

Empowered Sight Newsletter

“Seeing the future through an empowered lens”

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 **WOMEN
LEADERS**
IN EYE HEALTH



Events and updates

Key milestones across WLEH's implementation, from global advocacy at Women Deliver and InSight Live Kenya, to the launch of the Innovation Hub and engagement through Coffee Hours and Women Circles.

Innovation Hub Grants

Discover the WLEH Innovation Hub and take the next step toward turning bold ideas into action. Apply today!

Special Feature: WLEH at Women Deliver 2026

We spotlight WLEH's presence at Women Deliver in Melbourne, one of the world's leading global platforms for gender equality.

Explore how WLEH is advancing eye health as a core pillar of gender-equal development and amplifying women's leadership on the global stage.

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

As we move into the second half of 2026 for WLEH, we are pleased to share this edition highlighting both the progress achieved and the momentum building across our global community.

This edition reflects the early outcomes of a dynamic period marked by major advocacy engagements, the launch of new program components, and continued collaboration with our partners worldwide.

A key highlight of this edition is our participation in two major global platforms: Women Deliver 2026 in Melbourne and InSight Live Kenya, where WLEH contributed to advancing the global dialogue on gender equity in eye health.

These moments reinforced the importance of positioning women not only as beneficiaries, but as leaders shaping health systems globally.

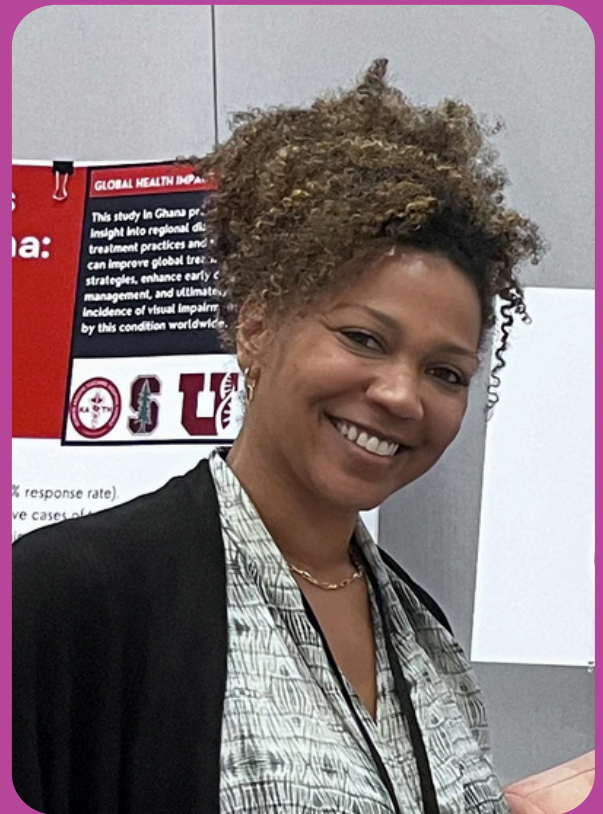
At the same time, we are excited to share the launch of the WLEH Innovation Hub, marking an important milestone in our Leadership Development portfolio. Alongside this, continued efforts across Women Circles, Coffee Hours, and country-level programming demonstrate the strength of our collective approach: integrating global advocacy with locally driven action.

As always, this work is made possible through the strong collaboration of our partners, country teams, and the wider WLEH community. As we look ahead, WLEH is entering a new phase of growth, one that builds on the foundations laid to date and increasingly positions the initiative as a global platform for leadership, innovation and advocacy for systems change in eye health. We remain committed to advancing a future where women not only participate in the sector but actively shape its direction.

Happy reading!



 **WOMEN
LEADERS**
IN EYE HEALTH



Ayisha Diop, Director,
Program Management
Orbis International

THE BIGGER PICTURE: DRIVING CHANGE

Building a Global Platform for Leadership, Innovation, Advocacy, and Systems Change

As WLEH moves into its 2026 implementation cycle, the initiative is increasingly evolving from individual programs into a global platform for women's leadership and systems change in eye health.

Across its core areas of work, WLEH is connecting leadership development, innovation, national advocacy, and global engagement into one integrated pathway designed to support women not only to participate in the sector, but to lead, influence, and transform it.



This edition reflects that broader direction.

From the launch of the Innovation Hub and the development of AMPLIF-EYE and Fellowship Grants, to the strengthening of Women Circles, Coffee Hours and global advocacy spaces, WLEH is building the structures needed to amplify women's voices, support emerging leaders, and advance gender-transformative change across institutions, countries, and global spaces.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT -1/4

Deepening Engagement with IAPB Gender Equity



Advancing Women and Girls Eye Health in Africa ahead of the Global Summit

Women make up 55% of the world's vision-impaired population. But behind that statistic are lives constrained, not by lack of solutions, but by lack of access and a failure of systems leadership.

4 JUNE 2026
2.45 - 5.30PM
MT KILIMANJARO 1

KEYNOTES:
DR. OKOLO OTERI EME, NIGERIA &
DR. CAROLINE CASEY, PRESIDENT, IAPB

SPEAKERS:
Denise Stuckenbruck, UNICEF
Stuart Keel, WHO
Mildred Adhiambo Omino, University of Nairobi
Peter Milo, Annette Kobusingye & Gladys Pono, The Fred Hollows Foundation
Moses Chege & Joy Shu'aibu, Sightsavers
Jennifer Gersbeck, IAPB
UN Women, KENYA
World Bank

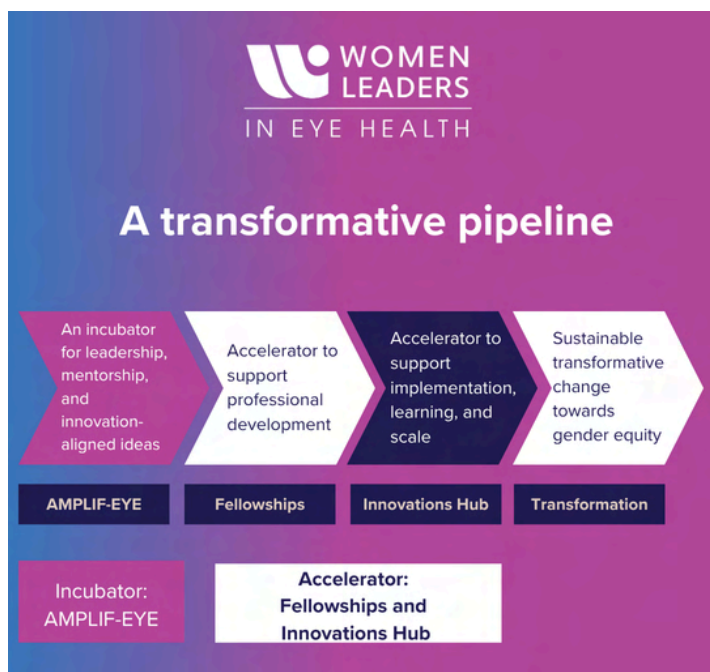
Starting this year, Orbis and Seva are more engaged than ever in the IAPB Gender Equity Working Group (GEWG), strengthening collaboration to advance gender equity across the eye health sector.

Orbis CEO Kathleen Sherwin has joined the GEWG's tripartite co-chairmanship alongside the Fred Hollows Foundation and Sightsavers, with WLEH team member Jennifer Tapia Boada supporting through the secretariat role. Colleagues from all three organizations are also actively contributing to GEWG initiatives. Recent highlights include:

- The inclusion of eye health in the Women Deliver 2026 agenda
- A dedicated session at InSight Live Kenya
- A recently published IAPB Brief on Gender and Climate Change

The GEWG continues to drive key priorities, including a stronger alignment with global policy efforts to support coordinated action across the sector.

Introducing the Incubator-Accelerator Model



The Incubator-Accelerator model is designed as a continuous pathway for women's leadership development, beginning with capacity-building and mentorship through AMPLIF-EYE (Incubator), and progressing toward the advancement and scaling of ideas and careers through the Innovation Hub and Fellowships (Accelerator).

By linking these components, the model supports participants not only to build leadership skills but also to apply them in practice, access resources, and advance high-potential initiatives within their professional and institutional contexts.

[Learn more here.](#)

Strengthening Country-Level Gender Action

The WLEH team has been actively supporting the allocation and management of WLEH and dedicated gender funding across country offices, working in close coordination with Country Directors, Gender Champions, and internal teams.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT - 2/4



A key shift this cycle is the growing proportion of funds managed directly at the country-level, enabling more responsive and context-specific implementation of gender-transformative activities.

These investments are supporting national advocacy efforts such as Women Circles and Coffee Hours, as well as community-level awareness initiatives. The WLEH team continues to work closely with country programs to ensure alignment and impact.

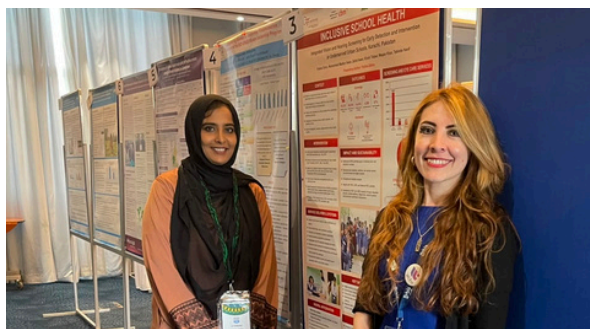
WLEH at IAPB InSight Live Kenya

The WLEH team was proud to be represented at InSight Live Kenya in early June 2026, where key findings were presented through a gender-focused poster authored by Jennifer Tapia Boada.

Drawing on insights from the 2025 global Coffee Hours, which reached over 700 women in eye health, the analysis highlighted the strong demand for peer-led spaces, career guidance, and meaningful professional connection. It reinforced the need to move beyond a focus on individual resilience and instead address the systemic barriers that continue to limit women's leadership, underscoring the importance of institutional support to drive sustainable change.



At InSight Live Kenya, moments of reconnection brought to life the long-term impact of the initiative, from former 2025 Professional Development Grant awardees, Juania Auguste and Fatima Zehra, now confidently participating in global forums on their own merits, to Women Circle leaders like Yamilee Cherubin and Stella Jane, who continue to drive change within their communities.



These encounters have served as a powerful reminder that WLEH is more than a program, it is a growing global movement. By investing in women, we are not only expanding individual opportunities, but also building a network of leaders who are transforming the eye health sector from within.

For its part, the Africa-focused session at InSight Live Kenya proved to be a highly impactful and well-received consultation, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to generate action-oriented feedback on advancing women's and girls' eye health across the region. Designed as a consultative space, the session linked discussions on gender equity, education, and the economic value of vision, while engaging participants through breakout discussions.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT - 3/4



A key highlight was the consultation segment, where Orbis CEO Kathleen Sherwin served as a core facilitator, guiding discussions on priority areas such as policy and governance, service delivery, leadership, and partnerships, with inputs from WLEH representatives, including Jennifer Tapia and Seva's Heidi Chase, helping to enrich the dialogue.



These discussions directly fed into the development of the Nairobi Draft Commitments, providing regionally informed recommendations ahead of the Global Eye Health Summit.

Growing Women Circles!



The WLEH team is actively working to strengthen the Women Circles model, building on the cohort of facilitators trained in 2025 and adapting the approach to better align with country-level realities.

This effort includes connecting with Women Circles leads across Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Ethiopia, to assess progress to date and identify opportunities for sustainable engagement. Particular emphasis is being placed on strengthening in-country coordination and supporting flexible delivery models.

This work is being spearheaded by Orbis Canada's Clare Szalay Timbo, in close collaboration with country-level focal points, including Njoki Wachira from Seva Foundation, with the aim of positioning Women Circles as a key platform for locally driven gender-transformative action.

Global and National Coffee Hours

Coffee Hours remain a core component of WLEH's national advocacy efforts in 2026, providing a platform to convene diverse stakeholders and strengthen connections across the eye health sector. Led by Clare Szalay Timbo, with support from Claudia Jose and the wider WLEH team, this workstream is focused on refining the delivery of Coffee Hours across both global and country levels.



IN CASE YOU MISSED IT - 4/4

A more strategic approach has been adopted to align sessions with key global convenings and priority audiences.

Planned engagements include sessions linked to the African Ophthalmology Congress, a virtual Coffee Hour associated with Orbis' Flying Eye Hospital visits, as well as country-level activities in Zambia, Uganda (COECSA), and other emerging contexts. Through close coordination with Gender Champions, Coffee Hours continue to foster peer exchange and advance gender-transformative dialogue.

Virtual Coffee Hour at Orbis's Flying Eye Hospital!

WLEH recently convened a Virtual Coffee Hour during the Flying Eye Hospital visit to Arequipa in June, bringing together nurses, eye health professionals, and leaders from across Peru and beyond.

Participants explored how mentorship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continued professional development can support a stronger and more empowered nursing workforce, while also openly reflecting on persistent challenges.

[Learn more here](#)



[Learn more here](#)

Global Digital Platform for Community and Advocacy!

In 2026, WLEH has continued to advance the development of a global digital platform aimed at strengthening community engagement and amplifying advocacy across the eye health sector.

Led by Clare Szalay Timbo in close collaboration with the WLEH Global Advocacy team, this initiative is being shaped through a participatory co-design approach that actively engages the broader WLEH community. An initial global survey generated strong interest, with over 60 respondents contributing to early development.



Building on this momentum, follow-up engagement has helped refine the platform's purpose, features, and user experience. The platform is envisioned as a space for connection, mentorship, and advocacy, where women leaders and allies can exchange knowledge and drive collective action.

The first advisory group meeting, held on May 21, marked an important milestone, with insights from this process guiding the platform's continued development and future launch.

LAUNCH OF THE INNOVATION HUB

**WOMEN
LEADERS**
IN EYE HEALTH

WLEH INNOVATION HUB



What kinds of innovations can be funded?
Learn more at wleh.org

TURNING BOLD IDEAS INTO ACTION

We are excited to announce the launch of the WLEH Innovation Hub, a new initiative under the Accelerator track designed to support women in eye health to move from ideas to real-world impact.

The Innovation Hub provides targeted funding for innovative solutions that strengthen leadership, advance gender equity, and drive institutional and system-level change across the eye health sector.



SUBMIT TODAY!

Women leaders across the sector are invited to submit proposals spanning a range of areas, including mentorship initiatives, clinical training innovations, implementation research, and service delivery improvements.



Please note that Fellowship Grants are not included in this call and will be launched through a separate application process at a later stage.

SELECTION

Projects will be selected based on their alignment with WLEH's gender and leadership objectives, as well as their feasibility and potential for measurable impact. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis through December 2026, offering a dynamic opportunity to support bold, practical ideas that can drive lasting change.

[Learn more here](#)

SPECIAL FEATURE: WLEH AT WOMEN DELIVER 2026

A GLOBAL STAGE FOR EYE HEALTH LEADERSHIP AND GENDER EQUITY

THE POWER OF WOMEN DELIVER 2026

The Women Deliver Conference held in Melbourne at the end of April was one of the world's largest and most influential gatherings dedicated to advancing the health, rights, and well-being of women and girls. Bringing together thousands of decision-makers, advocates, and global leaders, it served as a critical platform for shaping policy, influencing investment, and accelerating progress toward gender equality.

For the WLEH initiative, our presence at Women Deliver 2026 (WD2026) represented a key milestone in our global advocacy efforts. Represented by colleagues from Orbis International, including Kathleen Sherwin, Lucy Mvula, Clare Szalay Timbo, Lusungu Nyirenda-Mwami,

Jennifer Tapia Boada, and Shelby Stonecipher, as well as from Seva Foundation, including Heidi Chase and Njoki Wachira, WLEH contributed to elevating eye health within the broader gender equality agenda. Through this engagement, we worked to ensure that eye health is recognized as an essential component of gender-equal development, aligning with global policy movements such as the Melbourne Declaration and the Feminist Health Systems Charter.



ELEVATING EYE HEALTH BEYOND VISION

A defining moment of our participation was the high-level concurrent session, “Seeing Gender-Equal Development: Elevating Eye Health Beyond Vision,” co-organized with partners including Orbis International, Seva Foundation, the Fred Hollows Foundation, Sightsavers, and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB).

This session elevated eye health within the broader gender equality agenda and positioned the WLEH model as a scalable approach for operationalizing gender-transformative leadership in global health. Through contributions from cross-sector partners, the session helped strengthen alignment on the need to embed gender equity across service delivery and policy frameworks.

The session was enriched by contributions from global leaders, including Hon. Minister Cathy Nori of the Solomon Islands, who underscored the importance of systemic investment. Caroline Casey (IAPB) reinforced a core principle underpinning WLEH's work: that gender equality is not a secondary goal, but a leadership imperative that must be embedded across all levels of the health system.

A key highlight was the panel on women's leadership, featuring Orbis CEO Kathleen Sherwin and Seva's Njoki Wachira. Together, they articulated a critical shift in how women are positioned within the eye health sector, from beneficiaries of services to leaders shaping systems, policies, and outcomes.



The discussion not only amplified visibility for gender and eye health at a major global convening, but also contributed to ongoing advocacy efforts linked to global commitments, reinforcing the role of WLEH and its partners in shaping emerging dialogue ahead of key milestones such as the Global Eye Health Summit.

THE HEART OF ENGAGEMENT: THE ORBIS BOOTH



The heart of WLEH's engagement at WD2026 took place at the Orbis booth (H16), which served as a vibrant space for exchange, connection, and collaboration.

In this platform, WLEH launched a series of Coffee Chats: small, interactive discussion circles aimed at fostering meaningful dialogue among partners and peers.

These sessions explored how mentorship, leadership development, and community engagement can address persistent barriers faced by women in eye health.

Complementing these discussions, WLEH introduced an interactive engagement experience, including a Dice Roll Game and participatory wall, encouraging attendees to reflect on how vision and eye health intersect with gender equality in their own lives.

These tools helped translate complex concepts into engaging conversations, while reinforcing the importance of lived experience in shaping the global health agenda.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

WLEH's participation at WD2026 demonstrated the growing recognition of eye health as a critical component of gender equity, and the role of WLEH as a platform for advancing this agenda globally.

From high-level advocacy to grassroots dialogue, our engagement contributed to:

- Elevating eye health in major global policy discussions
- Strengthening partnerships across leading organizations
- Showcasing models for gender-transformative change
- Amplifying the voices and leadership of women in eye health

As we look ahead, WLEH remains committed to building on this momentum, ensuring that women are not only included in the global health conversation, but are leading it.



NEXT PHASE

Moving into WLEH's Next Phase



As WLEH moves into the next implementation phase, the focus is shifting from establishing core program components to scaling impact, strengthening leadership pathways, and increasing global influence.

Building on the momentum of recent milestones, WLEH is positioned as a connected platform that links leadership development, national advocacy, and global engagement.

In the coming months, our efforts at WLEH will continue to focus on driving gender-transformative change across the eye health sector and beyond!

STRENGTHENING INTERNAL CAPACITY

- Onboarding key roles
- Advancing the Incubator-Accelerator model to support a new generation of women leaders
- Launching AMPLIF-EYE as a pilot cohort of emerging leaders
- Further operationalizing the Innovation Hub
- Finalizing the Fellowship Grants model to expand opportunities for professional growth and innovation



SUSTAINED PROGRESS

At the same time, WLEH will continue to expand its advocacy footprint: strengthening Coffee Hours and Women Circles, as well as other potential platforms for national dialogue and influence.

We will also continue to deepen engagement in global spaces such as the IAPB Gender Equity Working Group.



In parallel, the ongoing co-design of the digital platform will play a key role in amplifying women's voices globally, connecting leaders across contexts, and supporting WLEH's evolution into a truly global movement for leadership and systems change. For its part, AMPLIF-EYE will bring together a cohort of approximately 15 women leaders in eye health to participate in a structured leadership and mentorship program.

These efforts reflect a more integrated, strategic approach, positioning WLEH as a growing global platform that connects leadership development with national and global advocacy to drive gender-transformative change across the eye health sector.



"Building 
a network helps us
GROW MORE
CONFIDENT
and stronger,
personally and
PROFESSIONALLY"

*Dr. Rosa Balcells, President of the
Chilean Society of Ophthalmology,
past WLEH awardee.*



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Have questions?

We are happy to help!

Contact us for more information, at wleh@orbis.org.