Chapter Six

Supporting Female Empowerment Through Visual Arts and Social Media

Where do we go from here? Now that we have learned that social entrepreneurs in the Global South recognize the monumental problems of endemic rural poverty that is made worse by climate change, is there anything we can do to help? As a college professor, I have noticed students and colleagues alike struggle to answer this question. In a climate-changed world that appears to be beyond our control, how can we contribute our time and talent (in the arts, business, computer science, education, health sciences, law, journalism, and so forth) to make a palpable difference? While having gainful employment obviously is important, it is also true that we want work and other activities that are emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually stimulating as well as worthwhile in remediating the problems that concern us.

It was heartening to hear Trupti Jain reveal that the poor and impoverished rural women she sought to help cared deeply about her success and happiness. She noted: “They enhanced my knowledge and gave me moral support when I got frustrated.” I believe that the personal decisions you make to help others are celebrated by others. Have you noticed, too, that social movements, including but not limited to Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, gain strength by connecting globally diverse audiences? For these movements to be credible, they had to extend beyond the immediate environment in which they germinated, beyond the states, beyond the nations and enter the consciousness and concerns of people around the world.

This chapter, conversational in tone, suggests several ways you might reach out to others in your fields of interest using visual arts and social media – to help change the status quo about climate change and women’s empowerment. I present ten initiatives from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Türkiye; and pose questions about how you might contribute to women’s
Empowering Female Climate Change Activists in the Global South

empowerment by using, for example, digital social media and networking, e-businesses, communication and technology, film production and arts and crafts. As someone who has enjoyed advising students and mentoring colleagues over the past four decades, I thought it was time to pass on some ideas. To be sure, the pandemic and several international conflicts have affected all of us emotionally, economically, socially, and politically. Even the world of work and styles of living have changed. Now we can reflect on what we have learned and, depending upon your personal disposition and skill set(s), some of the ideas I propose might further spark your imagination.

1. Digital Feminist Movements

In recent years, women in Türkiye have experienced a rise in online misogyny, political repression, and surveillance. Despite this, Gülüm Şener (an academic who has taught communication and media studies for over 15 years in various European universities) takes significant risks by interviewing social activists on digital feminism in Türkiye. Her most recent work, in 2021, has been published in the Media@LSE Working Paper Series by the London School of Economics. In reviewing her commitment to helping women in authoritarian societies, I wonder if you would be inclined to participate in a counterculture digital platform. It’s certainly not for everyone: As Şener notes, feminists take great risks to reinforce female solidarity and raise awareness in patriarchal cultures. She interviewed anonymous “moderators” from nine feminist movements to identify the benefits and limitations of global and local digital platforms. Below are her key findings for you to consider in deciding if this type of activism is right for you.

Şener’s analysis describes the ways different types of social media are used to promote feminist causes. She notes that, in Türkiye, there has been a dramatic increase in research on digital activism in which feminists challenge patriarchy through hashtag campaigns, disclosure of sexual harassment or abuse on social media, agenda-setting, online feminist call-out culture, video activism, digital archiving, data activism, and so on. Şener identifies blogs, newspaper and magazine sites, social media profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube profiles as “alternative media” in which women build relationships with mainstream media and construct their own “languages” (using abbreviations and new combinations of words) for their followers. Using the hashtag format (e.g., #endgenderbasedviolence), women begin to share their sexual harassment stories with others. She notes that hashtag activism has become the most popular form of activism today, especially among teenage girls who are beginning to learn about patriarchy, male domination, and sexism. Furthermore, “digital natives,” especially among urban-based university students who have not joined feminist groups (or affiliated organizations) use social networks to support women’s struggles; and girls who do not identify themselves as feminists have now become part of feminist causes.

In terms of everyday decision making among those who actively participate in a movement or cause, WhatsApp groups are the most frequently used digital
communication platforms precisely because they cannot be traced to an office or a physical space. As volunteers, users often experience secondary trauma and burnout because of the intense interaction within WhatsApp groups. If you are considering joining this type of social media group, I think it is important, as Şener indicates, to set limits for yourself. You don’t have to use all your “digital native” skills – website design, video shooting, editing, and so on – to support activist groups. In fact, social media groups are not interactive enough to be sustainable over long periods of time. Şener pointed out four negative consequences of the social media platforms that you should be aware of before becoming involved:

(1) Even in neoliberal societies, individualization and privatization of politics have not led to collective resistance. In fact, feminists also use advertising and marketing strategies to manage their presence and activity on the web.
(2) Hashtag activism can be both liberating and oppressive in creating solidarity and empowering victims/survivors. It can also lead to re-victimization, reinforcement of dominant discourses including victim blaming, and placement of the responsibility on the individual rather than on structural dynamics.
(3) For groups with fewer resources (including working classes), digital technologies may be used as new tools of surveillance and domination to control and restrict women’s social relationships and technology use and result in new forms of hegemonic masculinity.
(4) Digital media may lead to the normalization of sexist and homophobic hate speech and the reproduction of everyday sexism; and could cause self-censoring or writing anonymously under pseudonyms.

Şener also notes that while Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are three main platforms that feminist activists/dissidents use to distribute their messages as alternative public spheres, these platforms may be restricted by the government (in her case, it was the ruling political party in Türkiye). In addition, since the 1990s, many groups – including socialist, Kurdish, Alevi, Islamist conservative, and other feminist groups – use these platforms. Today, the once revolutionary, Facebook (now Meta) now is considered a “traditional social media” and only useful for reaching, for example, older women living in Asian Minor in Anatolia. In contrast, YouTube is popular among younger people who focus on podcasting collective reactions and hashtag campaigns to exert public pressure on legal processes and court decisions.

Among the recent successes in Türkiye were using a hashtag campaign to prevent a forced marriage and creating a public forum to monitor law enforcement activities related to an increase in violence against women. Şener acknowledges that repressive policies against women also contribute to the development of advocacy groups (in her case, Kadın Cinayetlerini Durduracağız Platformu – Platform to Stop the Murders of Women). She notes that, between 2008 and 2019, 3,185 women have been killed by men in Türkiye, and most of the perpetrators are former spouses or partners. That is the reason feminist digital platforms focus
on stopping femicide and violence against women; and misogynist discourses produced by Turkish politicians and mainstream media, formal education, promotion of Islam including the wearing of headscarves, abortion, political participation of women, and labor rights. Also on social media, beginning in 1996, Uçan Süpürge (Flying Broom) created a network of local women reporters to support “call-out” culture by women on digital platforms.

As mentioned, there are significant downsides that you should be aware of before deciding to use social media to promote feminist causes, regardless of the format. Şener notes that women’s issues are complex and, as a result, difficult to discuss on social media, including LGBT rights, economic violence, gender-based discrimination in the workplace, equal pay for equal work, psychological violence, sexuality, abortion, working-class women’s rights, women’s strike, women’s political participation, domestic labor, and feminist movements’ activities. While the relatively short posts preclude complex discussion of such issues, it is possible to expand or stretch the framework to facilitate longer discussions. Within this, though, is the fact that several countries ruled by authoritarian regimes still consider feminism taboo; and feminist activists are stigmatized and criminalized by the State, the media, and other social actors. Outside of Türkiye, Şener references Hou’s study on feminism in China as an example of how the State surveilles and silences feminist activists in online spaces, and how the mainstream media still endorses “feminist phobia” (Hou, 2020, p. 342).

In addition, digital platforms often are, as Şener states “one-dimensional, superficial, tabloid, post truth politics.” In essence, while digital platforms create counter public spheres and raise awareness to pressure politicians, mobilize citizens, and maintain solidarity, they do not serve as fora for debating and critiquing ideas. On the other hand, the digital platforms provide space for a kind of “tabloid” dissemination in simplified form of ideas debated and worked out in more traditional media venues, conferences, etc. that in most cases might be beyond the intellectual grasp, patience, and understanding of the majority of women – or of men, for that matter, were these platforms for men discussing complex issues. Young people who are, understandably, drawn to social media need places to work through their ideas experientially.

Thus, I wonder if you would be interested in interacting with others in real time to help rural women in the Global South, who may not have access to social media, become empowered and address climate change. As discussed in previous chapters in this book, you could help rural women tell their stories in the form of digital narratives. Şener presents an even more direct (and hands-on) activity, which she sees as important for seasoned feminists, to expose sexist and misogynist discourses while interacting with multiple audiences to build lasting domestic and international communities: Constructing a digital platform to replace official institutions to be a “hotline” for survivors of violence. In Türkiye, a 24/7 social media service helps women who have experienced violence, and directs them to experts (lawyers, psychologists, social workers, etc.).

While Şener reports that Turkish attitudes toward violence against women have changed due to digital feminist activism, she also notes that “the transformation of masculinity is very slow and occurs in small steps.” Social media often
becomes a place for people to voice their anger; and feminist groups continue to struggle online (and offline) against the normalization of gender-based violence (GBV). In fact, in Gujarat, Trupti Jain also strives to combat GBV in rural communities. The research in Türkiye seems to indicate that victim blaming can be decreased as women learn different tactics from each other. If you are drawn to participate in counterculture digital platforms, you might find the above initiatives rewarding.

### 2. Social Action

Another related type of work/contribution for you to consider is one that would allow you to focus on one specific initiative. For example, you might be interested in the joint work of A. Khalili from Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates (who formerly worked as a journalist covering Middle East news) and L. K. Storie at Lund University in Sweden (who studied public diplomacy). Their collaboration and expertise in journalism and public diplomacy apparently allowed them to together learn more about the way local and international digital media platforms advocated for Saudi women’s right to drive. It certainly is instructive that Khalil and Storie examine “collective” and “connective” actions through digital media platforms, both of which empowered Saudi women to challenge the status quo. Their discussion also could relate to issues women are facing in Iran today.

Though Saudi women still struggle to gain many freedoms, I wonder if you would be inclined to help change a particular set of laws. One concrete initiative, particularly if successful, may lead you eventually to pursue a career as a human rights attorney or lobbyist. Below is a summary of Khalil’s and Storie’s research that outlines the basic problem that Saudi women hoped to solve, the historical context, and the ways they rebelled using social media. While this case study does not focus on rural women in the Global South, but rather on otherwise privileged women in urban Saudi Arabia, it does introduce new uses of social media to help empower rural women in, for example, India, Guatemala, Vietnam, and other parts of the Global South. (See Chapter Three and Chapter Four for women-led climate change projects in these countries.)

In Saudi Arabia, the basic problem is that conservative cultural traditions, which were backed by the country’s powerful clergy, banned women from driving. Women had gained the right to attend school and work in offices, but they had to rely on men for transportation. Reacting to this subjugating inconvenience, on November 6, 1990, a group of 47 Saudi women took to the street in cars and demanded the right to drive. At the time, the authorities jailed them but, by 2011, the media scene had changed with the Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East, which generated much international attention. While a great deal was going on with respect to this issue, in September of 2017, the Saudi government announced, and the de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (aka “MBS”), approved the reform to allow women to drive beginning in June of 2018.
Saudi Arabia became an urbanized wealthy oil nation in the 1930s and maintained Islamic law as the primary source of legislation. Vast oil wealth made education available to both sexes; and families sent their daughters abroad to study. Those who attended college in the 1990s had become internet users: Khalil and Storie determined that 96% of young people used social networking sites and spent an average of 2.9 hours per day online.

With these online influences, a recent college graduate from King Abdelaziz University with a Bachelor of Science in computing and a Cisco Career Certification, Manal al-Sharif, was the first woman to capitalize on the wide reach of YouTube and post a video of herself driving in eastern Saudi Arabia in May 2011. Within a few days, al-Sharif’s video received more than 120,000 views and the video she posted on May 19 driving on public roads was viewed by more than 700,000 people. While she was arrested, the campaign accelerated on social media platforms and inspired more women to post their own videos driving in Saudi Arabia.

The issue became a topic for public debate on social media (and through word of mouth) in a country which, according to BBC News, in 2015, had the highest per-capita YouTube use in the world. Several online campaigns were initiated by various individuals seeking to contribute to the movement, officially launched on October 26, 2013, including a Facebook page called Women2Drive and the #oct26Driving hashtag campaign. Two components challenged the law – one that involved a small group of activists coordinating and sharing information through WhatsApp (called connective action) and the other in which large numbers of participants voiced their support via Telegram (called collective action). To effectively use social media, Khalil and Storie assert that both connective and collective actions are necessary and that a social media movement cannot depend on one leader or even a group of leaders.

This above campaign provides several ways that you could use social media to support women’s empowerment and climate justice. You would need to answer the question of whether you would gain a sense of satisfaction, emotional or otherwise, and/or whether this would be a useful learning experience for the future. Perhaps you are fluent in the country’s language (in this case, Arabic and English) and could help translate. Perhaps you have data coding skills and could help keep track of the thousands of tweets in a social movement. Are you surprised to learn that social movements need skilled data analysts to identify security concerns and protect the identities of activists, which could include devising “secret” code words?

Whether you are interested in becoming (or already are) a lawyer, journalist, diplomat, or data scientist, you also would want to decide if you would feel comfortable with anonymity and preserving the identities of women activists. Authentic and legitimate movements need to balance anonymity with careful revealing of some identities. In conservative/patriarchal cultures, even in rural communities, you would have to be cautious in provoking authorities. In the present day, very little social change occurs off-line. On the other hand, social media sources may be shut down either by their creators (once they outlive their usefulness) or the host government. It would be interesting to know whether social media in Pakistan, which has horrendous violence against women, as does India, too, of course, play a useful and/or noticeable role in women’s rights movements and would extend to concerns about climate change.
3. Computer Science

At present, many college students and professionals are interested in Applied Math and Statistics and Computer Science. Careers in data science and geographic information systems (GIS) mapping apparently have burgeoned, especially in the areas of national security and global climate change. In a brief review of the scholarly literature, I was surprised to learn that this has been building for years: The Association for Computing Engineering (ACM) was founded in 1947 “at the dawn of the computing age,” and now has over 100,000 members outside of the United States, in Europe, and Asia. The ACM focuses on raising awareness about computing social issues around the world. For example, in 2019, Indian sociologists M. Tharu and R. G. Yadav published a position paper through the ACM on the empowerment of women in electronic communication technologies, which included information on the social and economic barriers women confront in responding and adapting to weather-related disasters.

Tharu and Yadav state that reliable data, collected and analyzed at the national level, is necessary in gender equity policies:

We just hope that women become empowered at one hundred per cent and become equal to men so that both of them work side by side for a better world of today.

They aim to eliminate male domination over women and ensure that women gain equal access to and control over resources. Furthermore, they note that women often are not engaged in the “knowledge society:”

Women face barriers in real life that hinders them from participating in social media and seeing the impact it could have on their lives. One of the barriers is ICT [information and communication technology] literacy, which is the ability to use digital technology, communication tools and/or networks to define access, manage, integrate, evaluate, create, and communicate information ethically and legally to function in a knowledge society. Lack of education can be overcome by training.

They recognize that women’s empowerment is dependent on geographic location (urban and rural), educational status, social status (caste, class, and religion), household responsibilities (including childcare and eldercare), and age; and that many women in rural communities do not have access to information about healthcare, economic opportunities, and gender-based violence. In the past, radio and television programs were sources of information, but they were not interactive, nor were they successful in promoting social change or gender equity. Tharu and Yadav believe that the gender gap in technological advancement (including social media) prohibits women from “the fundamental right to information in addition to keep[ing] women in the dark regarding the misuse of the female and the distortion of the truth.”
Empowering women means increasing their control over the decisions that affect their lives both within and outside the household. In many countries in the Global South, women are not even listed in citizen registration databases perhaps because they are not literate and do not vote. But if you are interested in a career as a government analyst in international development, you might help gather and analyze data that would account for women's citizenship, voting rights, and further support female-led climate change initiatives—especially in the Global South where weather-related disasters are integral to impeding socio-economic development and often impact women more than men as household and smallholder managers. Because patriarchal systems often require women to stay at home, women often are unable to travel to community learning centers to acquire new skills. Furthermore, while the cost of mobile phones is low in most countries, many women do not have access to them either because they lack their own funds to buy them, or male family members decide that they don’t need them.

Tharu and Yadav believe that women who are engaged in agriculture and its “allied activities” (such as selling their goods in the city) need wider communication with others: If they are trained to use social media, they may be able to create content for websites and interact with potential customers. As a result, they could become part of a demographic that uses technology, gains self-confidence, and expands both their intellectual and economic growth. From my own experience in reviewing hundreds of gender equity and climate justice projects in the Global South, it is clear to me that many women would like access to any number and types of technological tools (e.g., community radio, video, television, tele/video conferencing, telephone, mobile phone, voice mail, blue tooth, digital cameras, and computers with the internet) because they need better information on healthcare, legal rights, economic and educational opportunities, social problems, governance, and collectivism.

While rural women often have multiple roles and responsibilities as well as heavy workloads, improved technology could reduce their working hours and increase their participation in a knowledge-based labor market. On this point, Tharu and Yadav challenge the government to develop appropriate programs:

The various social problems faced by women in Indian society must be addressed. If the violence against women, dowry, eve-teasing [i.e., unwanted sexual remarks or advances by a man to a woman in a public place], and feminization of poverty is reduced, it may offer a conducive atmosphere for women to have further new learning. [However,] the government has yet to extend ICT policies to pro-rural poor women.

While the government has formulated policies to help rural women establish their own small business ventures and savings accounts, these programs need to do a better job of collecting and analyzing data to assess success rates. For example, the Indian Ministry of Women and Child Development has established Self Help Groups (SHGs) for women to engage in “action-oriented literacy,” but it is unclear whether the SHGs are uniformly effective. The government needs data on how women develop small businesses and advocate for their legal rights.
Tharu and Yadav state that present-day policies are not effective in helping rural women in their local communities because the women are not introduced to modern technology and social media. Remember Trupti Jain’s experience with the Bhungroo irrigation technology in Gujarat? She left her government job of 20 years to establish a social enterprise. Significantly, she recognized the value of pushing the government and still partnered with national and state government agencies to empower rural women. While Tharu and Yadav describe the situation in India, it should be obvious to those of you who have data analytic skills that there are many opportunities in your home country – even in government agencies. In fact, international organizations use country data generated by national governments to establish eco-friendly programs for women.

4. Small Business Development

Two mass communication and journalism scholars studied rural women in the Indian state of Kerala who use social media to earn money through microcredit enterprises. E. P. Andra and J. R. Jenitha focused on Kudumbashree, a partially state-funded poverty eradication and women’s empowerment program.7 Beginning in the 1990s, Kudumbashree (meaning “prosperity of the family” in the Indian Malayam language) established local community networks to lend money to small business enterprises and to teach rural women how to use social media and manage their finances.

If you are interested in a career that combines finance and social media – and you enjoy teaching – maybe this project will spark your imagination. The description, below, focuses on how Kudumbashree’s mission was defined; what the program has accomplished to date; and what seems to be missing. I wonder if you would want to identify a community of women who need online training in financial management and/or if you would want to teach “in the field.”

Kudumbashree was established to help rural women improve health and nutrition in their communities. Partially supported by the state of Kerala through the Ministry of Rural Development, it also promotes women’s economic empowerment to help impoverished communities. Through local self-governing institutions, women are encouraged to start micro-enterprises. The basic premise in Kudumbashree is that SHGs will facilitate a creative exchange of ideas.

The program has a three-tiered structure where between 20 and 60 women form individual neighborhood groups (NHGs) and send representatives to 8–10 designated wards called “development societies” (ADSs), which then send representatives to the village community development society (CDS). The CDS acts as a bank for the poor and encourages thrift and investment through a credit system. This system provides several layers of review to help ensure that funds are well spent.

Andra and Jenitha cite a project in Assam in which micro-finance programs “had a profound influence on the economic status, decision making power, knowledge, and self-worthiness of women participants [with] SHG linkages.” They describe how families contributed and pooled their savings, which are then used to obtain credit from banks. Pooled family resources serve as a “subsystem” for formal banks:
The different needs of NHGs [are] shaped and presented to the ADS and they are transformed into mini plans at [the] ADS level and finally into [an] action plan at [the] CDS level.

The NHGs hold weekly meetings on a day when rural women (most of whom are day laborers) are not working. In addition, women use social media – mostly WhatsApp – to share messages with family and friends.

To find out more about the program, Andra and Jenitha distributed questionnaires, which were completed by 60 women in a rural village in Kerala, Nanmanda. Their findings indicated, first, that women (and their families) joined Kudumbashree to gain easy access to loans, which resulted in an increase in their incomes. Second, they found that women’s decision-making power and self-confidence improved, partly because they learned how to use social media (WhatsApp and Facebook) to share information and work out the distribution of financial resources among those in their network. Finally, to educate the next generation, the program also includes groups of children from the poorest families to learn how to earn money.

The Kudumbashree program also has some missing pieces that I imagine would be challenging (and interesting) for those who want to pursue a career in finance to empower women to be climate-change activists. For example, Andra and Jenitha state that the program needs software programmers to design financial management platforms that could be tailored for different businesses. While they do not identify the types of businesses women establish, it seems logical to assume that they mostly sell handicrafts and farm produce. Second, I wonder whether social media could help identify new customers and markets – and not just provide communication channels between farmers and family members who are, for example, setting up their stands at the fairs. Third, should we assume that the only way women become empowered is through collectivization? Is networking a key aspect of women’s equality? Is there room, too, for individual entrepreneurship? Andra and Jenitha state: “Personal empowerment usually fails to comprehend intellectual empowerment.” Perhaps asking a woman if she feels empowered because she earns more money for her family may not tap into her ability to think of new ways to use her time and talents to ameliorate the effects of climate change.

5. International Development

In 2019, the International Conference on Business, Law, and Pedagogy (ICBLP) featured a study from Indonesia by L. Nurwahidah, C. Julianto, and Z. Sulaiman that explored various ways rural women used social media to grow their businesses. For over 20 years, international development specialists have recognized that rural women must identify target audiences (and presumably customers) through newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the internet. They use a methodology called “participatory action research” (PAR), in which rural women “undertake their own appraisals through research, come to their own conclusions, and act.” I wonder if you would have an interest in using your skills in
Supporting Female Empowerment Through Visual Arts and Social Media

Social media to help women sketch out and co-identify their interests and needs. Below is, first, a brief description of PAR, and then Nurwahidah’s, Julianto’s, and Sulaiman’s “solution” as to how creative thinking in Indonesia helped rural women establish their own small business enterprises.

International development specialists began to use PAR techniques in the early 2000s to acknowledge the rights of indigenous people and help them manage and control natural resources. They acted as “facilitators” to increase social awareness, communication, and relationships to reduce gender violence, increase self-esteem among women and girls, and reconfigure the division of labor in rural households. Also in the early 2000s, international development specialists attempted to find new ways to address food and water insecurity; and recognized the futility of past programs that used rigid top-down instruction guides with one-size-fits-all solutions to rural poverty. Their switch to a PAR methodology also was motivated by practical considerations: To attract donors, for example, international development agencies like ActionAid, they needed to demonstrate that their programs were successful. Thus, they began to develop “participatory” methodologies in which local communities identified their biggest challenges, provided details, cross-checked data, and proposed solutions.

International development specialists help poor, often illiterate, farmers develop methods for keeping their own records by using pictorial diaries with symbols, objects, and diagrams; and encourage them to work together to draw maps and diagrams to pinpoint difficult aspects of agro-ecosystems and sustainable livelihoods. The specialists introduced new technologies such as GIS mapping to further define and chart the environmental terrain and cultural context of poverty.

The 2019 project published by Indonesian researchers Nurwahidah, Julianto, and Sulaiman references aspects of the PAR method that presumably increased women’s creativity within their own cultural traditions. They studied the ways mothers, who had part time jobs as traditional food makers in a village in Garut, Indonesia, used social media to increase their own knowledge and technical expertise and learn how to increase the quality of the shape, taste, and color of their food products. The women produced *rengginang*, a traditional rice cracker that is made from dried leftover sticky rice seasoned with spices, flattened, and shaped into a circle, then sun-dried and deep-fried in oil; and used social media to perfect their cooking techniques, experiment with different flavors and forms, and identify markets and cooperatives to sell *rengginang* in Panawuan, Jawa Barat (i.e., a city in Indonesia about 123 mi (or 197 km) east of Jakarta, the country’s capital).

Nurwahidah, Julianto, and Sulaiman found that the *rengginang* business enterprise was far more successful than government programs, which often tried to introduce “foreign” small and medium enterprises. Also, with the *rengginang* business, women (who have complex roles as wives, mothers, and day laborers) learned to utilize local resources and community organizations to increase their knowledge and technical expertise. According to Nurwahidah, Julianto, and Sulaiman, social media enhanced “collectivity, connectivity, completeness, clarity,
and collaboration.” They concluded that rural women’s empowerment must take place within the context of community empowerment – to raise human dignity, encourage individuals to participate in activities with technical and practical inputs, and support the emergence of local leaders. Because one of the causes of women’s powerlessness in society is gender inequality (which drives the decline of women’s roles and positions in society), they asserted that whole communities not only must acknowledge women’s rights but also propose ways to support those rights. One important question is how to convince men, who are dominant in these rural societies, to accept women’s empowerment – a situation that may denigrate men’s social status even though it may well improve the family’s economic situation.

I wonder if you are interested in international development field work and would be interested in teaching women in the Global South how to use social media in local communities to introduce gender just climate solutions. Nurwa-hidah, Julianto, and Sulaiman believe that women are apt to become tenacious, patient, diligent, willing to take risks to increase production and income, participate, good at reading market situations, and using time efficiently when they have a positive mentality towards work.

Don’t we all? It appears that both traditional and modern social media are useful for transmitting messages to appropriate target audiences; and women are better able to plan, manage, seek opportunities to build networks of collaboration, and feel optimistic about the future. Essentially, they develop businesses in accordance with their abilities and have greater potential to overcome poverty. I would like to acknowledge here that my readers (i.e., referred to as “you” throughout this chapter) are not entirely female; and that men who believe in climate justice and women’s empowerment may take part in the kinds of activities I showcase. This is also true for LGBTQ+ persons as potential instructors with social media skills: There is a place for everyone.

6. Environmental and Health Sciences

The International Journal of Business and Economic Affairs (IJBEA) recognizes international networks of scholars who develop models and share knowledge from a variety of fields. They have been referred to as “global illuminators” in using their research skills to convey something new – like the four scholars from Malaysia (N. H. Ali, S. Muhamad, M. M. A. Jalil, and M. Man) who devised a model to explain how rural women entrepreneurs could use social media in the Setiu Wetlands. Located in the East Coast region of Peninsular Malaysia, the 23,000-hectare Setiu Wetlands is a mixture of riverbank riparian forest, peat swamp, mangroves, brackish lagoons with vegetation and sand islands, seagrass beds, and sandy beaches.

Ali, Muhamad, Jalil, and Man focus on helping rural women in this region who have low literacy skills and poor nutrition by proposing a model that they hope the Malaysian government will use. If you are interested in a career in health care or environmental science, you might be drawn to Ali’s, Muhamad’s, Jalil’s,
and, Man’s social innovation model. Many of the rural women they strive to help are single mothers: In a rural conservative Muslim society, they need new ways of thinking about, frankly, how to make money. E-businesses seem to offer a viable alternative, particularly because the Malaysian government has invested in information and communications technology (ICT) literacy in rural areas. The underlying premise is that everyone needs to know how to use social media effectively and efficiently.

The Malaysian government has encouraged ICT, particularly in social media, to help rural women overcome low levels of education and training, poor health and nutritional status, and limited access to resources. Women transform their small home businesses into e-businesses and have become actively involved in marketing online. It is interesting to reflect upon what we might learn from this model: Will women’s experiences provide different perspectives on inventing new ways of dealing with climate-related disasters worldwide and help us introduce innovations in our relationship with the environment?

If you were interested in using social media to improve women’s nutrition and healthcare in climate-challenged regions, you might want to identify a region or country that has great potential. In the above case, the Malaysian government made substantial investments in developing a communication infrastructure to link urban and rural regions to ICT. You could help address the needs of women who live in ecosystems that are vulnerable to weather-related disasters. For example, the Setiu Wetlands, approximately 50 km north of Kuala Teren, with all its coastlines bordering the South China Sea, are affected by altered hydrology and rising sea temperatures. It has nine interconnected ecosystems – sea, beach, mud-flat, lagoon, estuary, river, island, coastal forests, and mangrove forests.

Between 2008 and 2011, the land was stripped of 20% of its vegetation (especially swamps and mangroves) to make way for new industries. Fortunately, local lobbyists persuaded the state government of Terengganu to establish a state park, which means that, at this level, the government was responsive, at least in areas that have economic value. Setiu is famous for its cottage industries, many of which are run by women that include fish farms, *budu* (fermented fish sauce), fish crackers, *belacan* (shrimp paste), and handicrafts made from *kercut* and *nipah* (long-stemmed grasses that grow wild in swampy areas).

If you were interested in women’s healthcare and nutrition, this region (or those like it) could use your skills and expertise. To date, the conditions of rural women receive little attention. Ali, Muhamad, Jalil, and Man point out that, in contrast to urban areas that provide health services through local governments, community clinics, private sector and various NGOs/charity organizations, rural women are isolated and deprived. In rural areas, women have poor nutrition, and lack basic education.

With its emphasis on ICT, the Malaysian government helps rural women who are engaged in small-to-medium-sized businesses to support their families. The authors also point out that private enterprises or other non-governmental organizations could work with rural women “entrepreneurs.” Since there is a solid ICT foundation in the Setiu Wetlands, why not use this platform to educate and
Empowering Female Climate Change Activists in the Global South

improve women’s healthcare and nutrition? Digital technologies could support rural women’s economic, educational, ecological, and social development – by reducing isolation, bridging the digital divide, promoting health issues, creating economic opportunities, and reaching out to youth.

Ali, Muhamad, Jalil, and Man assert that a social innovation model could help rural women by raising awareness and providing basic computer skills, including the use of the internet. Most of the women are first time users of computers. Why not take the skills needed to start an e-business and use them to connect to healthcare programs and practices in, for example, community centers? Social media platforms such as blogs, micro-blogs, social networks, text messages, and posted status or shared photos such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram, and Instagram all could be employed to raise awareness and even connect to women in other countries.

If you are, or aspire to be, a health care professional, you might think of other ways to improve the health and welfare of rural women. The reason I thought to connect ICT with healthcare was because of a student-led initiative at my university to educate poor communities about hepatitis-B, which is the leading cause of liver cancer among Asians and Pacific Islanders. The students joined a collegiate chapter (and received a weekend of training at Harvard University) to learn how to educate local communities about hepatitis-B. The students developed a website in English and Chinese and contacted several different at-risk Asian populations to provide information about the transmission of hepatitis-B, statistics, treatment, myths, and resources. They even published audio interviews with medical professionals. My point here is that creativity abounds and is much needed to achieve women’s empowerment and climate justice!

7. Journalism and Mass Communication

In 2019, the International Conference on Advanced Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (ICARSH) held inaugural conferences in Prague, Munich, Stockholm, and Amsterdam for academia and non-profit, public, and private sector members on the latest research initiatives. A research scholar from Faridabad, India, S. K. Md Afsar, presented her research on rural women journalists who published stories in India’s first feminist newspaper, Khabar Lahariya (News Wave) to address sexual violence and other crimes against women and girls. To learn about how this entirely digital news service gained traction domestically and internationally, read about Asfar’s research below. I wonder if you could imagine yourself writing an article or an editorial in this newspaper or other publications with a similar mission.

In India, traditional news sources, including print and TV news channels, place women’s contributions far below those of men. It is for this very reason that Khabar Lahariya was established in 2002. One of Afsar’s interviewees, a female journalist, talked about the resistance she encountered when trying to break into the field. “People around me said: You are a woman. How can you possibly do the job of a man?” Traditionally, women who begin a career in journalism are expected to leave their jobs after they get married and, even in
the job, are seen as ornamental fixtures and incapable of gathering and reporting the news: “They are viewed as unsound capital.” Afsar noted that because male journalists are revered in Indian society – as “gods” – women were unable to develop professionally.

Interestingly, because traditional journalists perceive rural issues and climate change to have a lower “profit interest” than issues arising from powerful economic centers, women journalists began to develop their careers in farming communities! They focused on rural concerns and began to report on women’s difficult living conditions. In the largely rural state of Andhra Pradesh, fifteen women were among the first to be trained as journalists with the goal of championing the state’s anti-poverty campaign. Coincidentally, the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) learned that, over the past decade, India’s rural mobile internet users had increased by more than 90%. By using a non-traditional format (i.e., social media and the internet), for the first time, women journalists began to write stories to raise awareness of government initiatives to confront crimes against women, offer prenatal care and proper nutrition, and provide literacy education and job training to poor women.17

Afsar found that rural women journalists used technology and social media to broadcast stories, record audio/visual interviews, establish Twitter feeds and websites, and so on. Sadly, she also found that even these female journalists – who were not reporting from urban centers – received death threats, their phones were tapped, and their email accounts were hacked. Considering this danger as part of the journalist’s job, Khabar Lahariya continued to “give larger entree to the media outlets and allow the concerns of marginalized groups to be addressed [in terms of their own experiences], specifically women from rural areas.” The tremendous growth of the internet served to raise rural women’s voices and help female reporters develop journalistic skills.

Afsar noted that these journalistic reports finally helped rural women improve their social and economic standing and become part of an informed citizenry. The female reporters’ stories concentrated on the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan, which are adversely affected by weather-related events such as cyclones, floods, and droughts. By using WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube, the news reports reached a wider audience in rural areas. Khabar Lahariya created a fully online presence in 2013 and produced and posted videos in several regional dialects on social media. By 2017, Khabar Lahariya received one million monthly page views on its website. Two years earlier, Internet Saathi had begun to provide information about the internet to women living in the rural villages of Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and Gujarat; and internet training provided on smart phones helped women journalists become digitally literate and train other women in their villages.

Presently, rural women journalists use independent (i.e., digital) media to support sustainable development and gender equality in India. The format combines traditional customs with modern concerns. For example, those who live in poor areas in the district of Chittoor in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh file news stories about cultural dances, songs, as well as women’s poor living conditions. Apparently, the stories are so effective that the state government established
policies to improve rural women’s lives; and women journalists established their credibility, which eroded the thinking that news media only can be run by male reporters. *Khabar Lahariya* was launched in 2002 in the district of Bundelkhand (an historic region of central India, now included in northern Madhya Pradesh state) where 60% of the population are farmers. Afsar states:

> It [*Khabar Lahariya*] created a new wave across the bleak landscape, where survival is the subject of life and areas such as education, civil rights, and gender equality have taken a backseat.

Despite their lack of formal journalism training, with some local initiatives, rural female reporters became experts in conducting interviews and filing news reports. In solidarity, *Khabar Lahariya* plainly asserts a feminist agenda – “that females must be free to determine their own social roles and be able to compete on an equal footing with men.” The editors maintain that the controversial stories by female journalists (e.g., illegal dowries, incest, mental trauma, child sexual abuse, etc.) are nuanced and sensitive rather than sensationalized. Perhaps not surprisingly, Afsar found that, over the past few years, there has been a significant rise in the percentage of women journalists in rural areas who use digital technology; and that that technology has played an important role in women farmers’ empowerment. If you are a writer or journalist, can you imagine how satisfying it might be to support rural women with traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) who long have been ignored? Rural women journalists have become aware of their impact, especially in using different kinds of digital platforms to counter rigid stereotypes, both in the personal and social spheres, and to put into practice “lived, engaged citizenship.”

Perhaps journalists in the Global North could learn from Indian women journalists how to better represent marginalized communities: To date, *Khabar Lahariya*, has a million plus viewers on YouTube and has become a regular syndicated news partner for digital English media with 232K+ YouTube subscribers worldwide.³⁸ Afsar makes the point that, in the present day, both print and digital media often is highly commercial, ideological, political, and “filthy.” But rural women journalists have become familiar with how to navigate this arena, how to make their place in it, and how to question its norms.

### 8. Cross-cultural Communication

Digital and social media have the potential to provide emotional support to women in the Global South who are dealing with climate change. In 2020, researchers from the Department of Communication and Applied Language Studies at the University of Venda surveyed 100 young rural females to investigate connections between rural female empowerment and digital media use in Thohoyandou, a small city in Limpopo province in the northern part of South Africa.¹⁹ While their study does not address climate change per se, it does reveal two factors that are integral to female empowerment: (1) access to digital technology in the
Global South and (2) the accuracy of information on social media and other internet websites.

The researchers, F. O. Makanaise and S. E. Madima, found that many rural women who answered their questionnaire belonged to at least one social media site (91%), logged into the sites daily (85%), and had easy access to a variety of digital media technologies, from computers to mobile phones (78%). As a result, the women engaged in networking, participated in social and political activities, and advocated for social change. The researchers identified several ways young women challenged the status quo:

With recent killings experienced by female youth in South Africa, [the] majority of youth have Twitter handles with #MeToo #AmINext #stopkillingus movement to voice their concerns on issues …. This suggests that the access to digital media gives [the] majority of rural based female youth an opportunity to stand against societal oppressions they had endured for years in silent [sic.] which could contribute to freedom gain and socio-economic empowerment in [the] South African context.

The authors predict that, within the next decade, the massive growth of smartphone and internet use will extend access to all rural communities throughout the Global South – and that Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp could bridge the digital divide between the haves and have-nots and increase gender equality. Their study revealed that, currently, 74% of the rural females they surveyed believed that digital media and ICT empowered them to tackle or debate socio-economic issues such as sexual abuse, gender-based violence, and education.

However, the use of digital and social media may not empower many women in rural communities who suffer the most from the effects of climate change. For example, the authors note that the government of Bangladesh, which has many climate-change challenges, severely restricts rural women’s access to the internet. Perhaps the government has determined that the women are not adequately trained to use the internet, or that the national budget does not allow for widespread dissemination of information and communication technology. The point here is that the rise in media usage accentuates the digital divide and leads to greater inequality, discrimination, and marginalization within the Global South.

The South African study also found that 70% of rural females trusted the information they found on the internet. As it is relatively easy to encounter “fake news” and misinformation, rural women (and all of us, frankly) need to learn how to discern fact from fiction. Misinformation can have a profound impact, especially on women who receive vicious social media messages from unknown sources. If not understood and discussed openly with others, these messages can be isolating and emotionally damaging. If you have an interest or expertise in navigating social media websites, you might investigate the types of workshops and training seminars currently offered, for example, by the Ife Centre for Psychological Studies & Services in Johannesburg.20
Some women climate change leaders recognize the power of digital technology. For example, “Defensoras Ambientales” (Environmental Defenders) has linked over 1,000 indigenous people and local groups in Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay through a mobile phone application to empower feminist environmental rights defenders to communicate, inform, and protect territories that have deteriorated because of extractivism and agrochemical contamination (Fig. 26).

Also, the Women and Gender Constituency’s social media toolkit provides policy briefs on its positions within the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC). It explains how to use – and supplies – hashtags, graphics, videos, and tweets to connect members to each other and promote public campaigns. To support these efforts, the Women’s Environment and Development Organization offers a 12-session training course on how to participate. This training is open to anyone who is interested in women’s empowerment and climate change and provides numerous ways for you to become informed and involved at an international level.

9. Visual Arts

At the COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow in 2021, in a burst of amazing creativity, there were many opportunities to participate in songs and dance and view arts and crafts from indigenous women. Perhaps the most prominent “display” was a 12-foot-tall puppet, Little Amal, dressed as a young Syrian refugee girl who strode around the venue as women danced around her to remind the attendees of the many persons displaced by climate change. In the present day, Little Amal appears in street protests around the world. I have learned that the many spontaneous dances and songs are expressions of empowerment-through-movement. Also, at COP26, to reinforce arts and crafts themes, there was a
special event titled “Subversive Stitching: Stories of Climate Justice through Needle and Thread” as well as several displays of small, embroidered pieces from Latin America (Fig. 27).

Within the past decade, a substantial body of literature from scholars, researchers, and practitioners proves that arts and crafts define “spaces for the empowerment of women.” From South Africa, D. R. Malema and S. Naidoo published research on community-based arts and crafts projects that helped women achieve economic independence, increase their public visibility, and establish networks outside of the home. Their study was based in Limpopo, a South African province that is 95% rural and where women on small farms have difficulty growing food for their families due to lack of water. As a result, the province’s climate change plan calls for a thorough investigation of the best ways to empower women in their communities.

For those interested in arts and crafts, there is much to reflect upon – and even possible projects to engage in – that can change social attitudes about women’s work, bring economic benefits to augment women’s modest incomes, and allow women in community-based projects to release stress and gain a sense of “empowerment,” a term that I will explicate below.

At an international level, the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal #5 seeks to achieve gender equality and end violence against women.
Correspondingly, in 2015, the South African Department of Women developed measures to promote social changes in attitudes and support women’s leisure activities. One challenge was that men behaved as if women were unable to make good decisions for the household: Women often had to choose between spending money to feed their children or being beaten by their husbands for spending money.

Encouraging women to share their knowledge and skills in arts and crafts has become a “generative activity” (also referred to as “evidence-based learning” – summarizing, mapping, drawing, imagining, self-testing, self-explaining, teaching, and enacting). Within this framework, women teach young people how to make things for themselves and preserve their African identity (e.g., rites of passage and mourning rituals). Story cloths, which depict women’s lives, are sold around the world. One aspect for further study would be to determine whether the programs include family planning to limit family size, which places immense burdens on individual families, women, as well as on social services, natural resources, food supplies, etc.

In South Africa, craft making is an essential part of rural living and provides some income for women who otherwise spend most of their time toiling as underpaid agricultural laborers. Often their only other source of survival is the income they receive from welfare programs (“social grants”) that are intended to support their children. As a legacy of the apartheid era, women in Limpopo (and other rural areas) have limited schooling. Bombarded with the responsibilities of taking care of children and others in the household, women find relief in easily accessible, community-based rural arts and crafts projects. According to Malema and Naidoo, the projects “heal the mind” because the women share knowledge, experiences, and appreciation of their art and craftwork and form support networks:

[... ] they engage in women-talk. This kind of talk is powerful enough for the formation of friendship, construction of identities and maintaining gender divisions. This talk is also arguably one of the most satisfying and sustaining kind and is also key within a leisure setting.

From this study, female empowerment is a sense of self-worth in which women take control of situations in their lives, their communities, and their societies. Leisure activities are necessary because they provide a platform for women to experience positive emotions and, the authors assert, “serve as a mediator for the improvement of self-definition, self-actualization, and a sense of empowerment.”

Remember the “sense of purpose” I discussed in Chapter Two? The study of leisure fits comfortably into that paradigm because, as previously noted, women benefit greatly by contributing positively toward bettering the lives of others. Malema and Naidoo include in their study the benefits accrued by older women who tend to become depressed without some form of productive work: “Late adulthood is often characterized as a period of increased dependency on others resulting from debilitating physical and cognitive abilities … and a drop in self-esteem.”
After COP26, I received an email from a woman who asked me to interview Samira Kitman, a young woman from Afghanistan who sought to bring color into the lives of children living in war-torn and climate-ravaged areas of Afghanistan. Now a political refugee in the United Kingdom, Kitman sends backpacks filled with art supplies to Afghan children, which her family members distribute. This showed me, and I hope you, that there are many ways to help, depending on your skills and interests.

10. Film Production

Finally, film production has been used to raise political awareness about underserved communities. Scholars based in Norway, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic published their research on how an international advocacy group, Survival International, used a blockbuster movie produced by James Cameron, *Avatar*, to raise public awareness about the Niyamgiri Movement in India, which protested a British mining company’s incursion on the Dongaria Kondhs indigenous site.\(^{26}\) When *Time Magazine* published an article on the Dongaria Kondhs as a “real life Avatar tribe,” the formerly apathetic Indian Supreme Court suddenly became supportive of the Dongarias. Based upon Cameron’s film, Survival International also produced a YouTube video to further explain “to a mainstream audience” the Dongaria Kondhs’ religious beliefs. Can you imagine yourself becoming part of a film production team to advocate for indigenous women’s empowerment in climate change? Or, if this is too big of a project, could you write short reviews of movies and documentaries? I have another idea – from a student – that I present at the very end of this chapter.

To spark your interest, here are some key elements of the process: (1) defining the problem, (2) strategizing ways to use media to represent the interests of indigenous people, (3) simplifying and dramatizing the message for the audience, and (4) gaining support from local and transnational organizations. If you are interested in using your skills to produce a short, well-researched low-budget film to support a social/political cause, you also might be interested in the story below of how intentions and messages evolve.

Before discussing *Avatar* and to emphasize the power of music and song, I want to mention a Puerto Rican feminist singer/political activist from a US “territory” which, although geographically is in the Global North, is otherwise in the Global South in many ways.\(^{27}\) Songs and music are effective ways to promote gender equity and climate change consciousness because these can be broadcast in newer forms of transmission online, through local stations, etc. to mobilize, inspire, and organize rural women (and men, too). There may well be career opportunities, internships, volunteer opportunities, etc. in this area. Many people who now reflect on their own political activism as young people in the anti-Vietnam War and civil rights movements recognize music as an important part of the ethos that helped build community and solidarity as well as bolster courage in the face of danger and adversity. The anthem of the civil rights movement, “We Shall Overcome” is just one of many such examples. Music, drama, dance, etc.
have always been integral parts of social and political movements and will remain so in the digital age. For example, songs were very important in the Water Movement in Hong Kong – 2019–2020 – that challenged the Hong Kong authorities who were controlled from Beijing.

To prevent bauxite extraction on sacred sites, the indigenous Dongaria Kondhs claimed that the whole Niyamgiri mountain range, which extended 115 km² (ca. 71.5 mi²), was sacred: They traced their ancestry to Niyamraja, a mythical god-king who is believed to have created the Niyamgiri range of hills and to have charged his descendants with their stewardship. The problem was that, in 1997, the Odisha state²⁸ in India, which has the third largest population of Scheduled Tribes,²⁹ signed a land rights agreement with the British mining company, Vedanta Resources, to construct an aluminum refinery at the foot of Niyamgiri mountain in 2002. In the past, most anti-mining movements in India have been unsuccessful because the Indian government and companies simply have waited until the protests subsided and then proceeded with their original projects. Banning the extraction of one of the world’s richest bauxite reserves in the Niyamgiri range of hills would prove to be costly for the Indian government. Amazingly, with the help of residents in the surrounding community and champions within the Indian political leadership, the Dongaria Kondhs were able to assert their subaltern ecological beliefs and religiosity, and the government canceled the Vedanta Resources project. (A similar struggle is going on in Arizona now over copper mining on land Native Americans deem sacred.)

Scholars conducted 19 oral history interviews with residents in Hindi, English, or Odiya (depending on the interviewees preferences). G. Spivak and J. Baudrillard found that local activists who live in areas surrounding the indigenous communities also become spokespersons for marginalized groups and, in some cases, overshadow their voices: In fact, activists who lived in regions surrounding the Dongaria Kondhs community used myths to stir emotions and create an “enchanted representation of indigenous people.”

Correspondingly, filmmakers created an image to generate popular support for indigenous peoples’ causes and environmental conservation. According to Borde and Bluemling, there have been several documented instances of indigenous people entering into conflicts with mining companies. And they noted that the Avatar film intended to spur audiences to reflect and act. They cited another study in which several viewers were converted to more ecological ways of thinking, incited emotions, and questioned “capitalistic logic.”

The job of the filmmaker is to translate the story for a mainstream audience, as Borde and Bluemling state: “Translation can actually ‘elevate’ the original, and the task of the translator is to ‘echo’ the original in a way that helps illuminate the intended meaning.” In the case of Avatar, the enchanted and fantastic representation of the Dongaria Kondhs helped reverse the Indian government’s decision and ban mining. The film did this by capturing and condensing the problem for a mainstream audience but did not delineate the complexities. The self-described environmentalist/filmmaker, James Cameron, stated that he used Biblical undertones so that his audience in the Global North could relate to the Dongaria Kondhs.³⁰
It is also true that local grassroots-level activists from small urban centers surrounding Niyamgiri helped resolve this conflict. This “second-tier activism” led the villagers to vote unanimously against the mining project, which was then ratified by the Indian Ministry of the Environment and Forests over a decade later, in 2014. In fact, those who have studied this case make the point that the exposure from *Avatar* (and a YouTube video produced by a transnational advocacy group, Survival International) were crucial to the outcome. In both cases, the filmmakers modified the Dongaria Kondhs’ religiosity by, for example, cleverly switching goats in sacrificial ceremonies, which are an accepted part of mainstream Hindu culture instead of buffaloes, which the subaltern Dongaria Kondhs usually sacrifice.

From the example above, it clear that – for those who are interested in producing a film or even a short YouTube video – altering details to appeal to a broader audience can raise public awareness of female empowerment in the Global South. In addition, to be effective, the film would need to reach both local and international groups. While the messages may be simplified, that is the prerogative and sometimes the imperative of artistic creation. Film production is a worthwhile endeavor because it helps change the public’s views on climate change and can reach broad audiences across regions and continents. Indeed, the many examples provided in this book demonstrate that “we” are not short on solutions that focus on acting with empathy and humanity.

On the one hand, film projects may seem too big and writing short reviews of movies and documentaries may seem to be too small. But I have another idea – from a student who majored in film studies – that may inspire you. Lucie Caputo’s senior project, “Globalization through Networked Audiences: How online Communities Facilitate Cultural Flow,” was a brilliant analysis of how a Norwegian web series, *SKAM* (“shame” in English), produced four seasons of video clips that encouraged audience participation and engagement and created a community around translating languages and understanding cultures in Brazil, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Russia, Ukraine, and the United States. According to Caputo:

> The communities formed by networked audiences not only start new conversations between members living across the globe, but they also can have real impacts on politics and activism. Fandom Forward [which turns fans into heroes] formerly known as the Harry Potter Alliance, is an organization that was formed in 2005 by fans of JK Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series that has initiated numerous global activism campaigns … [including] Immigrant Justice, LGBTIA+ Equality, Education & Libraries, Gender Equity, Climate Crisis, Media Reform, and Youth Advocacy.

I hope that you have found something in this chapter that sparks your interest in using visual arts and social media to help rural women and social entrepreneurs in the Global South deal with seemingly insurmountable problems of endemic poverty that are made worse by climate change. You may have other ideas as well to use your skills and share your interests with others.