

# Women's Bank Year Report 2013

English translation



## Chairmanship changes hands – Reetta Meriläinen steers the Women's Bank forward

During its first seven operational years Women's Bank has been growing and developing with the help of active people who have passed the message on and encouraged the Finns to make donations for the improvement of women's operational conditions in the developing countries. During these years we have been able to support approximately 15 000 women in their fight against poverty. All the work we do is precious.

When passing the chairman's duties to the next hands I would like to thank you all. You have been a great support. I wish the Women's Bank remains as a community where everyone can easily join and operate. The nature of operations should involve task sharing and rotating, the team play at its best. We are all united by a mission, which never expires. Our dream will remain and sustain: new chance and better life for our sisters who live in very difficult conditions.

*Ritva Ohmeroluoma*

Women's Bank is now seven years old. This first grader is eager to learn more, continuously excited. The future looks bright, the world full of possibilities. Especially for those who want to take a chance and are prepared to work for it.

It was delightful to visit the birthplace of Women's Bank in Liberia and to discover the miracle that was achieved by a wise group of women in 2007. When a Liberian chicken farmer can provide meals twice a day for her family, or a young mother who has been through hard times can still dream, we can be very pleased in the Women's Bank. Thank you greatly and congratulations to all volunteers – to us!

Women's Bank is one of the best things that have taken place in the development cooperation during this millennium. Therefore I will seize the chairmanship of Women's Bank with enthusiasm. I have a strong belief that the chain from woman to woman works. In order to avoid cutting that chain we need the enthusiastic people and flaming ideas, innovativeness, persistence and joy of acting. Most of all, we need a big heart.

*Reetta Meriläinen*



## OPENING MY OWN RESTAURANT

In January, graduation time was once again celebrated in the vocational school supported by Women's Bank in Sierra Leone. When it came time for a student's thank-you speech, Elizabeth Yeabu Masaray's voice began to quiver, and she faltered in her pre-prepared speech. No wonder, when the event was honoured by such high-ranking politicians as Deputy Minister of Agriculture Marie Jalloh in the audience. In her long speech, Elizabeth thanked Finn Church Aid, Women's Bank, the ministry and FAWE, among others.

What was notable about many of the eloquent speeches of the distinguished speakers was that they rarely directly addressed those that were being celebrated – the graduating young women! Fortunately, Minister Elisabeth Rehn corrected this failing in her own speech. She also distributed the diplomas together with Finn Church Aid Regional Representative, Leena Lindqvist. A group of visitors from Women's Bank was also present.

Although making the speech was an exciting moment, 30-year-old Elizabeth Yeabu Masaray is a very strong woman. There is no doubt that this woman will succeed. Elizabeth studied both cooking and baking during her school year.

"I like both equally. The start-up kit includes flour, rice, cooking pots and bowls, which I will use to start a restaurant. I have already found a place for it in the centre of my little home town," she proudly tells us.

In addition her own restaurant, Elizabeth's life is filled with her 12-year-old son. I do want more children, if I find a man someday," she laughs.

Text: Veera Hämäläinen



## Women are the future

In January, the founding members of Women's Bank made a trip to Sierra Leone and Liberia, where the idea of founding Women's Bank was born seven years ago.

Elisabeth Rehn, one of the participants on the trip, has followed the development in Liberia for over 12 years and has seen the country survive war to become a more or less functioning state. Rehn also knows the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, whom the Women's Bank group met again on this visit. The country has made progress in many respects under the current president, but much remains to be done. During the war, a whole generation missed out on education, which resulted in a considerable increase in youth unemployment.

"Even small things can be important for the country's development. There is hope, and women hold an essential role in building the future of the country. They were the ones to achieve peace, and they have taken the future in their hands, as well," commented Rehn.

Heidi Hautala, another member of the group, remarked that the activities of the Women's Bank are innovative.

"Both Liberia and Sierra Leone are recovering from war and need special support for building their future."

Women play a key role in economic development, but the legal status of women remains problematic. Women still do not have the same rights as men, nor can they own land. Heidi Hautala noted that the principle of sustainable development is now an integral part of development cooperation.

"The projects started at the initiative of Women's Bank represent a new, communal approach and continuity, which could be copied by other projects as well."



Päivi Sihvola told about a Liberian woman's chicken farm project.

At the moment, more than 90 per cent of eggs are imported, and their quality is often very poor. With the help of Women's Bank, projects have been initiated in the villages to enable Liberian women to benefit from the egg business. A local partner operates the central unit (Mother Unit), which selects the women most in need of support, trains them, gives them 30 chickens each, and helps them to build a small henhouse.

"With the income from the chickens, this woman can now provide her family with two daily meals instead of one. And the families are big. Women's participation in the labour market benefits not only the family but the entire community," says Sihvola.

Reetta Meriläinen described the Mothers' Club network in Liberia. Local clubs train women and engage in business activities, whose proceeds are used for girls' and women's education.

"At the centre which we visited, women were trained in sewing, and they sewed school uniforms for the children of the entire village. Day care was also provided, so that children could be taken along. The proceeds from the centre have been sufficient to finance the education of the girls in the village," said Meriläinen.

Finn Church Aid plays a key role in the activities of the Women's Bank: through their expertise and contacts, the impact and cost effectiveness of the Bank's work has increased.

Text: Tiina Toivakka

*Picture: With the help of Women's Bank, chicken farm projects have been started in Liberia which have helped women to improve their standard of living.*

## Women's Bank in 2013

- Close to MEUR 1.4 funds raised, with a total of MEUR 6.4 during the 7 years in operation
- 1,400 shareholders
- 3,390 business angels
- 33 regional units in altogether 35 regions

In 2014, Women's Bank will support endeavors in 12 countries: Guatemala, Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kongo, Uganda, Angola, the Region of Palestine, Kosovo, Nepal, Cambodia and Myanmar.

A village bank project in Peru, based on small loan funding was completed in December 2012. The project outcomes are currently being assessed.

In 2014, Women's Bank will sustain three new undertakings in Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda. Where Myanmar constitutes a new target region for Women's Bank, the other two locations represent continuation for the long-term development work supported by the Bank. These projects serve as channels promoting entrepreneurship among women and for establishing savings and loan groups.



## News

### TWO NEW REGIONAL UNITS

In the beginning of the year 2014 two new regional units were established at Women's Bank: one in Vantaa and a new Finnish language regional unit in Pietarsaari, where there already is a regional unit operating in Swedish language. Thus the Women's Bank in Pietarsaari will be even more active than before. See the contact information of the regional units from [www.naistenpankki.fi/en/about-us](http://www.naistenpankki.fi/en/about-us).

### DONATIONS TO WOMEN'S BANK FROM SWEDEN

The Swedish-Finnish church of Örebro is raising money to Women's Bank by offerings collected during ceremony, by profits of their cafeteria, by organising rummage sales and by selling products of Women's Bank. Once a week they also organise a men's sauna evening, from which the participation fee goes directly to the Women's Bank. During last year 62 professions were donated from Sweden.

### MAISA & KAARINA SUPPORT THE WOMEN'S BANK

Maisa & Kaarina, the cartoon duo who have brought joy into the Finnish people's lives for almost 30 years, are now starring in the post cards drawn to the Women's Bank. From each post card sold 10 per cent of the profit will be donated to the target countries of Women's Bank. The post cards can be bought for example at Posti, in K-market, and in S-market in the post card stands of Karto Oy.

### BUSINESS ANGEL CAMPAIGN VISIBLE IN THE MEDIA

In March the Business Angel campaign of the Women's Bank is visible in the media in for example in the channels Yle TV1 and Yle Fem, at ski resorts and online. Read more from [bisnesenkeli.info](http://bisnesenkeli.info).

### **THE UPCOMING MESSENGER -TRAININGS**

The virtual Messenger -trainings of Women's Bank are meant for everyone who wants to gain knowledge about the activities of Women's Bank and about supporting women's livelihood and entrepreneurship in the developing countries. The next trainings will be organised in May. The information about the trainings will be announced on the website of Women's Bank in the address [www.naistenpankki.fi](http://www.naistenpankki.fi).