

Clifford Chance

Clifford Chance's Cornerstone project



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Introduction

Clifford Chance's Cornerstone initiative ran in Kigali, Rwanda, from October 2019 to October 2024 with the goal of improving well-being among the city's poorest communities. The firm invested £5 million into the initiative, alongside a considerable amount of pro bono and other in-kind support. These resources were deployed to co-design and deliver, in partnership with both Rwandan and international NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), 10 projects, each of which was intended to remove barriers that the city's poorest faced in various areas of their lives that impeded their ability to improve their well-being. The intention was that over the course of the five years, the aggregate effect of the different projects would be to significantly improve well-being.

This report sets out:

A

the firm's thinking in deciding to develop the initiative

B

how it developed a strategy and theory of change to ensure that its resources were used effectively

C

the initiative's governance framework

D

a project-by-project examination of the impacts that the initiative delivered

E

reflections on what we learned.

Executive summary

The early months of the initiative were dedicated to talking to people who lived in these communities. We learned about the challenges they faced in their everyday lives and developed our understanding of the issues that needed to be addressed in order to tackle the barriers that prevented people from improving their well-being.

We learned that education, family relationships, food security, health, housing and livelihoods were the areas of life in which people faced the greatest challenges. We identified these as the domains of well-being within which the initiative would seek to deliver impact.

We then worked to develop a strategy for the initiative that set out the key goals we would set ourselves and a theory of change to guide us as we made decisions about how to invest funds and deliver our in-kind expertise as impactfully as possible.

At the heart of our theory of change was a commitment to working in partnership with outstanding Rwandan and international NGOs to co-design and deliver a series of projects that would tackle the principal challenges that people faced within the domains of well-being.

By distributing our impact across these areas, we sought to deliver an aggregate impact that would significantly improve well-being.

At the outset of the initiative, we set a target of making significant and long-lasting positive changes in the lives of 50,000 people from Kigali's poorest communities. The initiative delivered 10 projects. At the time of publishing this report, it has delivered this level of change to 103,090 people.

Alongside this commitment, we sought to deliver change that was capable of being sustained following the end of the initiative. This was a key priority for us throughout and we took decisions and invested funds expressly to support the NGOs we worked with to be able to continue to deliver change.

Clifford Chance's Cornerstone initiative was delivered in Kigali, Rwanda, between 2019 and 2024 with the aim of improving well-being in the city's poorest communities.



The thinking behind deciding to develop the initiative

Jennifer Mbaluto (now Chimanga) speaking on behalf of Kigali

In 2018, the firm's Executive Leadership Group (ELG) committed Clifford Chance to developing a highly ambitious community investment initiative that would align with its commitment to giving back in the communities where it does business, enable participation from people across the business, deliver significant and measurable impact and strengthen the firm's reputation. The ELG agreed to invest £5 million in the initiative (£1 million p.a. over five years), to be delivered alongside in-kind pro bono and volunteering support, and stipulated that the commitment was in addition to the firm's existing extensive pro bono and community practice and the philanthropy of the Clifford Chance Foundation.

Considerable work was undertaken to develop our thinking on what the nature of the initiative ought to be. The ELG decided that the initiative would adopt a narrow and deep focus on a clearly defined community. This was identified as the approach that would most effectively leverage the firm's resources to deliver a long-lasting and transformative impact.

A steering committee comprised of partners and senior business professionals from across the Clifford Chance network (see Appendix A) was created to oversee the initiative and initially focused on driving forward its development. This committee created a longlist of 23 cities as possible locations for the initiative and carried out due diligence to assess logistics, risk and the prospects for delivering impact on all the cities in the longlist. An initial shortlist of six cities was subsequently presented to the ELG.

The ELG then agreed a final shortlist of Kigali in Rwanda, Accra in Ghana and Lusaka in Zambia. The final decision on where to focus the initiative was put out to a firm vote in which 800 people from across the network participated, from which Kigali emerged as the clear winner. In the short campaign leading up to the vote, each city had a partner advocate.

Developing a strategy and a theory of change

In advance of the formal launch of the initiative in October 2019, the steering committee decided:

1

Provisionally, that the initiative would focus on improving well-being in Kigali's poorest communities.

2

That to maintain momentum in engaging people within the firm in Cornerstone, we should develop up to two projects at pace, at the same time as developing the strategy and theory of change. The steering committee was confident that the risk of the two projects developing a focus that was significantly misaligned with the eventual strategy was minimal.

3

That a group of steering committee members would visit Kigali to develop relationships with stakeholders on the ground and deepen our understanding of the key challenges facing the city's poorest communities. It was anticipated that sufficient understanding would be developed on the trip to inform the identification of the two initial projects and the development of the strategy.

Five members of the steering committee, including partners from London, Amsterdam and Paris, our pro bono director and a pro bono associate in Warsaw, visited Kigali in October 2019. Two further committee members, including the partner responsible for our pro bono work and a senior litigation associate in London, visited in November 2019.

Over the course of these trips, leveraging the firm's pro bono and wider networks, we were able to meet the following NGOs:

- Akilah Institute**
- Hope and Homes for Children**
- Human Rights First**
- Kvinna Till Kvinna**
- Orbis**
- Rwanda International Institute of Ophthalmology**
- Rwandan Wildlife Conservation Association**
- Society for Family Health Rwanda**
- Survivors Fund**
- UNHCR**
- UN Capital Development Fund**

We were also able to meet:

- The Rwanda Minister for Gender and Family Promotion**
- Representatives of the Ministry of Trade and Industry**
- The Executive Director of the National Commission for Children**
- Representatives of the Rwanda Development Board**
- British High Commissioner**
- Social Development Adviser at the UK Department for International Development**
- Representatives of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office**

We attended East Africa briefings from:

- EU Head of Delegation**
- IMF Mission Chief, Rwanda**
- World Bank Chief Economist**

Following reports to the steering committee on the trips, it was decided, in relation to the development of the two initial projects, to enter into discussions with Hope and Homes for Children with a view to developing a project that would support teenage mothers in Kigali's poorest communities and with the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association to support a tree planting programme at its reserve on the outskirts of Kigali.

It was also decided to work with a consultant on developing a fully developed strategy and theory of change for the initiative.

The consultant encouraged us initially to adopt a four-stage process and for this to be informed by a commitment to being led as much as was practicable by the communities in which we wanted to have an impact:

- A** Test whether the notion of well-being was one that resonated and had meaning in the communities we wanted to impact.
- B** In the event that it did, consult the same communities to develop an understanding of the areas of life in which they faced the most acute barriers to improving well-being.
- C** Alongside b, undertake desk-based research to identify possible key domains of well-being, through a review of existing global and regional frameworks and definitions.
- D** Alongside b and c, review and incorporate findings from Clifford Chance's fact-finding trips into our thinking.

Desk-based research

Consulting the communities where we wanted to have an impact

We had an existing relationship with Hope and Homes for Children, who had been a key pro bono partner since winning the Clifford Chance Access to Justice Award in 2010. They had a well-developed presence and programme of work in Kigali.

A Clifford Chance lawyer had a personal connection with the Survivors Fund, whose mission was to support survivors of the Rwandan genocide and we had been able to meet them on the first of the trips.

As a result, we were able to contract with Hope and Homes for Children and the Survivors Fund to conduct a series of 10 in-person focus groups in some of the city's poorest communities. The focus groups were carefully planned to enable exploration of key issues relating to well-being. The following framework was used to structure the discussions:

11 Business Professionals and colleagues in the Clifford Chance office in Amsterdam undertook extensive desk-based research examining prevailing international norms in relation to understanding the drivers and barriers to strengthening well-being, alongside evidence arising from well-being focused development initiatives in Rwanda. Broadly speaking, the key findings from the four-stage process were as follows:

- A** The notion of well-being had strong relevance to and resonance in the communities. It was a way that people thought about their lives.
- B** A consensus emerged from across the focus groups that the areas of life/domains of well-being in which people faced the most acute difficulties in improving their well-being were:
 - education
 - family relationships
 - food security
 - health
 - housing
 - livelihoods

Working with the consultant, we went on to develop a theory of change for the initiative that aligned with the findings.

The approach sitting at the heart of the theory of change was to design and deliver effective projects, in partnership with outstanding local and international NGOs, that would address the key issues impacting negatively on peoples' well-being in the six areas identified by the focus groups. We decided, in addition, to include the widening of access to justice as a seventh area of strategic focus, in the belief that it was central to enable progress across the other areas and that as a law firm this was an area in which we could make a considerable contribution.

At the same time, in order to bring about lasting and sustainable change that would continue after Cornerstone's conclusion, the theory of change focused on building the capacity of our NGO partners to continue to deliver impact in the long term.

The theory of change is set out here:

The thinking underpinning it is set out in this paper:

Cornerstone's governance framework

The Cornerstone steering committee had responsibility for overseeing the initiative. The committee was chaired by Roger Leese, the partner with overall responsibility for the firm's pro bono practice. The committee met quarterly. The standing agenda for the meetings comprised:

- considering proposals for new projects
- approving new projects
- updates on existing projects and impact reporting
- communications and engagement
- budget monitoring

We worked with the consultant to develop a framework and documentation to ensure consistency and promote effectiveness across the committee's key areas of responsibility. We created the following templates:

- A a project proposal form**
For use by our NGO partners to set out in detail the aims, implementation activities and areas of alignment with Cornerstone's strategic objectives of projects they wanted us to consider investing.
- B an impact reporting form**
For use by our NGO partners to report on the impact of their project. We anticipated that most of the projects would be multi-year and reports were submitted at the end of each year of a project to enable the committee to assess whether the project was on track to achieve its overall goals before releasing the next tranche of funding. Reports were also submitted at the conclusion of the projects to capture the overall impacts.
- C an impact reporting framework**
KPIs were developed by the committee working with the consultant in order to facilitate annual reviews of the progress being made towards the initiative's objectives. The KPIs were designed to align with impacts set out in the theory of change.
- D budget monitoring**
Tom Dunn, the global pro bono director, was given responsibility for monitoring the budget and working at the project design phase to ensure that we achieved the annual £1 million spend. The steering committee had access to a dedicated Clifford Chance Connect platform that held all the documentation and budget information.

Impact: project by project

In the reports that follow, we reflect on the approach that we took in designing and developing the projects with our NGO partners. We set out:

- the domains of well-being the project aimed to impact and, in line with our wider pro bono strategy, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the project aligned with
- the issues and needs within the domains of well-being that the project sought to address (rationale for the project)
- what the project delivered
- the impact that the project has had – we provide a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence
- prospects for the sustainability of the project

Here, we consider both:

- The support that we provided during the course of the initiative that had the effect of building the NGOs' capacity, and so strengthened their wider sustainability as organisations.
- The support that we provided to the NGOs we worked with expressly to contribute towards the sustainability of the work on which we had partnered with them following the end of the initiative.

One of the key KPIs enshrined our overall aim of impacting 50,000 people from Kigali's poorest communities over the course of the initiative.

Advocates for international development (A4ID)

Pro bono legal aid project

March 2021 to April 2025

The domains of well-being addressed by the project: Livelihoods, Education, Health, Family, Relationships, Housing and Access to Justice

SDG alignment: 8.8, 16.3 and 16.10

Rationale for the project

The Rwanda Legal Aid Forum had highlighted that Rwanda had a low lawyer-to-population ratio. Poverty is widely recognised as a major barrier to access to justice. The absence of a state-financed legal aid system and undeveloped pro bono culture means that many poor people in Rwanda are deprived access to justice and lack the ability to assert their rights, including in relation to Cornerstone's domains of well-being.



Launch of the A4ID Pro Bono Legal Aid Project.

Project activities

Work stream 1: Supporting local civil society organisations (CSOs)

Supporting the Legal Aid Forum, Human Rights First Rwanda Association and HAURUKA, Rwanda's three leading CSOs involved in the provision of free high-quality legal aid, in order to build their capacity to provide free legal services to the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Kigali. Key activities to include in-person training, legal health checks of the organisations' governance and grant-funding. In addition, funding was provided to support the scaling of an online platform to provide legal advice remotely.

Work stream 2: Partnerships with local law firms and promoting the culture of pro bono

Working in partnership with the Rwanda Bar Association to promote pro bono amongst Rwandan law firms and developing their support to gain access to justice CSOs, in particular, those working with the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Kigali. In addition, creating a working group of Rwandan law firms to foster peer-to-peer exchanges and share best practices on pro bono activities.

Work stream 3: Supporting universities' legal aid clinics

Instilling a pro bono culture in the future of the legal profession by supporting the establishment of legal aid clinics in universities and law schools.

Alliance of Biodiversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT)

Impact of the project

- Legal education and awareness: information and resources about the law were accessed 7,415,394 times, either by people using the online platform or by attending legal education community outreach sessions run by the CSOs, exceeding the target set at the outset of the project by 94%.
- 39,412 people received legal advice, were given access to mediation services or referred on to a source of free specialist legal advice, exceeding the target set at the outset of the project by 13%. Of the participants, 43% were women and 57% were men.
- Pro bono advice and representation was provided on 558 cases, exceeding the target set at the project's outset by 28%. Of the clients, 69% were women and 31% were men.
- The three CSOs supported by the project developed pro bono partnerships with 24 Rwandan law firms and government entities.
- The three CSOs established five pro bono university advice clinics.
- 97% of respondents to a survey of stakeholders said that they felt the project had either significantly or moderately achieved its objectives.

Sustainability

- Further funding was provided towards the conclusion of the project to enable A4ID to work for another year to strengthen the pro bono infrastructure within Rwanda, in particular, by working with the Rwanda Bar Association to support its rollout of a national pro bono scheme for all the country's 1,700 lawyers.
- In delivering the project, A4ID, for the first time, planned and implemented a strategic initiative focused on the expansion of the pro bono sector at a national level in partnership with key stakeholders across the leadership of the legal profession. This strengthened their capacity to pursue their wider mission.

These films cover the launch of the project and illustrate the type of impact the project went on to have

Improving nutrition in Kigali primary schools and supporting community agribusinesses

January 2023 to December 2025

The domains of well-being addressed by the project: Nutrition, Education and Livelihoods

SDG alignment: 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2a, 4.4, 4.7, 8.4, 11b and 15.2

Rationale for the project:

A 2016 study found that about 28% of children under six years who were living in Gasabo, a district of Kigali, were stunted. Estimates for the incidence of stunting in all children across Rwanda give a figure of around 800,000 children.

According to 2022 Rwanda government data, just 39% of primary schools across Rwanda were providing meals to schoolchildren and 54% of the schools did not have a nutrition garden.

Among all schools that provide school meals, 81% used firewood.



The project sought to address these issues by:

- Facilitating the establishment of school-based agribusiness centres with the capacity to improve nutrition in the schools and help to trigger the development of climate-smart agri-businesses in surrounding communities.
- Promoting agricultural knowledge sharing in schools and neighbouring communities through training and behavioural change communications.
- Building and strengthening multi-stakeholder platforms to sustain the links between schools, communities and traders.
- Pursuing policy advocacy around nutrition and sustainable agriculture at local and national government levels.

Project activities:

- The establishment of school garden demonstration plots in partnership with the Rwanda Agriculture Board.
- Training sessions were delivered across primary schools to a mix of head teachers and teachers that focused on:
 - improving bean production
 - best agronomic practices
 - the use of fertilisers
 - planting techniques
 - harvesting and post-harvest handling
 - nutrition
 - composting

Key elements of the training were delivered using animations that were produced in Kinyarwanda.

- The schools were provided with access to DACA, a digital agri-climate service, which provided real-time access to short-, medium- and long-term forecasting to help the schools and local communities develop climate-resilient agricultural practices.
- Community outreach sessions were run in schools with established demonstration plots for parents and community members that focused on:
 - the cultivation of high-quality beans using seeds
 - efficient water use
 - the use of fertilisers
 - pest management and post-harvest handling
- On the advocacy side:
 - the project team joined the national government's School Feeding Technical Working Group (SFTWG)
 - meetings were held with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of the Environment, the Rwanda Education Board, the City of Kigali and the World Food Programme

Impact of the project

Establishing demonstration school gardens:

Phase 1

Gardens were established in 11 schools, 600 grams of improved high-iron beans were planted in each plot and 50 teachers were trained in bean planting and plot management.

Phase 2

Gardens were established in a further 136 schools, 600 grams of improved high-iron bean seeds were planted in each garden and 300 teachers were trained.

Phase 3

Gardens were established in a further 126 schools, 600 grams of improved high-iron seeds were planted in each garden and 227 teachers were trained.

Initial monitoring of the harvest from 120 of the plots suggests that the average yield per plot is consistent with a yield if scaled at around 1.2 tons per hectare, which is higher than the national average

On the advocacy side:

- Following discussions with CIAT, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education recommended that the national government should work closely with the City of Kigali to strengthen co-ordination across Kigali schools around improved nutrition and that all larger schools in Kigali should consider establishing their own gardens and growing high-iron beans. It was subsequently decided to run a pilot programme to drive forward both aspects across Kigali in September 2025.
- Following advocacy by CIAT within the SFTWG, the national government appeared to adopt a more flexible approach to the procurement of school meals and was more willing to permit individual schools to contract with local agribusinesses to supply nutritious, pre-cooked high-iron beans. For example, it appears likely that the government will allow 40 Kigali schools to contract with a supplier of processed beans in 2026; all schools in the Huye District, Southern Province, are now permitted to contract with a local supplier of pre-cooked beans. As well as being highly nutritious, the use of pre-cooked beans will result in a very significant reduction in school use of firewood for cooking.

Personal testimonies

“Beans are very important to our school children’s health. They are an important source of protein and they are served every day on meals,”

said Jean Baptiste Habanabashaka,
Headmaster at Groupe Scolaire (GS) Kimironko II in the Gasabo District.

“I have been using SAWBO animations since the previous training and I am still using them today because they help us to improve our school garden’s output. This knowledge should be shared with other schools beyond Kigali and with all farmers, as information is crucial for crop production. That is why we do our best to share this knowledge with our neighbouring farmers,”

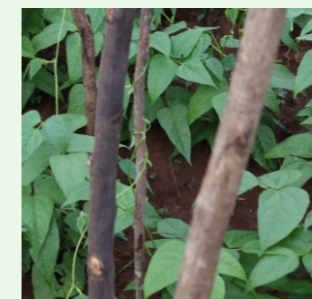
said Straton Barute,
Head Teacher of EP Kamuyange.

“The nutrition of school children is in our hands. It’s up to us—head teachers and teachers—to ensure that students eat nutritious and healthy foods. This is essential for their brain development, overall health and educational success,”

said Mr. Emmanuel Dusingizimana,
Executive Secretary of the Heads of Schools Organisation OSO.

“I have learned a lot from this school. The SAWBO animations we watched are in Kinyarwanda and very easy to understand. I have many animations saved on a flash drive that I received, which I continue to use throughout the season and share with my fellow farmers. As a representative of farmer promoters in this cell, I will continue to share this information with many other farmers,”

said Mr Rutiyomba,
a representative of farmer promoters in the Sha cell.



Sustainability

Capacity within 273 of Kigali’s primary schools to move towards the development of a self-sustaining model for improving healthy nutrition for their pupils and acting as a hub for improved smallholder agriculture across their communities was strengthened through the development of school garden plots and extensive teacher training.

Hope and Homes for Children

Supporting teenage mothers

April 2020 to June 2024

The domains of well-being addressed by the project: Livelihoods, Housing, Education, Nutrition and Food Security and Health and Family Relationships

SDG alignment: 3.7, 3.8, 8.6, 10.2, 16.9 and 16.10

Rationale for the project

Kigali District had the second highest rate of pregnancy among 15 to 19-year-olds in Rwanda, while the government estimated that annually, there were 20,000 teenage pregnancies nationally. In 2016, Le Collectif Des Ligues et Associations de Defenses des Droits de L'Homme au Rwanda, a well-respected human rights umbrella organisation, carried out research that showed that 50% of teenage mothers dropped out of education, 19% fell into poverty, 11% suffered adverse mental health consequences and 5% faced discrimination.

The Project was developed during COVID-19 when concerns quickly emerged that reduced access to reproductive health education and family planning services would lead to an increase in teenage pregnancy rates.

The available data on teenage pregnancy was widely held to underestimate the scale and consequences of the issue because it was derived from hospital records of mothers who had presented to give birth in a hospital setting; it was well-established that a significant number of teenage mothers do not give birth in hospital.

Pro bono support from Clifford Chance in relation to the project

The Legal Tech team in Clifford Chance's New York office advised Hope and Homes for Children on developing their capability to monitor and measure the impact of the project and of their work more widely.

Project activities

Delivery of the project was anchored around Hope and Homes for Children's well-established Kicukiro Community Hub in Kicukiro District in south-east Kigali.

- Worked with Community Development Networks, community volunteers and caregivers to strengthen their ability to support teenage mothers and their children, in particular, to enable mothers to better understand their rights and access government and other assistance.
- Delivered campaigns across the community to reduce the stigmatisation associated with teenage mothers and their children.
- Directly delivered vocational and livelihood training or further education to teenage mothers to help develop their economic resilience.
- Provided counselling and other psycho-social support to teenage mothers to help them recover from past trauma.
- Supported teenage mothers in reuniting them with their own families through mediation and other support services.



Teenage mothers at a peer support group.

Project activities

252 teen mothers:

- Were supported by the Community Development Networks (CDNs) in Kicukiro, including through the provision of day care.
- Were given training in career development and provided with essential skills to pursue employment opportunities, with many progressing into employment in a range of sectors, including tailoring, hairdressing and mechanics.
- Received financial support to start up their own businesses as well as tailored welfare support, including for food, clothing, rent and household items.
- Received psycho-social support, including counselling and support to re-establish supportive and loving relationships with their families.
- Became involved in peer-to-peer support groups in which they shared experiences, developed confidence and strengthened their social support networks and their ability to re-integrate into their community; some set up savings and loans groups.
- The births of 276 children to teen mothers were formally registered, ensuring their legal recognition and access to rights, while these children also received all their vaccinations.
- 102 teen mothers received intensive reproductive health education and support about using contraception and accessing family planning services.
- The capacity of the community to support teen mothers was strengthened:
 - 119 members of Community Development Networks, 114 community volunteers and six caregivers were trained to support teen mothers.

De-stigmatisation:

- Nine community sessions were delivered in partnership with Kicukiro District to promote more positive attitudes towards teen mothers, as well birth registration, child vaccination and reproductive health services.
- Community awareness materials were published, including 4,000 leaflets that were distributed during International Day of the African Child.
- Nine radio and TV shows were broadcast focusing on building support and positive attitudes towards teen mothers.
- The parents of 51 teen mothers joined peer support groups, which, in time, integrated mothers from the wider community and, as a result, attitudes shifted and a more supportive environment for teen mothers was fostered.
- The parents of 51 teen mothers were trained in setting up savings and loans groups.
- Family conflict mediation sessions were run for 51 parents and teens; parents who participated became more supportive of their children, in many cases encouraging them into employment and helping with childcare.

As a result of the renovation of the Community Hub building and facilities, the capacity of other programmes has increased: early childhood development programmes are now being delivered to 267 children, the youth club has 300 members and a community vaccination programme has benefitted over 12,000 people.

Personal testimonies

Amina



Amina

When she was 16, Amina was involved in a short relationship with an older man and she fell pregnant. Her relationship with her parents deteriorated. After she gave birth, Amina went to live with the father of her child, hoping to be supported by him. Unfortunately, he treated both her and the baby badly; they were often hungry with nothing to eat. Amina decided to return to live with her mother.

Hope and Homes for Children started to work with the family in May 2020, when Amina's baby was 18 months old. Amina was encouraged to join a workshop about healing emotional wounds. She attended workshops about reproductive health, children's rights, parenting skills and child registration processes. She started to get to know other teen mothers on the programme and said:

“After meeting with other girls, we shared our testimonies and I was very happy because I was not feeling alone anymore, I had people with whom I could share my worries and fears.”

Following this, Amina joined a peer support group for teen mothers to create a proper space to share their testimonies, to encourage each other and to grow their acceptance and resilience.

Amina went on to get paid work selling fruit at a local shop in the evenings, which meant that she could start paying her mother some rent and supporting her in other ways. Amina said:

“My mother is proud of me now. I look after my child and the family as well, I have learnt about the rights of my child and she is now registered. Hope and Homes for Children has encouraged me to know how to save money so that I can be self-reliant and provide basic needs to my child and now I have a bank account where I save my money.”

Amina next underwent a course in tailoring to gain new skills and further increase her prospects for securing paid work. Her son went on to benefit from Hope and Homes for Children's Early Child Development services. Amina said:

“We have now a stable family and my mother and I support each other. When I was learning about tailoring, she stayed with my child at home and she sometimes brought my child to the school where I was training. I am happy now because I have a good relationship with my mother.”

Personal testimonies

Beza



Beza

Beza grew up in Kigali city and had a happy childhood, growing up in a loving family. As the first born, her parents saw her as a role model for her three young siblings. She was in her final year of primary school when she became pregnant after having sex for the first time.

Her parents were furious. Beza explained: “My father was very angry. He told me the baby’s father should take responsibility.” She said she understood where her father was coming from, as it was very hard for her parents to provide for the existing family and she felt incredibly sad for bringing what felt like another burden on the family. Beza said:

“After I discovered that I was pregnant, I was feeling deep anguish. I was even ashamed to go out due to my pregnancy.”

After Beza’s baby girl was born, the father refused to take any responsibility for her. Hope and Homes for Children started to work with Beza and her family during the first COVID-19 lockdown. They conducted family counselling sessions and provided the family with other support, for example, supplying a combination of different sorghum, soja and maize so that Beza could have a balanced diet and breastfeed her child successfully.

Beza’s mother was also supported by Hope and Homes for Children to run a small business and develop an income by selling fruits and crops at a local market. It became easier for the parents to provide for the family. After many counselling and mediation sessions, Beza’s parents felt able to accept their grandchild.

Beza attended a workshop where teen mothers could share their experience. Beza said:

“Meeting with other girls in the same situation with me was a relieving event. I was feeling alone and the burden that I was carrying then diminished.”

Beza became more confident and ambitious. She completed a mechanic training course sponsored by Hope and Homes for Children and found a job. Beza said:

“I thank Hope and Homes for Children for the support provided for me and my family. I have registered my child and I feel more confident and am no longer ashamed. I’m inspired to be a hard worker and become someone important to my child and my family.

I thank Hope and Homes for Children because, from the day they entered in my father’s house, things have changed.”

Personal testimonies

Dorcas



Dorcas

Dorcas did not know her own father. She lived with her mother and stepfather. Her stepfather tried to make Dorcas have sex with him, which prompted Dorcas to leave home and move in to live with a man, after which she quickly became pregnant, while she was still at school. Soon afterwards, the man left Kigali to go and live in Uganda. When Dorcas tried to return home to her mother, she refused to let Dorcas back into the house.

A neighbour provided Dorcas with a mattress and bed sheets. She started selling avocados to support herself.

She was then supported by local leaders to go to hospital and she gave birth to a baby boy. Dorcas's mother and stepfather kept on abusing her verbally and refusing to help her and her stepfather continued trying to have sex with her.

After a while, Dorcas came to the attention of Hope and Homes for Children and they started to support her. She soon joined the teen mother's peer support group, from which Dorcas said she gained a lot of strength. Hope and Homes for Children also gave her some financial support and with the help and support of her maternal grandmother, Dorcas decided to buy two goats and now she has six goats. As a result, she is able to make a financial contribution to her family. Dorcas said:

“My mother has become a friend because I am backed by Hope and Homes for Children. I also get support from community volunteers working at the community hub.”

Sustainability

- Ring-fenced funding was provided towards the conclusion of the project to enable Hope and Homes for Children to design and implement a similar project outside Kigali, in order to test the model's ability to transform the lives of teen parents in a very different, rural setting. In a sign of proof of concept being effectively established by the Kigali project, Hope and Homes for Children secured match funding from another donor for the rural project and were consequently able to double its scale.
- Hope and Homes for Children effectively engaged a wide range of stakeholders in their dissemination of the project's impact and effectiveness, including senior officials and ministers from the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Rwandan and international NGOs and other civil society actors, and reported that in doing so, it strengthened the case for and interest in potential nationwide implementation.

The Rwanda Country Director for Hope and Homes for Children commented:

“I am particularly proud that this approach is now being referenced not only by the Rwandan government at the national level but also by intergovernmental bodies. It is a testament to what we achieved together and the undoubtably improved well-being of teen mothers, their babies and the entire family being able to function better.”

New York Academy of Sciences

Strengthening STEM educational attainment among 13 to 18-year-olds in Kigali

October 2020 to January 2025

The domains of well-being addressed by the project: Education and Food Security

SDG alignment: 1.5, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.c, 8.6, 9.5 and 13.3

Rationale for the project

The objectives of the project reflected the focus in government and among other stakeholders on the vital role that STEM education had to play in strengthening the school curriculum in Rwanda, in equipping students with the skills to thrive in a 21st century economy and in driving economic growth.

The government's Education Sector Strategic Plan (2018-19 to 2023-24) emphasised the role of school leaders in motivating girls to choose STEM subjects. In a parallel development alongside this project, the Ministry of Education launched Tech-Enabled STEM Teaching at FAWE Girls' School and other schools nationwide in 2020.

Pro bono support from Clifford Chance incorporated into the project

- Two members of the Cornerstone steering committee acted as judges on the innovation challenges.
- Members of Clifford Chance acted as mentors to innovation challenge teams.

Total number of students participating:
2,797

Project activities

At the core of the project was the delivery of a series of Innovation Challenges for students from public secondary schools in Kigali in which they were required to develop innovative solutions to real-world problems using the full range of STEM skills:

- Summer 2021: 24 students participated in a Vaccine Distribution Challenge.
- Spring 2022: 547 students participated in an Urban Gardens Challenge.
- 13 public schools in Kigali participated in the first two Innovation Challenges.
- Spring 2023: 909 students from 15 public schools participated in a Green Schools, Green Homes, Green Communities Challenge. 163 of the students participated in field trips to Umusambi Village, which were organised by the Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association (RWCA), another Cornerstone NGO partner, where they learned about RWCA's biodiversity and conservation work.
- Spring 2024: 1,317 students from 15 schools participated in a Climate Resilience challenge. 400 of these students took part in a further field trip to Umusambi Village led by RWCA, where they participated in activities relating to wetlands and climate preparedness.

Strengthening STEM expertise of teachers:

- 23 educators acted as supporters and mentors during the first two Innovation Challenges and participated in professional development training to incorporate the Urban Gardens Challenge into their curriculum.
- 12 teachers acted as mentors in the third Innovation Challenge.
- 30 teachers joined a professional development programme.
- A further 45 teachers received professional development training in connection with the fourth Innovation Challenge.

94%
of students reported
overall satisfaction with
the programme.

Impact of the project on the students

- Evidence of the immediate impact of the project was available in the numbers of students from each Innovation Challenge who followed up their participation by going on to join the New York Academy of Sciences (NYAS) Junior Academy, as follows:
 - 24 students in 2021.
 - 483 students in 2022.
 - 890 students in 2023; 632 of these students participated in NYAS's Junior Academy Open Innovation Challenges. From this group, a team of six students from GS Mburabuturo School was recognised as achieving a project of distinction in the international competition, placing it in the top 10 projects amongst hundreds of teams worldwide.
- An external evaluation of the programme carried out by Hello Insight found that:
 - 92% of students agreed that Mentors and NYAS programme staff expressed often that they expect young people to try hard and do their best.
 - 90% of students agreed that Mentors and NYAS programme staff frequently reminded students that they believe in them and their ability to succeed.
 - 90% of students agreed that these adults supported them to envision their future.
- Testimony from students who participated in the Challenges:
 - "I was very interested in this project. We had fun and did hard work in the group, brainstorming and searching for a solution."
 - "Me and my teammates have gained many things from this project. Working together, we have learned to be part of society and care about others' attitudes."
 - "Before doing this challenge, I was not good at working collaboratively in a team. This challenge made me realise that working together leads to the best solutions because different ideas are collected together to create the main idea."
 - "I was very shy at the beginning of the project, but now I can engage in constructive discussions."

"Being a first-year member of the New York Academy Innovation Challenge has been an unforgettable journey that has helped me hone my skills and make friends that will last a lifetime. I met hardworking individuals who helped me improve my own skills and taught me many valuable lessons in teamwork and analytical thinking."

Impact of the project on the teachers

The following is a summary of discussions with teachers involved in the programme during one of the day-long professional development sessions held by NYAS. The teachers commented that:

- Students had benefitted from the ability to practise academic research skills and employ scientific methods and increased their comprehension, knowledge and familiarity with complex concepts such as hypothesis-driven experimentation.
- Self-confidence and communication skills had increased in individual students because of their participation in the collaborative process and they also noted an increase in students' commitment to including all voices in group discussion and increased recognition of the different strengths that each team member brought to the overall project, while at the same time improving their ability to navigate disagreements during group discussions.
- The project's commitment to gender balance was crucial. One of the teachers was impressed by how often teams had a 50/50 split between girls and boys and how many girls acted as team leaders because, as she put it, "in our history, people used to think that ladies cannot manage sciences."
- Leadership skills developed in those participating in the programme and this was starting to show itself in the rest of their studies. Participating students also demonstrated increased perseverance, improved time management and project goals and learned how to navigate conflict in a teamwork setting.
- The technology skills acquired by the students were benefitting their performance across the curriculum.

The commitment of the programme to including 13-year-old students was highly valued. In the words of one teacher, the programme was "planting the seeds" of science in their mindset and showing them the joy and power that can be found in scientific discovery.

Impact on secondary stakeholders

During interviews with the families of students participating in the Urban Gardens Challenge, parents reported that in supporting their children's involvement, they had themselves learned about how to grow their own food. One parent who worked as a health worker reported sharing this new knowledge with her clients.

- Families also reported a shift in thinking about the importance of STEM and how it can be used to solve everyday problems.
- At the Open Day celebrating the Urban Gardens Challenge, the Administrative Mayor of Kigali said, "I never considered that young people could be part of the policy solution to solving malnutrition in Kigali."
- The project was delivered by NYAS in partnership with Association Mwana Ukundwa (AMU), a leading Rwandan educational and public health support provider. AMU experienced a number of benefits themselves resulting from their involvement, including a strengthening of its reputation as an organisation capable of delivering complex and innovative STEM education programmes and increased capacity as a result of building relationships with local and federal governments and other NGOs.
- Some of the winning entries were showcased both within the students' own schools and then across the wider community. For example, the winning team from the 2023 Challenge created a high-efficiency household cooking stove, which allowed more refined temperature control, thereby reducing the use of firewood, and showcased the model in a number of districts across Rwanda during a roadshow organised by AMU.

Sustainability

- Further funding was provided towards the conclusion of the project to enable NYAS to build on its engagement with the federal government, including the Ministries of Education and Innovation and ICT, with a view to accessing government funding for ongoing and national rollout of the project and to build relationships with other potential corporate funders.



Clifford Chance meeting students at one of the schools participating in the NYAS Innovation Challenge.

Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association (RWCA)

Tree Planting

2019 to 2020 and 2022 to 2023

The domains of well-being addressed by the project: Livelihoods and Education

SDG alignment: 15.5

Project activities and impact

- 2,000 indigenous trees were planted by RWCA within the Rugezi Marsh, a Ramsar-protected wetland, with the assistance of local community and youth groups in the area.
- This built on RWCA's well-established tree planting programmes, which had seen over 20,000 indigenous trees planted by 2018.
- RWCA adopts a sustainable philosophy of growing trees rather than simply planting them, which involves continuing oversight and care of saplings as they develop. Five of RWCA's Community Conservation Champions were given the responsibility of providing ongoing care to the saplings; after two years, the survival rate was 90.5%.

In a postscript to the project, in 2022, the organisers of a Clifford Chance offsite made a donation of over £17,000 to support RWCA's carbon sequestration programme as part of its commitment to offset the carbon emitted as a result of the offsite.

These funds contributed to the restoration of two RWCA sites and the planting of 8,047 indigenous trees from 34 different species. 354 local community members, including 253 women, were employed to participate in ground preparation, the distribution of manure and planting of trees. In addition, eight Conservation Champions were recruited to monitor and care for the sites and check on the progress of the trees.



Local students on a school trip to learn about the tree planting programme.

Rwanda Wildlife Conservation Association (RWCA) / The Lifescape Project

Payment for ecosystem services pilot

2022 to 2027

The domains of well-being addressed by the project: Livelihoods and Education

SDG alignment: 8.9, 11.7, 12a, 12b, 15.3, 15.5, 15.9 and 15a

Rationale for the project

This project sought to establish an evidence-based model for the sustainable funding of ecosystem renewal, initially by focusing on rural areas in the vicinity of Kigali, and was developed at the same time as the Rwandan government was seeking to develop its own strategic approach towards what has become known as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES). This term refers to the range of financial or in-kind incentives that can be offered to individuals or communities in exchange for managing land or other natural resources sustainably, including through biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and the maintenance of clean water.



The land that will be restored during the course of the project.

Project activities

The project developed over three distinct phases:

1. Seed funding was provided to support the groundwork for the development of a detailed project proposal for significant ecosystem restoration in Kigali, in particular, by enabling RWCA to create credible science-based methodologies and metrics for demonstrating the natural capital impact that such a project could achieve.
2. Following the successful completion of phase one, further funding was provided to support the development of a detailed feasibility study for the implementation and ongoing monitoring of two pilot ecosystem restoration projects in Rwanda.
3. The resulting feasibility study identified a number of potential sites for the delivery of an ecosystem renewal project. Funding was provided to enable land purchase, carbon accreditation and restoration.

The thinking behind the project was that the most effective evidence for the feasibility and efficacy of potentially self-funding ecosystem restoration would come in the form of a well-designed PES project implemented at some scale. It was believed that if such a project were successfully implemented, then, in time, considerably more opportunities for ecosystem restoration capable of delivering tangible community benefits could be unlocked and, over time, drive systemic and sustainable change.

The key stages in the plan to execute stage three were:

- purchasing the land, drawing on RWCA's extensive knowledge of the local market
- registering the project with Plan Vivo for certification under the Plan Vivo Carbon Standard, so as to enable the sale of carbon credits (Plan Vivo were winners of the 2022 Clifford Chance UN SDGs Award)
- restoring the plot, drawing on RWCA's extensive experience of restoring sites in Rwanda
- verifying carbon credits under the Plan Vivo Carbon Standard
- selling the carbon credits

Implementation:

- In September 2024, two contiguous parcels of land were purchased.
- RWCA were admitted onto Plan Vivo's accelerator, which gave them access to specialist training and, between October 2024 and March 2025, members of the Lifescape Project and RWCA completed the Plan Vivo Accelerator training programme on key aspects of project development, including financial and carbon modelling and communication strategy.
- Adam Eagle, the Lifescape Project CEO, and Amelia Holmes from the Lifescape Project travelled to Rwanda in mid-November 2024 to meet with the RWCA team in person and hold in-depth community meetings with the Gakoma community on site to discuss project details with potential participants. This included facilitating participatory exercises, including social mapping and well-being assessments, to ensure meaningful community engagement.
- In February 2025, the Project Idea Note was officially approved by Plan Vivo; work on the Project Design Document is ongoing, with submission planned for the summer of 2025.
- Olivier Nsengimana, the RWCA CEO, met in person with the carbon markets department within the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) to present the project model. REMA provided positive feedback and stated that they regard the pilot project as a Voluntary Carbon Market model with strong alignment with government policy and potential to scale. They also outlined the documents that needed to be submitted in order to secure a formal non-objection from the government.

Save the Children

Supporting child-focused businesses in partnership with Kumwe Hub

May 2022 to June 2025

The domains of well-being addressed by the project: Livelihoods, Nutrition and Food Security and Health and Education

SDG alignment: 1.2, 2.3, 2.4, 8.5, 8.6, 9.3 and 10.2

Rationale for the project

Startups have faced significant hurdles in accessing affordable capital in Rwanda and consequently, the potential for scaling the impact of socially focused entrepreneurs is a long way from being realised. Save the Children's Kumwe Hub was established to support the growth, success and sustainability of child-focused entrepreneurial companies, in particular, those seeking to address some of the most entrenched problems arising in relation to children's well-being, including child mortality, malnutrition, school absence, illiteracy and poor sanitation.

Pro bono support from Clifford Chance incorporated into the project

Mentoring support from lawyers within Clifford Chance's corporate practice to businesses who secured loan funding in each round.

Testimony from the business owners

Project activities

The project involved the provision of a package of support to Kumwe Hub to build its capacity to provide a combination of loan capital and wrap-around technical assistance to startups and, in this way, try to ensure that loans are leveraged well for growth. Support was intended to be flexible, tailored to and based on the needs of each business.

- The establishment of a revolving loan fund, to make one-year repayable loans with interest rates set at 10%, considerably below the market average of 23 to 30% offered by commercial banks and microfinance institutions (MFIs).
- A round of loans in each of the three years of the project to businesses with innovative proposals to improve children’s well-being, focusing in year one on health and nutrition, in year two on education and, in year three, on the environment.
- Wrap-around support delivered to the businesses, including in relation to:
 - registration
 - business strategy and growth planning
 - business-specific thematic technical support
 - mentoring, coaching and peer support

“While I had thoroughly thought out my business idea, rented premises and acquired some equipment, I got stuck because I had utilised all my savings. The loan I received helped to kick-start commercial operations. I managed to purchase huge stock preserve jars, establish the cereal washing facility and acquire a pressure canner. I immediately hired two new employees to sort and wash the beans and maize and to monitor the pressure canner. To date, my product is known and loved. I am now working on expansion of the business, first in Kigali city, and my vision is then to expand across the country using a franchise model.”

said Charles Gatete,
Founder and CEO, Ndengu Ltd

“I started off with a rudimentary, high energy consuming and noisy grinding machine that had a maximum capacity of one tonne per day and could process only one type of cereal at a time. After obtaining a loan from Kumwe Hub, I purchased a more advanced, low energy consuming processing machine with a capacity of up to five tonnes per day, which can mill multiple types of mixed cereals. The new machine has minimised cereal wastage, reduced processing time and improved the quality of the porridge. I also used part of the loan to acquire a delivery van that quickly improved porridge distribution to schools, franchises and supermarkets.”

said Samuel Uwihanganye,
Managing Director, Rainbow Health Foods (Porridge Business)

Impact of the project

In year one,
seven businesses accessed loans

In year two,
seven businesses accessed loans

In year three,
six businesses accessed loans

“Our school targets children from low-income families and children living with disabilities but we have faced a challenge feeding them at school. Fortunately, we came into contact with Rainbow Health Foods, which agreed to supply our school with nutritious porridge at a lower price than other porridge brands on the market. Before connecting with Rainbow, our teachers spent a lot of time searching for good porridge on the market and organising transportation, which was costly for us. To date, Rainbow Health Foods has supplied us with porridge consistently, at a low price and delivered it to our school without any additional transport charges. The porridge is good quality and the children like it so much. Since the children started eating the porridge, we have observed that children are more active in and out of class, school attendance has increased, and teachers report better concentration in class.”

said Nyirahirwa Sylvie,
Headmistress of Tiberian Initiative for Children School
(Nursery and Primary School)



“The loan provided by Kumwe Hub, was very useful and timely for our business. It enabled us to renovate our premises and to comply with the regulatory requirements for premise registration. We used part of the loan to invest in high-quality packaging that preserves the quality of our yoghurt. This has enabled us to penetrate the market and place our products in some of the most prominent supermarkets in Rwanda.”

said Sharon Akanyana,
Managing Director,
Ishyo Foods Ltd (Yoghurt Business)

Sharon Akanyana from Ishyo Foods Ltd.

“The loan was very helpful to me. I bought a hatchery and now I am able to hatch chicks at a much bigger scale so that clients do not have to wait to get their orders. I have started expanding to other communities that I was not serving before. I plan to grow my business to supply chicks across the whole country.”

said Diogene Gold Rwema,
Managing Director, Diosol Ltd

“I am utilising the loan fully on rainwater harvesting and storage infrastructure. This will make my business sustainable for a very long time. I am sure many people will see and get inspired to harvest and use rainwater for various purposes, both in business and at home.”

said Founder and CEO, CAPCN

Sustainability

- Further investment was made in the revolving loan fund towards the end of the project, ensuring that Kumwe Hub would be in a position to bring new businesses into the programme.
- Further funding was also made to enable Kumwe Hub to build its own capacity to provide in-kind, wrap-around support to the businesses.
- The project represented a significant development in Save the Children’s own capacity to support the growth of socially focused small and medium enterprises in the region, which represented an important development in its overall strategy.

Survivors Fund

The project differed from the others in that it evolved over four phases, each phase building on the success and lessons of the previous phase, as follows:

Phase one:
COVID-19 Emergency Response Project

Phase two:
Counselling Extension Response Project (April 2021 to October 2022)

Phase three:
Counselling Enhanced Reach Project (December 2022 to October 2024)

Phase four:
Training and sensitisation of Community Health Officers and Community

Providing mental health support to survivors of the Rwanda genocide

April 2020 to December 2025

The domains of well-being addressed by the project: Health, Family Relationships and Livelihoods

SDG alignment: 3.4 and 3.5

Rationale for the project

Each year, from 7 April to 16 July, Rwanda commemorates the genocide against the Tutsi with a series of local and national events in which communities come together, visit memorial sites and hold their own commemoration events.

None of this was possible in 2020 because of the lockdown and other restrictions introduced by the Rwanda government in response to COVID-19.

The original intention of the project was to enable the Survivors Fund to address the mental health and economic challenges that faced genocide survivors as a result of this.

In particular, Survivors Fund were concerned about the following issues:

- isolation and loneliness resulting from the lockdown
- lack of income due to not being able to work
- incidents of trauma and flashbacks to the genocide resulting from the public announcements that the police and army were regularly making for everyone to stay indoors, the setting up of roadblocks and the sights of planes repatriating foreign nationals, all of which had been prominent features of the genocide

Project activities

- Raising awareness of the availability of mental health support using radio adverts and social media channels and focusing on Kigali, the Eastern Province and the Southern Province as the areas in which the greatest number of survivors lived.
- The delivery of a short series of radio broadcasts with information and advice on how to effectively manage mental health at times of stress.
- The delivery of mental health support and emergency assistance to genocide survivors through toll-free, telephone-based counselling services: three new toll-free lines were set up, operated by professional counsellors, who were supported by 48 fully trained volunteer peer support counsellors.

Over the course of the subsequent phases, the project evolved as follows:

- It continued to focus on providing access to phone-based counselling and supplementary support to vulnerable survivors of the genocide and related vulnerable persons across Rwanda, through local survivors' organisations in partnership with Survivors Fund, including AVEGA (National Association of Widows of the Genocide), GAERG (National Survivor's Association of Graduate Students), AERG (National Student's Association of Genocide Survivors) and IBUKA (National Association of Survivor's Organisations).
- As the project evolved, it became possible to extend its reach to children born after the genocide and other members of survivor households with mental health issues affecting their well-being.
- The other evolution in the focus of the project was in response to the decision of the national government to end mental health support services dedicated to genocide survivors and to transition such support into the mainstream health system. The concern was that mainstream health professionals lacked the necessary expertise and experience to support survivors effectively and that survivors would find the switch into the mainstream system challenging.
- Training was provided nationally to equip Community Health Officers and Community Health Workers from the mainstream health system with the expertise required to help survivors transition into the new form of provision.

Impact of the project

The project delivered direct support to 56,387 people. This was made up of:

- people receiving counselling support over the helpline
- others receiving direct counselling support
- others who received direct hardship assistance (in particular during the COVID-19 lockdowns)
- peer support counsellors and Community Health Officers who received training
- Community Health Workers who received support from Community Health Officers

Monitoring and evaluation were conducted at the conclusion of each phase of the project. This highlighted the following benefits, as reported by the participants themselves:

- The helplines had a positive impact by providing easily accessible and convenient support.
- There was an improvement in the well-being of the participants, not only as a result of better mental health, but also in fostering a more positive outlook for the future.
- A reduction in the incidence of trauma otherwise experienced by survivors during the annual genocide commemoration period, as a result of always having access to counselling support.
- The guidance on where and to whom vulnerable persons could be referred to receive support for the most severe and acute mental health episodes was highly valued.
- A reduction in stigma relating to poor mental health as people realised that they were not alone in being affected by it and more people were made aware of it and improved their understanding of it.

In addition, the partner organisations reported benefits from their involvement, over and above those experienced by the participants:

- The partner organisations collaborated closely to explore ways of continuing to provide remote counselling after the project end, including through engagement with other key stakeholders, including the Rwanda National Police, Ministry of Health and Rwanda Biomedical Centre.

Their own professional counsellors benefitted from being able to access the training delivered by the project.

Personal testimonies

View these videos about the project – Supporting the health and welfare of genocide survivors

M.P. is a 46-year-old married woman. She lives in the Kiramuruzi sector in the Gatsibo district, Eastern Province, Rwanda. She has six children, the eldest of which was born as a result of rape during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. She has suffered from back problems for a long time, resulting from being raped by many people while she was young. M.P. revealed:

“I was in conflict with my husband due to the fact of having a child as a result of rape. Once we were married, he started traumatising me. I attempted many times to kill myself but thank God it did not happen. I then heard people talking on the radio about a helpline to call when you are living with trauma. I called the helpline and explained my problems to the counsellor. A counsellor helped me a lot over a number of sessions. As it was the first time for me speaking about these issues, it was not easy for me to speak about it. However, she kept building my trust in her and, over time, I managed to open up to her.

Later she visited me at home with my family to discuss the main concern about my mental health. Personally, I did not know anything related to mental health and I had never heard of it during the 30 years following the genocide. Though I lost my parents and relatives, I hadn't received any support related to mental health.

As I speak now, the conflict has ended with my husband due to the visit of the counsellor. I cannot understand how it endured for so long, but I am now a very happy woman. I used to feel useless, having back pain and stomach aches but now I am a new creation. If I have any problems at home, I call the same helpline and get support from the counsellor. I believe this service will continue because it helps many survivors who are still struggling with mental health problems.

Today we are a very happy family, and with all my children and husband, we are now looking forward to a bright future together.”

“It was made a lot easier as there was no requirement to travel to meet the counsellor, nor did I have to buy airtime. I took my cell phone and made the call when it was convenient for me and received an exceptional service from the counsellor.”

D said: “I was very young at the time of the genocide and I was always thinking about why I do not have my father. I did not have any hope for life because I did not have anyone to make happy or be proud of me when I succeed in life. When I was in school, I had no purpose. When this project came, I shared my life story. The counsellors helped me, calling me many times and providing guidance. That process of calling me slowly opened me up until I revealed all of my thoughts. Now I feel a lot better.”

E said: “The counselling has removed the darkness that was present in my head. When I called the helpline, a lady picked up. She took time to listen to my life story and she promised to pick up my calls any time of the day. I used to have trauma, but face-to-face counselling was only provided in times of crisis. There were no follow-up checks after getting well. With this project, it was different. I prefer the phone counselling to face-to-face counselling.”

A caregiver said: “After the genocide, I remained with my two daughters. I loved them so much, but I used to tell them not to marry or come into contact with someone who was not a genocide survivor. Finally, my daughter came into contact with those people. I immediately chased her from my home and she went to live with him. We did not greet each other for six years. I didn’t even greet her children. When this project arrived, other young survivors went to see her and she started joining their meetings. After only two months, she came to visit me. Both of us thought we were right, but after talking to a counsellor through the helpline, I realised that I had trauma. Now, I am living well with my daughter and her children. I see her husband as my son and his family has become mine, too.”

A project worker said: “Most trauma cases are hidden by survivors who feel stigmatised. If they are known as people who have trauma, they will be treated in a different way by the community. This was also my situation for a long time. The helpline was a great answer and helped us to discover so many new trauma cases because it was delivered confidentially between the counsellor and the participant.”

A counsellor on the programme said: “I have been a counsellor for a long time, but with the helpline I heard many cases that I had not heard before. I think this was because of the cost-free line that was accessible for participants. I can give an example involving a woman. She kept a big secret from the genocide because she was advised by her mother not to tell anyone. Each time she wanted to tell, she remembered that she had promised her mother she would not. Then she revealed the secret to me. In her follow up, she told me that she felt at peace because she had told the truth.”

Sustainability

- The focus in the final phase of the project, on equipping Community Health Officers and Community Health Workers from the mainstream health system across Rwanda to support genocide survivors as they accessed mental health support from the mainstream health system for the first time, had the potential to make a significant and long-lasting contribution towards sustainable mental health support.
- AVEGA was able to set up its own Agahozo Call Centre to support genocide widows in need. In due course, the national government stepped in to provide national funding for an official Agahozo Call Centre to provide sustained counselling support to genocide widows in need.

Survivors Fund

Youth Economic Empowerment Project (YEEP) for survivors of the Rwanda genocide

July 2021 to June 2025

The domains of well-being addressed by the project: Livelihoods, Family Relationships and Health

SDG alignment: 1.2, 8.5, 8.6, 9.3 and 10.2

Rationale for the project

In a survey undertaken by the Survivors Fund of 366 members of the National Student's Association of Genocide Survivors (AERG), 88% of respondents said that their mental state had an effect on their ability to work. Around 68% of those regularly needed to take days off work because of their mental health issues and 20% felt that their productivity was below average when they did work.

AERG knew the challenges that came with seeking to support young genocide survivors into employment: "Many survivors come to us thinking we can help them to walk straight into a job. When that doesn't happen first time, they take rejection very personally and can become depressed. Many don't try again."

In addition, youth unemployment nationally stood at 20% at the outset of the project. 23% of young people who had completed upper secondary school were unemployed according to the Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey, and in a 2018 survey by FARG, 60% of respondents said that there was a strong need for career guidance and ongoing learning support to assist them in finding employment.

Young people faced a further layer of challenges around employment as a result of COVID-19. Many entry-level jobs in Rwanda are in the service industry, especially in restaurants, bars, hotels and tourism. These were all critically impacted by COVID-19, with airports, borders and national parks being closed. Retail was also affected as customers remained at home and most non-essential shops were closed, as was manufacturing, as border closures led to a lack of raw materials for food, carpentry, metalwork and other production industries.

Small business owners faced fewer customers and enforced closure during periods of lockdown, while those seeking loan capital were finding it more difficult to secure because of rising rates of default. It was against this background that the project sought to address the issue of youth unemployment and underemployment and to help vulnerable young people, particularly those who experienced and have been directly affected by the genocide, to start businesses or find steady employment.

Project activities

In order to deliver entrepreneurship, work readiness and vocational training, as well as provide access to finance and learning resources, to empower vulnerable young people – specifically young survivors who dropped out of school and marginalised second-generation survivors – and enable them to develop secure livelihoods and sustainable incomes, the project implemented the following activities:

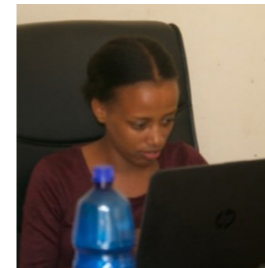
Personal testimonies

Business startups: Building on their experience developed in delivering their Empowering Vulnerable Genocide Survivors in Western Rwanda to Alleviate Extreme Poverty Project in 2019, the Survivors Fund, in partnership with AERG, delivered a structured entrepreneurship training programme, tailored to the needs of young people. Where appropriate, this was followed by assistance in applying for a bank loan from the Survivors Fund long-term microfinance partner, Urwego Bank, or helping trainees to integrate with existing savings groups.

Vocational Training: Each participant was individually assessed to determine the most suitable course and a place was then secured for them at one of two vocational centres, both of which have experience and expertise in working with vulnerable and marginalised youth.

Employment Skills: The project delivered a four-pronged programme designed to support young survivors into employment:

- Delivery of the USAID Work Readiness curriculum, a 150-hour course for jobseekers that was complemented by regional workshops run by a specialist recruitment firm.
- Creating a dedicated section on employment skills and materials on the AERG website, including CV and cover letter templates, as well as guidance on job interview preparation and job seeking.
- The establishment of a peer support programme through which employed survivors of the genocide supported survivors seeking work, providing encouragement and practical advice.
- Creation of an internship programme.



Ines Cyurineza is a young survivor who has participated in the Work Readiness and Internship programme of YEEP.

“I don’t have words to express my feelings. After my graduation, I tried to look for jobs, but no one would give me a chance. I started feeling that my life would amount to nothing and could not stop having bleak thoughts about my future. I joined YEEP and started a five-month internship in office administration. After completing the internship, I applied for a job at a coffee and food business as an administrative assistant and secured the position. This was due to the skills that I was able to develop through the Work Readiness programme that I attended, as well as the experience I built up during the five months of my internship, which opened my mind and has helped to improve my confidence.”



Marie-Claire Kanyumba is a young survivor who has participated in the Training and Vocational Education and Training of YEEP.

Marie-Claire found out about the YEEP programme during COVID-19 and, when lockdown restrictions started to be relaxed, she enrolled and started to learn how to operate a sewing machine and went on to become a competent tailor. She secured a plot in the local market and started up her tailoring business after graduating and received support to purchase her own sewing machine through YEEP.

Today, Marie-Claire is earning enough income to be able to cover all her basic needs. She is seeking to expand her business and start a shop that sells kitenge (African wax print fabrics), for which there is significant local demand. Marie-Claire said:

“I was a cleaner at one of the hospitals in Kigali before joining YEEP. I could not afford to eat more than one meal a day due to my small income.”

Impact of the project

From 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2025, 7,329 genocide survivors and family members of genocide survivors were supported by the project, which provided:

- entrepreneurship training
- work readiness training
- an internship programme
- vocational training

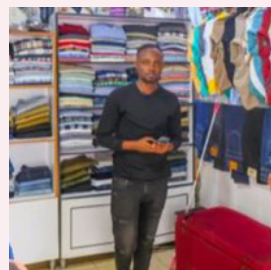
“Before I got enrolled in YEEP, I was a fresh university graduate who didn’t have a formal job. Whenever I secured some freelance work, I would pay some bills, but sometimes I would lack the money to cater for my needs.”

Through YEEP, he acquired skills in finding, securing and retaining employment, including guidance on how to look for a job, how to conduct oneself during a probation period, and various tips relating to professionalism, among other areas.

“I used the skills to apply for a job at Radisson Blu Hotel and Convention Centre in Kigali and secured it. I am currently a Sewage Treatment Plant Operator and have a job contract,” says Jean-Pierre.

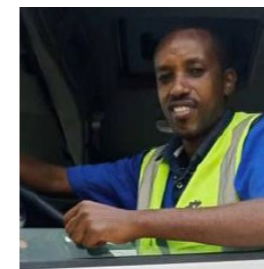
“My goal is to keep working hard so that I can thrive, build a good house and have a healthy family,” he says.

His employer, Eugene Gashugi, testifies that Kwizera is a hardworking and disciplined employee who performs his tasks wholeheartedly and delivers good results. He urges Survivors Fund to continue helping more young people to access the programme.



Jean-Pierre Kwizera is a young survivor who has participated in the Work Readiness programme of YEEP.

“Through this project, I received entrepreneurship training, which really opened my mind. Previously, I faced hopelessness due to a lack of job opportunities and not having any collateral to access loans. However, after joining YEEP, I gained the necessary skills and developed the idea for my business. With the support of GAERG and SURF (Survivor’s Fund), I received a loan of RWF 400,000 (£270) to start my business in July 2022.”



Francois Sekaregeya used the money provided by SURF to complete courses to become a category E driver.

“After completing the payment of the first loan, I applied for a second loan of RWF 900,000 (£605). Since then, my business has been growing steadily and is now valued at RWF 6 million (£4,050). I earn a monthly income ranging from RWF 300,000 to RWF 400,000 (£200 - £270), which covers my basic needs such as food, rent, clothing and some social expenses. I have also provided jobs to two other people, who are now earning salaries of around RWF 80,000 (£55) per month.”

– Jean-Pierre Kwizera

“I am very thankful for this project. After high school, I started university at Adventist University of Central Africa, but I had to drop out after completing semester 6 due to a lack of funds to finish my studies. As such, I never graduated.”

“Life has not been easy for my family as I could not earn enough money to pay for their basic needs and I have not been able to fully support them. I thank GAERG very much for selecting me as a participant in YEEP, as I have been able to attend and complete vocational training. I attended a mechanics and driving course through which I secured a category E driving permit.”

– Francois Sekaregeya

Sustainability

- Further funding was provided towards the conclusion of the project to fund the appointment of three Community Business Development Assistants to work across the Southern Provinces of Rwanda and Kigali to provide ongoing mentoring and advisory support to project participants
 - An additional contribution was made to top up the Loan Guarantee Fund, which will enable more young entrepreneurs to access funding.
- and thereby help ensure their continued engagement and the maintenance of loan repayments.

Women in Africa

Teaching adolescent girls coding and other digital skills

March 2020 to July 2022

The domains of well-being addressed by the project:

Education, Health, Family, and Relationships

SDG alignment: 4.4, 4.5, 5.b and 8.5

Rationale for the project

The project aligns with a number of education priorities identified by the Rwanda government, including enhancing the use of information and communication technology to transform learning and to strengthen STEM teaching in order to align educational outputs more strongly with urban and rural markets across Rwanda. By equipping teenage girls from the poorest communities in Kigali with coding capability, the project was intended to close the digital gender gap and to make them more employable as they approached entering the job market.

Project activities

- The coding skills programme was delivered by three leading Rwandan coding trainers to 230 teenage girls, aged 15 to 19 years old, drawn from three secondary schools in Kigali.
- The programme delivered a blend of soft skills and technical training:
 - an initial two months focused on soft skills, including written and oral communication, presentation and public speaking and group work, followed by 25 technical skills sessions
- The project provided other welfare support to the girls, including free sanitary products and all the incidental equipment required to participate fully in the programme.
- Mentoring support from members of Clifford Chance to the participants.

Pro bono support from Clifford Chance:

Mentoring of the participants

Impact of the project

- In year one of the project, 100% of participants said they wanted to continue IT education following high school and that they planned to pursue careers in which IT skills would be essential, including as software developers and designers; in year two, the figure was 85%.
- In year one of the project, 73% of participants with a mentor described the mentoring relationship as highly beneficial; in year two, the figure was 70%.

This video showcases some of the key education-related activities across the projects with Women in Africa and the New York Academy of Sciences:

Personal testimonies

From the participants:

“Coding opens my mind and helps me to learn and to innovate. It makes me want to learn and do more and to discover more about IT.”

“To me, coding is useful because it helps me to understand a new language – the coding one – and it will help me to fulfil my dream of becoming a web designer.”

“Coding is a source of skills and jobs.”

From the teachers at the schools the participants attended:

“They have achieved a lot. The girls did not have any basic skills with computers to start with and now they are able to create their own website! Also, they gain soft skills such as public speaking.”

“Most of the girls would not have gone on to computer sciences studies and now they are considering it as they are seeing it as a reliable career path.”

“Our girls have gained not only a huge opportunity but also critical skills, including public speaking. This is a good opportunity for their future.”

From the trainers:

“As soon as they started to learn practical skills, e.g. how to create a website, they were highly motivated to learn.”

“Considering the level the girls were at when they started, it was a real challenge to achieve what they have achieved. Over time, remarkable progress was made. The girls were attentive and had a lot of energy.”

“We were able to increase their interest in computers and their skills by 80%.”

“As soon as we began with practical skills and when they realised they were capable of doing it, they thought they were capable of doing more. If I get the chance to train more girls with the same profiles, I will know how to deliver the training from the start.”

“As a girl in Rwanda, if you can work in an ICT field, you have more chances to improve your living conditions and those of your family.”

Reflections on what we learned

We developed a number of approaches in seeking to make good on our commitment to making the work sustainable following the end of the initiative:

- We provided pro bono support to strengthen the NGOs themselves, including by seeking to improve organisational efficiency and expanding their networks.
- We frequently adopted a proof-of-concept approach to the design of projects, incorporating robust impact measurement, so that in the event of a project succeeding, the NGO would be well placed to secure funding from elsewhere to scale the model.
- We set aside a part of our budget to fund an additional phase of work at the end of each project focused explicitly and exclusively on securing sustainability.
- We created a platform through which the Cornerstone NGOs were able to develop relationships with each other; in some cases, this led to NGOs being able to contribute resources to each other's projects.
- We took care where appropriate to align project objectives with the wider strategic aims of the Rwanda government.
- An openness to giving other stakeholders and potential funders access to projects during the design and delivery stages.



The workshop held in Kigali on 9 September 2022 bringing together the nine Cornerstone NGOs.

- We found there was some trade-off between delivering impact within the vulnerable communities in Kigali and enabling Clifford Chance colleagues around our global network to make active pro bono and volunteering contributions to that work; at times, it proved challenging to create as many opportunities as we would have liked for people at Clifford Chance and within our wider networks to get personally involved.
- We entered into dialogue with the NGOs over the design of the projects, as opposed to leaving them do this on their own. In some cases, we learned that we had more to offer in this process than we had originally imagined we would and some of the NGOs commented on how valuable our inputs were:

“Working with you has been a privilege. I deeply appreciate your trust in our partnership, your flexibility, and your willingness to listen and co-create solutions. These qualities made the Clifford Chance Foundation truly unique as a donor when you played a pivotal role in the success of the...initiative.”

- Working in partnership with Rwandan NGOs and INGOs with extensive experience of Rwanda was fundamental to our ability to:
 - pursue our ambition of supporting some of Rwanda’s most vulnerable communities, including by giving us the confidence to do this;
 - navigate key wider stakeholder relationships; and
 - access a further layer of partnerships that were essential to the delivery of some of the projects, e.g. Survivors Fund were able to work closely with the other leading genocide survivor organisations.
- We entered into the initiative with an appreciation of the value of seeking to be guided by the communities we wanted to impact but with relatively limited experience of accessing community voices. Thanks again to our partners, we were able to implement this approach to a large extent and we intend to carry over the learnings that we gained in doing so into the future activities of the Clifford Chance Foundation.
- There was a significant lead-in time to the point where the initiative was delivering hard impacts of the kind that had the potential to be compelling for our internal audiences. A key part of the initiative’s innovation lay in the approach we took to project design, community consultation and impact measurement and, at time, we found it challenging to communicate this.

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