WEJ AWARDS 2024

The World Economic Journal's "WEJ Awards" recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to specific fields while demonstrating a commitment to advancing humanity. In 2024, the awards focused on a key finding of Nobel Laureate Daron Acemoğlu, who was also named WEJ's Person of the Year: the importance of inclusive and equitable institutions.

Acemoğlu's research highlights how extractive institutions, which benefit only a select few, hinder societal progress. In contrast, pluralistic and inclusive institutions empower individuals by fostering greater participation in decision-making and ensuring equitable access to opportunities. Aligned with this principle, the awards recognize leaders who have championed projects that create a more equitable and inclusive society. These projects empower individuals across diverse social groups by providing them with greater opportunities for living, creativity, self-realization, and contributing to their communities.

WINNER DARON ACEMOĞLU
NOMINATION PERSON OF THE YEAR

2024 Nobel laureate in economics and Institute
Professor of Economics at MIT

For studies of how institutions
are formed and affect prosperity

WINNER **HIS HIGHNESS SHEIKH KHALED BIN MOHAMED BIN ZAYED AL NAHYAN**
NOMINATION **EMPLOYMENT**

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council

Mawaheb Talent Hub is a strategic initiative launched by the Abu Dhabi government to address the employment challenges faced by specific segments of the UAE population, including recent university graduates and older individuals seeking to re-enter the workforce. These demographics often encounter significant barriers to employment. Mawaheb Talent Hub seeks to bridge the gaps left by traditional employment services that may not adequately address the unique needs of these groups. As the first employment assistance center in Abu Dhabi to leverage advanced AI technologies, personalized training, and tailored career path development, Mawaheb Talent Hub aims to equip participants with the necessary skills, connect them with suitable job opportunities, and ultimately secure their employment.

"Technological change and innovation can have significant impacts on employment patterns, both by creating new jobs and by displacing workers from existing ones." ("The Environment and Directed Technical Change")

WINNER **CLARA BRUGADA**
NOMINATION **SOCIETY**

Mayor of Mexico City

The Units for Transformation and Organization for Inclusion and Social Harmony (UTOPÍAS) are a network of community centers located in underserved areas of the city. Established and expanded under the mayor's leadership, these centers aim to reduce inequality, foster community building, and contribute to the revitalization of these neighborhoods. UTOPÍAS provide a range of free services to vulnerable populations, including seminars, workshops, sports and music programs, and access to affordable food. Each center specializes in addressing specific community needs. For example, some centers offer support groups for victims of domestic violence, while others provide programs for individuals struggling with addiction.

"When societies become more inclusive, they can harness the talents and energies of their entire populations, leading to more vibrant communities and sustainable development." ("Understanding Prosperity and Poverty")

WINNER **SILVIA GRECCO**
NOMINATION **PUBLIC SERVICES**

Secretaria Municipal da Pessoa com Deficiência, São Paulo

The Intermediation Center for Brazilian Sign Language (Central de Intermediação em Libras) is a groundbreaking initiative by the São Paulo City Hall designed to ensure equal access to municipal services for deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens. This innovative program provides real-time, 24/7 access to qualified sign language interpreters through video calls, enabling seamless communication between citizens and government agencies.

"Public services must be accessible and effective for all members of society if we want to achieve sustained economic growth and social stability." ("State Capacity and Economic Development")

WINNER **TARIQ HILAL AL BARWANI**
NOMINATION **LABOR MARKETS**

Founder, Knowledge Oman

Knowledge Oman is a non-profit organization established to foster collaboration between government and private entities in developing a knowledge-based society. By partnering with both local and international organizations, Knowledge Oman aims to implement projects that cultivate "sustainable knowledge," particularly focusing on equipping young people with the skills necessary for the future economy. In 2024, the organization launched the KO Academy, a new initiative designed to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired in universities and the practical skills demanded by the job market. The Academy offers students and educators access to expert-led sessions and workshops, providing them with valuable industry insights.

"Education systems should equip students with the skills needed to succeed in the modern economy, rather than simply imparting theoretical knowledge." ("Why Nations Fail")

"Technological change and innovation require continuous adaptation and re-training of the workforce to match evolving demands of the labor market." ("The Environment and Directed Technical Change")

WINNER **JOYCE LIU**
NOMINATION **TECHNOLOGY**

Director, TECH4ALL Digital Inclusion Program Office, Huawei

TECH4ALL is a long-term global Huawei initiative focused on leveraging technology to enhance digital skills and bridge the digital divide, particularly for vulnerable populations. This initiative encompasses education, environmental protection, healthcare, and development. In September 2024, Huawei launched the second phase of the 'Technology-enabled Open Schools for All' program in Brazil, Egypt, and Thailand. This program aims to drive digital transformation in education by fostering inclusive learning environments that seamlessly integrate offline and online learning experiences. Key components of the program include teacher training in ICT skills, the development of digital educational resources, and fostering collaboration among schools. The ultimate goal is to ensure equitable and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

"In the modern era, technology plays a critical role in shaping economies and societies. Countries that fail to adapt to technological advancements risk falling behind, both economically and socially." ("Why Nations Fail")

WINNER **SERGEI SOBYANIN**
NOMINATION **CITY**

Mayor of Moscow

"Moscow – a city for everyone" is one of the foundational principles and key priorities of Moscow's development concept under the leadership of mayor of Moscow S. Sobyanin. Within the framework of this concept, the city has created and is constantly improving institutional, physical, and service infrastructure in all areas significant to citizens, from education and healthcare to transportation and access to government services. To ensure that everyone's opinion is heard, the city has developed electronic participation services ("Active Citizen," "Electronic House," "City of Ideas," "City of Tasks") and implemented a system of remote electronic voting. The city's transportation accessibility and overall connectivity are being enhanced through the implementation of a comprehensive accessibility concept, the development of public transportation systems, and highways.

"Inclusive institutions create the basis for sustained economic growth because they ensure that a large segment of society has the opportunity to participate in economic life. This includes both the creation of secure property rights and the establishment of public services and infrastructure that are accessible to everyone. Without these foundations, economies cannot grow sustainable." ("Why Nations Fail")

"Cities flourish when they are part of a larger network of inclusive institutions. This ensures that urban areas attract talent, facilitate trade, and become centers of innovation. When cities are supported by inclusive institutions, they can transform into hubs of economic activity, creating widespread prosperity." ("Cities and Growth")

WINNER **SHIFERAW TEKLEMARIAM**
NOMINATION **SECURITY**

Commissioner, Ethiopia Disaster Risk Management Commission

A significant challenge in disaster warning systems is the failure to effectively communicate critical information to vulnerable populations. This often occurs due to language barriers or inadequate communication channels, leaving entire communities unprepared for natural disasters. Ethiopia, facing multiple threats including droughts, floods, armed conflicts, and economic shocks, is particularly vulnerable. In collaboration with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Early Warnings for All initiative, the UN Country Team in Ethiopia, and the World Bank, a comprehensive analysis was conducted. The analysis focused on enhancing community resilience by improving information dissemination, ensuring critical information reaches all communities, including those with limited access; building local capacity – empowering communities to effectively receive, understand, and utilize disaster warnings; expanding access to resources – providing communities with the necessary tools and resources for disaster preparedness. These efforts have contributed to the development of an inclusive early warning system that better protects vulnerable populations in Ethiopia.

"Inclusive states not only manage to avoid civil wars and high levels of criminality; they also manage to provide basic public goods, such as roads, law and order, and some amount of schooling and basic health care, almost universally." ("States and Power in Africa")

WINNER **CHRISTEL HEYDEMANN**
NOMINATION **AI**

CEO, Orange Group

"Fine-tuning AI Large Language models to understand regional languages in Africa" is a part of Orange's commitment to digital inclusion and fostering local business growth in the Middle East and Africa. The company has partnered with OpenAI and Meta to fine-tune AI large language models to understand local African languages currently not supported by any GenAI model. This project will enable customers to interact with Orange in their native languages. Open-source AI models will also be provided by Orange under a free, non-commercial license for use in sectors such as healthcare, education, and others. Orange plans to collaborate with local startups and technology companies to work on these AI models, aiming to bridge the digital divide in Africa.

"Inclusive institutions are those that allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic activities that make best use of their talents and skills and enable them to make the choices they wish." ("Why Nations Fail")

WINNER **PETRA OLSCHOWSKI**
NOMINATION **DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

Minister of Science, Research and Arts for the State of Baden-Württemberg

Citizens' Jury "Artificial Intelligence and Freedom" is a series of meetings with citizens of Baden-Württemberg, hosted by the University of Tübingen. The purpose of these meetings is for citizens to formulate recommendations for ethical AI research principles, which will be summarized in a memorandum for the consideration of the Ministry. The goal of the project is to foster a discourse on AI that can serve as a foundation for policymaking based on societal values and the diverse perspectives of citizens. Participants were randomly selected from all four administrative districts of Baden-Württemberg and from municipalities of various sizes to ensure a broad range of viewpoints and personal experiences.
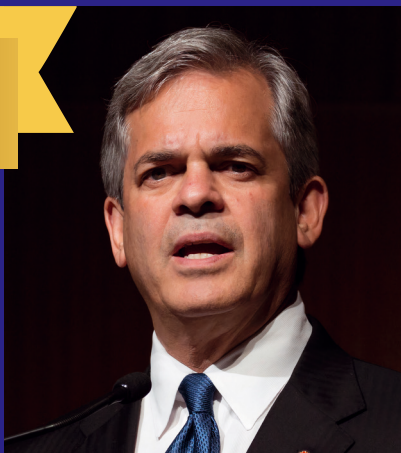
"For inclusive institutions to work, it is crucial that there is some degree of centralization of the state, so that political authority and the ability to enforce rules and regulations are consolidated. But unless this process of centralization is accompanied by the building of inclusive institutions, allowing different groups to have a say in decision making, it will ultimately fail to bring prosperity." ("Why Nations Fail")

WINNER **STEVE ADLER**
NOMINATION **HOUSING**

Former Mayor, Austin

The Austin Housing Conservancy stands as the United States' pioneering non-profit-managed investment fund dedicated to affordable housing. The Conservancy's operational model involves acquiring existing market-rate housing units and subsequently offering them for long-term lease at below-market rates. This initiative specifically targets households earning approximately 80% or less of the area's median income, with a particular focus on young professionals, nurses, teachers, and other essential community service workers who face significant challenges in securing affordable rental housing.

"Economic institutions shape how an economy functions and perform by determining the incentives of the key players in the economy. If economic institutions are inclusive, they will foster economic activity, productivity growth, and economic prosperity. If they are extractive, they will instead impede economic activity and progress, leading to stagnation and poverty. Therefore, governments should strive to create and maintain inclusive economic institutions that provide equal opportunities and access to social benefits for all citizens." ("Why Nations Fail")

WINNER **YVONNE AKI-SAWYERR**
NOMINATION **ENVIRONMENT**

Mayor, Freetown

Transform Freetown is a strategic development plan for the city, launched by the mayor shortly after taking office. The plan was developed through extensive community engagement, involving over 300 meetings and online surveys. One of the plan's primary goals was to increase the city's resilience to natural disasters, particularly floods. Between 2019 and 2023, the city planted 977,000 trees, created over 1,500 jobs in the forestry sector, and over 1,200 jobs in waste management. Additionally, more than 2 kilometers of drainage channels were constructed, and other measures were implemented. These initiatives not only supported local communities and engaged them in the city's development but also significantly improved the city's resilience to floods and reduced temperatures. The next phase of the plan, spanning until 2028, aims to create an additional 150,000 jobs.

"It is the way the state and society interact and control each other that determines the capacity of our state, the policies of our government, and our resilience, prosperity, security, and ultimately, liberty." ("Balance of Power")

WINNER **CLAUDIA LÓPEZ HERNÁNDEZ**
NOMINATION **GENDER INCLUSION**

Former mayor of Bogotá

Bogotá Care Blocks is a municipal program that supports women engaged in unpaid care work (caring for sick relatives, people with disabilities, children, etc.). A 2021 study revealed that 90% of women in Bogotá are involved in unpaid care work, and 30% of them are fully dedicated to it. The city has established over 20 "blocks" where staff assist women in caring for their dependents, while the women themselves can attend educational courses and improve their skills under the guidance of mentors.

"Inclusive institutions are those that allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic activities that make best use of their talents and skills and enable them to make the choices they wish." ("Why Nations Fail")