



WHO CARRIES THE CHANGE FORWARD?

THE LEGACY OF DUFATANYE PROGRAMME



Photo credit: Be Bold Firm Ltd/Emmanuel Munezero

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For all women's rights,
in every corner
of the world.

Photo credit: Our Sister's opportunity



FOREWORD



■ **Annette Natukunda Mukiga**
Country Director
Kvinna till Kvinna Rwanda Office

The work continues

When the Dufatanye programme was launched, it was built on a belief that advancing women's rights requires strong women's rights organisations, active communities and collaboration across different actors working for change.

Over the past five years, we have had the privilege of walking alongside partner organisations working with women and girls in their diversity and communities across Rwanda.

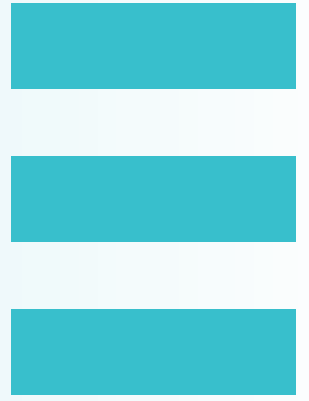
Along the way, we have witnessed important conversations, difficult questions, new partnerships and inspiring examples of leadership, learning between partners and collective action. This publication offers a glimpse into some of the changes, experiences, reflections and lessons that shaped the programme.

It captures moments that challenged our assumptions, strengthened our partnerships and reminded us that meaningful change is not linear and takes time. As Dufatanye comes to an end, I hope these stories contribute to ongoing conversations about women's rights.

I also hope they serve as a reminder that while programmes may come to an end, the work itself continues.

I would like to thank all the partners, the government institutions who provided a conducive environment and the local authorities who engaged with communities throughout the programme, as well as the activists, community members, women and girls who have been part of this journey. This publication exists because of your work, your experiences and your willingness to share them.

I would also like to extend our sincere appreciation to the Embassy of Sweden in Rwanda for its support throughout this journey. Their commitment made it possible to accompany partners over time, learn together and invest in the partnerships that are at the heart of this work.



01

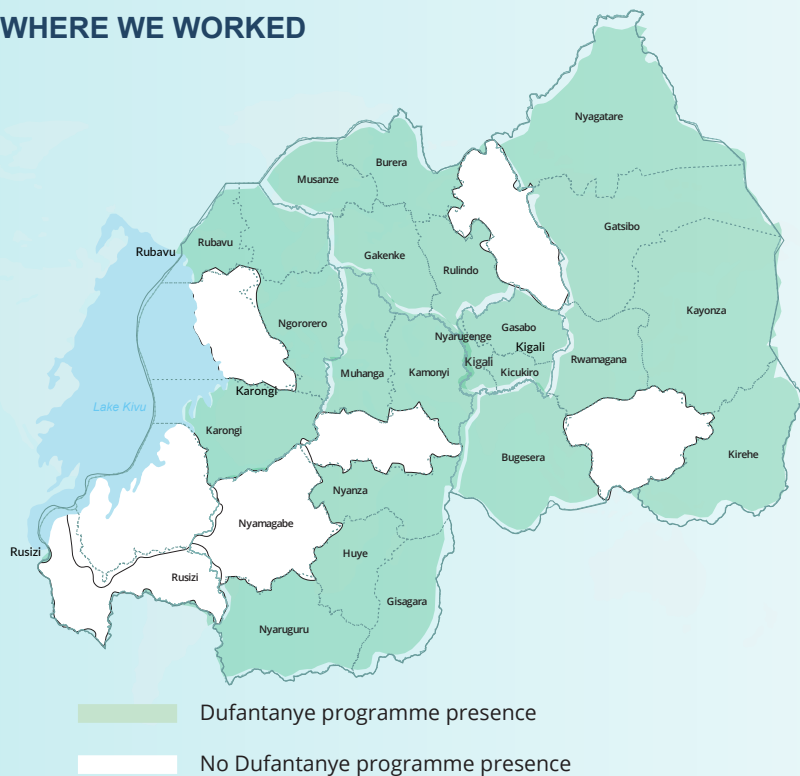
DUFATANYE AT A GLANCE

PROGRAMME VISION

To strengthen the capacity and coordination of the women's movement in Rwanda for more strategic interventions to enhance women's voice and participation, freedom from violence and full enjoyment of human rights.

Working together to reinforce change for the respect of women's rights in Rwanda

WHERE WE WORKED



05

YEARS
2021-2025

22

DISTRICTS
REACHED

19

PARTNER
ORGANISATIONS

WHO WE WORKED WITH

- Empower Rwanda,
- Afro Ark
- Certa Foundation
- Rwanda Women's Network
- Réseau des Femmes
- Impanuro Girls Initiative
- HAGURUKA
- Save Generations Organisation,
- Feminists in Action for Development Ambition
- Rwanda Association of Deaf Women
- Hope for Single Mothers with Disabilities
- UNABU.
- Réseau des Femmes
- Our Sisters Opportunity,
- Association of Kigali Women in Sport
- SEVOTA
- Duhozanye
- Family Circle Love Lab Organisation
- Strive for Inclusion

PROGRAMME PRESENCE

Over five years, Dufantanye partners worked across 22 districts in all five provinces of Rwanda.

Nineteen women-led civil society organisations were supported over the life of the programme, growing from eleven partners at launch.

FOUR OUTCOME AREAS

01

Partners are stronger, more effective and work more strategically and collaboratively.

02

Improved protection from gender-based violence with a specific focus on prevention

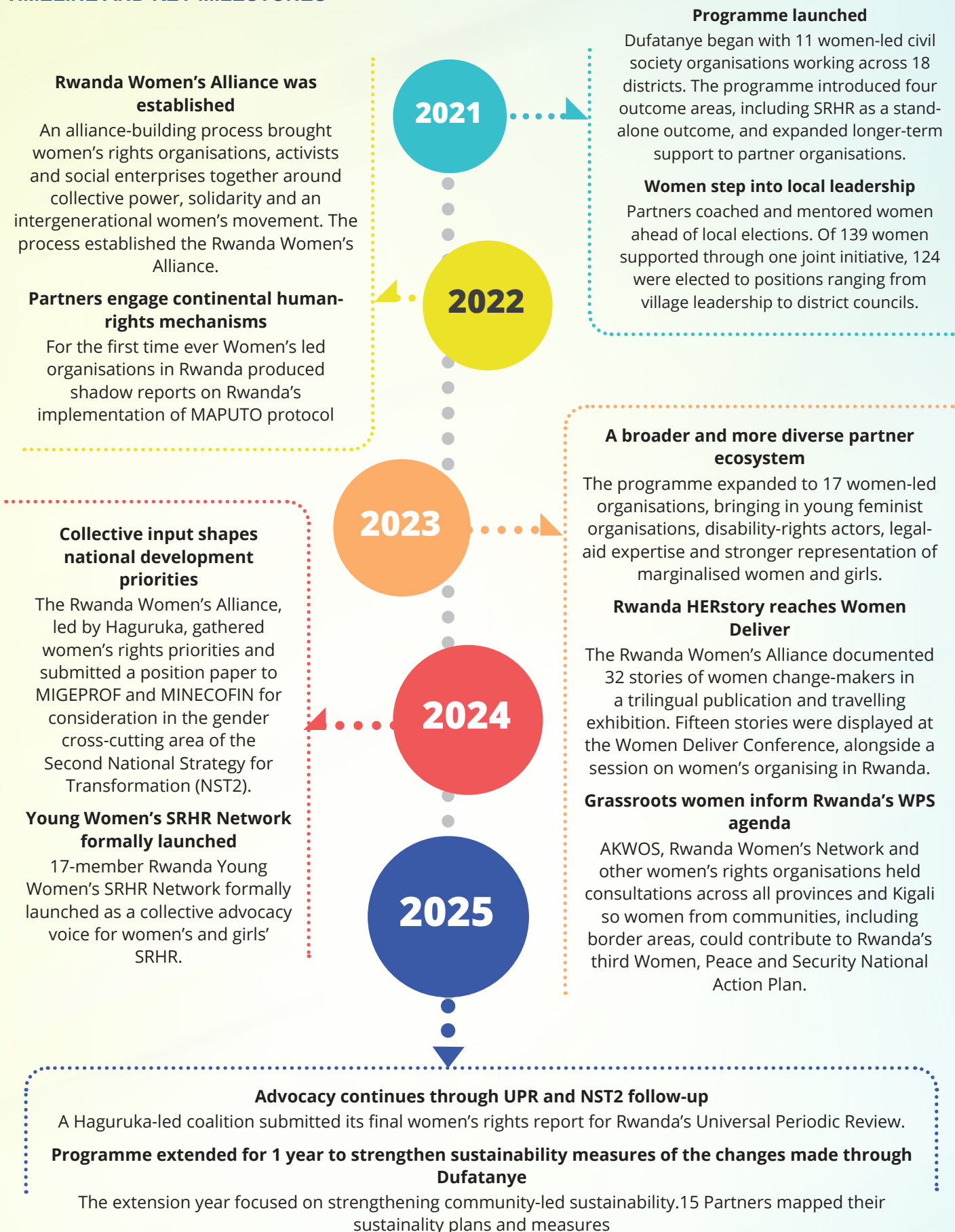
03

Rights holders and duty bearers have an increased understanding and respect for SRHR

04

Women's meaningful participation and influence

TIMELINE AND KEY MILESTONES



DUFATANYE IN NUMBERS

26,126

Rightsholders directly reached through sensitisation on GBV policy, legislation and underlying norms.

12,298

Rightsholders reached with information on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

5,177

Women rightsholders with increased knowledge and skills to participate in economic decision-making.

3,042

Women rightsholders with increased knowledge and skills in leadership, decision-making and self-confidence.

4,259

Rightsholders with increased knowledge and skills regarding conflict resolution.

3,849

Duty bearers reached through GBV sensitisation activities.

3,290

Duty bearers participating in partner activities on SRHR.

1,468

Rightsholders reached through economic-empowerment initiatives provided by partners.

494

Women rightsholders taking leadership roles in the home, community, district or national level.





02

INVESTING IN GROWTH

LESSONS FROM FOUR PARTNERSHIP JOURNEYS

If the Dufatanye programme taught us one thing, it is that women's rights organisations do not all start from the same place.

Some begin with a strong passion but few systems to hold it up. Others are deeply rooted in their communities but cannot access funding because they do not yet meet donor requirements. Still others have years of experience and national recognition behind them but continue to ask new questions about their work and the communities they serve.

That understanding shaped Dufatanye from the start. More than 30 years of experience working alongside women's rights organisations in different contexts had shown us that no two organisations grow the same way. So, partnership had to mean more than funding, training and reporting requirements. It meant understanding where an organisation was at a particular moment and adapting our support to match.

This case study follows the journeys of four partner organisations: **Impanuro Girls Initiative**, **Afro Ark**, **Our Sister's Opportunity (OSO)** and **HAGURUKA**. They joined Dufatanye at different points in the programme and from very different starting points. Their experiences show how support evolved in response to each organisation's needs, challenges and ambitions.

04 Organisations Starting points

- ▣ **Impanuro Girls Initiative**
Investing before organisations are ready
- ▣ **Afro Ark**
From passion to a shared direction
- ▣ **Our Sister's Opportunity (OSO)**
Looking beyond livelihoods
- ▣ **HAGURUKA**
Redefining what success looks like



▣ Photo Credit: Kvinna till Kvinna/Aline Niwenshuti

INVESTING BEFORE ORGANISATIONS ARE “READY”

Most young women or most young feminist organisations find themselves in the same position when they first start out. Many Donors and funders tend to look for organisations that have good financial systems, strategic plans in place and prior experiences. yet having all of that requires resources that most newly established organisations do not have, leaving them in a dilemma where they cannot develop due to being under-resourced.

It was the situation in which organisations like IGI and Afro Ark found themselves when they were just getting started.

Before becoming a formal partner, IGI had already mobilising and organising around issues affecting girls and young women. The organisation was lacking visibility, structure and access to different networks.

Marie Ange Raissa Uwamungu, the Founder and Executive Director, recalled a period in 2020 when the organisation did not have a physical office and was still trying to establish itself. That is when the organisation met Kvinna till Kvinna.

However, even before there was funding, there were invitations from Kvinna till Kvinna to meetings, trainings, exchanges and networking spaces. Those invitations helped the organisation build relationships and find its way into the wider gender and feminist networks.

Looking back, she described those spaces as an important learning and exposure.

“Even without formal funding at the time, the trainings and networking spaces served as an important resource. They guided us in designing our initiatives and building a stronger foundation for our organisation.”

Marie Ange Raissa Uwamungu, Impanuro Girls Initiative

Although IGI had started in 2017, the organisation would wait another five years before securing its first donor. As a young woman leading a youth-led organisation, she often found herself having to prove



Photo credit: Impanuro Girl's Initiatives

that both she and the organisation deserved to be taken seriously. What stayed with her most was how much persistence it took simply to keep going.

A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

There were moments when the challenges felt overwhelming. Funding was difficult to secure, technical knowledge was limited and many of the things needed to run an organisation simply had to be learned along the way.

"There were moments when I felt overwhelmed and would go home in tears, even considering giving up. I remember telling my grandmother that I was ready to stop because it was too difficult."

Marie Ange Raissa Uwamungu, Impanuro Girls Initiative

However, the organisation kept going. The connection with Kvinna till Kvinna also strengthened and the collaboration moved beyond networking events. One of the things Marie Ange Raissa Uwamungu kept coming back to during our conversation was the strategic planning process.

"We developed our first three-year strategic plan (2022–2024) in December 2021. At that time, we did not yet have funding from Kvinna till Kvinna, but they still supported us together with other organisations through the strategic planning process."

Prior to this process, much of the organisation's work revolved around reacting to urgent needs and seizing available opportunities. The development of the strategic plan allowed thinking about what lies ahead for the team and setting priorities in order to be better prepared for future challenges.

Another step towards reflecting upon the organisation's work and its future directions was the organisational self-assessment exercise that helped the team to look deeper and set a reference point from which they could compare future growth.

The work Marie Ange Raissa Uwamungu, started continues through IGI and the girls and young women as she sets out to serve



Marie Ange Raissa Uwamungu had founded IGI at just 24, in response to the realities she saw around her: teenage pregnancy, school dropout, gender-based violence and the lack of information available to girls and young women.

As the organisation became more established, it was able to reach and engage more adolescents through programmes such as Imenye Wikunde, creating spaces where girls could openly discuss issues that were often considered taboo.

As time passed, girls who had initially joined these spaces quietly and hesitantly began taking on leadership roles, facilitating discussions and speaking publicly about issues affecting their lives. It took five years before the IGI could secure their first donor, but by then, many lessons had been learned.

IN MEMEORY

Marie Ange Raissa Uwamungu, Founder and Executive Director of Impanuro Girls Initiative, passed away on 19 June 2026, after this publication had begun. Her words appear here as she shared them with us. A record of her vision, her persistence and the organisation she built. The work she started continues through IGI and the girls and young women she set out to serve.



Photo credit: Afro Ark

GROWING TOGETHER

Patience, the Founder and Executive Director of Afro Ark, is the first to say the organisation was learning by doing. The team worked from a small office, depended heavily on volunteers, and was trying to respond to the realities facing women and girls with very little money or experience.

The organisation had been born as response to the realities of gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights faced by women and girls in Rwanda. However, although the commitment was there, much of the work was being driven by instinct, lived experience and determination rather than formal knowledge or organisational experience.

The volunteers were mostly high school graduates or they were university pursuers, then most of the times we didn't have any background studies on what we were doing, except the fact that we had a passion that was driving us and different experiences we had in life or realities that could guide us throughout the implementation."

Patience, Founder and Executive Director of Afro Ark

Like IGI, Afro Ark was not yet in a position to meet all the requirements for a formal partnership. Yet the potential was unmistakable. Rather than waiting for the organisation to "arrive", the support started

early through organisational assessments, strategic planning and opportunities for thematic learning and exchange.

Patience remembers the organisational assessment process as one of the first moments that encouraged the team to pause and reflect more critically on where they were and where they wanted to go. The process highlighted gaps, but it also helped the team see where they wanted the organisation to go next.

One of the first forms of support to Afro Ark before partnership was the development of its first ever strategic plan. For a young organisation that had mostly been firefighting, the plan offered something it had never had: a shared sense of direction, and a reference point for its work and growth.

"That gave us a foundation of having a document that reflects who we are, why we exist, and what we do."

Patience, Founder and Executive Director of Afro Ark

FROM PASSION TO A SHARED DIRECTION

Another need that came up during that stage was technical support on gender-transformative approaches that could strengthen the organisation's work on SRHR and GBV. Although a formal partnership had not yet been established, Afro Ark received tailored support in these areas, including dedicated training on gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, safeguarding and feminist approaches. For a young organisation still building its identity and approach, these opportunities provided both technical knowledge and space for reflection long before the first grant agreement was signed.

Afro Ark entered a formal partnership under the Dufatanye programme in 2023. The learning, however, did not stop there. As activities were implemented and relationships with communities deepened, new questions continued to come up. What was working? What was not? Were the activities responding to what women and girls actually needed?

These were not questions Afro Ark had to answer alone. Through regular monitoring visits and ongoing dialogue, Kvinna till Kvinna created spaces to discuss observations from the field, share concerns and think together about possible adjustments. Conversations often revolved around the experiences of women and girls who participated in the programme, and reflection on how to continue the work based on those experiences.

Looking back, one of the biggest changes Patience describes is the confidence gained.

"There is confidence in how we do our programming compared to that time when we didn't have all that capacity built."

As our conversation continued, Patience returned to one lesson that stayed with her throughout this process.

"One key thing that really stands out is mostly on having a human centered programming or prioritising what the right holder needs than what we think is right for the right holder."

Patience, Founder and Executive Director of Afro Ark

CONFIDENCE, VOICE AND COMMUNITY ACTION

That perspective grew more important as the partnership matured. Field observations, accumulated experience, feedback from the women and girls themselves, and regular reflection all helped Afro Ark pay closer attention to the realities people were facing — and adapt. Instead of offering solutions built on assumptions, the team shifted towards listening, learning, and involving women and girls in shaping what came next.

You could see the change in the women champion¹ supported by Afro Ark.

Many had first joined activities simply looking for information and support. Over time, some took on far more active roles, facilitating discussions, talking to parents, engaging schools, helping other women and girls navigate SRHR barriers and gender-based violence. As their confidence grew, so did their place in their communities. Many now lead conversations, challenge harmful norms, and open space for others to speak about things that had long gone unsaid.

The shift was also reflected in how Afro Ark worked. in the way it planned, documented and organised its activities.

"...the way we do our work has evolved in a way that I would say we have now a systematic way of working or doing things."

It also changed how the organisation presented itself to others. The strategic plan developed with Kvinna till Kvinna's support became one of the documents Afro Ark would later put on the table in fundraising and partnership discussions. Many potential funders asked to see it as part of their due diligence. Afro Ark now had better tools to tell others who it is, what it stands for, and where it is going.

Over the past years, Afro Ark took an increasingly active part in coalitions, networks and feminist spaces, creating new chances to engage, learn, and connect with other actors of the women's rights movement. Just a few years after working from a small office and relying heavily on volunteers, In 2024, Afro Ark would go on to host the Rwanda Feminist Forum, bringing together feminists, activists and women's rights organisations from across the country.

¹ Women and girls trained and supported by Afro Ark to facilitate peer discussions, raise awareness and support community engagement on SRHR and GBV.

Young organisations need the chance to learn, reflect, test ideas and build experience step by step.



Photo credit: Our Sister's Opportunity

LOOKING BEYOND LIVELIHOODS

When Kvinna till Kvinna first met OSO in 2021, what stood out immediately was its commitment to vulnerable young women and teen mothers. The organisation was already changing the lives of young women who had been pushed out of education, rejected by their families, or left with few ways to support themselves and their children. The vision was clear, and the organisation had strong roots in the communities where it worked. And yet, despite the strength of the programme, OSO did not meet all the requirements for a formal partnership.

An assessment that usually done by Kvinna till Kvinna was also done in case of OSO. as a grassroots, young and women led organization, according to Kvinna till Kvinna funding strategies, there were still requirements to fulfill to qualify into Kvinna till Kvinna partnership standards. Those include finance management, gender related policies and organization internal control. At the same time, it highlighted a programme that was already reaching young women who were often overlooked and

responding to challenges that many others were not addressing. For us, that assessment posed a question: could the organisational gaps be closed? We believed they could.

So support went exactly there — accompaniment to strengthen financial management systems, help in developing financial procedures, and a follow-up assessment. Delphine, the Founder and Executive Director of OSO, remembers that period clearly.



Photo credit: Our Sister's Opportunity

"But we also felt seen. We felt seen and appreciated. Because it was not a robotic decision, it was a human-centered decision. Trying to understand the context, where we are coming from, where we are at, what we can offer on the table. Not judging us based on what we could not yet offer. As a young organisation, it is not easy to hire people who are qualified to do great work because sometimes you don't have enough funds to pay experts."

An external financial consultant worked alongside the team to strengthen its systems and close the gaps.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

"...So giving us the opportunity, holding our hand as we grow, saying let's work together, that co-creation meant a lot."

After a second assessment, OSO successfully met the required standards and entered into a formal partnership with Kvinna till Kvinna in 2022.

At the time, OSO believed it had found the answer to many of the challenges facing vulnerable young women and teen mothers. Through fashion design, vocational training, entrepreneurship support and income-generating activities, young women were gaining practical tools to earn a living and support their families. Delphine describes those years as a period of growing confidence in the model.

"We were really trying to implement our model, We were past pilot phase, where we knew we have a solution."

But as OSO became more involved in the feminist spaces and the discussions on gender-based violence, power and gender-transformative approaches

organised by Kvinna till Kvinna, deeper questions began to surface.

"We believed we had a strong economic empowerment approach, but it was threatened by the fact that we were not strong in addressing the root causes of poverty."

As programme implementation continued, these reflections deepened through monitoring visits, ongoing dialogue and exchanges between OSO and Kvinna till Kvinna. Asking what was working, what was not, and what participants were actually experiencing pushed the organisation to look beyond livelihoods alone .

"What we developed was a holistic approach that includes everyone in the community. Starting from local leaders, parents, health actors, youth, students."

Economic empowerment stayed at the heart of the programme, but it was now integrated with conversations about gender, power, leadership, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, self-esteem and decision-making. Parents, community leaders and other actors became part of the conversation.



Photo credit: Our Sister's Opportunity

Bridget Rhinehart, then Head of Office at Kvinna till Kvinna, remembers that OSO had a strong understanding of the realities facing girls and young women. The challenge was turning those experiences into a more structured approach that the organisation could continue to lead and own. The result was a curriculum shaped by both the lived experiences of the girls OSO worked with and the lessons the organisation had gathered along the way.

WHAT EMPOWERMENT CAME TO MEAN

"We created a curriculum that includes most of what was needed to create a safe and supportive environment for girls and women. That became a cornerstone of our impact."

Daphne, Our Sisters' Opportunity

The effects rippled outwards, beyond the young women directly in the programme. Girls who go through our programme start sharing what they learned with their peers. They also talk to their parents and influence them. We have seen parents change how they support their daughters."

For Delphine, these were the moments that showed the work reaching beyond its immediate participants. Many graduates started businesses, earned an income, and created opportunities for other young women. Some became community leaders, speaking openly about gender inequality, power and gender-based violence.

"Some of the girls we trained have become leaders in their communities. They are now leading initiatives and supporting others."

Not all of these changes were welcomed. As young women grew more outspoken, some met criticism and resistance from the people around them. OSO responded by deepening its engagement with parents, community members and local leaders. Opening up broader conversations about what young women were experiencing and the barriers still in their way.

Listening became a huge part of the programme. Feedback from young women, observations from the field and regular reflection kept shaping new adaptations, so the work could keep answering needs as they emerged.

Looking back, perhaps the most important lesson from OSO's journey is that empowerment cannot be reduced to income.

Economic opportunity matters enormously but lasting change demands attention to the wider and underlying social realities shaping young women's lives.

For us at Kvinna till Kvinna, OSO's experience reinforced the value of learning alongside partners. Sometimes the most important changes happen when an organisation takes the time to listen, reflect, and lets what it hears reshape how it works.



Picture credit: Kvinna till Kvinna/Bridget Rhinehart

Economic opportunity matters. Lasting change requires attention to the wider social realities shaping young women's lives.

REDEFINING WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

When HAGURUKA joined the Dufatanye programme, it was already one of the more established organisations working on women's and children's rights in Rwanda with decades of experience providing legal aid, supporting survivors of gender-based violence, and working with families and communities across the country.



Photo credit: Kvinna till Kvinna/Aline Niwenshuti

One of the methods it was best known for was dialogue sessions with couples experiencing conflict. Through these sessions, paralegals and community facilitators worked with couples to improve communication, ease tensions in the household, and reduce violence against women.

The method worked. Many couples reported better communication, less conflict, stronger relationships. Angelique, a legal officer at HAGURUKA, puts it plainly:

"We believed that the outcome we wanted was for all households experiencing conflict to resolve those conflicts and live together in peace."

Angelique, Legal Officer, HAGURUKA

But on visits to programme sites, Kvinna till Kvinna kept meeting couples who could not resolve their conflict, even after several rounds of sessions on rights, laws and structures. Those couples were not appearing in the programme reporting at all — and some of them were satisfied with how things had turned out anyway.

Over time, the conversations became less about whether couples stayed together and more about what the couples themselves wanted, and about helping each woman understand the options open to her and choose the one that was right for her.

A DECISION THAT WAS RIGHT FOR HER

Angelique describes one situation in particular. A woman went through the dialogue process with her husband that included information on rights, laws, structures, etc. However, The violence continued. Eventually, she left him.

"In this case, if she leaves, have we failed? Or have we helped her make a decision that was right for her?"

Angelique, Legal Officer, HAGURUKA

Over time, the conversations became less about whether couples stayed together and more about what they wanted and needed — and about helping them understand the options open to them. "Should we force them to stay together no matter what?"

For one rightsholder, the answer had already become clear. She had stayed in a violent marriage for years,

for the sake of her children, until she was selected to join dialogues:

"Throughout our marriage, I endured both physical and psychological violence... After four sessions on gender equality, gender and power, and GBV, I decided to live alone, because my husband had not changed his mindset. Now I have chosen to seek a divorce — I no longer want to endure GBV, and I want a life free from violence."

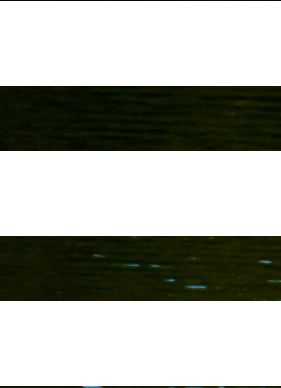
Violet, 35, a rightsholder supported by HAGURUKA (name changed).

Many families continued to benefit from the dialogue approach. At the same time, HAGURUKA grew more comfortable with a harder truth: reconciliation is not always the best outcome for every woman.

Sometimes a woman deciding to leave is not a sign that the intervention failed. It is a sign that she had options that worked best for her.



Photo credit: Gloria Powell



RWANDA — WHERE THE WORK CONTIUES

Relationships and collective action grow through continued engagement — through people showing up in shared spaces, again and again, over years.

 Photo credit: Be Bold Firm Ltd/Emmanuel Munezero



03

WHO GETS TO
DECIDE?

INFORMATION WAS NEVER THE END GOAL

Across Rwanda, organisations, communities and institutions have spent years working to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights. There has been real progress — more information, more services, more public conversation about things that were once considered taboo. And yet many women and girls still cannot exercise their rights.

Teenage pregnancy continues to affect girls across the country. Gender-based violence continues to affect women and girls in all their diversity. In many settings, conversations about sexuality are still wrapped in silence, stigma and discomfort.



Photo credit: Impanuro Girls Initiative

When Kvinna till Kvinna launched the Dufatanye programme, many partners were already running SRHR programmes. Girls and young women were receiving information, and services were gradually being put in place.

And still, one question kept coming up: if women and girls know their rights, what stops them from exercising them?

That question followed us into schools, youth clubs, safe spaces and community dialogues. It surfaced again and again in conversations with adolescent girls, teen mothers, deaf women and girls, women with disabilities, parents, teachers and community leaders.

We met girls who understood their rights but still could not make decisions about their own lives; women who knew where to seek help but stayed silent after experiencing violence; teen mothers who

wanted to return to school but faced barriers that had nothing to do with the classroom. Those conversations forced us to look more closely at what it actually takes for women and girls to exercise their rights.

This case study is a reflection on that journey. It is a story about the questions that kept coming back, the assumptions that were challenged along the way and what we learned about delivering feminist and human rights-based SRHR programming.

Throughout the programme, girls and young women kept telling us they were learning things no one had ever taught them. Some were getting accurate information about menstruation, puberty and reproductive health for the first time. Others were learning about consent, gender-based violence, contraceptives, or where to turn when their rights were violated.

THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

But the more communities we visited, the clearer it became that there is no single SRHR experience. For some girls, the challenge was confidence — the ability to speak openly about their own lives. For teen mothers, it was juggling childcare, education and the weight of community expectations.

Women with disabilities described barriers to getting information and services at all. For Deaf women and girls, even access to information could not be taken for granted: information can exist and still be out of reach if it is not available in a language you understand. And having information did not always mean having the final say. Parents still made decisions

on girls' behalf. Some women wanted to seek support but feared what their families or communities would say.

Others knew exactly where services were but could not afford the transport or did not feel safe walking through the door. Sometimes the information was there and the confidence to act on it was not. Sometimes what stood in the way was stigma, judgement or the threat of violence.

Women championing SRHR in their communities reported resistance, criticism and sometimes violent reactions to their efforts.

Women and girls told us about knowing their rights and struggling to exercise them.

THE QUESTIONS WE KEPT ASKING

Looking back across the programme, we realise there might be no universal recipe for delivering effective SRHR programming. Adolescent girls, teen mothers, Deaf women and girls, women with disabilities and other groups each face distinct realities, and those realities cannot be met with one-size-fits-all solutions.

- How do you support a girl who knows her rights but has little control over her own decisions?
- How do you open a dialogue about bodily autonomy in a collectivist environment, where decisions are made by whole families and communities?
- How do you support women and girls facing backlash simply for talking about SRHR?



■ Photo credit: Gloria Powell

WHAT IT TAKES

LESSON 01

Information is important, but not enough. Many of the women and girls we met already knew what they should do and what rights they were entitled to. The challenge was whether they had the support, confidence, safety and opportunity to act on that knowledge.

LESSON 02

Rights are not exercised in isolation. Decisions depend heavily on relationships with parents, caregivers, partners, teachers, service providers and communities. Programmes that focused only on women and girls ran into barriers created elsewhere — which is why dialogues expanded to include families, communities and duty bearers.

LESSON 03

Participation is essential. Women and girls were neither passive nor helpless recipients. They had opinions, ideas and perspectives about what was working. Some of the most meaningful adaptations happened when partners created space for those perspectives to shape decisions and influence implementation.

LESSON 04

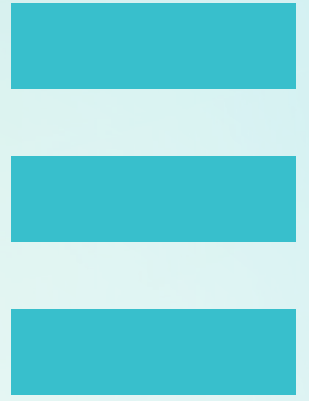
Feminist and rights-based programming requires humility. The importance of listening, being ready to question one's assumptions and acknowledging the limits of the programme's design.

The work to ensure that women's and girls' rights are respected and upheld is far from finished. But if there is one message that we carry forward from the Dufatanye programme, it is this: delivering feminist and human rights-based SRHR programming is about continuously asking whose voices are being heard, whose choices are being respected and who gets to decide — and being willing to keep asking those questions even when the answers are uncomfortable.



Photo credit: Gloria Powell

Keep asking whose voices are heard, whose choices are respected and who gets to decide.



04

**BUILDING
TOGETHER**

OPENING THE CONVERSATION

The Dufatanye programme was built around a simple but ambitious vision: a society where women and girls can live free from violence and discrimination and fully enjoy their rights.

From the beginning, we knew this vision could not be achieved by individual organisations working alone. Women's rights organisations can create change in communities, influence policy and support women and girls. Lasting change, however, requires collective action, solidarity and shared power.

Supporting women's movements has long been part of Kvinna till Kvinna's approach. Strong organisations are important, and strong movements help create the conditions for sustainable change.

In Rwanda, movement building needed to be approached with care. After the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, words such as movement, mobilisation and activism can carry political meaning and may be interpreted in different ways. For Dufatanye, this meant being clear that movement building was about women's rights, solidarity, inclusion and collective action.



Photo credit: HAGURUKA

"Do we have a women's movement in Rwanda?"

THE QUESTION THAT KEPT COMING UP THROUGHOUT THE FIRST CONVENING

Women have played a key role in Rwanda's social, political and economic development, including rebuilding communities and institutions after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. For decades, women's rights organisations, activists and community leaders have pushed for legal reforms, supported survivors of violence and expanded opportunities for women and girls. For many in the room, the answer was clear: yes, a women's movement exists..

However, the question was not whether Rwandan women were organised but rather how. How connected were the different actors working for

women's rights? Who was included and who was missing? Were younger feminists, informal groups and newer organisations finding their place within the wider ecosystem?

The first convening brought together women from different generations, backgrounds and experiences to reflect on these questions. Discussions focused on the history of women's organising in Rwanda, the meaning of movement building and the values needed to strengthen collective action, including solidarity, diversity and inclusion.

WHAT STARTED TO CHANGE

We also reflected on how women's contributions to Rwanda's development had been documented and preserved. Many stories of leadership, activism and organising risked being forgotten. These conversations later contributed to efforts to document and celebrate the stories of women who helped shape Rwanda across different sectors and generations².

Looking back on the process, it was interesting to notice that the first convening was not about defining the women's movement in Rwanda but about opening conversations on collaboration, inclusion and the work that needs to be done.

The changes from this journey were often visible in relationships, behaviours and the ways organisations began interacting with one another. As time went on, organisations began turning to each other for ideas, support and collaboration. Partners shared training materials and methodologies.

Organisations that had always worked separately started trading approaches and learning from one another's experience. Afro Ark, for instance, received support from Duhozanye on community scorecard

approaches — expertise that already existed within the movement.

The changes were also visible in who was participating and whose voices were being heard. Throughout the programme, younger feminist actors, organisations led by women with disabilities, Deaf women and queer women took up space in forums that had not always felt accessible to them.

FADA's journey provides one example. Beyond participating in movement spaces, the organisation contributed knowledge and expertise on sexual orientation and gender identity to other women's rights organisations and took on leadership roles within collective initiatives.

The relationships built through these efforts also contributed to collective initiatives. One example was the establishment of a diverse coalition of women's rights organisations working on Rwanda's Universal Periodic Review process, led by HAGURUKA and involving actors from across the women's rights ecosystem.

While no single initiative can be attributed to one workshop or one programme activity, these developments reflected the relationships and trust that had been built over time.

² kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-Rwanda-HERstory-English.pdf



WHAT WE LEARNED

The question from the first convening is still relevant today. Do we have a women's movement in Rwanda? The answer is still yes — and the work ahead is to keep strengthening it.

The biggest lesson we take with us is that movement building takes time. Many of the changes we saw grew out of years of conversations, exchanges, relationship building and repeated opportunities for people to meet and work together — because people kept showing up in shared spaces, learning about one another's work and finding ways to connect.

We also learned that diversity does not happen automatically. If movements are to reflect the realities of all women and girls, inclusion must be deliberate. It meant making space for voices that are often overlooked and paying attention to who is missing from the conversation, not only who is already present. Sometimes this meant having difficult conversations and being uncomfortable. At other times, it meant meeting people where they were, understanding their hesitations and creating conditions together that allowed them to participate in ways that felt meaningful and safe for them.

The programme's experience also confirmed the importance of flexibility. Some collaborations grew through conversations and exchanges that happened along the way. Different organisations and activists moved at different paces, and the programme needed enough flexibility to accommodate those realities.

Another lesson was around funding. Movement building requires time, patience and continuous engagement. Yet many funding models are built around activities, outputs and short project cycles. Some of the work that mattered most during this journey happened between workshops and formal activities — through follow-up conversations, accompaniment and maintaining relationships over time.

The Dufatanye programme is coming to an end, but many of the questions that shaped this journey are still relevant. How do we continue building a women's movement that is diverse, connected and able to respond to the realities facing women and girls in Rwanda? How do we ensure that newer organisations, young feminists, women with disabilities, queer women and other groups continue to have a voice within it?

These questions feel especially urgent now, when many women's rights organisations are working in an ever more challenging funding environment. Scarce resources put pressure on organisations that are already doing vital work and can make collaboration harder when everyone is competing for the same opportunities. At the same time, many of the challenges facing women and girls demand collective answers. No single organisation, network or activist can meet them alone.



Photo credit: Kvinna till Kvinna/Aline Niwenshuti

Over the course of the programme, relationships were strengthened, new actors found their place within the movement and organisations discovered ways to work together that might not have happened otherwise.



05

WHO KEEPS THE CHANGE GOING

CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR WOMEN TO COME TOGETHER

The Dufatanye programme was built on the belief that women and girls are not passive recipients of support. We wanted women and girls to see themselves as rightsholders: people with knowledge, experience and the ability to influence the decisions that affect their lives.



Photo credit: Kvinna till Kvinna/Aline Niwenshuti

From the start, Kvinna till Kvinna and its partners worked to apply a human rights-based approach across different interventions. This meant asking questions that went beyond the number of people trained or activities delivered. Were women participating in decisions that affected them?

Were they taking on leadership roles? Were they able to influence what happened in their families, communities and local institutions?

These questions kept shaping monitoring visits, partner dialogues and many of the adaptations made along the way. Across the programme, partners trained women and girls on a range of issues, including gender-based violence, leadership, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and economic empowerment. Many of the women participating were already facing multiple challenges. Some were

survivors of gender-based violence. Others were adolescent mothers, women from poor households, women living in rural communities or women living with disabilities.

One of the conversations that kept coming up between Kvinna till Kvinna and partners was what happens after the trainings. How do we avoid one-off activities? How do we continue the conversations? How do we create opportunities for women to keep learning from one another after a training has ended?

Partners answered in different ways. Some organised women into Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs). Others created safe spaces for adolescent girls, support groups for survivors of violence, youth clubs or community forums. These spaces created opportunities for women and girls to continue meeting regularly.

FROM PARTICIPATION TO COMMUNITY ACTION

For many women, these groups became spaces where they could speak openly about experiences they had never discussed before. They shared challenges, exchanged advice and supported one another through difficult situations.

Slowly, relationships started forming within these groups. Women saw each other regularly. They followed up on one another's challenges. They celebrated successes together and looked for solutions together. Many of these groups were strengthened through continuous dialogue — group meetings, follow-up sessions and regular interactions.

We often encouraged partners to think about how existing groups and structures could be used to keep conversations going. If a one-day training introduced a discussion on gender-based violence, leadership or rights, what then? Who carries it forward? Where does a woman take her new questions? For many partners, the groups became the answer.

Some were encouraging survivors to seek support. Others were mediating conflicts, or passing on what they had learned through the programme.

For example, in Nyagatare District, Afro Ark trained 48 women and girl peer champions in SRHR, GBV prevention, public speaking and community scorecard methodology.

These women went on to facilitate dialogues with more than 100 women and girls, identify challenges affecting their communities and engage directly with local authorities. In Mukama Sector, four of the seven issues raised through the scorecard process were resolved within a year.



As these groups became established, another question started shaping conversations between Kvinna till Kvinna and partners: how can these structures be used to strengthen leadership and community action?

Because of monitoring visits, we kept meeting women who were already going further than the project asked of them. Some were talking to other women about GBV, SRHR and the services available.

At AKWOS, women who initially joined sports clubs and savings groups gradually took on responsibilities within their communities. Some organised sensitisation activities. Others became people that community members approached for information, support, advice and conflict resolution. Over time, women who had once struggled to speak in public were facilitating discussions and mobilising others around issues affecting women and girls.

LEADERSHIP GROWS IN DIFFERENT WAYS

At OSO, teen mothers and young women who entered the programme through vocational training and economic empowerment activities began taking on leadership roles beyond the project itself. Some became mentors to other girls. Others assumed responsibilities within church groups, youth committees at local level and savings groups.

"I used to think girls had no say in family decisions. But after the sessions on power dynamics, I learned that I have a voice and can influence the choices that affect me and my family. I now speak up in family meetings, and my opinions are respected."

A young woman supported through the dufatanye programme



Photo credit: Afro Ark

WHAT WE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

Looking back across the programme, one of the first lessons was that training alone was rarely enough. Partners often worked with women facing multiple and interconnected challenges. A single session could introduce new information, but information alone did not necessarily lead to confidence, leadership or action.

The women who went on to support others, lead discussions, organise activities or take on responsibilities within their communities usually had opportunities to continue engaging with other women over time. This is one of the reasons why groups, clubs, safe spaces and savings associations became such an important part of the programme. They created opportunities for women to keep learning from one another, discuss challenges, test new ideas and build confidence through practice.

We also learned that leadership develops differently for different women. Some became community champions and facilitators. Others chose to mentor younger girls, support survivors of violence or share information within their communities. Not everyone wanted to take on a visible leadership role, and that was equally important to recognise.

Nor did progress move at one speed. Some women stepped quickly into new responsibilities. Others needed more time, encouragement and support before feeling comfortable speaking publicly. Many were balancing participation with childcare, household responsibilities and income-generating activities. These realities often shaped how and when women could engage.

WHAT WE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

Another lesson was that creating groups was often the easier part. Keeping them active required continued effort. Partners invested time in following up with groups, facilitating discussions, mentoring new leaders and helping groups navigate challenges as they arose. Some groups remained highly active and continued meeting regularly.

Others struggled with attendance, competing responsibilities or changing circumstances within the community.

We also observed that community activism was often strongest when women were able to connect their efforts to structures that already existed around them. Some took on responsibilities within church groups, savings groups, school clubs and local committees. Others engaged community leaders through dialogues and community scorecard processes.

These connections created opportunities for women to continue applying what they had learned beyond programme activities and helped link the work of the groups to the wider community. Women often developed confidence after being trusted with a role within their group or community. Sometimes that role was formal. Other times it was as simple as helping organise meetings, supporting new members or following up on issues raised within the group.

These efforts require being intentional and patient. Building confidence, strengthening leadership and voice, and sustaining community structures often takes longer than a project cycle. The examples highlighted in this case study were built through years of engagement, accompaniment and continued investment by both partners and, above all, by the women themselves.

 Photo credit: Afro Ark



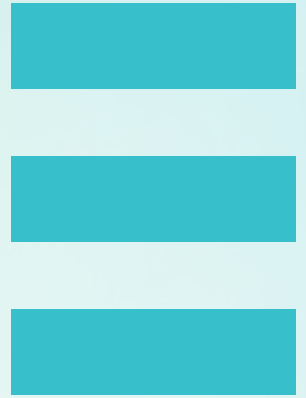
Community activism cannot simply be delivered through a project activity. It grows through relationships, trust and repeated opportunities for women to come together and act on issues that matter to them.



RWANDA — WHERE THE WORK CONTIUES

Relationships and collective action grow through continued engagement — through people showing up in shared spaces, again and again, over years.

■ Photo credit: Be Bold Firm Ltd/Emmanuel Munezero



06

THE LEGACY OF
DUFATANYE

THE LEGACY LIVES IN MANY PLACES

As we reflect on five years of Dufatanye, we find ourselves returning to a question that came up repeatedly throughout the programme: who keeps the work going and the change multiplying?

We asked it of partner organisations, of communities, of women's groups, of individual rightsholders, of stakeholders and of duty bearers. As the programme closes, we believe the answer lives in all of those places at once.

When Dufatanye began, one of our ambitions was to contribute to a stronger and more connected women's movement in Rwanda. Looking back, one of the things we are most proud of is the growth we witnessed among partner organisations.

Some joined the programme in their early stages, still developing systems, structures and visibility. Others were already established but were navigating questions around sustainability or their role within the wider movement.

We saw partner organisations grow in different ways. Some strengthened their internal systems and governance. Some expanded their programmes and geographical reach. Others became more confident in engaging with policy processes, building partnerships and contributing to national conversations on women's rights. Many organisations

that entered the programme with limited funding went on to secure support from multiple donors and continue their work.

At community level, the programme reinforced something we had observed in many contexts before: change is more likely to last when people have spaces to come together. Partners invested in groups, clubs, safe spaces, savings associations and other community structures that created opportunities for women and girls to meet regularly, support one another and organise around issues affecting their lives. Some of these groups have evolved into platforms for community leadership, peer support and local activism.



■ Photo credit: Kvinna till Kvinna/Aline Niwenshuti

WORKING TOGETHER

The legacy hardest to measure, yet most important to acknowledge, is the confidence, knowledge and leadership that women and girls carry with them. In this publication, we have shared stories of women who found their voice, challenged discrimination, supported others, assumed leadership roles and advocated for change within their families and communities. These stories remind us that while programmes have timelines, people's lives keep moving.

The programme also opened space for conversations that are often difficult to have. Discussions around GBV, SRHR, disability rights, women's leadership and unequal power relations took place in homes, schools, churches, community meetings and public forums. Not every conversation led to immediate change;

some remain ongoing, and creating space for these discussions was an important step in itself.

At Kvinna till Kvinna, we do not see the legacy of Dufatanye as something we leave behind. It belongs now to the partner organisations, communities, women and girls who shaped the programme along the way. And it is a legacy for us to build on.

The name Dufatanye means "working together". Looking back, that spirit may be the programme's most important contribution: the partnerships built, the relationships formed, the organisations strengthened and the women who continue to work together to lead change in their communities.

Aluta Continua! Turikumwe.



Photo credit: Kvinna till Kvinna

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IN MEMORY OF**MARIE ANGE RAISSA UWAMUNGU**

Founder and Executive Director, Impanuro Girls Initiative. With
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For all women's rights, in every corner of the world.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation is one of the world's leading women's rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war and conflict to strengthen women's influence and power.

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