

## Michelle Ell MBA, BA (POLITICAL SCIENCE)

### PROFILE

**Strategic and dynamic executive leader with 20+ years of experience supporting complex international development programs in East Africa.** Proven track record of driving organizational growth, strengthening governance systems, and leading high-impact, multi-sectoral programs. Adept at business development, partnership building, and strategic positioning to secure funding and scale global initiatives. Passionate about building high-performing teams, fostering innovation, and ensuring programmatic excellence aligned with donor priorities and global best practice.

### KEY SKILLS & EXPERTISE

- Executive Leadership & Organizational Growth
- Business Development & Donor Engagement
- Managing Complex Partnerships
- Governance, Risk & Compliance Oversight
- Capacity & Systems Strengthening
- Systems Thinking
- Adaptive Management
- Strategic Communications & Thought Leadership
- Policy Influence
- Technical Writing

### CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**Kenya:** Leading the design and implementation of a transformational capacity strengthening initiative with 3 county governments, supporting over 3,000 officers to improve services and support to vulnerable groups and those affected by gender-based violence.

**Uganda:** Convening 18 universities, with the National Council for Higher Education and UNICEF, to initiate a national review of the training and certification process for social work in Uganda - resulting in harmonized standards for the profession which were adopted into law.

**Rwanda:** Coordinating partners to launch, scale, and continuously adapt services to address the health, education & social welfare needs of over 50,000 marginalized households, enabling 84% of households to graduate out of program support within five years.

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE & KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

#### Team Leader/Chief Technical Advisor, Kenya

**NIRAS Finland: 2021 - Present**

- Providing **strategic direction and managerial oversight on a €6 million bilateral program** to strengthen systems and capacity - working with six government departments and 100+ CSOs.
- Leading the development of high-quality learning and evidence briefs - to influence policy and programmatic investments. Key innovations piloted in this program will soon be scaled nationwide by UNWomen with new funding from USAID.
- Initiated and supported the design and execution of seven special studies with over 500 respondents - the qualitative and quantitative data from these surveys was used to guide key changes in the program targets and priorities - scaling up those interventions which were showing the greatest impact on service delivery, and halting interventions showing little/no impact.
- Facilitating multi-sectoral workshops and high-level meetings to align priorities and investments - developing compelling presentations and reports resulting in unanimous approval from all donors.
- Conducting the SWOT and regular risk assessments to conceptualize and refine strategy - to adapt to changing needs, including social and political dynamics affecting safety and security.
- Coordinating multiple workstreams to strengthen performance of senior, middle, and frontline staff - supporting changes in organizational culture and practice in response to new learning.
- Cultivating partnerships with local leaders and influencers to inspire collective leadership- securing commitment to lead advocacy efforts that reached over 100,000 people.

## Program Director, Uganda

## Catholic Relief Services: 2016 - 2020

- Responsible for the **technical, operational, and financial management of two USAID-funded activities** - including a randomized controlled trial with over \$11 million in funding. These pioneering initiatives included a partnership with national government, 14 local experts, 17 senior technical advisors, and 9 national and international organizations.
- Led the design and start-up of two USAID/PEPFAR-funded projects in Uganda - setting the foundation for strong institutional partnerships with government, national associations, and academia.
- Galvanized sector-wide learning through two major studies including a Functional Review of the social service workforce carried out in partnership with UNICEF and Government; and a Review of the National Child Helpline response - these findings and recommendations were used to scale-up capacity strengthening interventions and deepen collaboration across sectors.
- Provided strategic & technical leadership on protection system strengthening - working high-level engagements, with government, UN agencies, academia & civil society - resulting in nationwide scaling of an App for the social service workforce, and new standards for workforce certification.
- Delivered weekly briefs to USAID highlighting project progress, important learning, and emerging issues - these efforts contributed to additional funding of \$787,000 and a one-year extension of the project with an expanded scope.
- Established a vibrant and engaging work culture, evidenced by employee engagement scores of 91% in annual surveys and widespread recognition of creativity, respect, and openness among staff and partners.
- Authored or co-authored ten abstracts and other publications with representation at conferences & high-level meetings to advance thought leadership & guide future investment.

## Deputy Chief of Party, Kenya

## Plan International: 2015 - 2016

- Managed the **start-up of a \$41 million USAID/PEPFAR-funded project**, including recruitment, procurement, and establishment of field offices to support staff and partners in multiple regions to scale services and support for vulnerable children & families.
- Led work planning and review process with government, partners, and the donor to build trust, and create an enabling environment for innovation, learning & deeper collaboration in all six Counties.
- Collaborated with technical experts and teams to develop operational guidelines based on the latest evidence and contextual knowledge, helping to scale services with consistent quality to over 80,000 beneficiaries.
- Supervised organizational development assistance to 19 grantees across multiple sectors, coordinating assessments, and the delivery of training/coaching/mentoring in response to changing needs.

## Deputy Chief of Party, Rwanda

## Global Communities: 2015

- Supported all aspects of **\$37 million program** start-up for a USAID/PEPFAR flagship program: focused on health and social welfare for children and families affected by HIV.
- Collaborated with external evaluators to prepare for a USAID-led randomized control trial, measuring the impact and cost-effectiveness of the program model for enhancing resiliency.
- Mentored four technical teams and local staff members to adapt/develop new service delivery guidelines in response to new data/evidence, and changing donor priorities.
- Facilitated strategic collaboration across partners, assisting teams in developing systems, approaches, and tools (work plans, trackers, M&E Tools) to align with global best practice.

## EARLY CAREER

Program Coordinator	Global Communities: Rwanda: 2011 - 2015
Team Leader: Health & Social Services	Global Communities: Rwanda: 2009 - 2011
Senior Project Officer,	Johns Hopkins Centre for Communication Programs: Uganda: 2005 - 2009
Program Officer	Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief: Canada & Uganda: 2001-2004
Director, Youth Leadership	Kids Can Free the Children: 2000-2001

## EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

- **Master of Business Administration (MBA)**, Athabasca University, Canada, 2014.
- **Graduate Diploma in Management**, Athabasca University, Canada, 2011.
- **Bachelor of Arts (Political Science)**, University of Lethbridge, Canada, 1999.
- Certificate in AI: Implications for Business Strategy, MIT Sloan, USA, 2024.
- Certificate in Environmental Leadership, Yale University, USA, 2021.
- Certificate in Conflict Resolution, Cornell University, USA, 2018.

## OTHER SKILLS & EXPERIENCE

### Resource Mobilization

- Co-creating new programs & technical writer on the following winning proposals:
  - Keeping Children Healthy and Safe (USAID) - \$19 million: Uganda, 2020
  - Improved Services for Vulnerable Populations (USAID) \$37 million: Rwanda, 2014
  - Social Services for Vulnerable Populations (USAID) \$50 million: Rwanda, 2009
- Developed a variety of strategic communication materials, presenting innovations backed up with experience & sound management to secure funding for a new €6 million program.
- Building relationships with diverse stakeholders - aligning priorities, goals, and shared values to identify present and future areas of collaboration.
- Organizing multiple school-based fund-raisers with children and youth in Rwanda and Kenya to participate in social justice initiatives or fund school upgrades - raising over \$US 10,000.

### Strategic Communications (Webinars & Conference Presentations)

- Author and co-author of numerous technical guidelines, strategies, and curricula, with several training packages and frameworks successfully scaled nationwide to strengthen capacity/systems.
- Produced high-impact briefs and persuasive presentations for governments, UN agencies, and development partners, effectively influencing policies, investments, and programmatic decisions.
- Developed compelling reports for high-profile international and national conferences, advancing thought leadership and advocacy for key social impact investments.
- Led the development of numerous materials for social & behaviour change communication (SBCC) campaigns, webinars, & other strategic initiatives to impact knowledge, attitude, and practice.

### Remote/IT Skills

- Video Conferencing, Microsoft 365 (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Teams, Forms),

### Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

- Successfully leading diverse teams in multiple countries, promoting cultural awareness, accommodations, and inclusive and collaborative decision-making.
- Designed and oversaw multiple community-centered initiatives to integrate the ideas and experiences of marginalized groups in the design and budget of new programs.

### Languages

- English: Fluent
- French: Medium Proficiency

## Volunteer Service

- Board Member, Director at Large, New Age Spaces, 2024-Present.
- Established a Community Library for Children, Andrew's Little Library, Kigali, 2013-2014

### TESTIMONIALS

***"I have no words to describe what you have been to the international development fraternity in Rwanda. We will miss your passion, professionalism, initiative and candor."***

*Team Leader, USAID Rwanda.*

***"I am full of praises for your strong and compassionate leadership all through your time at [Catholic Relief Services] CRS. Your visioning, staff care, and creativity will be missed..."***

*Senior Project Officer, CRS*

***"Thank you for steering the project, your energy, enthusiasm and passion to get things moving will be missed."*** *Program Management Specialist, USAID Uganda*