance Gould:** [00:04:44] So first question will be for Anne, and you found a girls education collaborative in Buffalo, New York, but your focus is on Tanzania. Tell us about how this project got off the ground, and what is so important about making sure that girls and young women receive an education?

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:05:00] Thanks, [00:05:00] Lance, and greetings to everybody. Really happy to be here as we launch The Month of the Woman--a great start to it. So the problem in the world that Girls Education Collaborative is trying to solve is that there are millions, approximately 130 million girls around the world who are out of school simply because of their gender. And there are many reasons for this. There are quite a scale and scope of barriers that keep girls out of school that range from, uh, the very harsh and extreme, which would include female genital cutting and forced early marriage, to the unequal burden that girls often have in the household, like collecting firewood or water, compared to boys in their household, because boys are given preference for their education. So there's a variety of reasons why girls are barred from

their education, but the majority of them are matters of inequity and based solely on their gender. So that is the problem in the world that we're trying to solve. And we go about that by supporting and investing in and being allies to the community-born and community-led and community-based solutions that are centered around the girl-child and helping children gain agency and to stay in school and complete 12 years of a quality secondary education. The reason this is so important is, first and foremost, it is a basic issue of human rights, that girls are denied the freedom and choice and life and barred from all that education can tee up for them later in life, simply because of their gender.

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:06:59] So first and foremost, it is an issue of human rights. But in addition to that, when you do educate a girl who eventually becomes a woman, it actually has an even a greater impact on that girl's community, nation and our world. So when you see, um, societies where girls are educated, they contribute more to revenue development. So a country's, you know, gross national product is higher, there's more productivity. There are, fewer children...Um, the children who are born have better health outcomes, have a greater chance of education. It is a pathway actually out of generational poverty. And that has a ripple effect, as I say, beyond their community, into their nation, into our world. And lastly, I'll just cite: I think we can also...There's a very clear line that can be drawn between how a country treats and educates its girls and women and its level of radicalization. And so that's certainly something that touches all of us in our world. So in in nutshell, those are the reasons why it's important and the problem that we're trying to solve.

**Lance Gould:** [00:08:19] Thank you Anne. And while you were speaking, we saw some really beautiful photos from some of the projects that you're running in Tanzania, helping to run in Tanzania, supporting in Tanzania. Um, we mentioned the SDGs earlier and how, uh, the SDGs are also interconnected in promoting gender equality, which is SDG5 can have an impact on climate, can have an impact on economic outcome, things of that nature. You have another program, another initiative that Girls Education Collaborative has helped launch, which also involves the Katanga School, which is the school in northwest rural Tanzania that you really first started with. And this program is called Garden for the Future. Tell us about how this initiative, how it tackles so many of the UN SDGs simultaneously as well.

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:09:05] Right. So our first, um, engagement with the community was with the Katanga Girls Secondary School in Tanzania, as you've mentioned. And that's where our deepest partnership and most long lasting partnership is. And on this site of it's a residential secondary school in a very underserved and remote area where cultural traditions, a distinctive cultural traditions are still very, very strong. And this garden for the future is a regenerative agriculture project based on the principles of permaculture. And the idea is, is to bring together these new ways of doing agriculture, which are actually based in sort of ancient and indigenous traditions. But it's moving away from the colonial and, [00:10:00] um, methodologies that were introduced, which involved monocropping and heavy use of pesticides and fertilizers and back to multi-cropping in a way that restores the land, restores topsoil, uh, restores deforestation and leads to climate resiliency and climate change mitigation. But the idea is to bring it together with girls at this age and level of their education, because women play a really super-sized role in agriculture across the continent of Africa. And so it's a pilot, it's a sandbox, uh, and where we can watch the outcomes of, from, at minimum, girls taking these strategies home to their own families and their own home family gardens, to, as a way to ripple out the impact of restoring the land and also producing crops that are better for the body and nutrition to, at best, inspiring the next generation of educated girls coming up in the leadership ranks. Right now, they just--the feeling is that agriculture is what old people do and what uneducated people do, and the continent really, really needs people who are inspired by how certain types of agriculture can change our world and save our world. So we're hoping that this pilot project will inspire some of these talented young future leaders to think about agro-entrepreneurism and regenerative agriculture as a pathway for them.

**Lance Gould:** [00:11:47] Well, thank you for sharing that. And that's a great segue to talk to Janna, talking about, uh, great economic opportunities for women in the future and trying to develop them with the skills that they need to do so. So, Janna, thank you for joining us today, first of all, and tell us about Mission Impact Academy, MIA, and how MIA is helping to open new doors for women in high paying and important jobs in the tech sector, specifically the emerging technologies affiliated with AI.

**Janna Salokangas:** [00:12:14] Wonderful. Thank you so much for having us and me here. I'm honored and excited to be on this panel together with you all. My name is Janna Salokangas. I'm Co-founder of MIA, Mission Impact Academy, and Mia is a

global AI Academy, empowering forward thinking companies and non-technical women through education. In AI, our goal is really to upskill 1 million non-technical women worldwide and unlock 100,000 jobs, accelerating the advancement of AI skills and driving inclusive innovation in the AI space. Today, we have a learning network of more than 1000 women globally from over 65 different countries learning daily about AI. We run interactive, fun, upskilling challenges and AI challenges, and we want to make AI accessible for all non-technicals who want it, me included. By the way, I'm the best example. I used to be a non-technical founder only a few years ago. So it's all about continuous learning and getting out there, learning by doing. And this is what we believe in. Uh, in as mayor we do run different, uh, upskilling programs as well for companies to send their internal workforce and, and the women to be upskilled inside our, programs.

**Janna Salokangas:** [00:13:24] Really the future of work is being created now. And the biggest question we always get whether AI will take over my job. And my answer is no. But a person using AI will have incredible career opportunities. And this is what we want to empower these women to understand. "Let's start to learn the skills of the future AI now, because you will have incredible career opportunities by understanding and using these." And we have great testimonials, and I'm happy to share a bit later about those as well. Those, uh, new jobs, new roles that we have, we have achieved or these women have got after going through our our programs. But we really want to make sure that women are at the forefront of the AI revolution. And we do believe that the winning combination of the future is human plus AI. So by focusing on relevant AI education and upskilling for the non-technical workforce, we can really create well-paid, inclusive jobs that will include both AI and the human intelligence. They're both they're both equally needed.

**Lance Gould:** [00:14:22] And I love your point about how we shouldn't be afraid of AI. We should embrace it. But let me let me point out a statistic here. I'm not sure that our viewers realize just how disproportionately devastating the global pandemic was on women in the workforce. While women held less than 40% of all global jobs before the pandemic, they suffered 54% of pandemic driven job losses. Some European women leaders put an op ed together, and they noted at the time that, uh, at least, quote, "an entire generation of girls was robbed of the opportunity before they were even born to stand on equal economic footing as male counterparts." [00:15:00] So your thoughts on that, Janna?

**Janna Salokangas:** [00:15:02] Yeah, shocking. Obviously what's happening. But let me give you a little bit of hope. And we really started MIA's work during the pandemic as well. And what we were able to validate with only few weeks, uh, upskilling programs, micro-credential programs, we were able to validate these women's skills and they were able to get internal promotions, start new companies, and get new roles. So we believe that the future is really about micro learning. And the traditional learning methods are having hard times to keep up with the fast-paced information. So with only few weeks with upskilling the relevant skills, and we need to make sure that we work together with organizations to understand what are the future skills required for the future jobs, and make sure that we upskill these women to meet those needs. So there is really hope there, because only with short upskilling programs, we can see the incredible impact. Already we have great examples. [For example] of Simone, 60 years old, becoming a CEO of a Swiss bank after going through our program. So she was able to showcase her AI skills. This is my AI portfolio, this is what I can do. And she was hired. We have Maricar, who is a mother of eight. She got a new job just after six weeks upskilling program. And and the fact that she was a part of our global AI leadership program at that point was a critical factor for, uh, for at the final round of the interviews, because you can really show what is important to show. It's all about the continuous learning, and this is what the employers are looking at at the moment. So there is there is hope there as well. That is something I wanted to point out.

**Lance Gould:** [00:16:32] That's wonderful. We're going to talk to Melissa. Now, Melissa, you're bravely taking on some of the biggest names in the fossil fuel industry Exxon, Mobil, Shell, BP, Chevron, by filing a lawsuit against them, pointing out that they are responsible for producing 40% of all global greenhouse gas emissions since 1965. And as a New York Times profile of you pointed out, you're also holding them accountable for, quote, "colluding to deceive the public about the disastrous consequences of their actions." Tell us about your legal strategy here.

**Melissa Sims:** [00:17:02] Thanks for having me on today. I'd be happy to talk about it. Um, so when we look at their collusion. So they had two forms of collusion. First of all, their collusion started in the 50s when they earnestly studied carbon in the atmosphere. Greenhouse gas has--or the greenhouse effect has been coined as far back as the 1800s. So we knew that carbon in the atmosphere was going to affect the climate. But

these fossil fuel companies actually colluded together to study that in earnest. They even funded the Keeling Curve. So the Keeling Curve was what we rely on today that detects carbon in the atmosphere. And it's a needle way on top of Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii that looks at the increase of carbon in the atmosphere. So the companies actually colluded together to decide what was going to happen with more carbon in the atmosphere and how it's going to affect their equipment. So they actually were looking at modifying their oceanic equipment against the rise of sea level that they knew was going to happen. So in the 50s, 60s and 70s, they accumulated a lot of studies that were not available to the general public. And in 1979, which is very fascinating, an intern at Exxon named Steve Kinsley was asked to to put all those studies together and come up with a whitepaper. And he did so. And the fascinating part of this whitepaper is that it shows with pinpoint accuracy how much carbon is in the atmosphere today. So you can look at the graph from ExxonMobil and you can compare it to the Keeling curve. And it's exactly accurate as to what's going on today. So they knew with pinpoint accuracy what the effect of the carbon in the atmosphere was going to be. But instead of gathering this information and deciding to take the crossroads towards global health, no, they decided to take the the crossroad towards towards actual profits in their pocket. In 1998, the companies, through their representatives, got together through the American Petroleum Institute and others and sat down at a table and March of 1998, they come up with the victory memo. And the victory memo is a division of labor among who is going to be the promoters, what they were going to say and how they were going to change the world into believing that climate change wasn't real when they knew that it was so they had particularized individual knowledge as to what the effect of climate change was going to be, and that it was going to disproportionately affect people throughout the globe. And instead of doing something about it, they chose and I think Shell coined it in their memo in a 1998 memo called Tina, there is no alternative. And that was a wow. That [00:20:00] was an economic, um, uh, terms of art coined by Margaret Thatcher. That meant we can't go back. So we couldn't go back either. So they chose that crossroads, um, after having this knowledge and they decided to sell their consumer products, and they colluded together to deceive the world into believing climate change was not a real existential threat.

**Lance Gould:** [00:20:27] That is so upsetting and I'm so glad that you're on the case. But speaking of the collusion, interestingly, your lawsuit is the first to do two things, as I understand it. It is the first to use the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations

Act, also known as the RICO act, which is often used to go after mobsters and organized crime as a legal strategy. And it's also the first--your lawsuit is the first to sue for damages for specific weather event. In this case, Maria, the punishing hurricane that pummeled Puerto Rico in 2017. Can you, uh, elaborate on that and let us know if that's accurate and and how you're pursuing that?

**Melissa Sims:** [00:21:02] So when we filed this, everybody acted like RICO was something that we created. No, RICO is filed all the time. We did it in the opioid litigation. Our firm was involved in the opioid litigation. If you look through all of the racketeering cases that have been filed, you see they used it in the admission cheat scandals with Volkswagen and Ford and Bosch. They used it against State Farm, uh, for colluding with a sitting Illinois Supreme Court justice to overturn a verdict. In fact, the fossil fuel industry uses it against their protesters. so it's really used all the time, right? And it's actually.

**Lance Gould:** [00:21:39] So that was inaccurate. What I said, uh, just to be clear.

**Melissa Sims:** [00:21:42] No, it's the first time it was used in the climate change plaintiffs, um, portfolio of cases.

**Lance Gould:** [00:21:49] Thank you for clarifying.

**Melissa Sims:** [00:21:51] It's used all the time. It really and I don't want anybody to think that I, you know..

**Lance Gould:** [00:21:58] Wait, did we lose Melissa? There she is. Okay. Yeah. Please continue. Sorry.

**Melissa Sims:** [00:22:02] So, um. So then what happened was you look at what is racketeering. So all racketeering is, it means someone outside your own organization colluded with each other to perpetuate a fraud. Okay. Or one of the other enumerated 18 offenses, predicate offenses in the racketeering Act. And so what's usually used is the mail fraud and wire fraud. And what that means is you use the internet, the US mail or money to perpetuate a fraud. And what they did is they let the world in to believe that climate change was not real, when they knew privately that it was. So they used the US



mail and wire to perpetuate that fraud. And we have thousands of, um, examples that we put in our 300 page racketeering complaint.

**Lance Gould:** [00:22:52] Wow. That is just--as a non-legal person, it sounds brilliant and I'm sure legal people would agree. But I'm so glad you're on the case. And, uh, we'll come back to you and hear more about that in a few minutes. But, Nyaradzo, I want to come to you. First of all, thank you so much for taking time off of your patrol to join us for this broadcast. And we understand there maybe some connectivity issues where you are in Zimbabwe and we know it's evening time in your time zone. So we really appreciate your being here with us today.

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [00:23:22] Thank you so much.

**Lance Gould:** [00:23:23] You are the biodiversity officer and a sergeant leader of the Akashinga Rangers, a nonprofit that has one of the largest portfolios of wilderness under protection by a nonprofit in southern and eastern Africa. Tell us about Akashinga--from what the word means in the local Shona language to your specific role and your leadership in conservation.

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [00:23:42] Thank you so much for this golden opportunity to be part of the show. I'm so grateful. Um, Akashinga is a Shona word that means the brave ones. It means the brave ones. Uh, so it is a local Shona word, that means someone who is strong, someone who is dedicated. Um, I don't know how best can I explain it, but it really means the brave one. So Akashinga, uh, was started in 2009, but the initiative of employing all female rangers was implemented in 2017. That's when I joined Akashinga, and I successfully passed the Ranger training and also progressed with my career from being a Ranger, to becoming a Sergeant, and also recently being promoted to be a Biodiversity Officer. And Akashinga is promoting a lot of financial freedom to a lot of women from the local community.

**Lance Gould:** [00:24:53] That's wonderful. And so the word comes from the Shona word, meaning the brave ones. And you [00:25:00] joined in 2017. Akashinga's focus is not solely on the women in the unit, but also on the animals that you're protecting. Tell us about that mission and specifically what you do in the field, how you do it and why that matters.

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [00:25:14] Yeah. Akashinga is focusing on a plant-based approach. That's, we female rangers, Akashinga's female rangers are vegans, meaning that we believe in not killing the animals. We are protecting the animals. We have dedicated our lives to protecting the animals. So we think that to us, it is meaningful and worthwhile to protect and let the nature control itself than to protect. Then we bring the buffalo into the pot. So we are based on the plant based approach, focusing on, uh, planting more trees, planting more vegetables and bringing vegetables into the pot. So Akashinga through the plant based approach, it is also working aligned with the fight of the climate change.

**Lance Gould:** [00:26:11] And tell us about how Akashinga is working on a climate change level right now.

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [00:26:19] Uh, I'm very proud that I'm now working as a Biodiversity Officer. Last year, we started to introduce an indigenous tree plant nursery in Urunga district. Thus we are trying to, uh, plant more, restore the vegetation, restore the ecosystem to the areas that have been facing deforestation from the local communities. Uh, we are some people who do deforestation. So I, as the officer, we go into the, into the schools and do conservation clubs, speaking about the goodness of conservation and also with this program of planting more trees. It is also working hard to [fight] climate change.

**Lance Gould:** [00:27:07] Well, I really hope you get a chance after this to talk with Anne from Girls Education Collaborative because of their Garden for the Future in Tanzania. I'm sure there's a lot of information that your two organizations can share there about preservation and food security and things of that nature and climate resilience. Uh, thanks to all of you for sharing more about your organizations. Now, let's hear more about some of the ideas that have emerged from your work. So, Janna, you and your co-founder, Tarja Stephens, have both joined the advisory board of Women of the Future, an impact-driven initiative dedicated to highlighting and applauding the leading women changemakers in emerging tech. Tell us more about this important project?

**Janna Salokangas:** [00:27:44] Yes, for sure. And we're actually the co-founders of this important project. Okay, yeah. But how it started was funny, because we were

interviewed in an innovation blockchain book because there was obviously not enough women in tech and AI and Web3 and blockchain at that time. And we were one of the few women who were invited and interviewed for this book. And during this interview, this interviewer asked us, like, "Do you have any other women that you could recommend that we could interview as well?" And we were like, "Oh my gosh, yes, we have hundreds of them." So we figured out, let's do a book about these women, shining a light on their incredible work. This is so important. The more examples we have, the more women's voices we have out there, the more we can feel included in the AI and the tech revolution as well. So the more we can shine a light on these stories. We just published the second Women of the Future book. The first was all about Web3 and the metaverse. Now it's all about emerging tech. And I just want to highlight that there are incredible women and pioneers out there, and we just need to shine a light on them even more than we're doing now. And that is what the project is all about. So it's an inspirational project.

**Lance Gould:** [00:28:51] Could you give us one example of a of a particular woman who stands out from the latest book?

**Janna Salokangas:** [00:28:57] Oh, there are so many. Can I highlight all of them?

**Janna Salokangas:** [00:29:02] Maybe a few of our changemakers as well? Who are learning, who used to be non-technical, but now they're working on incredible tech projects and leading their AI innovations. And there are so many. You will have to--I'll send you all the books. So you can select your favorite ones from there.

**Lance Gould:** [00:29:17] Excellent. Nyaradzo. I've read that when Akashinga first began, it was hard for local communities to accept women in ranger positions. How did that feel for you and the other women in the unit, and were you able to channel those feelings as motivation for your work?

**Speaker9:** [00:29:33] Yes, of course. When I started in Akashinga, most of the men from the local community were mocking it, and were discouraging us, were drawing energy from us, discouraging us that we cannot make it because they just think that only men can be Rangers, since it was a male-dominated space for some decades. But that [00:30:00] [which] they are doing to us, motivated us and gave us power to prove

them wrong, that we have no limitations, we have no boundaries. We can do it. And we have proved that, proved that we women, we can break the boundaries. We women, we can change the world. We women, we can do something, we can bring a difference by the arrests we have made since we have started and the successes we have made since we have started as Akashinga Rangers. We have proved that female rangers can be more powerful and can bring a big difference to the world. So the actions that we are doing that were being done by the men from the local community gives us power and motivated us to break the boundaries. And today we are living testimonies.

**Lance Gould:** [00:30:55] That's amazing. And speaking of the differences, can you tell us how Akashinga is making a difference on how women are perceived, as well as how the unit is having a is demonstrating its protection of species? I'll just throw out a couple of quick stats that I read. Some astounding statistics show, that wildlife has increased 400% since Akashinga came into existence. And there's been a 90% downturn, 90% downturn in poaching. Tell us about those numbers. And and just the the difference that Akashinga is making.

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [00:31:24] Yeah. When we started to operate as Akashinga Rangers, the area we started to operate in had a history of, uh, 8000, uh, elephants that have been poached before the formation of Akashinga. 8000? Yes, 8000 for the past 16 years before the formation of Akashinga. And it proved so because when we started to, uh, do our patrols, we used to find few animals along the patrol. But as time goes, when we were doing the patrols, the animals started to gain to, to, uh, to come in, and they were feeling protected, because the area also was a hunting area before we started to operate. So whenever the animals see us, maybe they were thinking that, uh, the Rangers wanted to kill us. So at first they were running away from us. But maybe they started to sense that these guys, they are not after killing us, but they are there to protect us. So they started to feel relaxed, and the number is getting increased. And for sure, since we started from the wildlife sightings of, uh, that have been recorded on the patrols, it have increased to 399%, almost 400% increase. And for the poachers for the poaching rate, we have, uh, reduced it by 90%. And we have also rated it on the snares we were removing in the bush, that they were being laid by the poachers. It's almost 700 snares that we have removed from the [\_\_\_\_\_] since we started. And right now the number has decreased. So it means that we have reduced the rate of poaching by a greater effort.

**Lance Gould:** [00:33:06] Amazing. And you said, uh, 700 snares. Is the poaching that's going on there, is it mainly subsistence poaching or is it commercial, large-scale poaching?

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [00:33:16] Yeah, it's both subsistence and commercial, large-scale poaching. So for the subsistence that those who use, uh, the snares and for the commercial are the ones who target on the elephants.

**Lance Gould:** [00:33:28] Got it. Okay. Thank you. And we'll come back to you briefly. Just want to get another question to Melissa here. Melissa, this is not the first time that you've sued Exxon. Tell us about the impact that you think you're having by going after multinationals, and what you would have been the driving motivations for you to do this work.

**Melissa Sims:** [00:33:45] Yeah. So, before I joined Milberg. Milberg is an international class action law firm. But before I joined Milberg, I was an attorney in a small town, general practice law with my boss, who was in his 80s. So the two of us represented municipalities in addition to everything else we did--wills, trusts, divorces, all of that. And one of the towns we represented was the village of Depew. And what I've learned from my work now is that--and I wish someone had opened my eyes up to this sooner, and part of me doing these webinars and talking to people is so that you could open up your eyes to--most of the people who are the victims of pollution, are communities of color, throughout throughout the world, right? And they're the ones who are disproportionately affected by climate change. But one of the towns we represented was the village of Depew. And we have a very high, undocumented worker population in that town. Exxon, CBS and Viacom had made film for the film industry. And in the in the 80s when everything went digital, they left, they left town, and we had bright blue mud puddles all over town. We had one of the highest miss rate in the country of multiple sclerosis. A [00:35:00]nd nobody cared. Nobody cared. Nobody tried to get them to clean it up sooner. We had blue mud puddles from the nickel, cadmium, chromium. And if this was in a white community, it would be cleaned up, you know? And that was kind of like an eye opener for me. And I start at my firm with my former boss. We started every day in prayer, and I am a devout Catholic, and I was not raised to bully people, okay. And I was the one who went to court every Tuesday and Friday and took people to court for

mundane ordinance violations like, you know, flicking a cigarette butt or not picking up your cat feces, or, you know, dog feces, or, not cutting your weeds, not having your trailer on a permanent foundation. Those are things I went to court with every Tuesday and Friday of good people, um, and finding them. And I was at a board meeting in August of '06, and they're just exasperated why this Superfund site had taken so long to even study. I mean, they were still in the studying phase, right? Meanwhile, there's bright blue mud puddles in town. And I remember the mayor, uh, leaned over to me and he said, "Missy, what can we do?" And I said, "We're going to sue them." And he said, "Can we?" I said, "I don't know." So I went home that night and I don't know. Oh, no, that night I took a run. And that's where I get alone with the Holy Spirit. And I just said, all I said is help me help them. And he doesn't want big, long prayers. He just wants something from your heart. And he said, find them. And I thought, huh? I find people every day for dog poop in their yard. Tall weeds, broken windows. Why can't I fine Exxon, CBS, and Viacom? So I call a friend of mine who does work for the big corporations, environmental work for them, and I said, "Would I look stupid if I did this?" And she said, "Nobody's ever tried it before. Why not?" So me and my 90 year old boss took Exxon to traffic court and we fined them for littering for something they did 60 years ago. Uh, because in Illinois, there's no statute of limitations against municipalities. It's called "nullum tempus occurrit regi." And it means literally "no time runs against the king." So I had all this ...

**Lance Gould:** [00:37:18] And was that a successful lawsuit against...

**Melissa Sims:** [00:37:20] Well, they dismissed us. We went to Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, and for the first time, though, the Seventh Circuit ruled that there was no preemption, everyone had assumed there was preemption. Everyone had assumed that a unit of local government could not take on, big corporations for something that was going on like a nuisance. And it really turned the nuisance world on its head, because after the Seventh Circuit ruled, I had all these big plaintiff firms say, "how did you do that? Like, what was there? Like, how did you get rid of preemption?" And so then it was after that that I was asked to sue Shell and Sonoco Phillips for benzene pollution in southern Illinois, in a little town called Roxana. I used the same ordinance scheme, and we fined them for benzene again. We won a motion to dismiss on that, settled that case, and then the big plaintiff law firm saw me and said, "hey, can you help out with the opioid litigation?" Because I knew a lot about municipal law. So, uh, really,

what drives me is my faith. And I think my sense of community, which is really part of being a Catholic, is, um, being Catholic is not necessarily a religion. It's a community. And you're taught every night before I went to bed, my mother would say, "what did you do to help other people today?" Right. So it's part of ingrained in your rhythm as finding ways to right wrongs. And that's part of what I do now, is I look to see who is affected by this. And nine times out of ten, it's a community of color. And so then I try to find innovative ways to get around certain laws that are on the books to try to get them some compensation or just get it cleaned up.

**Lance Gould:** [00:39:05] That's amazing. And I want to come back to you, uh, shortly, because I wanted to hear more about Puerto Rico because of the great work you're doing down there. Uh, but speaking of local communities. Anne, one of the strategies that is so important to your approach is backing local leaders on the ground where you offer support and you're not coming in to rescue them. Tell us more about your Ally Funders Alliance approach, uh, with Girls Education Collaborative. This is for Anne. There we go.

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:39:34] Thanks, Lance. Well, you're right. So just a little bit more about our approach. When we launched about 12 years ago, it was a little bit more typical for a Western based organization who wanted to help affect community change, to go be the ones to start a school or an orphanage or a program and of course, get the community's cooperation. But basically, [00:40:00] the Western organization would be the decision maker and kind of lead the, um, ideation and problem solving and. When we launched. Uh, as I say, about a dozen years ago, we launched with really the core value that local leaders and people of the community know their communities in a way that we could never know, and that there are change makers really fighting. To bring equity to their communities to bring dignified lives, lifestyles, help their community emerge out of poverty. Better health outcomes. Et cetera. Et cetera. And that they have the ideas on how to do that and the buy in from the community in a way that we could never have to really bring, um, meaningful, authentic and long lasting solutions. What they really struggle with is access to resource and networks and getting notice, especially in these, you know, truly underserved and marginalized areas, which tend to be rural areas out of the more popular realms, um, where NGOs typically work. So, in addition to trying to solve this world problem I mentioned earlier about girls being barred from their educations, we also think about how can we accelerate this work. You know,

how can we catalyze activity? How can we catalyze investment? How can we? 130 million is a really big number, and we're not going to do it by ourselves. So how can we accelerate change? And we're doing that in a way, uh, through the Ally Funder Alliance, which is a funders collaborative of bringing together a deliberately small, intentionally small group of like minded funders. Uh. In who? Uh, so like minded funders who really believe in this issue of helping the world's girls access quality education. And then Jessie acts as a portal or a bridge to early stage, um, girl centered. Community work. Uh, right now we're doing this in, in Tanzania. And, uh, those organizations are called ally organizations. And this is all within the umbrella of the ally fund or Alliance. And what we're trying to do is one get unrestricted dollars to these changemakers. So they do get, grants that range from 5 to \$20,000 multiyear unrestricted, because we're putting faith and trust in the leaders that they know best how to spend their money. And then also offering allyship which can be thought partnership capacity, training network building introductions to other funders and really trying to put the um, take away some of the burdens that, um, smaller organizations often face of jumping through hoops to get funding and, um, disproportionate reporting, etc., etc.. And while this our ally funder alliance may only touch a relatively small group of organizations and a small group of funders, we're kicking the tires on the model. Also as to is this something that could be replicated by others globally? Uh, regardless of the issue, regardless of the sector, regardless of the geography, where, um, there is a GEC that can act as the bridge or the portal.

**Lance Gould:** [00:43:53] That's Girls Education Collaborative for the viewers.

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:43:56] Thank you. Girls Education Collaborative, that can bundle philanthropic dollars behind us in the peanut gallery, but then be the mediator on how to best get those dollars out into the community level in a really efficient and effective way to to really create impact on the ground.

**Lance Gould:** [00:44:20] It seems like it has incredible scaling possibilities.

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:44:24] We think so. We think so because we're really trying to keep down overhead. We're trying to keep down bureaucracy. Be deliberately lean and mean, because we think that that's the way to, um, get these dollars to doers, because,



you know, these needs have to be met now. And the pandemic was you referenced the pandemic earlier. It's been a huge setback to adolescent girls.

**Lance Gould:** [00:44:48] Oh, yes. And you're really shaking things up on a philanthropic level and shaking up the status quo is not easy work. And it can be dangerous, too. Um, this this question is for all panelists. Nyaradzo. For example, speaking [00:45:00] about danger, tell us about some of the dangers you face in your work, not just from the wild animals you deal with, but also from the armed poachers that you encounter. And you mentioned that you've made a lot of arrests. And tell tell us about some of the work in the field. Wait. I think you might be on mute. Nyaradzo.

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [00:45:21] Thank you so much. We female rangers, we are doing our operations in a different approach to the way that the male rangers were doing. Because I can understand that the male rangers were only believing in gunshots when it comes to arrest. But we can arrest whilst you will be like, uh, doing, like, sort of discussions, like sort of stories. We, we do the, what can I say? Like mothers. Yeah, we de-escalate tension in the community. So by going into the community, we can have much information, especially the, uh, armed poachers, the commercial poachers. We usually arrest them while they are in their home estate, because what they do is if they kill an elephant, they don't just want to sell the ivory or the tusk at that real time. They're going to just even take one year whilst keeping the ivory, try to find the best buyer of that ivory. So usually when they have the ivory, we hit their home estate, uh, and during the, what we call raids during the night. So we raid their home estate during the night whilst they are asleep. So working the groups, then we raid the homestead, usually like around 1 a.m. or 12 a.m. whilst everyone is asleep, not even being suspicious that they're going to be arrested. Then we, uh, we raid the homestead and we start to do the searchings. And, uh, after we find something, we do the arrest. So the way we--

**Lance Gould:** [00:47:04] Have you ever had any resistance in any of these arrest scenarios? Like, tell us about some of the--? From what I understand from you, a lot of times they're very, uh, there's a very calm scenario, and there's not a lot of tension. But tell me if I'm wrong about that.

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [00:47:24] Yeah. The, uh, the challenge was just to... When we started, uh, the the operation is female rangers because male will feel like being

challenged, that we are not like overtaking or we are now overtaking the will that they are, uh, being excluded from the field as Rangers. But because we just keep on pushing and showing our effort and also showing that we are strong and we are dedicated to the job, they started to understand that they have done an offense, so they deserve to be arrested. And also we work with some other stakeholders, uh, around the country, like the Zimbabwe National parks authorities, the Zimbabwe police. Then we work together as a team of conservationists.

**Lance Gould:** [00:48:16] I see. And Melissa, speaking about shaking things up. Your work is making some of the world's largest companies sweat that they could face judgments that could cost them billions of dollars. Tell us how you navigate those concerns.

**Melissa Sims:** [00:48:29] Uh, it's not a concern for me how they navigate. I'm just, you know, representing our clients and trying to get some sort of abatement or reimbursement for the costs that they've expended. So, um, how they pay for it is, you know, beyond my ability to control.

**Lance Gould:** [00:48:48] I apologize. I probably didn't articulate that as well as I could have. Like, tell me about some of the challenges you face in taking on these billion dollar companies and how they can come back at you. Like, how are you navigating that part of the strategy?

**Melissa Sims:** [00:49:03] Well, I mean, they, uh, some of the companies have gone after lawyers for, um, it was Steve Donziger. If you're aware of the Chevron case, you know, they went after him for racketeering.

**Lance Gould:** [00:49:16] Chevron did.

**Melissa Sims:** [00:49:16] Right? Yeah. Chevron did. And, you know, they've gone after some protesters for racketeering and criminal charges. We're not doing anything criminal. We want to, um, pursue everything in court, in the open. We want to get at the information that they have. What the information that's going to be very important in our case is not necessarily climate change, because they admit now climate change is real. When I run across people who don't believe in climate change, the first thing I say back

to them is say, well, Exxon agrees that it's real. Yeah, because they all do. Like now they all agree. Oh yeah, it's real. It's just our fault, right? It's all of us. All of our fault. Right? They didn't give us any alternative, but when they could have done so. But, um, so, you know, I say, [00:50:00] well, you know, all of the CEOs of, you know, the fossil fuel industry admits that climate change is real and is a threat. Um, so to me, though, what's going to be very important and it's not really challenging, uh, is finding out who is funding these climate deniers, you know, who is actually giving them the money.

**Melissa Sims:** [00:50:19] Where is this dark money coming from that we can trace to these climate deniers? Because if you're in the business of selling a consumer product, which oil and gas is, if you're in the business of selling a consumer product, you cannot use a promoter to say something that you know is untrue. And so is there a material funding of those promoters? Uh, and if we look at the victory memo, that's what the victory memo said, is how they were going to get funders to go after, um, the, you know, trying to undermine what they knew was real about climate change. And then also, uh, who ordered all that, you know, and is it still going on because we still see, you know, your, you know, um, outliers saying, oh, climate change isn't real. The Earth is still flat, you know, things like that. But who's funding that? Yeah. Um, and so that's what's really going to be at the core of our case is who funded this climate denial campaign, and is it still being funded? While they're admitting that climate change is real?

**Lance Gould:** [00:51:17] I have a lot of thoughts about that, but I'll share them off camera.

**Melissa Sims:** [00:51:21] I'm open to them.

**Lance Gould:** [00:51:23] I'll have more questions for our panelists in a bit. But first, uh, Grace, do we have any questions from the audience? And let me remind the audience that if you are watching you have questions, please submit them to us shortly.

**Grace Chalmers:** [00:51:34] Yes, I'm hoping we haven't stunned our audience into amazed silence on the other end of the screen here, like I have been. I've been sitting here off camera just smiling at all of your amazing contributions. So thank you all for joining us. We've actually had a couple of questions about resources that you all can share--to read, follow, keep up with your work on women's leadership and women's

empowerment in general, because there were so many amazing things you've all said here today. How can people who are watching stay up to date and stay informed?

**Lance Gould:** [00:52:05] Let me add that one note, which is that at the end of this broadcast and when this is published next week, we'll have a lot of those resources on the Samuel Lawrence Foundation website. But please, panelists, please add to that anything, anything else that we can learn about resources for your information about your projects.

**Janna Salokangas:** [00:52:25] Well, I can add quickly here about just MIA on the AI resources, because I think this is what we are all about, really creating a one stop destination to find all of the latest and greatest in AI and the tech revolution. Because the information is so fast, critical thinking is one of the most important skills going forward. So this is a great question. Where do we find those right sources and who do we trust in the age of AI? So that is what we are trying to create a safe space for women to come together to learn and get really the latest resources in in AI, but also connect with each other. And we have been talking about the power of community, which is so important for us women to come together, create that safe and inclusive environment for us all to belong in, in a place to learn together and get, get, get the best resources available. So I am inviting everybody to Mission Impact Academy to see what what we have going on there. But there are incredible things. I'm using LinkedIn a lot, and I'm connecting with amazing women leaders around the world on LinkedIn. So I'm a big believer in the power of social networks and LinkedIn, so to say today.

**Lance Gould:** [00:53:30] And, the floor is open for everybody else. But in the meantime, uh, let me just note this isn't intended to just be a Q&A, but also an opportunity for panelists to ask questions of each other. So while you're thinking about the first question, feel free to ask each other questions too.

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:53:48] I had a question for Janna. Um, what is kind of the baseline education, for women to start your program? Like, what level of education? What would be the entry level of baseline education? Uh, before they go into one of your programs for upskilling?

**Janna Salokangas:** [00:54:09] It can be anything, really. Mostly of our students are non-technical. Uh, and anything from about above of 18 years old to we have, I think, 75 or 78 years old. So it's super diverse, the expertise, what we see. So professional women tend to find us and really be interested about AI because obviously this is something that they need to do in their workforce. So rather than the youth, we have more professional talent joining, joining our program. But it's super diverse. And what I believe with the power of AI in the future, it will be about personalized, hyper personalized learning. So we can use AI as well in the future to create more equitable learning plans. In a way, because the AI could read you and based on your skills and what you have learned so far and your profiles, I could be able to suggest the right things for you to learn [00:55:00] going forward. These short micro lessons and but it's a super diverse community, so any requirement is just openness and willingness to learn. And then we are interviewing companies as well, because we need to work together with companies to understand their hiring practices and also their AI implementation, so we can best match our programs to meet those needs, because our goal is really to make sure that these women, we unlock their economic empowerment after going through the upskilling programs. But no, no expert experience needed at all actually, to join. You just need to be willing to start. We believe in learning by doing quite a lot. So get your hands dirty and start prompting and experimenting together with us. So it's a safe space to come together and just ask. There are no stupid questions at all.

**Lance Gould:** [00:55:48] It's so important what you're doing, Janna, just to to, um, to offer this, uh, this new pathway for women specifically after the pandemic, but even in the pandemic had not occurred, just trying to level the playing field and to bring these opportunities for upskilling and reimagining careers after wanting to change paths. And make it fun. It can be learning can be so much fun. We do metaverse field trips and we do our graduation parties are always in the metaverse and great gatherings together. So it's about coming together and learning the skills of the future together and obviously networking. That's the best part of it as well.

**Lance Gould:** [00:56:28] I have another question for everybody, but I'm going to pause just in case there's any questions from the audience or if you guys have a more questions for each other. But if you don't, just, uh, if you do, let me know. But otherwise I'll move. I'll move on.

**Grace Chalmers:** [00:56:39] Actually, can I interject with a personal question?

**Lance Gould:** [00:56:42] Absolutely.

**Grace Chalmers:** [00:56:43] Thank you. I actually grew up going to a girls' high school. I've been surrounded by powerful and really inspiring women my whole life, so I personally feel very strongly about girls' education and inspiring young women. Have any of you personally talked to younger women since you've started your work and had any interesting or inspiring stories talking to young women who could really look up to you guys? What has your experience been?

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:57:09] I talk to young women a lot, and, and it's been amazing watching sometimes these, um, these people who I meet as girls, become young adolescents, and then turn into women. And actually, one of the pictures that came up earlier while I was doing my earlier comments were two graduates of the Katanga Girls Secondary School who are now beginning their university careers. And during the break of school, our volunteers for Girls Education Collaborative. And they have incredible visions for their communities and are really excited about becoming changemakers. So it's really been wonderful to see girls not only get their educations, but one of the things I really see, is this dedication, this commitment to coming. There you go. That's the picture, uh, Naomi and Naima and this was actually in Katanga, Tanzania, about two weeks ago, and they were getting some tech training for their volunteer positions. But what I really see is this commitment not only to their professional educations, but to giving back to their communities rather than abandoning their communities. And they really want to be change agents, um, and they're really committed to becoming a change agents. And one of my greatest moments was--we have a tagline that we did when we did our very first website, and it's "There's nothing a girl can't do." And the first time that I ever heard a girl say that back to me in the course of conversation, she turned to me, and she was like, "Well, you know, there's nothing a girl can't do." I was like, "Okay, I can go home now!"

**Lance Gould:** [00:59:04] And just to note and just to give some context to the audience, what you're doing, Katanga is so incredible. I mean, this is in northwest rural Tanzania, where a lot of these girls would not be allowed to go to school at all. They're discouraged from going to school. You mentioned earlier in the broadcast how they

have a disproportionate number of household chores, and there are other cultural barricades, but to see two alumni who've gone through the program heading on to university must be very satisfying for you.

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:59:35] It is. And actually, 100% of the girls have continued on in their education who graduate.

**Lance Gould:** [00:59:42] That's a let's say that again, 100%.

**Speaker8:** [00:59:46] Right.

**Anne Wadsworth:** [00:59:46] And in a region where, you know, the the average might be around 10% and it is an area with, where it's hard for us to wrap our hands around it, but the destructive traditions [01:00:00] prevail the female genital mutilation, bartering into marriage for cows. And so it's really tough. But girls want their education, and we are seeing a transformation in the families and the surrounding communities. Uh, and this last January, it was a record-breaking class being admitted.

**Lance Gould:** [01:00:25] The largest ever, right?

**Anne Wadsworth:** [01:00:26] The largest ever.

**Lance Gould:** [01:00:27] Right. Amazing.

**Anne Wadsworth:** [01:00:28] And I think I think that is a demonstration of the changing mindsets.

**Lance Gould:** [01:00:36] Well, we're coming up on time here. We can certainly go a little over. But let me do a speed round here. Uh, let's ask each panelist, "What gives you the most hope for a women led future?" Nyaradzo, why don't we start with you?

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [01:00:54] Thank you so much. Um, I can say that for the planet's health and wellbeing, to keep going, it depends on the choices we make today. So we Akashinga Rangers have already made the choices to change the world, to change the environment, to keep the the wildlife and nature. So there is no limitation. There's no

boundary for everyone, even if it is a boy or it is a girl, because, uh, it is our responsibility to fight and for the conservation to keep going. And also the the action is happening on the ground, not just on the ground, but also in the sea and also in the air. So if we just keep our hands together and we can make a difference and change the world, and as women, we can keep on changing the game.

**Lance Gould:** [01:01:45] Amazing. How about you, Melissa?

**Grace Chalmers:** [01:01:46] Actually, may I interrupt for a moment while we have Nyaradzo speaking? We just had a question in from our audience.

**Lance Gould:** [01:01:52] Oh, sure.

**Grace Chalmers:** [01:01:52] Someone was inspired by your comment, Nyaradzo, about the link between vegan lifestyle and plant-based living and impacting climate change. Are there any things that you can tell our audience about that in particular? Especially because they were so inspired by your comment.

**Nyaradzo Hoto:** [01:02:08] Yeah. On vegan on vegan diet. Um, I can say you need more land. Uh, you need to clear more land to keep like livestock or poultry. But you don't need more land. Like to plant a lot of vegetables. A lot of vegetables or a piece of garden or even some trees. So for the for the vegan diet, it's, uh, supports the climate change since it doesn't need, uh, more terrestrial lands to be cleared so that we can, uh, sustain our living. So we believe that if we if we turn our diet into vegan, I think we can support the nature at all cost.

**Lance Gould:** [01:02:51] It's such a great connection. But Melissa, let me remind you of the question. And thank you, Grace, for that great question from the audience. And thank you, audience as well. Uh, Melissa, what gives you most hope for women led future?

**Melissa Sims:** [01:03:06] Think I think we'll care more, more about the world and about each other. Um, you know, I see the effects of climate change, and I see who it's affecting and the devastating number of people who die every year from climate change. And I think the more women become in charge and have positions of



leadership, we're going to reach out to those people who are disproportionately affected, and we're going to help them. And I, I believe that that's what we need to do is to we may not be able to stop climate change. We may not be able to end it, but we can help each other. And I think that's where women are going to be instrumental.

**Lance Gould:** [01:03:49] That's a very well well-taken point. And, uh, in the annual UN climate conference known as COP, the next one is going to be in Azerbaijan. And when that was first announced, the president of the Azerbaijani President of that conference selected a panel of advisors. I think it was, I think it was 14 people, and not one of them was a woman. Uh, there was such blowback that they ended up selecting, adding a few more. But to your point, we need more, uh, we need more women leadership in that space. Anne, how about you?

**Anne Wadsworth:** [01:04:22] Yeah, I think it's people like our guest, Nyaradzo here, um, who are just local change agents who are carving out new pathways and demonstrating--I loved what you said about the Mama Approach. And that challenges and problems can be solved with a feminine approach and lens and be just as effective, if not more effective. And just that you're representing, being a community agent [01:05:00] change agent and taking it forward. And so I'm meeting a lot of incredible community based leaders like yourself. And I'm just so inspired by what they are doing and what they're accomplishing. So you go, girl.

**Speaker8:** [01:05:16] Thank you.

**Lance Gould:** [01:05:18] And Janna, how about you?

**Janna Salokangas:** [01:05:21] I'm really echoing with Anne as well, but the women-led future is all about leading with empathy and leading with example. And even though we talk about AI and the importance of AI and these hard skills, but there are some things that technology won't ever take over. Our emotional intelligence, our human skills, which are our power skills, our emotional intelligence. And this is what we are so good at, being women. So let's just continue harnessing those skills and continue leading with empathy. And the more we have women in leading position, the more we have inclusive innovation and the more innovation will happen for sure. So the time is now.

**Lance Gould:** [01:05:59] Amazing all of you. I'm so grateful. Thank you all for panelists, for this fascinating conversation and for sharing your perspectives here today. You all are doing such phenomenal work with consequences that seem bound to have more impact on our future than ever before. That concludes our program today. To rewatch this podcast or to see a transcript, go to the Samuel Lawrence Foundation website in the coming days. At some point next week, the website is [SamuelLawrenceFoundation.org](http://SamuelLawrenceFoundation.org). Thank you so much to Girls Education Collaborative, Mission Impact Academy, Sims Law Offices, and Akashinga for their participation in today's event. We'll also have links to all four of those organizations on the website there next week, as well as to Blue Planet Alliance, one of the supporting partners, to learn more about the critical work all participating parties are doing to advance women's rights and other sustainable initiatives, and to stay informed about upcoming events and important initiatives. Sign up for the newsletters of the Samuel Lawrence Foundation and Brooklyn Story Lab. That's [BrooklynStoryLab.Net](http://BrooklynStoryLab.Net). Uh, also, make sure you join us for the next Samuel Lawrence Foundation First Fridays series in April. Thank you and goodbye.