

leadership

**Ouagadougou  
Partnership  
Woman Leadership  
Accelerator :**

**Impact  
Report**

**December 2024**

Ouagadougou Partnership  
Woman Leadership Accelerator :

**Building a network of  
African women leaders  
driving positive change in  
sexual and reproductive  
health and beyond.**

*The OWLA program is implemented  
with the financial support of the*

**BILL & MELINDA  
GATES foundation**

# Contents

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- 4 **The Urgent Need for Women’s Leadership in Ouagadougou Partnership countries**
- 5 **Nurturing a Legacy of Leadership**
- 6 **Theory of Change**
- 8 **How the program is Igniting Transformation**
- 9 **Impact of the program**
- 10 **Impact Assessment methodology**
- 11 **Transformational Mentorship**
- 13 **Career Progress**
- 14 **Community Impact**
- 15 **Personal development**
- 19 **Overcoming Challenges**
- 20 **Scaling Impact, Securing the Future**
- 21 **A Call to Action**
- 22 **About EtriLabs**



## The Urgent Need for Women's Leadership in Ouagadougou Partnership countries

Assiba is a bright young woman from the village of Sehoun in rural Benin. She is determined to pursue her education but carries the weight of deep-rooted challenges on her shoulders. Limited access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, coupled with the pervasive effects of gender-based discrimination, threaten to dim her aspirations for a brighter future.

Her story is a poignant reflection of the struggles faced by countless women across Africa. Gender-based violence, early marriage, and limited educational opportunities cast long shadows on their paths, hindering their ability to reach their full potential and contribute to their communities' growth. In OP countries, systemic gender inequities in leadership positions limit

women's ability to influence key sectors, including but not limited to family planning (FP) and sexual and reproductive health (SRH). These inequities reduce women's access to decision-making roles across multiple areas impacting health, economy, governance, and education. Barriers to female leadership include limited access to mentorship, professional training, and support networks, hindering young women from reaching leadership positions where they can drive societal change.

This stark reality begs the question: How can we dismantle these barriers and unlock the untapped leadership potential of African women, empowering them to overcome these obstacles and become catalysts for transformative change across the continent?

# Nurturing a Legacy of Leadership

The Ouagadougou Partnership Women's Leadership Accelerator (OWLA) program, a 12-month initiative, was born out of the pressing need to address the disparity between men and women in professional and decision-making spheres within the Ouagadougou Partnership (OP) countries.

OWLA's unique approach is rooted in a comprehensive support system, designed to equip participants with sustainable, long-lasting, and actionable leadership skills. This includes:

**A comprehensive capacity-building journey with hundreds of hours of workshops and training.**

**Personalized support through a network of over 50 experienced mentors and coaches.**

**Personalized support through a network of over 50 experienced mentors and coaches.**

**Access to a network of key partners and high-level connections.**

**Networking opportunities at numerous local and regional events.**

**Funding of up to \$10,000 for each participant to bring a project to life, addressing a social issue in their community.**

# Theory of Change

## ► Problem Statement

In OP countries, systemic gender inequities in leadership positions limit women's ability to influence key sectors, including but not limited to family planning (FP) and sexual and reproductive health (SRH). These inequities reduce women's access to decision-making roles across multiple areas impacting health, economy, governance, and education. Barriers to female leadership include limited access to mentorship, professional training, and support networks, hindering young women from reaching leadership positions where they can drive societal change.

## ► Vision

Empower a new generation of female leaders who can drive advancements in gender equity and impact various sectors, including FP, SRH, education, economic development, and governance, across OP countries. By building a sustainable local leadership pipeline, OWLA aims to create lasting changes in policies and practices that support women's rights, health, and socioeconomic empowerment.

## ► Theory of Change Statement

If OWLA empowers young women through intensive training, mentorship, and project funding, then these women will advance into leadership roles across diverse sectors, implement impactful projects, and build a support network that drives gender equity and societal progress. This will foster a pipeline of female leaders who contribute to transformative changes in policy and practices in OP countries, achieving long-term empowerment and socioeconomic benefits for women and their communities.

## Strategic Interventions (Inputs and Activities)

- **Rigorous Selection and Engagement:** Identify and recruit young women with high leadership potential from diverse OP countries. Emphasize a commitment to gender equity, community well-being, and professional impact across sectors, including health, education, business, and government.
- **Skills Development and Training:** Provide training modules in leadership, advocacy, management, communication, and sector-specific topics (e.g., public policy, business strategy, and community health). This will build a foundation of competencies essential for effective leadership across professional fields.
- **Mentorship Program:** Pair participants with experienced female leaders from various sectors, offering guidance, role modeling, and support to navigate career advancement and impact projects.
- **Professional Networking Opportunities:** Facilitate in-person and digital networking to strengthen participant support systems and create pathways into professional communities and opportunities.
- **Project Support and Funding:** Enable participants to design and execute impactful projects, with practical applications across FP, SRH, economic empowerment, education, or governance—ensuring direct community impact and professional growth.

## Pathways of Change (Outputs and Intermediate Outcomes)

- **Enhanced Knowledge and Skills:** Participants develop critical leadership and advocacy skills necessary to navigate and influence the FP/SRH landscape.
- **Increased Access to Role Models and Support Networks:** Through mentorship, participants gain insights and establish connections with influential leaders, building their professional networks.
- **Empowerment and Confidence Building:** The structured training, coupled with project-based experience, bolsters participants' self-confidence and readiness to lead.
- **Career Advancement and Impact Projects:** Participants apply their skills within their communities and organizations, advancing in leadership roles while implementing impactful FP/SRH initiatives.

## Outcomes

### Short-Term Outcomes (1–2 years):

- **Professional Growth:** Participants report career advancements, with many moving into senior roles across fields such as FP/SRH, education, economic development, and public administration.
- **Successful Implementation of Projects:** Participants complete projects that positively impact communities by addressing gender equity, health, education, and economic resilience.

### Medium-Term Outcomes (3–5 years):

- **Increased Women's Leadership Across Sectors:** OWLA alumni hold influential positions across sectors, serving as advocates for gender equity and social advancement in OP countries.
- **Strengthened Women's Networks:** Alumni maintain connections, fostering a regional network of women leaders who support each other and drive social and economic change.

## Impact

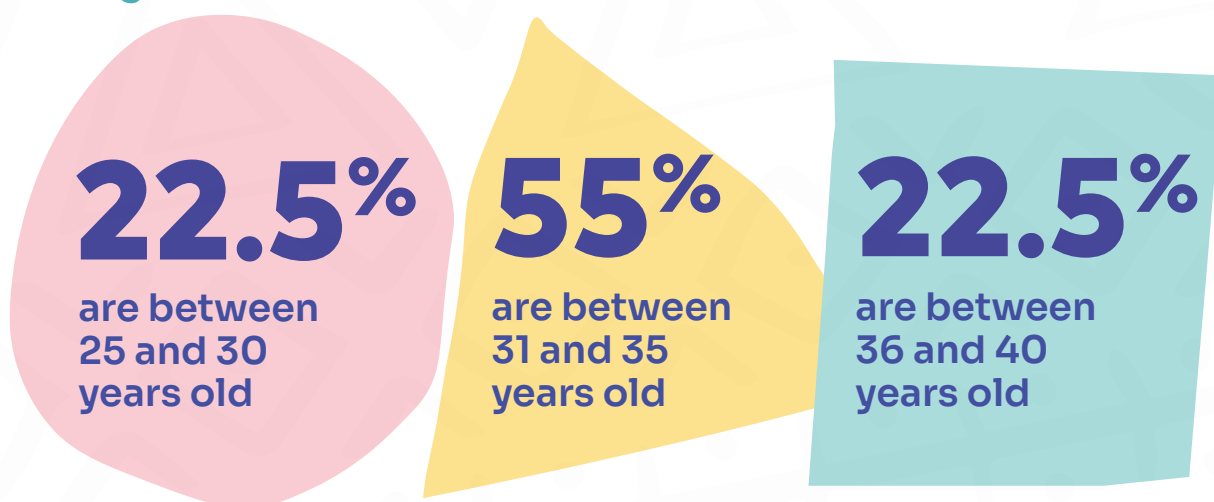
### Long-Term Outcome (10+ years):

A sustainable, self-sustaining network of female leaders across OP countries champions gender equity, drives transformative change in health, education, economic empowerment, and governance, and contributes to a broader vision of gender equality and socioeconomic progress across the region.

# How the program is Igniting Transformation

The OWLA program has attracted diverse cohort of exceptional women, each with unique experiences and a shared passion for driving positive change in their communities.

## ► Age



## ► Highest qualification



### Among the OWLAs are:

- Senior officials in public service
- Heads of civic organizations
- Activists committed to gender equality and reproductive health
- Employees in the private sector and entrepreneurs
- Influencers
- Reproductive health project managers
- Researchers and academics
- Health practitioners



# Impact of the program

Through OWLA, women have embarked on a transformative journey, embracing new knowledge, skills, and confidence. The program has equipped them with the tools to become effective leaders and agents of change.

Here are some examples of their personal transformations:

« The OWLA program strengthened my leadership skills by enhancing my confidence, decision-making, communication, and team management abilities. I am now prepared to take on leadership responsibilities and inspire others. »

**Seny Chantal LOUA**

« The biggest impact has been on my leadership abilities, which have developed significantly. The coaching came at a time when I really needed it. It truly transformed my management skills, helped me build my leadership skills, and improved my working relationships with my colleagues. »

**Fatou Diop**

« OWLA allowed me to gain concrete skills in project management, communication, and sexual and reproductive health - key skills in my field, which is humanitarian work and public health. The mentorship helped me strengthen my ability to lead, influence, and manage projects confidently, which has become an essential asset in my public health career. The grant for my project enabled me to apply these acquired skills in a practical way, further enhancing my professional profile while creating a tangible impact in my community. Being recognized as an OWLA Laureate also increased my visibility, opening doors, building confidence in my abilities, and inspiring strong interest from others to follow the OWLA path as well.»

**Rachidatou Ouermi**



These stories illustrate the profound impact OWLA has had on individual participants, empowering them to step into leadership roles and make a difference in their communities

# Impact Assessment Methodology

## Longitudinal online survey

The evaluation team conducted an online survey with participants of each cohort and Etrilabs staff at multiple time-points:

Online surveys	For participants questions covers	For EtriLabs staff questions covers	Period
Monthly questionnaire	Their experience with training, mentoring, and impact project activities	Operational efficiency, participant feedback, and progress made by participants	Throughout the 9 months of the program
Quarterly questionnaire	Progresses made in terms of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Knowledge and Skills</li> <li>● Access to Role Models and Support Networks</li> <li>● Empowerment and confidence</li> <li>● Career and Impact Projects</li> </ul>	-	Throughout the 9 months of the program
Annual questionnaire	Progresses made in terms of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Knowledge and Skills</li> <li>● Access to Role Models and Support Networks</li> <li>● Empowerment and confidence</li> <li>● Career and Impact Projects</li> </ul>	-	During the 2 years following the program's end

### ► Key Informant interviews (KIIs)

To capture qualitative findings about the program, the evaluation team conducted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with participants and EtriLabs staff. Specifically, KIIs were conducted with four participants from four Ougadougou Partnership countries and two members of the EtriLabs staff.

### ► Monitoring and Program Data

The evaluation team utilized all data gathered from the program activities including training sessions, mentoring sessions, workshops, events, and office hours.

# Transformational Mentorship

The program fosters invaluable mentorship relationships, connecting participants with influential leaders across various sectors. These mentors provide guidance, support, and inspiration, empowering the OWLAs to navigate their leadership journeys and amplify their impact. Here are three exceptional women who have contributed their expertise and experience to the program as mentors:

## Pr. Awa Marie Coll-Seck

Pr. Awa Marie Coll Seck is a distinguished Senegalese public health expert and the current President of the Forum Galien Africa. She has an extensive career in public service, having served as Minister of State to the President of Senegal (2017–2024) and as Minister of Health (2001–2003, 2012–2017). A specialist in infectious diseases, she has held prominent roles in academia and healthcare, including Professor of Medicine at the University of Dakar and Chief of Infectious Diseases at Dakar University Hospital. Pr. Coll Seck has also had a significant international impact, serving as Director of UNAIDS' Department of Country and Regional Support (1996–2001) and as Executive Director of the Roll Back Malaria Partnership (2004–2011). Her leadership extends to roles such as Chairperson of Committee B of the World Health Assembly and President of the Assembly of Ministries of Health for the West African Health Organization.



## Fatimata Sy

Fatimata Sy is a renowned public health expert with over 35 years of experience in designing and implementing impactful health programs across West Africa. A passionate advocate for women's access to contraception, Fatimata led the Ouagadougou Partnership Coordination Unit (UCPO) for seven years, during which she repositioned family planning as a priority in Francophone West African countries. She is also a staunch supporter of girls' education and female leadership.

Throughout her career, Fatimata has held pivotal roles, including Senior Advisor for Regional Partnerships and Liaison Officer with the Global Fund at USAID/West Africa; Director of the FHI Regional Offices in Ghana and Senegal; Health Program Officer at the World Bank in Senegal; and Health & Nutrition Program Officer at USAID/Senegal. Since retiring in 2018, she continues to contribute as a board member of organizations like Tostan International, ACDEV, Baobab Institute, and Prokids Côte d'Ivoire, as well as serving as Senior Advisor to OWLA and as part of the investment committee for ClIFF programs. Her work has significantly advanced public health, female leadership, and family planning across Africa.



## Pr. Christine Ouinsavi

Pr. Christine Ouinsavi is a distinguished academic and public servant from Benin, recognized for her groundbreaking contributions to science and education. In 2007, she received the prestigious UNESCO-L'ORÉAL International Fellowship for Women in Science, making her one of only three African women honored that year. In her public service career, Pr. Christine served as Minister of Primary Education, Literacy, and National Languages, contributing to the advancement of education in Benin. In 2017, Pr. Christine achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first woman to attain full professorship at the University of Parakou after earning a Ph.D. in agricultural sciences. Pr. Christine's work exemplifies her dedication to advancing knowledge, empowering women in science, and fostering sustainable development.



## Dr. Ginette Hounkanrin

Dr. Ginette Hounkanrin brings 20 years' post-graduation experience cutting across clinical medicine and various public health programs in low- and middle-income countries especially in the sub-Saharan Africa with about 10 years in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights program management. Dr. Hounkanrin has international field experience in providing strategic leadership and technical support to national authorities as well as Civil Society Organizations in Family Planning/Reproductive health field. Throughout her various positions, she has acquired excellent competences in managing multi countries programs and projects grants and has demonstrated excellent ability to work in multi-cultural environments as well as building effective working relationships within and outside different organizations she worked with.

In recent years she has focused on managing and overseeing scaling up of Adolescents Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights interventions in various west and central Africa sub region.  
<https://www.pathfinder.org/team/ginette-hounkanrin/>



## Hon. Marième Baba Sy

Hon. Marième Baba Sy is a member of the National Assembly of Mauritania and President of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of Mauritania. Hon. Marième Baba Sy is the former Minister of Social Affairs, Children and the Family of Mauritania.



These are just a few examples of more than 40 exceptional women leaders who serve as mentors in the OWLA program. Their guidance and support play a crucial role in shaping the next generation of women leaders in Africa.

# Career Progress

Within just 12 months of completing the program, 70% of participants have been promoted to leadership positions, with some even taking on political and governmental roles. This demonstrates the program's effectiveness in equipping women with the skills and confidence to excel in their careers and become influential decision-makers. For example:

## Fatou Warkha Sambe

is a Senegalese feminist journalist committed to combating inequality and gender-based violence. She founded *Warkha TV*, a digital platform that produces thought-provoking discussions on feminism and women's rights. As a founding member of the *Dafadoy collective*, she actively fights against rape in Senegal, raising awareness and advocating for justice for survivors. In 2024, less than a year after being a member of the OWLA inaugural cohort, she declared her candidacy for the legislative elections in Senegal on the national list of the *Gox Yu Bees* coalition.



## Badjoumbena Bakolé

also known as **Elsa** is a Togolese feminist activist and social entrepreneur dedicated to advancing gender equality and social justice. As a member of the organization «*Négresses Féministes*» she actively advocates for women's rights and empowerment.



Elsa is the founder of *Auréole Monde*, a social enterprise that produces reusable menstrual pads and promotes menstrual hygiene management, aiming to empower women and keep girls in school. With expertise in gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health, she supports organizations and communities in implementing impactful projects.

While still part of the inaugural cohort, Elsa was hired by *Equipop* as the Regional Innovation and Support Officer for Feminist Organizations and Initiatives, furthering her commitment to advancing women's empowerment and social justice.

# Community Impact

The OWLAs have launched 32 impactful projects during the program, directly benefiting over 65,000 people and indirectly reaching more than 100,000 individuals in sectors such as sexual and reproductive health, education, and more.

Within a year of completing the program, 80% of participants have initiated an average of two new endeavors aimed at expanding access to sexual and reproductive health and family planning.

These initiatives have garnered support from a diverse range of organizations, including:

- **International Organizations:** UNFPA Mali, UNICEF Côte d'Ivoire, Swiss Contact Niger
- **Embassies:** Embassy of the Netherlands, Embassy of France, Embassy of Canada
- **Public Organizations:** Ministry of Promotion of Women, Mali
- **Universities:** Université Alassane Ouattara  
**Private Companies:** Bank of Africa
- **Civil Society Organizations:** Women in Science and Technology, Burkina Faso

The collective impact of these projects is undeniable, creating a ripple effect of positive change across communities.

**32** Impactful projects launched by OWLA's

**+ 65,000**  
People directly benefit

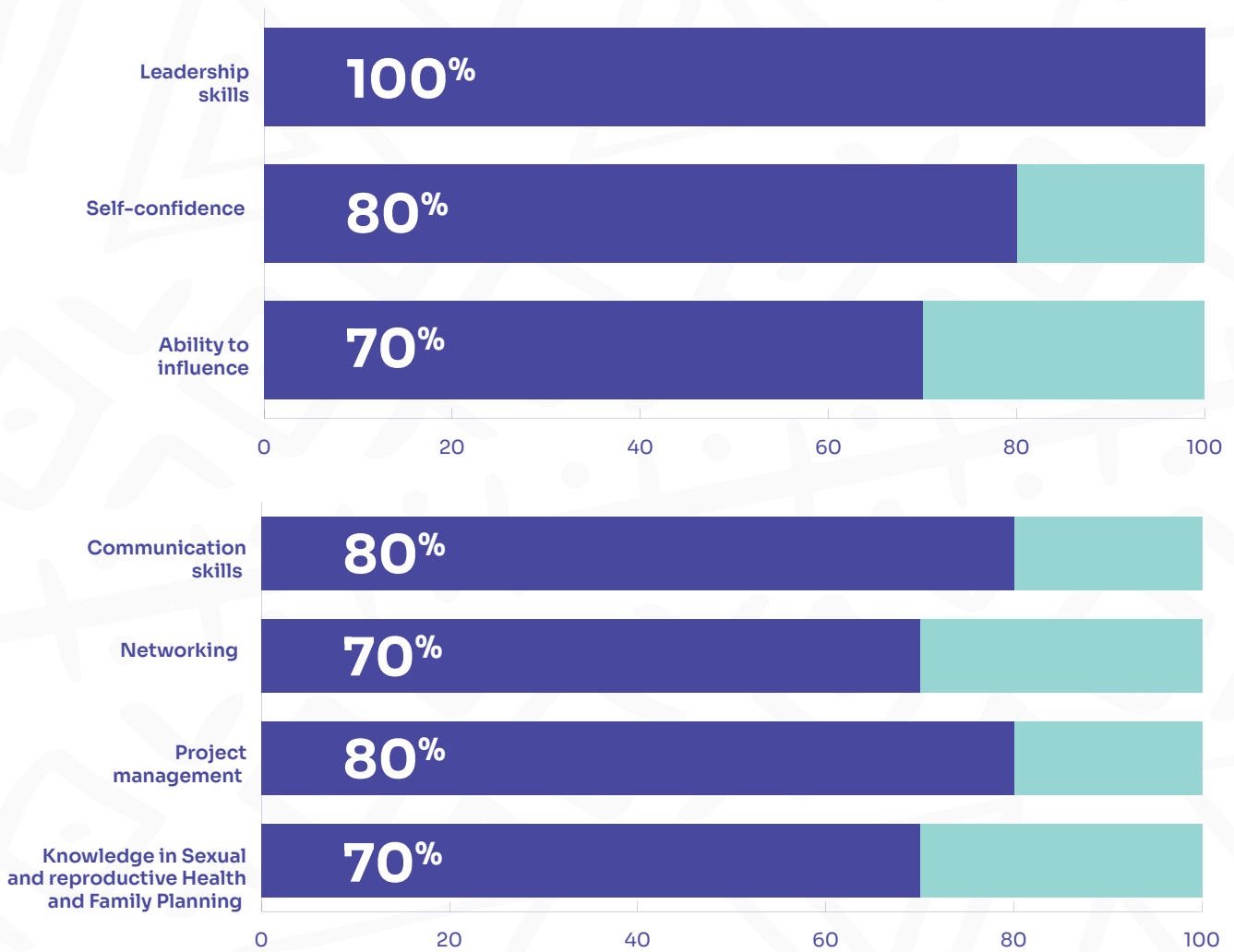
**+ 100,000**  
individuals reached indirectly in sectors such as sexual and reproductive health, education, and more

**80%**

Participants have initiated an average of two new endeavors aimed at expanding access to sexual and reproductive health and family planning

# Personal development

Areas of personal improvement as reported by the participants



## Case study



### Awa-Marie Drabo: From OWLA to Empowering Millions of Women and Transforming Access to Menstrual Products Across Africa

**Awa-Marie Drabo** is one of the participants from OWLA's inaugural cohort. An entrepreneur from Mali and founder of Sutura, a company specializing in the manufacturing of menstrual hygiene pads, she credits the program with providing her invaluable tools and insights that have profoundly enhanced her personal growth and business success.

Through the coaching and mentoring she received, Awa-Marie gained a renewed sense of confidence and initiative, reshaping her approach to entrepreneurship. The guidance and encouragement from her mentors, coupled with the strong sisterhood within the OWLA community, empowered her to take bold, strategic actions that accelerated her company's growth. She significantly expanded her client portfolio by forging partnerships with Gulf-based cooperation agencies. Additionally, she collaborated with some of Mali's largest corporations to design corporate social responsibility initiatives focused on empowering women and addressing period poverty.

Today, Sutura has scaled its production capacity to over 1,000 sanitary pads per day, up from 600 prior to OWLA. Its products are now used in Mali, Congo, Angola, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. The company has achieved remarkable growth, boasting a six-figure USD turnover, consistent double-digit annual increases, and a strong order pipeline. Sutura has also embraced sustainability by leveraging solar energy, with their production plant now equipped with solar panels. Reflecting on her OWLA experience, Awa-Marie shares,

***"I am so thankful to the OWLA program for everything it has given me. I will never stop praising it because it was such an immensely valuable opportunity for me."***





### Mariem Fall, from OWLA to contributing to the assessment of the national health system in Senegal

**Mariem Fall** describes the program as a deeply transformative experience, particularly in terms of her self-confidence and adaptability. For Mariem, three aspects of the program stood out as particularly impactful.

First, the coaching and mentoring sessions gave her access to inspiring individuals who expanded her horizons and strengthened her confidence. Second, the training sessions helped her consolidate her knowledge on various topics related to her work as a consultant. Finally, being surrounded by other young entrepreneurial women served as a true catalyst for her personal and professional growth.

Through OWLA, Mariem learned that there are no “small victories” and that it’s essential to celebrate them all.

Today, Mariem works as a consultant on two key projects. The first is a study on the impact of the Ouagadougou Partnership, and the second is a project evaluating the health system, focusing on family planning as well as maternal and child health. This project examines several critical aspects, including human resources, information systems, healthcare financing, and public-private partnerships.

Twelve months after completing the program, Mariem is more than ever a change-maker. She is directly contributing to the improvement of public health policies in Africa, particularly by addressing issues affecting women’s health. She also shared,

***“Thanks to OWLA, I now feel capable of working in any environment and with any type of profile.”***

## Case study



### Aïcha Gladys Traoré, from OWLA to being honored by the President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire with the 2024 Excellence Award

Reflecting on her journey, *Aïcha Gladys Traoré* emphasizes that the most enduring impact of OWLA has been the powerful connections she formed. These relationships—both with mentors and fellow women participants—have not only fuelled her personal growth but also strengthened her ability to empower others.

Aïcha values the mentorship and networking within the OWLA community. Her ongoing relationship with her mentor has been crucial in shaping her organization's structure and securing key partnerships, including with UNICEF. In addition to the community, Aïcha credits OWLA for helping her lay the crucial groundwork for scaling her organization. Through the training and coaching sessions, she gained the tools and mindset to navigate growth challenges, equipping her with the knowledge and support necessary to strengthen her foundation.

With this knowledge, Aïcha is preparing to launch Boostelles in 2025—a hybrid incubator aimed at empowering vulnerable women, especially from rural areas. The initiative will provide tailored support in visibility, communication, and access to financial resources, helping women overcome financial exclusion and build sustainable businesses for long-term independence.

Twelve months after completing the OWLA program, Aïcha continues to foster the ripple effect intended by the program, passing on the lessons she's learned to inspire and empower others. She highlights the power of sisterhood in OWLA, saying,

***“What has struck me the most about OWLA is the incredible solidarity among the women in the network. We are able to rely on each other, share resources, and uplift one another. It's more than just a network; it's a sisterhood.”***

# Overcoming Challenges

While the OWLA program has achieved remarkable success, its implementation has not been without challenges. Acknowledging these challenges and the lessons learned along the way reinforces the program's commitment to continuous improvement and transparency. Some of the challenges encountered include:

- Meeting the needs of over 4500 women who have applied for the program but could not be accommodated because only 20 participants are selected per cohort. This leaves hundreds of unmet needs for leadership support.
- Ensuring consistent engagement from mentors and participants across different geographical locations and time zones.
- Adapting the program to the diverse needs and contexts of participants from various backgrounds and professional fields.
- Navigating unforeseen circumstances, such as political instability that may disrupt program activities.

To address these challenges, OWLA has adopted several adaptive strategies:

- Develop a scale-up strategy over the next 5 years including national programs in all 9 OP countries starting with Benin and Senegal, and an online leadership academy open to thousands more women across the region.
- Strengthening communication channels and providing ongoing support to mentors and participants.
- Developing tailored resources and activities that cater to the specific needs of different participant groups.
- Building flexibility into the program design to accommodate unforeseen circumstances and ensure continuity.

# Scaling Impact, Securing the Future

The OWLA program is not just a one-time intervention; it's envisioned as a catalyst for lasting change. Building on its early successes, the initiative is poised for expansion and long-term sustainability.

To achieve this, a strategic roadmap has been laid out, focused on key objectives:

**Strengthening Mentor Networks:** Recognizing the vital role of mentorship, OWLA is committed to building and sustaining strong mentor networks. These networks provide ongoing support, guidance, and inspiration, ensuring that the OWLAs continue to thrive on their leadership journeys.

**Government & Institution Partnerships:** Engaging with ministries and relevant institutions is crucial for policy alignment and support. OWLA aims to work closely with these stakeholders to create an enabling environment for women's leadership.

**Expanding Program Reach:** To amplify its impact, OWLA plans to increase the number of women leaders it reaches through regional and national initiatives. This means making the program accessible to more women across diverse sectors and backgrounds.

**Securing Funding & Local Support:** To ensure long-term sustainability, OWLA is focused on diversifying funding sources and partnering with local institutions. This collaborative approach will empower local communities to take ownership of the program and ensure its longevity.

**Aligning with OP Goals:** OWLA is committed to integrating itself as a core program within the Ouagadougou Partnership. This alignment will solidify its role in advancing gender equality and sustainable development in the region.

To achieve these ambitious goals, a phased approach to scaling the program in the next 5 years has been adopted:

**Years 1-2: Pilot & Consolidation:** This phase focuses on launching pilot programs in Benin and Senegal, adapting to local needs, and strengthening regional mentor networks. It also involves establishing a robust monitoring system and a dedicated fund for participant-led projects.

**Years 5+: Sustainability & Legacy:** In this phase, the focus shifts to long-term sustainability. Cultivating an active alumni network will be crucial for ongoing support and mentorship. Formalizing mentor roles in advocacy and conducting a long-term impact assessment will further solidify OWLA's legacy.

**Years 3-4: Scale-Up & Diversification:** Building on the lessons learned in the pilot phase, OWLA will expand to other OP countries based on demand. The program will also diversify its offerings to cater to specific sectors, such as business and politics. Partnerships with local agencies and the private sector will be key to this expansion.

## A Call to Action

# Join us in supporting the next generation of women leaders.

*The OWLA program has demonstrated the transformative power of investing in women's leadership. By equipping women with the skills, confidence, and networks to thrive, OWLA is creating a ripple effect of positive change across communities in Africa.*

**Together, we can amplify their impact and accelerate progress towards gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and sustainable development goals in Africa and beyond**



# About EtriLabs



We are EtriLabs, an innovation hub with a proven track record of empowering women, youth, and entrepreneurs building a brighter future in Africa.

## We have built a solid track record over the years

Successfully executed

**over 20 programs**

with **multi-million-dollar budgets**

Supported more than

**30.000 young entrepreneurs**

across **20 African countries**

Demonstrated **expertise in designing and delivering 360° entrepreneur support systems**, including

ecosystem development, hands-on advisory, growth capital deployment, and business monitoring.

**We are experienced, trusted, well-connected.**

14 years of expertise.

Trusted by top-tier organizations in the management of social entrepreneurship programs and ministries of education

We are committed to creating opportunities for youth in Africa and building a fairer, more inclusive, and prosperous continent

**We Place Women are at the heart of our mission. We believe empowering them strengthens Africa.**

Over 70% of the beneficiaries of our programs are women.

We have impacted more than 3,000,000 women over the past 10 years.

Our programs cover a wide range of critical areas for women: inclusion, capacity building, sexual and reproductive health, and leadership.

## They trust us :

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES foundation

unicef 



 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands  
Dutch Good Growth Fund



 PLANIFICATION FAMILIALE  
Le Partenariat de Ouagadougou

 IPPF International  
Planned Parenthood  
Federation

**womenleaders.africa**



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