

Survivors Fund

Youth Economic Empowerment Project (YEPP) 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.

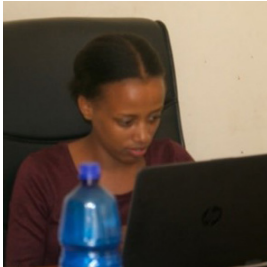
Employment Skills: The project delivered a four-pronged programme designed to support young survivors into employment:

- 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.

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



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.”

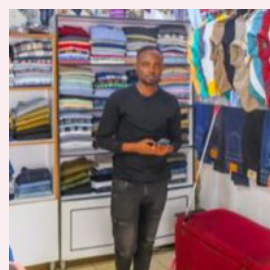
“Before I got enrolled in YEOP, I was a fresh university graduate who didn’t have a formal job. Whenever I secured some freelance work, I would pay some bills, but sometimes I would lack the money to cater for my needs.”

Through YEOP, 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.

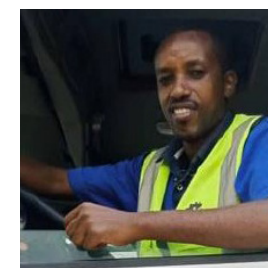
“My goal is to keep working hard so that I can thrive, build a good house and have a healthy family,” he says.

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 YEOP.

“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 YEOP, 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 YEOP, 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 and thereby help ensure their continued engagement and the maintenance of loan repayments.
- An additional contribution was made to top up the Loan Guarantee Fund, which will enable more young entrepreneurs to access funding.