

# Peace through Business



2009 Rwandan student Francoise Uwamwezi (L) and Dallas businesswoman Terri Quinton, who spoke to the students on their first day of Leadership Development, along with other American businesswomen, on how to implement business plans.

BY TERRY NEESE

A day in the life of a woman business owner is undeniably busy. The daily ins and outs—effectively managing her employees, maintaining quality products, making payroll each month, assuming responsibility for the livelihoods and incomes of her employees, writing checks for the monthly bills, deciding how to invest her revenues, and the list goes on and on.

As a business owner, from sun up to sundown, her business is always on her

mind. Not only does she have to care for her business family, but more than likely, she has her own family at home. This extraordinary balancing act is what defines the woman business owner.

Now imagine a day in the life of a woman business owner in Afghanistan. Not only do all of these responsibilities weigh on her mind every day, but she lives in a war zone.

Not only is she worried about making payroll that month, but she's not sure if she will even have electricity that day, or if all of her employees will show up to work. She's not even sure if she will make it home alive that night.

To complete the full Northwood University experience, each student was initiated as a Northwood Knight through a Crossing Over ceremony. (L-R: Immy Kamarade, Mariam Yousufi and Khalida Dunya).



This dynamic program is changing lives in Rwanda, Afghanistan and for the American mentors who were part of the program.

"I am a businesswoman," says Frozan Raufi, a 29-year-old Afghan woman who co-runs a medical clinic. "But I take risk, because there are some challenges for Afghan women to work."

Countries like Afghanistan need economic stability in order to break out from the issues brought on by war, poverty and security. As people build their businesses, they build their countries. As Founder and CEO of the Institute for Economic Empowerment of Women, I believe that **women** are the fuel for that engine.

The Institute's mission is to assist in the development of the vast and untapped resource of women entrepreneurs. A country that is economically sound has a much greater capacity for peace—and women are the catalyst behind that movement. Achieving PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS

First Lady Laura Bush (center) addressed students and women entrepreneurs from Rwanda and Afghanistan at the PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS graduation ceremony in Dallas.







Annette Karenzi of Kigali, Rwanda

is what we're all about—our program aims to empower women around the world economically, socially and politically.

PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS provides long-term business training to women in Afghanistan and Rwanda through educa-



*LEFT: We hosted a true Texas BBQ, complete with bandanas, cowboy hats and boots. (L-R: Hamida Hassan, Joan Twagira, Shahrbanoo Rezai and Roqia Sajjadi.)*

tion and mentorship. Since its inception in 2007, the program has directly trained over 100 women. But the education doesn't stop there. Each student is committed to pay forward her knowledge.

The evolution of PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS over the past three years has blossomed into a thriving and successful program. 2009 marked several milestones, as the program trained more women by providing an in-country business course to 30 women in each country. The top 15 women from each country were then selected for leadership development in the United States—three weeks of further training and a weeklong mentorship with an American woman business owner.

2009 also joined the women from both countries together on the same campus in

*BELOW: Our International Women's Economic Summit included more than 50 speakers, including Karen Hughes, former Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, with Lydie Hakizimana.*



Dallas at Northwood University, making the program a truly global adventure. In years past, the Afghan women studied at the Michigan campus, while the Rwandans studied at Oklahoma Christian University in Oklahoma City.



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During introductions, 21-year-old Farghana Alimy said it best: "I've come here to connect Afghan women with a global world."

Combining the countries was particularly interesting, because the Rwandan women could internalize just how far their country has come—and the Afghan women could see the progress for which they aim.

Together, these women embarked upon their leadership development journey, which included a non-stop week packed with panels, speakers and training in the classroom. American businesswomen shared their real-life experiences, and the students couldn't seem to get enough.

2009 also included the inaugural International Women's Economic Summit, which truly elevated the global initiative focus. The Summit featured more than 50 speakers, including women executives from AT&T and Wal-Mart; Ambassador Karen Hughes; Eleanor Clift; Eva Weigold Schultz, Executive Director of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council; Ambassador Steve Steiner from the U.S. State Department; and Second Counselor Andrew Tusabe



*Françoise Uwamwezi (left) and Manizha Wafeq await Mrs. Bush's arrival for the graduation ceremony. Manizha served as the 2009 Afghan facilitator and was responsible for teaching the in-country class and serving as a liaison between the Institute and the students.* Photo courtesy Daniel Drienski.

After mentorship, the students returned to Dallas for their AT&T-sponsored graduation ceremony and roundtable discussion featuring former First Lady Laura Bush.

Every year, we miss our students when they return home. Hearts and lives have been touched, but there is more work—and more business—to be done.

Our program is delivering real results. Before PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS, 2007 Afghan graduate Amir Taj Sirat couldn't tell you what her annual revenue was. Now, she can tell you that her revenues have increased by 400 percent. Previously, Sirat employed 60 women; today, she employs 300. And that's not all. Sirat is also running for Parliament in Afghanistan in 2010.

# Immy Kamarade & Co. Enterprising Women

BY MONICA SMILEY

In conjunction with the PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS program, Enterprising Women was invited to select one Rwandan and one Afghan woman entrepreneur to receive the magazine's prestigious Enterprising Women of the Year Award.

Immy Kamarade was the Rwandan woman entrepreneur chosen to receive the award. Her company, Dallas Investments, Ltd., is an import/export business that distributes petroleum products, cement, and coffee. Her coffee plantation drew the attention of our judges because of the way she has grown her business to benefit her entire community.



Immy's business challenges included first building a road to make it possible to get to her plantation. She had a well put in so that anyone in the community could access water without walking for an hour or more as they had in the past. She built a washing station into the side of a mountain to wash the coffee beans, a process that makes them more valuable when they are sold at market. She invited neighboring coffee growers to use her washing station, and even assists them in transporting the beans to market.

During the peak coffee harvesting season, Immy employs more than 200 workers from her community, providing good jobs and a regular paycheck. Her business is on solid ground and she is in touch with the needs of the people in her community. A 43-year-old mother of five children, Immy has plans for expansion. Her next step is to find the funding to purchase the equipment needed to process the beans herself, and there is a global market waiting. We have no doubt she will reach that goal.

## Mentoring Marlene was a wonderful experience,

—Smita Vasant

from the Rwandan Embassy.

The students then set out all over the United States for mentorship week. Each student was individually matched with an American woman business owner. Learning in the classroom is one thing, but going out and experiencing the real-life situations in the business world—and how to balance the work/family life—takes our program to the next level.

The students aren't the only ones who benefit from this experience; our mentors repeatedly tell us that they feel as though they receive *more* than their mentees do.

Smita Vasant, owner of Neemo's Exotic Ice Creams in California, said opening her heart and her home to mentor her Rwandan student was unforgettable. "This is a unique program that truly can empower women and give them that much-needed push to seek a better future."

Gloria Uwizera, a 2008 Rwanda graduate, successfully moved her textiles company from her home to a storefront after her training. The stories could go on and on.

As we begin our search for mentors in 2010, take a few minutes to reflect on this opportunity, and decide to join our efforts. This is an experience of a lifetime and an educational experience for your family and your business associates—not to mention the start of a new, life-long friendship. Sign up by visiting the Institute's Web site at [www.ieew.org](http://www.ieew.org). Help change the world, one woman at a time.

**TERRY NEESE** is the founder and CEO of the Institute for Economic Empowerment of Women. She is a member of the Enterprising Women National Advisory Board and has been inducted into the Enterprising Women Hall of Fame. Contact her at [www.ieew.org](http://www.ieew.org).

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# Asma Ataie Receive of the Year Award

Asma Ataie was one of the youngest PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS students at just 23, but she has already accomplished a great deal in her life. We honored her with the Enterprising Women of the Year Award for her work with the Economical and Social Service Company, which she founded with her father in Kabul, Afghanistan.



Her company's mission is to reach out to illiterate women in Afghanistan and offer them reading and writing classes. With that goal accomplished, the women continue on in their second year of her program to learn a specific trade, including traditional handicraft skills, as well as welding and other nontraditional skills. Micro loans follow, with the goal of each woman starting a small business once she completes the program.

Asma shared the special challenges she faces building a business in a country torn by war. Though she is married (her husband is studying at a university in Europe), she lives with her parents for safety as well as cultural reasons, and never goes out after dark. To encourage women to participate in her program, she goes door to door with her father. He speaks with the husband in the household, assuring him that the program is safe and that having an educated wife is a good thing, while she speaks privately with the woman.

In a country where only 5 percent of women can read and write, the work that Asma is doing is both essential and courageous.

Asma is also involved with the Women's Entrepreneur Association, with a mission of enabling women in the trade and service industries to come together to stabilize and grow their businesses. The association offers classes on greenhouse growing, food processing and packaging. Since most Afghan farmers do not have an income in the winter months, the greenhouse project is especially valuable.

When Asma came up on the stage to

receive her award at the PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS conference in Dallas, she responded that her heart was beating fast and there was "too much love" in the room. She was overwhelmed with the outpouring of support she received for the outstanding work she is doing.

We have given the Enterprising Women of the Year Award to more than 200 women over the past eight years, but Immy and Asma—though their businesses might be

smaller in revenue than others who have received the award in the past—shine brightly as perhaps our finest examples of outstanding women entrepreneurs deserving of recognition.

**MONICA SMILEY** is editor-in-chief and publisher of Enterprising Women. She can be reached at [msmiley@enterprisingwomen.com](mailto:msmiley@enterprisingwomen.com).



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