

PART II

Graduate Stories



Image: Adeline Uwamahoro

Adeline Uwamahoro's story¹

Thesis: 'Assessing the effects of a "women to women" entrepreneurship training/mentoring program in Rwanda: Rwanda Peace Through Business Program.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1977, the first born in a family of seven children with three sisters and three brothers. I am Rwandese by nationality and my parents moved to Rwanda when I was four years old. I studied primary and secondary school in Kigali at Groupe Scolaire Notre Dame de Citeaux.

Career and higher education

I then taught at Gitega primary school, before going to the National University of Rwanda at Butare where I finished with a degree in Educational Psychology in 2005. I particularly feel privileged by doing the master's degree because it is intrinsically connected to the vocation that I chose of being a women's activist. It equipped me with necessary knowledge and skills in gender for my realisation and for my contribution to women's development in the world, and particularly in Rwanda. I have been CEO of a business Rwanda LinkCycle Company since 2006.

Personal life

I married in 2004 and have two children, a girl born in 2005 and a boy in 2006. In 2006, I began to work at the Kigali Health Institute and since then I have done much training on HIV/AIDS, social work and gender. I also completed a

postgraduate diploma in counselling. I am a risk taker, optimistic and dynamic, but I am most happy when I take time to be quiet and explore nature. This helps me to listen to myself and feel peacefulness inside. During weekends and holidays, I love watching movies and reading non-fiction books.

I like handcrafts made by women, not just for seeing them as beautiful but also because they represent the hands of the empowered women who made them. I look at entrepreneurship as a catalyst to women's empowerment since many women didn't have the same opportunity to study as much as men, but I am sure that women are clever and could succeed if they were given a chance. They have inner potential which can be triggered for their empowerment.

Role models

I admire people who are passionate and with a strong sense of purpose. My personal unconventional hero is my Dad. I admire him so much for his strength. He made all of our challenges a lot lighter to bear because of his positivity and integrity. Ever since I was very young he used to encourage me, believe in me and show me that I have to think big and to go far. He created confidence in me and I really feel this confidence in every situation I have to face. It also motivates me to give each challenge my best shot, trusting that the future will be worth everything, as long as I don't give up on the current challenges I meet in everyday life.

Looking forward

All the colleagues I had in the Master of Gender and Development program inspired me. I believe that, as Rwandan gender experts, we will all work together and bring out the best in each other and I am looking forward to being part of a team with them to strengthen gender equality promotion in Rwanda.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Adeline Uwamahoro in 2011.



Image: Aline Mukantabana

Aline Mukantabana's story¹

Thesis: 'Assessing the barriers faced by women export-oriented business owners in Rwanda.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Burundi in 1970, the sixth of ten children, three boys and seven girls. My father was a very old man, who had not gone to school and had no work. He was much older than my mother, who was a teacher and at the same time a leader in the local community. The family left Rwanda as refugees in 1959 during the first conflict. They faced problems at first, but life was not so bad. My hardworking mum was teaching, and my sisters and brothers were all educated and started to help my parents. Mum died when I was seven, so my big sister looked after me, and she was like my mother. My primary and secondary school education was in Bujumbura, and I finished secondary school in 1989 while still in Burundi.

While I was growing up I used to ask my parents: 'Why am I here? Why are we Rwandans in Burundi?' They explained the stories of our history, and from my childhood I was thinking 'Let's go back'. When I finished my senior 6 in 1989, I moved to Kampala in Uganda to join the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), I was still very young. I had met Aloisea Inyumba, who told me what was going on there. There were many women involved in the struggle, as cooks, nurses and fighters and in political and other roles. I was a fighter and Rose Kabuye was my boss. We women faced so many challenges and problems but the RPF leader, Paul Kagame, now president, really protected us in so many ways. We went back to Rwanda after the genocide and, by then, two brothers and many cousins had been killed.

Career and higher education

From 1994, I worked in the Ministry of Gender with Minister Inyumba, and then Minister Angelina Muganza. Both supported me going on to undertake a bachelor's degree. I received a scholarship from the Minister of Education and went to study gender at the University of Western Cape in South Africa, becoming the first person in Rwanda to get an undergraduate degree in gender.

In 1994, when I came back to Rwanda, I was appointed as Director for Good Governance and then Executive Secretary for the Eastern Province, 2008–2009. But all my life I wanted to work for myself, to have my own business. My idea is that, for women to be empowered, they need economic empowerment. I am doing business now and it is going well. I supply food and beverages to hotels, as well as office equipment and construction materials. I work in Bugesera. Starting a business is very difficult, so I wanted to conduct my master's research on women in entrepreneurship. The bank even had to ask my husband to sign for my loan as I could not get a loan as a woman. The bank manager asked me: 'How are you going to manage this money? Can you use this money? Ask your husband to sign.'

When I started the Master's in Gender and Development, because I already had a degree in gender, I thought that it would be easy for me. But the program has challenged me, every day I am learning something new.

Personal life

I married in 1996 to a man who had also been in the struggle with me in the RPF. By the time I was studying we had one son and my husband looked after him while I was away. I came back to Rwanda after my first year for holidays and again got pregnant. I went back to school in Western Cape and delivered my first daughter in South Africa, and immediately afterwards sat my exams. I now have three children, one boy and two girls.

Role models

My mother was my first role model. She was a very strong woman, really tough. Starting from my childhood my mum was a leader, supporting all the women in the village. She was a very respected leader, like a queen. I remember a story she told about a woman who had two babies and was pregnant and her husband came to beat her. My mum woke up and told the husband: 'I don't want you to beat your wife, I will put you in prison if you do it again.' Inyumba and Angelina were also role models to me.

Looking ahead

I loved the master's program and I want to go on to a PhD program. I want to be a role model for women and women's lives in Africa.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Aline Mukantabana in 2011.



Image: Allen Cyizanye

Allen Cyizanye's story¹

Thesis: 'The role of higher education in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment'.

Childhood and early education

I was born in Uganda in December 1982. My family fled to Uganda before I was born. I am the third child in a family of six children, we are three girls and three boys. Among the girls, I am the oldest. I started primary school in 1988 when I was five and, in 1995, I started secondary school in Uganda. In 1997 I returned to Rwanda where I continued my studies after joining senior three. After, I joined the advanced level at Kayonza Modern Secondary School and was offered the combination of HED (History, Economics and Divinity). I finished my secondary school studies and joined the National University of Rwanda in 2002–2003 to study in the School of Languages. After, I joined the Faculty of Law, where I studied most of the courses in French while I had an English background.

Personal life

After finishing my third year of university, in December 2006, I got married. We are blessed with two beautiful daughters, the first one is almost finishing her primary six.

Career and higher education

After completing my first degree, I started doing family business, but later, in 2011, I started serving the Government in the Ministry of Justice, and I was

privileged to contribute towards offering legal services, especially to victims of gender-based violence and child abuse. At the same time, I had started my master's degree in gender and development studies at the Centre for Gender, Culture and Development at the Kigali Institute of Education.

After four months on my first job, I got a job at the Gender Monitoring Office and I am still working at the same institution since then. I have occupied different positions and I am currently blessed to be serving as the Executive Secretary.

Role models

My career success is attributed to hard working, dedication and patriotism. My mother has been my role model ever since my childhood. I also pay tribute to my Chief Gender Monitor, who has supported my career and spiritual growth as I deliver my duties.

Looking ahead

My wish is to be in a community where both men and women are enjoying their full rights.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Allen Cyizanye in 2011, updated in 2019.



Image: Angelina Muganza

Angelina Muganza's story¹

Thesis: 'The changing gender roles during refugee situations.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Rwanda in 1958, the last of two sisters and two brothers. My mother was 40 when I was born. She was a housewife, a farmer who did everything, and my father was a trader. He came to Kigali to buy merchandise—salt, sugar, clothes and bicycles and take them to the Eastern province to sell. We left our home after my father was one of the first people to be killed in 1962, progressively moving until we reached Uganda in 1964. As she moved, my mother could see signposts, but she could not read them. I would hear her telling other women in Uganda that that was the reason she pledged to send her children to school—so they could learn to read. In the rural area, there were very few local schools and I regret that I never taught my mother to read when I was growing up. Later on, she became a small businesswoman. She counted her money and knew that she was making a profit. She then started owning property, cows and goats.

My uncle had left Rwanda in 1940 and still lives in Uganda. Uganda had some policies regarding coffee production, they used to whip people to force them to grow coffee. Some refugees went as labourers and others left, looking for something less coercive. We had lost all our cows but some of those Rwandans outside their homeland became cattle keepers for other Ugandan citizens. One of my aunties, my father's sister, advised my mother not to stay in the refugee camp because she thought I needed to drink milk. However, my mother stayed in the camp so that I could go to school, beginning primary school in 1966.

After finishing primary school in the refugee camp, I went to two different high schools attended by rich children I did not know. I always did well. I applied

with eight others to what was considered a very good school and there was no discrimination if you had good marks. I completed high school in Uganda.

Career and higher education

I earned my tertiary education in agriculture in 1982. In 1995, I came back to Rwanda and worked in agriculture from 1997 to 1999, and then as Minister for Women and Gender Development from 1999 to 2002, to encourage women's political participation and change inheritance laws that favoured male heirs. In 2003 I was appointed Minister of State in the Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA) where I was responsible for labour relations, ensuring safety in the workplace so that people can work in comfortable, clean and safe places. In this role I led the Ministry's negotiations with public service unions before and during the large-scale public service retrenchment that took place in 2006. Rwanda's Public Service Commission (PSC) was established in 2007, and I was appointed its Executive Secretary in 2008, leading the process of staffing the commission, communicating its role to government agencies and assuring its independence. The PSC took over the supervision of the civil service from MIFOTRA, but whereas MIFOTRA had only supervised the recruitment process, the PSC standardised and centralised the process. Rwanda depends on its human capacity to grow the economy as we have no mineral resources. Before the genocide, recruitment was based on nepotism, connection and prejudice, but all these have stopped. The priority now is to find staff, with the entry year into public service at 18 and exit at 65. The recruitment process is done online.

In 2009, I was appointed President of the Rwanda Association of University Women (RAUW) and led it for three years, working to improve gender equity in the country. Gender roles changed during the refugee situation. Men lost their land and cattle, that which made them heads of families, and they were affected by it, going out looking for jobs. Women went out to look for jobs too. These factors had a negative effect on some men, who became idle as they didn't get to do what they used to. For my Master's in Gender and Development research I investigated this situation, to see how gender roles can change without it turning into a negative situation.

Personal life

I still had many relatives here in Rwanda when the 1994 genocide started: my father's sisters and cousins, their children and grandchildren. It was a huge family, 11 sons and a daughter, and only two, a deaf and dumb son and daughter stayed with the sister in Uganda. My mother's family too were in Gatete, on the same hill. It was a big family, of about 300, with wives and cousins. They

had not left Rwanda as my mother's uncle had been in prison, and the women would not run away. So many were killed. But we have no choice other than reconciliation; it is a bitter one, but there is nothing sweeter than that.

I married in 1987 when I was almost 30 years old. We knew each other from across the border and he had had to move during the time of Idi Amin, when many professionals ran away from Uganda because of the war. I moved to where my husband was living in Kenya, and I worked in ActionAid Kenya from 1988 to 1994. My husband has been a professional language teacher for the last 15 years, teaching and translating English and French.

Role models

One of my first role models was Doreen Drake, a teacher at my high school in Uganda who particularly assisted Rwandan girls and boys to get scholarships from various benefactors. She handled this fund, which paid for our school fees. She was a career mistress at the school and she always guided us. Doreen was a very strong woman, very kind, who loved us and wanted us to be disciplined. I feared her and did not want her to hear me making a noise. She had chosen to be single because of her religious faith and was influenced by Pope Pius, who called people to teach children in Africa. I was surprised to find there were women like her in Africa.

My mother was such a strong woman and has been another role model. I knew her only as a widow, and I could see how hardworking she was with her brothers and brothers-in-law. She was more hardworking than the men and their wives. We children were never hungry and never deprived. We were so happy. We never lacked anything, and she always protected us. We never heard her complaining about anything. When we look back, there was no water and no electricity. People were very kind to each other and looked after each other. Rwandans were very industrious and very competitive, despite some hardships. When we saw poor families among Ugandans and in other places, we could see that in the refugee camp we were quite privileged. Some people managed to bring over their cows and harvest. We had access to schools, dispensaries and churches and led quite a dynamic life.

Another one of my role models was Dr Shirley Randell who I worked closely with in RAUW and who was the Director of the Centre for Gender and Development during my master's program.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Angelina Muganza in 2011.



Image: Anne Abakunzi

Anne Abakunzi's story¹

Thesis: ‘The contribution of the “Women Guarantee Fund” to the socio-economic development of women.’

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1964 in Uganda, the first of seven children, four girls and three boys. My parents were peasants working in agriculture and left Rwanda as refugees in 1961. Like almost everyone, in the first years they did not have cows, but after some time they did. I started primary school in Uganda, in a school mainly for refugees that started as a church school but later became a government school. I had to walk very many kilometres to reach the school, passing two other schools, just because they were protestant schools. I went to Maryhill High School for both O-levels and A-levels. My family was very religious. My grandfather was a catechist, and many people came to my home to teach and pray together. Even at the age of eight, I would be involved in teaching others.

Career and higher education

I started tertiary education at Nkumba University, a private university, and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Accounting and Business Studies.

We returned home in 1994, after the genocide. Together with other women friends, we started the Benishyaka Association as we wanted to help widows and orphans after the 1994 atrocities. Many of those orphans are university graduates now. I first worked at Concern Worldwide for two years as an administrator. Then I went to BCR, the Commercial Bank of Rwanda, as an accountant in the legal department at first, later, I requested to be put in the accounts department. Being at BCR encouraged me to continue studying

finance. I became a branch manager at Novotel in 2002, then went back to head office in 2004 as a personal banking officer. In 2009, I moved to Bank Populaire, at the branch for the promotion of women, which was started by an association of women entrepreneurs. However, Bank Populaire is now a commercial bank with branches, giving no special consideration for women, but we hope this will change soon.

Personal life

I met my husband in Uganda and we had a son. I married him in 1999. Unfortunately, he had hepatitis C and went to South Africa for treatment. He came back when doctors suggested a transplant. He died when he was 50, in 2004. I have three children.

Role models

My most important role models are probably my mother and our President. In relation to my mother, it was the way she brought us up and her values of loving people. She used to encourage all of us. She did not think boys were better than girls. About our President, he loves his country and what he says is reflected in his actions. He lives by his word and I admire that. There are also many of my customers that I admire. Some of them are women who are not educated but they are just convinced that they can do something, so they have incredible stories. One woman was a primary teacher earning 30,000 RWF and she asked for an advance of 90,000 RWF which she used to buy items that she sold to her friends—she now goes to buy goods in Dubai and Tanzania. Some come to my office and say: ‘This is my idea and I want you to put this into writing’. They really think about a project. They have not gone to school, but they have their own ideas. They are focused and inspiring and want to go on to higher levels even without education. That is why I think that women’s empowerment is so important.

Looking ahead

I would like to go for a PhD and study the economic empowerment of women. I don’t know why some women come to talk to me about experiencing gender-based violence, but they do. One woman told me about her problem the first time we met, so I called two of our fellow students for their advice. I want to study about this: how do people come to you, asking you to settle problems, and go on with their lives? I would like to leave banking and study the economic empowerment of women. My passion is to find the solution to all this violence against women, to end this war in their homes at night.

Notes

- ¹ Extract from an interview with Anne Abakunzi by A Escrig-Pinol and S Randell in 2011.



Image: Aquiline Niwemfura

Aquiline Niwemfura's story¹

Thesis: 'Land Rights: Women's transformation in Rwanda.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in the Jari Sector, Gasabo District, Kigali, Rwanda, in 1952, the eighth child in a family of ten children, four boys and six girls. My father died when I was four years old. We grew up with the support of our brave mother's efforts, managing a big farm with the support of our brothers, who were adults. The oldest was working in the colonial public administration. In 1962, my family was forced to leave the country because of ethnic persecution and killing. At that time, my oldest brother was leading one of the districts, Kingogo, of former Gisenyi Province. He had friends in Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and he advised my mother to go there, where he had relationships. After completing my secondary education in Lycée Amani in Goma, a well-recognised girls' school, I had to teach to help my mother. At this time, all my older brothers and sisters were married and had their own families to nourish.

Career and higher education

Two years after I finished school, I was offered an opportunity to pursue my studies in Kinshasa at the Higher Institute of Education. When I finished, I was lucky to be recruited in United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) local office, as administrative assistant to the Resident Representative, and, three years later, I was promoted to program officer. In 1989, I became a UN international staff member working in Guinea-Bissau, Zambia and Angola. In May 2000, I was requested by the Rwandan Government to set up and run the Beijing Follow-up Permanent Secretariat, of which I was appointed Executive

Secretary by Cabinet, so it was not possible for me to return to my UNDP international post. I do not regret this, compared to the modest contribution I have been able to make to the reconstruction of our country, especially in the area of women's promotion. To better advocate for women's rights, knowing Rwandan legislation was a must, so I decided to return to school and, in 2006, I completed my bachelor's degree in Law from the Independent University of Kigali.

In March 2009 I was appointed the Executive Secretary of the Gender Monitoring Office. In addition to studying for an advanced certificate from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in gender analysis, gender research and gender budgeting methods, I decided to update my skills in gender at a more specialised level. May God bless abundantly Professor Shirley Randell for her determination and active role in the setting up of the Master in Gender and Development degree. In my master's course I learned a lot about transitional justice, which was very new to me, and feminist research. I already knew something about masculinities and femininities and gender methods, but I learned a lot more. My thesis was about land rights and women's transformation in Rwanda, using the case of Gasabo district. Traditionally, women in Rwanda were not allowed to inherit property, and I wanted to see if, now, they really have equal rights with men. The law started only in 1999. I interviewed women who actually owned land, and discussed the size of their land.

Personal life

My mother passed away in Rwanda in 1995 at the University Central Hospital in Kigali (CHUK). In June 1997, I applied for a four-year temporary separation with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to settle in Kigali, where I had to organise and care for the four adopted orphans of my cousins killed during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. The youngest was one year old and the oldest was eight. Last year, the two youngest, Florence and Fabrice, finished their secondary school, the oldest, Christian, is already working, while Carine married after her secondary school and already has a son. In 2002, I adopted another orphan of the 1994 genocide, Françoise Byukusenge, with whom I have no family relationship. She is the only survivor of her parents and she stopped going to school because of lack of support. She was living with other orphans in a genocide survival Umudugudu [village settlement] in Kimirongo Sector. She returned to school and last year she also finished her secondary school. I am very proud of those children and I am very happy when I see them rejoicing, full of hope for the future. I praise God for having used me to re-give them hope and family.

Role models

When I was with UNDP my mentor was Robin Kinlock, the Chief of Staff in the New York Office. He used to be my boss in DRC. Once, when I was offered a good post in the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), Somalia, he recommended that I should not go there, but continue to gain what I was achieving and keep my life safe. He was keen for me to be an international staff member.

Looking ahead

My dreams for the future are to become a good writer and a publisher on gender matters and to participate through consultancies in regional and international fora on gender and development.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Aquiline Niwemfura in 2011. She was still studying for her master's degree when she contracted breast cancer in 2012 and travelled to India for surgery. She returned to complete her degree and continue to work in the Gender Monitoring Office. Sadly, she passed away in 2014.



Image: Claudine Murindahabi

Claudine Murindahabi's story¹

Thesis: 'Women's role in fighting against domestic violence in Rwanda using the Participatory Action Research Model'.

Childhood and early education

I was born in a family of six people, including my parents and four children, one boy and three girls. Unfortunately, one son and one daughter passed away and, later, my father perished during the circumstances surrounding the 1994 horrible event: the genocide. I, my young sister and my mother were struggling to cope with the aftermath and consequences. My mother was a teacher in primary school and managed to do her best to get us educated up to university level. Later on, she retired, and it is now our turn to cater for her. Her advice and encouragement have made us who we are today. We are and will be forever grateful for her. Actually, her pushing lessons of life inspired me and rendered me full of hope.

Career and higher education

I and my young sister got bachelor's degrees in social sciences and vegetable protection (agronomy), respectively. Surprisingly, when I applied for a job, I was appointed in charge of social affairs at sector level in a rural area. This was really a good lesson of life due to the fact that it was a place where the issue of gender equality is yet to be understood. My position was not allowing me to react to the alarming situation of women in remote areas, but I had a dream of one day getting an opportunity to address the issue of gender inequality I observed that was exacerbated in one of the sectors under my jurisdiction in the Northern Province.

During my childhood, I was told that women are weak, but I did not believe it because my motto is: 'Known and positive weaknesses are more than strength'. Fortunately, after two years of bad experiences in a rural area, I got a job at one of local NGOs (HAGURUKA) which has the overall goal of defending women's and children's rights by assisting people in need of legal representation and providing psychosocial assistance. For the last three years, I have worked there as a counsellor. I help people with different problems to overcome them. Due to the fact that I was working in close relationship with women and children whose rights were denied, I had in mind that, once I got a chance, I would take a gender course. I managed to enrol in the master's gender programme in the Kigali Institute of Education. The knowledge that I am getting from KIE will allow me to be helpful for my country.

Personal life

I am married and have one son. My husband has two degrees, one in education (sports) and one in law. He likes studies and is always pushing me to go far in my studies because he tells me that my future is bright.

Looking ahead

I wish to now go up to a PhD in gender.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Claudine Murindahabi in 2011.



Image: Donatha Gihana

Donatha Gihana's story¹

Thesis: 'Analysing impact of the nine years basic education policy on girls' education: A gender perspective'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Kampala, Uganda, and I am the firstborn of six children. My parents were Rwandese refugees who had fled their motherland and joined other family members who had already exiled in Uganda due to political tensions. My father ran a small store for men's suits in Kampala and was part of the Rwandese community who had joined hands to own different stores in order to earn a living and take care of their families. Mama has been and will always be my role model. She initiated and ran small businesses including selling clothes and food for cash and was determined to educate all her six children, irrespective of their gender! Papa and Mama worked hard to pay school fees in time so that we do not miss any classes. Papa took a deep interest in our studies and at the beginning of each term he took extra time to meet with all our teachers. He kept a very strong relationship with our teachers and always checked in to see if any of us were weak in any subject and, where necessary, he paid for extra lessons. Papa's regular follow up at school gave me confidence as a young girl and my teachers regarded him as a very responsible man. I went to government-aided private missionary schools in Kampala for both my Primary and Secondary education. I was always a top student, Papa and Mama were proud of me.

When I became an adolescent girl in secondary school, my parents were very worried and protective at the same time. My mother provided me with what I thought was even unnecessary, things like perfumes and good lotions from her very little resources. She later mentioned to me that she did not want me to receive any of these things from men and did not want my studies to be

interrupted at all. Mama always reminded me to take good care of myself but did not really explain to me her deeper fears. She always reminded me, using a Kinyarwanda phrase *'Muko, ntuzankoze isoni mu mahanga'*, which literally means 'My girl, never bring shame to me in a foreign land'. This phrase brought tears to my eyes, stuck in my head and I remembered it all the time. Mama was worried about her daughter seeing men at a young age and the most worrying thing, getting pregnant in a foreign land, would bring such a big shame to our family. I lived to Mama's statement because I wanted to make my parents proud!

My family's historical return to our motherland is a day we will never forget, 20th December 1996 is a day that Papa and Mama thought will never come. A day that marked the end of being called a refugee, a day of tears and joy—the day we returned back to a country we all call HOME. Papa's ancestral home is in Nyanza, former Butare Province, where most of his relatives were killed in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. Mama's relatives were killed too. The return to Rwanda was a new beginning—although I missed my old friends, neighbours and School, Papa and Mama were very happy to return home. They felt comfortable and easily interacted with our new neighbours, as we were somehow learning to cope up with a new environment. I grew up in a home where all siblings equally supported Mama with household chores, running her small businesses and in Rwanda, we continued to do the same. My young brother went to Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST) and always helped Mama to run her business whenever he came back for holidays. I took care of the house and made sure it was always well organised. Papa and Mama supported each other so much in different business opportunities too. I thank God that I had both my parents as I was growing up. My biggest fear was becoming an orphan in a foreign country, that strong sense of family support, togetherness is fundamental for children.

My activism for girls and women's rights was more evident when I joined secondary school. I was part of the student leadership, actively engaged in different clubs and events. I always found myself among the few girls, if not the only one taking an active lead in different activities, especially when I joined a mixed school back home. The involvement of girls was even less when I joined University on a government scholarship, and this situation always made me very uncomfortable—I always asked myself, where are girls? Why are they missing out in different activities?

Career and higher education

Listening to the radio was one my hobbies, BBC World Service and Radio Rwanda were my favourites. One day, when I was listening to Radio Rwanda, I learnt about an organisation that empowers girls, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE Rwanda). I looked for FAWE Offices and, at the age of 18, I had an opportunity to be a young volunteer in this organisation

as soon as I graduated from high school. This exposed me to a number of opportunities, I connected with Rwandan women leaders then and learnt a lot about gender equality especially in the education context. I experienced being in a workplace at a young age and had access to lots of gender resources. FAWE modelled me into a gender activist! Mentorship is such a great thing, very important in the lives of young girls and boys. Ms Anne Gahongayire, the National Coordinator of FAWE Rwanda then, was and will always be my great Mentor. Without this experience, I would have just stayed home to take care of my siblings and drown in household chores.

The activism I acquired from my volunteering experience helped me to champion gender issues when I joined university. In my 2nd year at the University, I was elected as the first Gender Commissioner in the Student Leadership Council. This leadership engagement built my activism even beyond the University campus. I worked so hard to address some of the major gender issues and negative stereotypes affecting female students, mobilised them to attend university events as well as organised specific gender trainings and, before I graduated, I was already one of the young women members of FAWE, an organisation that I later joined in a professional role, the National Coordinator.

I do not regret doing a bachelor's degree in education and then a master's degree in gender and development. My deep passion is gender, and I really wanted to be an expert in this field. Being passionate about something is not enough without the deeper knowledge, studying gender concepts and accessing different gender resources was very important.

After my master's degree, I was appointed as Deputy Country Director of Girl Hub Rwanda—an organisation that is championing girls' rights—and later its Country Director. Today I serve on the Rwanda Advisory Committee of the same organisation. In 2016, I was nominated in Africa's most Influential Women in Business and Government awards organised by CEO Global and later won two awards, Country and Great Lakes Regional Winner in the category of Welfare & Civil Society. I am currently a gender and development Consultant in Rwanda and Sub-Saharan Africa. I enjoy doing research on adolescent girls, youth and women's rights issues including sexual reproductive health, education, leadership, mentorship and civic engagement, and also serve on various NGO boards. I would like to empower as many young girls as I can and each year, I mentor two university young women whom I expose to different skills and opportunities.

Personal life

I have been married for over 10 years and I am a mother of two sons and one daughter. I have never viewed marriage as a time that would make me stop my activism. I knew marriage should not be a moment that makes me lose myself.

My husband is a very understanding person who truly supports my activism in all ways. When you are open with your partner and are friends, and as long as you are true to yourself, you truly enjoy your relationship.

Looking ahead

My dream is to pursue a PhD in Education or Gender studies.

Notes

- ¹ Interviewed by A Escrig-Pinol and S Randell in 2011, with Donatha Gihana's update in 2019.



Image: Edouard Munyamaliza

Edouard Munyamaliza's story¹

Thesis: 'Improving cross-gender communication about sexuality to promote healthy families in Rwanda.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1970 and was second to an older girl in a family of nine, six girls and three boys. We were told we were not allowed to sit for primary examinations at age 11 and I had to change my birth date to put it back to 1969 to sit for a final exam as if I was 12. My family left Rwanda in 1959. My father told me our ancestors lived in Kibuye. They crossed the lake to Zaire (now DRC) and stayed for some time there. There were three main refugee camps at the time, one was Mokoto, not far from a monastery and it benefited from the support of some monks. The camp soon became a village situation. My father was a teacher at first, but then, those who were not qualified could not continue teaching, so he continued working as a religious teacher, a catechist, because he had only completed three years post-primary. My mother had not studied but she was good at taking care of livestock. After settling in Zaire, they started with one cow and soon they had many of them and a huge piece of land, but in the 1990s there was conflict and all their land was taken by a tribe, so the situation changed again. They lost their land and my father told me this small thing: 'In this country, Zaire, don't invest in anything material but only in your knowledge and skills because this can help you in tougher days.' I appreciated this advice. I finished primary and secondary school in DRC. My father died in 1992 and then my mother died too, and I had the six children to look after, so I had no means to get married early. When we came back to Rwanda we came with bare, empty hands because the soldiers in DRC would not allow us to carry anything.

Career and higher education

In 1994 I studied English in the faculty of arts, and humanities, literature, etc. After I graduated in 2001, I immediately worked with Trocaire, which means compassion in the Gaelic language, as a project officer, and then as a civil society and capacity building officer. The first job I started to do was to work in human rights organisations and strive to become an activist. I started to work as a field officer on human rights issues (Association des Volontaires de la Paix—AVP), then continued to create a youth human rights promotion and development (AJprodh) as a founder member and then President from 1999 to 2003. This organisation grew and with it my passion to see how I could help people to protect their rights. In 2004 I was one of the people who started the Junior Chamber of Young Entrepreneurs in Rwanda. I liked it there, but to do private business is not my passion. Then, in 2004, I joined USAID working as a conflict management adviser. Later that year I joined PACFA, Protection and Care for Families with AIDS, in the office of the First Lady as project supervisor, and then as acting coordinator for 8 months. In 2007, I went to the Canadian International Development Association, CIDA, as senior development officer.

It was really my choice to take a salary cut to go back to work with local civil society, and in 2010 I began to work for the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC) as executive secretary, managing the day-to-day activities there. I found this much more challenging. In CIDA I was told what to do but in RWAMREC I was thinking, creating, and deciding on anything that can help. This was important for my autonomy in career development. We had started RWAMREC in 2006 with a board of directors and Fidèle Rutayisire as the chair. Because of my learning from others and contributing to other organisations' work I was elected chairperson of the Rwanda Civil Society Platform. I wanted to go as far as I could go in helping civil society in Rwanda to grow. I devoted 70 per cent of my time to that, and 30 per cent to RWAMREC, and they were happy about that. I was also appointed a Commissioner at the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission from 2013 for a term of three years, and in 2014 I was appointed a member of the National Labour Council for four years representing civil society interests at national level.

I am currently working as Gender Advisor to a humanitarian organisation called Nonviolent Peaceforce in South Sudan-Juba. The Master's in Gender and Development was very important for me. When we worked on the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) I was with PACFA and had a particular interest in gender and women's issues as part of human rights activism in general. When we developed the gender checklist for priority gender objectives and indicators, I was active in the gender cluster. I had been trained for some 300 hours as a gender expert with CIDA and learned a lot. This provoked a thirst for more, so I said 'Yes' when I heard about the gender course at the Centre for Gender, Culture and Development, Kigali Institute of

Education. When you work in gender organisations you are just receiving part of it, only gaining the practical side but not the theoretical part. I wanted to gain both and to strengthen my skills and knowledge. I had a particular interest, as a founder member of RWAMREC, to try to promote positive forms of masculinities and work in partnership with women to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in general. For a long time, gender has been an agenda for donors, pushing gender on other development partners, especially local ones, and not so much of a home-grown initiative.

My master's research was looking into sexuality practices, a new trend of transactional sex where sexually dissatisfied women, or sugar-mummies, look for support from young men. These women would pay more than ten times the price for what men pay for transactional sex as a result of rigid traditional norms on sexuality. Women are doubly victimised as survivors of these norms that consider sex as a taboo. The word *Abunganizi/abapfubuzi* was forged for that purpose, meaning if you have done unfinished work, somebody else will finish or correct it—that is *umupfubuzi*. I wanted to look at the causes that push these dissatisfied women who are looking for something outside, and they have to pay a lot for that. The word is all about doing something half-way and then somebody else will continue to finish something you started and make the woman satisfied. Being done by women is seen as a shame, something extraordinary, in many newspapers it is portrayed as a strange and costly thing, while nothing is being said about some men who have concubines here and there and are paying almost nothing. So, my studies contributed a lot to my work in advancing positive forms of masculinities and femininities and gender equality in Rwanda through my organisation.

Personal life

I am married now with three children (two daughters and one son).

Role models

My role model is the late Minister of Gender and family Promotion, Aloisea Inyumba. The first time I came to know her was when she came to Butare as Rwanda's first Minister for Gender. At that time, she was talking of discrimination in households, things I saw with my own eyes and know are still there. When I Googled her and saw her entire life, I found her an extraordinary woman who worked very hard in liberating the country. She could walk from Uganda to Burundi, spending days and days doing the travel, and mobilising and sensitising people to join the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) struggle. She was mobilising funds to support the struggle, and she did not use part of the funds for her own life, she was honest and dedicated. The ideals of the RPF that

she was part of and working for might have disappeared with many people, but they are still in her. At the time I read in an article produced by CIDA where she was rightly portrayed as the mother of the Rwandan nation—I fully agree with that. It is true, we have good leadership, but we need the right people to translate that into work hard to uphold those values and to make them real in our country. I saw her real face when she was appointed again as Minister for Gender and Family Promotion and the first visit she made was to Profemmes. She is a feminist who does not have to be in a shell and she came out straight away to show what she is and what she is intending to do. Women and men can be proud of her—she wanted to do something to change the entire country for the better.

Looking forward

I want to continue my studies to do a PhD (when I get an opportunity) and go for more training so that I become knowledgeable and a great contributor to gender and development in my country. My ambition is to take more steps on what I have already started. I really want to see how I can be somebody who can achieve more in gender and development, continuing to do research and work to make a difference in people's lives. In 2002, while working as president of the youth human rights organisation, we helped around 2,400 workers at NUR who were expelled unlawfully. We advocated for them until they were re-established in their work. I was happy to see how people were thankful, we played a positive role helping them get their jobs back and earn a living. If my knowledge can help others I will be fulfilled.

To be behind a big organisation like Profemmes, that is my dream. However, there is a problem in Rwanda that most of the time we tend to work and already empower those already in a better position, rather than supporting those really in a status of marginalisation, powerless, and in the lowest positions in the community. I don't believe the country will develop unless we focus on the poorest segments of our population. Whenever they put in place a women's fund in Kigali, how do ordinary women up country make use of it? A member of Parliament can use that money for more activities for herself, but how does that translate into the welfare of other women in difficult situations in rural areas? The entire effort at national level must translate into something concrete and tangible for vulnerable segments of the population.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Edouard Munyamaliza in 2011 and updated in 2018.



Image: Egidia Rukundo

Egidia Rukundo's story¹

Thesis: 'Gender, culture and sexuality: attitudes and considerations of labia minora elongation in Rwanda.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Byimana Rwanda in 1981, the fourth in a family of six children, five girls and one boy. My father and mother were farmers. They did not have the opportunity to complete schooling because of political discrimination and suffered because of this, so were very motivated to make sure that all of their children had a very good education. My mother and other family relatives were killed in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. The rest of the family escaped because they were held in Kabgayi ghetto for Tutsis; it was like a concentration camp for the Jews. Every day, Interahamwe came to kill and rape women and girls. The young and still strong men were the first targeted by the killing, leaving the rest to die of starvation. The RPF arrived on 2nd of June 1994, before all of them were killed. I went to the Marist Brothers Schools for both primary and secondary and was one of few girls studying at the Byimana School of Science.

Career and higher education

I studied Sociology in Kigali Independent University and graduated with a bachelor's degree with first class honours. Later, I received a scholarship to go to Alexandria in Egypt from 2007 to 2009 to complete a two-year master's degree in development studies with a speciality in project management. All of my sisters and brother have gone to university, but I was the first to do a master's degree. Three of my siblings have now completed master's degrees. I started to become interested in gender issues when I was at university in 2003, working

in a temporary job as a data collector on a project for fighting gender-based violence for the International Rescue Committee.

I worked as a trainer of trainers in gender with the Forum of Activists against Torture (FACT Rwanda), Africare International as Education Specialist and ActionAid International as the National Project Coordinator to fight GBV in and around schools. After graduating with a Master's in project management, I began work as the Gender Cluster Coordinator of the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion. I developed the passion to work as an international staff in 2006 and, after applying for several positions, in 2013 I was appointed Senior Gender Specialist with the African Development Bank.

I joined the master's program so that I could have a theoretical understanding of my gender practice. My research thesis was on gender, culture and sexuality, particularly looking at attitudes and considerations of labia minora elongation. This work has been published. The master's degree qualified me to become Senior Gender Specialist at the African Development Bank (AfDB). I am now interested in conducting research on the role of women in decision-making positions in the organisation. As a senior gender specialist at the AfDB, I am responsible for gender mainstreaming in the bank's operations and participate in preparation and appraisal missions to conduct gender analyses and propose specific activities to promote gender equality and empower women. I also act as peer reviewer of project concept notes and project appraisal reports.

Personal life

I married in 2010 and my husband has been supportive of my studies. I was pregnant when studying for my MGD and I am now a mother of a three-year-old daughter.

Role models

From February 2015, I have had a mentor, Dr Victoria Chisala, the division manager at the AfDB. She coaches and guides me on career development and how to deal with the international work environment and family. I also have another role model, Mrs Geraldine J Fraser-Moleketi, the Special Envoy on gender at the AfDB. My other role models in the past have been: the Representative of Africare Rwanda in 2006, Mr Obura Willis, the first international staff I meet and who inspired me to be international staff and the late Aloisea Inyumba, Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, for her simplicity, tenacity and passion for gender and women's empowerment.

Looking forward

My goal is to work in management as a high-level representative of an international organisation or UN agency.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Egidia Rukundo in 2015.



Image: Egidie Murekatete

Egidie Murekatete's story¹

Thesis: "Suffering in silence": Sexual and gender-based violence victims at Muhima Hospital.'

Childhood and early education

I am the fifth born in a family of nine children, eight girls and one boy, who was born after me. From her second child, my mother was always expecting a baby boy, until her fifth. This time my mom was certainly expecting a boy and, surprisingly, I came out. When I asked my father the reason for my family name, he said that my mother was not happy to give birth to a baby girl again and I told her to let this girl be a favourable girl! Murekatete means 'everyone should cherish'. From my childhood I saw my mom was very close to us. She wanted every one of us to work hard so that each one would be able to survive when she would not be there. She is my role model, my inspiration. Because of this, from primary school every child wanted to be the first in her/his class, and I was used to being the first in my class. My father was formally educated; my mother had informal education, but she was always telling us: 'Even If I did not study much, you have to do so'.

Career and higher education

My mother loved me a lot because I was her first daughter to attend university. My older sisters got married after finishing their secondary schooling, but I am glad now that all completed their university courses. As a woman, being empowered and having my own financial means has been the aim of my life. I worked in HIV programs with a focus on sexual and gender-based violence and I have observed how difficult it is for women to disclose what happened to them. I decided to do my master's research on disclosing sexual abuse. In

fact, I came across women who were abused by their bosses in order to keep their jobs. In countries where there is no sexual harassment policy at work, women are suffering. Indeed, whatever the circumstances, I work hard to meet my company's objectives.

I have always been ambitious to advance my career. As a matter of fact, after an international competitive recruitment I found a job at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague. Some of my women friends were so surprised because, in our culture, men are the ones who should travel outside the country and bring money while women stay behind taking care of the kids. I like my job and it has advanced my knowledge in gender programming, human rights and addressing sexual and gender-based violence in conflict. Supporting women and children who went through arduous experiences via the ICC Trust Fund for Victims assistance initiatives gives me professional satisfaction.

Personal life

I regret the death of both my parents, especially my mother, who died 10 months before my marriage. Since her death I am always committed to working hard so that my children will have a bright future. I have a feminist husband without knowing it before, because he is one of my supporters at home, during pregnancy and with childcare he showed he was different from other men in this patriarchal society. I am so glad to be doing gender studies that has helped me to look clearly at my vision and I am also happy to be a mother now. It is not easy to work, study and care for a child at the same time but I made it.

Role models

My mother has been a role model for me; she was a hard working person, I remember when the time came to go to school, our father gave us a little money, and I was surprised by the way my mother gave us supplementary money so that our needs were covered. I have never seen my father insult or argue with my mom. Looking at the way she gave birth to nine children and worked so hard, I said to myself: 'I will study until I get enough money to help my mother'. In the morning she was occupied by farming and agriculture and in the afternoon she sold drinks so that she could get more food and money to feed her children.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Egidie Murekatete in 2011 and updated in 2018.



Image: Emmanuel Bimenyimana

Emmanuel Bimenyimana's story¹

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1968 in the Southern Province of Rwanda. I am the firstborn of a family of nine children: six boys and three girls. My father's education did not go beyond primary, and my mother is illiterate. My mother explained to us that, during her time, parents preferred to only send boys to school because, according to them, girls' education had no value. Now, I understand that my mother was a victim of gender discrimination supported by a patriarchal society. At some point, we encouraged her to join in an adult literacy program, but she withdrew after a short period. My parents are now in their 70s.

As far as my formal education is concerned, I completed my primary studies at Nsanga Primary School before joining High School at Collège St. André in Kigali. In 1989, I was granted a government scholarship to join the National University of Rwanda English Department of the Faculty of Arts. Like many other Rwandans, my education process was affected by the war and the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. As a consequence of war, I was not able to complete my bachelor's degree program.

Career and higher education

In order to take care of my younger siblings' education, I searched for a job instead of going back to the university when it re-opened its doors after 1994. I worked as an interpreter for international journalists (NHK-Japan), then for NGOs, including the Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF) in their program 'Justice for All' which mainly focused on genocide trials in Rwanda. Finally, in October

2000, I was recruited by the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (UN-ICTR) as a translator for the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) in Kigali.

In January 2005, I enrolled in the Faculty of Law at the Kigali Independent University (ULK), in the evening program. I was motivated to study law because I was working with an institution of justice and wanted to grasp the necessary legal knowledge in order to be accurate in my translation services. I also wanted to practice as a lawyer to defend the oppressed and the voiceless. In 2008, I completed my bachelor's degree in Law, with distinction.

In 2010, I was excited to learn that KIE was launching a master's program in gender and development and decided to join since I consider gender to be part of human rights. For me, it was important that I could study while keeping my job.

In January 2011, when asked to draft a professional development learning plan, I wrote that my vision was to secure an international position with the United Nations system in three years' time where I could use the expertise acquired in the master's program.

However, I had to suspend my studies at the end of semester one when I was offered a promotion as an international civil servant within the ICTR in Arusha, Tanzania, where I was called to support the Appeals and Legal Advisory Division of the OTP.

From 2012 to 2015 I took a Graduate program in Translation Studies at Portsmouth University in the United Kingdom, to master my translation skills. From 2015 to 2017, I obtained a Master's degree in Criminal Justice (Law and Public Policy) at Walden University in the United States of America to enhance my capacity as a lawyer. From 2017 to date, I am still working hard to realise my dreams as a gender advocate. I am a part-time volunteer with the Department of Immigration Legal Services at the Catholic Charities of Dallas Diocese.

I am proud to have joined the master's program in gender and development at the KIE. The knowledge acquired concerning basic gender concepts and relations will surely guide my future career wherever I will be called to serve. I shall keep my commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment globally. This is because I believe that there are so many women like my mother who are facing different types of discrimination and they definitely need a 'voice'.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Emmanuel Bimenyimana in 2011, updated in 2019. He started the MA in Gender and Development in 2010 but paused his studies due to a career conflict.



Image: Ernestine Narambe

Ernestine Naramé's story¹

Thesis: 'Stressors, coping and social support among single mothers: case study of the mental health project of Handicap International Rwanda Program, Bushoki Sector.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1981 in Rwanda. I am the first born in a family of four; I have two brothers and a sister. My mother is a teacher in primary school and my father was a high school teacher and headmaster for many years and is now a pensioner. After primary school, I studied psychopedagogy in secondary school.

Career and higher education

In 2005 I completed a bachelor's in clinical psychology, and then in 2008, a master's degree in this domain at the National University of Rwanda. In 2010 I completed a Diploma in Child Care and Education from the Indira Gandhi National Open University, and in 2012 obtained the Master in Gender and Development at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies of the Kigali Institute of Education, now part of the amalgamated University of Rwanda. From 2005 to 2015 I worked as a clinical psychologist at Doctors without Borders (MSF/Bélgique) and Handicap International, and as a project officer in various community mental health and gender-based violence (GBV) projects. As well, I was involved in large research teams working on SGBV, child protection and mental health issues in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Since 2015, I have been studying a PhD in Social Science, specialising in education at Lausanne University in Switzerland, that I successfully completed in 2019.

Personal life

I am married to Simon Nsabiyeze. Simon works in the humanitarian area and travels a lot. We have two children, a daughter of 12 and a boy of nine.

Role models

My first role model is my father: he loves and gets involved in his work to make the best of himself, whatever the circumstances. During my early childhood, he never stopped mobilising enough resources and ‘motivation’ to ensure the continuity and success of my studies. My second role model is Dr Naasson Munyandamutsa. He is the most prominent psychiatrist that Rwanda has had and has been a key player in the training of mental health professionals and dealing with the consequences of the genocide against the Tutsi. A human rights defender who has unwavering support for reconciliation, his interest and involvement in research is what pushed me to do my doctoral studies.

Looking forward

My research interests are to report on vulnerable populations, especially children and women. The livelihood and psychosocial programs I work in and the research I have undertaken about ‘Rwandan children’s school experience’ during my doctoral studies have led me to discover that vulnerable children and single mothers are both categories that need attention to ensure sustainable development. I have had two articles on my research accepted for publication and am now working on an English one. After my studies I intend to work in education and continue research, especially with vulnerable children and women.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Ernestine Narambe in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Ernestine Uwimpeta

Ernestine Uwimpeta's story¹

Thesis: 'Efficiency of microfinance loans in the economic development of women: the experience of beneficiaries of Duterimbere microfinance (COPEDU)?'

Childhood and early education

I was born the second child in a family of eight children: five daughters and three sons. My name, Uwimpeta, in Rwandan culture means 'the second child in the family'. My parents are Habiyakare Jean Berchmans and Bazarama Euphrasie. Both were born in Ngoma district, Eastern province, and were educated. My father studied Arts and was working as an Eastern province official agent, while my mother has knowledge of modern cooking. We did not have a chance to live for a long time with our beloved father; he died in 1975 when I was only five years old. A long time ago, Rwandan society did not recognise that women are able to guarantee education for their children. My mother used her skills and means to educate us alone. Every day we had to work hard in order to escape the negative stereotypes attributed to uneducated children when their mothers failed to do this after the death of their fathers. This situation that we grew up in incites me to think deeply about the extent of gender inequalities and their impact on women's lives; we were discriminated against as the children of a woman without a husband.

My mother couldn't tolerate any kind of mistakes; we had to execute all orders she recommended, such as good behaviour, and she encouraged us to study hard to sustain our life in the future. Those advocacies influenced my personality and guided my will in building my capacity. When I reflect on how much as a family we were consolidated, both economically and socially, after our studies because of our dear mother, I tell myself that there is no difference between the sexes to hinder your social and economic progress if there is good will, self-esteem and confidence in yourself. My mother supported our school

fees without any help from our paternal family, who did not want her to stay with us on the family property. They wanted her to leave, but their wish was not successful as my mother was open and educated and it was not easy to practice gender-based violence against her. I now realise that she was a feminist without knowing the meaning of that ideology.

Career and higher education

The idea of continuing my studies became my dream after analysing the posts I occupied as a radio monitor and gender focal point in the Media High Council. I realised there is room to address challenges in order to enhance women's capacity through the principle of equal rights. I noticed that, even in the institution I worked in, there weren't any women among the decision makers because of their low level of education. I changed my post and continued to check on the extent to which women were employed in decision making positions as I moved to another job which did not give me the opportunities to be able to execute gender equality. I had enough of the image that women are not even able to deal with the simple responsibilities of a secretary or desk information officer. The new post of public relations and communication officer let me be open with the public and through that network I received the information that there is a master's program in gender and development at KIE. I decided to join, and I aim at being involved in gender economic development and promotion of equal rights for both sexes. Sincerely, the commitment to changing women's economic situation has marked me and I still reflect on gender inequality through our culture and have decided to double my efforts to improve the negative stereotype given to my mother and grandmother as ignored human beings and unvalued because they were not educated.

Personal life

After the Genocide, I married Habakuri Donat, and we have four children: two boys and two girls. Regarding the experiences I have had in my life, I am wondering to what extent our children will be gender sensitive. As far as I am concerned, I do my best to educate equally our children, but so far, society's norms and cultural practices remain the biggest challenges in gender mainstreaming.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Ernestine Uwimpeta in 2011.



Image: Fidèle Ndamyeyezu

Fidèle Ndamyeyezu's story¹

Thesis: 'Reinforcement of women's participation in management of cooperatives (small-scale farming) as a way to promote gender equality and empowerment in Rwanda: A case study of Rutsiro District.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Rwanda in 1974, the second born of seven children in a rural peasant family with four girls and three boys. My father completed primary school and my mother was illiterate. They worked together in agriculture. My family has a big coffee plantation and many cattle; my parents are still alive but are now old. We travelled to Burundi and Congo from time to time to visit friends, but we have always lived in Rwanda. I started primary school in 1981, when the educational language was Kinyarwanda only, and for eight years we learned French as a subject. I started secondary school in 1989 when French was the educational language, it was very hard for me to be with students who were used to French. I did secondary school from 1989 to 1995 in teaching practice school. I was good in mathematics in primary and secondary.

Career and higher education

I received training in accounting and banking, and then worked for three years as a bank manager for Banque Populaire. I went to university from 2000 to 2004 at the Kigali Institute of Education (KIE), and studied history, geography and education. After graduation in 2005, I worked as a civil servant at district level as a school inspector, a professional in charge of social welfare for vulnerable groups, like genocide survivors and historically marginalised groups. I then was employed by the Ministry of Public Service and Labour as a labour inspector.

When I read about the Master's in Gender and Development course it sounded good, so I applied. It was sometimes difficult to balance professional, academic and family responsibilities while studying. I had an office job in the Western Province, Rutsiro District, and I attended class every evening and Saturday in Kigali. I had to leave my office at 2.30 pm and it took me three hours to get to KIE on a little motorcycle to Kibuya and then 25 minutes to arrive. Otherwise, I either had to get a bus or travel with a friend, who was doing a master's degree at KIST, in his car for the next two hours to KIE. After class, I went back to my family which stayed in Gitarama, Muhanga District, Southern Province. Then, I left early in the morning at 5 am to go back to work. I was interested in doing this master's because I wanted to become a practitioner and specialist in this field. As a labour inspector I had to deal with gender equality and equity in the workplace, to prevent sexual abuse and harassment and to introduce child labour prevention mechanisms and fight discrimination.

My research was in the area of strategies for reinforcement of women's participation in the management of cooperatives. The cooperative business model is a major factor in realising economic and social development of women and men and achieving gender equality and equity. The UN Resolution of 18 December 2009 proclaimed 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives, and called on governments, international institutions, and other stakeholders to support the development and growth of cooperatives worldwide. I was motivated to pursue my master's thesis research in this field because I was very interested in the potential it has as a strategy to promote equality.

Personal life

I am married and have one child, a girl. I like to swim, if possible, every early morning and evening, listen to music and dance. I am a Roman Catholic and like to go to the church service every Sunday. My wife completed a bachelor's in law and worked as a secretary in prosecution. She is 40 and we grew up together.

Role models

When I was in primary school, I had five cousins who were priests in the Roman Catholic church, and it was a very beautiful period. As a younger child I saw them as role models to imitate: the way they spoke, smoothly, kindly, were well dressed, having a car, bringing gifts to our family, accompanying us to church, sharing food and Fanta—it was an enjoyable time. Also, in my bachelor's studies at KIE I met Professor Pierre Ilunga, who has taught me fundamental issues in life.

Looking ahead

In the future I would like to be integrated in the army. I have a neighbour in the army and he has inspired me.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Fidèle Ndamyeyezu in 2011 and updated in 2018.



Image: Fidèle Rutayisire

Fidèle Rutayisire's story¹

Thesis: 'The gender socialization process of girls and boys and how it facilitates domestic violence in Rwanda.'

Career and higher education

I am the founder and executive director of the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC), a leading Rwandan NGO that aims to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence through promotion of positive forms of masculinities in Rwanda. I am also a Researcher and Master trainer on Gender, Sexual and Gender based violence at the International Conference on the Great Lakes region (ICGLR), which is an intergovernmental organisation working on peace and governance in twelve countries of the Great Lakes region of Africa. I hold a master's degree in Gender and Development and a postgraduate degree in peacebuilding, and I am involved in many women's organisations in Rwanda.

After completing my master's in Gender and Development, I served as the Program Manager for a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded project named Human and Institutional Capacity Development. I also served as the National Director of Community Based Socio-therapy, which addresses psychosocial well-being issues including peace of mind and dignity, interpersonal reconciliation and social cohesion among people at grassroots level in Rwanda.

I am currently a board member of various national and international organisations including, Servas International, BENIMPUWE, Living Peace Rwanda, Rwanda Business Owner's Association, Community Based Sociotherapy Rwanda, Hope Assistance Foundation and Africa MenEngage Network. I have also been a board member of PROFEMMES TWESE HAMWE, an umbrella of 58 Women's organisations in Rwanda and the East African Civil Society Organization Forum (EACSOFF). I also do consultation around gender equality,

male engagement in different international organisations including Partners in Health, Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid (CORDAID), United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) West Africa, Johns Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynaecology and Obstetrics (JPHIEGO), For the World (PROMUNDO) US, UNDP Rwanda and many others.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Fidèle Rutayisire in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Françoise Uwumukiza

Françoise Uwumukiza's story¹

Thesis: 'Prevention of minor students' sexual abuse: Needs assessment approach. Case study of Rwamagana District.'

Childhood and early education

I was born on 25 March 1973 in Rwamagana Hospital, Rwamagana District (the former Commune Rutonde) in Eastern Province in Rwanda. I am the fourth of nine children, two boys and seven girls, from a military father and a farmer and handcrafter mother. I grew up in a military camp, and I attended nursery school in Gabiro and Muhima Military camps until the age of six. Then, I pursued primary school with success at Nyarusange Cell, Muhazi Sector, in Rwamagana District from P1 to P8. My mother instilled in me morals and values and taught me to stand on my own. I was the most trusted and loved child of my family from the day I was born in such a way that I was named Françoise, almost the same name as my father, François. My late sisters Uwamariya Christine and Uwimana Claudine used to be jealous of me because of that. I refused to imitate them as we were growing up, since they opted for a life of luxury during their adolescent age and after, even though they belonged to a family with limited means of subsistence (given that five of us were attending high schools without any other financial support except from my father's job and my mother's handcrafts).

I have the wonderful privilege of still having parents in a country where most people are orphans. At the age of 12, I began to realise the importance for a young girl of being trusted in and feeling loved by her parents. The fact that I did not want to disappoint my parents' love, shaped my educational life and my behaviour in the community. I was obedient to God and was tirelessly praying for my eldest sisters' behaviour to improve and for my siblings in general. It was the beginning of a new life that I had in mind: to become a nun. This idea gave

me a future as I faced temptations successfully, in particular, those related to sexual relations, but more importantly, it gave me hope. I always strongly said No to those who wanted to corrupt me and to have sex with me during my early age. In particular, God helped me to strategically overcome the incident of one married man who tried in vain to rape me in 1998 when I was studying at the National University of Rwanda (NUR). During 1997–1998, two men fell in love with me and I was wise enough and strong to manage this very uncertain situation.

Career and higher education

After getting my Diploma of Arts with Education with Distinction in 1999, I joined the convent where I stayed for five years in training, praying and service. One of the men who had fallen in love with me came once to visit me at the convent in 1999. He was so disappointed that one of my superior spiritual Godmothers could not leave me alone with him, but rather kept her eye on his face. The year 1999 was also the year I sadly lost my first elder sister Uwamariya Christine who was suffering from HIV/AIDS, leaving a five-year-old boy child, Harerimana Patrick, under my family's responsibility after disclosing that he was born from a Congolese father who never came to see his child. I thank God for having allowed me strength, time and willingness to accompany her until her last breath at Rwamagana hospital. During my religious trainings and while a nun, I worked as a deputy head teacher in charge of discipline in Kiruhura Secondary School from 2001 to 2002 and in College Sainte Marie-Kibuye from 2003 to 2005. In the meantime, in 2000, I sadly once again lost a sister, this time my second elder sister Uwimana Claudine, leaving a boy child, Banamwana Jean Claude of nine years. I got a short time to assist her in the very last days of her life. One day before her death, my sister Claudine left a legacy to my little sisters to always observe my advice as their remaining elder and wise sister. I was proud to hear that, thanked God and committed myself to observe that legacy of being a role model to my young sisters and to the departed one, even though she realised that when it was too late for her to survive. At that time, no vaccine and no treatment for HIV/AIDS sufferers were easily accessible; I'm not sure if HIV medicine was not available in Rwanda at that time, what I know is that we could not have access to it.

While a nun, I was a school-based mentor in terms of girls' education in charge of discipline. I was trained by ARCT-RUHUKA: Association Rwandaise des Conseillers en Traumatisme, where I learnt best practices about guidance and counselling for two years and was practising active listening to deal with the consequences of the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 in Rwanda, such as trauma and self-isolation among students. I was very innovative in making sure girls were well managed and supported to improve their academic performance, as well as their behaviour on a daily basis.

In December 2005, I was no longer a nun. Through a non-religious movement called Focolari founded by Chiara Lubich that I had already joined while a nun, I had the opportunity to be hosted by a family of Ugandans, Paul and Edith Magimbi, who generously accommodated me during the entire month in Kampala, Bugolobi City, improving my English skills before I was reintegrated into the University for my Bachelor's degree studies. I took this decision after a lot of thought because, within the same period, I was offered a job to work for the National Commission of Reconciliation through the good leadership of its former Chairperson at that time, currently Honourable Ambassador Fatuma Ndangiza. In December 2006, I graduated and was awarded a bachelor's degree of Arts with Education with Distinction from the former NUR.

Afterwards, I worked as a Deputy Head teacher in charge of discipline with Lycée de Kigali. After three months, I had to leave the school for a higher position as District Education Officer in the whole District of Rwamagana from April 2007 to February 2008. Meanwhile, in 2007, I got a contract to work with Amici dei Popoli (as a consultant), an Italian Project working in Rwanda to support the young generation, where I trained teachers at Gatenga Youth Centre on Psychology and new Pedagogy (active methods of teaching/learning). I worked for five years (2008–2012) with the former General Inspectorate of Education (GIE), covering seven Districts of Eastern Province, Bugesera, Rwamagana, Kayonza, Gatsibo, Nyagatare, Ngoma and Kirehe. Under the GIE, I received training in many educational domains, such as Early Childhood Development, Adult Education, Girls' Promotion and Inclusive Education.

In July 2009, I was appointed the Vice-President of the Board of Directors of the former National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), today CPMD (Curricula and Pedagogical Materials Department of the Rwanda Education Board—REB) by the Cabinet of Rwanda.

The year 2011 was the year of great achievements for me. Firstly, I worked as an REB Focal Point with a USAID funded project of the Education Development Centre in its Literacy, Language and Learning (L3) Initiative in Kigali City. Secondly, I won a NORAD partial scholarship with the top marks out of 25 successful candidates to attend the Kigali Institute of Education's Centre for Gender, Culture and Development (CGCD), in the first cohort of students to obtain my master's degree in Gender and Development. Without the scholarship, this hope would not have existed because my family could not have afforded the full school fees. I was attending evening classes, and at the time my home was based in the Eastern Province, Rwamagana District and my job was across the Province, comprising seven Districts. I used to come to the Centre in Kigali after work, sometimes from 200 kilometres (Nyagatare and Kirehe Districts for instance) and go back home after class at around 10 pm because I had to wait for a UNILAK (Université Laïc de Kigali) student van to transport me from the University to Rwamagana District. From 2012, I coordinated Duterimbere activities (a local women's network) in Rwamagana Region

until 2016. In August 2013, I joined RWAMREC (Rwanda Men's Resource Centre), a local NGO aimed at men and women working together for gender equality where I worked as a Community Trainer for a Project called 'MenCare': 'Bandeberaho' in Kinyarwanda meaning 'I'm a role model man' supported by Promundo-US. In December 2013, I founded a Club at Rwamagana District for an organisation called Soroptimist International and coordinated its activities up to March 2015, advocating for girls and young women with unwanted pregnancies, involving boys in family planning and gender equality in close partnership with nurses who were members of this club.

In March 2015 I was engaged as an independent consultant with RWAMREC, and Concern World Wide, where I successfully applied my experience and competences in leading the group trainings at Huye District. In December 2015, managers in Promundo-US in Rwanda and in the United States also engaged me in an assessment for two weeks to evaluate the impact of MenCare Project activities in Rwanda. From March 2014 up to 2016 I was employed by EDC-L3, a USAID funded Project, as a Provincial Coordinator, Eastern Province, with a variety of coordinating, management, training and reporting tasks. During this period, I focused on gender equality among boy and girl pupils and I always had an opportunity to support girls as well as boys from isolated areas to have access to school resources. In 2016, women from the village to national level voted for me to represent them as the President of the National Women's Council (NWC). This Forum aims at building women's capacity and ensuring their participation in national development through advocacy and social mobilisation under the guidance and supervision of the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF). NWC is composed of all women and girls aged from 18 and above. It also engages in consultation with foreign organisations with similar mandates. I did this voluntary work to serve the women of Rwanda for two years, motivated by the high political will of the Rwanda top leaders lead by His Excellency Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda and Champion of Gender Equality, who backed gender equality movements such as the He for She campaign, leading to his recognition through honours such as the Gender Champion Award by the African Women's Movement. I was also appointed a Member of the Consultative Committee for the Gender Monitoring Office (GMO) by the Cabinet of Rwanda, where I contributed to advising the Institution on how efficient they can oversee and monitor gender equality accountability for all Rwanda Institutions. Cabinet also appointed me as a Member of the Chancellery for Heroes, National Orders and Decorations of Honour (CHENO) to contribute to the promotion of good values and recognition of Rwanda citizens ready to act as heroes and heroines. In 2017, I was elected by the National Parliamentarians to represent Rwanda as a Member of Parliament in the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA), an Organ of the East African Community (EAC). Before the swearing ceremony, I had the opportunity to travel to China in November 2017,

nominated by RPF-Inkotanyi, to participate in the third China-Africa Political Parties Theoretical Seminar held in Beijing with the theme: ‘Building a China-Africa Community with A Shared Future’. The Government of China gave opportunities for representatives of African English-speaking Political Parties to participate in a workshop and field visits and to attend various lectures at Guilin, Yangshuo County, Baise Leadership Academy, Tianyang County and Nanning.

In March 2018, I was nominated by EALA Speaker to participate in the 138th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. Some of the conference resolutions were supporting gender-responsive legislation, policies and budgets aimed at ensuring equal access of youth, women and men to science and technology, education and training, capacity-building programs for women, especially in rural areas, and equal opportunities to engage in all stages of the renewable energy value chain.

Personal life

I met my husband Banzubaze Evariste at the university in 2006. The hard work, the team spirit and goal-setting principles put us closer without knowing that God was preparing a surprise for the two of us, getting married on 14 July 2007 for our legal civil marriage and 29 December 2007 for our religious wedding. In June 2009, we were blessed to welcome our first girl child, Neza Kelia. My family was happy to welcome our second child, a son Mihigo Ganza Angel in 2012, the year I graduated with a master’s degree in Gender and Development with First Class Honours. In 2015, we were blessed to receive our third and last born, our daughter, Hirwa Lisa.

Currently, I am living with my husband, who works as a Headteacher of a Twelve-Year Basic Education school in Gasabo District, Kigali City. My husband and my children are the most important part of my life, as well as the engine of my successes. My husband is a supportive man, cultivating in me strength that I never want to lose, and with his blessings, encouragement and our shared faith in the Almighty God, I am becoming the woman I always wanted to be. It is the influence that I have from my family as well as my personal goals that have driven me to want to excel in all I do and try to be a good role model for my family.

Looking forward

I am now a mature wife, a mother, an educationalist, a gender practitioner, a legislator and a master’s degree holder aspiring to a PhD within three years from now. As a professional, I hope to become continuously an important member of the Rwandan community throughout the institutions I will work with in

the future. I am practising what I learnt, and I am realising at a daily basis that education is vital to my life, if associated with hard work and decision-making capacity, I will always successfully accomplish all my dreams and goals. To conclude, I am committed to keep advocating for the poor, especially girls and women in need and other underprivileged populations.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Françoise Uwumukiza in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Grace Igiraneza

Grace Igiraneza's story¹

Thesis: 'Sexual and reproductive health: The challenge for women living with HIV-AIDS in Rwanda.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Gikondo, Kigali on September 22 1983, the second of four children with two younger sisters and an older brother. Born and raised in a Christian family, I always had a passion for service and social justice. Understanding the role of education to acquire the skills that I needed to accomplish my dreams, I studied biology and chemistry as major courses, among others, in Groupe Scolaire Saint André secondary school.

Career and higher education

I went to medical school at the National University of Rwanda in 2002. During my university training, my extra-curricular activities included community outreach activities, where we organised and conducted educational activities to raise awareness about sexual and reproductive health issues among secondary school students and uneducated youth in the Southern Province of Rwanda.

After graduating from medical school, I worked in the Police Hospital in Kacyiru as a general practitioner, during which period I served as the coordinator of Isange One-Stop Centre, an organisation that offers holistic care to victims of gender-based violence. The job offered me the opportunity to realise my dream: I practiced as a clinician but was also able to participate in women and child rights advocacy. Beyond this practical experience, and in order to better understand the concepts of gender inequalities and their consequences on individuals and society at large, I enrolled in the 18-month Master in Gender and Development program at the Kigali Institute of Education and graduated

in 2012. As part of my dissertation, I worked with women living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and through focus group discussions I learned about their reproductive and sexual health challenges. These interactions allowed and empowered them to understand opportunities and advocate for their reproductive rights.

I then enrolled in a residency program and four years later graduated as a specialist in Internal Medicine, after which I worked at Kigali University Teaching Hospital with a career focus in Nephrology. I then pursued a clinical subspecialty with a fellowship, training in Nephrology at Yale University School of Medicine, USA. I am also engaged actively in clinical research and with interests and focus on acute kidney injury, noncommunicable diseases in resource-limited settings, as well as women's reproductive and sexual health issues, including sexually transmitted infections such as HIV. I have published many papers on my work.

Personal life

I am married and blessed with two sons.

Looking ahead

I will be excited to return to Rwanda upon completion of my training with two major goals in mind: to institute programs and protocols in collaboration with other nephrologists to prevent kidney disease, and also to improve the care of patients who have already developed the disease in Rwanda. I share my personal philosophy to encourage others who are like minded, encouraging young women and men to pursue their dreams, whatever the obstacles may be. I believe that there is always a way forward if you truly believe in your dreams and they can come true.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Grace Igiraneza in 2011 and updated in 2018.



Image: Irenée Umulisa

Irenée Umulisa's story¹

Thesis: 'Male involvement in family planning decision-making: a qualitative case study in Kagugu health center, Kigali city.'

Childhood and early education

I have five sisters, but neither parents nor brothers as all of them died. After the 1994 genocide, even though I was young, I decided to live a better life to honour my parents and brothers. That is why I always do my best in everything I do. This has allowed me to realise achievements in medicine, in my career and in my social life.

Career and higher education

I studied at the National University of Rwanda (NUR) to be a medical doctor. Since I entered university, I have been an active advocate for gender equality as I consider gender as a pillar for sustainable development. I believe that promotion of gender equality implies explicit attention to women's needs and perspectives. In the early 2000s, while I was a student, I was a member of the NUR University Women Students' Association (UWSA) and led the Association as its President for two years. I continued as a gender advisor and trainer for UWSA for another two years after leaving NUR. I have been a mentor and counsellor for the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) girls' school for five years. I like encouraging young girls to fight to be examples in all the things they do and everywhere they are.

After my graduation as a doctor, I worked at the NUR Teaching Hospital of Butare in charge of the antiretroviral clinic. I then worked with the Ministry of Health in the Rwinkwavu district hospital in Kayonza district as the head of the Department of Internal Medicine and in charge of antiretroviral and

tuberculosis treatment for some health centres of the program. I am currently the Senior Programme Officer at African Leaders Malaria Alliance. Prior to that, I worked with the Rwanda Biomedical Center and the World Health Organization. Through these positions, I have gained extensive experience coordinating, developing and implementing programs, and overseeing clinical studies and operations research, including recruiting subjects, conducting follow-up surveys and collecting data. I have published extensively in medical academic journals. Education is important to me and I now have three master's degrees, the first one in Gender, Culture and Development, the second in Public Health and the third from the Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program.

Personal life

I am a Christian. In 2009, I married Alex Hakuzimana and we have now three children.

Role models

Among the people who inspired me are both my parents, Dr. Kathy Kantengwa, the former FAWE coordinator, and Prof. Shirley Randell.

Looking forward

My wish is to work towards achieving my objectives and to offer care to families and individuals of the community with a preferential option for the poor. Something which makes me happy is to see how our beloved Rwanda is developing so fast and I am happy to work hard to be among the contributors to its sustainable development.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Irenée Umulisa in 2011, with 2020 updates.



Image: Jane Umutoni

Jane Umutoni's story¹

Thesis: 'Nurturing women entrepreneurship and promoting reconciliation in post-conflict Rwanda: A case study of Buranga Women's Cooperative.'

Childhood and early education

Prior to relocating to my country, Rwanda, my family and I lived in Uganda and Kenya. It is in these two countries that I had part of my education. I have very fond memories of this part of my life in these countries. Despite the fact that we were living away from our motherland, it felt like home away from home and I will forever cherish these memories.

I moved to Rwanda in 2001. Just like many fellow country folk, I must say this was one of the most wonderful feelings in my life. It was like finally coming home where I truly belonged, no more words like refugee, stateless, foreigner, etc. Sadly, my country had just gone through the worst period in its history, the 1994 genocide. However, despite the horrible tragedy that had befallen my country, it made me happy that at least I had come home to be part of the efforts to rebuild our beloved country. We are still doing the same and by all indications our joint efforts are paying off amazingly. I am very proud to be called a Rwandan.

Career and higher education

I acquired my initial working experience in Kenya, in the private sector, first as an intern and later as an employee in the same company. By qualification, I hold a Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS). Currently, I am an employee in a public institution of higher learning. Working in an institution of higher learning has a way of inspiring one to upgrade their qualifications. Through observing colleagues growing academically and then finding yourself still in

the same status year in, year out; you then begin to question yourself, ‘What about me, why not me?’ This is partly what happened to me; a motivation to grow professionally and academically. My first thought was to try a master’s programme that was in line with my business studies background.

At just about the time I was thinking of enrolling in a Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme, a new Master of Social Sciences in Gender and Development was introduced at the Kigali Institute of Education (KIE), the first of its kind in the whole country. In Rwanda, as widely acknowledged, promotion of gender equality is a top priority, I thus said to myself, ‘Wow, this is a God-sent gift to me and many other Rwandans’. While growing up, the issue of gender inequality never really crossed my mind. This was because in my family setting all children were treated equally. However, as I became older, I would notice issues of gender inequalities around me, but they were just accepted as normal. In a way, I must have known it wasn’t right, but then who was I to change or say anything, besides, I grew up in the same society and most of it appeared normal to me too. Little did I know that, at a much later stage I would begin to see gender inequalities through different lenses and could actually have a say on such issues.

So, I grabbed the opportunity of the new master’s programme with both hands, dropped the MBA idea and registered for the Gender and Development Master’s programme. I was so lucky to be selected among the fifty pioneers and later qualified as one of the 25 beneficiaries of the NORAD partial sponsorship. I have never regretted the decision; I am so happy I made this choice. In fact, I feel so privileged, honoured and dignified to be part of the pioneer group thanks to Professor Shirley Randell and her team for this noble initiative. For my master’s thesis I chose to research saving cooperatives as a tool for promoting women’s entrepreneurship as well as reconciliation in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide. This is my small contribution to an area that has always been of personal interest, women’s socio-economic empowerment and the building peace after conflict. With regards to women’s entrepreneurship, the business sector in Rwanda is currently buzzing with women involved in all sorts of businesses, both at small and large scale, and I must say this brings joy to my heart.

Personal life

I am blessed with a wonderful daughter; she is my joy, my treasure and my best friend. I am also an aunty to delightful nieces, nephews and a sister to loving siblings.

Role models

While growing up, the eldest sister in my family was my mentor. She actually tripled as a big sister, mother and friend. She watched me grow, taught me much of what I know and this has pretty much determined who I am today. There are many qualities that I borrowed from her that have positively steered me through life. She went to be with the Lord years ago but still remains my role model and will always be in my heart.

Looking forward

I am using the valuable knowledge acquired so far in the best way I can in a continued joint effort to promote women's empowerment. I look forward to doing even better and bigger things upon graduation from the master's programme.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Jane Umutoni in 2011 and updated in 2019.

Janvière Mukantwali's story¹

Thesis: 'Community perceptions of women workers in reproductive health/HIV-Aids programs: A case study of Kimironko Health Centre'

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1960, the first born in a family of four children, two boys and two girls. My mother and father are farmers. My father had P4 schooling and my mother P2, and both were able to read. My family was not rich, but we were together. We shared what we had, and I enjoyed it. I finished public primary school but did not pass the national exam. My father transferred me to an Adventist primary school and when I completed that year successfully and passed the exam for the Adventists, I went on to their secondary school, Collège Des Adventistes, finishing in 1980.

Career and higher education

I started university in education and science at the NUR and completed my degree in 1985. I began to teach then and taught for two years. In 1987, I became a professional in charge of training in the Ministry of Health (MoH). In 1991, I passed a test and became a director of the centre on the intervention, counselling and taking care of people living with HIV/AIDS. I worked in that position for seven years and left in 1997. Then I did a test for an American NGO, Africare, and worked there for six months on a project on local governments. Then I was offered a job in a regional organisation, the NGO PREFED, which focuses on capacity building within Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). From 1997 to 2004, I was Coordinator for the Kigali branch of the organisation, and after that I was the regional coordinator. From 2005 until now I am in the unit support program of the Canadian Cooperation.

At first, I was coordinator of a project on technical and vocational education and training (TVET), then I was in charge of the education sector and now I am mainly their gender advisor.

I enrolled in the master's program because it is linked with my professional occupation as I am in charge of gender, and secondly, I would like to learn in the real academic world, beyond professional training. At a personal level I was looking for a team with gender professionals, just to be connected to and to learn from them, and perhaps to develop more my understanding of gender interventions. I also thought that studying in English would help improve my English proficiency. I had not previously had time to practise writing, reading and so on.

Personal life

My interest in gender in general began as a first born. When I failed the national exam, my father paid for a private school education for me and this was very difficult for my whole family. He had to sell all his cattle to take care of my school fees. When I was in P4, his capacity was really down, and the people said 'Why are you investing in a woman? Perhaps she will get pregnant from someone and you will lose all your investment'. He really struggled to give me an education. I never studied with girls only, we were only two girls in a class of 25 students. That helped me to understand how all human beings have weaknesses and strengths. Being with men and with women doesn't give me trouble but helps me to really look at men as people and human beings who have weaknesses. Because I was always in the top ten of my class, there were boys who needed my help to learn.

I married in 1987 but my husband died in 2009 of a heart attack, at 62. He was a good man, seven years older than me, and was a public professional in transport engineering. I lost a lot of weight and still have difficulty sleeping. My daughters studied maths, physics, anatomy and physiology at FAWE school, and now my first born is at KIST studying electronics. The second is in Canada studying civil engineering and the last is in France studying information technology.

Role models

My best role model was my father. He was the one who influenced me a lot in my life. I liked my family in general, but my father was the best and I liked him a lot. My other role model was the wife of our Director when I was in college. She was an American, with a strong character, and had a heart for looking for people who are in need. She would not only look at a needy person but gave them the values to become a woman or a man. She influenced me with her

approach, her principles and as a human being. You try to understand people to be empathetic, but you have to have principles. I am a hard worker, even if I have to go to sleep at 2 am in the morning. My work every time is hard, but I never have problems with my bosses. The first influence to improve myself came from my husband.

Looking ahead

When I graduate from the Master's in Gender and Development, I will work with community workers, because I have worked with them in eight programs and I want to perform better in this area. I want to see how the community perceives them and how the message they deliver changes according to their gender. Women are able to do things but they need an environment that is really supportive. I work with widows and have seen how they can improve their lives, but they need an enabling environment and support, and sometimes that environment is not there.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Janvière Mukantwali in 2011. There is no image with this contribution.



Image: Jean Damascène Gasasira

Jean Damascène Gasasira's story¹

Thesis: 'The Rwandan Government Family planning policy: Muhima sector study'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Rutsiro District, Western Province on 1 July 1968, and I am the seventh of nine children in my family. In 1991 I went with my young brother to Democratic Republic of Congo to study in secondary school and we stayed there as refugees until 1994 as Rwanda had not yet achieved peace and security. My wife also studied in DRC. The chance for Tutsis to get places in secondary school in Rwanda was limited.

Personal life

All of the members of my family who stayed in Rwanda were killed in the genocide against the Tutsi. My mother survived—she was 90 years old and was living with me before her death in 2013. My mother was helped during the genocide to cross Lake Kivu to Ijwi island, where Congolese came to take some refugees from there. She stayed with Congolese families and when they knew that she had a child who was studying in Goma, they started to look for me and found me. I was very happy to see my mother. My sister who was pregnant and too tired to flee quickly during the genocide was killed while running away with my mother.

I am married to Donatha Tuyishimire and we have six children, four girls and two boys. The first was born in 1994 and the last in 2003. After the genocide it was necessary to rebuild my family that had been completely destroyed. My brother is also married and has four children, two girls and two boys.

Career and higher education

I studied in the Paramedic School until 1994. I returned to Rwanda after the genocide and war, and I continued my paramedic courses in Anaesthesia at Kigali Health Institute (KHI) and graduated with an advanced diploma, A1 level, in 2000. I started work providing anaesthesia in the University Central Hospital of Kigali (CHUK) as a non-physician specialising in anaesthesia. Since 2007 I have held a bachelor's degree in demography (Population Studies), and work as an Executive Secretary/Secretary General of the Anaesthetics Association and continue also to provide anaesthesia in CHUK.

I wanted to empower my children by continuing to study for a master's degree. In my work on a peace-keeping mission in Sudan in 2009–2010, I saw in conferences that the United Nations gave much importance to gender. When I returned to Rwanda, I saw in the newspaper that there was a masters' course in gender, and I applied. My work at the hospital was very hard during the period of my master's. It is still the same today, because I am still working in the anaesthesia domain with additional responsibilities in the Quality Assurance unit, where I am in charge of the Resuscitation system of continuous quality improvement and at the level of an advanced diploma. I represented Rwanda at the World Congress on Anaesthesia and Resuscitation in Hungary. After my master's I did a six-month voluntary internship in the Gender Monitoring Office.

Role models

My older brother who was killed in the genocide was my first role model. He fled to Burundi and Congo in 1973. He studied at university and returned in 1986 to teach mathematics and physics at a secondary school in the Eastern province. I was happy to see him and knew that studying was good. I could see that one day I would be in secondary school like him, and get a job and be a good man, respected by others and who respected others. He was very serious and treated me very well. Unfortunately, he was killed during the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994.

My second role model is the current President of the Republic of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. I have not seen such a good leader in Rwanda. He is developing a country destroyed by genocide in a little time. I follow his example in order to achieve many valuable projects in my life and help people to develop themselves. That is still my aim with my master's degree, to help people, those who are not empowered to empower them socially and economically, working for maintaining security and sustaining development as certain goals.

Looking ahead

During my studies for the Master in Gender and Development I learnt theories, insight and skills that have influenced my life and my work, and I expected to be able to do a lot of things. Some have been done but a number of them are still pending. I am still interested in projects in gender, culture and development. However, starting in a new field is still difficult. I wish to get a national or international job to stand strong in this field.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Jean-Damascène Gasasira in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Josephine Kobusingye

Josephine Kobusingye's story¹

Thesis: 'The factors that affect sexuality among secondary school girls in Rwanda.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1969 in Uganda, the youngest of ten children, six boys and four girls. The family moved to Uganda in 1962 due to the turmoil in Rwanda. My father was an administrator then. I saw my mum crying for the first time when they burnt our house and took the cows. My dad went to stop them, but they had a huge stick with nails in it. My mum was behind, and she came rushing to help him. She was cut in the head, but a neighbour came to her rescue. My father was wounded, they had crushed his head, so he had to stop working. The effect was long lasting, and he died. I do not remember him much. All of the people in the same area in the east with us were wounded. They collected money at the church and decided to go to Uganda. Mum had to get ready very quickly. My older brothers and sisters helped.

Although I was the baby, I did not have time to be spoiled. My mother was very strict and very kind at the same time. She was clever, though she did not go to school, but she insisted on us all going to school and taught me how to read and write. She looked at things with a sharp eye. For example, earlier on she was saying people should not have only a few children: 'What if I had stopped at three children, then seven of you would not be there.' Later, when things got tougher and tougher, she realised how difficult it was to send them all to school. Now she is saying, 'I hope this pregnancy is the last, what are you doing with all these children? I could not understand this in 1995, after so many people had died. If we were to replace those who had died, we had to give birth to 20 or 15 children.' But she said, 'The land is small! She mixed modern and traditional positions and the way she did that was very interesting to me. My mother worked in agriculture for what the family could consume at home and others paid the school fees, so we could all go to school. I completed primary

in Uganda but when there were problems during Idi Amin's regime, the whole family went to Kenya, in 1979. I went to secondary school in Kenya until S5 and S6 when I went back to Uganda. In 1987–1988 I went to Nabingo High School.

Career and higher education

I attended the College of Commerce to learn secretarial work. I worked first as a secretary in Uganda. My first important job was as a functionary in a private company. Then I went to Rwanda to the Minister of Health. From 1995 to 1997 I was secretary to the Minister in the Ministry of Education. After that, from 2004 to 2006, I went to South Africa to do gender studies at the University of Western Cape and completed a bachelor's degree in Women and Gender studies.

I still wanted to know more. I know that gender is dynamic, things keep changing and there are specific books available as more information is being generated every now and then. I found that there was a lot I did not know that I still have to learn. I am glad I completed the Master of Gender and Development. I learned many things about what I really believe in. Gender is a social construction. This is the same in America and in Russia as well, even in Australia, where the men feel they have the right to chastise women. They are wrong. Who gave men that authority worldwide? There are a few islands where women have power over men. I want to know more about that, and why is it like this? The more I learn the more worried I get, I am disappointed. When I was growing up, I had a nephew who was the same age, but I was more responsible than he was. He would say: 'Do not forget that you are a girl, come and clean this.' When my brothers would come home for holidays it would be me who had to wash their clothes. They liked me so much, but it was still the fact that it was me who had to do this. I had to wash the plates, and my nephew was there with the others, playing together.

I work as a Program Manager in the African Women Educationalists (FAWE) in charge of gender-responsive schools, two centres of excellence and mentoring. My master's study was on sexual and reproductive health, the sexual activity of young girls. I wanted to know their attitudes, knowledge and practice. In culture and Christianity, people know that having sex is bad, but they still have unprotected sex and can get a disease. They know that if they go out, they can have an early pregnancy, but with all that knowledge, they still go ahead and get diseases. They still jump barriers and go out. I am intrigued by this.

Personal life

I got married in 1999, and when I was going for my degree I had to go to Cape Town and leave my husband behind. He wanted me to get what I wanted but

to stay here on his own was a big problem. People would say, ‘When she comes home, will she be a husband or still be a wife?’ My husband is a veterinary doctor and he understands about education. I had to ask myself several times if I had made the wrong decision. When I arrived in South Africa, I spent three months crying every day because I was not sure I was doing the right thing. After the first year I got an award, a golden key because I had performed very well. There was a celebration with the certificate and I had a photo taken with the rector. My husband put this photo on the table and in the car. He said, ‘You see what my wife is doing?’ That did a lot to make me feel relieved. He did a consultancy to pay for my fees.

Then I did my master’s degree. When we first discussed it there were no funds, and he was not working because he was sick at home for some time. At first, I was scared to tell him, but when I told him, he told me to go ahead and do it. People told me that, when I came back, I would rule over him. I was scared to be as educated as him as he is no longer employed. For me, working in a non-government organisation like FAWE is better than being in the government. When I got the job, things were fine. Now my contribution to the welfare of the home is much better. Now, we are living and staying ok, at home. My husband says, ‘I think you did well by going to school. If you had not gone, we would not be surviving now’. We are considering taking a loan. We had started to build a house, and now I think I can get another loan. Now my husband is so proud of me. He says, ‘My wife is well educated’.

Role models

My sister, Christine, is my role model, and then my mother. My grandad had three sons, all of them with wives. My mum brought up two of them and she was admired by the whole family and had good relationships with the in-laws and the women in the village. When I saw how the rest of the women in charge looked at her, I knew she was a good woman with her energy, her way of doing things, not being proud but very approachable.

Looking ahead

I want to do another master’s degree to reinforce the field I am in and to add on to my gender knowledge.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Josephine Kobusingye in 2011.



Image: Josephine Mukakalisa

Josephine Mukakalisa's story¹

Thesis: 'Consequences of lack of male involvement in the women's reproductive health: The case of selected women in Mageragere, a rural sector of Kigali City'

Childhood and early education

I am 54 years old, the fifth born in a family of eight children, five girls and three boys in Rusizi district in the Western Province of Rwanda. Although my mother never went to school, she was very intelligent, hardworking and lived peacefully with neighbours and family members. My father was a teacher and inspired me. I was among the best in primary and secondary school and dreamt of becoming a teacher like my father. I completed secondary school at Nyamasheke, Institut Sainte Famille.

Career and higher education

I liked to play volleyball at secondary school, which constituted one of the motivations for me to pursue university studies, where it was possible to develop my sport talents by participating in competitions and tournaments. That was achieved when I had the opportunity to be part of the first Rwandan national female volleyball team in 1989. After secondary school, I started working as a teacher at Murehe primary school in a remote rural area. Although this was the achievement of my childhood dream, it was not sufficient. My objective was to teach at secondary school. French and Physical Education were my favourite subjects and I wanted to do further studies and teach in French in secondary school. After only one year of teaching at primary school, in 1985 I won a scholarship to go to the National University of Rwanda. In 1990, I graduated with a Distinction in the Faculty of Education Sciences, majoring in School Psychology. Late in 2010, I had the chance to join the Centre for Gender,

Culture and Development (CGCD) to study for my master's degree in Gender and Development.

I have worked in different organisations, both national and international non-government organisations (NGOs). This has been mostly in the area of reproductive health where I began in 1991 with the National Population Office after the completion of my university studies. I was responsible for the integration of population and development content, including sexual and reproductive health, in the national education curriculum for primary and secondary education.

From 1998, I worked with Association Rwandaise pour le Bien-Être Familial (ARBEF), the Rwandese Family Welfare Association, a specialised national NGO for sexual and reproductive health and a member of the International Planned Parenthood Federation. In ARBEF I occupied the positions of Responsible for Information, Education and Communication, Director of Programs, and Director of Advocacy and Partnership. In 2005, I joined IntraHealth International with responsibility for supporting the development of the curriculum of A1 nurses and midwives being established for the first time in Rwanda. In 2007, I was appointed National Program Manager for the Right To Play Rwanda Country Office, and after excellent performance was promoted to Country Manager for Right To Play Tanzania. With the team I lead, we have done a great job in terms of growing the country program and positioning the organisation as an important stakeholder in education. We successfully scaled up our program at national and district levels. Right To Play Tanzania has one of the program models of the Integration of Play Based Learning approach in the national education curriculum materials for the pre-primary stage, with a plan to extend it to primary level and pre-service teachers training in collaboration with teacher's colleges.

I have facilitated various trainings, workshops and conferences for staff and partners of many organisations. Combining managing programs with managing people has not been an easy task but with patience, hard work and determination, it became possible for me, and led to the position of country leader in an international organisation in Tanzania. There are not many challenges with the job except the responsibilities related to a leadership position and workload within NGOs but we are used to it, and during this time—it is about seven years in the position—I learned the importance of investing in building the capacity of team members, in order to be able to delegate and build a strong country program. I learned about how to motivate team members and retain good talents. I believe that my personal empowerment has come from different capacity-building opportunities, through trainings, experience sharing, travelling to different countries and learning from other women's successes. Inspiration, good coaching from supervisors who provided me with opportunities to take initiatives and make decisions have contributed to my growth, and I feel responsible for passing this on with the people I am coaching

now. I will be pleased when a successor arises from the people I supervise at this moment. Participating in sport has also played a big impact in my life. The skills I learned through sporting activities—teamwork, discipline, resiliency, respect for the rules, confidence, striving to reach goals—have contributed to my personal development and the leader I am today. This has also led to me liking the philosophy of my organisation, Right To Play, which is using sport and play to educate and empower children and youth.

During all these years of experience, I have been inspired by the need for promoting the wellbeing of families, most specifically children and youth. During my professional life, I was appointed to the board of the National Information Office of Rwanda (ORINFOR) from 1999 to 2009 and have also been board member and president of the Women Cooperative for Family Economic Development from 2007 for many years. I have continued to learn and have completed an online course on leadership in Global Development with edX.

Personal life

I married in 1991 and have one child, a boy of 24 years, who has graduated as a Medical Assistant at Baker College, Michigan, USA. He is working as an intern at Henry Ford Hospital, while waiting to continue his master's degree. I have joy and am satisfied any time I achieve my goals and when I am with my son and my husband, taking care of them, and when I visit my mother and see how she is still hard working despite being 89 years old.

Role models

My mother has been my source of inspiration in terms of hard work and patience. Dr. Shirley Randell has been my mentor and I learned from her to always have objectives and strive to achieve them as hard as that can be. My Supervisor at Right To Play Rwanda, Massamba Gningue, has also played an important role in my leadership skills by supporting me and coaching me for high performance.

Looking ahead

My dream of becoming a university teacher is still alive and I am still watching for any opportunity to join a PhD program that will allow me to occupy confidently the position of university lecturer when I leave my work with NGOs. Our organisation is promoting active learning and competence-based

learning and my dream is one day to share a model of teaching that prepares students for the development of their competencies and for self-reliance.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Josephine Mukakalisa in 2018.



Image: Jovia Kayirangwa

Jovia Kayirangwa's story¹

Childhood and early education

In 1959 my family was exiled from Rwanda. I was born in Kampala, Uganda, in 1975 and was the third born and the first girl in a family of five children, I have three brothers and one sister. I completed my primary and secondary schools in Uganda. My parents were teachers, my father in secondary and my mother in primary. They were very strict; all their children are now university graduates. They helped us and forced us to complete school. Being urban refugees in Uganda had a big impact on us and helped us in a way. Most of our close relatives were outside of Rwanda during the genocide, in Tanzania, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, but many cousins died, and our friends lost many relatives too. That created a bond between us and we became like family.

Career and higher education

We came back to Rwanda in 1995, and I studied law at the newly opened law faculty at the National University of Rwanda in Butare. I graduated in 2000 and worked with the Minister for Justice for three years. I was doing mostly family cases. In my work as a Public Prosecutor, abused women would come to me as the only woman in the prosecution department. I helped them with legal challenges, learning from them and interacting with them—and this inspired me to work as a leader towards the empowerment of women in society. I was among the first lawyers to review and pilot the Gacaca courts structure in Rwanda.

The way I was able to help women appealed to me. Then I worked at ActionAid Rwanda for two years in human resources and logistics.

I worked for three years on the UNHCR GBV (Gender Based Violence) committee that sorted GBV and all other protection issues for urban refugees and was able to help reintegrate many Rwandan returnee families, mainly female-headed households, to resettle back into their country. The biggest achievement of the team was to repatriate 4,000 Burundians and resettle over 80 families in other countries like Canada, Australia and others, and to finally close the Burundian refugee camp. On a daily basis, I supported refugees to organise their lives, supervised distribution of food and non-food items, ensured children were enrolled in temporary schools and organised refugee committees and governing bodies. My inspiration during that time was women refugee leaders who managed crosscutting issues around their complicated lives, working hard to uphold their families when their husbands had given up because of displacement and the loss of their livelihoods. These women took advantage of the Rwandan system and laws, which were fair and empowered them, and 80 couples who understood the benefits of living in a legal union had their marriages legalised.

After, I worked with Imbuto Foundation for three years, leading the GBV project funded by USAID—PEPFAR that focused on enabling HIV positive mothers to be mentor mothers at health centres. This project concentrated on the prevention of transmission of HIV from mother to child to prevent HIV negative babies. I worked in 50 health centres across the country and closely supervised 80 HIV+ empowered women who gave testimonies to encourage expectant women to test for HIV and enrol into the PMTCT (Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission) program. These women's stories had a big impact on my life—coming to know that empowered women, despite HIV stigma, can change the world. In my next job with Girl Hub I entered a new world by focusing especially on adolescent girls—with the motto 'educate the girl and you will have educated the world. Empower the girl and you will have empowered the woman of tomorrow'. It is joyful to see adolescent girls becoming empowered, making right choices around education, job opportunities, reproductive rights and marriage, knowing that later this will have a positive impact on their lives, families and society as a whole. With my gender expertise I was in the position to continue to provide leadership in advising how gender can be mainstreamed to ensure equality and equity are attained.

Personal life

I have a girl and a boy, and I have raised my children in a similar way to the way my mother raised us. My mother was strict with me but tried to help us as well. My growing up was influenced by her in the same way as my children's growing up has been influenced by me.

My husband studied political science, which he finished in 2004 at Makerere University, and went straight to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His first political appointment was First Counsellor in Rwanda's High Commission in South Africa. He is very supportive and said maybe I should stay and complete the Master's in Gender and Development course I had enrolled in at the Centre for Gender, Culture and Development, but he is very hard-working and I knew he needed me as a diplomatic wife. This master's course came as a big opportunity for me. I dealt with sexual and GBV cases in the refugee camps but did not have enough knowledge, and I have learned so much since then. Not only definitions, but the course really opened me up to many things. I looked forward to the South Africa appointment but was sad to leave Rwanda. When I had my last farewell with Imbutu, people praised me and appreciated my work. I am also an Anglican, and active in the mothers' union, so had farewells at the church as well. I have been told I am a role model and I have worked with women in most of my jobs.

In Pretoria, I did voluntary work with the Mothers to Mothers peer group to support HIV women, who are very courageous. Testimonies say they still suffer stigma, but drugs are free and things are changing. As a diplomatic wife I would have liked to use this time for study as well, because I was not allowed to work. I wanted to take up as many courses as I could and go on to do my PhD. While in South Africa, I came to learn more about women issues, which were more alarming—women faced rape, murder and other forms of violence—and this made me realise that I needed to complete my studies in gender to find out why there was so much violence against women in different societies. I enrolled in an online master's course in Human Rights at the University of South Africa, which unfortunately I did not complete because relations between South Africa and Rwanda deteriorated and we had to relocate back to Rwanda.

This was a blessing in disguise because I was able to re-apply at the Centre for Gender Studies in Rwanda after being away for three years and have completed all modules of the Master's in Gender and Development. I have learnt to analyse all aspects of my life using a gender lens, including my own family, realising that change needs to start from the smallest unit of society, which is the home. My thesis will highlight the challenges faced by the Batwa women who live in Kigali because they have many disadvantages; first their identity as Batwa people, then being women, then living in the urban area and being exposed to GBV both from their families and community.

Role models

My mother was my biggest mentor and role model and had a major impact on my life. My mother pushed me to achieve my best, taught me how to work hard and to relate with everybody and how to love God above all. During my time at Imbutu, I met my other role models, the First Couple of Rwanda. The

First Lady of Rwanda, Jeanette Kagame is so zealous about her work in helping the most vulnerable families in the Rwandan community to have a better life. She is humble and loves excellence in all her work. She taught me how to work with the local community—she always mentioned, ‘be humble and the most vulnerable will reach out to you.’ Her husband, H.E. Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda, loves his country and his people with so much passion—African leaders should borrow a leaf from his life. They both always inspire me, and I will always look up to them. At Girl Hub Rwanda, my role model was the then Country Director, Kate Wedgwood, she was very passionate to ensure that the girl effect happened in Rwanda.

Looking ahead

Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to complete my thesis because of the demands of my work. I’m now based in the biggest refugee camp in Rwanda, hosting more than 57,000 Burundian refugees (Mahama Refugee camp in Kirehe District). I am with UNHCR as a Protection Associate and deal on a daily basis with children and women survivors facing different sexual and GBV issues. The camp is located in the Eastern province, 15 minutes from the Tanzania boarder. I leave home, Kigali, early Monday morning (4 am) for Kirehe and I return to Kigali on Friday at 6 pm. During the weekend I concentrate on my family plus my weekly reports, it is very hectic, but I guess if I push hard enough, I can still do it.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Jovia Kayirangwa in 2011 and updated in 2019. She paused her master’s degree studies due to increasing job demands.



Image: Jules Sebahizi

Jules Sebahizi's story¹

Thesis: 'Educated women as social and economic agents of change within households in Rwanda.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in the Central-Eastern Africa region. Growing up in a country with multiple tribal conflicts, poor governance, and inequalities among men and women, insecurity and disturbances were features of normal life. As a member of a minority tribe in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), born the fourth child in a family of eight boys, I was raised with a strong sense of culture and solidarity in the community where we lived. This strong community existed despite experiencing years of conflict due to absence of government, being robbed of our national identity, and being accused by all neighbouring tribes as foreigners who did not belong there. Although we lived in the richest part of the DRC, with an abundance of minerals, forests, water, and development aid, our community has been plagued by conflict for over half a century.

After primary school I went to high school for my secondary education and started suffering from the taunts of peers and teachers who called me 'Rwandese', meaning that I am not Congolese like them. One day a teacher said to me, 'We, as Congolese, we are going to take you back where you came from'. I asked him where that was, and he said, 'Rwanda'. I was very frustrated and confused. I wanted to know why this happened. Is there something wrong with me? My parents always taught me to love and live in peace with all people, and yet people here did not seem to feel that way.

In 1991, President Mubutu attacked the University of Lubumbashi and I was forced into exile in Burundi through Zambia. Several fellow students were killed; our sisters were sexually abused, and many of them were raped. From that experience, I started thinking and questioning about what my contribution

should be to change the situation. What could I do to make people think more positively and believe in peaceably sharing the land together? When I imagine how the women students were threatened, violated, and sexually abused, I thought maybe I should just move away from that part of the world. I spent the following years exiled in Burundi and then the same situation occurred in 1993 with the assassination of the first elected president, Melchior Ndadaye. People—even children—were killed, women raped, and families displaced. People went into exile in the neighbouring countries of Tanzania, Rwanda, and DRC (Zaire at that time). I went into exile with a family friend in a place called Ruyigi in eastern Burundi. I spent three months in fear of being killed, but my faith (trust in God as a Christian) and good friendship helped me through those difficulties, and I survived.

Career and higher education

In 1989, I went to the University of Lubumbashi and found the same taunts and discrimination. Getting admission to university was a privilege, not a right to me or those from my tribe. We were forced to pay extra money while other students were admitted with no unusual fees. I endured those frustrations throughout my education and constantly questioned why this discrimination continued. Often people of my tribe were beaten, verbally abused, and qualified as foreigners—this kept them from getting higher education like other Congolese.

Because of insecurity in the eastern DRC where my family was living, I was not able to travel to that part of the country. So I remained exiled in Burundi and had to look for job. As a refugee, the only job I was permitted to do was teach. I taught at Nyankanda College for almost one and a half years. During that time, Burundian colleagues called me Rwandan, while others called me Congolese Munyamulenge—the real name of my ethnic group of Congolese Tutsi living in the Southern Kivu province of eastern DRC. The same situation happened again and again. I used to visit displaced people in different camps and see the pain they endured. Women and children suffered the most. The same question came up again for me: why doesn't anyone—the government of Burundi, international organisations including the United Nations, and strong powers like the United States and European countries—take action to pursue peace?

In 1994, after the genocide in Rwanda, I decided to move to Rwanda for two reasons: firstly, I was interested in witnessing Rwanda's reconstruction and the peace-building process after such a violent national tragedy, and secondly, to explore the possibility of continuing my education there. I was admitted to the National University of Rwanda to pursue my undergraduate studies. In 1996, the first war started in DRC by the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) with its former leader Laurent Desiré Kabila.

During that period, people in my home village were killed and others took refuge in Rwanda and Burundi. Women and girls were raped, forced to marry former soldiers and authorities of the former Zaire, and then brought with them to refugee camps in Tanzania. In 1997, Kabila took power in Kinshasa with help of the Rwanda Patriotic Army. In 1999, I finished my bachelor's degree in Public Administration and decided to look for a job.

My interest all through my undergraduate studies, professional career, and master's level degree was to know why people, despite international assistance, continue to kill and rape, and why women are the first target of all wars but are excluded in peace talks and negotiations. It is in that framework, when I finished my Master's in Gender and Development, that I decided I must search for a recognised doctoral program in international relations to explore more and understand the theories and practices of international affairs, conflicts, human rights, and humanitarian and international interventions. I am interested in studying how these factors affect peace negotiations to end conflicts, with a focus in the Great Lakes region of Africa where I was born and lived most of my life.

In 2000, I was recruited into the public sector as a Junior Trainer under a UNDP project supporting capacity building in Rwanda. From 2001 to 2006 I joined the Ministry of Public Service and Labour as the head of the division in charge of training, director in charge of Human Resources and Capacity Building, manager of the reconversion program for civil servants from the public sector, and coordinator of redeployment of civil servants of the provincial decentralisation process to restructure local government in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government.

In 2007, I decided to leave the government and join the private sector. I started my own consulting company, which I still manage today, but also work as senior consultant with international firms in developing countries in Africa. My 18 years of professional experience, as well as personal history of growing up in a conflict region, contribute extensively to my current work and build strong sense for peacebuilding wherever I go. In addition to my consultancy business, we decided together with my wife to start charitable activities in 2011 helping the poorest widowers and teenage pregnant girls without means. Since that time, some other people have joined us in that precious responsibility. From 2016, as activities grew, we created a non-government organisation called Youth and Women Drivers of Peace (YWDP), a national non-governmental organisation which aims to empower vulnerable (the poorest) widows and youth who drop out to find or create job opportunities through income generating activities and hands-on skills and advisory services. Currently we are supporting more than 50 families in the Ndera Sector in Gasabo District.

Personal life

I married in 2004 and have four children, three boys and one girl. The way I do things and live with my wife and four kids follows the model of my family and I am proud to have that harmony in my family. I married my wife when she was at the level of Senior 6 and helped her get to master's level.

Role models

My father is and will remain my central role model. He lived with honesty, integrity, morality, and love for all people. He was also loved by people. I think all the time about my father, who taught us to be always seeking to be the first. He told us 'don't be satisfied with second place at school, seek always to be the first in whatever you do', and added, 'don't fear challenges; they will make you stronger'. So, when I faced those challenges, I thought about his words and that made me what I am today. Thank you, my Dad.

In my career, one person who inspired me by the way he works and his career path is Ambassador Vincent Karega, my former Secretary General at the Ministry of Public Service. He coached me in my career—he was my supervisor, with a very frank, open mind who openly discussed things with me and showed me how things should be done. I learnt more from him and this helped to understand the world of the public sector. Thank you, H.E Ambassador.

Looking forward

From the situations I have lived and experienced, my central research question is to understand the role of gender in civil and international conflicts, particularly the use of rape as a strategy of war and the exclusion of women in peace talks. In war there is often no victory for women, no matter which side wins. Women are the often disproportionately affected by war, and are hence the highest stakeholders for peace, says Noeleen Heyzer. The ultimate goal is to pursue my doctorate in this area. Further doctoral research will help me understand and contribute actively at global, academic and individual level as scholar in peace making and contributing to equal gender representation at peace negotiations. It will also emphasise the centrality of the role of women during negotiation among parties in conflict in the respective countries. The research will also enhance further international focus on making effective peace through mediation processes. The research will help us to understand more deeply the continuing discrimination against women in peace talks despite international legal frameworks that, in theory, respect the principles of non-discrimination of any form. Additionally, I would like to explore the existing international legal frameworks in post-conflict countries to assess how political peace talks

contributed to reducing rape and increase the role of women throughout the conflict, as well as in the post-conflict period in the Great Lakes Region.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Jules Sebahizi in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Landrade Umuraza

Landrade Umuraza's story¹

Thesis: 'An analysis of women and poverty in rural areas of Rwanda: Case study in Karongi District.'

Childhood and early education

I am Rwandan and was born in September 1972. My father was Twagirayezu Antoine and my mother was N. Ngororano Vénantie. I completed primary school in 1986 and my secondary school in arts in 1992. After finishing secondary school, my aspirations changed and I wanted to become a teacher.

Career and higher education

I undertook studies in higher education from 1995 to 2000 with an option for public administration in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Economy and Management at the National University of Rwanda, and completed a bachelor's degree. I have undertaken a number of training opportunities: Public administration, Decentralization and Management of the Changes; Conflicts Resolution, Human and Stock management, Organization of Work; Circulation, Treatment, Information management and Files; Administrative and Decision-making Methods and Techniques of Training of the Adults; and Training on Public Procurement Procedures. I travelled overseas in 2004 to do a 3-month training course in Belgium at the Institute of Public Affairs on 'The Management of the Administrative Acts, Finances and Human Resources of Decentralized Entities for local development'. My next course on 'Leadership, Management and Training of Trainers Skills Development' in 2005 was organised by the Eastern and Southern African Management Institute in Tanzania.

I have had several management and political experiences in my employment. I was elected Commissioner in National Electoral Commission during

the elections for District Mayors in 2000, and then in 2001 was appointed Executive Secretary of Maraba District in charge of governance and management of the district's assets. In 2003–2004, I became staff-in-charge of civil servants in the Ministry of Public Service, then Director-in-charge of planning and finance in Kibuye province. From 2005 I moved to Director in charge of public relations and human resource management in the former Kibuye Prefecture, then Executive Secretary of Rubengera Sector in Karongi District and Director of administration and good governance in Karongi District. After my appointment as Director of Human Resource Management I was appointed Deputy Mayor in charge of social affairs in Karongi District. Since my appointment in October 2008 I have been a Member of the Parliament representing the Western Province in the Rwanda National Assembly.

In 2011 I began the Master's in Gender and Development. For the thesis, I undertook research on poverty of women in rural areas. By analysing this, I presented recommendations to different stakeholders who played a role in social transformation, including the government. In 2013 I was appointed Commissioner at the National Itorero Commission, a platform for educating and training Rwandans on shared values and taboos in coexistence and contribution to national development. Previously, Itorero, borrowed from traditional Rwandan culture, which was launched in 2008, was a task force that operated under the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. The Itorero was a cultural school and it was the channel through which the nation could convey messages to the people regarding national culture in areas such as language, patriotism, social relations, sports, dances and songs and defence of the nation. Different groups of people get a chance to attend Itorero and get training which usually lasts two weeks. Every intake is given a different Kinyarwanda name and a self-praising slogan which resonates with that particular group—university students, women, youth, artists, journalists, teachers, medical practitioners, bishops, judges, members of cooperatives, district and city council members and committees, health workers and public servants. By 2018, over 1.5 million people have passed through Itorero, and the target is that all Rwandans undergo the same training to promote patriotism, unity and fraternity.

Personal life

I am married to Muligande R. Augustin and we have two children. The role I play in my family is not different to other women. I am a sister, a wife and a mother, but I am fighting for gender equality, especially with the education I give to my children.

Role models

When growing up, my role models were nuns in a parish near our home.

Looking forward

I hope I will continue my management and political career and work for projects which aim at the transformation of our people, especially for poverty reduction.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Landrade Umuraza in 2011 and updated in 2018.



Image: Laurence Uwera

Laurence Uwera's story¹

Thesis: “Child Friendly Schools” as a way to improve retention rate of primary school girls: Four case studies.’

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1980 in Butare City, Rwanda, the second of four sisters. My mother was a nurse. She returned to study at the Kigali Health Institute and finished her first professional degree in nursing with distinction at the age of 55 years. My father was a judge. He has now retired. My mother has been my role model. She was very intelligent in her studies and was always the first one in her class. From primary school, I was also the first in the class and ended both my primary and secondary schools as the first in the school. In my secondary education, I studied how to teach, so after finishing school, I was a teacher for one year in a secondary school in Southern Province.

Career and higher education

I won a government scholarship to continue my studies at the Kigali Institute of Education where I studied for a Bachelor of Arts: geography, history and education. I passed every exam without a supplementary and finally I graduated with a distinction—upper second-class honours. My family encouraged me to continue studying and I wanted but had no opportunity to do this immediately after graduating, because it was hard to get a scholarship. I was trying to apply to go study abroad, but we thought it would be hard with two small children. When I saw the advertisement about the master's degree in Gender and Development with a scholarship in Rwanda I immediately applied and was selected. We were happy in the family because we were all able to stay together in Rwanda while I was doing my master's studies. I graduated in 2012.

When I graduated from KIE, I gained a job in an American non-government organisation, WE-ACT (Women's Equity, Access to Care and Treatment). I began as a Program Coordinator, working on a program to educate people on the prevention of HIV and AIDS and later was promoted to be Project Manager for a project funded by USAID, supporting Orphans and Vulnerable Children. I then moved to World Vision International as Education Specialist and later I worked for SOS Children's Villages International as the Program Development Director/Deputy National Director in Rwanda. In 2016 I began an international position in Guinea Conakry where I worked as Program Director for Child Fund International and I played an important role in fighting against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). I participated as a speaker in the European Development Day's event of 2017 to advocate for the abolition of FGM in Guinea. Currently, I am representing FHI 360 (formerly Family Health International) in Guinea and managing a USAID funded \$12 million project, Citizen Involvement in Health Governance, where I am leading a team of 20 staff in Guinea Conakry. It is challenging to be a woman leader in Guinea because the country is male dominated. I am involved in different women's networks in Guinea to promote women's empowerment. I aspire to continue my career at the international level and to continue the advocacy for women's empowerment in Africa.

Personal life

I married in 2005 and we have two children; a boy named Yvan born in 2006 and a girl named Ketia born in 2008. My husband is supportive, he is a consultant in accounting with a Bachelor of Accounting degree. We both want to go further with our education.

Role models

My mentor and role model is Professor Shirley Randell, my thesis and research supervisor when I was a research mentee in a project on Child Friendly Schools (CFSs) for the Forum of African Women Educationalists, evaluating the impact of CFSs on the dropout rate of girls at primary school level.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Laurence Uwera in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Leonie Mujawayezu

Leonie Mujawayezu's story¹

Thesis: 'The analysis of factors influencing girl pregnancy in nine years basic education in Rwanda: case of Burera district'

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1975. I did my primary education at Mucaca Primary School from 1982 to 1990 and completed my secondary education at Groupe Scolaire Notre Dame des Apôtres de Rwaza (Normale Primaire) in 1998.

Career and higher education

In 2006, I obtained a bachelor's degree in education at the National University of Rwanda (NUR), and in 2014 I graduated from the Master of Social Sciences in Gender and Development. I have been a teacher since 1999 and in 2009 I became the head teacher at the G. S. Kigeyo. From 2011 to 2016 I was a representative of the National Women's Council at the Burera District, and since 2017 I am the president of the economic commission of the District Council.

Personal life

I am married and currently live in Rwanda, in the Northern province.

Notes

¹ Information obtained from a CV provided from Leonie Mujawayezu in 2018.



Image: Marie Odette Kansanga Ndahiro

Marie Odette Kansanga Ndahiro's story¹

Thesis: '1994 Genocide Memories: Genocide raped women's relationship with their rape conceived children, Study on "SEVOTA"'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Rwanda, the first born in a family of three girls and four boys. My family is Christian in the Catholic Church. My parents were both educators in primary schools in Gatsibo District, Eastern Province. They were also the elders of their families, so my entire life has been surrounded by young loving people of whom I am the eldest. I believe this situation shaped my leadership skills from a young age. Furthermore, my early life was influenced by three very important old people who formed my character and made me believe that 'a woman can do'. Those were my paternal great grandmother, paternal grandfather and maternal grandmother, whom we called Mama. My grandfather could not tolerate any abusive attitude towards women. My grandmother was the one taking us to and from school. The three were coordinated in a way to always be present in all stages of their grandchildren's lives. I believed they were my own parents as I considered my father and mother my older siblings then.

When my father was two months old, he lost his mother, so his great grandmother raised him until he married. She remained with the family as she was too old to stay alone. She was older than 110 when I was born. She was very strong and would not allow any house worker to care for her children. She liked to tell stories and she told me she had left her husband when she was young, in her early 20s, because she gave birth to only two girls and was subsequently harassed by her in-laws, so she left with her children. She assured me she was proud of her two daughters and their offspring when they married.

My grandfather lived seven kilometres away but travelled once a week to check on us. He made it clear that he had zero tolerance for any contemptuous attitude toward women in his family. From the age of five, I became my

grandfather's informant on my dad's and brothers' behaviour. This forced everyone in the family to grow without gender differences and with fewer stereotypes. The controversy was outside the family. My favourite games were dancing, poetry, football and spear throwing, the latter not deemed to be girls' games. My father was my personal trainer and wanted me to be sufficiently strong both spiritually and physically to defend myself. He specifically mentioned that he did not want anybody to be able to hurt me just because I was a girl.

From the age of 14 I pursued studies in economics in the secondary school, usually the choice of students from socially highly ranked families, of which I was not. I was a high achiever at school. I became interested in the analysis of power relationships in society, the politics, beliefs behind them, and the strength this power has to be able to shape and construct inequalities between social classes, race, religions, men and women. I joined, and soon headed, a cultural research group, focusing on history, culture, kingship and leadership, politics, epic poetries, writing and dance and other entertainment clubs. The 1994 Rwanda Genocide against Tutsis disrupted my education, which I stopped in order to support my younger siblings. I was fortunate to survive the killings, although with many narrow escapes.

Career and higher education

In 1995, I married and now have three children. Although I had a record of good jobs and great experiences in international organisations, the private sector and public institutions, I had not finished my studies. Therefore, I decided to enrol with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants as a professional accountant, graduating in 2007.

Late in 2009, after many attempts to get admission to universities, I won a scholarship to join the first group of Masters' students in Gender and Development students at the Kigali Institute of Education (now the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Rwanda). The study confirmed my vocation: to study society. I had a strong interest in the relationships between the minority versus the majority, the powerful versus the vulnerable and men and women. Perhaps because I was a genocide survivor and until then could not face my traumatic memories, this served as the genesis of my master's thesis on the Rwanda 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsis and the lives of raped women. The objective of this research was to allow the flow of victims' memories to be told and known, and to facilitate them to discover similar groups to identify with. This revolutionary work raised both theoretical and methodological innovations. At the same time, the study allowed a deep analysis of rape, children born of rape and war and its consequences, in an attempt to change Rwandan society's view of women and children victims of war rapes and community exclusion. Additionally, the thesis addressed a long-standing

deficit in Rwandan women academic writers on the causes and consequences of genocide rape; a perspective that was missing from the literature largely debated by international researchers. It became my first cornerstone, my healing process as one of many members of the genocide survivors' community. As well, it constituted a platform for advocacy to the leadership, law and policy makers in the country.

Ever since my studies, I have taken positions in the community and participated in positive small changes. African and Rwandan universities have invited me for public speeches, women's mentoring and role modelling. I was given an important presidential appointment to head the National Electoral Commission as the Vice Chairperson. I was nominated 'Champion for Reproductive Health Rights' by the Rwanda Women's Network Organization for fighting and enforcing these family rights. I was then elected Senator. I won a position in the body of Rwandan academic researchers, mainly university professors, academics, researchers and media journalists in the National Centre for the Fight against Genocide and Conflict Resolution. We regularly participate in debates on research papers on genocide, transitional justice, international law, governance and corruption.

Since graduating with my Masters in Gender and Development studies where I learnt about and internalised feminist methodologies and ethnographic methods of research, I have gone deep into the knowledge and practice of them as pillars of my academic and research work. As a feminist ethnographer, since 2012 I have acquired important skills and tools. I usually handle a large volume of data and allocate enough time and effort, with a reflexive analytical approach, to ensure proper analysis. Participants who are survivors of atrocities require a sensitive and special approach. I personally have developed a rich experience running qualitative ethnographic research in East African countries. I use ethical guidelines of research in post-conflict countries, emphasising eight ethical value guidelines to guide the qualitative field work: beneficence, minimising harms and maximising benefit, informed consent, right to withdraw, culture, context, respect and confidentiality.

Looking ahead

Given that academic research has been my focus since I was a teen, my next step is to do a PhD. It will provide me with precious opportunities to gain academic maturity and profound professionalism, to learn about other academics' culture and practices and develop a global research perspective.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Marie Odette Kansanga in 2011 and updated in 2018.



Image: Mediatrice Mukeshimana

Mediatrice Mukeshimana's story¹

Thesis: 'The socio-economic conditions of households headed by girl children in Rwanda: Experiences in the Niboyi Peace Village.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1978 in Bugesera District, Eastern Province. My parents are Wenceslas Runyambo and Costasie Icyitegetse. I was the third in the family of six children; three boys and three girls. In our village, many neighbours are relatives; grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. I studied at a primary school three kilometres from our home. I was very competitive because our teachers sometimes said to our boy classmates, 'You should be the first rather than the girls'. When I finished my primary school in 1991, I had the chance to go to a public secondary school at Groupe Scolaire, Remera, Rukoma, now Southern Province. While I was in Secondary 3 in 1994, the tragedy of the genocide against the Tutsi occurred and my parents and many relatives and friends in my peer group died. Only three of us children survived. In 1996, I continued my study at Groupe Scolaire, Zaza, now Ngoma, Eastern province.

Career and higher education

When I finished Secondary 6 in 1998, I got a job in a supermarket, where I worked for one year, and after, I continued my study in Kigali Independent University, in the Social Sciences department of sociology in an evening class. When I finished my studies, I got a job and worked for five years in an international non-government organisation called Africare, in the COPE project, in charge of psychosocial support to Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), especially those who are infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS. In this project, I realised that, in general, all OVC are psychologically affected by the

consequences of HIV/AIDS in the family, but girls are more affected than boys due to their tasks at home, like taking care of their siblings and their parents when they are in the depths of sickness. From 2010, I worked in the Ministry of Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) as OVC Technical Assistant in charge of the implementation of the National OVC strategic plan.

With my experience, since 2005, I have worked in the OVC area, where I saw the different vulnerabilities of children and how the Child Heads of Household (CHH) try to fight for the survivors themselves and their siblings. I also saw how the support provided by stakeholders for the common needs of education, health and insurance for OVC is very limited compared with the needs of children who are at the same time the heads of households. My master's research was about the responsibility of family management and development in female-headed households. The objective was to explore the social, psychosocial and economic challenges faced by the female children-headed households, how they are considered and how they try to change that situation.

Personal life

In 2003, I married Jean Claude Bariruka.

Looking ahead

My vision is to continue to help and to advocate for OVC, especially girls, in order to help them to access to their basic needs.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Mediatrice Mukeshimana in 2011.



Image: Monica Kirabo

Monica Kirabo's story¹

Thesis: 'Analysing the role of women in peace-keeping missions: Rwanda National Police as a case study'

Childhood and early education

Both of my parents are peasant farmers who became Rwandan refugees after they escaped Rwanda in 1959. A large number of Rwandans had to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. I was born in 1979 in Uganda, the third to last in a family of seven girls and one boy. I was always good friends with my brother and always asked God why I was not born a boy, so I grew up with a longing to be a boy. However, when I realised that it was God's wish, I thanked him for what I am and the way he created me with a unique character and personality. During my teenage time, I came to appreciate myself as a woman and became proud of it. I have a zeal to explore my potential as a woman, to use it to bring change to my people and the entire world. I have come to learn that the tools, skills and potential to achieve my dreams are within me.

Career and higher education

I am glad that after attaining my first degree in education and pursuing my masters' degree, I know the sky is the limit.

Personal life

I am married with two sons.

Role models

My role model from early childhood was my father; regardless of the challenges he went through as a refugee he tirelessly did his best to make sure all his children were educated. He was always proud of us because most of us performed well in class. He always stressed that the best gift you can ever give your child is education.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Monica Kirabo in 2011.



Image: Natacha Kaneza

Natacha Kaneza's story¹

Thesis: 'Women entrepreneurs and access to finance: Challenges faced by rural women in Bugesera District, Rwanda'

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1980. I am the second child in a family of five children, four girls and a boy. I did my primary and secondary education in schools managed by Catholic sisters. My mother was an assistant in a public company and had a secondary level education, and my dad was an engineer and a manager of a national institute in charge of protecting the environment. Even though my father knew that women had no role in determining the sex of the future child, he blamed my mother, saying that it was her fault that they had mostly girls. It was my father who decided everything: management of family properties, school of the children, etc. According to him, my mother had nothing to say even though most of the time it was her ideas that were practical. However, due to our culture, she had to be submissive and try to correct the consequences of the wrong decisions made by my dad without my father knowing it. Even if my dad was so patriarchal, he pushed me and my sisters to study hard and we were all performing well at school.

Until now, the majority of my family members are still in Burundi. There is no political will for gender equality there. When I was doing my studies, I tried to explain to my father the gender concepts, but for him, women have nothing to say. He thought that gender equality will bring women to disobey their husbands. However, I promised myself that one day I will go there to explain to my father and other family members that gender equality is a good policy for the development of the family and the country.

Career and higher education

In university, I studied Economics and finished with distinction. From my life and work experience, I knew that women have problems with access to formal credit. That's why I took a decision to do my thesis in the Master's in Gender and Development on challenges faced by women, especially women entrepreneurs, while accessing formal credit in the banks and the extent to which credit can empower them and change their lives once they access to it. I also identified strategies women use to overcome those challenges. My thesis ended by giving recommendations to enhance women's accessibility to formal credit in order to empower them economically.

Personal life

In 2007, I married a classmate. We have three kids, one girl and two boys. When I was doing my Master's degree in Gender and Development in 2011, my first born was one and a half years' old. It was so difficult for me to manage the work, parenthood and my studies. In the first three months it was not easy to balance all the important things. The church, social life and sport and leisure were forgotten. At that time, I was new in my workplace and had to perform well during my probation period. My husband has been patient and so supportive, encouraging me to continue and perform well at work and at school. He was caring for our kids and other home needs.

I remember that it was my husband that had to take our boy to the doctor whenever he got sick during that period. At that moment, his job was asking him to work more often in the field than in the office, which gave him the possibility to come home and see our boy during lunch time and also to come home early from work. Therefore, our boy was closer to his dad than me and it was difficult for him to pronounce the word Mama. It affected me and made me feel guilty for abandoning him. My husband has been so present, and it gave me strength to work and study. He used to tell me that he was proud of me and that he is ready whenever possibly to help me and reduce my stress. His support was vital to the success of my studies and work.

Role models

When I met Mrs Shirley Randell and knew that she has four children and also grandchildren and that it did not prevent her from studying to the PhD level, it gave me the courage to go far in life, to continue my professional development. She has been a role model for me. Her capacity for balancing work, social, sport and family life is so incredible. She used to push students to be serious and meet deadlines given by professors, but also added that we should relax and do sport.

She made me know that if you have a plan in life, you can achieve regardless of the present challenges.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Natacha Kaneza in 2011 and updated in 2018.



Image: Oda Gasinzigwa

Oda Gasinzigwa's story¹

Thesis: 'Women in political leadership positions: challenges and barriers in Rwanda.'

Childhood and early education

Born in Tanzania on 1 August 1966 to refugee parents who fled to Tanzania in 1959, my father was a teacher and my mother a nurse, may their souls rest in eternal peace. I was second among eight children, four girls and four boys. I completed primary, secondary and University education in Tanzania. Thanks to my parents who relentlessly supported and encouraged me and my siblings to excel and succeed in our studies regardless of life hardships they were facing as refugees. I remember how it used to be exciting whenever I received gifts from my parents in appreciation of my good performance in my studies.

I joined different youth groups such as Girl Guides, Young Women's Christian Association, basket and netball teams, etc. The exposure in co-existing with my fellow students from different backgrounds, cultural and gender diversity, family upbringing and religious beliefs was a life experience that prepared me for the challenges ahead in life and also my contribution to society.

Career and higher education

At the university I pursued Local Government Administration. Successful graduates were to be given jobs immediately after graduation in districts. This standing offer for employment motivated most young students like me to join the program. After graduation, I was offered a job. However, at the same time I was lucky to be offered another employment opportunity at the National Bank of Commerce in Dar es Salaam. At the time, the bank had a program to

promote young professionals where I was hired as an administrator. With other fresh employees we underwent different on-the-job special training courses in bank operations. I worked with the bank for eight years through which I received several promotions.

When RPF (Rwanda Patriotic Front) stopped the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 and started rebuilding the country, most refugees including my family returned. Back in Rwanda people were filled with mixed feelings, excitement, diverse expectations but also tears and sorrow for the tragedy that left the country in ashes and agony. Life had to continue and everyone was trying to contribute in building a new Rwanda. Gender stereotypes were also still in existence in some sectors, especially the private sector, hence a hindrance to young mothers and girls in the process of searching for jobs. I am grateful to my president H.E Paul Kagame for championing the promotion of gender equality and eliminating discriminatory laws and policies in Rwanda. Strong political commitment in Rwanda has resulted in significant positive strides in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Rwanda.

Fortunately, I came across a job offer and I was employed at the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs, responsible for gender, family, children and social promotion. This was a new and challenging sector especially in the aftermath of genocide. Gender equality was identified as one of the pillars and a priority in the new constitution; I was happy for the opportunity to serve my country and work with others in strategising, putting in place policies and laws and supporting communities especially at the family level. My main task was to support women in preparing viable projects and link them with banks for credits hence improving their well-being, with the support of a guarantee fund established by the Government of Rwanda. My eight years' experience in bank operations was of great value to my new assignment.

In 2001 I joined a UNDP project working in partnership with the Ministry of Environment under the department charged with resettlement of newly returning refugees and displaced people. The objective of the project was to promote for their welfare. This enabled me another opportunity of working closely with communities at the grassroots level and enhance my better understanding of the challenges being faced then by both women and men and their endeavours in building a new Rwanda. I later joined the Ministry of Agriculture, working in the crop intensification program, designed to promote large scale farming in Rwanda.

Gender equality and women's promotion became my passion and I joined women's associations inside and outside the country. I became a member of Profemmes Twese Hamwe, an umbrella for women's associations in Rwanda. I also became a member of the National Women's Council, a forum for women and girls in Rwanda. In 2001 the first election for the National Women's Council was conducted and I was elected to be a secretary at the cell (grassroots) level,

and in 2004 I was elected at the National level as the National Women Council Chairperson.

It is important to encourage and support women and girls during elections. When people tell you that you can do it, you build confidence and move forward. Through these forums, women continue to be empowered socially, economically and politically. I am humbled and thank the leadership for the opportunity.

Appointed as the first Chief Gender Monitor in 2008, the establishment of the Gender Monitoring Office was in fulfilment of article 185 of the constitution which provides for the independent public institution as a reference point on matters relating to gender equality. The office is an icon observatory for gender equality that promotes accountability for sustainable development.

I enrolled for the Master's Program at the Centre for Gender, Culture and Development studies at Kigali Institute of Education in 2011 in the first cohort and graduated in 2012 with a Master of Social Sciences in Gender and Development. I thank Professor Shirley Randell who was the first director of the Centre. My appreciation also to the Government of Rwanda for establishing and supporting the Centre.

In 2013 I was appointed Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, the central government institution mandated to ensure strategic coordination of policy implementation in the area of gender, family, women's empowerment and children issues.

I was then elected by the Rwanda Parliament in 2016 to join the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) as Rwanda's flag-bearer. Article 49 of the EAC Treaty established EALA as the legislative organ of the community, its core functions being legislating, oversight, and representation.

Personal life

I am married to a civil engineer and blessed with four children. My husband is a loving and supporting, wonderful man; my lovely boys are my treasure in life and they have also been supportive in my family life and career development.

Role models

My father and my mother; they were loving, hardworking and more importantly believed in me, I learned many different things from them. They supported our family and all who were needy during difficult times. All believed in educating their children as a first priority.

Looking ahead

Our country has registered tremendous success in empowering women and making sure women participate fully in all sectors for national development. However, this has been a journey and is a work in progress. My research findings on women in leadership I believe will inform policy makers and other researchers to continue searching for solutions for existing gaps in giving equal opportunity for women. I aspire to pursue a PhD Program in Gender Sector in the near future to continue researching on the still pending challenges.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Oda Gasinzigwa in 2011 and revised 2020.



Image: Odette Bagitengire

Odette Bagitengire's story¹

Thesis: 'Legal analysis of informal marriage and its impact on women: Gicumbi case study'

I am from Rwanda, married and the mother of two children. I earned a bachelor's degree in Political and Administrative Sciences at the National University of Rwanda. In 2011, I obtained a Maîtrise, Gestion des Ressources Humaines at the Université Mercure International with grande distinction. I served for more than five years in the public sector, especially in the administrative area. I have also worked for the UN and NGOs: four years with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, three years with United Nations Population Fund and two years with Danish Centre for Human Rights.

Notes

¹ Biographical note written by Odette Bagitengire in 2011.



Image: Odile Muhayimana

Odile Muhayimana's story¹

Thesis: 'Gender-based economic violence in Rwanda: a case study of the Bugesera District'

Childhood and early education

I was born in 1984, the only daughter among three boys. I am very proud of my brothers, the eldest is a doctor of medicine, the next is a computer scientist, and the last one, who is the youngest in our family, is finishing his studies for a bachelor's degree in project planning and grant management in Uganda. My parents are Gakwandi Jean Baptiste and Mukantaganda Madeleine, who are a civil engineer and a civil servant, respectively. They encouraged me to become an intellectual person and be a respectable woman. They always taught me to avoid a life of dependency. I acknowledge that my parents were really gender sensitive, because they always considered me in the same way as my brothers and gave us all the same rights. I remember that several times I was the first to have everything I wanted, even before my brothers.

Career and higher education

I studied for a bachelor's degree in economics. I always remember my first job. I was 22 years old, and I applied for the first time in my life for a position. I was appointed a branch manager of Réseau Intérdiocésain de Microfinance. It is from that time that I came to believe that to be a woman for me is not a simple thing. I worked also as statistician for three years. Fortunately, in 2010, I got a job in Gender Monitoring Office and my dreams have become a reality, because I'm now in the field that I really like. In addition to this, I have a master's in gender studies.

Personal life

My husband, Rukundo Olivier, is a lawyer and has a master's degree in business law. His advice reminds me of my childhood and my parents because he really likes education, to the extent that he always encourages me to go ahead with my studies.

Looking ahead

I will have at least two master's degrees, the first one in gender and development and the second one in economics. As I have built in me the spirit of competition, I aspire to a PhD in gender studies. Finally, let me say that, in my life, I really enjoy being a wife, mother and advocate for other women through my work. I really wish to be a good gender analyst in order to handle gender inequality, and to prevent and fight against all forms of gender-based injustice and violence.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Odile Muhayimana in 2011.



Image: Patrick Mico Ntunga

Patrick Mico Ntunga's story¹

Thesis: 'Rwandan men's perception of positive discrimination for women: the case of the 'constitutional clause'—at least 30% women's participation in political decision making.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in October 1973, the fifth in a family of nine, five sisters and four brothers. Two of my sisters are married to Burundians. In the Rwanda crisis of 1959, my father was a teacher and he became a refugee in DRC. When he arrived, there was no job but then he became the head of a primary school. My mother was caring for the children and in the agriculture business. They were married at the time and their first child was born in Burundi on the way to DRC.

We came back to Rwanda after the genocide, but my mother stayed in the DRC until 2005. Two of my brothers and two sisters were in the Rwanda Patriotic Front. My father died in 1985 when I was in primary school and we had problems because DRC took our property. I was starting secondary school with limited means, but my mother did everything to help me to continue my studies. She inspired me and I stayed very close to her and took responsibility for the other children. 'What can you do for those young sisters and brothers?' my mum would ask. She told me to consider them as my sons and daughters.

Career and higher education

I was accepted at the National University of Rwanda (NUR) in 1995, but the first thing I did was to look for a job to see how I could help my mother. I worked for the Red Cross for a year in Butare and was well paid. Life in DRC is cheaper than in Rwanda. When I finished secondary school in 1993, I became a teacher for two years. I bought a lot of cows in DRC, gave them to my mother

and hired someone to look after the cows. I studied education and science at NUR. One of my cousins was there with me. My father was the last born of the family and they all stayed in Rwanda. All the children were killed as well as my mother's father. Only some of my cousins were alive after the genocide.

I started working with MIGEPROF in 2001, in charge of gender advocacy. In 2003 I became head of the division of gender mainstreaming and advocacy and, in 2005, acting director of administration and human resources (HR). In August 2007, MIGEPROF became part of the Prime Minister's office and they took over the administration and HR. In 2006–2007 I worked in the Beijing Secretariat and in 2007 became coordinator for the UNFPA gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment project. I moved to the Gender Monitoring Office (GMO) in 2009 as coordinator of the pool of experts. The GMO is now developing tools for auditing and monitoring in partnership with MIGEPROF.

My education background was in another field than gender, and I learnt gender by experience, so I came to the master's program to build my theoretical knowledge and academic background. In all assignments given to us in this program I see the direct relationship with my daily job. I chose to write my master's thesis on the contribution of men to gender. I was a man born in a family with a powerful dad. He worked in another area without learning about gender, so how can he contribute to gender? Because of the patriarchal system, some men have problems if their wife is a leader somewhere, like a mayor. If women don't have value in the society, they become an obstacle to the development of the family. If I wanted to become a minister, my wife would be the first to help me to accomplish my duty. If I have a problem, my wife would help me. This is not the same for men. Men need to change their behaviour, to help their wives to do work in the home. Women have a problem if this is not the case, we need social transformation.

Personal life

I am married and have two boys. My wife was the Executive Secretary of the Unity Club and is an independent consultant in HR. My wife is Catholic and I am Protestant, and we are inspired by religion. We wanted a religious marriage, so we asked a Catholic priest. In this patriarchal system it is not so easy to go into the wife's church. Other people queried this, so we analysed it. My pastor had no problem. For special events we go together to our churches and we share what we learn. The Catholic religion wants the children to be in their church.

Role models

My role models include Ghandi, Mandela and Nyerere for their promotion of peace building. My mother was also a very interesting person and my relationship with her changed me. I remember what my mom did in a difficult situation and how she found a solution. I am what I am now because of my mother. She took the trouble to help me to be what I am now. At that time my mother was a widow. There were other families who lost their mother and stayed with their father. I saw a very big difference if the family was headed by a woman or a man. The men married again and gave birth to other children. These families are often a problem because of conflict between the children. We have a patriarchal system, but I don't accept that women don't have capacities. My mother was strong and had integrity. She facilitated love between the kids. She was responsible for women at the church and had time to pray. In the rural areas people started the day at 4 am with prayer and my mum led that session. When I was 10 to 12, I would go with her to pray.

When I started work and it was new to it, John Mutamba helped me by coaching me. He encouraged me and appreciated me, and that made me do better in order to be more appreciated. It was my first time meeting with him and we became good friends. Even now, if I have any problem, he is like my dad. If he has to do something on gender, he asks me to help him and we discuss it. So now I have this moral responsibility to do the same with others. I learned from him how to analyse everything in a positive light. Every person has good things and bad things and I learned that we should try to analyse the good things in others, without only considering the negative things.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Patrick Mico Ntunga in 2011.



Image: Radegonde Bayisenge

Radegonde Bayisenge's story¹

Thesis: 'Factors affecting girls' performance in rural primary schools: Gikomero primary schools.'

Childhood and early education

I am the third born in a family of four girls and three boys. My father was a public worker and my mother was an educator. At the age of 16 I lost my parents, my two brothers, and one sister. We remained as orphans, two sisters and one brother, and our elder sister had to stop her studies and head the family. We continued our studies, but it was very difficult. We faced many problems like school fees, school materials, uniforms, notebooks, and so on. It was a struggle to be a teenager without parental protection. That situation pushed me to get married at an early age, and other constraints forced me to stop my studies for two years.

Personal life

I am 45 years old, married, and I have three children, a son and two daughters. After having my first boy, I returned to school when he turned one. My husband encouraged me to continue my studies as soon as possible. He was very supportive. Even my little brothers and sisters are assisted by my family. I completed high school in human sciences. At that time, I had one goal: to be among the best and receive a university bursary. I achieved my dream and registered in social work at the Faculty of Social Sciences, National University of Rwanda. However, before starting university I had my second child. It was difficult to study with a baby, but I had a vision to be among intellectual Rwandan women, to have a good job, to help my husband to support our

family, and to also help my elder sister to return to school. Now my sister is an educator in primary school.

Career and higher education

Before starting my master's studies, I worked for a local non-governmental organisation called the Women's Promotion Initiative, in Nyamagabe District, a rural area where women are facing problems of poverty and different kinds of violence. In this association women received training, like modern agriculture, entrepreneurship, project management, etc. They also received information about family law, land law, and gender-based violence law, and were able to share their life experiences. They manage to stand for their rights. I loved working with women, but I looked for a higher paying job so I could support my family.

I joined the Ministry for Gender and Family Promotion and was in charge of orphans and vulnerable children, based at Gasabo District. I am interested in working with children, to identify children in need, to assist them, to hear them, and to share my life experiences with them. It was God's will and a joyful time to work with those to whom I can compare my past life. During holiday meetings as a facilitator, I introduced some gender issues for discussion. I realise that boys have the same thoughts as their fathers and girls as their mothers. Girls must stay at home helping their mother in home chores and helping them to look after their little ones, while their brothers are at school. Starting there, I try to show them the truth, that sustainable development requires efforts from both men and women, boys and girls, and that education is the pillar for all.

I decided then to study a Master's in Gender, Culture and Development to learn what gender really is, what gender issues are, the ways to handle them, and to become an expert in gender issues. My master's research was about girls' performance in rural secondary schools in Rwanda. I found that socio-cultural factors and school-related factors affected girls' performance. After that, I decided to change the way I raise my own children, to let both the boys and the girls explore their potential. It helped me visualise the potential of both boys and girls in different life aspects in Rwanda. In my village, I helped with the creation of Urukundo Family, a women's association. We meet once a month, we exchange life experiences, we teach each other, and we explore different laws and policies to protect women, children, and families. This is a good opportunity to decrease violence against girls and women in our village. All in all, my master's degree had a big impact in my life since the knowledge and skills I acquired have helped me to relate positively with my family, friends, community, and in my workplace as well.

After the master's studies, I changed my position at the same institution, and I am part of the team in charge of reintegration of all children from orphanages to their families or foster families. That is to help children to be

raised in families instead of institutions, to be loved, and to benefit from the family's warmth.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Radegonde Bayisenge in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Regine Abanyuze

Regine Abanyuze's story¹

Thesis: 'Analysing the effect of the "one cow per poor family" Program on women's economic development in Rwanda: A case study in the Rulindo district of Northern Province.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Uganda in a family of eight children, five girls and three boys, and we lived there for about 30 years. At that time, very few girls would go to school because of their culture. I thank my parents who thought wisely to put us in school and supported us all throughout. My childhood was influenced by my brothers who made me believe that girls can also compete in science subjects. I studied science up to high school level.

Role models

An important person who contributed a lot to my character is my daddy who always reminded me that life is not a straight line, especially for girls, putting more emphasis on working very hard to obtain a bright and independent future. Another very important person I will never forget is my cousin, the late Dismas Rutayisire, who loved me so much, encouraged me in all angles of life by always saying that nothing is impossible if one is determined to do it in a wise manner. He always encouraged me to be courageous by being a good example to others in order to become a lady of integrity. He was the same person who paid my school fees from primary three to senior four; unfortunately, he died when I had just joined senior five. I will never forget his kind heart and determination to make me a model to the girls and boys of those days.

Career and higher education

I joined the Institute of Teachers' Education Kyambogo in Uganda and later became a teacher of chemistry and biology. Due to the advice, wisdom and words of encouragement from the above-mentioned people, I have been given the chance to look ahead. When I left teaching, I joined the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission in 2000. For the first five years I was challenged by my lack of managerial skills, so I decided to do a bachelor's degree in management, which I successfully completed in 2007.

Personal life

I am married to a civil servant and we are blessed to have six children, three girls and three boys. I no longer have children at home during school time, and this has facilitated me in doing the master's degree in gender and development, a field I appreciate and longed for. I am sincerely happy about this. Indeed, I am very grateful to my husband who contributes to all the family needs in order to allow me to manage to pay my tuition, and I also appreciate the way he encourages me always to succeed in life.

Looking ahead

From the time I was still very young, I felt bad about gender inequalities of any kind found in different societies, especially in Rwanda, which I know most. One day I thought of contributing to the fight against inequalities, but I realised that I must first understand them well so that I have the knowledge and practical skills to find a solution to these inequalities. I am really very grateful to be among the few people who were selected to be pioneers in the Master's in Gender and Development at KIE. When I complete this program, I am determined to work in a network with other feminists to fight against all discrimination and oppression against women worldwide.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Regine Abanyuze in 2011.



Image: Shamsi Kazimbaya

Shamsi Kazimbaya's story¹

Thesis: 'Impact of polygamy on the lives of Muslims in Rwanda: Kigali women's experience.'

Childhood and early education

I am Rwandan, born in 1975 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). I am the first born of a big family of one boy and seven girls, this being, I believe, the reason behind my passion and interest in the field of gender. My parents left Rwanda in 1959, when hundreds of Tutsis were killed, and millions displaced and forced to flee to neighbouring countries. Since then, my parents, like many other Rwandans, became refugees in DRC (then Zaire), navigating in the Great Lakes region in order to survive. They lived a relatively good life in DRC, well integrated with all the rights of a Congolese citizen. By the end of 1980, when Rwandan refugees in different countries started to organise themselves to return to their homeland, things started to become very bad in DRC. Locals started feeling animosity towards them, categorising them as intruders.

In 1992, as the tensions became so high in DRC, my family decided to move to Tanzania where they thought the climate was better for Rwandan refugees. They struggled there for two to three years. My young sister and I were left in a family in DRC because our parents thought it would be difficult for us to reintegrate in new schools, given the difference between the educational systems in the two countries. They decided to take the younger ones only, so I pursued my secondary school in DRC and finished in 1994. Life in Tanzania was not that easy for my parents, this being the worst of all periods of the Rwandan wars and killings that were marked by the 1994 tragedy of the genocide against the Tutsis. In late 1994, after the Rwandan Patriotic Force stopped the genocide, my family returned to their homeland, my sister and I also returned from DRC

and the family was reunified again. This was the beginning of a new and bright life and future.

In all that struggle, my parents made sure they gave us a good education, teaching us to be responsible, smart, love our country and practice our religion. They always gave us equal education as far as gender is concerned, until today, we have never felt or seen them preferring or favouring our brother because he is a boy, regardless of the common 'son- preference practice' in most societies in Africa. As Africans say, first born children are deputy parents and this is how my siblings proudly call me and I like it because I feel I deserve it—I have developed the sense of responsibility from an early age and this both at home (responsible of all household tasks and caring for my siblings) and at school (working hard to always perform very well). In fact, I can't remember myself being a child. This became then a real challenge for my siblings, with my parents telling them they should be like me, and indeed I was and still am their role model in many ways. This makes me feel very happy and proud and continues to inspire me to work even harder. I also feel very blessed to be a role model and inspiration for many other women and girls.

Career and higher education

I went to university in Rwanda and studied public administration, receiving my Bachelor of Public Administration in 2000. Right after I graduated in 2001, as a young woman without any experience, I was fortunate to start my professional life in a senior position. I was the first, among very few women, executive secretary of Nyamyumba District in the Western Province (then Prefecture de Gisenyi). I was struggling and it was very challenging, but I made it, and this was a very good experience for me, which I think has been a very strong foundation for my career success later on. In 2003, as I felt that I wanted to grow professionally, I competed for the position of 'in charge of good governance, and decentralisation' at provincial level and got the job. I was not happy with that position and only stayed there for a few months, then left to work with the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. At first, I was coordinating the Southern Province and then was promoted to the position of Director of Planning and Programs based in Kigali at the Commission's headquarters.

During my entire career I always had in mind my wish to work in gender-related projects. Luckily, one day I saw an advertisement for the position of Executive Secretary of SWAA (Society for Women and AIDS in Africa), and I applied and got the job. I stayed there from 2006 to 2012 and this experience allowed me to love my work more and think big about how to grow, to do better and to achieve more. I started dreaming of working with bigger organisations such as the UN in the field of gender. As I started looking for such jobs, I realised that I needed a master's degree in gender, which I managed to do with Dr Randell's support. Regarding my Master's in Gender and Development, after

I submitted my research proposal, I realised it was too broad. At that time, I was lucky as a young woman to start early to be seen in the public sphere, in decision-making positions, especially as a member of the Rwandan Muslim Council. It was a challenge to be the only Muslim in my class and that pushed me to do my own research, to be able to explain my belief.

After graduation, from 2012 to 2015, I worked as the MenCare+ National Coordinator for the Rwanda Men's Resources Centre. As a senior manager I was responsible for the day to day implementation and coordination of all project activities, particularly those aiming at promoting men as positive fathers in maternal and child health, and as caregiving partners in sexual and reproductive health. I was also responsible for promoting good working relationships and networking with the donors, government and civil society organisations for effective implementation and ownership by other stakeholders. From 2016 to 2017 I was a Gender Advisor with JHPIEGO, an affiliate of John Hopkins University. In this role I worked to reduce child and maternal mortality through increased coverage and utilisation of high-impact low-cost reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health interventions and innovative new approaches, and to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Health to manage and scale up these interventions. The position was focused on developing, integrating and documenting strategies to address gender issues related to the uptake of health services, especially respectful care, gender-based violence, male norms and involvement and fees.

I then joined Promundo in the position of Program Officer for Promundo in DRC and soon after was promoted to Senior Program Officer, leading Promundo-US technical assistance to projects in East, West and Central Africa. Since its founding in Brazil in 1997, Promundo has worked to advance gender equality around the world through formative research and rigorous evaluation, implementing evidence-based educational and community-wide programs and partnering with women's rights groups. Our advocacy campaigns, community mobilisation, group education and group therapy create safe spaces for men and women in post-conflict and high-violence settings to heal from trauma. Youth in over 22 countries are involved, and encouraged to question harmful gender norms, and for men around the world to discuss the benefits of involved in fatherhood and shared decision making, and the costs of violence and exploitation. My work with Promundo expanded when I was sent back to be based in Rwanda as Senior Program Officer, involving extensive overseas travel. Our research, programs and advocacy efforts show that promoting healthy masculinity (or positive notions of 'what it means to be a man') and femininity (or 'what it means to be a woman') leads to improvements in men's own lives, and in the lives of women and girls. Our programs strive to create change at multiple levels: in addition to working with individual men and women, we use campaigns and local activism to build community support, and advocate

with institutions and governments to adopt policies and scale up programs that reinforce personal and social change.

I am very grateful to all my lecturers at the master's program in gender and development who provided me with the necessary quality knowledge and skills, which allowed me to progress so quickly in my career and make my dream a reality. I owe them a lot in my international position today with Promundo US, as a very highly qualified trainer and researcher in gender and masculinities. The most important skills and methodologies that helped me most to do my work are those related to feminist/qualitative research since these are the core of my work; the various gender analysis frameworks are very helpful to me during my gender transformative trainings. As a gender activist I am a member of various women and feminist organisations at national, regional and international levels, and regularly speak at international conferences like Women Deliver and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

Personal life

In addition to all this, I was able to build a family. I married in 2008—relatively late in an African and Rwandan context and expectations of a woman. In fact, there is a certain age when a woman should get married otherwise it becomes an issue and you start being pressured and even given names. I am happy to have two beautiful girls today, six and nine years old. However, my marriage, like any other, has had some challenges, first because of our different backgrounds as far as the Rwandan history is concerned: me with my whole journey that I described above and my husband with his own, born and raised in Rwanda then survived from the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis. When it comes to gender, being a gender expert who has strongly improved her understanding, knowledge and skills, it is very challenging for us to deal with the persistent unequal gender norms and negative masculinities in our own relationship and turns out to be source of conflict and frustration sometimes.

Looking ahead

I know that the victims at the end of the day are women—although some women, sometimes, are the ones reinforcing gender inequalities, unfortunately—and would like to continue advocating and working to increase their knowledge and awareness, alongside men. I know that is a process that will take a long time, but I believe it is possible.

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Shamsi Kazimbaya in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Sidonie Uwimpuhwe

Sidonie Uwimpuhwe's story¹

Thesis: 'Effects of Rwandan culture on female commercial sex work'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Southern Province, Huye District, in 1979, the fourth of six children, three boys and three girls. My parents have always worked in the education sector; my father as a secondary school teacher and my mother as a primary school teacher first, and later as a public officer in charge of teachers' affairs in the ministry of Education (MINEDUC). Two of my older brothers and my father were all killed during the 1994 Tutsi genocide. This was the case for many Rwandan survivors of the genocide; life was not easy. I completed primary school at Byimana, and secondary at Nyamirambo St André College.

Career and higher education

I studied a bachelor's degree in Sociology at ULK (Kigali Independent University). I hold a master's degree in public health (MPH) from the National University of Rwanda and a second master's degree in social science in Gender and Development from KIE (Kigali Institute of Education). My research for the gender and development degree sought to understand and unpack the interconnections between sexuality, gender and the agency of practicing commercial sex for women and girls in the Rwandan society. Our assumption is that they are not doing this because they want to. I considered whether this was the product of a patriarchal society, whether it was that they have been denied access to basic services to meet their basic and strategic needs and whether commercial sex work was a radical alternative for a desperate woman to face life.

I have extensive professional experience of 15 years; i.e., in the public sector (8 years), especially in the health sector in Rwanda where I played various key roles in tailoring the national HIV response in planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation in the area of integrating HIV/AIDS services within the general health care system while working as a technical expert in the Ministry of Health. I was responsible for mainstreaming HIV in the poverty reduction strategies and processes while working as an expert in the National AIDS Control Commission. I ensured gender equality in the national HIV/AIDS response when I was appointed as a senior advisor to the Head of the Institute of HIV disease prevention and control of the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC-IHDPC). I was also project manager of a UNWOMEN funded project in RBC-IHDPC entitled 'Supporting gender equality in national HIV/AIDS response'.

In International Development (7 years), I have worked for two major international organisations. First, at CARE International, where I was heading all gender equality and women empowerment programs, focusing on: women's economic empowerment; prevention and response of violence against women and girls; women's leadership and political participation; engaging men and boys for gender equality; sexual reproductive health and rights; grassroots activism, and women's collective action, advocacy, national civil society strengthening. I am currently serving as a Country Director for Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) Rwanda.

Personal life

I am a proud mother of two children, a boy and a girl.

Role models

I have two special role models. In the academic world, Dr Paulin Basinga was the director for my MPH dissertation and has been mentoring me for my master's studies. He is still young and has pushed very far with his academic studies, doing amazing work and publishing. He is very inspiring, helping me to publish too and I am currently preparing an article for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. In relation to family, my role model is my mum. She has been a perfect mother to me and my siblings. She had to struggle to look after us alone after the genocide, and she gave the same opportunities to all her children, both boys and girls. We got the essentials of life and now are all able to look after ourselves. My mum has been always there for me and my children. What I love on her side is that she used to pray a lot; in so doing, this helps us, her children, to stay in God's boundaries and so make us feel God's presence and favour in our lives. Her passing away, back in 2015 (may her soul

rest in eternal peace), triggered a revelation to me that led me to dedicate my life to Jesus Christ, following my mum's path. Even dead, she continues to be my source of inspiration like no one has ever done.

I particularly recognise and I am forever thankful to the Government of Rwanda, under the leadership of President Paul Kagame. I am a product of Rwanda's development and girls and women's empowerment programs. Right from my earlier years of the orphanage back in 1994, the government has been there to provide me scholarships through my education, and has given me employment opportunities, that I earned, at times competing with others who studied in the world class universities. And here I am, heading one of the most reputable international organisations. I encourage the youth, especially the girls, to take up the opportunities that are presented to them, and seize them to uplift their lives and those of their families and communities.

Looking forward

I am motivated to give back to the community. I have been doing it in the framework of the various positions I have occupied, focused on the most vulnerable segment of the Rwandan population. I always seek various opportunities to volunteer in restoring social justice and giving back to the community. I have plans to create my own organisation that would be using its own resources and others from like-minded partners to empower girls. In the future, I would also like to pursue my studies for a PhD in an area that combines public health issues and gender equality, which are at the core of my career development goals.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Sidonie Uwimpuhwe in 2011 and updated in 2019. Sadly, she passed away suddenly in 2021, just before this publication went to press.



Image: Sifa Bayingana

Sifa Bayingana's story¹

Thesis: 'Causes and consequences of domestic violence among couples: Perceptions of Women and Men of Kacyiru in Gasabo District-Rwanda'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Uganda in 1969, the second in a family of seven children, four boys and three girls. My parents were refugees from Rwanda. I studied primary and secondary school at a time when the education of the girl child was not given due value in most societies. Some families, especially those which did not have sufficient means to support the education of all their children, preferred supporting boys because they believed that girls would be married off to other families and contribute to the wellbeing of their husbands' families.

Career and higher education

After completing secondary school, I joined Makerere University to study social sciences (political science, sociology, and French), and then, Education as a Postgraduate Diploma.

My first job was with the National Insurance Company, and after, I worked with different government institutions including the National Population Office, the National AIDS Control Commission, and the Ministry of Local Government. I also worked with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, World Food Program, and the UN Population Fund in Rwanda, as a consultant in the areas of HIV and Gender. Currently, I am working with Rwanda Governance Board as a Governance Specialist and expert on gender aspects.

In 2011, I joined the master's course in Gender and Development Studies (MGD), which I found very interesting. Before joining the MGD program, I

had studied the tools for gender analysis and gender mainstreaming, but after this degree, I had a much deeper understanding of gender, about the sociology and the power relations between men and women. In my opinion, studying gender, culture, and development is like studying social sciences. My research thesis was on domestic violence. I was curious to learn about the causes and consequences of domestic violence among couples within my own society. At the time of this research, there were just a few studies on this topic in Rwanda, in particular, a number of attempts by undergraduate students. That is one of the factors that motivated me to explore the causes of domestic violence that is confined to the household level but has a wider impact. Being a mother of four children and a student while I was pursuing my master's was not an easy task. It necessitated dedication and extra energy. I am grateful that my family encouraged me and supported me. I am a member of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) Rwanda Chapter with a vision for promoting the education of girls.

Role models

My teachers have been my greatest role models and mentors. I am now pleased to be a mentor for young undergraduate girls studying in universities. One of them gained an award for her outstanding performance for her master's thesis in China. I also give advice to girls who drop out of school due to teenage pregnancy on how they can go ahead with their lives and strive to continue with their education.

About the future

After acquiring knowledge and skills in the area of gender, my passion is to help my community understand the concept of gender equality and its relevance to sustainable development, as well as the prevention and management of gender-based violence. Given the opportunity, I would like to do further research in social sector fields, especially in gender. When an opportunity arises, I will pursue a PhD in Gender Studies.

Notes

- ¹ Extract from an interview with Sifa Bayingana by A Escrig-Pinol and S Randell in 2011, updated in 2019.



Image: Simon Nsabiyeze

Simon Nsabiyeze's story¹

Thesis: 'The Catholic Church's response to adversity: A study on the involvement of men and women in relief and development work through two CAFOD funded projects in Great Lakes.'

Childhood and early education

I am 41 years old, the third of eight children, five girls and three boys, and was born and raised in Rwanda. My parents were from the same village, my mother a cultivator and my father a civil servant. My grandparents were in a large, happy family. My grandfather worked for missionaries, and I was schooled in Catholic schools. I was a good student throughout my education.

Career and higher education

I studied psychopedagogy in secondary school and was recruited to work as a teacher of French and Psychology and in charge of discipline before I completed a bachelor's degree in 2004 and then a Master's in Psychology in 2007 at the National University of Rwanda. I joined the gender studies program for my second master's degree because I wanted to increase my understanding of phenomena and problems I had encountered in life and at work, especially with widows, orphans and other vulnerable people. I also wanted to understand, among others, why and how some men behave badly when their wives are strong and independent like mine. There was a component of culture in gender studies and I had a research interest in the Rwandan culture and post-traumatic stress disorder. I had jointly published in the area during five years of practicing therapeutics and psychotherapy, amongst other books. My thesis dissertation in the social sciences was on the involvement of men and women in the relief and development work of the Catholic Church. While I was studying I was also the Country Program Manager and Gender Focal Point for the Catholic

Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), managing the Rwanda sub-office, coordinating funding for 12 local organisations with a small team of colleagues and giving support to two projects in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi.

In 2016–2017, I completed a Diploma in Humanitarian Diplomacy where I studied humanitarian diplomacy and aid effectiveness. My dissertation focused on challenges and successes in aid delivery to Chadian returnees from the Central African Republic (CAR). This was one of the courses that opened my lens wider and deepened my understanding of international and humanitarian affairs, equipping me to perform my responsibilities in the changing humanitarian industry. I aimed high for senior international job positions in humanitarian work. Over the last 14 years, I have worked with international organisations that deployed me in Rwanda, DRC, CAR, Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Mozambique. I am currently working in Chad with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of the Humanitarian Affairs, where I am in charge of a sub-office in the South of Chad, dealing with the consequences of the CAR crisis.

I have been involved in managing teams of national and international colleagues of between 10 and 200 and a budget portfolio of up to US \$5 million per year. As a psychologist, a participative and empowering leader, I have a situational leadership approach, due essentially to my belief that my team has diverse and enormous potential that has to be given opportunity to blossom. I try to promote listening, problem-solving and ownership, enhancing creativity, building on diversity, ensuring accountability but also promoting each and everyone's potential and performance, engaging and motivating my team and celebrating success. I have faced huge challenges as a leader in a context where humanitarians and peacekeepers are sometimes victims of varied accusations and humanitarian access challenges. Leaders in humanitarian work are expected to perform and deliver sometimes where governments and other traditional systems have failed or are failing in their mandates. This requires negotiation skills, diplomacy, conflict management, dealing with intimidation and managing the security and safety of staff. Working in both rebel and government held territories in countries like CAR and South Sudan, and keeping neutrality and humanitarian principles is not an easy task and I have been involved in situations of nearly being kidnapped, including my team taken as hostages and later released after negotiations.

Trained in gender, gender sensitive and being a feminist, I am troubled by how women and children, especially young girls, are treated in most of the places I have worked. I have also lived many joys in my leadership. As a humanitarian, for example, while with Save the Children, I was always joyful and felt energised to continue my work despite challenges when, as a result of my team's efforts, one or more children were removed from the long list of the millions of children worldwide who go hungry every day, who are malnourished, who do not have access to education or health services, whose rights are violated and who are voiceless.

Personal life

I married Ernestine Narambe in 2006. We have two children, Amanda and Romeo, now 12 and 9, schooling in Switzerland where Ernestine is concluding PhD studies at University of Lausanne. Her thesis, entitled ‘The Schooling Paths and Socio-emotional Development of Children raised by Single Women in Rwanda’, is a continuation of her thesis for the Master’s in Gender and Development degree, in which we enrolled together. Amanda won a yellow belt in karate at the time she belonged to a kids’ club in her home country; she is a fan of piano and swimming. Romeo plays in a local basketball club and is a good swimmer. His hobby, as with many kids of his age, is building Lego, and with the aspiration of becoming an aviation engineer, he builds them with immense passion and talent. I am very proud of my ‘amazing family, growing, united and in love’ and we do all that is possible to ensure we have time with our children.

Leaving my children and wife behind constitutes a huge challenge in my life. I keep in close contact with my family, especially the three women pillars of my life: my wife and my daughter daily and my mother weekly, as they constitute my source of energy and resilience. I confirm that ‘besides every successful man, there is always a woman’s support’. I visit them every two months during my rest and recovery breaks and annual leave.

Role models

I have had two role models. One is an uncle. Even though he was not an academic, he liked reading and being up to date. He had a very happy family and was in a good relationship and a friend to everyone. He managed conflict and contributed to his children’s education, accompanying them to school when possible, and going with them to mass. This was different from what I saw in some others and it inspired me as a good example and the kind of family I wanted when I had my own. My other role model is a priest who was one of my neighbours when I grew up and I always wanted to be like him. We belonged to the same choir when he was in major seminary and he inspired me in terms of both intelligence and religion.

Looking forward

Above all, I aspire to be more, not to have more!

Notes

¹ Autobiography written by Simon Nsabiyeze in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Violet Kabarenzi

Violet Kabarenzi's story¹

Thesis: 'Causes and risk factors for violence against women by intimate partners identified by abused women in Runyonza Village, Rwanda.'

Childhood and early education

I was born in Uganda, in a family of three boys and five girls. My parents, Mrs and Mr Oliva and Daniel Karemera, were priests in the Anglican Church. I owe my compassion and commitment to social justice to them; they socialised me to value humankind without discrimination. This has impacted on my dedication to the promotion of gender equality. I went to primary school at Rwengoro Primary school, Mt. St. Mary's Namagunga for secondary school.

Career and higher education

I attended the National University of Lesotho at the tertiary level and hold a Bachelor of Commerce degree specialising in management. In my earlier career, I served as a secondary school teacher in economics and accounting in different schools in Kenya and Lesotho. From 1998 to 2003 I was head of the gender training division in the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development in Rwanda, the Ministry that has evolved to become the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion. I took the opportunity to facilitate the development of the gender training manual that was used widely to train about gender concepts and gender and development. From April 2003 to July 2006, I had the opportunity to serve as the head of gender and media, and later as head of women in technology and community development at the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology, KIST. During this period, I facilitated projects for promoting girls' education in science and technology through capacity building and mentoring programs. I also initiated KIST's outreach programs for women's empowerment

through dissemination of appropriate technologies, including energy saving technologies and imparting skills in food technology and entrepreneurship skills. While at KIST I also participated in development of KIST's equality and diversity policy.

In 2011 I was a Gender Projects Officer in the Rwanda National Police with a special focus on prevention and response to gender-based violence. During my service in the Rwandan National Police, I was a member of the coordination committee that organised the Kigali International Conference on the role of security organs in ending violence against women, held in October 2010. An outcome of the conference was the adoption of the Kigali Declaration by Africa region security organs to end violence against women.

In recent years, I have been doing research as a consultant. I undertook a participatory gender audit report on tea companies in Rwanda on behalf of the Gender Monitoring Office (2016), developed the Rwanda Ministry of Infrastructure Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (2016) and coordinated and monitored the Women Economic Empowerment study in Rwanda (2018). Currently, I am working with Kvinna till Kvinna Rwanda, an international women's rights organisation as a program officer. I am responsible for supporting partners to prepare grant proposals, report writing, monitoring and organisational capacity building. I also participate in organising networking forums at national, regional and international levels.

Role models

I have two role models. First, Dr Jolly Mazimpaka, who was my literature teacher from senior one to senior four. She inspired me through the compassion she displayed in her work and using a student empowering teaching methodology. She had the power to take you along and that has a lasting impact. She puts a human touch into whatever she is doing. My second role model was Dr Josephine Odera, who was the Regional Program Director for UNIFEM, CARO, while based in Kigali. She was out to do the best possible to promote gender equality, not just as part of her job but with the commitment to bring change. She spread her energy to reach out to the influential for policy change without forgetting the community for their empowerment and encouragement. She valued knowledge and combined Godly values with respect for humankind and a heart to serve while a leader.

Looking ahead

For my future I am committed to further research into women's issues, especially in the areas of violence and peacebuilding as key constraints for

women's development and full participation in development and enjoyment of their human rights.

Notes

- ¹ Autobiography written by Violet Kabarenzi in 2011 and updated in 2019.



Image: Viviane Kalumire Furaha

Viviane Kalumire Furaha's story¹

Thesis: 'Sexual risk behaviors and HIV/AIDS risk: Perceptions of National University of Rwanda students.'

Childhood and early education

I am 36 years old, third in a family of eight children comprising four boys and four girls, with only two years age difference from each other. I was born in Bukavu, a town in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and was raised in the Roman Catholic Church tradition. I was very close to my siblings, and my big sister was my best friend. My family, especially my mother, was very spiritual; a wonderful, loving, compassionate woman whose values built in me my passion to advocate for vulnerable women and girls and thus led to my career in gender and development, while my father forged in me the 'Go get it!' attitude. My parents owned a business together and were incredibly hard working. They did not have the chance for enough education, my father completing elementary school and my mother high school. However, they ended building up a wholesale business and became successful, thus allowing their children to have the opportunity to study in very good schools, since they both believed that a good education was the way to succeed in life. Having successful entrepreneurial parents that started from zero gave me the strong belief and confidence that nothing is impossible. My father was very strict, especially with school and my choice of friends, monitoring everything his children did, and we had lot of restrictions. My life was between the school, home, library and church. It was like we were in an army camp with him being the chief commander. He said: 'I put you in nice schools, but it depends on you to take advantage of the opportunities. It is your own life and you are responsible for it.'

The first tragedy of my childhood was my first experience with domestic violence when my dad beat my mother who, for the first time, ended up in

hospital. That day changed the image I had of my father. Despite all his restrictions in our education, I used to look at him as a role model and suddenly he began to be violent to my mum over nothing: that changed everything for me. Then, from October 1996, my family experienced a tragic war and its consequences in DRC during which women and girls faced serious gender-based violence (GBV), especially rape as a weapon of war. This was the end of my somewhat happy and stable childhood. I lost close family members and experienced different traumas that impacted on my health, family and social life. The most life-changing event was to get HIV from the sexual abuse I was a victim of, after which I just struggled to survive in a world controlled by men. These different situations impacted my adulthood terribly, because I lost trust in men.

Furthermore, I emotionally struggled for a long period with the lack of paternal affection during my childhood and early adulthood. This made me make poor choices regarding male partners and getting involved in intergenerational relationships.

I completed elementary and high school at College Alfajiri, a Jesuit school that originally was just for boys but later admitted a few girls. In a class of 30 students there were only two or three girls. I knew I had to perform very well and worked hard. While in elementary school I was a fervent reader and was amazed by reading the story of Madam Marie Curie. She seeded in me the passion for sciences and research from an early age. Furthermore, under the influence of a family friend, who was a pharmacist, I decided to take biology and chemistry as my main subjects for my last three years in high school.

Career and higher education

In 2001 after graduating from high school I left DRC to go to Rwanda. I developed a coping mechanism in order to forget all these things that had happened to me: silence. I was not talking, nor had I mentioned any of my traumatic experiences to my university friends. I was pretending everything was ok and was living as a normal young woman. But it was not easy.

I went on to study pharmacy at the National University of Rwanda (NUR). I found that I enjoyed and learned more through tutoring my classmates, and thus discovered the teaching talent that led later to my academic career. During that period, my friends saw me as a strong and influential woman, however, what they did not know was the secret of sickness, war, sexual abuse, GBV and patriarchal norms that was eating me up.

In 2006, psychologically and physically weakened by all the traumas I had been through since 1996, I suffered severe depression with memory loss mixed with psychosis in my fourth year at university and was put into a psychiatric hospital for six months. I began to develop many HIV-related sicknesses and attempted suicide. While I was recovering, my counsellors and social workers,

one also a woman living with HIV, suggested I join a group of educated women leaders living with HIV. We founded a local NGO, Rwandan Women Living with HIV/AIDS and Fighting Against It (FRSL+/RW). These activities helped me regain confidence in myself to enjoy life again. I felt useful for society since I could speak out for the rights of people who suffered like me.

I went back to NUR and in 2009 graduated in pharmacy with honours. In 2011, while working as a Tutorial Assistant and doing advocacy work with FRSL+/RW, 80% of my co-workers were men and some supported my professional development, thus I regained trust in men. I enrolled in the Master of Gender and Development to gain more knowledge and skills in order to enhance my ability and efficiency as a women's rights and health-for-all advocate. I won the first Shirley Randell Award for Excellence as the top student of my year.

I worked and trained for NUR, the United States Agency for International Development, the International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW), UN Women, the Global Fund and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS amongst others. When I relocated to the United States of America, I prepared for the USA Foreign Graduate Equivalency Exam of the National Association of Pharmacy Board so that I could be certified as a Pharmacist and get my license to practice pharmacy in the United States. I am a Social Enterprise strategist and a certified Trainer, Speaker and Coach with the John Maxwell Team, taking leadership, business, marketing and sales courses. I co-founded and currently serve on the AFROCAB Executive Steering Committee, a pan-African organisation that provides valued, significant and independent contributions in HIV, TB and other HIV co-morbidity, drug development, research, treatment, prevention and diagnosis. I am currently working as a health professional with a leading National Community Pharmacy in the United States, as well as a Youth Development and Women's Empowerment Activities Facilitator at Fairfax County, Virginia State, USA.

In 2013, I co-founded a nongovernment organisation IMARA-Women Empowerment Foundation to advocate for the social, economic and health rights of vulnerable women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo, essential to their dignity and empowerment. I am currently establishing an innovative global social enterprise and authentic African fashion brand: IMARA Social Enterprise, a catalyst for socio-economic empowerment of women in Sub Saharan Africa, to break through the inter-generational cycle of poverty by providing them with the tools and support to reclaim their own futures and flourish as independent entrepreneurs, driving development in their communities. In 2016, I started a coaching and training business (Furaha Transformational Leadership) and developed commercial acumen to promote and develop my business and build up my professional network. I provide marketing tools and training for business owners and non-profit leaders by helping them foresee and pave the way while helping them to set and achieve goals

and overcome limiting paradigms through coaching. I am passionate about research and since my graduation my publications have included many scientific peer-reviewed articles, and books.

Personal life

Reading has been one of the activities that has highly impacted the quality of my results, from recreational reading as a child to higher literacy and languages development as an adult. As a teen and young adult, reading was a great coping mechanism in traumatic situations and helped me to develop into a resilient strong woman. My daily reading habit for personal and business growth is helping me to leverage the wisdom and experiences of successful mentors and leaders and being smarter with feelings. Emotional Intelligence factors such as self-awareness, positive self-image, self-discipline and empathy add up to a different way of being smart and they aren't fixed at birth. Shaped by childhood experience, emotional intelligence can be nurtured and strengthened throughout adulthood with immediate benefits to our health, relationships and work.

Having a child of my own totally changed my life perspective. My daughter made me more focused in my spiritual, emotional and professional life. Before having her, I was sometimes 'just playing with life', but now I am aware I am responsible for a human being. Despite all my flaws, God trusted me and made me a steward of this precious princess on the Earth. So now I think twice before taking any decision: what impact will it have not only on my life but on her life too? I want to be a role model for my daughter. She is still little, but she is really changing my life for the better.

Role models

My role models while growing up were mostly from the books I was reading, and even today, when I have real mentors and role models, I am still teaching what I learned from people who paved my way through their writing. I developed the love of reading books as a child and became inspired by the lives of my role models and heroes who were instrumental in my choice of subjects to study: sciences from Marie Curie, and how to deal with life issues and become a good leader from Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, Helen Keller, Maya Angelou and Jeanne d'Arc.

There are many other role models in my life that I reach out to. For my academic career, Professor Kadima Justin and Peter Salah from the University of Rwanda are great role models and mentors. I always look up to Professor Shirley Randell as my gender and development expert mentor, I follow her work, publications and social media and get guidance from that. Lillian Mworeko, the ICW East Africa coordinator, is a great role model as an executive

woman living with HIV advocate. I have other role models in specific areas. In turn, I coach my mentees.

Notes

- ¹ Extract from an interview with Viviane Kalumire Furaha by A Escrig-Pinol and S Randell in 2011 and updated in 2018.