

Artisan Profiles Week 6

Nyiransabimana Colette

48, Co Op Leader, 2 children, Rwanda, Ihangare Ruli

I am fortunate to be one of the people who was not badly affected by the Rwandan genocide. Despite this, I still lost my father at a young age and grew up with just my mother raising me. I was not able to complete primary education and became pregnant at 20 years old. The father of my child did not want to marry me, so I was responsible for providing care my own. A few years later, I became pregnant again. After having multiple children as a single woman, I knew I would not be able to marry because of how society looked at me. I didn't want to let this stop me. I wanted instead to show everyone I could still be successful.

After the genocide, I started to learn how to weave. This gave me an opportunity to meet other people, including other single mothers. We encouraged each other, and I began to see that what we were doing was important. I was able to buy a home for children, and myself. One of the homes even has electricity. With the money from weaving for All Across Africa, I supported the costs of health insurance for my kids and my mother.

In some aspects, life was improving, but there were still many barriers to overcome. My eldest daughter became pregnant without a husband, and, around the same time, I lost my mother. I also learned that I was infected with HIV. I became tired all the time, even with medication. Through these hardships, I knew we couldn't lose hope. I remained faithful and did not place blame on anyone else. Our family had to persevere, love each other, and work together.

The former leader of this cooperative tricked us by having us weave a large order and then selling the products in Kigali to profit for herself. When she did not return to distribute the profit, other women in my cooperative were very discouraged. I told them that she may have taken our baskets, but we still have our hands and creativity. Those can never be taken from us. Since I was the one to encourage and uplift the women, they selected me to lead the cooperative. Now, I make sure that only experienced, creative, honest weavers may join.

I am proud that I can show others in society that, despite my illness, and the fact that I am single, I can still care for a family. I am an example to many people because I fought on my own and am achieving beyond expectations. All Across Africa continues to give me these opportunities to better the lives of my children. I am saving up so that I can afford to pay for a wedding for my youngest daughter, who is engaged. A mother's greatest wish is to one day leave her children in a better place.

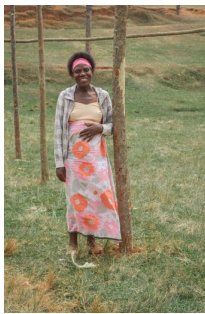


Mukanderanya Clarisse

39, Rwanda, Weaver, Not Married, Pregnant, Ihangare Ruli

My name is Clarisse, I am thirty-nine years old, and I am a weaver for All Across Africa. Life before weaving was very tough because my family had very little money. My father got sick and passed away when I was still young, leaving me with four older sisters and a mother, who now suffers from a mental disability. All of my siblings left for work or got married, so I was left alone to care for my mother. My mother is 82 years old and cannot do anything on her own.

I knew I had to find a way to make money, so I started learning different skills, like painting clothes. The people in my choir group saw how hard working I am and knew I had a sick mother to care for, so they taught me to weave and helped me join a cooperative. Once I started getting orders, I was so relieved because I knew I would never have to beg for money. Joining the cooperative came at a very important time in my life because I am now pregnant, without a husband. Soon I will be a single mother who needs to care for my own mother and a new born. Luckily, I have great relationships with people and find it easy to relate with the other weavers. Having the support system of the cooperative and the other weavers, who can help me care for my family, keeps me at peace. I have already started saving money for my child's health insurance and school fees. I bought a plot of land with the money from All Across Africa, where I planted coffee. By the time my baby is born, I can harvest and sell the coffee for a good amount of money. Everything I do now is in preparation for my baby's life. We all are striving for better futures and have seen how weaving can promise a more developed life.



Karurangwa Vestine

37, Vice Cooperative Leader, Married, 3 kids, KODUKORU Cooperaive

I have been weaving with All Across Africa for four years now, and it has allowed me to take care of my family and start planning for the future. As a child, I was very intelligent and loved school, but when my father died, I stopped the 6th grade and became a digger to provide for my family. Digging for a farmer was an exhausting job, but at least it gave us some food. I was only 10 years old at the time, and my older brother had to guide the family in my father's place. My father had been the only financial provider, so it was very difficult for all of us, especially my brother. When the genocide began, life got even harder. One day, we heard many loud gunshots outside of my home. We were terrified and decided to run to hide to some bushes where we thought it would be safe. While we were trying to escape, they caught my older brother and killed him. That day, I also lost friends, neighbors, and

relatives. This is when I realized, at a young age, that, with my brother gone, I would have to learn to provide for myself and support my family. All I wished for was to be able to return to school, but this wasn't a possibility for me. At age 20, I got married. This marriage didn't give me any more money, and my husband and I were poor. At this time, I was blessed to find weaving and All Across Africa. I suddenly started earning good money, and eventually earned enough to build a home with 5 rooms, electricity, and water. I am so proud of myself for getting out of that bad life.

Today, I am constantly trying to find ways to save and invest my money from All Across Africa. I want to be prepared in case I face any future problems. I helped my husband to buy more farmland and am buying a lot of chickens with the goal of starting my own poultry business. I only own 10 chickens right now, but I hope to expand that number to 2000 chickens. Though someone may say that I am successful, I am always aiming higher. I need to make sure I can make my kids dreams come true and let them know they can accomplish what ever they want. Thanks to All Across Africa, I have the skill set to teach others how to improve their situation. I enjoy sharing my knowledge with others, especially with kids who are not able to go to school.



Kabasinga Concilide

47, Rwanda, Co-Op Leader, 7 Children, KODUKORU Cooperaive

My name is Concilide, and I am the leader of a cooperative named Kodukoru. I am married with eight children, including one who is adopted. Unlike many other women that I work with, I did not grow up poor. Because of my father's different businesses, my parents were able to afford school fees. I loved going to school, but, even though money wasn't an issue, my dad didn't understand why girls should go to school. He believed that I should stay in the home to learn household activities. My uncle was always the one to encourage me and explain to my father that education would give me more opportunities. When I was in 6th grade, my uncle moved away, and my father decided to stop sending me to school. He wanted me to marry at a young age so he could receive the benefit of cows and money in exchange.

At age 21, I got married to a successful businessman, but, unfortunately, the genocide changed our lives. He could no longer safely work, and we were both without jobs. For the first time in my life, I was poor. My husband and I didn't understand family planning at this time, so we started having a lot of kids, making it more difficult to sustain a decent life. I was encouraged by my husband to start weaving, and I was lucky enough to join a cooperative. The company accepted the first few products I weaved, and it turned out I had great talent for weaving. Everything in the home started to improve because of the money I received each week. Even my relationship with my husband improved. Unfortunately, we discovered my sister and her husband were ill with HIV. When they both eventually passed away, I adopted their youngest daughter in hopes I could save her from a

tough life and send her to school. She has just completed her high school education, which makes me very proud. I was very sad when my dad stopped me from going to school, but now he is so proud of me and thinks I am an example to the family.

I didn't let being a woman stop me from succeeding in life. I believe that when you give a woman money, she knows what to do with it and how to spend it. Women are responsible and spend to improve daily life as well as society. We are good at communicating and quick to understand every situation. This is why I am so grateful for All Across Africa, because I see them giving women a chance to succeed.

