

Participant Directory and Bios

PLAY LEARN THRIVE WORKSHOP - NAIROBI 2026

This document contains the biography and information for each participant.

Hassan Yare Abdi

CDI Network CLG

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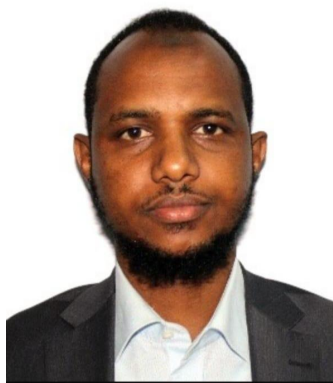
I am a Program Specialist and Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) professional at CDI Network CLG, where I support project design, implementation, and learning. My work focuses on strengthening education and child development initiatives by building the capacity of caregivers and teachers to effectively deliver the Jifunze Play program. I am passionate about evidence-based programming, play-based learning, and innovative approaches that improve learning and wellbeing for children, particularly in refugee and marginalized communities. I enjoy collaborating with partners to develop, monitor, and scale impactful programs.

Yussuf Omar Abdi

CDI Network CLG

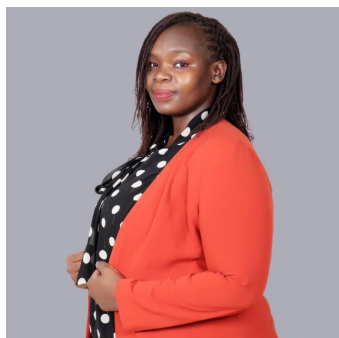
yussuf@cdi.or.ke

Yussuf Omar Abdi is the Program Director at CDI Network CLG with over 15 years of experience across Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Rwanda. He specializes in program design, fundraising, strategic partnerships, and community-led innovation in fragile and crisis-affected settings. His work advances education, health, livelihoods, climate resilience, peacebuilding, and social inclusion for vulnerable populations, including refugees and displaced communities. Yussuf currently leads the Jifunze Play program, funded by Grand Challenges Canada and the LEGO Foundation, integrating AI, virtual reality, and play-based learning to improve children's learning and wellbeing in Garissa County, Kenya.



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**MARTINA AOKO
ADEGA**

TAJIZURI SOCIETY

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Martina Aoko Adega is a senior Multi-Development expert with 16+ years advancing child development, health, and nutrition across Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Bridging policy and grassroots impact, she specializes in systems strengthening and empowering caregivers in emergency settings. As a Play Champion, she builds county capacity for nurturing care and Care for Child Development (CCD), training frontline workers to utilize no-cost and low-cost play materials. Having scaled interventions by training 600+ CBOs with orgs like Amref, KANCO, Tiny Totos, Mama Respond and Kidogo Early Years, she founded Tajizuri (2022) to drive community-led early learning. She holds a BSc in Nutrition and is completing her MSc.



Safa Al Ashqar

Abu Alanda Association

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Safa Al Ashqar is an education leader and project strategist in early childhood development, teacher capacity building, and education in resource-constrained settings. She is the founder of Project Asobi, an innovative play-based approach to strengthen fine-motor, socio-emotional, and foundational learning skills among young children. Safa holds a Master's in Educational Psychology and is a Harvard Graduate School of Education MEPLI Fellow. She leads international education initiatives across multiple countries, with a focus on scalable, low-cost solutions that empower teachers and improve learning outcomes for underserved communities.

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Wesal Al-Sebai

Azahir

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My name is Wesal Al-Sebai, originally from Syria. I work with Azahir Association in the areas of Human Resources, Child Protection, and Psychosocial Support. My work focuses on designing and facilitating training programs for youth and trainers, particularly in life skills, psychosocial support, learning through play, and robotics education. I am passionate about empowering young people, fostering creativity and resilience, and creating safe learning environments. I am also deeply interested in strengthening identity, connection to the land, and inspiring a generation that believes in its cause, invests in self-development, and contributes positively to its community and future.



Majd Albeltaji

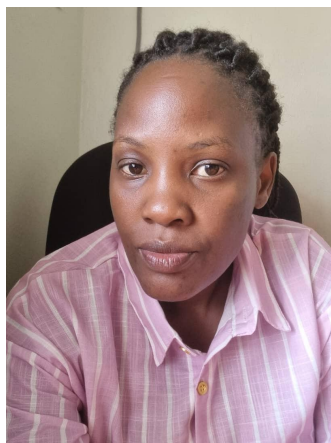
International Rescue
Committee

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Majd Albeltaji is the Regional Partnerships, Policy, Advocacy and Communications Lead for Early Childhood Development (ECD) at the International Rescue Committee. With over 10 years of experience across the MENA region, she specializes in policy reform, strategic advocacy, and cross-sector partnerships to strengthen systems for young children affected by crisis and displacement. Majd previously held roles with UNDP, UNESCO, and UN Women, and holds a Master's degree in International Cooperation and Development.

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Loyce Asasira

Bantwana Initiative
Uganda (BIU)

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Loyce Asasira is an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Specialist at Bantwana Initiative Uganda with over 12 years of experience in education and humanitarian programming. She has worked across development and emergency contexts, leading initiatives in early childhood development, Education in Emergencies, Learning Through Play, teacher professional development, and community-based education. Loyce is passionate about strengthening education systems, promoting caregiver engagement, and improving learning outcomes for vulnerable children. Her interests include play-based learning, systems strengthening, policy advocacy, and innovative approaches that expand equitable access to quality education.



Neelam Azmat

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Canada

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Neelam Azmat is Portfolio Manager, Seed at Grand Challenges Canada, where she supports 120+ early-stage innovators across various thematic areas as they kick off their entrepreneurial journeys. Neelam has been working in the social innovation and impact investment ecosystems over the last 12 years across all 7 continents. She is a strong advocate for using technology and innovation for economic, financial, and social inclusion of those who are marginalized.

Neelam is a Fulbright scholar with a master's in public administration from The Ohio State University and studied startup incubation and gender inclusion at the University of Queensland, Australia as an Australia Awards Fellow. She was also a fellow at the Swedish Institute Feminist Leaders Lab, the DICE Social Innovation Exchange, Global Shapers Islamabad Hub (World Economic Forum) and a TechCamp trainer for the US State Department.

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Rawan Barakat

Raneen Foundation

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Rawan Barakat holds a Bachelor's degree in Theater Arts from the University of Jordan. She is the Co-founder and Executive Director of Raneen Foundation since 2009. Driven by her expertise in building interactive educational programs, she serves as a Board of Trustees member at both the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the National Centre for Human Rights. Her outstanding contributions have earned her prestigious accolades, including the King Abdullah II Award for Youth Innovation, the Ashoka Fellowship, the Takreem Innovation in Education Award, and the esteemed Order of Al Hussein.



Lina Barakat

Raneen Foundation

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Lina Barakat (b. 1974) is a dedicated educational professional and the Co-Founder and Deputy Executive Director of Raneen Foundation. Holding a Bachelor's degree in Music from Yarmouk University, she possesses 13 years of diverse experience as an administrator and teacher across both public and private schools. Since 2013, Lina has served as Raneen's Deputy Executive Director and Project Coordinator. She has extensive expertise in managing educational programs, designing impactful learning initiatives, and driving institutional development.

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Bianca Bozzone

TruePoint Centre

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Bianca is passionate about the positive impact of education and the power of innovation to transform pathways. She has held multiple leadership positions across the for-profit and non-profit sectors, giving her unique insights into the complex ecosystem of business, government and social sectors. She has a depth of experience with innovative startups, having established and led an Enterprise Incubator focused on kickstarting township-based enterprises to increase access to pre-school education, kickstarted an early learning social franchise, and implemented a step-up programme in a youth accelerator. She spent a decade at a family office, managing and building a portfolio contributing to inclusive and sustainable solutions.



Michelle Cruickshank

Grand Challenges
Canada

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Michelle Cruickshank is the Lead for Child Development and Education at Grand Challenges Canada, where she supports innovative solutions that harness the power of play to improve child health, education, and development outcomes globally. With expertise in child health and education innovation and systems integration, Michelle collaborates with innovators, funders, researchers, and community partners to build collaborative initiatives and harness lessons that embed play into health, education, and caregiving environments. Most recently launching Play Learn Thrive to support children in crisis settings, in partnership with the LEGO Foundation.

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Christy El Khoury

Independent

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Project management and humanitarian professional with over 10 years of experience leading complex programs, partnerships, and multidisciplinary teams. Holds an MBA in Human Resources and PMP certification, and currently serves as a University Instructor in Project Management and Human Resource Management. Experienced in program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, donor compliance, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement. Passionate about strengthening project and program management practices, developing future leaders, and driving sustainable impact through effective planning, collaboration, and organizational excellence.



Leonard Chumo Falex

Early Start Africa

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Leonard is the Executive Director and Founder of Early Start Africa, an organization dedicated to promoting access to quality care and education for children through appropriate policy advocacy, program prototyping and early learning scholarships. He is a World Forum Foundation Global Leader for Children Fellow and current Regional Coordinator for Africa. He is a part-time lecturer at Daystar University Institute for Child Development and the first Chair for the Early Childhood Network for Kenya. Prior to founding Early Start Africa, Leonard held various positions at Aga Khan University Institute for Human Development, Missions of Hope International, International Child Resource Institute and Barclays Bank of Kenya.

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Tarek Ghuneim

Azahir

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I am a Palestinian refugee living in Lebanon. I work in psychosocial support and community work, in addition to monitoring and evaluation. Through my experience, I have learned that humanitarian work is not measured only by laws and regulations, but by the humanity we are born with. I believe we come into life with pure hearts, and that every person has the ability to give when there is sincere intention. I also believe that building a strong generation starts with a child growing up in a safe and supportive environment, as the small seed we plant today can make a deep difference in the future.



Patrick Habib

Lebanese Alternative
Learning

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Patrick Habib is a senior technology consultant with a background spanning early childhood through K-12 and professional education. He has spent his career at the crossroads of pedagogy and educational technology, helping schools and NGOs design learning experiences that work for every learner. As LAL's Head of Edtech, a Lebanese EdTech NGO, he leads efforts to bring quality education to under-resourced communities across the region.

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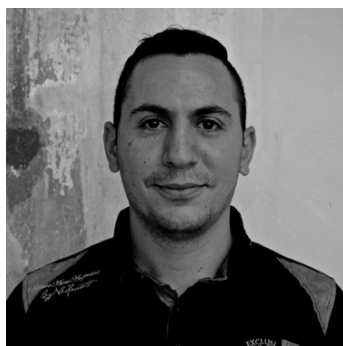


Lynn Hajj

GAME

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Lynn Hajj is a Communication & Project Coordinator at GAME Lebanon, an NGO working in Sport for Development across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Over the past six years, Lynn has worked on youth-focused initiatives, closely collaborating with young volunteers in Lebanon to design and implement projects that use sport as a platform for social inclusion, education, health awareness, bridge-building among youth from diverse backgrounds, and the creation of positive, supportive communities. She holds a Master's degree in NGO Management and International Organizations.



Ibrahim Hourani

GAME

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Ibrahim Hourani is the Country Director of GAME in Lebanon, an International NGO that empowers youth through street sports and culture. With a background in sports management, nonprofit leadership, and community development, he has led initiatives that promote inclusion, peace-building, and youth engagement across Lebanon, the Middle East and Europe. Ibrahim's work bridges sports, education, and social impact, reflecting his passion for empowering young people, fostering collaboration, and creating safe spaces for growth and creativity.

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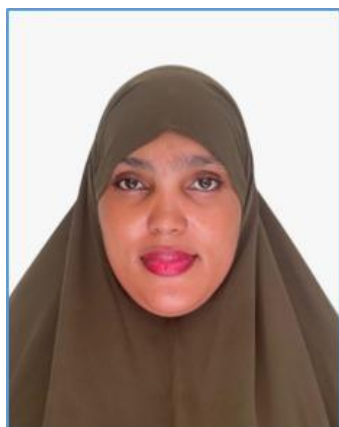


Adior Ibrahim

Cohere

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Adior Ibrahim is a community advocate focused on refugee inclusion, leadership, and community-driven change. My work explores how lived experiences can inform more equitable humanitarian and development systems, with a strong interest in shifting power and narratives, strengthening trust, and amplifying underrepresented voices. I am passionate about youth leadership, storytelling, and participatory approaches that center dignity and agency. Through research, dialogue, and advocacy, I aim to contribute to more inclusive systems where communities are not only heard but actively shape the decisions that affect their lives.



Muria Ibrahim

CDI Network CLG

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I am Muria Ibrahim, the Project Development/ Procurement Lead for the Jifunze Play program at CDI Network CLG. I lead project development, oversee procurement processes, and implement strategic initiatives that strengthen education and child development programs. I also coordinate partnerships and stakeholder engagement, fostering collaboration with communities, government agencies, NGOs, and development partners to enhance program impact. I am passionate about building innovative, inclusive, and sustainable solutions that improve learning opportunities and outcomes for children and underserved communities.

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Oscar Kadenge

ECDNEK

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Oscar is an ECD and Education Consulting Specialist. He is currently the Chair of the ECDNEK Board of Directors. He is a member of the PLT Platform faculty. His expertise lies in creating legal, policy, and institutional frameworks, system-wide organizational development, philanthropy/grant management, research and advocacy.



Eric Kamunvi

Bantwana Initiative
Uganda (BIU)

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Eric Robert Kamunvi is a seasoned development and humanitarian leader with over 15 years of experience in child protection, education, community health, social protection, livelihoods, and organizational development in Uganda. He currently serves as the SAFE Program Lead at Bantwana Initiative Uganda, providing strategic leadership and promoting locally led solutions that improve the well-being of children, families, and communities. Eric is passionate about parenting, early childhood development, community-led change, leadership development, and strengthening local organizations. As a mentor, trainer, and advocate, he is committed to empowering individuals and teams to achieve their full potential and create sustainable social impact.



Mireille Karaky

Hilfswerk International
GMBH

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Mireille Karaky is a social development professional with over 25 years of experience in humanitarian, recovery, and development programming in Lebanon and the MENA region. She serves as Country Manager for Hilfswerk International in Lebanon, leading national representation, donor relations, government liaison, and program management in line with international standards. Her expertise includes psychosocial support, youth engagement, community mobilization, gender, and livelihoods. She has held senior roles with Hilfswerk International, UNDP, and World Vision in post-conflict and emergency contexts. She holds a BA in Social Service and is fluent in Arabic, English, and French.

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Samaa Kazerouni

Grand Challenges
Canada

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Samaa Kazerouni Shah is an Investment Manager at Grand Challenges Canada. She has spent the last five years at GCC supporting innovations in maternal and newborn health, early childhood development, sexual and reproductive health and rights, sanitation, digital health, mental health, and education. Samaa has worked with UNICEF South Asia and with an accelerator in India. She spends her time outside of GCC working with high school students on global challenges. She holds a Masters of Global Affairs from the University of Toronto.



Amal Kiswani

Abu Alanda Association

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Amal Kiswani is a writer and development professional serving as MEAL Consultant for Project ASOBI, an origami-based early childhood education initiative reaching children aged 4–5 across 12 public kindergartens in Southeast Amman, Jordan. She leads impact measurement across child development outcomes as well as teacher wellbeing and parent engagement. Before ASOBI, she spent nearly two years writing and reporting for the IRC's Syria Country Program. Outside of her development work, she writes, reads, and spends time with her two cats.

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PLAY LEARN THRIVE WORKSHOP - NAIROBI 2026



Jasmine Lam

TruePoint Centre

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Jasmine has over a decade of experience partnering with mission-driven leaders to amplify the impact and sustainability of social and health innovations at scale. She brings skills in strategy development and execution, problem-solving in complex systems, and inclusive facilitation. Currently, she manages the Saving Brains Learning Platform, which has supported over 100 innovations globally. In addition, she designs and facilitates action learning groups for private sector leaders advancing purpose-driven cultures and diversity, equity & inclusion. Previously, Jasmine led international partnership development and fundraising with a humanitarian NGO, and supported uptake of mobile health applications in Canada's largest health research organization. She holds a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Toronto and a B.A. from McGill University. In her free time, she finds joy in eating delicious foods, movement, and exploring with her partner and dog in Toronto, Canada.



Cindy Lithimbi

GDI Africa

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Cindy is a Senior Manager at Global Development Incubator, where she is focused on designing, launching and scaling transformational social impact ventures. Her experience spans entrepreneurship, non-profit, and consulting experience in the childcare, education, and youth employment space. She holds an MSc in Social Policy and Economic Development from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Cindy has been part of the GCC Platform team supporting PLT innovators since September 2025. Outside of work, you'll find Cindy hanging out with her family and young children, kite-surfing, cooking and writing about her work.



Mellen Kemunto Marucha

Sense International
Kenya

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Mellen Kemunto Marucha is a development professional with over 15 years of experience in disability inclusion, programme coordination & advocacy. She serves as Senior Programmes Coordinator at Sense International Kenya, leading the planning & implementation of inclusive education, early intervention, vocational training & livelihoods initiatives for children & adults with complex disabilities. She is the Secretary of the Action for Children with Disabilities (ACD) advocacy network in Kenya. Mellen & her team received the Zero Project Award 2025 in Vienna, Austria. She was also honored with the Global Sense International's Outstanding International Development Person Award 2025 for her dedicated service.

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PLAY LEARN THRIVE WORKSHOP - NAIROBI 2026



Daniel Musango

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Kenya

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Daniel Musango is a seasoned development professional with over 14 years' experience in programme management, strategic planning, fundraising, leadership, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation across multicultural contexts. He is the Country Lead for Sense International Kenya, overseeing programmes, partnerships, finance, and operations. Previously Programme Manager (2016–2024), he led donor-funded initiatives influencing county policies in Kwale and Garissa. He has contributed to national policy and training reforms, received the Zero Project Award, and was named Outstanding International Development Person in 2023.



Nyaboke Faith

Sense International
Kenya

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I am Nyaboke Faith Omache, a passionate advocate for inclusive education and early intervention for children with disabilities. I currently serve as a Program Officer for Early Intervention at Sense International Kenya, where I lead initiatives focused on strengthening early screening, identification, and support for children with Deafblindness and other complex disabilities, developmental delays, hearing loss, and multi-sensory impairments. I hold a bachelor's degree in special education and a master's degree in development studies. I have over nine years of experience in disability inclusion, with expertise in program design, capacity building, and partnership development.

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Jared Okwach

GDI Africa

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Jared Okwach is an M&E Manager at the Global Development Incubator (GDI). He is a highly accomplished development professional with over a decade of experience, bridging strategic vision with practical implementation to spearhead transformative initiatives. With a strong background in Statistics and Project Management, he specializes in designing robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) frameworks that deliver measurable results in complex, multi-stakeholder environments. Having served on the GCC Platform team supporting PLT innovators, Jared is deeply committed to leveraging data-driven insights and collaborative technical assistance to improve early childhood outcomes and drive systemic change.



Jamie Radner

TruePoint Centre

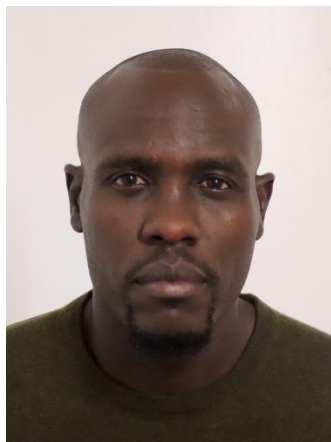
james.radner@utoronto.ca

Jamie is Assistant Professor, Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, Univ. of Toronto; Senior Fellow, Center on the Developing Child, Harvard Univ.; and Research Director, TruePoint Center.

His teaching and research involve social and economic development policy and practice, locally and especially internationally. The work uses quantitative and qualitative tools to improve the effectiveness of social innovations at local, national and international levels, for impact at scale. In the past decade, he has focused primarily on policies and programs that work with families to improve the life prospects of vulnerable young children, applying scientific and community-based knowledge in fruitful collaborations based on human equality.

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PLAY LEARN THRIVE WORKSHOP - NAIROBI 2026



Ragen Hillary

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I enjoy working in monitoring and evaluation, and I have a keen interest in strengthening learning as part of M&E and accountability processes. I believe accountability to the communities served facilitates more ownership and inclusion.



Ali Saleh

Hilfswerk International
GMBH

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I hold a PhD in Biology with a strong background in research, assessment, and evidence-based program development. My experience spans scientific research and applied work in humanitarian and education settings, with a focus on learning, child development, and vulnerable populations. Currently, I serve as Education Coordinator for the Play, Learn and Heal Bus project in South Lebanon, where I support initiatives that create safe and engaging opportunities for vulnerable children. I believe every child deserves the opportunity to enjoy their childhood, grow, learn, and thrive with dignity.

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**Mohammed .I.
Shalle**

CDI Network CLG

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As Program Manager for Jifunze Play at CDI Network CLG, I lead initiatives integrating AI, VR, and play-based learning to improve outcomes for refugee and local children in marginalized communities. I am dedicated to build inclusive education systems by empowering teachers and caregivers with locally driven solutions that promote resilience and lifelong learning. My mission is to ensure every child has access to high-quality, engaging opportunities to reach their full potential.



**Majdi Tayseer
Suleiman**

Zaatari Charitable Society
for Community

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Majdi Tayseer Suleiman is a project coordination and community development professional currently serving as Strategic Project Coordinator and Donor Liaison Officer for the Play Learn Thrive initiative implemented by Zaatari Charitable Society for Community Development in Jordan. His interests focus on child development, community engagement, learning through play, and strengthening local initiatives that support children and families in vulnerable communities. He is particularly interested in practical approaches to monitoring, evaluation, learning, and building sustainable partnerships that help community-based programs achieve long-term impact.

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Anthony Wambua

CDI Network CLG

I am currently serving as a project development & safeguarding specialist. My background work is in Strategic Management, Consortium Coordination, Child Protection, and Alternative Care Specialist with 20+ years of experience leading multi-stakeholder programmes across Kenya and East Africa. I have overseen reintegration of 800+ children from institutional care into families and communities; coordinated Psycho Social Support (PSS), CPIE, and resilience interventions to over 1000+ children and families; established Alternative Care Models in 25+ SDCS and Probation institutions; supervised finalization of National Foster Care Handbook, and Mentorship Guidelines. I have influenced policy and institutional reforms through various initiatives.



Nanjala Were

Nivishe Foundation

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Nanjala Were is a finance and grants management leader with over ten years of experience supporting nonprofit, philanthropic, and civil society organizations. As Director of Finance at Nivishe, they lead financial strategy, donor compliance, risk management, budgeting, and organizational sustainability. An intersectional feminist economist and social justice advocate, Nanjala is passionate about equitable resource distribution, feminist funding approaches, and strengthening financial systems that balance accountability with community-centred values. Their work focuses on advancing sustainable and inclusive financing models that support marginalized and historically excluded communities.

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Mariam Yusuf

Nivishe Foundation

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Mariam Yusuf is an award-winning mental health practitioner based in Kenya with a strong passion for mental health and media advocacy. She is currently the Director of Operations at Nivishe Foundation, where she leads impactful mental health projects aimed at promoting community resilience and well-being. Beyond her organizational role, Mariam serves as an advisory board member at the Aga Khan University Brain and Mind Institute for the Brain Resilience Project, contributing her expertise to advancing research and advocacy in mental health.