



## STORIES OF IMPACT

*Church based programme: prevention and response to sexual violence*

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Rwanda



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Cover Photo: Church focal points who have received training on sexual violence and work within the community to raise awareness and create links with service providers

*Please note that names have been changed (denoted by \* )to protect identities in this booklet.  
Consent was given by all individuals to enable us to share these stories with you.*

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## WORKING WITH CHURCH LEADERS

Providing training and awareness so church leaders will speak out and act against sexual violence (SV)

### Anglican Archbishop of Rwanda, the Most Reverend Dr Onesphore Rwaje

“We are experiencing sexual violence in Rwanda, both in rural and urban areas where there is a growing use of drugs as well as no respect of women as human beings...

Historically with the legacy of the genocide, we have many child headed households (young girls). This in itself is a vulnerability that can be an entry point to sexual exploitation of young girls as many lack basic needs and some men use that...

As a church we are called to do our work, which is a counseling ministry and create a space where people are free to talk about their experience, share their wounds. **It is our mandate as a church; we do not have a choice. We are dealing with people, dealing with their hearts.** We know that some churches say that this is a government issue to deal with as Rwanda government is engaged in fighting sexual gender based violence (SGBV). **For us, the Anglican church of Rwanda, it is part of our ministry, it is part of Integral Mission, we are dealing with people’s lives, with human beings and in their totality, so there is no choice in the matter, we must address the issue...**



Photo: Bishop Louis Muvunyi (left) and Archbishop Dr Onesphore Rwaje (right)

Practically speaking in the case of child headed households, we can empower them economically via savings and credits associations, to avoid young girls falling into the trap of being sexually exploited for lack of material things. SGBV is not an isolated issue; it goes with HIV and AIDS, therefore by being vocal about the issue we will also fighting against HIV and AIDS.”

### Bishop Louis Muvunyi of Diocese of Kigali

“Our culture has also contributed to the rise of sexual violence. Our culture does not allow people to talk about these issues...

In the context of healing and reconciliation in Rwanda, the issue of sexual violence has not really been addressed. We however feel strongly as a church that we need to talk about this in our sermons, raise awareness and also give space to survivors to share their experiences. **When you bring something into light, especially an issue such as sexual violence, it is easier to fight and address it...**

We need to equip our pastors, mothers union and fathers unions with the right skills so that they provide effective care and support for survivors. “

## Providing training and awareness so local churches are equipped to be able to provide a 'safe' space'

**Dorcela**  
**Pastor from Ntunga Parish**  
**36 years old**

### What are the root causes of SV?

"There are mainly three reasons that cause sexual violence in this area and it is specially targeted at women and young girls.

1. Culture beliefs that give men the right to abuse women, we have various sayns in Kinyarwanda that encourage that:

- ***Impfizi ntiyumirwa***  
(never attempt to restrain the sexual desires of a man)
- ***Umugore n' uwo muryango***  
(a woman is her extended family property)
- ***Umukobwa n' uwo kurongorwa***  
(a woman has no other purpose to a man other than sexual)

2. Ignorance of community members about sexual violence

3. Lack of knowledge of Rwandan law and who to go to if you are violated"



Photo: Dorcela is passionate about fighting sexual violence

"**BEFORE taking part** in the project training on SV, I did not fully understand what sexual violence was. I looked at it as a form of adultery. I could not differentiate a sexual act that took part by mutual consent to the sexual act that involved force or coercion. Now I understand what the bible says about adultery and sexual violence as well Rwandan legislation. The training has resulted in increased knowledge of what sexual violence is and what the bible say about it. **As a woman pastor, it became very clear to me that I needed to engage with the issue as what was happening to young girls and women could easily happen to me.**"

"**AFTER the training on SV** we have seen changes in the church and the community around us:

- People have been able to disclose the sexual abuse that happen to them and
- People who witnessed sexual abuse or hear about an incident are now reporting this

As a church when we hear that someone has been sexual violated, we first of visit them and ascertain what has happened, then we accompany them to the police to report the crime and then hospital. If they have nowhere to go, often they will come as stay with me...

We also act as mediators with their families as sometimes they become ostracized and their families do not want to have any more contacts with them due to the sexual violence they have suffered. Members of other churches have also been able to come to us as they hear that our church helps survivors of sexual violence...

**In order to fight sexual violence as a church we need to do more awareness raising on what sexual Violence is, advocate on the issue and provide more practical support to survivors of sexual violence."**

### LONG TERM PROJECT OUTCOME

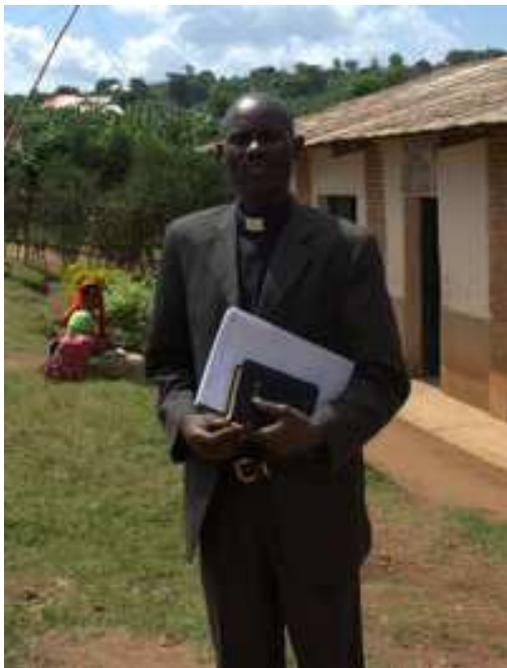
Changes in gender social stereotypes leading to transformed relationships in the community

**Etienne**  
**Pastor of Rutongo parish**  
**41 years old**

“Sexual violence in the community covered by Rutongo parish is caused by cultural beliefs. The belief that a woman cannot take part in decision making and does not have the capacity to make the right decisions.

**Before having training** around SV, I did believe that as Christians we are made in the image of God but do not fully understand what sexual violence is...

The Anglican Church can engage more on this issue by sensitizing other churches in this area because many do not feel it is their mandate to talk about this on Sundays. There are those who believe that you do not talk about sexual matters in the pulpit; it is a government issue and not a church issue. The perpetrators of sexual violence can be people that are in our congregation, so therefore if we are to minister to people, we must do it in a way that is practical and relevant...



**AFTER receiving training**, I gained more understanding in terms of how to bring up my children. I understood that I needed to speak to them about important issues, so that they can feel free to talk to me as well. We are also planning to have training for married couple to discuss on the issue of marital rape.

We have helped our survivors, especially those who had children as a result of rape get health insurance for their children. The church members did a collection so to cover the health insurance costs. We also ensured that survivors are welcomed within church groups; we strongly felt that in order for them to heal, they needed love, support and encouragement.

We need more capacity in the church, a dedicated person at diocese level if not parish to coordinate our response. **We need to create a space for our survivors to share their experience and heal together”**

Photo: Etienne wants to see his community free of sexual violence

#### **PROJECT OUTCOME**

Church leaders can demonstrate themselves and educate others:

- how to demonstrate zero tolerance
- advocate for transformed gender stereotypes

## Mobilising church leaders to challenge stigma and discrimination associated with SV

Rev. Canon Gasarasi, 45 years old, is married with 5 children and one grandchild. He is a small farmer and the Pastor of Bihembe Parish. He has been using his own personal experience to support parents whose children have been survivors of sexual violence.

His daughter, Elisabeth\* was kidnapped and raped by Interahamwe rebels when she was 8 years old, at the time they were in exile in Democratic Republic of Congo. The family returned to Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, 10 years later, Elisabeth was found and able to return home. She arrived in Rwanda pregnant, and deeply traumatized, her healing took time. She has now given birth to a girl who is 4 years old.



Photo: Rev Gasarasi with his daughter and granddaughter  
© Tearfund

Pastor Alphonse family is now looking after their daughter and their grandchild. As one of the pastors who leads a church (involved in the pilot programme) and a trained SV Trainer Of Trainers, he uses his testimony to teach, to encourage and share his experience with Bihembe Community especially with parents whose children faced sexual violence problems.

### PROJECT OUTCOME

Church leaders have an:

- Increased understanding of church's role responding to SV
- Increased commitment to act & reverse the 'silent voice of the church' to end SV

Currently the Bihembe community has the highest statistics in terms of the number of people reached out with the message of SV compared to other pilot parishes. They are engaged in eradicating Sexual Violence in their community.

From April to September 2013 Bihembe parish mobilized:

- 13 Church leaders
- 8 community leaders
- 9 focal points
- 2,015 church and community people (958 men and 519 women), 538 youth (353 boys and 185 Girls).

## Providing increased awareness and training for churches about sexual violence

**Acier**

**45 years old**

**Mwogo parish**

“One of the causes of SV is due to power men hold over women. This power can be physical as well as economical. One example is that of lady in our area who had a child from a Chinese labourer. She did not really want to have anything to do with him but because he was providing a job, he coerced her into sleeping with him. This is quite common and I believe we need to empower people economically so that they do not fall in that trap...”

**I personally gained a lot of understanding** during the seminars and discussions we had, especially around marital rape, I did not realise a husband could rape his wife...

I think **the church needs to provide more counselling and create a space for survivors of sexual violence to share their experiences”**



Photo: Church leaders sharing about their increased knowledge of sexual violence

**Mathias**

**58 years old**

**Gahanga parish and school director**

“ **AFTER** attending the SV training, I was empowered to get closer to people in my church so that they can tell me their problems. I felt that it was no longer just the government responsibility, but my responsibility as well as a pastor is to know what their problems were and reach out to them”

## WORKING WITH SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Enabling the local church to understand needs of survivors and provide adequate care and support

**Mahoro\***  
**14 years old**  
**From Rutongo parish**

“I was visiting a family that was friends with mine. I spent the holidays there, and there was a boy of 18 yrs who lived there. One day he said to me that he wanted us to have sex and I refused. I am young and I could not think of doing that, there were also consequences such as pregnancy. As I refused he raped me. I returned home, and after a few months I realised that I was pregnant. I told the boy and he said that I should have an abortion. Rumours started around our neighborhood that I was pregnant, my mother then asked me about it and I lied first, but then eventually said that I was. My parents were devastated by the news and they confronted the boy, he denied it and is still denying it.

Our pastor was very supportive of me and my mother. **The church has been really helpful and supportive.** They visited me at the hospital when I had my baby as well as at home. I was really moved by their support. They helped me and my mother get some clothes for the baby.

I find it difficult that I have a child when I am still a child myself; it is really taking a while to come to terms with this, especially when you hear some comments from neighbours. They say that my mother encouraged me to get pregnant so that as a family we will get help from other organisations.

**My hope for the future is to be able to get back into school and finish my education. Before I was raped, I wanted to be a doctor and I hope this will happen in the future.”**



Photo: The church seeks to understand survivor's needs and provide holistic care and support

### PROJECT OUTCOME

Survivors have increased access to holistic support  
(psychosocial, physical and emotional)

**Ineza\***  
**19 years old**  
**from Rutongo parish**

"I lived with my aunt for a while. She used to go to school and sometimes would spend the nights there, so I would stay at home and look after the house. I would stay at home with her husband. One night he came into my room and raped me, he said if I told anyone, he will chase me out of the house. I had nowhere to go, my aunt had helped me get an education, and I spent the school holidays with them and helped looking after the household when she went to school.

He raped me three times over a period of two weeks. I told no one at first, but once I felt unwell I went to the hospital where they did some tests and confirmed I was pregnant. I was 17 years at the time and I now have a 2 year old boy. I felt in my heart that I need to go to the police and I went. Once he heard that I had gone to the authorities, he fled and went missing for about a year but was eventually caught and is now serving 10 years in prison.

**Ineza feels that she has found acceptance within the church.**

I am no longer living with my aunt and have not really discussed what happened to me with her or any other person from my family. They are aware of what happened as I now have a child as a result of the rape, but we have not discussed it further. The fact that I became pregnant this way and such a young age has been a real struggle because I wanted to finish my education and do something with my life.

**The church has really been helpful, I did not attend church much, and so had no expectations from them.** However when I experienced their caring and love, I decided to go to church more often and there experienced so much love and acceptance. They visit me; they make sure that I have all that I need. I am now part of the choir and they also accept my child. **Their caring has allowed me to face the world, I do not feel so much shame now because of the rape, and they accept me and have adopted me into their family. I can face the world"**

**LONG TERM PROJECT OUTCOME**

The impact of sexual violence is reduced

**Janette \***

**38 years, mother of 4 boys**

**from Rutongo Parish**

"I work in the market selling some fruits and vegetables. I had house-help, a 21 year old girl who helped me look after my children, especially my youngest son who is 3 years now, whilst I went to work in the market. She had been our employee for almost a month and was not from our area. We had a bath time routine where the girl would prepare the water for my son and then give him a bath and I would come back from work in time to feed him and put him to bed. One day I came home and went as per the routine to room where she would give him the bath, so that I could feed him. As I opened the bedroom door, I saw her attempting to rape my son. I was in shock, I could not believe what she was doing, and I screamed, took my son away, run out of the room but in the process fainted due to shock. My brother in law was nearby, he heard my screams and came to help. We were in shock and so angry with what this girl had done, we fired her immediately; we were more concerned about our child. The girl went to a nearby town to stay with her aunt.

A few days later, our pastor came to visit as they had heard what had happened. We told him that we had fired the girl. **They advised us to report the matter immediately to the police and also take the child to the hospital.** We reported the matter to the police who then managed to track her down and arrest her. She accepted that she had indeed abused my little boy and that when I caught her it was the third time she had done that.

After a few days we hear that the girl had been released from custody as the police felt there was not enough evidence to keep her. **Our pastor pursued the matter for us with the police and really supported us** by advising us to stress that hospital test results demonstrated that our son had been sexual abused as she infected him with a venereal disease. She was arrested her again.

**Janette has been empowered by the church to raise awareness of sexual violence among other mums**

This sexual abuse has really affected us as a family. I feel that my son has been affected psychologically he reacts differently to women, he prefers them to men. My other sons think that women, except me are bad as they are aware of what happened. And as a mother, I feel so devastated by what has happened and still have nightmares about this, especially as I saw the girl raping him.

**I really did not expect that the church would be so helpful and supportive as I felt that it was our problem and issue. It was such a blessing to have them visits us, advise us, and pray for us and with us.**

I have been empowered by the church support that I have been speaking with other mothers so that they are vigilant in protecting their children."

**Alice \***  
**16 years old**  
**from Ntungwa Parish**

“I was on my way to fetch water when I met a man by the river. He told me that he had heard about me that I go to church a lot but that would not save me as he would have me at whatever cost. He then put a cloth in my mouth to prevent me from screaming and raped me.

He left me there and I screamed. Some church members were passing by; they heard me and came to my help. They took me home and went straight looking for the man. They found him and took him to the police.

This has really affected me I do not feel safe anywhere, I see the man’s face everywhere. **The church members have visited me and accompanied me and my family to the police to report the man.**

I initially felt shame and thought that people especially in the church would start talking about me. I have been really surprised because everyone has been supportive of me and sympathetic to my situation.”

**Alice has been inspired to help other survivors just as she supported**

**“I have also been inspired by my pastor who is a single lady. She has been a real role model for me especially looking at the love she demonstrated to me. My hope for the future is to be like her and help other people who go through the same situation as me”**

#### **PROJECT OUTCOME**

Survivors and families have:

- Increased access to psychosocial support and economic empowerment
- Increased use of services by survivors
- Decreased stigmatisation
- Increased reintegration and rehabilitation

**In Rutongo parish, a young girl of 13 years** was raped by her cousin. After 3 months of continuous sickness, her mother realised that her daughter was pregnant. The pastor and his wife as well as trained church focal points heard about what had happened and immediately came in to help the mother who is a widow with little resources. They help the young girl get medical tests by paying the costs; **they paid for her health insurance and helped the mother pay for maternity costs.** Now the girl and her young baby boy are staying with her poor family in a small house. **The church continues to visit and help the new young mother by giving her some food.**

**Patience \***  
**27 year old**  
**from Ntungwa Parish**

“There was a man in the church choir who was interested in me. I repeatedly told him that I was not interested in having a relationship with him. One day he became ill and my best friend asked me to go with her to visit him. I really did not want to, but felt as a good Christian it was my duties to visit him. So my friends and I made plans to go visit him. When we got there, we sat down had some drinks. Someone kept on calling her phone and I could see she was acting strangely. I said to her that we should go home, as I started making my way to the door, the man stopped me and said I would not leave the house, that that night I would become his wife.

My friend did not seem concerned, in fact she had been instrumental in getting me to his house as I came to find out she had been paid to lure me there. My friend left and the man blocked me, took me to his room and raped me numerous times. He also took my phone away. To him I had become his wife, even if I wanted to go, he hoped I would be too ashamed to leave his house.

I managed to get his phone and called my sister who was in Kigali and told her what had happened. My sister immediately called my family and pastor. **My pastor contacted the authorities to let them know that a crime had been committed.** My brothers came looking for me and I was able to escape when they confronted the man. I managed to reach Pastor house and took refuge there.

**I had dreams to have a family in the normal way; this man has robbed me of my life.** The fact that I am 27years old and having saved myself this long for this to happen to me is really painful.

**My pastor has been really supportive; if it was not for her I don't know where I would be. She has been my friend, she has encouraged me.** Not all members of the church were supportive of me. Some choir members kept telling me to go back to him as I was no longer a virgin.

**My pastor has supported me practically in terms of giving me shelter, a safe place to be whilst I recover from this ordeal.** She has faced some harsh comments from church members for even allowing me to remain part of the choir. I faced stigma as if I caused this to happen to me, in fact the man seems to have gotten away with everything.

My fear was that I would have a child as a result of the rape, however this did not happen. I am not sure if I have been infected with HIV as I am waiting to take a test. I have not taken the man to court, but **my pastor has reassured me that if I want to/when I decide to do this, she will accompany me.”**



Photo: Patience is grateful to the support her pastor gave her

#### PROJECT OUTCOME

Church leaders will support survivors in seeking justice and laws being enforced

## Enabling church leaders to challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs

**Ruth \***

**28 years married with 2 children**

**from Ntungwa Parish**

“I found out that my husband has been having an affair when someone came to our house to tell us that he should go visit his new-born baby. I was of course in shock when I heard that especially as we were being asked to provide some money to buy food for the new mother.

I asked my husband if it was true and he said it was. I was very upset by that especially that he constantly forced me to have sexual relations with him when I did not feel like it. For him, he had to have sex whenever he wanted and it did not matter what I said. I tried to speak to some people about it, but they advised me to endure it.

Him being unfaithful to me and forcing me to have sex has really affected my confidence. If someone looks at me for long period of time, I think that maybe they know what has been happening. When he raped me, the next day I was so upset and in such bad mood that sometimes I take it out on the children and shout at them.

**Church leaders are now speaking openly about marital rape within their churches and communities**

**Our pastor has been really supportive.** I have told her of the issues at home and she has had meetings with us to talk to my husband. He has accepted that he was unfaithful but denied raping me. In fact he says it is not an issue as every husband does that.

**When I spoke to pastor about the issues, I was confident that she would help and speak to my husband as I knew that she had helped other people in the church with the same issues. Pastor has been counselling my husband and using the bible to demonstrate to him that what he is doing is wrong.** Of course I am still hurt and realise that it might take a while for my husband to change his ways, but I am happy that pastor is involved and is on this journey with us.

I think what more can be done to help me and others who are in the same situation are to keep on speaking to husbands who rape their wives. To keep on teaching them on what the bible says about it.”

### **LONG TERM PROJECT OUTCOME**

Men and women do not engage in violent behaviour or practise which are an abuse of power

## WORKING WITH MEN AND WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY

### Equipping the church to raise awareness and understanding of SV

A man called **Nsanzimana** said that **“BEFORE the project** started I used to be the lion man in my family. I used and managed the family assets on my own and did not consider my wife’s opinion. My wife had no right to the money, to the land and all valuable family properties. I used to be intimidating, cold and would purposely look dangerous especially when things were not going well at home.

But **AFTER participating** in different meetings and seminars about fighting against SGBV, **this program opened my eyes** and realized that what I was doing was violence against my wife and children. I am now friendlier and communicate better with them. I support them emotionally and physically, but also allow them to support me where needs be, unlike in the past. Today my wife and I decide together on how best to use our money, land, and other family assets.



**I will never do what I used to do again”.**

Photo: Nsanzimana is a changed man due to project training ©Tearfund

#### **Philip**

**25 years old**

**Youth leader in Kibagabaga parish**

“When we received training in our church, and started talking about sexual violence to the congregation, **people started coming forward and letting us know of their problems.** A lady who was experiencing marital rape came forward and told us of her ordeal. We went to visit her and members of the church were able to counsel her and her husband. Our pastor discussed with the husband what the bible said about sexual relations between a husband and wife. **The husband in the end realized he had been sexually violating his wife, asked her to forgive him and also came to church to give testimony on how this new knowledge had helped save his marriage.**

There should be more campaigns and seminars within churches around themes of sexual violence. People do not have the knowledge. They do not realise they are violating their wives“

#### **LONG TERM PROJECT OUTCOME**

Changes in gender social stereotypes leading to transformed relationships in the community

**Patricia**  
**36 years old**  
**from Murambi parish**

“**BEFORE** training, I did not feel that it was any of my business to intervene if someone was going through sexual violence. I felt it was inappropriate to speak of such matters even in church. The church for me was a place for sermon and nothing to do with sexual matters. I also used to be judgmental and think that if someone has been assaulted it must have been their fault. If the person was not a church member, I did not see the need to be involved in their problems.

**AFTER** a seminar that I attended, I gained knowledge of what sexual violence is and its causes. **There after I saw the need to address it in our church.** I am now fully involved in groups that go around homes who are experiencing problems and provide counselling for them”



Photo: Members of the community sharing how the SV training has impacted their lives

**Singiraho**  
**38 years old with 7 children**

“**BEFORE** I attended a seminar on sexual violence, I thought my wife role was to respect me, feed me and be ready for me to have sex with her whenever I wanted.

**AFTER** the training I realised that I was ignorant and was violating my wife. I was counselled on what the bible says about sexual violence and role of men and women. **I am a changed man.** The church should have more training for the youth, specifically bible teachings on sexual violence, what it is and why the bible condemns it. This way **if we start within our youth, there will be more chance of reducing sexual violence in the future”**

**Jean**

**48 years with 6 children**

“I have gained so much from the training the church gave us on sexual violence. What the church need to do more is to keep on teaching us, updating us on so that when we go in the communities we have the right information”

**Theogene**

**54 years old, married with 7 children**

“**BEFORE** the training, I always thought that any decision to do with family assets had to be taken by me. My wife had no say in the matter. I felt it was my right as a husband to have my sexual needs met no matter what. I had paid her dowry so she should have sex with me whenever I required it. I would even use emotional blackmail and spend days without speaking to her until she gave in.

However **AFTER** the training I realized that I needed to share in the decision making on how we spend our money. I also did not understanding that forcing my wife to have sexual relations was wrong.”



Photo: Men whose views and attitudes have changed as a result of training on sexual violence

**Alice**

**23 year old**

“ We have seen changes in our community as a result of the discussions and seminars we had. It is not only in the community, but also within us on individual basis. **As a young woman, I came to understand how important it was for me to be engaged in fighting sexual violence**, it robs us of our future and we must fight it.”

**Emmanuel**

**27 year old, married with 1 child**

“I must admit that before being trained on issue of sexual violence, my wife had a difficult life. I managed our household assets, she had no say in the decision making process and I did not treat her in the right way. I can now relate to what the bible says....indeed I was blind but now I see and because of that my family has a better life, we are happier especially my wife.

**The church is key to changing attitudes towards sexual violence**, I know that we are being criticised for engaging in this issue as it is seen as a government issue, but it is our duty. That is the ministry of Jesus, to teach, to love and to heal and I am so happy to have been changed and being a vehicle through which change takes place.”



Photo: Focal points (men and women) who are volunteers trained to raise awareness in the community on SV

**LONG TERM PROJECT OUTCOME**

- Strengthened local institutions and systems
- Enhanced capacity of local church in prevention and response to SV
- Improved quality of life for communities in targeted communities of



Photo: Church leaders see the fight against sexual violence as part of their ministry