KARINA RIOS MICHEL

CHIEF CREATIVE & TECHNOLOGY OFFICER, GIRL EFFECT

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Designer and technologist with over 15 years of building brands, media and technology with young people across Africa and South Asia. From a garment factory in India to national youth brands, phone lines, apps and AI chatbots reaching millions.

EXPERIENCE

Chief Creative & Technology Officer · Girl Effect — 2023 TO NOW

- **Leading creative and technology.** I lead teams in Nairobi, Kigali, Dar es Salaam, Addis Ababa, Abuja, Johannesburg and Mumbai building chatbots, apps and media with young people.
- **AI health chatbots.** Big Sis, WAZZII and Bol Behen, co-created with young people, reach 3M+ people. In South Africa, young women reached were three times as likely to use mental health services (30.9% against 9.5%); in Kenya, young men reached were 18% more accepting of contraception.
- **Frontline care.** I conceived the Champions App, an offline app for community health workers on routine immunisation, HPV and maternal health. It contributed to more than doubling vaccine uptake among girls in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Tanzania, and was named one of Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies in 2026.
- **Safe by design.** I pioneered digital safeguarding practice for girls, co-wrote Girl Effect's ethical AI guidelines, and lead the data scientists and researchers who test when AI is the right tool and when a person stays in the loop.
- **Evidence and partners.** Research partnerships with Yale, Oxford, the University of Cape Town, Columbia and Stanford.
- **Funding.** My team's work has raised $5M+ from the Gates Foundation, CIFF, MSD for Mothers, Enlight and individual donors. I wrote the cases, led the pitches and negotiated the agreements.

DPhil Industry Supervisor · University of Oxford — 2026 TO NOW

- Industry supervisor for an MRC iCASE DPhil studentship in Oxford's Department of Psychiatry, supporting doctoral research on AI and adolescent mental health.

Fellow · Van Leer Foundation — 2026 TO 2027

- One of 18 leaders worldwide selected for the Van Leer Fellowship, a 16-month interdisciplinary fellowship on early childhood development.

Head of Create · Girl Effect — 2020 TO 2023

- Led a global creative team across 10+ markets, including Chhaa Jaa in India, an online youth platform reaching 23M girls.
- Worked with Meta on COVID rapid-response campaigns that reached 2.2M+ girls, raising perceived vaccine safety by 3 points and mask-wearing intent by 2.7 points (Meta Brand Lift).

Director of Product Design & Development · Girl Effect — 2019 TO 2020

- Designed, prototyped and launched Big Sis on WhatsApp, working with WhatsApp ahead of its API release. It grew from a magazine column answering ten questions a quarter to around 100,000 a day.
- Won a UNICEF innovation grant; ran research with UC Berkeley, the University of Essex and Profusion Labs.

Senior Brand Manager · Girl Effect 2015 TO 2019

- Designed and scaled Girls Connect, a free phone line of stories and advice for girls in conflict-affected northern Nigeria, built with communities and made free through deals with mobile network operators.

Design & Innovation Manager · Nike Foundation, Girl Hub, Kigali 2013 TO 2015

- Co-created Ni Nyampinga, Rwanda's first national youth brand, reaching 70% of the population through radio and magazines; negotiated free access to youth health content with telecoms companies.
- Led design research and co-design with girls and their communities with Fuseproject (Core77 Design Awards, 2014).

Designer & filmmaker in residence · Pratibha Syntex, India 2008 TO 2012

- Lived and worked in a garment factory for four years, researching and documenting the practices behind the label.
- Designed an upcycled collection from production off-cuts, later the cover of *Fashion & Sustainability: Design for Change*, and set up a mentorship programme bringing student designers inside the factory.
- Made the documentary *Chalo Let's Go!* (2011), shortlisted for the Buckminster Fuller Challenge 2012.

RECOGNITION & SPEAKING

2026	Fast Company Most Innovative Companies (Champions App)
2026	Finalist, She Shapes AI Award
2026	Speaker, Skoll World Forum: Designing AI for Transformative Change
2026	Girl Effect case study, World Bank compendium on digital mental health in low-resource settings
2025	Yale School of Public Health case study: Big Sis
2025	Featured in Stanford Center for Digital Health white paper, Generative AI for Health in LMICs
2025	Fast Company World Changing Ideas, main list (WAZZII)
2025	Speaker, AI for Good Global Summit, Geneva, and Yale Innovation Summit
2024	Finalist, Fast Company World Changing Ideas (Big Sis)

SELECTED WRITING

2026	Building carefully: how Girl Effect is researching AI and youth mental health
2025	Building with GenAI: our journey to smarter, safer health chatbots
2025	Girl Effect ethical AI guidelines for social and behaviour change chatbots

SKILLS

Brand building · Human-centred design · Co-creation · Product, zero to one · Creative direction · Film · Conversational AI · Responsible AI & safeguarding · Social & behaviour change · Fundraising · Governments & multilaterals

EDUCATION

MFA, Sustainable Design & Technology
London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London

BFA, Fashion Design
California College of the Arts

Languages
English and Spanish (native), Hindi and Chinese (beginner)