



# RWANDA

## RWANDA UNION OF THE BLIND

WISDOM IS OUR DIGNITY



### **RUB Changing lives of VIP**

- Promoting inclusive education
- Equipping VIP with technical skills
- Rehabilitation program- a trigger towards social economic empowerment

## Acknowledgement

### About RUB

Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB) is a local non-governmental organization legally operating in Rwanda since 1995 to work towards the improvement of the living conditions of persons with visual impairment in Rwanda. It represents an estimated number of 3000 members in Rwanda who are blind and partially sighted.

Since its foundation, RUB has strengthened and extended the scope of its activities by establishing branches in all districts of the country. Currently, RUB has 64 well-established branches in 30 districts.

The organizational activities and interventions aim at improving the living conditions of persons with visual impairment through advocacy, promoting the education of children with visual impairment, capacity development of members and rehabilitation program/service

RUB promotes the rights of people with visual impairment through advocacy assistance, education and outreach work to build the Rwandan society awareness and support for inclusion. Its members are supported in a wide range of situations, including cases where they have been denied their right to education, to work, to live independently, to access a good standard of healthcare and to enjoy participating in family and community life.



#### **Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB)**

as an organization founded in 1994 with a mandate to work towards the improvement of the situation of blind people through education and rehabilitation to facilitate meaningful equality and integration, RUB is pleased that has gradually developed into an organization that provides a hope for the future and life changing opportunities to thousands of the visually impaired people in the country. It's work positively impact the lives of the end beneficiaries that are persons with visual impairment through its various programs and activities on the support from different partners.

RUB therefore acknowledges the support of Disabled People Organizations in Denmark (DPOD) through Danish Association of the Blind (DAB) in the production of this handbook and our other various partners for their valuable contribution towards our endeavour.

Your contribution helps RUB to further its crucial work of changing the lives of persons with visual impairment in Rwanda.

**WISDOM IS OUR DIGNITY**

# Contents

RUB changing lives of the visually impaired ————— 4

DREAM Project breaking down education barriers for visually impaired children — 6

Meet Habumugisha, a low vision teacher inspiring others ————— 8

Visually impaired Uwifashije finds her niche in tailoring —————10

Meet Niyobyose, a quicker learner and talented visually impaired female ———12

Kankindi embraces saving culture —————14

MRCB restored Hakorimana's hope —————15

Despite vision impairment, RUB turned Habanabakize into advocate —————16

MRCB training gave Kabarinda a fresh view of disabled living —————18

More support still needed to promote inclusive education —————20

3



# RUB changing lives of the visually impaired

**R**wanda Union of the Blind (RUB) is helping people with visual impairment in the country to avoid dependent lives and realize their potential through its DREAM project.

RUB received funding from Disabled People's Organizations Denmark (DPOD) through Danish Association of the Blind (DAB) to implement a three year project entitled "Disability Rights, Empowerment, Advocacy and Mobility (DREAM).

With the DREAM project, visually impaired persons were empowered to defend their rights by approaching local authorities, community leaders, family members and to help each other in getting people to understand their rights.

The project also helped RUB to know whom to target, and the status of their advocacy campaigns among other things.

The project was designed in part as continuation of some of the work that RUB had done before.

"We have had a project empowering persons with visual impairment through rehabilitation and provision of independent living skills to them," said Dr Donatilla Kanimba, RUB Executive Director.

"We also wanted to get them together in local

associations to be able to manage these local associations as it helps us to know where they are, and how many we have."

The DREAM project ensured that persons with visual impairment know their rights and are empowered to carry out advocacy and awareness campaigns.

"We helped visually impaired persons to move from the bottom of the social scale, being the poorest of poor, the most neglected, to rise up and be part of society without leaving anyone behind socially and economically," Kanimba added.

The goal is to make people with visual impairment independent instead of appearing as a burden to others.

There is a lot worth celebrating

Kanimba said there is a lot worth celebrating after three years of the project's implementation, including visually impaired people being able to carry out their own advocacy at the local level.

She believes when the visually impaired remain in local groups they are stronger to approach local authorities at district, sector and cell levels.

They are also able to intervene if one of them is experiencing challenges related to denial or violation of their rights.

Such empowerment has enabled visually impaired people to report cases of children with visual





*Dr. Donatille Kanimba says there is a lot to celebrate thanks to RUB DREAM project.*

impairment who are not in school.

It is also worth noting that a number of people with visual impairment are now actively participating in the economic life of the country, Kanimba said.

The Dream project supported some visually impaired people to be placed in vocational training centers to learn Knitting skills.

Following the training quite a number of them own knitting businesses or are part of Knitting cooperatives.

"They are able to earn some money to support their families. So I think there is a reason to celebrate," said Kanimba.

The Masaka Resource Center for the Blind (MRCB) serves as the first step to regain hope for somebody who lost his or her

sight and has been staying at home.

The centre offers a rehabilitation program that helps them to learn reading and writing braille, and to do house chores on their own.

A lot of people believe that without sight one cannot be able to cook or prepare food for cooking, take care of their own hygiene or to look after their homes, keep home clean or iron clothes.

But besides orientation, mobility lessons and use of a white cane, all these other skills are taught at MRCB.

"We realized that much as the government has done a lot in promoting education, there were no schools which were truly inclusive because there were no learners with sensory impairments," said Kanimba.

To address the challenge, RUB offered to place volunteers at the existing model schools and then enrolled in children with visual impairment from the surrounding areas. The volunteer teachers not only supported children to read and write in braille but also helped teachers, showing them how best to support the learners with visual impairment.

So far I can say that this has been quite successful, said Kanimba.

"We have seen one child move from being almost at the bottom of the class to being at the top of the class. We have also managed to bring in school age-going children who were not going to school." ■



6

## DREAM Project breaking down education barriers for visually impaired children

**I**t is about 11 a.m. at G S Rwisirabo in Karangazi sector, Nyagatare district.

Promise Manzi sits in the classroom following lessons. He is reliant on a slate and stylus he uses to take notes in braille. Manzi is the only visually impaired person in P4 class at this school.

He follows the teacher attentively and responds to the teacher's questions.

"Air is a mixture of gases," Manzi defines air, in response to the teacher's question.

Born blind due to illness from her mother, Manzi's parents were supportive but never thought that he could access education because they knew no single school that could accommodate him.

But now, the parents are excited that their 11-year-old son is at GS Rwisirabo and accessing his right to education.

GS Rwisirabo has embraced inclusive education promoted by the Rwanda Union of the Blind through the DREAM project. It is aimed to break down barriers and ensure

visually impaired children are not left out of education.

"I study well without major challenges. My facilitator sent by RUB who is also visually impaired assists me in taking notes and learn braille. He is always available whenever I need support," Manzi says.

Rwanda Union of the Blind deployed one, Jean Claude Mpagaritwenimana to assist Manzi to study flawlessly.

Mpagaritwenimana's roles include supporting Manzi to take notes, read and write in braille. He also supports school teachers to learn how to read



*I study well without major challenges. My facilitator, who is also visually impaired, assists me in taking notes and explaining lessons.*

and write in braille and on how to cater for learners with visual impairment in an inclusive classroom.

Manzi started primary school in Kibeho Educational Institute for the blind Children ; a school which is located in Nyaruguru district - Southern Province, over 320 kilometers away from his home in Nyagatare district.

For Edmond Ntagwabira, Manzi's father, the journey to Nyaruguru was scary.

"Travelling to and from Kibeho was so tiring and costly in terms of transport. Kibeho is very far and whenever my son was at school there was no communication for the entire

term, I was always worried," he said.

"But thanks to RUB support, Manzi was transferred to a nearby school at GS Rwisirabo; an inclusive school and he gets assistance from RUB. I am so thankful that my child is fully supported to access education close to his home," he added.

Despite visual impairment, Manzi excels in class.

In fact, he was the best student in P2, P3 and only one pupil beat him in the first term of P4 to become the second in class.

"I am determined. I experience difficulties in Math but I also try my best. I have been occupying the first position and slipped a little bit in the first term, but I am putting in all

the efforts to retain my position," Manzi says.

Thanks to the DREAM project, Manzi has got a dream.

"My dream is to become a pianist, an actor or a journalist. I am working hard to achieve it," he says.

RUB is promoting inclusive education through the DREAM project, according to Dr. Donatilla Kanimba, the Executive Director of the Rwanda Union of the Blind.

She noted that when people talk about inclusive education, they want to include those with physical disability only and claim that this is inclusive enough.

But RUB engaged the National Union for People with Disabilities in Rwanda (NUDOR) to make them truly inclusive among established inclusive schools "We joined hands with NUDOR to make the schools truly inclusive because they were not, there were no learners with visual impairments, there were no learners with hearing impairments, so that means no learners with sensory impairments," she said.

RUB sent volunteers to 3 inclusive model schools and the schools were encouraged to enroll children with visual impairment from the surrounding areas.

The volunteers were tasked to teach the children to read and write in braille and also support the teachers in braille literacy and showing them how best to support the learners with visual impairment.

"So far I can say that the results have been quite amazing," Dr. Kanimba added. ■



# Meet Habarugira, a low vision teacher inspiring others

**S**ebastien Habarugira joined Masaka Resource Centre for the Blind two years ago to receive rehabilitation training which could help him following the loss of his vision.

He developed eyes defect which deteriorated when he was in year one at university.

"I joined the University of Rwanda's College of Education hoping to become a teacher. I lost that hope after my sight deteriorated, I didn't imagine any school or institution could employ a visually impaired person," he says.

Having low vision at his age was a serious hindrance as he could hardly walk, read or write or do anything else on his own. But he is now a teacher at a school of inclusive education GS Rukingu in Rulindo district, where he teaches Biology in O' Level.

MRCB as a turning point

While at University Habarugira sought support from a resource room that assists students with disabilities. There, he met Dr. Patrick Suubi who told him about RUB and its rehabilitation program and encouraged him to enroll at Masaka Resource Centre for the

Blind (MRCB). The Centre is run by Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB) with support from various partners.

"I did not hesitate to join the Centre. I acquired more training ranging from mobility and orientation to reading and writing in braille among other Independent living skills," he says. "The skills, especially reading and writing in braille restored my hope that I would soon get a job," he says.

This came true in 2020 when he applied for a teaching job and was shortlisted for interviews.

"I informed the examiners that I had a low vision and could not do my exam in the regular format. I was thus allowed to do the written exam in braille and I passed," he says.

That is how he ended up at GS Rukingu.

How he teaches

Habarugira applies normal methods of teaching but often prepares notes in braille. He has a power point projector for students to easily follow his lessons.

"It is easier for me to prepare notes in braille as I have software that helps me read. With my

knowledge of using ICT for the visually impaired, whenever I am done with preparing notes I use a projector and teach as all other teachers" he says.

"I am so grateful to RUB for supporting my reintegration. I cannot imagine where I could be if I had not received the rehabilitation training," he says.

He gives tests and exams and another teacher assists him in marking but can prepare all the materials on his own.

Habarugira is determined to develop his career and upgrade his education.

"I want to become a leader so that I can participate in decision making. I hope that my future will be bright, I know how to teach and can further my studies," he added.

An exemplary teacher

According to Pascasie Niyitegeka, the head teacher of GS Rukingu, Habarugira is an exemplary teacher.

"Habarugira is a professional teacher with an insatiable thirst for knowledge. He is gifted and was not employed on compassionate ground. He prepares notes as all other teachers, give test and exams and students succeed in his reason. He is a source of inspiration among other teachers," she says.

Habarugira completed his 6-month rehabilitation training at MRCB in the year 2019 and he got a teaching job in 2020 at Groupe scolaire Rukingu. ■

*I did not hesitate to join the Center I acquired more training ranging from reading and writing in braille to orientation and mobility*





*Rosette Uwifashije uses skills in knitting to improve her lives*

10

## Visually impaired Uwifashije finds her niche in knitting

**Rosette Uwifashije passes a thread through the eye of a needle within a blink of an eye, as she guides her trainees to apply the acquired knitting skills.**

Uwifashije is visually impaired but looks no different from other people without disabilities performing knitting. She exhibits impeccable knitting skills and has been a source of knowledge to many people in her home village of Kibangu sector in Muhanga district, Southern Province.

She owns the Rosette Fashion business.

"Despite my disability I train people in knitting to acquire skills. I use a knitting machine that I mastered how it works," she says, as she guides one of the trainees to perfect a partly finished product.

She acquired knitting skills from Ubumwe Training Centre in Rubavu district, in Western Province with the support from RUB in the year 2018.

"I am able to knit all sorts of clothes and in different styles depending on clients' choice.

So I train and make money from knitting as well," she adds.

A trainee pays Rwf80,000 per term. She is also contracted by Education Development Center through its Umurimo Kuri Bose (Employment for all) project to train youth without disability, earning her Rwf40,000 per term per person.

She has so far trained 21 people, including nine with visual impairment.

The 30-year-old Uwifashije lost her sight in 2000 due to illness and lost hope.

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*I have managed to acquire a plot of land worth Rwf 300,000. I managed to pay school fees for my young sister*

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Her hope was only restored after joining the Masaka Resource Centre (MRCB).

“I can say that my life has since changed, orientation and mobility training I acquired helped me change my perception and overcome stigma,” she says.

After acquiring skills from the Centre, the journey towards her independence started. She had gained confidence that she was able to walk independently and engage in farming and do other activities.

She opted for another business though. She enrolled in a TVET school for a one-year knitting course, where she graduated with a certificate.

What she has achieved so far

After graduating, Uwifashije went home and advocate for her and was able to get a knitting machine from the district.

“I started knitting for residents, especially students' uniforms. That is when I started to make money,” she said.

From savings she was able to buy another Knitting machine

machine machine within a few months.

She now has three Knitting machines.

In 2021, Uwifashije got married. Her husband also has vision impairment but they live happily together.

“We learned to live as a visually impaired couple, this is something people can hardly understand but I am so grateful that we are living a better life, it is a great achievement,” she says.

#### **Award winner**

In 2019, Uwifashije was among the winners of Youth Connect Awards, walking away with Rwf500,000. It was a boost to her business and welfare.

“I have managed to buy a plot of land worth Rwf300,000. I managed to pay school fees for my young sister after we had lost our mother. Thanks to saving I also refurbished our house,” she says.

Uwifashije knows different knitting models and has the ability to transfer skills to others. ■







12

## Meet Niyobyose, a talented visually impaired female

**P**enninah Niyobyose was born blind. She stayed in Rusizi district, Giheke sector and knew no other places.

She was so dependent and sometimes her family ignored her and offered little assistance.

"Back in villages, a visually impaired is considered a burden and a curse to the family. I always felt rejected and desperate," she says.

That is the life she lived in for more than 26 years until in 2018 when she joined the Masaka Resource Centre for the Blind. (MRCB)

"I learnt about MRCB from a colleague who was visually

impaired and had completed training there, he came to see me home and shared testimonies about how the Centre has changed him, he also encouraged me to join," she says.

At the Centre, visually impaired persons are assisted to restore hope among the beneficiaries by introducing new hands-on skills to them in various disciplines such as Agriculture and Animal husbandry, orientation and mobility, attending to home chores on their own among others.

At the centre, we also learn to socialize with others, visually impaired persons are considered to be harsh because of their background. Because of stigma and a lonely

life in the past, a visually persons needs to be reintegrated socially," she says.

That is the first support she says she received. Besides, she was so fast to learn orientation and mobility skills and combined it with modern agricultural and animal husbandry.

"For the six months I spent at MRCB, I had mastered enough skills that I hoped for a better future, when we graduated I went home and started with rearing small animals and practiced modern farming," she says.

She acquired the MRCB training thanks to Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB)'s DREAM project. As part of the

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*I started training in knitting and covered the school fees using the funds I had got after selling my small animals and vegetables,*

”

project, she acquired a goat as a start-up kit upon graduation.

She reared the goat and started planting vegetables in a modern way. I planted cabbages, carrots and used the manure from the goat. The goat delivered and I sold vegetables I used to sell vegetables and sold one goat to buy ships,” she says.

At one point she had 2 goats, two ships and a vegetable garden, she decided to sell them off to start knitting training. She had over 200,000 Rwandan francs from it and enrolled in Ubumwe Training Centre in Rubavu district.

“I started training in knitting and covered the school fees using the funds I had got after selling my small animals and vegetables, learning knitting became easier and I had

acquired after two months I started knitting for money while still at the training centre,” she says.

She worked for individuals and could first ask for advance which she used to buy raw materials. The little money she earned helped her survive during the training while acquiring more practical skills.

After graduating, she went back home to Rusizi district where she rented a knitting machine at Rwf 5,000 per day.

“I got a job to knit 50 jumpers for the GS. Giheke and I used the money to pay for the rented machine, I also used the money to acquire my own machine at Rwf300,000,” she says.

Niyobyose moved her business to Rubavu district, hoping that

she could get more clients where she works for a few months. She was offered a job in Kigali to train a business woman in knitting. That was the beginning of 2021.

She could earn 70,000 Rwandan per month from training the business woman. After training her, she got a knitting job for eight months, still earning the same amount.

After eight months of employment, she quit and started own business in Masaka suburb, a short distance from MRCB where she acquired the basics.

“I have my own business. I share the rental space with three other people who are tailors. My life has changed thanks to knitting, I work for individuals but I also knit for business people who win tenders,” she says.

Niyobyose can produce at least 4 items per day and charges between 4000 Rwandan Francs and 5500 Rwandan Francs. She also knits other sorts of materials such as skirts, hats, scarfs among others.

Much has been achieved

Niyobyose says that she has achieved a lot ever since she started her business.

“I have acquired a plot of land worth 600,000 and pay school fees for my young sister who is in secondary school, I am also able to cover all expenses on my own. For me, this is a huge achievement for someone who was once considered useless and who had lost hope,” she says, expressing hope for even a better life in the future.

Niyobyose also changed other's life

“I learnt a lot from Niyobyose, she is a good trainer and so friendly, she trained me in knitting and I now have a business thanks to the skills she imparted to me,” said Marie Leontine Mukamisha, a business woman in Kigali. ■





# Kankindi embraces saving culture

**E**renestine Natete Kankindi never thought she could one day have an account in a financial institution registered under her name due to the stigma she experienced after losing her sight.

"I was so worried and grew up with little hope of a better future," she says.

"My family was poor and little did it care about me, as a visually impaired person, I was rejected and much stigmatized," she adds.

Kankindi's past was not promising and she believed that her life would always be dependent. Little did she think that Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB), an organization bringing together visually impaired persons, would one day change her life.

She is one of the visually impaired persons who benefitted from the knitting program under the RUB support.

Thanks to RUB, Kankindi currently runs a small knitting workshop in Zaza sector, Ngoma district in Eastern Province.

The journey towards her self-reliance started in 2018 when Kankindi joined Masaka Resource Centre for the Blind (MRCB), where she learnt orientation and mobility among other things.

From there, she was able to walk on her own without any guide and could do some activities on her own.

## **The knitting skills changed Kankindi's economic status.**

"After graduating from the rehabilitation training, RUB supported me to Joint vocational training Center-Nyanza where I learnt knitting.

After completion of the training on Knitting, I went back home and got information about the Business Development Fund (BDF) subsidized support for people with disability," she says.

"I met an agent who introduced me to a variety of loans offered by BDF through Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO). I acquired a loan of Rwf500,000 of which I paid Rwf250,000 and the rest was a subsidy," she says.

She acquired the loan in May 2020 which she serviced within a period of one year.

She used the loan to acquire a Knitting machine which she uses to knit a variety of clothes in her home area to earn a living.

Kankindi testifies that her life has since changed.

"After acquiring the machine I worked hard to service the loan, paying Rwf28,100 monthly installments," she says.

Kankindi works with another weekly savings scheme called Village Savings and Loan (VSL) from where she can request small loans to solve family issues.

She contributes Rwf2100 per week.

On a good day she can earn Rwf20,000, especially during the beginning of the academic year.

She also offers knitting training to people who pay her Rwf20,000 per month.

She has so far trained four people.

"I cannot claim to have achieved much within two years of working but I can say that my future looks bright, that I have managed to service the loan and still save some money," she adds.

"I am able to buy basics and raise my child; I live an independent life despite being visually impaired. I am also proud that I train people without disability, I feel happy when the community members are happy that I help others," she says.

Kankindi is also grateful to RUB that helped her acquire needed skills.

"Hadn't it been for my Organization (RUB) my life wouldn't have been changed. The training I acquired has changed my life and that of my family," she says. ■





# MRCB restored Hakorimana's hope

farming skills which I apply at home. I trained my wife on best farming practices and she was amazed," he says.

**V**IVENS HAKORIMANA is visually impaired. But he is a very positive individual. Hakorimana got an illness at the age 12 which eventually robbed him of his vision.

The father of three lived a desperate life for almost three decades.

"I don't remember anything I saw going on around me. I always lived a dependent life and often stayed home, upset," says this resident of Kivuye Sector in Burera district.

"Life was very hard for a visually impaired person. The attitude of family members was that I was a curse in the family. It was so negative that nobody cared about me, my parents, relatives and society rejected me," Hakorimana, says.

"I had lost hope," he says.

## DREAM project shines ray of hope

In 2015, a friend introduced Hakorimana to the Masaka Resource Centre for the Blind (MRCB). The centre equips persons with visual impairment with hands-on skills, mobility and orientation among others so they can live an independent life.

"The first day I joined Masaka Resource Centre for the Blind in 2017 for rehabilitation training was a turning point. Trainers there welcomed me and all my other colleagues. The training changed my perception on life," he says.

They were trained to try to overcome stigma and feelings of loneliness.

"We were later introduced to mobility and orientation, a course in which we were taught how to walk independently and how to use a white cane," he says.

After a short period, Hakorimana says he was able to move alone using the white cane.

The range of training included domestic chores such as house cleaning, washing, cooking, modern crop and livestock farming among others.

"We were involved in practical farming, growing crops such as maize and vegetables. I acquired

## Starting knitting career

The rehabilitation training at MRCB had opened doors and Hakorimana wanted to undertake more training.

In the year 2018, he enrolled in knitting at the Vocation Training Centre in Nyanza, in Southern Province on the support from RUB.

"At first, I was afraid it would not be easy but I was assured by RUB that I would get used to it. Indeed, after three months, I had mastered basic skills and I was able to knit my own jumper which I wore going back home," he says.

"I became confident that everything is possible and I went on learning different knitting styles from the training centre. I know how to knit in 20 different styles," he adds.

At his home trading center in Kivuye, Hakorimana runs a knitting business together with other 20 visually impaired persons under Twizerane; a RUB local branch.

His branch received two knitting machines from Rwanda Union of the Blind following Hakorimana's successful completion of the training. He uses the machines together with three other people from the branch.

"I have so far trained three visually impaired persons in knitting. I committed to train more. I always mobilise persons with visual impairment to embrace technical and vocational training so as to live independently," he notes.

## Achievements

Since 2018 when he started practicing knitting, Hakorimana says he is satisfied with his achievements.

He is able to cater for daily needs of the family besides feeding.

But what excites him even more is being able to train other people with visual impairment.

He hopes to expand his market, knitting school uniforms.

"I am so grateful to RUB, for me RUB shone the ray of light which restored my hope for a bright future. We are also grateful that on top of training, RUB gave us start-up kits," he adds. ■

# Despite vision impairment, RUB turned Habanabakize into advocate

**S**traton Habanabakize is visually impaired but that does not stop him from helping with domestic chores.

At his home in Busengo sector, Gakenke district in Northern Province we found him busy washing dishes and doing other home chores, helping out his wife who had recently given birth.

One cannot immediately realize that Habanabakize has a visual impairment, as besides washing dishes, he feeds livestock.

He uses a white cane to move around without a hindrance.

Habanabakize says he learnt all the skills from the Masaka Resource Centre for the Blind (MRCB).

The MRCB is the only centre in the country that provides rehabilitation training for visually impaired adults.

It provides training in orientation and mobility, daily activities, braille literacy, crop and livestock farming among others.

With these skills, a visually impaired person can join mainstream society and live comfortably in a normal rural setting.

Habanabakize, 30, lost his vision at the age of 6.

All the efforts to help him regain sight were fruitless.

"I stayed home and fully depended on my family members who cared less

about me. I even got a Good Samaritan from Germany who tried to give me an artificial sight but it failed after it was installed," he says.

It was not until in 2019 that Habanabakize joined Masaka Resource Centre for the Blind (MRCB).

He learned of the training opportunity from his neighbour, also visually impaired who was studying at HVP Gatagara.

"I contacted the managers of the centre and I was welcomed. On reaching there the first thing they did was to dispel my misconceptions," he adds.

Habanabakize and others with the same disability were trained through the DREAM Project under the support from Disability People's Organisations Denmark Danish Association of the Blind (DAB).

He later learnt orientation and mobility and within weeks, he started walking without any guide using white cane or simply a stick.

"The training was designed in a way that they could mark you up and ask you to walk to ensure that even those with low vision could not cheat. Through the training, I mastered how to use white cane and walk independently," he says with confidence.

The orientation and mobility training also taught them how to locate objects without breaking them.



*I even got a Good Samaritan from Germany who tried to give me an artificial sight but it failed after it was installed*



### Becoming an advocate

Habanabakize is currently the representative of National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) at the cell level and the vice chair of Youth Volunteers at sector level.

"I also learnt how to read and write in braille, we were sensitized about our rights and how to advocate for others. From the center I felt empowered," he says.

He acquired leadership skills that have helped him to lead

other persons with disabilities with disability.

"I engage local leaders whenever rights of persons with disability are abused and ensure our voices are heard. I mostly advocate for persons with visual impairment and those with deaf blindness," he adds.

As a youth volunteer, Habanabakize mobilises citizens in his neighborhood to observe measures in place to curb the spread of COVID-19.

"I have a megaphone that I use especially in markets and other public places to sensitize people on proper wearing of face masks, hand washing and physical distancing," he says.

"I also sensitize people on COVID-19 vaccination," he adds.

With the training and support from MRCB Habanabakize also practices modern crop and livestock farming. ■

# Rehabilitation training gave **Kabarinda** a fresh view of a life

**E**mmanuel Kabarinda stood in his shop in Gatenga sector's Kicukiro district attending to clients alongside his wife.

The duo run a shop selling food items and have a min-bar where customers sit and have a drink.

Unlike his wife, Kabarinda is visually impaired. The fate befell him in 2020 due to illness.

After the predicament, Kabarinda got worried about how he would be able to take care of his family.

"I was a lecturer at Integrated Polytechnic Regional College Kigali teaching mechanical related courses. I felt unwell with a serious headache and could hardly see, doctors tried to provide treatment all in vain, I ended up getting visually impaired," he says.

"I lost hope, I was dependent on my wife who had to guide me and do all the home chores, she had also lost hope that I would be able to help her again," he says.

Seven months after losing his sight, Kabarinda heard how the Masaka Resource Centre for the Blind (MRCB) equips visually impaired people with ways to cope with their disability.

Kabarinda says the center resurrected his hope.

"I learnt orientation, mobility and I started walking independently without any guide. We were also trained in different activities of daily living such as crop and livestock farming, cooking, cleaning among others," he says.

"At Masaka, we were trained to live with others and overcome stigma. From MRCB, I learnt that one can make it in life despite visual impairment," he adds.

Kabarinda graduated from a six-month training course and went back home. He was lucky that his employer was still paying him.

"I had requested a medical leave and I kept getting my salary, that pushed me and my family while I was away for training," he adds.

After graduation, Kabarinda looked to entrepreneurship.

"I realized that I have the ability to join the mainstream society and contribute to my family and the community as well. I acquired a loan from the bank of Rwf1.5million to start this shop which serves as our source of income," he says.

My wife was a primary school teacher but she decided to leave teaching and join me for our business to grow very faster. The father of four says that from his business, he is able to take care of his family

*I never thought that I would one day be able to walk alone, let alone to run a business or to be optimistic about resuming my work*

and cover the school fees for their children.

"I also hope that I will resume my teaching career soon, though I lost sight, I still have skills. I am discussing it with my employer and I hope I will start soon," he says.

To the RUB and, Kabarinda is grateful.

"I can't be thankful enough to RUB, through its center-MRCB. I never thought that I would one day be able to walk alone, let alone to run a business or to be optimistic





about resuming my work," he says.

"My family is convinced that I am still supportive despite being visually impaired. Life would be different if I had not gone to MRCB," he adds.

Kabarinda, however, calls for more concerted efforts by the government and other partners to support the inclusion of the visually impaired persons. "We still have more people with visual impairment who face stigma and are dependent on others and yet MRCB has proved that they can live a better life if they are supported," he said. ■





## More support still needed to promote inclusive education

Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB) is grateful for the support the government has offered so far to promote inclusive society.

It however urges the government to put in more efforts to keep supporting persons with visual impairment including children who are in schools. For instance, the Government should be specific about school materials children with visual impairment need for smooth learning.

There is also a need for more awareness and involvement by the government to ensure that the rights of persons with visual impairment are respected and that they enjoy equal rights in their families and in their communities.

The government should assist in the inclusion of visual impairment whenever it comes to competing for jobs and ensure that visually impaired persons have the needed materials to compete for jobs and have the tools enabling them to perform well whenever they get jobs.

It is very important for the government to support Non-Governmental Organizations such as RUB in the journey towards transforming the lives of persons with visual impairment. It should not be only the responsibility of RUB or any other NGO to strive for the rights of the visually impaired.

Much as a lot was done together, the journey is still long and we have come to the time when more support is needed than ever. The living conditions are becoming harder and the dependence on the families is becoming harder as well.


There is a need for the government to support for example the training centres where persons with visual impairment can acquire skills such as knitting that will enable them to create their own jobs and live independent lives. ■









 Kigali City, Nyarugenge District,  
Muhima Sector on Poid -Lourds Road

 [rubura1994@gmail.com](mailto:rubura1994@gmail.com)

 [info@rubrwanda.org](mailto:info@rubrwanda.org)

 (+250) 788 856 671