



Voices of Hope and Dignity for women smallholder farmers

“ From the cow donated to me by ActionAid Rwanda, I do not only earn an income, but respect from my husband and dignity from the community as well.”
Perpetue Mukamuhoza

“ActionAid Rwanda started with opening our minds to embrace change, new ideas and giving us an insight of how it has been done, made possible elsewhere, and therefore emphasizing that we can as well do it. This changed our lives. That alone gave us new energy, insight, appreciation of life and interpretation of issues.” Mujawamungu

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Who We Are

ActionAid Rwanda (AAR) is a Country Program of ActionAid International, a global federation committed to end poverty and injustice.

ActionAid in Rwanda has worked along sides with the people living in poverty and exclusion empowering and building their capabilities to claim and realize their rights. ActionAid is a non-political, non-religious development organization and in alliance with leading anti-poverty agencies working directly with over 500,000 poor and excluded people in 11 communities of five districts in Rwanda.

ActionAid partners works with rural communities to challenge the root causes of poverty, build their skills and increase their knowledge to identify solutions for lasting change impacting their lives.

Our Vision

A world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys the right to a life of dignity.

Our Mission

To work with people living in poverty and exclusion to eradicate poverty and injustice

Why We Are Here

Poverty is a trap created and sustained through unjust systems and ActionAid works with people to overcome poverty by harnessing their own power to claim their rights.

We believe that the indignity of poverty is a violation of human rights, arising from unequal power relations from the household to national level. With evidence from our programmes we have seen, how traditions and practices, the state and the family often perpetuate inequality and injustice through exclusion, exploitation, patriarchy, and other forms of discrimination. We seek to end poverty by purposeful connections and partnerships, led by the active agency of people living in poverty and supported by solidarity, credible rights-based alternatives and campaigns that address the structural causes of poverty.

“Me? Participating in the budgetary process? How?” Asked if she is interested she then turns around; “Maybe when we are put into the loop as to why we should participate. But at the moment the local leaders may take care of that. We mind most our immediate needs—food, school requirements, and those things we cannot do without.”



The participation of the general population in the process of national budget development can see a number of their needs and priorities included implementation closely and aptly followed up and results shared among them.

This process of collecting views from the masses ensures ownership. The participation, especially, of rural women has been very , minimal, if not outright absent. Much as they are being empowered to demand for better service delivery in the Agriculture Sector and also increase their involvement in budget allocation decisions in Agriculture with in their communities, their overall appreciation of this phenomenon is still very incoherent.

Mujawamungu Hilary, 41, also the president of Huguikiwa Cooperative in Muko Sector of Musanze District expresses open ignorance about the whole process. “Participation in the national budgetary process? I am not a government official. I have even never got myself into the position of readying myself of knowing how the sector budget is drafted, debated and approved. May be in the future, but as of now, I have no knowledge of such.”

When I ask Hilary whether she is interested in participating in the budgetary process, she cautiously says; “I think we need to start with our homes. Very few women today participate in the making of the household budgets. Then from there we come to our cooperatives, we learn more about the whole issue

Participation in agriculture budget allocation yet to be understood by women smallholder farmers

what it means and why we should participate. Like that until we get to what you are saying. All that we know at the moment when the top leaders come, our local leaders present the issues at hand to be solved; roads, schools, good farming tools among others.”

Hilary is optimistic that when she is sensitized more about why he

should participate, may in the future she and members of the cooperative may participate.

But Nyirandikubwimana Joselyn, 36, a member of the same cooperative takes a totally different view. “Me? Participating in the budgetary process? How?” Asked if she is interested she then turns around; “Maybe when we are put into the loop as to why we should

participate. But at the moment the local leaders may take care of that. We mind most our immediate needs—food, school requirements, and those things we cannot do without.”

In Gitesi Sector, Karongi District, Cecile Uwamariya, 40, a headmistress of the ECD Gitesi, says she does not see rural women in the very near future participating in

process of budget making. “May be at community level; but at national level? I doubt. Anyway, what do they know about the whole thing? The best they can do is saying what they need; better schools, health facilities and others.”

In Nyaruguru District, Ruheru Sector, the three residents I try talking to about their involvement in the budgetary process, do not even attempt to give an answer on the same. “Ask that teacher those questions,” one of them says pointing to Charles Munyaneza, the Headmaster Remera Primary School in Rusanze Cell.



Abused, beaten and deprived: Helped to turn tragedy into triumph

Today Imaculee's person overflows with enthusiasm, happiness and hard work

You have heard and read stories that transport you and the main character through hell, suspense and triumph. Yes you have read those stories created in the writers' kitchen of imagination. Fiction. Imaculee's story sounds like the work of fiction. But it is not. She tells it in a way that stirs those storms of emotion that make you hate (and with a passion), that person you have never and may never meet. But what do you do when she, at the end of it all, says that she has since forgiven her ex-tormentor? And then she walks out of the grave the tormentor had condemned her to and now living like a princess she never knew she would become?

Tell me! What do you do?

This is how Nyirampore Imaculee's story begins. In 1995 Imaculee, 20 years old then, got married to her sweetheart, John Gahima. They

settled in Gahengeri, Rwamagana District. Prior to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, Gahima, now 60, had two wives and twelve children all of who were killed during the mayhem. He never revealed this tragic past to his new wife.

Evil begets evil

Two months into the marriage, the portentous and mysterious characters of awe, entirely difficult to explain and account for, began gushing from Gahima's person.

Imaculee tells her inexplicable past in simple emphatic words with an effortlessly soft tone, squalls of pain and anger, and spasms of delight and triumph. All! "First, he banned all visitors from coming to our

house. He never wanted me to talk to anyone in the village, lest they tell me of his past. I could neither visit nor be visited. He would beat up anybody he found at our home, saying he was beating 'rumours' not the person. On my slight intervention during his sporadic beatings, he could then beat me and the visitor to pulp. He was habitually drunk. I was in a fenceless prison. Any slight provocation, even a joke, could ignite a war. My hope was miserably turning into dust. So in late 1996 I decided to call it quits. I came back to my family here in Nyanza. I was pregnant."

Gahima, with his obsessive-mania could not let go of Imaculee. He went after her at their home in Kigarama village, Nyanza sector in Nyanza district, Southern province. "Early in 1997 Gahima came to our home,

not to make mends, but to grab and take me back. All by force! He could threaten whoever he found at home. And his threats were spooled with barbs of death. I went back to our home. But he had sold off much of the family property in such a very short while. My cow and its calf I had left were gone; so were the chairs and some utensils. Towards the end of 1997, I gave birth to our second child. A girl, like the first born. He became so abusive, always telling me I was only producing prostitutes of tomorrow. It was at around that time that he sold off my second cow I had recently brought from home. I was getting used to his awkward ways and beginning to sprout some inner happiness. But one day in 1998 when I was carrying my third baby (halts)....(with a wide grin then a

Continued on next page

Helped to turn tragedy into triumph

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bout of laughter)...yes I used to produce every year... I am fertile my friend...(more laughter, a brief debate on family planning ensues). So, one day he called me for a meeting in the sitting room. He was sober and cheerful.

"I, anxiously, thought he was about to declare a new life free of quarrels, beatings and drunkenness. A new chapter. How wrong was I!"

More misery

Imaculee's progressive misery, tended in no way to diminish; for in proportion as grief and indignation abated, her hatred for others began to take their place after that meeting. "In the 'meeting' he told me how he had got someone to give me a hand in my daily chores. So he wanted to marry another wife. I hated him and her."

In 1999, Imaculee lived with her co-wife for eight months. "They could sleep all day. I used to single handedly dig the gardens, prepare meals, fetch water and firewood, boil water for both of them, and while they were having meals in-between, I had to make their bed. I hated them! But I thought I had no option. I wish I knew then what I know now. Anyway, my co-wife's honeymoon soon waned. After eight months she left.

"Abuses mounted. Profane obscenities and beatings were now extended to my three girls. Everyone of the girls has their father's inflicted scar. He, once, broke a collar bone of one of the girls. Another lost a tooth to his savage beatings."

Suicide attempt

And then her tragedies descended into hell. "On 5th October 2002, I reflected on a life, mine, where love was absent and kindness a distant virtue, a luxury. I was seven months pregnant with the last born, a boy. I took poison. I wanted to take my life. My hatred for everyone, including myself, was so intense." Imaculee's life was saved by neighbors who gave her milk and induced vomiting.

Local leaders look the other side

But couldn't local leaders stand up to Gahima's imperious acts? "They couldn't. They used to share alcohol. They were friends," instantly replies Imaculee, who, even after recovering from the suicide attempt remained under Gahima's roof. "But why could you hang on despite the trek to hell and back?" I ask her.

Her prompt reply comes with a sad force. "My body had been so cruelly abused that my mind stopped functioning straight. I was spiritually addled. I was a shell."

Quits

Imaculee's last dizzying tale is scratched from the annals of 2004. She trims down her voice, gets more composed and looks me straight in the eye.

"At the beginning of 2004, he gave me transport fares to come to Nyanza, sell off family land and take the proceeds to him, warning me of serious repercussions if I didn't. 'If you want to live, sell off that land and bring the money.' I took the transport fare he gave me and hid among relatives. After two weeks, he came to Nyanza to see what happened. He never saw me, and I never went back. He got another woman. But after almost two years, I was told my kids were suffering; were not schooling, abused, and overworked.

"In 2006, while going to Rwesero Cell offices, I met many women who were facing problems emanating from gender-based violence. In 2007 we came together and formed DukundeInzuki Cooperative. But four of the abused women had committed suicide. When I told members that my children were in bad condition, the raised Rwf15,000 for transport to collect them. Of course I went with some escorts. He was hesitating from giving me the kids until we engaged local leaders.

With ActionAid a new dawn blossoms

"After that little while, things were in a slow motion. But in 2007, ActionAid Rwanda came to our rescue. We were given a donation which we used to collectively start bee farming, and each individual started a personal business. I opted for tailoring. I sew trousers, shirts and blouses, kitenge, uniforms for secondary school students, and embroidery.

"Under the auspices of ActionAid Rwanda, we were trained on human rights, children right and women rights, how the law can help an abused woman, business and savings management among others."

Imaculee's life, eight years after walking out of a marriage that had become hell, has now blossomed into happiness, focus and hard work. "I bought the sewing, ActionAid Rwanda gave me a cow and I bought another on my own, I have four goats. Because I had been enlightened about my rights, I went to courts of law and got a share of our land with Gahima in Rwamagana. It is worth Rwf5 million. I have some money on the account and can make monthly savings of Rwf20,000. In a month, I earn an average profit of Rwf100,000. I have put all my kids back to school. The first two are in primary six and the last two in five. I have since forgiven Gahima. I sometimes think he is traumatized because of the loss of his first family during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Forgiving him gives me that inner peace. I am now focused on developing myself and see my kids through to the university." ■



Mukasina Theresa, Right, during an exhibition in Murundi

They used to count abuses, now they count money

Gender-based violence has been a social evil in many societies for as long as humanity has existed. The subjugation and subordination of women is a common social phenomenon in Rwanda which, however, the government is fighting hard to eliminate with the help of the civil society.

It is such cruel oppression towards women that forced a total of 40 women in Murundi Sector, Karongi District, to organize themselves into the Isangano Cooperative in 2008, to emotionally support each other, raise some money for buying household items and eventually start income generating products.

The president of the cooperative Mukasina Theresa, 46, says they started with weaving baskets in 2008 and opened an account of

Banque Populaire du Rwanda. Each member was required to raise a share capital of Rwf1000, and then a weekly Rwf100 for buying a hoe. "We then increased our contributions to Rwf500 per month for buying clothes. In addition, we rented land for Rwf20,000 at Kirehe village to plant cassava, tilled the land ourselves, the harvest of which fetched Rwf40,000 in 2009. We realized with more investments we could make good money, but we didn't have enough capital to rent bigger land."

Their prayers were answered in 2010 when ActionAid Rwanda donated Rwf3 million to the cooperative. "We used the money to rent land, bought cuttings for seed, and planted cassava on 10 acres. We also distributed cassava cutting to the residents."

The cows earn me money and dignity



Perpetue Mukamuhoza

“Another thing, my husband now respects me. I do buy the household items, so we no longer lack. My children go to school and I clothe them as decently as I can. He cannot touch any of those cows and sell them. He knows they are a government property. And when he sees you coming from Kigali every now and then, in those big cars, he just knows that even selling household items bought with income from the project can spell him trouble.”

Perpetue Mukamuhoza, 51, is a resident of Gatare Village in Nyanza Sector, Nyanza District. She has lived with her husband for the last 27 years. Their marriage has been characterized by quarrels and sometimes beatings from the husband.

“There are times when I could decide to leave him and just live friends. But then I could not live with my children at friends’ or relatives’ homes; that is how I always ended up coming back. I remember the last time I left him, he had sold off some household property so he could pay bride price for another woman. There are even times he could sell an item simply to take local brew,” recalls the mother of seven.

In 2007, Mukamuhoza joined the DukundeInzuzi Cooperative and, from the Rwf50,000 given by ActionAid Rwanda, started a small business of selling vegetables and fruits. She got profits and expanded her stock, and as the confidence

from her suppliers grew, she could get some on credit and pay later. “I made sure that I involve my children in the business. In 2011, I got a Friesian cow, courtesy of ActionAid Rwanda, which calved in 2012. Now from the cow I get milk, for home consumption and to sell and fertilizers for my gardens where I grow beans, potatoes, maize, beans, cassava and soy beans.

“My yields have now increased because of the organic fertilizers I do apply in the gardens. But because my gardens are seated on a small piece of land, I sell off some fertilizers. During holidays, the children get involved in the sale of the manure from which we get Rwf15,000 a month and Rwf20,000 from the sale of milk,” says Mukamuhoza.

Mukamuhoza gets more than money from the Friesian cow that she got two years ago as she delightedly explains; “Another thing, my husband now respects me. I do buy the

household items, so we no longer lack. My children go to school and I clothe them as decently as I can. He cannot touch any of those cows and sell them. He knows they are a government property. And when he sees you coming from Kigali every now and then, in those big cars, he just knows that even selling household items bought with income from the project can spell him trouble.” She concludes; “Muri Make, (Kinyarwanda speak for ‘in a few words’) from the cow donated to me by ActionAid Rwanda, I do not only earn an income, but respect from my husband and dignity from the community as well.”

Today, members have got their own land. “On the 2013 International Women’s Day, ActionAid gave us Rwf2 million part of which we used to buy land. We have also donated Rwf100,000 to a group of mothers in the sector whose children were experiencing nutritional problems, says Mukasine.

She says they are planning to buy land for a drying yard, a processing machine and build an own store for the cooperative. “We shall raise money from amongst ourselves.”

These efforts will go a long way to sustaining lives of these women and their families. Indeed such efforts restore power and self-reliance to a once dejected group.



Mpore Dukunde Inzuki Cooperative members during an expo in Murundi

Mpore Dukunde-Inzuki

A cooperative that has hatched members' inner abilities and confidence

Mpore Dukundenzuki Cooperative was started in 2007 by a group of women who were victims of gender-based violence. The women used to meet at the sector offices where they realized they had the same problems and therefore decided to get together, form the cooperative and move on.

According to the president of the cooperative, Mary Grace Mukashema, ActionAid Rwanda got in touch with them in 2007, started with training them on their human rights, handling and solving gender-related problems, running small businesses and choosing right investment choices.

"These trainings hatched the abilities and confidence we didn't know we have. The emotional support we

get from each has, too, added to our strength," appreciates Mukashema. In 2008 ActionAid Rwanda gave the cooperative Rwf2.5 where members were each given Rwf50,000 to start individual business and each deposited Rwf10,000 to the cooperative account for use in the bee farming. The money was used to buy 40 bee-hives, rent land, and pay the honey harvesters.

The honey harvests have been growing; 36 Kg in 2010, 40kg in 2011 and 60kg in 2012. A kilogram is sold at Rwf3500. ActionAid Rwanda has sponsored members for study tours and therefore can handle the project with precise competence and skill.

Using a donation of Rwf5 million from ActionAid, the cooperative has bought land at Gasisino village in Nyanza Sector and so will shift from the current site of Bunyenswa. "There are more flowers there for nectar collection, little wind effect and land is on the leeward," explains Mukashema. They are also building a house which will be used as a honey processing center at the Gasisino site.

The revenues obtained from the sale of honey are lent out to members to meet different needs such as paying school fees and insuring members in the Mutuelle de Sante. One member, Jane Mukarugwiza, 55, whose house had been de-roofed was given some

Rwf30,000 from the cooperative account to repair the house.

The formerly abused women are now at different levels of prosperity. Collectively, the cooperative has plans of producing other wax by-products such as candles, soap and vaseline. "We want to be role-model of bee-keeping cooperatives in the country," explains Mukashema.

She says by 2015, every member will have got hives of their own at even expend the apiculture skills to neighbours. "We want to share our benefits with as many people as possible."

Repeatedly beaten and bitter in the past, today Grace is better and her future brighter

Mary Grace Mukashema's long walk to the freedom and dignity that she enjoys today has been bumpy and stormy. The forty one year old mother of four, resident of Bunyeshwa in Nyanza district, Southern Province got married at age 16, and what she thought would be a bliss turned into a nightmare when she delayed to give birth. "My husband became violent and arrogant. But even when I gave birth, he refused to buy clothes for the baby. Nurses asked him for the clothes when I was in labour but he arrogantly told them to ask me. 'After all, even your parents know that you are about to give birth, why didn't they do anything to help you out?' was his mean reply"

Mukashema continues; "I found myself between a rock and a hard place because even when I went to my parents for help, they said that my husband will look at it as a way of putting him down and sending him a message that he cannot adequately manage his home. So when I came back home, my husband was so furious that I have exposed his weaknesses to other people. He gave me a thorough beating.

"So we lived that life of disagreement for some time. Meanwhile, the baby was growing and help from him was not forthcoming. So when I got better, I started looking out for some odd jobs that I could do. I could dig people's gardens, to get money for buying milk for the baby, clothes and food. One day he came back home when he was so drunk and smashed the baby on the wall. He bled profusely, so I rushed him to the hospital. At another time, when I was tilling someone's garden, the baby was exposed to a poisonous herb where I had put him to rest, and got a deadly skin rash. Up to today, the scars are prominent on his body."

Mukashema's woes were not about to end. The beatings were only getting amplified. After giving birth to two other children in such circumstances, she decided that enough was enough. She tried to use traditional family planning methods to stop producing, but in vain. "When my husband learnt that I was engaging some family planning methods, he burnt me with very hot water. Meanwhile, our children

had grown to become adults, but he did not stop being abusive, drunk and violent. So in 1998 we parted ways. But in those early days of separation, even when he found me on the way going somewhere, he could demand for sex and I had to run away from him."

Mukashema took her children along after the separation. In the process of getting a solution from the local leaders, one day when she had gone to the sector offices she found other women whose stories of domestic violence were similar, others worse than hers. They shared the experiences, decided to get out of that quagmire, and formed a cooperative society—MproeDukunde- Inzuki Cooperative. "We opened up an account, and ActionAid through Faith Vision Association gave every member a donation of Rwf50,000 in 2007 as start-up capital. Today we are engaged

in apiculture, with nine modern hives and 18 traditional ones, under our umbrella DukundeInzuki Cooperative. The membership stands at 50, all victims of gender-based violence. I started with petty trading. I could give my children some fruits and vegetables to hawk around. I also went back to school and completed Primary Six as a mature student. Then I sat for S.3 finals which I passed and joined A level in 2011. I did well and will join university sometime to come.

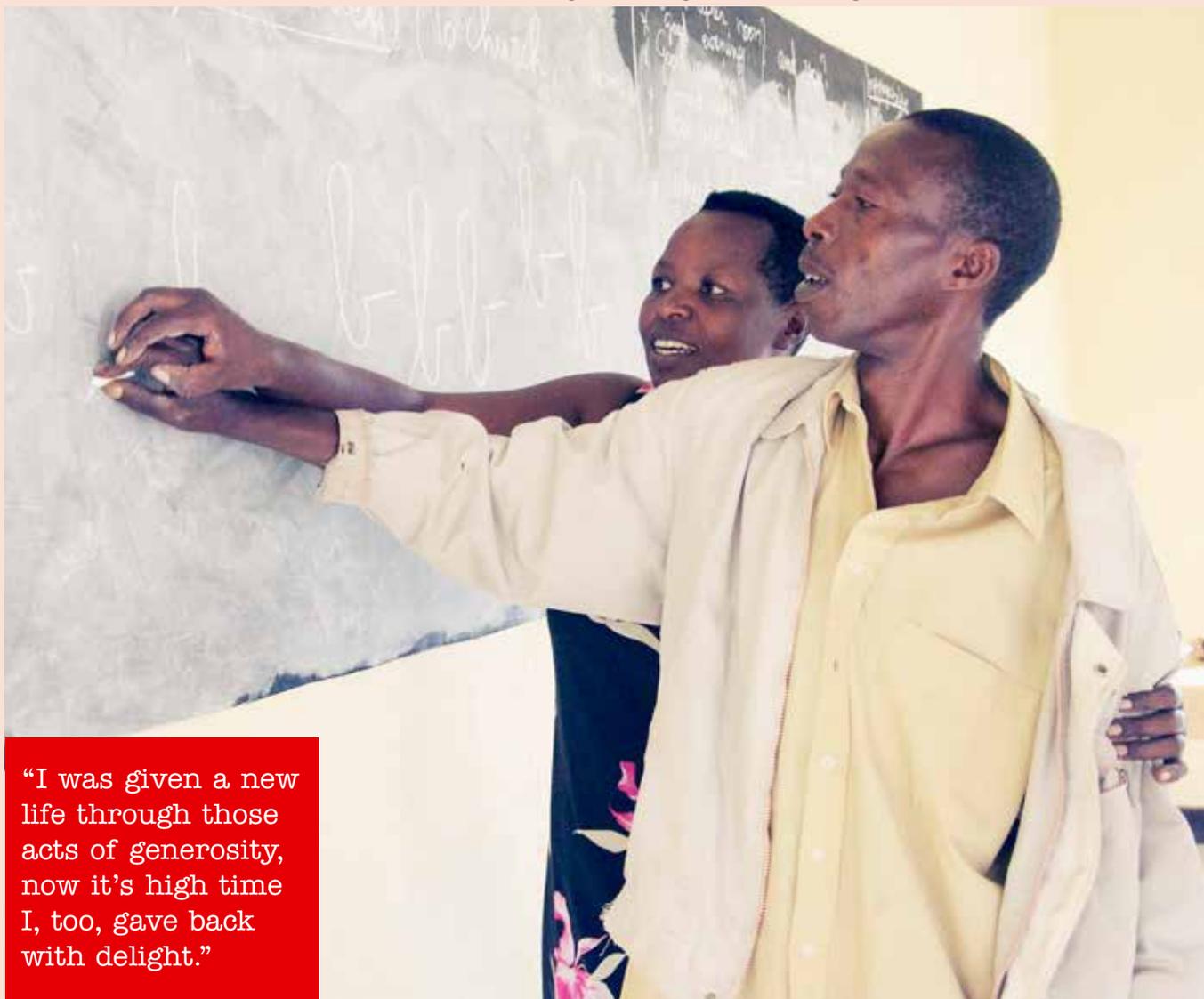
"We started realizing profits, and I sent my children back to school. I now trade in beans as well. I have invested in cassava growing and trading, and ActionAid Rwanda gave me a cow in 2012.

Today Mukashema's life is different. As she was planning to buy land where she could erect a house

for her children, a friend, Godfrey Karema gave her a piece of land in Nyamagana, 5 kilometers north of Nyanza town. She has mobilized her colleagues to mould bricks and started building. "ActionAid has been a parent to us. The level of confidence we have today, the income, the sharing of experiences and general welfare have all been giant strides in our lives courtesy of ActionAid Rwanda," says the now ardent farmer who recently returned from Ethiopia, courtesy of ActionAid Rwanda, on a study tour on farming and gender-related issues.

She has now embarked on teaching adults; there is a group she teaches how to read and write and she teaches English to the second group. "I was given a new life through those acts of generosity, now it's high time I, too, gave back with delight."

I was given, now I give Grace teaching an adult to write



"I was given a new life through those acts of generosity, now it's high time I, too, gave back with delight."



From 8kgs, members now harvest bunches that weigh over 60kg

Land consolidation opens new gates for Karungu farmers

Land fragmentation has been a time-term problem amongst many farmers in Rwanda. The residents of Karungu village, Gishuri Cell, Nyiranzu Sector in Gisagara District were also experiencing the same problem, with small economically unmanageable scattered plots of land, where they practiced mixed farming and inter-

cropping. The pace of degradation was alarming, agricultural development was made difficult, and agricultural innovations stifled.

Having been sensitized on the benefits to be reaped from land consolidation, 24 households of the village got together in 2011, merged their

landholdings and formed one big parcel of 4 hectares. They formed a Bishizehamwe Cooperative, through which they can now access different extension services.

The Cooperative president Faustin Rukundo explains that they have started gaining from their move. "Before the formation of the cooperative, we only had local banana plants and the yields were low, with a bunch weighing between 8-10 kg. After forming the cooperative, we got enhanced banana 3300 suckers, courtesy of ActionAid Rwanda, from Kirehe District. The three types of offshoots we got are for food (cooked), ripe bananas and for juice extraction," he

explains adding: "today we harvest bunches that weigh between 50-70 kg."

He also explains they have learnt several farming methods for controlling soil erosion. "We practice the digging of ditches and terraces, mulching with humic material got from Ngyiri marshland, thinning off the excessive young offshoots to leave only three, practicing single crop cultivation and adequate spacing –of three meters apart."

The sector agronomist has extended services to them, explaining to them the best farming practices. "Having got the basics from the agronomist, we then wanted to Kirehe, where the suckers had been brought from. So ActionAid Rwanda organized our study tour to Kamara Cooperative to learn the best farming practices," explains Kamara.

He says they learnt several lessons from the visit. "After harvesting the banana, we could usually leave the stem standing. From Kamara we learnt it is important to fell it, peel it and use the layers for mulching. We also learnt adequate pruning, mulching techniques of putting the manure 40 cm from the stem, and not to remove the stem peels until they are dry."

The land consolidation has not meant members losing attachment to their respective plots. Every member farms his/her land, and look for markets of the produce individually. "But in the future we are planning to have a joint market place. Every member contributes Rwf1000 per month which we use to solve our farming related problems, and all members have Mutuelle de Sante."

Niyoyita Daphrose, 49, says she has started reaping from the cooperative. "I was given 30 exotic offshoots. I could get 70kg from ten bunches. Now I can get the 70ks from only one bunch. This is a great stride. From the same land I can harvest 500kg in a season. The major challenge I so far have is getting fertilizers. I, like many other members, do not have a cow. Sometimes accessing markets is a problem. But when we start joint marketing programmes, I think that will be solved," says the mother of three with a tinge of hope.

The Karungu village leader, Ntawuhiganahe Wesclas, 37, the farming knowledge has translate into good harvests, and food and nutritional security are well assured. "There are no more threats of famine and hunger. But if we could get a market for the offshoots, it would be another good step. Apparently, the neighbors we would have given them cannot afford sustaining them."

"After harvesting the banana, we could usually leave the stem standing. From Kamara we learnt it is important to fell it, peel it and use the layers for mulching. We also learnt adequate pruning, mulching techniques of putting the manure 40 cm from the stem, and not to remove the stem peels until they are dry."



We are the winners

School take the first positions in the termly performance."

Musabyimana Crysostom, an A2 nurse at Centre de Santé Kirambo, says the school significantly contributes to the health of the children. "The values of hygiene and sanitation are instilled among the children at a very early stage of their lives in addition to proper feeding, grooming, and resting. The school itself is very clean. The pupils and parents do learn that discipline as well."

From the cows, the school gets 32 liters of milk per day, some of which is taken with breakfast porridge for the 77 children aged between 3-5 (42 boys, 35 girls), 3 teaching and 4 support staff. About 80% of the eggs are sold and 20% are prepared for children's consumption. The school has also got vegetable gardens. Because the center is prepared to be self-sustaining, much of the revenue is used in running school operations. During holidays, all the milk and eggs are sold.

Parents contribute Rwf1,000 per month for school operations but those who cannot afford to pay are, twice a month, invited to participate in the preparation of gardens from which vegetables for their children are harvested. "It strengthens their ownership of the school and the activities thereof," says the headmistress.

Adeline Uwifashije, 33, a parent of the school says apart from her kid accessing pre-school services, she (as a parent) has adopted the farming methods of kitchen gardens (akarimak'igikoni) which she now practices.

Ingabire Jacqueline, a teacher at the school, says; "with hygiene and sanitation, we teach the children by doing. For the children who come to school without bathing, we take them to the bathrooms and bathe them."

The center benefits all stakeholders in more ways than one as Nyirandakomeje Alphonsine, 30, with a child at the center testifies. "My child was very shy and could hardly mix with other children, but today he is a very social child. Another advantage with this Center, I get ample time to tend my gardens and take my produce to the market. I could not get that enough time before."

One of the teachers, Ingabire, has since acquired more skills in child pedagogy and care, while the headmistress has acquired additional training in child care and development, child healthcare and project planning and management all courtesy of ActionAid Rwanda.

Gitesi ECD Center

Childcare initiatives that by extension improve parents' incomes

When the children arrive at the school in the morning, at 8a.m, they go to classes for one hour, and then they are given porridge, fortified with milk with eggs for accompaniment, at 9a.m and get back to classes at 10a.m. After an hour, at 11.00am, they are sent home, ending the day's lessons. But in-between, when they get tired, develop ill-health or any situation that requires resting, there is a spacious room, with six cozy beds where the infants can rest until their parents can pick them.

This is Gitesi ECD, a kindergarten in a remote rural Munanira Cell, Gitesi Sector in Karongi District, opened in February 2012. Built with support from ActionAid Rwanda, the school has classroom, office and resting blocs. It also has a store, a chicken house, teaching and playing aids, modern toilets and bathrooms all built and equipped with ActionAid Rwanda finances.

The Headmistress of the school, Ms Cecile Uwamariya, says the parents were given a fully equipped school, to which they as well added income generating projects. "ActionAid Rwanda at the launch of the school also gave us four cows which have since calved and multiplied to eight, 200 chicks, all the school furniture and money enough to pay staff salaries for one year."

The kindergarten is a blessing to the children and parents from around its proximities as the headmistress reminisces. "Ordinarily, children begin primary at age 7, knowing nothing. But when they go through the nursery, they join primary section when they have internalized the basic values of child school socialization—playing, singing, drawing, conversing, reading and writing. The children learn to love studying at that age. In fact the 26 children who left this school last year and joined Kirambo Primary

Milk takes care of my nutrition needs



The cooperative that pushed away poverty from Mujawamungu's life

Mujawamungu Hilary was among the pioneers in the Hukukirwa Muko Cooperative. She joined efforts with others to start cooperative in 2007 to extricate members out of poverty that had become a permanent undesired companion.

The 44 year old mother of four, who is also the president of the cooperative wanted to ensure that her children get education and live a decent life. "Before joining the cooperative, I used to grow beans, maize and Irish potatoes using ordinary methods, so the yields were generally low. My husband therefore used to provide for much of the family. But things were not easy. There are times I could ask for my or children's clothes but instead of providing them, the request could only unleash a barrage of abusive words. This was because he did not have the money.

"The poverty at the time was so much so that there are times we could take food without salt and shoes for the children was seen as a distant luxury. I remember we could sometimes take beans only for food. When the opportunity of forming the cooperative availed itself, I was among the first to nurture the idea.

"We started with the weaving of Agaseke of whose skills were easy to hone, later diversifying into curtain beads and horn and bone jewelries. In 2010, ActionAid Rwanda trained us in human rights, modern farming methods and sanitation and hygiene. This was the beginning of the way of my looking at things with a different view. I knew that I could engage in more economic activities, earn a living from my own toil and support my children."

And indeed today Mujawamungu's
Voices of Hope and Dignity

family does not lack. Despite the fact that the husband does not have a permanent job, she has managed to pay school fees for all her children, who are now in S.4, S.2, P.5 and p.4 respectively. "From the sale of baskets, curtain beads and other times, I can individually earn Rwf50,000 a month."

Her emancipation has however spilled over to the neighbours who were hitherto jobless. "During the training that was sponsored by ActionAid Rwanda, it was made explicitly clear that when the neighbours have an income, She now grows more beans and maize. "I have bought land and expanded my farming activities. During the growing season I employ about nine farmhands whom I pay Rwf700 per day. Every season I harvest 4 sacks beans (where each goes for Rwf32,000) and four sacks of maize with each sold at Rwf20,000. " This means from her farming activities only, Mujawamungu earns over Rwf200,000 per year and an average of rwf600,000 from the sale of handicrafts. So she is good to count the harvest. "I have so far opened bank accounts in Banque Populaire du Rwanda and Irengere SACCO."

"I have been able to connect our house to the EWSA grid—for electricity and water. Today, my unwavering zeal is to see all my children through to the university. I do not want them to stop midway the academic journey. It is my ambition to have them live a good free of wanting," she says also pointing out that she is about to venture into some bigger business which she does not want to divulge yet.



Every Wednesday, Mukagatete Clementine, 46, looks forward to meeting with members of HuguKirwa Muko Cooperative, to which she also belongs. It is during the meeting that she polishes her handicraft skills, gets advice on business and domestic-related challenges, and feels at home sharing ideas with members who she has come to call sisters and aunties. She calls it her bigger family.

Established in 2007, with an ultimate goal of mobilizing resources to start small businesses, acquire skills and giving emotional support to members, HuguKirwa Muko has 30 active members involved in weaving Agaseke, a Rwanda trademark basket, curtain beads, horns and bone jewelries and banana reproduction. Every Wednesday, after tending their gardens and other domestic chores, members meet at the Cell Offices at Kabundundu village in Muko Sector, Musanze District.

Making curtain beads is an art the HuguKirwa members have come to embrace with skill and liking, using such simple materials as ordinary paper, glue and coloured powder. They soak papers in water for three days after which they are mashed into a dough mixed with glue to fortify cohesion and coloured powder (depending on the colour they want). The dough is then kneaded into small circular balls, the size of a small bottle lid which are sun dried, pierced with a machine to make a hole through and are strung on a small long cord.

The about twenty cords are then stitched on a horizontal string ready for use in either the window and or, especially the door as curtain strings/beads. The curtains give off an excellent view as they sway and exude some muted clacked sounds as the beads on different strings rub and click with each other. Restaurants, salons and households are some of the major clients. "In a month, we can make about 30 curtains of two meters with each going for Rwf15,000. We sell the curtains in Musanze, Kigali and during the Annual International Trade Fair at the Gikondo Expo grounds, we sell to people from the neighbouring countries as well," explains Mujawamungu Hillary, the president of the cooperative.

When members make a sale, they put 30 per cent on the cooperative account and the rest is given to the member who made the artifact. "It's from this banked money that is later used to buy raw materials and other needs that may require cash."

HuguKirwa also has a jewelry making project mainly from the cattle horns and bones. Using special machines



Members of HuguKirwa practicing their trade



Members of HuguKirwa practicing their trade

HuguKirwa Muko Cooperative

Sowing one seed of hope at a time

for cutting, smoothening and curving, members produce necklaces, bottle openers, earrings, bangle bracelets, buttons and hairpins. From this project the Cooperative gets an average income of Rwf50,000 a month.

"Weaving of Agaseke is also part of our activities. We usually produce AgasekeK'amahoro (Basket of Peace), trays and small holder baskets. We sell these on ordinary markets in Kigali art crafts shops," explains another

member, Igabire Claudine.

HuguKirwa members believe in diversifying their activities and embrace new innovations, which explains why in 2012 they ventured into a banana reproduction project. "There are times when the sales of other products we deal in a very low because many other cooperatives are also engaged in the same activities. So we are migrating to new ventures where there are few players," asserts Mujawamungu.

At the inception of the programme in November 2012, the cooperative hired the services of an agronomist who trained them for four months in the best ways of doing the reproduction from the rhizome, looking after the plantlets, and other best nursery management practices. "We have now started selling the offshoots at Rwf500 each, and the cooperative has so far earned Rwf210,000."

ActionAid Rwanda amplifies hope

Members of HuguKirwa have got an explicit gratitude for ActionAid Rwanda's (AAR) support that has seen their lives getting to greater horizons.

"ActionAid Rwanda started with opening our minds to embrace change, new ideas and giving us an insight of how it has been done, made possible elsewhere, and therefore emphasizing that we can as well do it. This changed our lives. That alone gave us new energy, insight, appreciation of life and interpretation of issues," explains Mujawamungu with a reasoned strength of pride.

She adds that AAR has supported their training in human rights, information sharing, and modern farming methods which have all had a direct bearing on their always improving welfare.

"In 2012, ActionAid donated Rwf3,256,000 to our cooperative which we have used in our banana reproduction and multiplication project. In just a very a very small span of time, we have started earning from the project, and we are looking at the best ways of expanding it."

Challenges

"The major challenge facing the cooperative is the lack of market for the artifacts. In Rwanda there are many producers of the handicrafts, and in the region there are not many capable buyers. This forces us to rely almost entirely on European, American and Asian markets. And we do not have direct access, but go through the national cooperatives," says Mujawamungu.

She says that the lack of a cooperative central building, forces members to keep stocks (of raw materials and finished products) in their homes, and only meet at the Cell compound under the shade of a tree and do their work.



Inside the workshop

Indatwa ku Murimo Cooperative

Training and ActionAid acts of generosity have brought us this far

Testimonies of life transformation

Shyngiro Sector in Musanze District is endowed with young volcanic loam soils. So fertile are the soils, so densely peopled is the sector but, unfortunately, so fragmented are the plots of land. The fertile soils are interspersed with small volcanic boulders that are not weathered, mostly seated on steep slopes, with individuals owning very small patches of land. The residents, for long, had not effectively harvested from the rich environs. The poor, especially, could not gain anything from the land until they decided to form a cooperative.

In 2008, the Indatwa ku Murimo Cooperative was started in Kibuguz Cell, Syngiro Sector with a total

of 370 women members. The President of the Cooperative Mukarwego Bridgette, 39, says members were very poor and so ostracized by the bigger community. "It is one thing to be looked down upon by the community, and another (pain!) to be incessantly subjugated and abused by one's own husband. This was mainly a result of asking every small bit of the household item from the husbands. They are also poor. So when the routine of begging from the poor husbands continue, they (husbands) become bored, adamant and, at times, outright violent."

Mukarwego says when they formed the cooperative, they started with growing passion and plum (ibinyomoro) fruits. They did not have the chance of harvesting from

Pottery business propels women independence

business of a small shop and a member of the cooperative.

Mukantwari says because most of the members do not have the skills in pottery, they raised share initial capital of Rwf50,000. "But the turning point was in 2010 when ActionAid Rwanda donated Rwf2.8 million which we used to buy more raw materials and pottery moulds. We also helped the community to get connected to the Mujoyo-Kabaya water pipeline."

They make pots, cups, vases and platters of different sizes. The fired ceramic wares are then sold from different outlets including a crafts shop in Karongi town and others in Kigali. "Because the production has increased, we now employ ten casual workers. After paying the workers and for the raw materials, every member, on average, gets dividends of Rwf20,000. "This is not little money given that members are involved in other activities. This is a one way of diversifying the incomes so that we do not depend on a single source," emphasizes Agnes Nyirangimana, 38, who also is the president of the cooperative.

Nyirangimana says the challenge of the market is yet to be squarely addressed. "In Kigali the competition is so high. But all we are doing is improving the quality of the ware we produce, so that we get to effectively penetrate the local and regional markets. The best way of doing this is to take our key employees for training, so they can gain those advanced skills," explains the president.

It is true that much has been done and has to be done. However, the success that has been achieved already is an inspiration to many to continue helping women realise the power in working together.



Abadahigwa Cooperative members in Murundi expo

Abadahigwa Cooperative is one of the oldest cooperatives in Western Province for it has been in existence since 1994. Operating from Kareba village in Murundi Sector, Karongi District, only two women members of the group survived the 1994 genocide.

Even when the two members resumed the business of pottery, the only activity of the cooperative, they were doing it on an individual basis. 15 women approached the sector office and requested to operate from an abandoned office. "In 1998 we resumed operating, hired three casual labourers to collect clay, stone dust and firewood to fire the products in the kiln," explains Mukantwari Stephanie, the 37 year old mother of three who has another



their first combined efforts. "The plants were invaded by disease and got stunted. Not a single return was realized. They could not even pay for land rental. Members left in drifts. They only saw hostile mountings of losses to the vagaries of nature."

In 2010, ActionAid Rwanda came to the rescue of the 110 members that were left in the Indatwa Cooperative. "When ActionAid Rwanda donated Rwf4.8m to our cooperative, we bought a hectare of land, Irish potato seeds, fertilizers, backpack sprayers, fertilizers and we got back into farming with a new energized passion. The first 2010 harvest was a bingo. We reaped 4 tonnes from which Rwf240,000 was earned and deposited on the Cooperative account in BPR. Some Irish were given out to members for home consumption, and the rest put aside as seed crop. In the second season we harvested 8 tonnes."

What has made this change possible is not only the money, but the training sessions as well. "ActionAid sponsored our study tours to Gako Training Center where we acquired modern farming methods including Kitchen Garden establishment techniques," says Mukarwego. Mukaruhumuriza Tharcien, 30, who has been a member since the inception of the cooperative, says training in the human rights has also been significant in the lives of members; "The trainings and skills we have gained under the auspices of ActionAid have opened our eyes. When you are not trained you can't know what you don't know and you can't aspire for change. ActionAid sponsored our training in modern farming methods. The knowledge we earned on the Gender Based Violence, rights of women and children have meant we can now defend those rights. We could be abused by our husbands and there could not raise a finger. After the opening of our eyes, we can ask questions, we can work for ourselves and we can support our families. So training has been a big blessing for us. It the training and ActionAid acts of generosity that have brought us this far."

She says because women no longer ask for every item from their husbands, but instead contribute to family support, they are respected by their husbands. "This respect has eliminated that violence. In fact some of our husbands consult us before taking decisions something which was a distant dream of the yore."

Mukawego explains their harvests have registered an upward trend of growth. In the third season of 2011, however, Kibuguza Cell experienced heavy downpours that saw whole gardens washed away, a phenomenon that recurred in the second season of 2012.

In December 2011, ActionAid donated 20 cows to some members. From these, the beneficiaries get milk for home consumption and for sale, but also fertilizers for their gardens. "When we want to sell some cow-dung manure, we do sell to members at very subsidized prices," says Chantal, a beneficiary of the cows' donation.

Because the Indatwa Murimo Cooperative harvests of Irish potatoes are steadily improving, ActionAid Rwanda has constructed a multipurpose house that has been put to use. "During the harvesting period, much of the harvest is kept here. It is our meeting place and plan to be renting out a room to Cell administrators for some big meetings and conferences, especially when we have no produce to keep in here."



In 2010, ActionAid Rwanda donated a maize milling machine to Tuzamure Agaseke Cooperative which was installed and became operational in March 2011. This has been a big blessing to the members.

Tuzamure Agaseke, in Gitesi Sector, Karongi District is a 62 member cooperative created in February 2008 with most of the members being single mothers; genocide widows, incarcerated husbands and separated. Members used to contribute Rwf200 per week to help each other to buy clothes and another weekly Rwf500 for buying mattresses.

The maize milling machine donated by ActionAid spreads its benefits beyond the cooperative membership as the cooperative president Esperance Nyirahabiyambere explains. "We employ three people, a technician and two casual labourers. We also buy the maize from the residents of the sector and sell to them the flour to them. And our flour, Akiwacu, is sold in small and big quantities. Anyone can afford it." The cooperative also sells maize breed to livestock farmers of especially piggery and poultry.

The maize mill is not connected on the EWSA grid yet, so they still use a diesel-run generator, which eats into their profit margin. But on the whole they are making progress. "In a season we can gross Rwf800,000 and do save about Rwf350,000. Much of the revenue is deposited on the account as we plan to expand the business," explains Esperance.

"We can now sleep on mattresses and work together, and feel aware of how to look forward and build a better future," says one of the members.

Nyiraneza testifies about the changes registered in her life. "I can now ably feed my children, buy them scholastic materials, and in the cooperative we emotionally support each other. The ignorance we used to live in has been pushed out of our lives."

The Cooperative president, Espérance, reiterates that opening members' minds was a very significant step. "We look at issues through a bigger window than the miniscule pigeonhole we used to appreciate with before. We are open-minded. There is a big difference between cooperative members and non members."

Nyiraneza, like many other members, has an account with Gitesi Sacco and plans to engage in the trade of beans and sorghum in the very near future. "I have the will, I have the ability and so I will do it," she unflinchingly concludes.

Tuzamure Agaseke Cooperative

Single mothers find strength in unity

- Unity is a strength-giving tool
- Confidence building made easy
- Economic empowerment brought to fore

Nyiraneza Jacqueline is a single mother of three. Her 50-year old husband is in Mpanga prison. He will be incarcerated for the next eleven years. Before his imprisonment in November 2007, the husband, a builder, could adequately provide the family. With his absence, life became one long nightmare for Nyiraneza and her children.

The 39-year old tells how she started a new life of toiling. "I was an ordinary housewife. I had to feed the children all by myself. We did not have land, so I started with renting, grow beans, cassava, potatoes and bananas. But the proceeds were insufficient for meeting the subsistence needs. When the opportunity availed itself, I joined Tuzamure Agaseke Cooperative in 2008. It brings together single

mothers. We started with weaving baskets which we could jointly market together."

Nyiraneza, a resident of Rucango village in Munanira Cell, describes her life before joining the cooperative with little enthusiasm. "I was lonely and fearful. Because my husband had just been incarcerated, I had developed an enveloping cloud of inferiority complex. I could not freely mix with others. In 2009, ActionAid Rwanda identified and started working with us. They trained us in a number of issues. The first tenet I gained from the training was hope. All the fear and self-doubting I had were washed away. They instilled in us the spirit of self-esteem, and that we could work, like any other, transform our lives and support our children."

Books, vegetables, goats and more books

It is not a common phenomenon that livestock is donated to school children. We have all got used to goats and cows being donated to household heads—men and women.

It is not a permanent. Some of the pupils of Remera Primary school, in Rusanze Cell, Ruheru Sector, Nyaruguru district were given goats in 2012 to help them learn the elements of goat rearing, use their droppings to fertilize gardens and, as they multiply, enable them get an income to buy personal items and scholastic materials. The headmaster of Remera primary, Munyaneza Charles, says the goats have got a lot of potential to change the recipients' lives.

"In January 2013, ActionAid Rwanda donated 18 goats to the pupils of this school; pupils from poor families—11 to girls and 7 to boys, with an agreement that the first kid is brought back to school and passed over to another pupil. They have so far not delivered, but the recipients are getting fertilizers from the droppings, the experience of goat rearing, and in future when they multiply, will be able to buy personal and school effects," explains Munyaneza.

He says at the time of handing over the goats to the parents, it was explicitly made clear to the parents that the animals belong to the children.

The children have also been very appreciative of the ActionAid Rwanda generosity. Irasubija Jean Baptiste, 13, in primary six, from Uwamukumbu village, has great expectations from the goat. "I was so excited with ActionAid Rwanda's donation. Of course after returning the first kid to school, I expect to build a bigger herd. By the time I join secondary school, I will be able to personally buy my own requirements. For now, I used the goat's droppings to fertilise my kitchen garden. I believe there will come such a time when I will sell off the goats I will have accumulated to buy a cow. I will," Irasubija promises with a glowing sense of enthusiasm and foresightedness.

His mother, Nyirarukundo Charlotte, 34, explains the goat has given his son an extra notch of responsibility. "He is so passionately committed to his goat. He feeds it several times

a day. He cleans its pen thoroughly and it makes him busy."

Remera Primary School is also among the few that have directed much effort in promoting environment protection and nutrition security. "In 2008, the pupils were mobilized into forming the Turengere Ibidukikije Club, an environment protection group," says the Headmaster.

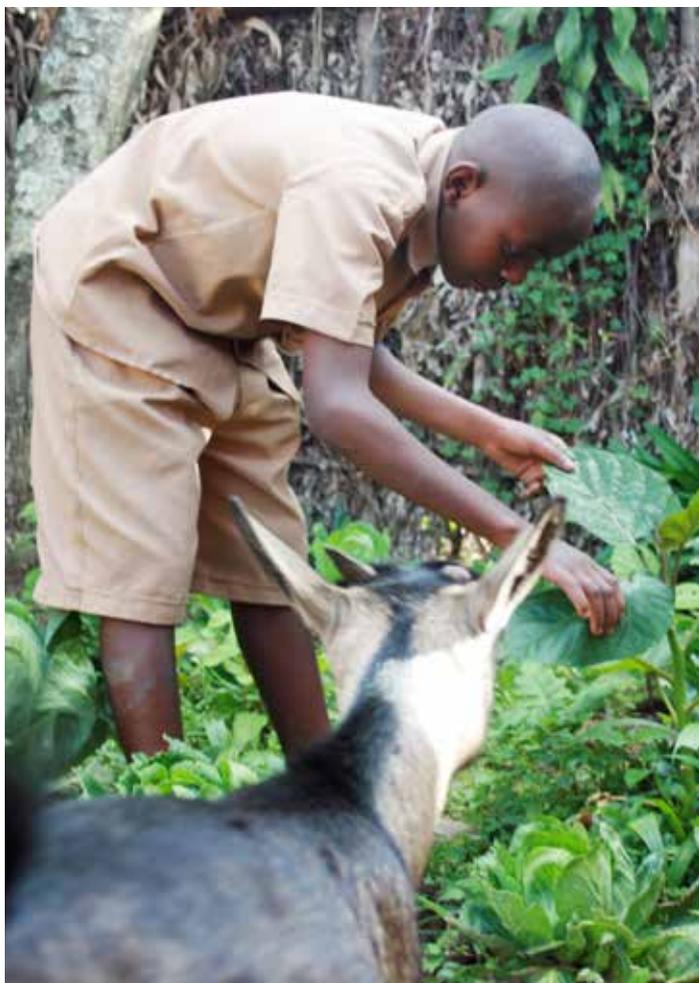
Agnes Muheshimana, a 14-year old p.5 pupil says they have fifty members in the club. "We plant trees around the school, but we also grow vegetables in the kitchen gardens," she says. Muheshimana confides that she has three kitchen gardens at home from which she reaps Rwf5000 per month.

ActionAid Rwanda boosted their efforts at the beginning of 2013 to buy seeds for carrots, cabbage, egg plants, onions and other vegetables using the kitchen garden techniques. Dukundane Eddy, 12, in primary five has taken the techniques to his home. "I interested my parents into building the kitchen garden. I led the way of directing them to build it the

same way we do it at school. From the first season, I raised money which I used to buy shoes, and books. I am now ready to prepare as many as five kitchen gardens."

The entry of ActionAid Rwanda into the farming life of Remera Primary School has spread beyond the school gates into the children's homes. The effects of goats donated and the kitchen garden development techniques are all bound to leave the children and their parents a happier lot.

The headmaster says of the ActionAid Rwanda intervention; "They found us with books only, they constructed new classrooms, modern pit latrines, provided us with new furniture, more text books, sports materials and now gave us goats and helped to establish vegetables gardens. The children are also able to buy even more books for themselves. The problem of absenteeism emanating from lack of materials will be totally eliminated in the near future and the pupil performance has tremendously improved."



Irasubija Jean Baptiste in the kitchen garden and his goat



Nyiramana Violet in one of the Jijuka Mubyeyi Cooperative gardens

The garden, the business and adult education **A cooperative's success triangle**

The residents of Ruyenzi Cell in Ruheru Sector, Nyaruguru District, mainly grow Irish potatoes and beans. A majority of them use ordinary methods, rudimentary tools and local seeds. The yields are usually low, with much of the produce used for home consumption. Land fragmentation is very apparent and the effects of soil erosion painfully visible.

Some of the residents realized that they could extricate themselves out of poverty if they at all combined their efforts. In mid 2012, 24 of them, 4 male and 20 female, formed the Jijuka Mubyeyi Cooperative. It was at around that time that actionAid Rwanda donated Rwf1 million, with slightly more than half (Rwf515,000) of which was loaned to members to start small businesses and the Rwf485,000 used to rent land, buy Irish potato seeds and fertilizers.

"Every member was given the start-up capital, depending on the project they wanted to start. The small businesses range from juice extraction, sorghum trading, chicken rearing and selling beans. ActionAid Rwanda trained the members in; managing small savings, running small businesses and elements of modern farming methods," explains Nyiramana Violet, 36, who also sells sorghum and the president of the cooperative. The mother of three says the sector agronomist has also been helping the cooperative members.

Nyiramana says the ActionAid Rwanda were explicitly clear that the donated money had to be used in investments, not for consumption. "We were advised to only consider using the profit for personal use. And we embraced that advice."

Members save Rwf200 per month, deposited with the Nkunganire Ruheru Sacco. The cooperative has also got an account with Banque Populaire du Rwanda. The savings are sometimes loaned out to members that may have urgent financial problems.

From their first harvest, they got 1.4 tonnes. Their yields have kept on improving, they have rented more land with an equivalent of about 3

hectares, at different villages.

For the loans given out to members, they have to fully repay them every after four months. However, there is about Rwf300,000 that is still locked among the members that hasn't been fully repaid.

Members have also been introduced to adult education. For the last six months, members have been meeting at the Ruyenzi Cell offices, every Tuesday and Saturday at 2p.m, to learn reading and writing. "By the time of forming the cooperative, only eight members could read and write. Today, however, 5 more members can read Kinyarwanda," explains Nyiramana.

Nyirakanani Severine, 58, says she has benefited from the adult classes. "I can now count, write and read. With time, I hope I will be able calculate profits from my small business with smooth efficiency," says Severine who deals in beans, salt, cooking oil and other household items. All members have medical insurance.

Bampigire Samuel, 38, father of three is one of the Jijuka Mubyeyi Cooperative beneficiaries. He extracts juice from banana and trades in a locally bottled brew—Inkumburwa. A former porter in Nsiri Kivu tea farm, Bampigire today earns Rwf80,000 a month. "I used the money donated by ActionAid Rwanda to buy banana. I use Rwf12,000 to buy bananas from which I extract five jerrycans of banana juice and, on wholesale, I earn Rwf4500 from each, and Rwf6,000 if retailed. ActionAid Rwanda has been a parent to the young and the old. I have plans of expanding my business and venture into retailing other drinks and household items. I am able to do all this because ActionAid Rwanda began with giving us training that opened our minds to new ways of doing things."

So ActionAid Rwanda through the Jijuka Mubyeyi Cooperative has given members a chance to grow Irish potatoes, to do own businesses and to read and write. "We really do appreciate," says Iyayo Irene more personal details needed.

Through the cooperative, I repossessed my gardens

Nyirambanguse Anastazia got married to the man of his love more than thirty years ago. She doesn't remember the exact year, but vaguely recalls it to be slightly before 1980. The 50 year old mother lived with her husband, not in exact bliss but within satisfactory levels of intimacy; tilling their little land, enjoying the mild fruits of their labour and raising their six children together.

"We lived a generally happy life. Even when there was not enough money for meeting the immediate household needs, we could improvise; as a couple, as a family. Things only changed in 2009 when my husband developed an insatiable appetite for raising a chain of complaints. He became aloof and distant; spent less hours at home and before long I realized he was seeing another woman. When I tried to complain, he chased me out of

the house.

"I began living as a floater, sleeping at friends' homes. He sold off much of the home property. After a little while, he then brought his newly acquired wife at our marital house. He couldn't allow me even stepping next to our home. I lived like that for 3 years."

In 2011, however, having got basic training about human rights through the Indatwa ku Murimo Cooperative, under the auspices of ActionAid Rwanda, Anastazia started taking measured steps of recovering her status, dignity and property which they had accumulated with the husband over the years. "I had resigned from everything to do with my family. But after this training, I went to the Cell and sector offices to register my grievances, until I was referred to the First Instance Court in Busogo. In the process of the

court procedures which took about 4 months, members could provide emotional support, counseling and at times could fundraise transport for me. I once again felt loved and valued by those acts of generosity.

"I eventually won the case, regained my land and gardens. When our cooperative provided the Irish potato seeds, I started serious farming that today I live a settled normal life. The comradeship I have witnessed from the Cooperative, the moral and financial support all give me a reason to continued cultivation of cooperative values and seed them among other individuals who are not members yet," relates Anastazia with a delighted composed smile.

"I can now earn about Rwf10,000 a month from the farming activities. Members of the community now respect me and other members of the cooperative."



Nyirambanguse Anastazia



Striving for our families

Do you work? "is the first question I ask Edisa Mukamana after exchanging those routine pleasantries when you are building a rapport with the interviewee. Looking drawn and somehow disoriented by the question, she, in a subdued manner, answers; "No, I do not work, I only do household chores."

As I mull over her answer, before I even ask her a second question she then says; "If you mean being employed, I am not." At 31, this mother of four, carrying her fifth baby, looks a bit older than her age. She was born, raised and got married in the same Kabungu Village, Gishumbi Cell in Nyeranzi Sector of Gisagara District.

I do not work, I only do household chores

We get down to the household chores she says are all the work she has. "I usually wake up at 5a.m, to prepare the kid who goes to school. He walks to school with other children. At around six o'clock I also go to dig. We have a small plot of land where we grow beans, bananas, cassava and potatoes. She also sometimes tends other people's gardens.

"At around 9a.m I go back home to check on the children, serve breakfast to them and their father before going back to the garden. After digging, which usually goes on up to eleven o'clock, I then go to collect water from the spring. In the morning I go with the jerrycan. "

Mukamana says she does not tend the garden with her husband. "He is a builder, so he starts his work, when available,

in the mid morning"

As she goes back home, and because their plot of land is 2km from where they leave, she walks past some bushes from where she gets dry branches for firewood. "When I reach home, I have to prepare lunch very fast because by that time the children are very hungry."

Mukamana says she does all the household work; laundry, washing utensils, cleaning the compound, and supplies all the time to take care of the children on an hourly basis.

"Then when does your husband help you with the work at home?" I ask. Her fast answer springs to her flushed face—Astonishment! It is then accompanied with words; "What do you want him to do? To wash? No! He takes care of us in bigger ways, I can take of the family in the smaller ways I can afford."



Jacqueline Nyiranzirera (in red and blue coat) with other members of the Cooperative

Ibyiringiro Cooperative

Rebuilding confidence and nurturing the values of positive living

Jacqueline Nyiranzirera is a 42 year old widow. A resident of Rwinuma village, Kibuguza Cell in Shyngiro Sector, Musanze District, she has lived with HIV for the last ten years. Ever since she realized that she has the virus that causes AIDS, her emotional and physical life has been oscillating between the storms of mad dashing from the community, self condemnation and rising to the horizon to give her inner self and those around her a streaming dawn of assurance and hope.

Jacqueline's woes were birthed when she lost her husband in 2003 to HIV. The society passed their judgment to

the remaining members of the family, splashing them with soiled tags of promiscuity and illicit behavior. "There was much discrimination, dehumanization and demonization. The stigma was so thick and infectious. We could not even borrow anything from a neighbor, a relative or a friend. We were named 'the sick' and our children at school were rag-named 'children of the sick'. This accusatory state of affairs became so overwhelming that I started feeling guilty, like I sought it out and brought the curse upon myself," she reminisces.

She recollects that the medical personnel

in the locality could only give ordinary medicines. "We were usually given painkillers. Many of the infected persons of the time succumbed to the virus."

In 2005, Jackie joined efforts with 12 other people in her ilk to start the Ibyiringiro Cooperative, with an aim of giving moral and other forms of support to each other. "It was thenceforth that our lives began to change for the better. Social Workers from Ruhengeri Catholic Diocese gave us some counseling and took us through some sessions on peace and justice. They taught us how to handle ourselves, living positively and a complete

life devoid of worries. CARITAS Rwanda gave us some assistance—clothes, food and counseling on medical consumption regimes of the infected persons," says Jackie who is the President of the cooperative that today has 42 members.

The improvement of Jackie's life has been a function of many interventions. She, however, has special appreciation of the ActionAid Rwanda intervention.

"In 2006 ActionAid Rwanda through the Shyngiro Sector offices reached us. They trained us on human rights and counseled us on the best ways of continuing to live positively, support ourselves, other infected persons and our families. They then built two schools at Gakingo and Mudende, which helped in reducing distances our children had to trek to get to school. The children who had dropped out of school were given uniforms and walked back to school," she explains.

She says that besides, 12 members that were in grass-thatched houses were given iron sheets. Nyirakwibuka Lucy is one of the beneficiaries. "I used to live in a leaking grass-thatched house until ActionAid gave me 30 iron sheets. Now I live in a very comfortable environment. Even the opportunistic diseases that could gain traction because of sleeping poorly have since been assuaged," says Lucy, a resident of Rwinuma, Kibuguza Cell in Shyngiro, Musanze District.

Jackie thought of sharing what she had been able to gain with others. "In 2006 after undergoing a 10-day training in Kigali, I went about telling people why coming out in the open is important, how they can be helped and live happily. This is how the Ibyiringiro Cooperative grew its membership to the present 42."

Jacqueline has led the cooperative with the power of example. When she recollected herself, she embarked on working harder and smarter. "I now employ modern farming methods to grow Irish potatoes, maize and beans. I also have 20 chicken, layers. I have two sheep and one cow which is very instrumental in supporting my family. We drink milk, sell some and get fertilizers for the gardens. On the whole, I earn about Rwf35,000 a month. We are now respected and accepted members of the community," says the now confident mother of three, two of who are now in vocational schools and the youngest, 16, in senior two.

But all is not well. Nyirandayambaze Bonnefield, 48, says that when the doctor who attends to them at the Kibuguza Medical Center, other medical personnel are very reluctant to attend to their health needs. "They need to be more flexible," she observes. But members, on the whole, are appreciative of the way they have been helped; to live again, to support their families and to hope. Jacqueline wraps it distinctly; "Today, with a good amount of certainty, we can face tomorrow."