

**Brandon Kabagambe**

**Indashyikirwa (Activists for Change) Project, CARE International, Rwanda**

**Interim Report**

I remember when I was applying to colleges in the United States, I was so eager to go to this new land and obtain knowledge, skills and a great deal of connections. I was not sure how this would be of use to my people and the impact it would accumulate. Over the past 4 years at Morehouse and other internship locations, I was making a realization and connecting my studies to the problems solving strategies that would be applicable at home. As a graduating senior, with the help of Bridge2Rwanda and my mentors, I explored all the work possibilities. I was looking for a place that would grow my working experience and with operating in Rwanda. CARE international was what I decided to intern with and start my professional experience mainly because of the organization's impactful projects in Gender-based violence, Youth employability, emergencies intervention not only in Rwanda but also in all its host countries. I was able to connect with CARE international in Rwanda through CARE USA. With the help from Jessica Jennifer Cohen Foundation fund, my desire to work with CARE in Rwanda was realistic.

Since my first contact with CARE, my experience has been marvelous starting with coordinating with JJCF to the first day of work. When I arrived at the CARE country office, I was welcomed in a usual gesture. It almost felt like I had met all staff members before and we were reconnecting. Starting from the cook for the office to the Country Director, everyone was smiling at me, greeting me and willing to share about their job and projects. Additionally, I was given a detailed briefing on the working terms and conditions, security details and my expected deliverables over the internship duration.

I was matched with the Indashyikirwa (Activists for Change) project which is in its closing stages. The project started in September 2014 and will be closing on the 23rd of August 2018. Given my experience with writing reports, data collecting and analysis, I was added to the team to assist with cleaning the already collected data and making its quantitative analysis that would be used for the quarterly and final report of the project. For the purposes of good quality job delivery, my first was spent reading the project's quarterly and annual reports and also was given the opportunity to meet with the beneficiaries of the project. Reading the reports was helpful but listening to one of the activist's testimony was breathtaking.

The first phase of the Indashyikirwa project trained 840 couples individuals that were randomly selected to be going through the training about the gender-based violence and how to fight against it. These people were victims of gender-based violence. After the training of 5 months, 420 individuals that demonstrated great learning abilities, observable transformation, with amazing public speaking skills and had the willingness to share their stories were elected by their fellows to become activists. They would proceed to teach their learned lessons to many other groups of individuals in their respective locations using the same module that they learning from.

In my first days of understanding the project, I was given the opportunity to visit and talk to one of the activists who freely shared how she joined the project, the lessons learned and how she impacts her community through the Indashyikirwa classes. What was more outstanding was the visible transformation in her husband from a sexual assault and domestic abuser to a supporting husband and father. As she explained to me, her husband would misuse the family money, always come home drunk, sleep with other women, and beat up their children for no

reason. Through the Indashyikirwa's couple lessons, the husband was able to realize his human rights violations and undo all the unrighteousness that he was practicing in the family.

It is stories like this that I have been listening to every day when I travel to the field to either document success stories or attend the project's closing events. These testimonies have caused me to be attached to the project and have a better understanding of beneficiaries' benefits from Indashyikirwa activities.

After the understanding of the project, I started summarizing the numbers per the collected data. This data is to assist in knowing the number of dialogues that were provided to couples or individuals and communities. I was also graphing and comparing variables from different categories; gender, location, age and to illustrate the impact in terms of couples and individuals trained.

The highlight of my internship so far has not been the data analysis rather the fact that I have been able to travel nearly 2 days a week. In the first 45 days at work, I have been able to travel to 12 of the 30 Rwandan districts, visiting 3 projects, attending 4 Indashyikirwa closing ceremonies and interviewing 6 beneficiaries about the impact of the project on the day to day life. Oh yes, its tiresome, long hours of driving sometimes in dusty roads and may have to spend a day without a meal for food security but it has helped me to relate a lot to my people. Being able to see the happiness in someone who appreciates increasing his/her saving from 1000 RWF equivalent to 1.14 US dollars a month to 3000 RWF equivalent to 3.42 US dollars is worthwhile.

I am not trying to say that they are in absolute poverty, but these amazing people work day in day out in plantations, farms, art crafts, construction, mines and other physical occupations. The smiles on their faces and hope for a better tomorrow backed by the support of

the local government is unimaginable. One of the beneficiaries shared with me a Rwanda quotation “Ntawe ubyara ngo yuzuze ingobyi,” which means no one gives birth and the child fully fits the carrier (the cloth that most African parents use to carry their children on the back). The meaning is that nothing suddenly explodes to a big impact/income/benefit as it is started; rather it takes more efforts and time to attain the expected impact/income/benefits.

I also assisted with the team from CARE U.K--Ruby and Peter--to document the success stories of the beneficiaries as well as taking amazing pictures of them. I was assisting in translating for the team and also helped Peter, the photographer, with taking the perfect picture of the respective beneficiaries. It was a great experience and yet another exposure to CARE International's work and impact across Country Offices.

I would also want to mention that everyone in the Country Office is super busy and it can be scary. Rwandans tend to be slow walkers, take long lunch breaks, but CARE Rwanda employees are the total opposite. I have a deadline after deadline to submit deliverables which reminds me of those college days when I had homework due every 11:59 pm. It is challenging but I love it as this is the perfect place to have my first professional experience. Honestly, I want to get an extended contract with the office or with any CARE Country Office because of the friendliness of the people, the experience I have attained so far, the impact of the organization to its beneficiaries, and the exposure to the outside world it has given me.

I want to give great thanks to Mr. Gene for coordinating all the JCCF and CARE communications to see this experience happen and Mrs. Katie for the continuous support with nearly everything. Lastly to the great CARE Rwanda team led by Mrs. Bena, the Country Office director, who takes time to check in with me often; Miss Rachel, who has briefed and supported me since day one in my internship; and Mrs. Sidonie, who has been a great supervisor and

advisor. I am dearly looking forward to more experiences and amazing work with CARE International in Rwanda.