



Most Significant Change Stories

“Empowering Secondary School Leavers to Create, Secure and Sustain Employment in Rwanda Project, 2015-2017”



Project Implemented by
AERG Rwanda and Survivors Fund

Acknowledgements

This report is a collection of most significant change stories gathered during the end of project evaluation of a 30-month project entitled “Empowering Secondary School Leavers to Create, Secure and Sustain Employment in Rwanda (ELE)”

The ELE Project was implemented across eight districts of Rwanda by AERG, with support from Survivors Fund, and funded through the GPAF grant (UK Aid).

We are sincerely grateful to all the people who shared these stories, that are a true reflection of the work of Survivors Fund and partners. Everyone whose names and/or pictures are included in this report gave their consent to include their identity and share these stories.

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	i
Table of contents	ii
Introduction	1
Improved livelihoods resulting from access to entrepreneurship training, start-up loans, small businesses and employment opportunities.	3
Change Story 1: I gained so many useful skills	4
Change Story 2: The project opened up my mind	5
Change Story 3: Everything is possible	7
Change Story 4: Never to go back to poverty	8
Change Story 5: Back to school	10
Ability to overcome issues of trauma and to lead more productive lives through reflective counselling sessions and peer support.	11
Change Story 6: The project gave me hope	12
Change Story 7: I opened my heart to others	13
Change Story 8: I learnt to forgive	15
Increased knowledge on rights and ability to enforce land and property rights by young survivors	16
Change Story 10: Recovered my piece of land	17
Change Story 11: The project created a positive environment	18
Change Story 12: Learnt about rights and helped others	20
Change Story 13: Was supported to adopt my niece	21
Change Story 14: I got my family's land back	23
Change Story 15: Chose to be the village lawyer	25

Introduction

Background

With funding from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and in partnership with Survivors Fund (SURF), the National Student's Association of Genocide Survivors (AERG) in Rwanda implemented the "Empowering Vulnerable Young Survivors who have left Secondary School to Create, Secure and Sustain Employment" (ELE) Project". The 30-month project (April 2015 - September 2017) was aimed at improving the lives of 9,000 vulnerable people, i.e. 2,000 young survivors of the genocide and 7,000 of their dependents across eight districts in the Eastern and Southern provinces of Rwanda.

Funding was made available through the Global Poverty Action Fund (GPAF) Community Partnership Window. In this project, SURF provided technical assistance and capacity-building to AERG to deliver inclusive financial and non-financial services to rural young survivors who had dropped out of school or had graduated from secondary school. By the end of the project, ELE had reached 1,925 young people and an estimated 6,500 dependents.

At the end of the project in September 2017, ELE had occasioned the initiation of 678 small businesses and the securing of 55 employment opportunities for young survivors. In addition, at least 100 secondary school leavers were enabled to return to school. The project has also increased the networks and social support of these vulnerable young survivors and has given them hope for the future. Through legal support, survivors have regained lost property and gained essential skills to take necessary legal steps in cases where rights were violated.

Project purpose and outputs

ELE was aimed at reducing the extreme poverty experienced by young survivors and their dependents, by ensuring that they have the skills, resources, and confidence to generate income. The project was designed to deliver the following specific outputs:

1. Secure viable livelihoods and empowerment of young survivors and their dependents (through capacity building, counselling, access to legal and health assistance)
2. Entrepreneurship training and greater access to capital will empower and enable young survivors to establish their own businesses and/or find quality employment post-graduation.
3. Reflective counselling sessions will enable young survivors to overcome issues of trauma and lead more productive, self-sufficient lives.
4. Greater access to legal representation will ensure young survivors are able to enforce their land and property rights and make productive use of land.

Collection of Significant Change Stories

The collection of Most Significant Change (MSC) Stories was used to identify qualitative evidence of the difference that Survivors Fund and AERG, through this project, has made across the two provinces where ELE was implemented. The process of collecting MSC Stories was pioneered by Rick Davies. This invention was out of the challenges faced by mainstream monitoring and evaluation practitioners in reporting on changes happening in complex participatory rural development programs. Davies (1996) developed the technique as a means of monitoring changes in a development aid project in Bangladesh.

Significant Change Stories are collected from those most directly involved, such as participants and field staff. The stories are collected by asking a simple question such as: 'During the last (period), in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for participants in the program?' It is initially up to respondents to allocate their stories to a domain category. In addition to this, respondents are encouraged to report why they consider a particular change to be the most significant one.

The stories recorded in this report were self-reported by ELE project participants and supporters during the independent review carried out by Lifetime Consulting & Partners Ltd. Most of the stories were narrated in Kinyarwanda, after which they were translated and transcribed into English. As much as possible, we tried to maintain the story in its original form, as it reflects the real feelings of the storytellers.

Domains of change

The evaluation used the following criterion that involves broad domains that the project intended to make an impact on as a standard for evaluating the impact of the project. These domains were the themes around which the stories were collected and assessed. The main themes in which stories were placed were given as follows:

1. Improved incomes resulting from access to entrepreneurship training, start-up loans. establishment of small businesses and/or securing employment opportunities.
2. Ability to overcome issues of trauma and to lead more productive lives through reflective counselling sessions and peer support.
3. Increased knowledge about rights and improved ability to enforce land and property rights by young survivors.

Domain One

Improved livelihoods resulting from access to entrepreneurship training, start-up loans, small businesses and employment opportunities.

Change Story 1: I gained so many useful skills

By: UWAMBAZA Jeanne, Female, Project Participant, Southern Province

Significant Change Story

My name is UWAMBAZA Jeanne. I am single and I am 25 years in age. I live in Burambe village, Mulinja cell and Kigoma sector, Nyanza. I was informed at the cell office that AERG members were looking for members out of school and that's how I got registered. I had stopped my studies when I was in S5. I had hoped to go back to school but could not do so because my young brother had an accident and was in hospital for more than six months. I was the only one who was there to take care of him and so could not go back to school. Before I joined this project, I was living in extreme loneliness. However, with the project I made new friends and I am no longer living in the solitude. I now have friends to meet and talk to about life and our history. We share experience of life and that helps a lot.



I received training from the project. I then began a small project of keeping goats. I currently have three goats and I believe that my business will grow. After starting the training, we were told that we will access loans if we present our business plans. Although we presented our business plans., some of us did not receive the loan. Nevertheless, I am glad that I used the skills that I learned from the training to start my small farming business with my own money.

The most significant change of all is that I learned a lot of skills that will help me in the future, especially for managing small businesses. I also learnt a lot about counselling and legal assistance. I developed many new skills which I did not have before the project was introduced to us. I have used all these skills back at home and I have also shared them with others. I am grateful for the efforts of the project in bringing us together to work in groups, meet, talk and share with others.

We faced some challenges which I can quote for you: the long distance we had to cover all the days of the training. We were promised loans but this did not happen. Some of our friends also stopped because the transport fees that we had been promised were not given to us. Now that some of us have secured loans and others did not, we are not happy among ourselves.

I did not know that the project was coming to an end. If this is the case, the groups that we formed will stop meeting and people will start working individually which can cause them to go back to solitude or isolation. The businesses we started will continue but may be weak because we do not have enough capital to run effective businesses.

Change Story 2: The project opened up my mind

By: MANIRUMVA Ephraim, Male, Project Participant, Southern Province

Significant Change Story

My name is MANIRUMVA Ephraim. I am 26 years old and I am single. I live in Bumbogo Village, Nyamagana Cell and Ruhango sector. I got involved in this project when AERG staff came to the sector looking for people who had dropped out of school, to train them on how to overcome poverty. Since I did not go to university after I had finished my secondary school, I also joined the project. We had a large group and our trainers decided to divide us into two teams. While one of the group were meeting at the sector offices, the other group, which I belonged to, was going to be meeting at the cell office. We received several trainings and these were on counselling, business and legal support. The trainings were also divided into 8 modules. In business, after trainings I was self-confident because my mind was really opened.



After being trained about counselling I am proud of what I can do or how I can counsel people. For example, when I was working at Horizon, a transportation company, one of our cars had an accident. Unfortunately, one of the beneficiaries whom we were trained together died in that accident. We went to visit her mother as a group, and I also revisited her with my friend. We talked for a long time and she tried to open her heart to me. That was when I realized that she was living with wounds of the genocide although she had tried to hide them. With the death of her daughter, she was traumatized. I decided to treat her as my mother and I started to visit and call her many times. These days she is different as she accepted counsel and she is no longer living with anger or fear.

My small business idea is selling charcoal. To save costs, I decided to plant trees on my land. Since it takes long for the trees to mature, I decided to look for a job in a transportation company called Volcano Tours here in Ruhango. With my salary, I have been able to buy another plot of land and I have planted more trees. After two years, I will start my project and will be getting between 1,500,000 Rwf and 2,000,000 Rwf. I have another plot of land where I have planted 140 banana trees in September last year, and after 2 years I will start selling. I started all these activities after being trained through the project. Before this project, I depended on others. I could never imagine doing something by myself until I attended the trainings. Since these projects do not require my daily presence, I continue doing my job and monitoring my projects at the same time. For sure this project changed my mind because I was thinking that with 100,000 Rwf or 200,000 Rwf you cannot do any business, that you need at least 1,000,000 Rwf. But now I know that even with 5,000 Rwf you can start a business and change your life.

The most significant change to me is in the area of business. Without these trainings, I could still be living depending on others but now I am independent. I can buy everything that I need without asking anyone. The greatest factors that helped me to achieve all these changes are self-confidence after trainings.

The challenge that I faced was that my young brother was involved in an accident and I took him to GATAGARA for treatment. That accident cost me much money that I had not planned to use. I used the money from the loan, which made me fail to pay it back as I had wanted to do so.

On the legal aspects, I did not face any major challenge. However, I know some people who were helped by the trainings of legal support. I am sure that if one day I face a legal case I know how I can handle the situation.

If the project comes to an end, our projects or businesses will continue. The knowledge we got from the project will help us survive. Nevertheless, our wish is that the project should continue to help us and others who did not get a chance of securing a loan. We thank the ELE project, AERG and FARG in general for helping us.

Change Story 3: Everything is possible

By: MANISHIMWE Jean de Dieu, Male, Project Participant, Southern Province

Significant Change Story

I am MANISHIMWE Jean de Dieu. I am 29 years old and I am single. I live in Buyanja Village, Nyarubuye Cell and Munyiginya Sector. I got involved in the project when Sector officials called for AERG members. I went there and they told us about the trainings we were going to do. Joselyne also helped us in counselling. Before this project came, many of us were living in loneliness. We experienced horrible scenes in the genocide and many were traumatized. She brought us together and spoke with us about our problems. We shared our experiences which helped us to let go of the negative things that filled our minds. This helped because when we were together, we felt free to talk and to cry – leading us to feel much more free and to change our perceptions.



We have been part of the project and experienced many changes. We received training in legal assistance from Sylvie, including information on how to get our properties back and how to fight for our rights. She advised many of us to help get back their land. As well, she has helped many of us to recover other things that had been grabbed or taken by others.

In starting our new businesses, they trained us about preparing business plans, not to fear or doubt our capacities, to start with a small amount of money, and then we will experience positive changes in our lives. We were also taught to always have a positive mind, to work together in groups and to keep what we have already achieved. Before this project, I was jobless. After the training, I started saving my little income and I managed to buy 2 goats for myself. They gave birth after a few days. I have been selling them and they help me generate income. I also received a loan of 100.000 Rwf from the project. I used it for buying 5 bags of sorghum which I resold, which generated for me a profit of 80,000 Rwf. I have also been able to sell the goats and generated even more income. With that money, I have been renting a local bar to generate some income and it is working well. Before the project began, my capital was 60.000 Rwf but now I have 500.000 Rwf.

The greatest change above all was the skills I got in business which helped me to increase my capital from 60.000Rwf to 500.000Rwf in just a few months. That success created a new hope that everything is possible.

The main factors that helped me achieve all this were trainings and skills from the project, as well as, the loan of 100.000Rwf. The challenges faced were first that the loan was a small amount and secondly, the long distance we used to walk every day to go for training.

Now as the project is coming to an end, trainings will stop since trainers will no longer come. However, our businesses will continue to run, though not as we wanted. The loans will stop because many of us were

supported by the project to get loans. Yet for me, I can easily take a loan for myself, according to the level where I am now. What we are asking to the project is to not leave us now because we still need them.

Change Story 4: Never to go back to poverty

By: NARAME Marie Louise, Female, Project Participant, Southern Province

Significant Change Story

I am NARAME Marie Louise. I am 30 years old, single with two children. I live with my children and my grandmother in Cyerwe village, Cyerwa cell and Gashanda sector. I got involved in this project when here at the sector, they were calling for people who stopped school because of various reasons. Personally, I finished secondary school and did not continue to University because of school fees. I also become pregnant and I had to wait to deliver and raise my child. I felt concerned and came to do training when they told us it would help us to do business and help us to better manage life by ourselves. It was interesting because I met different people that I did not know before. These included those who had never attended school, others who had only done primary school and others who finished secondary school like myself. I found that I was not alone, which gave me confidence to be open with them. We were people from 4 cells of this sector and we started trainings about legal support, counselling, doing business and meeting with others to share ideas and experiences of life.



My attempts to do business after my secondary school, such as selling onions or buying and selling second hand clothes before the project failed. Since then, I also joined a self-help group and had started a small restaurant where I would sell tea, bread and mandazi. The business was flourishing until a day when thieves stole all my money and even my identity card. At some point I also tried a business of buying and selling pork, which did not succeed. All of the failures were because I did not have any knowledge about doing business. After that I was feeling that I was a really loser and lost hope.

Thank God that when the ELE project came. I got 25.000 Rwf from my savings group which we formed through the project. I did not get any loan from the bank. However, with my little income, I started a business of buying sorghum, treat it and sell beer. Although the money is not enough, I am still able to take care of my children and my grandmother. I am prepared to realise my dream of going back to school, especially for vocational training. I am thinking of studying driving since with a driving license, women get opportunities.

The most change above all these changes is that because of the trainings, I got to know how to run a business and to never fall back into poverty. I also learnt how to save my money. I now have my own account and I already have 10.000 Rwf in the account as I am also paying back the loan I received from my self-help group.

The factors that helped me was the trainings. The trainers were good people and always nice with us. We had the same history and we were open with them. They were also very open with us. For example, Nepomuscene helped us a lot in legal support. I also thank my grandmother for accepting to stay with my children when I came for training. The money I took from the group helped me to pay for *mutuelle de santé* and to continue my project of sorghum.

Another thing which these trainings helped me is in the area of legal support. The father of my children did not accept them as his children, and does not help them. However, with the knowledge gained, I am now preparing to go to court so that he will take responsibility and help me to raise up the children.

Of the challenges faced, the principal one was distance from my place to the training venue. I had to walk for about an hour and sometimes I was late for the training. But I kept going and finished it. The other thing is that they promised things that they did not give us and we were not happy at all. For instance, they said they will give us transport allowances but they did not. We also thought that they would help us to get jobs but that did not happen.

As the project is coming to its end, the groups that we formed will continue meeting. We will contribute money and continue sharing loans among us to help each other. The trainings will surely stop and all that the advocacy trainers were doing for us also will stop.

Our request is that people from AERG should do advocacy for us to sector leaders so that they recognize us. We also hope that once there are job opportunities, let them give us a chance to do those jobs.

Change Story 5: Back to school

By: *UWINKABIRE Jacinta, Female, Project Participant, Eastern Province*

Significant Change Story

I am a 27-year old single lady. I finished secondary school in 2014 and I got low marks such that I could not get a scholarship to proceed with education. The ELE project came two years after I had finished school and I was just living with my mother, who is a farmer. I was also cultivating land, helping my mum to take care of the family. I came here to target a certificate and that's why I was participating in the project. I came to the trainings and I enjoyed them so much. I was very happy because I was lonely and I had lost all hope of going back to school. I received a certificate from the ELE project training.



After training, there was an announcement from FARG for a scholarship. After getting that information, I took my documents from AERG to the district. It was not easy to go to the district with no transport, especially with the way we used to live at home. When we wrote exams, I passed and I was placed first in this sector.

After the training, we were told that FARG was awarding scholarship. The trainers encouraged us to apply for a government scholarship. I took their advice and I went to the district to apply for a place. Using the certificate that I was awarded from the training, I was able to get a chance to go to school. I got a place in Kigali for university. I started in March in Kicukiro where I am studying a general course to link with the others who have continued. I am also studying English. Now I have finished first year exams and now I am waiting for my results to know if I will qualify for university or not. I have hope that I will be successful and may be able to get a place and scholarship.

The most significant thing that this project did for me is to give me information and skills. These have helped build my self-confidence. Even if I have gone to school, I continue to be part of this work.

I have had challenges. There is no support in my family. I also need money for stationery and for accommodation in Kigali. We only get support for tuition but we need to buy our own food. FARG gives us school fees and small contributions, which comes between 3 to 4 months late.

I am very happy for this project. We received a chance to get information and now I have been able to go back to school and I have a hope for life.

Domain Two

Ability to overcome issues of trauma and to lead more productive lives through reflective counselling sessions and peer support.

Change Story 6: The project gave me hope

By: NIYIRORA Donata, Female, Project Participant, Eastern Province

Significant Change Story

My name is NIYIRORA Donata. I am a single mother aged 27. I live with my 4 year old son and my mother in Nyabisambu village, which is in Icyeru cell, Mukura sector. I got involved in the ELE project when the Social Affairs Secretary of the Sector asked the Cell Executive Secretary to look for young survivors who had dropped out school in their villages. I was one of the people who soon after finishing my secondary school, I got pregnant and was not able to proceed to the university because of lack of school fees. This project trained us about how to use money for improving our lives. We were trained on saving money, writing a business plan, and to start a business with very little money. I had a project of buying bananas and the profit that I generated I saved in our local village savings group. Although I did not join the savings group for ELE, I have witnessed its benefits for my friends who are members. I have also personally opened a bank account even though I do not always use it since I save my money in savings group.



I got a loan of 200,000 RwF from the project but it was all stolen on the day that I received it from the bank. After that incident, I felt like committing suicide as I could not accept the situation. However, because of the training and counselling, I managed to calm myself and to come out of anger and fear. My neighbour who is also in the project used to come to visit me and giving me counsel, alongside other friends who went through the same.

According to me the most significant change is about continuing with life after such difficult times. If it was not because of the trainings in counselling that we got from this project, I should be dead now since I was about to kill myself and I had lost hope for some days. The project gave me hope.

The factors which helped me to achieve all these were the confidence built in me to be able to meet other people that I did not know before. We share history and this project helped us to meet and share ideas. The only challenge in this project was that I lost all the money to thieves.

For the legal support, project staff trained us on what to do in case we meet situations related to our legal rights or in case we meet someone who needs help. We had never known that we we had to register our children but now we know. As a single mother, we learnt about our rights and those of our children.

As the project is coming to an end, nothing will stop because the knowledge we got will help us in this life. After the training, some of our friends got jobs and others went back to school. We are very glad about that we do not wish for the project to end now.

Change Story 7: I opened my heart out to others

By: MUKAKALISA Consolée, Female, Project Participant, Eastern Province

Significant Change Story

I am MUKAKALISA Consolée and I have been married for 17 years. I am a beneficiary of this project. I left school when I was in S4 and I got married due to family problems. However, I went back to secondary school in 2013 and completed my examinations. After joining the project, we were trained in entrepreneurship, legal assistance and counselling.

For the counselling side, the project gave us the opportunity to talk about how we feel for the first time after the genocide. The project counsellor, Vestine, was welcoming and shared her own testimony. This helped us to feel very comfortable and to open ourselves up to her. Initially, I could not think about talking about my life to anyone. But when my time came, I was unstoppable. I cried like a baby because of what I had gone through during the genocide. The trainings really helped me to open up and tell my story without shame.

I was only 15 years old during the genocide. My whole family, except for me and my young sister of 4 years of age, were killed. I was captured and raped. I thank God because I did not get HIV or pregnant. After the genocide, I went to a boarding school in Nyanza and I was raped by the priest. At that time, I got pregnant. Since we were not in love, he did not help me. He tried to support financially. When the child turned 2, I brought him back to the priest's family since I was living with the painful memory of what had happened. I have now got married to someone that I really love. He is also a survivor and has helped me with counselling. He is also supportive of my young sister, with the help of FARG. With a fresh mind, I have accepted my situation. We are now legally married and we now have a child whom I love and accept. I would have wanted to continue with my studies but I had to stop so that I could help her to finish her university.

The most significant change was in counselling. After attending the project, I felt healed and the counsellors helped me to appreciate that there are many people who share similar history as mine. I opened my heart out to them, which really brought new hope in my life.

I thank the training skills given through AKAZI KANOZE, which are helping me in my job today. I then got the job that I have today. Besides, I also learned that it is possible to start business with a very small amount of money. After the training, I wrote a business plan and the bank gave me 400.000 Rwf for a loan. After getting my certificate from this project, I presented it for a job that was applying for. With additional savings, I bought a piece of land for 1.500.000Rwf, which is now worth more than 5.000.000Rwf. Now, I can buy anything that I want without asking for money from anyone.

In legal support or law side, I had cases in gacaca court of my properties which were taken by other people. Now the case is done I am waiting to be compensated. All this is because of the project and I am thankful. Factors that helped me to achieve all these was the opportunity to meet other survivors with similar history; trainers whom we shared the same history; and appropriate training or teachings received from the project.

I did not personally face many challenges except money for transport each week for the training. However, a general challenge was that we did not all get the loan that we wanted for our project. Even though I got a loan, several others did not.

And as the project is coming to the end, the trainings and the fact of meeting with others will probably stop. The businesses we started will not end because we no longer feel like orphans as it was before the project began. The loans the project enabled us to take will never be accessible to all beneficiaries because we do not have the collateral that the bank ask for. What we ask to the project is to stay with us. Many of us still have wounds in their hearts.

Change Story 8: I learnt to forgive

By: KAYIGAMBA Jean Claude, Male, Project Participant, Southern Province

Significant Change Story

My name is KAYIGAMBA Jean Claude I am 25 years old. I finished my secondary school in 2013. That time I had no capacity or hope to continue up to University. I live with my mum and I was responsible for everything in the house. Because of that I could not think that one day I will have hope of life. I had no job and yet I had the responsibility to take care of my mum who was always sick – with some little support from my brother.

When I was in school, it was fine because I was with others. They used to be with me which helped me not to think about my situation. At the end of my studies, I could not meet with them and it was painful for me to stay alone with no job. When the project launched, AERG approached me to tell me about the project targeting school leavers and I was in that category.

When I joined this project, many changes happened in my life. I had no confidence before this project. I could not go anywhere and make a speech before other people. But the project gave me that confidence. Now I contribute in meetings and I have learnt how to live with others. This project helped me to also respect everyone's opinion.

Because of this project, I started to cultivate legumes like carrot, cabbage, onions, etc. This is very important for me and my family and the whole community. I now have a source of income and I am able to feed my family and my community. I also learned how to save money.

The most significant change is my way of thinking that changed because of counselling. My mind changed and my situation also changed positively. My openness to people who committed genocide in one of the changes, and I have learnt to forgive them. Through counseling, I also feel that I am now in a better position to help those who have trauma.

Interaction with others and team spirit helped bring about the changes. We learnt a lot of things, including how to work with financial institutions. I am thankful for the knowledge acquired from the project. I am also happy with the project staff who supported us.

The challenge was that I did not get any capital to put into action what we learned from the training. Some people got loans but the majority of us did not. Furthermore, the project was not long enough to support many young people who needed its services. It is now that we were ready to start seeing changes and we are being told that the project is coming to an end. It is unfortunate that we will not have the legal officers and counsellors who were helping us. The trauma is still there and we still need support. Although the project also linked us with financial institutions like BPR, there is no continuity since there will not be any loan guarantee anymore. As young people, we do not have collateral to show to the bank and so it will not be easy to get loans.

Domain Three

Increased knowledge on rights and ability to enforce
land and property rights by young survivors

Change Story 10: Recovered my piece of land

By: NTUYAHAGA Jean de Dieu, Male, Project Participant, Southern Province

Significant Change Story

My name is NTUYAHAGA Jean de Dieu. I am 35 years old in age and I live in Ndora sector of Gisagara District. I dropped out of school when I was in Secondary S2. This happened because I was traumatized after I lost my brother due to a car accident in Kigali. I decided to go home to cultivate land and support my family in the village. Unfortunately, my mother also decided to go and live in Uganda. From that time, my life condition changed and I could not trust anyone. I could not share or tell any of my issues to anyone. It was only in 2016 that my neighbour heard from his church about a project training youth survivors who were out of school. That was how I came into the training and found other survivors who had already joined.



One benefit from the project was getting young survivors to work as a family. The project selected people who shared the same history. The space created by the project enabled us to be open and free to express ourselves. We share stories within the group, which we could not do before the project. In addition, we have also learned how to use money properly. The lesson about financial management has changed our minds. We know that if money is well managed, it can be used to generate more income. For example, I have since taken an initiative of selling maize from my land and get capital to buy goats. Now I sell some goats, and I also keep others at home.

The project brought many changes in my life. The most significant change was that after attending legal training, I got to know about my rights to property. Within our sector, our land had been taken by MINAGRI and given to cooperatives for cultivation. Before receiving the training, we thought that there was no way we could get back our land. However, using the skills I learnt from the training, I raised the issue of our land with the Mayor who promised to get back to us with feedback. True to his word, the Mayor made a follow up and we finally got back our piece of land. I am proud to say that I got back my land due to the legal advice from the ELE project. Angelique supported us a lot.

Besides the positive stories, we have had some challenges. The main challenge was that we did not have capital to support our ideas. Although others received a loan, I did not receive one and so I was not able to put my ideas into practice. Some of the people who got loans from the bank have not been able to repay them— which means we cannot get loans. Furthermore, I had problems when thieves broke into our house and stole food from the storage. From our savings groups, we have also had some people leaving, including the president of the group.

We did not know that this project was coming to an end. They did not tell us. However, we will continue meeting, even though people may no longer participate in large numbers. We will do our best to continue to

work in the group. We want to keep building ourselves into a group where mutual trust will help us to become even stronger.

Change Story 11: The project created a positive environment

By: KAYIRANGA Jean Nepomuscéne, Male, Project Staff, Eastern Province

Significant Change Story

My name is KAYIRANGA Jean Nepomuscéne. I am 29 years old and I am single. I am currently working as a volunteer in the AERG project since our contracts ended a few months ago. I got involved in the project as a project worker. My professional background is that of a lawyer. I got my degree in 2013 and I was always interested in working with AERG since I was a member since my school days. So, I got this job to work for AERG in the Eastern Province since May 2016 as a paralegal. The project focused on young survivors who dropped out or have left school, of which 70% were female.



The first change we noticed was that the young people from rural areas who were desperate and living in fear were brought together and started to feel like they had a new family. Secondly, the project improved beneficiaries' incomes. Some used to be able only to eat food once a day due to poverty but the project helped them to move out of poverty. This was done through the trainings and ability for them to engage in small businesses such as buying and selling items in their areas. This was also a result of the loans accessed by some of the members through BPR. With the coming of this project, counsellors were always there to listen and support those who had trauma.

Of the significant changes, I can say that many young people were helped to know and understand their rights through this project. Project beneficiaries learnt about land rights and issues around inheritance, as well as, how to challenge gender based violence. They grew their knowledge and confidence on resolving their own problems or at least to know where to go in case of need.

The main factors that supported the achievement of all these changes was a good environment created by the project. Young people of the same past and background were enabled to meet and share issues of concern. Several beneficiaries were happy to see people that they could trust, and with which they could share problems. These young people had been hiding for a long time with no one to help them address their issues.

However, there were also some challenges. First, there was not enough time to talk to every beneficiary personally. We mainly used to meet and discuss in groups, leaving some cases unresolved. Now that staff contracts have ended, it will not be easy for the legal officer at AERG to manage people in the South and East alone. Second, the project had several workers at different times since others resigned. Third, the project has a limited budget for transport which limited the number of times for staff travel to the field.

As the project is coming to an end, several things will not continue. The aim of the project was to end poverty at some point, but there is still poverty among the beneficiaries. The loan facility which was supported through

the project will not continue. The problems of law and rights are always there. We used to talk to young survivors and if the project come to an end, this will stop.

Change Story 12: Learnt about rights and helped others

By: IYAMUREMYE Jean Bosco, Male, Project Participant, Eastern Province

Significant Change Story

My name is IYAMUREMYE Jean Bosco and I am 32 years old. The genocide took my whole family and only two of us survived, that is my young brother and myself. When the project came to us, I got involved. This was done through the Sector people who invited about 30 young survivors to participate. They started to ask us about our daily life and they were recording the discussions. After collecting all the information that they wanted, they came up with a list and we started trainings. The training was offered by AKAZI KANOZE. I was elected as someone who could help to identify and address some of the issues as a community facilitator. We were there to help other young people who felt traumatized. I was pleased to work with the project since I had been a member of AERG since my school days.



Many changes occurred in my life and those around me. As we were trained about self-confidence through legal trainings, I learnt how to defend my rights and to defend others. I started my own business of animal farming for pigs. I stopped that project and began buying and selling chickens. Through the income, I was able to continue building my house even though it is not yet finished. I also learned how to apply for employment in case I will get to know of places where they are looking for employees.

After being elected as a community facilitator, I have helped to solve several cases. I can give four examples since others are still being resolved. First, I supported some orphaned young people to recover their property from an uncle who wanted to take it over from them. Second, an elderly brother and sister were fighting over their father's land. I helped raise awareness of the law that all children are equal. The land was therefore divided equally between them. Third, a man married had two wives. When he died, the first wife wanted to take possession of all properties of the late husband, but we helped solved the problem and ensured that the rights of the second wife were enforced. And importantly, I got back my father's land which was stolen by someone.

Of all these changes the most significant one to me was that I learned about my rights and the worthwhile use of laws which helped me to go to court and to get back my father's land. In fact, I am also helping others to get their rights respected.

The factors which helped these changes is that I found joy in doing that for which I have always had a passion. We received training and that is great because we will use the lessons in our future lives. The projects we started will continue to work, except those which will fail because they are no longer receiving support. I also wish to say that we faced some challenges in this project, especially the long distance that we had to walk to come for training. It is also sad that the trainings will stop and others will not benefit like we did.

Change Story 13: Was supported to adopt my niece

By: DUSABE Marie Claire, Female, Project Participant, Eastern Province

Significant Change Story

I am DUSABE Marie Claire I live in Kamahinda village, Icyeru cell and Mukura sector. I am separated from my husband and I live with my 3 children. I got involved in this project when our village leaders called out for people who dropped out of school. I felt concerned because I stopped after finishing secondary school in human sciences. I stopped after I had got married. My husband did not allow me to continue with my education up to University level. For the past two years, we were invited into the project and attended trainings about business, counselling and legal support. Through these trainings, we learnt a lot of things. For example, about business, I learnt that I do not have to spend the money that I have but to reduce the cost of things and learn to save.



I started a business of buying bananas producing beer and selling it in our village. Although the business was running well, I have had a problem that one of my children fell sick and there was nobody to help me solve the needs of the household. I used all the money that I had to take him to the hospital and my business stopped. But by God's grace, if I can get money I can continue this business because it is a very good business, and I believe God will provide and I will continue it.

The counselling trainings helped me. Before this project, I was living in anger and I was lonely. My family refused to come and visit me since I got married. They did not like my husband and I was suffering with such a situation that I wanted to commit suicide. Most of the time I regretted why I did not die in the genocide. I remember how I was with my mother. She held my hand saying that we will die together but I ran away from her and survived. I always said at that time that I should have died with her so that I would escape all the problems that I was facing. I would not eat and would cry for hours in my bedroom. The situation got worse when my husband left for another woman. However, after the training, I managed to talk about my life, released my pain and I was healed. I met others who helped me, counselled me and encouraged me. They taught us games to play with someone who is traumatized and many techniques to help them.

For the legal support, I was living with my sister's daughter and I wanted to adopt her. I did not know how to do it but after trainings I went and talked to IRYAGARAGAYE Gerome, the trainer of legal support and lawyer at the same time. He advised me and told me what I needed to do. He did it for free. Before that, the families wanted to take her and all her properties like land. But her mother left her to me to take care of her before she died. Now she is officially my daughter since I adopted her legally. I have all the documents and this is all because of the legal support and training from the project. There are many others who also received such help.

The big change occurs in the fact that I got the right to adopt and to raise my niece as my own daughter as we agreed and as I promised to my sister before she died. Without forgetting the fact that I can do any business from any amount of money I can have.

The factors that helped me to achieve all these changes are the trainings I got which helped to open my mind and to have knowledge I did not have before, and the fact of meeting people who love me. The challenge of the project was that we all did not receive the money they promised to us. Even if the project is ending, the businesses we started will continue and our groups will also continue, and we will take loans to continue our businesses. We will also continue meeting, visiting and helping each other. Only the trainings will stop, but the baggage we have will help us. But our wish is to continue with the project.

Change Story 14: I got my family's land back

By: MUKESHIMANA Brigitte, Female, Project Participant, Eastern Province

Significant Change Story

My name is MUKESHIMANA Brigitte. I live in Nkende Village, Nyarubuye Cell of Unyiginya sector. I am 27 years in age and I am a married with one child. I got involved in this project when sector officials called for people with many problems to be trained by AKAZI KANOZE. Since my case was well known in our area, they called me too. I stopped my studies after finishing my secondary school. I could not continue in university because of lack of money. Likewise, many survivors also stopped their studies and that is why they live in loneliness and solitude. The project came just on time to meet our needs and support us as young survivors who were faced with many challenges. I personally gained skills and many of my expectations were met in all domains.



Some of the main changes were in the business domain. We were asked to present our business plan with the amounts of money that we wanted as loans. I did a business plan of 600,000 Rwf but they told me that amount was too high. I was given a loan of only 100,000 Rwf and that I was supposed to pay it back within one year. With the little money that I got, I decided to start a small shop. I got the loan on 5th of August 2016 and I have been slowly paying back. Even though it is not yet fully paid, I know that I will finish to pay it as soon as possible. The trainers continued to provide the advice, encouraging us to work hard and to pay back the loans. With the training, I learnt how to use a small amount of money to go very far. The project also helped me to live better in a community and to talk with others. Before this project, I was living in solitude. I was traumatized. With the help of our counselor, Vestine, I can now talk with others and share my experiences.

I also met Sylvie who helped me with legal assistance. I had a case of my family's land which was taken by a neighbor. In the genocide, my whole family was killed and after the war I went to my grandmother's place where I grew up. When I came back to our place, our house was destroyed and the land occupied by someone else. When I asked them for my land, they had told me they were given the land by the authorities. I tried to defend myself but I had failed. When I met Sylvie, she advised me what to do and I went back to the court. On 13th July 2017, they gave me back my family's land. I was happy and very thankful for the help. However, there is one problem that I do not have the land's papers. The man who had taken the land got a loan from the bank with the papers after knowing that the land had been given back to me. I still need Sylvie to help me and tell me the process to get back those papers.

The most and greatest significant change in my life is to win back my land in the court. I had tried this before but had failed. For me it was not going to be possible – but the project helped make this possible.

The factors that helped the achievements is the space to share experiences and talking about our lives and histories. Thanks to AERG people who were visiting and advising us. Also thanks to the loans that we got from

the project to support us start our small business projects. We were also given opportunities to learn from others. For example, we went to visit Muhanga, "URUTARE RWA NDABA". There we saw a survivor who started by selling beads and now he is able to pay for his University with the money that he gets. For me, I think that was a stimulating point for most us, motivating us to not fear but to feel confident to start our own new small businesses.

The challenges that affected me was that I had to spend a lot of money to go to AERG and to travel to Rwamagana to the court for my case to be resolved. In addition, the counselors did not come to visit us as often as we needed. We needed her so much because we still have so many problems in our hearts and our minds. Even though she had suggested that we should sit and share our problems amongst ourselves, we still very much needed her to be there with us. Also, the loan that they gave to us was not sufficient enough. We could only do a little business. So, for me, I have only been able to pay for four out of 12 months. The capital was too little.

As the project is coming to an end, my business will continue. I will try to continue paying my loan even if it will not be easy because my business does not generate enough profit. The trainings will stop because the trainers will not be able to come and train us. However, we will try to stay in touch and will never separate again with the people we met because of the project. After being trained in legal support, and getting back my family's land, I helped others with the advice I got from Sylvie and I will continue to help others. However, her support and help is still needed by many others. In case she is not available, I hope that local facilitators will help us.

Change Story 15: Chose to be the village lawyer

By: KAMALIZA Yvette, Female, Project Participant, Eastern Province

Significant Change Story

My name is KAMALIZA Yvette. I am 24 years and I am married. I live in Cyeru village, Cyerwa cell and Gashanda sector. I left school because of lack of school fees. I got involved in the project when AERG came to the sector and called for survivors to be trained about the counselling, legal support and business. I benefited in all the trainings that we got but especially more in legal support than in other domains. My brother used to say that I am a woman and I do not have any right to the lands that our father gave us. I received the training with one of my brothers. We therefore met and talked about the issue of the land. I tried to show him that we are all equal in front of the law and so he accepted to give me one of the pieces of land that we owned. We divided the lands and got the same part of the land with the other brother of mine.



I now know about human rights, about inheritance laws, as well about rights in the employment field. After being trained, I became the vice president of ISIBO, which is a group of people elected to explain and to help others about the law and their rights. We help them to understand the ways in which they can get to claim their rights. We also advise them that no one should be victimised or abused as long as we are there to help and support them. I chose to be the villager's lawyer. In addition, I also developed skills in business. In the past, I used to misuse or to waste money by buying unnecessary, needless and excessive things. However, I have now learnt and I can save all the money that I get or I earn – no matter how little it is. I also started my small business and I am working without any problem.

About the counselling, I had a big problem in my family. My husband had been rejected by my family because he is a Hutu and we are Tutsis. Since I really loved him, I tried to explain to my family that he is a human being like us. I tried to convince them to accept him as my husband and that we will spend the rest of our lives together. They refused and rejected both of us, which hurt me and made me feel lonely and isolated. I did not want to lose either my husband or my family, my blood. But after the training, I accepted it and I felt healed. Since we were trained with one of my brothers, he appreciated the importance of people to live together, despite their ethnicity. He accepted him as his brother-in-law and after that he helped me to convince my whole family to accept my husband. They did and indeed I do not know how I can thank this project. I was traumatized by that situation. I could not visit my family and they would not come to visit me. Now I am healed and I am happy with my husband and family. We can now visit each other.

Of all the changes that I experienced, the most important is that I got my father's land after discovering that men and women are equal in the eyes of the law. The training also taught me that no one is above the law. I have also begun to help others to claim their rights. My understanding has grown and now I am a source of help to other people, especially survivors who have problems.

The factors that helped these changes in my life are from the project. AERG put us together as we were living in trauma. We could not get the opportunity to open up our hearts in order to be healed. But after meeting with others, we shared the same history and pains. We released what we were always carrying in our hearts. Now we meet, we know each other and we share ideas, helping each other to develop in our lives. We now know the AERG staff members. We used to only hear about AERG without knowing it's members.

I really did not face any problem because from the beginning, I knew that I was going to gain big things and that is what happened. I did not have issues with distance but others struggled with long distances to come to the training events.

After the project stops, we will continue to meet and our groups will work as usual. We have a savings groups and we get small loans. Currently we contribute 100 Rwf but we are planning to increase that amount to 500 Rwf in order to increase our money in the bank account.

My worry is that the trainings will stop, though we believe that AERG will continue to come, visit, advise and encourage us. We want AERG to bring additional trainings to help us continue on from where we are now. We also wish they could open a vocational training center which will help us with skills such as sewing, car repairs, mechanics, hairdressing and other trainings. In case that is impossible, we suggest that they come to see what we are doing with our businesses and give us more money so that we can continue the businesses we started. All the same, for me, I will continue doing advocacy as a community lawyer to help people to access their rights.