

Women Guiding Their Own Future

Women in developing nations are often politically, economically, and socially disadvantaged. In this section we profile three women who are working, with the help of JICA's expertise, to change this situation by empowering others.



Teaching Skills to Build a Brighter Future

Asia Jabeen, Architecture Department, Government College of Technology–Railway Road, Lahore, Pakistan

Visitors to the Government College of Technology in Pakistan's northeastern city of Lahore will be greeted by a scene they may not have expected—female students dressed in flowing traditional garb and safety helmets, diligently practicing skills and techniques learned during their architectural studies.

The Government College's architecture department is the first at any public school in Pakistan to open courses to both men and women students. When JICA architecture expert Minoru Ito, who came to the college as part of a project to improve educational content, first put forward the idea of opening courses to women, architecture instructor Asia Jabeen immediately voiced her approval. Career choices for women in Pakistan are often limited to positions as public servants or nurses. In the last few years, though, the architecture industry has begun to open up to female workers. Behind this development is economic growth: as the country's construction industry continues to thrive, the demand for workers—including women—is on the rise.

"Women who come from families with limited incomes can keep costs down by attending a trade school like this one," says Jabeen. "Having women apply the skills they learn to get high-paying jobs in the construction industry is an important step in reducing poverty." After graduating with a master's degree in architecture from the University of Engineering and Technology of Lahore, Jabeen gained experience working at an architecture company before coming to the college. She hopes that her students will follow in her footsteps, using what they learn to build new futures for themselves.

When a bomb went off at a railroad station near the college as part of the political unrest that afflicts Pakistan, administrators considered closing the course to female students. Jabeen was adamantly against this proposal, pronouncing that she would do everything in her power to protect the students. A total of 104 female students have joined the architecture program in the three years since it opened in 2010, and Jabeen firmly believes these students, and other women like them, will become forces for change in society.



Fikirte Addis Tedla's dramatic transition from child psychologist to fashion designer was motivated by the problem of young women in her native Ethiopia being used as cheap labor in textile and other factories. According to Fikirte, the issue has a simple solution: "Factories wouldn't have to rely on child labor if clothing companies would pay a proper wage to have their products made."

Fikirte, deeply interested in fashion design ever since high school, opened her own company, Yefikir Design, in 2009. Her creations, which are manufactured by local women, combine modern design with elements of traditional Ethiopian ethnic attire. Being involved in the clothing production process allows employees to raise their children while they earn money and learn design; the result, of course, is a better quality of life. Fikirte's efforts to raise the standard of living for women have been bolstered by the high praise her brand has gained in New York, Paris, and other fashion centers.

In February 2014, Fikirte participated with other women entrepreneurs from Japan and Africa in a seminar cohosted by JICA and the city of Yokohama entitled "Empowerment of Women Through Entrepreneurship." Participants discussed various projects and policies in place in Japan to promote and support entrepreneurship among local women. After returning to Ethiopia, Fikirte began applying what she learned in Japan to create training programs for women entrepreneurs in her homeland. "I found that to succeed as an entrepreneur you must maintain a commitment

and continually strive to improve your product," says Fikirte. "Ethiopia abounds with unique and beautiful customs that I would like to share with the world. I am hopeful that through my efforts, the coming decades will see women playing a larger role in Ethiopian society." Using her knowledge gained in Japan, Fikirte continues to work to empower women in her native land.

Fashion as a Force for Change

Fikirte Addis Tedla, Fashion Designer, Yefikir Design, Ethiopia

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Using Local Color to Enrich Lives

Elena Chiquival, Coordinator for Women's Consortium, Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala

Along the shores of beautiful Lake Atitlán in Guatemala are rows of vibrantly dyed cloth hanging in the sun. This colorful fabric, a specialty in this traditional land of the Mayans, is the means by which Elena Chiquival endeavors to improve the livelihood of women in the region.

At present, Chiquival has created 13 women's groups where she teaches weaving techniques with an eye to creating products that will have a strong market appeal. "Many women haven't had the opportunity to receive an education," says Chiquival. "By helping them to make high-quality goods that can be sold at a premium, I'm aiming to improve life for local women."

Chiquival traces the genesis of her activities back to participa-

tion in a 2007 training program in Japan, where she learned about the post-World War II movement to improve the livelihood of residents in rural areas of the country. Seeing how women in farming built ways to improve their livelihood was an eye-opener for Chiquival. Reflecting on her experience, she says, "I learned the importance of being involved locally in matters that affect you. You shouldn't wait for a handout, but should rather set out on your own to create something of value."

Soon after returning to Guatemala, she began discussing her ideas in earnest with other women in the region. Seeing how chemically based dyes faded easily, the group decided to make products from local, naturally dyed cloth. Chiquival's eyes brighten when talking about the project, showing the obvious pride she feels. "As part of our marketing, we gauge what designs and colors people will like. Our goal is to make products that have a wide appeal."