

# Michelle Ell

MBA, BA (POLITICAL SCIENCE)

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## PROFILE/PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Senior executive who solves the big, systemic problems facing mission-driven organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Over 20+ years, I have led complex, multi-million-dollar portfolios focused on children and families—achieving what others thought impossible through strategic partnerships, policy influence, and high-performing, values-driven teams. Whether standardizing national certification systems, rebuilding organizational culture, or launching rapid start-ups, I bring clarity, governance maturity, and the ability to translate mission into measurable, lasting impact.

## CORE LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

Strategic Communications | Stakeholder & Community Engagement | Organizational Development and Growth | Internal Communications and Culture Change | Crisis & Issues Management | Process Improvement & Operational Excellence | Cross-functional Collaboration | Performance Monitoring | Team Leadership /Management | Digital & Social Media Strategy

## RELEVANT CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- **Strategic Leadership:** Developed high-level briefs, talking points, and presentations to inform policy, partnerships and decision-making—skills directly transferable to engaging school leadership and staff, parents/guardians, and educational partners.
- **Stakeholder Engagement & Community Building:** Proven experience building meaningful partnerships with parents/communities to guide service delivery; advance culture change within international organizations; and strategic partnerships to mobilize resources & support.
- **Strategic Communications:** experience developing Executive briefs, board presentations, and talking points; Technical publications, annual reports, and impact stories; Digital content strategy including website, social media, and email campaigns; and videos.
- **Crisis Communication & Reputation Management:** Served as safeguarding focal point managing sensitive communications across multiple incidents, ensuring timely, transparent stakeholder engagement while protecting organizational reputation and maintaining community trust.
- **Brand Management:** Co-designed multi-channel communication materials (print, video, and digital) to elevate the profile of a new bilateral program—using data, briefs, and photos to highlight key innovations and impact - earning recognition from donors and government.

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE & KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

### Director/Founder, Kenya

- Founded and led a boutique consulting firm partnering with donors and social enterprises to review and refine strategy and strengthen systems to amplify impact across East Africa.
- Led a consultancy for the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) to leverage data and international best practice to design a €1M Call for Proposals to enhance service delivery.
- Developed comprehensive brand identity, digital strategy, and marketing materials to establish market presence and attract mission-aligned clients.
- Launched a social enterprise, developing the brand identity, marketing strategy, and digital presence to build a values-driven following.
- Facilitated high-level consultations and working sessions with senior government and donor leaders—aligning vision, crafting core messages, and establishing safeguarding and communication protocols for a new €3M program.

### The ReVision Collective May 2025 - Present

**Team Leader/Chief Technical Advisor, Kenya****NIRAS Finland: 2021 - 2025**

- Directed communications and strategy for €6M bilateral program, managing multi-stakeholder engagement across government, donors, and community partners, and leveraging data insights to refine program investments and outcomes.
- Designed and oversaw a workforce strengthening program that trained 3,000+ education, health, and social welfare officers to improve services to marginalized groups by 94%.
- Developed multi-channel communication strategy including digital content, stakeholder reports, and advocacy materials that elevated program visibility and influenced policy decisions across 5 counties.
- Partnered with hundreds of local leaders & groups to support grassroot advocacy to end child marriage and FGM, reaching 100,000+ community members to reduce harmful cultural practices.
- Conducted regular SWOT and risk assessments ensuring adaptive management and operational excellence amid changing social, economic, and political dynamics.

**Program Director, Uganda****Catholic Relief Services: 2016 - 2020**

- Led strategic communications for two programs (\$11+ million) to strengthen services for vulnerable children - co-authoring technical briefs, leading webinars, and facilitating high-level roundtables to align priorities and strengthen collaboration.
- Convened all major stakeholders - including universities, government, and practitioners- to reform social work standards, which were adopted into law.
- Co-designed and rolled-out a country-wide staff engagement and organizational development strategy which included staff surveys, town halls, feedback mechanisms) resulting in a 91% staff engagement score, and a 55% reduction in staff turnover.
- Built strong platforms for thought leadership through strategic publications and presentations at regional and international forums, positioning organization as an industry leader and attracting top-tier talent and partnerships.
- Served as the safeguarding focal point, ensuring sensitive, timely, and appropriate communication on reported incidents, organization policies, and staff training.

**Deputy Program Director, Kenya****Plan International: 2015 - 2016**

- Directed the start-up of a \$41 million USAID/PEPFAR-funded project, including program strategies, plans, and communications.
- Facilitated joint work planning processes with government, partners, and the donor to respond to local priorities, build trust, and create an enabling environment for innovation & learning.
- Developed operational guidelines (adapting global best practice to the local context) to improve service delivery across six counties.
- Supervised capacity building for 19 grantees, aligning technical assistance with changing needs.

**Deputy Program Director/ Team Leader, Rwanda****Global Communities: 2009-2015**

- Oversaw 8 departments - piloting and scaling new strategies and metrics to strengthen service delivery- gains that have been featured in multiple global and regional conferences.
- Developed guidelines, handbooks, and presentations to communicate new models for service delivery, highlight key achievements, and advance thought leadership.
- Represented the program in high-level meetings and contributed to media and partner-facing events that strengthened the organization's profile.
- Coordinated internal communications to provide timely and accurate information to leadership, donors and field teams.

**Senior Project Officer, Uganda Johns Hopkins Centre for Communication Programs: 2005 - 2009**

- Led advocacy and communication for national health and child protection initiatives in Uganda – designing campaigns, toolkits, and media materials.
- Co-authored and edited multiple communication materials adopted by the Ministries of Health, and Gender, and the Uganda AIDS Commission, including radio, community engagement guidelines, and training materials to guide service provision.

**Consultant, Uganda****AIDS/HIV Integrated Model District Program, 2004 -2005**

- Developed technical guides and training manuals on community-level interventions for children and youth affected by HIV – materials later adopted nationally by government ministries.

**Program Officer, Uganda & Canada****Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief, 2001-2004**

- Drafted donor reports, funding proposals, and stakeholder communications; presented program progress to donors and partners in high-level meetings.
- Coordinated internal and external communication flows between HQ and country offices; supported Board reporting.

**Director, Youth Leadership Coordinator, Canada****Kids Can Free the Children 2000-2002**

- Developed and facilitated youth leadership curricula in Canada, Kenya, and the US; delivered motivational talks and training to students and teachers.
- Led communication for youth-led fundraising and advocacy initiatives, ensuring compelling storytelling, consistent messaging, and donor engagement.

**Communications Intern, Philippines Cooperative Education & Development Center, 1999 -2000**

- Edited publications and created youth-focused communication materials promoting cooperatives; supported staff to improve digital content production.

**EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL TRAINING**

**Executive Education:** MIT Sloan (AI & Strategy, 2024); Yale University (Environmental Leadership, 2021); Cornell University (Conflict Resolution, 2018).

**Degrees:** MBA & Graduate Diploma, Athabasca University, Canada (2014, 2011); BA Political Science, University of Lethbridge, Canada (1999)

**Diploma:** Advanced High School Diploma, Dr. E.P. Scarlett High School (1995).

**OTHER SKILLS & EXPERIENCE**

**Advanced IT Skills:** Office 365, Video Conferencing; Graphic & Web Design; and AI.

**Safeguarding:** Developed and institutionalized a comprehensive safeguarding policy and implementation plan, serving as the primary focal point for reporting and response.

**Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:** Championed & led multiple community-centered initiatives to integrate marginalized voices into program design, budget, and decision-making processes.

**Languages:** English: Fluent; French: Medium Proficiency.

**Children's Book Author:** So Many Ways to Say I Love You in Uganda (2019); Jingle Bells in Uganda (2018).

**Program Development & Resource Mobilization:** Successfully secured €6M, \$19M, \$37M, and \$50M in donor funding; with co-funding from local partners and governments.

**Board member/Director at Large:** New Age Spaces, South Sudan, 2024 to Present.