



MY STORY

My name is Vanesa MBABAZI. I was born blind and I am 17 years old. I am a senior four student at HVP Gatagara, which is a special school for the blind located in Rwamagana district in the eastern province.

I was informed that, 9 months after my birth, I developed an eye disease caused by severe allergies. My aunt, who was taking care of me, took me to various hospitals, but my eyes were not able to be restored to good health. I did not have the opportunity to be with my parents because they separated after my birth and left me in the care of my aunt when I was just a little baby.

During my childhood, I did not see my father often, but I occasionally met my mother. My parents are no longer together as they each found new partners after their separation. I grew up in a financially disadvantaged family, where even affording food was a complex task. However, my aunt, who took care of me and her four other children, somehow managed to provide us with food and clothing.

We sometimes received additional support from family members to send the other children to school. However, I was not given the same opportunity, which made me feel sad. Living in this complicated situation, I was not happy and often felt frustrated. I lived without hope of going to school and also had no hope for my future.

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I remember in my life, I used to cry because I was a child and had no father or mother around me. I would hear hurtful words from people around me, including my family members, who discriminated against me. Throughout my childhood, I was not allowed to play, enjoy, or participate in various activities at home. I began to experience a life of solitude, feeling isolated from my colleagues and utterly hopeless about my future.

Today, I am very fortunate because the Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB) through the SRF project is supporting me in my studies at school. RUB and SRF have provided assistance for me to return to school, covering my school fees, providing school uniforms, and assisting with transportation costs to and from school.

I normally interact and associate with my colleagues with visual impairment at school. I am very glad that this year, I succeeded in the national examination and received the opportunity to pursue arts and languages, which aligns with my vision for the future. I am considering a career as a journalist or interpreter, and I am also interested in entrepreneurship as I enjoy conducting business activities.

By attending school and succeeding in the national examination, my community has changed their negative attitude towards my ability. Now, my family and other children see me as a capable student, just like everyone else.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to RUB and its partners who have played a significant role in shaping the person I am today. When barriers are eliminated for children with visual impairments, they gain the ability to explore the same opportunities as other members of society.