“There are more than 90 families in this community, none of the homes have access to energy.” This is the reality for Martha Alicia Benavente, 45, a widowed mother of four, from a small municipality in Guatemala. She was offered the opportunity to study for six months at the Barefoot College in India to become a solar engineer, a major change from her life as a domestic worker. The training changed Ms. Benavente’s circumstances and benefits other women in the community who are learning from Benavente and earning a livelihood while providing their community with a clean, sustainable energy source.

“My dream is that my community benefits from solar energy.”
– Martha Alicia Benavente

“I am doing my dream job… protecting women and children, trying to strengthen their voice and agency.”
– Major Cleo Bigwood

Major Cleo Bigwood participated in a UN Women training, funding by Norway, on ‘Mainstreaming gender in UN Peacekeeping to End Conflict Related Sexual Violence’ and noted that following the training in India “…I felt better prepared to return to MONUSCO and continue to serve my mission.” She also notes that “…in fragile societies there is an even greater need to build trust and strengthen communication between UN peacekeepers and members of the most vulnerable sections of the society” and sees the role of female peacekeepers as vital to contributing to broad engagement.
Malawi

“...the conflict hasn’t ended for us. We have a peace agreement, but look around you...”

— Mila Rodriguez

Colombia

“We are looking at this as a way of creating a movement for women.”

— Olivier Mukuta

Olivier Mukuta, is a proponent of blockchain technology to promote transparency and accountability in the use of funds. From his own frustrating experiences of sending funds to family and friends in the Malawi refugee camps and finding the resources were not used for the intended purpose, Mukuta and his team developed ‘VipiCash’, an app that uses blockchain technology to enable secure money transfer among women, independent of the male members of their family. This app was one of the winners at the blockchain hackathon co-organized by UN Women and Innovation Norway.

Mila Rodriguez is a young member of the Cantadora Network which uses traditional Afro-Colombian music to promote peace. In the port city of Tumaco, the impact of decades of armed conflict are still relevant. The Cantadora Network provides a safe space and opportunities to join in a peaceful pastime, creating music and preserving their culture. Rodriguez explains that “through the lyrics of the songs we sing, we are telling the real stories of our lives. When we sing, we feel free.”