You know that feeling. The aha! The spark of an idea that you just can’t stop thinking about. The persistent “what if” that becomes an urgent “why not.” These moments have brought women the right to vote, tax-free tampons, and organizations like The MATCH Fund. You have fought for these things. You have built upon these victories. You are the reason The MATCH Fund is poised to celebrate 40 years in 2016.

Collectively, we are in a lightbulb moment—a moment where women are innovating, connecting, and driving change like never before. Look at the mobile apps tracking street violence from Mumbai to Michigan. Look at Malala. Look at The MATCH Fund’s partners highlighted here. Women—our partners and our donors—are shedding light on discrimination, lighting the way for future generations, and ensuring that women in disaster-struck regions can literally turn on the lights. What does it look like when women support each other? Well, let’s just say that the future is bright.
BOXGIRLS USE DOUGHNUTS TO STAY IN SHAPE

Financial shape, that is. This summer, Boxgirls participants made and sold mandazis (Kenyan doughnuts) as a part of their financial literacy and entrepreneurship classes. These fluffy, triangular pastries are more than delicious; they teach young women and girls how to plan, budget for, and market a product. And did we mention that mandazis are delicious?

AT AGE 19, AKILI DADA’S MICHELLE BUYAKI TELLS IT LIKE IT IS

“One does not have to be great to start, but one has to start to be great. With this in mind, I do not have to wait until I’m ‘old enough’ to start making a difference. Leadership for me is about service. It’s about walking the talk and being a role model. I am a Young Change Maker with Akili Dada. [Through Akili Dada,] I have volunteered as a teacher in a rehabilitation centre for girls, where we started a book club to improve the girls’ reading skills.

I am also an aeronautical engineering student at the Technical University of Kenya. Being a leader and a young woman in a highly male dominated field often puts me at loggerheads with those who hold on to the notion that leadership is purely a man’s world. Having braved the storms that come with being a woman in a patriarchal society, I mentor young women and encourage them not to be intimidated. Our communities have responded very positively. Young people are more empowered and more aware of the opportunities they can create for themselves.”

THE BRIGHTEST MINDS IN KENYA AND UGANDA

Women's Fund Coordinator, Wariri Muhungi, visited The MATCH Fund’s partners in Kenya and Uganda this summer. Read messages from her conversations with Michelle (Akili Dada) and Jay (FEM Alliance) and see recent updates from Boxgirls, Akina Mama wa Afrika, and LAW Uganda.

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AKINA MAMA WA AFRIKA CELEBRATES 30 YEARS

Akina Mama wa Afrika began around a kitchen table, where women gathered to discuss the effects of conflict within Africa’s Great Lakes Region. Moving from the kitchen table to the peacemaking table didn’t happen overnight. But it did happen. Throughout the years, Akina Mama wa Afrika has played a critical role ensuring that African women are trained as leaders in peace negotiations. Today, as a thriving feminist hub, Akina Mama wa Afrika celebrates three decades of peacebuilding.

LAW UGANDA TAKES THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

The road to ending Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is long. And muddy. In the rural region of Karamoja, FGM is on the rise. Luckily, LAW Uganda is on the move. As the majority of those arrested for practicing FGM are women, LAW Uganda travels to these hard-to-reach regions to teach change from within. Women are trained to be community-based paralegals who advocate for alternatives to the customary laws that harm women and girls. A recent training for 25 women also included 12 police officers and 5 village chiefs.

JAY MULUCHA CAN END DISCRIMINATION IN FIVE WORDS

“It all begins with you,” says the Executive Director of FEM Alliance. “The activism, advocacy and sensitization that we have done as LGBT people in Uganda is tremendous and has yielded some good results. Through this work, some homophobic and transphobic people changed their attitudes towards us. This is an achievement. Last year, LGBT organizations feared to operate because of the Anti-Homosexuality Act. When it was nullified, the situation became a bit calmer, although bills and laws affecting our work are coming up all the time. We still have a lot of work to do and a long way to go because attacks on us are still ongoing. We, as a community, are constantly under attack. But with more work done, I think we will slowly be able to change negative attitudes, behaviours, policies, and patterns towards LGBT people.” In the meantime, Jay and his team have created an underground network, designed to protect Uganda’s most marginalized people. The work is discreet and the obstacles are great, but one thing is certain: change is on its way.
DIFFERENT BY DESIGN
FISH OUT OF WATER IS A FORCE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

What do Nepal’s recent earthquakes have in common with Toronto-based Fish out of Water Design? They both demonstrate women’s leadership under pressure. (And they are both a force of nature.) When Fish out of Water’s co-owners, Rebecca Hamilton and Charlene Codner, heard about the disaster, they wanted to help. They mobilized their business to support Her Turn, The MATCH Fund’s partner delivering hygiene kits and safety training to women throughout Nepal. “We believe women are resilient if they have access to the right resources,” Rebecca and Charlene said. “Basic hygiene products are often overlooked, but they are essential for a woman to engage with confidence in disaster-relief activities and to be productive members of their communities. We wanted to ensure women were armed with information to protect themselves at this particularly vulnerable time.”

RUTH MANDEL IS READY TO ACT

Throughout the years, Ruth has made a mark by giving to charitable causes, consistently choosing issues that are complex and difficult to fund. In her twenties, Ruth supported The MATCH Fund at its inception, hosting a benefit cabaret in the 80s. Now, with more experience, she jumped at the opportunity to re-engage with The MATCH Fund and has recently decided to increase her commitment. She currently supports two partners: FEM Alliance in Uganda and, immediately after April’s earthquake, the Women’s Awareness Centre Nepal.

Ruth explains, “When you are ready to act, the fewer steps the better.” That can be said both of issues that have been on her mind for some time and also of rapid-response philanthropy. So, why The MATCH Fund? Ruth is blunt: “The MATCH Fund has broad range. I am no expert on Uganda or Nepal. But I am an expert in philanthropic relationship-building. That takes time, but once that’s in place, giving can be quick and confident.”

When it comes to women in a disaster zone, there’s no time for a learning curve. “We know that with natural disasters, just when we think things can’t get worse, women and girls are raped and targeted for trafficking. You just can’t sit with that on your mind. Because I already had a connection to The MATCH Fund, I knew they would know who was already on the ground in Nepal that could use my funds to trigger a big wave of light.”

HANDCUFFS, HOAX VIDEOS, AND HOT PINK TRUCKS

On International Women’s Day, The MATCH Fund launched a nationwide campaign to raise awareness about women’s rights. Our bold public service announcements, billboards, bus shelter ads, videos, and street activations reached millions of Canadians. In May, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation awarded this disruptive campaign a 2015 Innovation Award. We are proud to be recognized as being innovative from the inside out.