

# The Switch

Generation RISE magazine

January 2021

First  
Edition

## #GirlsVsCovid-19



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Generation  
RISE



## Generation RISE

**DIALOGUE**  
**EMPOWERMENT**  
**INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP**

### **Vision:**

A gender equitable world where all people can be leaders and advocates for positive change in their communities.

### **Mission:**

To cultivate an inspiring generation of young women leaders who are valued, equipped and encouraged to articulate and realize their dreams for themselves and for their communities.

### **Approach:**

Generation Rise uses a novel approach to gender equity. By using literature as a catalyst for women and girls to think critically about themselves and their societies, Generation Rise is empowering girls and women to ask questions and voice their opinions on issues that determine their futures and the futures of their communities.



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**D**espite the challenges created by Covid-19, we were able to adapt our core program and work with 60 girls from Gahanga and Kabuga High School. We engaged these girls through a writing competition, which gave them an opportunity to share their stories and to improve their writing skills. With the support of the Segal Family Foundation for this and other activities, we managed to inspire and help girls in our program to return to school. We are excited to launch the Switch magazine, which will be a bi-annual platform for both girls and stakeholders to share, learn, and exchange strategies and inspiration, as we all to adapt to a new way of life as the challenges of Covid-19 continue to unfold.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this first edition. We are so motivated and inspired by these stories and ideas, and we hope each and every one of you reading this magazine will feel the same way as we do.

Thank you for being part of our 2020 journey. The team at Generation Rise wishes you a happy new year of 2021! Stay healthy and hopeful!

*Solange Impanoyimana*  
Co-founder & Executive Director

# Women in STEM and COVID-19 Pandemic response

**Growing up, there was often a higher value placed on educating boys over girls, especially in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and decision-making. The devaluation of educating girls in these fields is often due to the stereotypical narrative that suggests a woman must only aspire towards a domestic role. Despite these stereotypes, I was lucky to have parents who had more progressive attitudes about gender roles, and believed that boys and girls should be treated, and educated, equally. As such, my brothers and sisters alike were sent to school and given equal support in our educations.**

Once I got to high school, I chose science as my major subject because I was interested in health care services and finding treatments for diseases like cancer. To my surprise, I wasn't motivated to pursue science because of a teacher, but because of the book, "Les Jeunes S'interrogent" by Jehovah's Witnesses, which I read independently while I was in senior Three. Although studying science was by no means easy, I was able to find success with the help of role models like my father who believed in my ability to be successful in any subject I chose.

After high school, when I started to work, I realized that many school girls did not have access to the same resources or role models that I had, that would enable them to successfully pursue science as a career. After coming to this realization, my friend Solange and I became inspired to start Generation Rise as a way to foster an inspiring generation of women leaders who are valued, equipped, and encouraged to realize their dreams and their communities. Generation Rise is working

hard to inspire young women, especially in the most vulnerable communities in rural settings. We are focusing on building literacy to develop leadership and change old mindsets that have historically hindered the progress of young women.

Now more than ever, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen the importance of empowering women leaders in our communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has and continues to test everyone, but it has brought enormous and unexpected demands to working women, from increased professional demands to home lifestyle adaptations.

Despite the myriad of challenges and learnings that COVID-19 has forced upon us, the most pertinent of them has been the importance of being an independent person who can balance professional demands with the demands of home and family life. This has been most prevalent for the scientists and epidemiologists working on the front lines, like my team and I at the Rwanda National Reference

Laboratory, who have spent days and nights working to come up with reliable test for COVID-19. Working night and day shifts has become a new working style for most of us. In addition to our usual work, most of my female colleagues have had to go back home and assist their children during online-home schooling.

My team's ability to persevere through these unprecedented times has been nothing short of inspiring. On 14th March 2020, my team, led by Madame Alice Kabanda, detected the first case of COVID-19 in Rwanda. Our team later detected the first case of COVID-19 from clinical samples that came from the Republic of Central Africa. This required non-stop work at the lab, coupled with the increased demands of at-home childcare for the mothers on my team, and still they continued to perform their jobs impeccably. I still remember one day at Rwanda COVID-19 Joint Task Force where we spent 24 hours organizing and running COVID-19 Real Time PCR tests and then afterwards, one of my colleagues, Jeanne d'Arc Umuringa, had to go home and assist her two daughters with their studies.

Beyond meeting the demands of work and home life, I have also been inspired to increase my independence by starting additional income-generating projects. The inspiration came from an incident that obliged me to stay at an upcountry hospital's laboratory for more than a week. I was supposed to return home on the 31st

of July, but was obliged to stay there until the 7th of August, causing me to miss the celebration of my sister's baby boy on 1st August 2020 with my family. With crying eyes and mixed feelings of joy and of feeling like a less-considered hero to the fight of COVID-19, I came to the realization that my fellow scientists and I sacrifice our precious time to save lives, which was a big source of motivation to continue doing what I do. This new-found motivation also inspired me to act on another long-awaited goal, which was to take additional measures to ensure my independence by starting an Irish potato growing business in the West province of Rwanda. I look forward to using this business as an example for Generation Rise's social enterprise initiatives, where mentors and mentees can learn while pursuing their incoming-generating ideas.

I am more motivated than ever to continue empowering Her Voice Matters girls and women, with strong hope for seeing the next female scientists, business owners and community policy influencers. As the saying goes, "**behind all successful things, there is a woman behind.**"



*Enatha Mukantwari*  
**Co-founder & Partnership  
Coordinator**

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## Key words

**Women in STEM:** Professional women who are leading in the field of Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

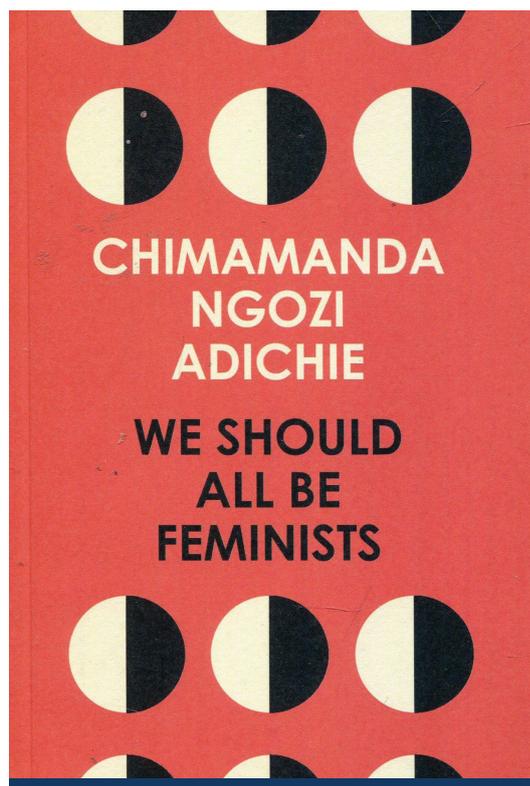
**COVID-19 pandemic:** Respiratory Coronavirus Diseases that was declared by WHO to be a pandemic in 2019.

# Reading and Dialog

**Reading is to learning as feeding is to growing. There is nothing more magical and exciting than learning another person's inspiring story through reading. At Generation Rise, we provide a reading platform for young girls in order to empower them to unleash their full potential and leave a mark on their communities.**

**A**t Generation Rise, we often look to admired female authors, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose book, *We Should All Be Feminists*, has inspired us to empower ourselves and other young Rwandan women to speak our minds and not settle for less in life. As Chimamanda once said, **"I speak because I think our time on earth is short and each moment that we are not our truest selves, each moment we pretend to be what we are not, each moment we say what we do not mean because we imagine that is what somebody wants us to say, then we are wasting our time on earth."**

Chimamanda, a Nigerian native, is an award-winning author of four books whose work has been translated into thirty languages and has appeared in various publications such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune* among many others. She now divides her time between America and Nigeria. Inspired by Chimamanda's story, among many other inspiring revolutionary women across the world, Generation Rise strives to nurture an inspiring generation of young women leaders who are valued, equipped and motivated to articulate and realize their dreams for themselves and their communities through staying true to who they are.



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**What better way to make this vision a reality than through inciting young Rwandan women to read the inspiring stories of women who paved the way before them?**



## My Life in Lockdown

**T**he COVID-19 lockdown created challenging circumstances for everybody, but especially poor people because it made it very difficult for them to get the help that they needed. Consequently, each family member was placed with the responsibility of contributing to their family's wellbeing in order to survive. While everyone struggled in lockdown, girls in lockdown were disproportionately burdened with challenges. This is why I set personal rules and goals to take good care of myself by always following my parents' advice.

During lockdown, I was stuck at home and tried to handle all the problems that I had by myself. I had different issues that disturbed me like my studies being abruptly halted, which was particularly challenging because my education is one of my favorite things in life. In order to handle this problem, I took matters into my own hands and began studying while I was at home so that I could continue my education independently and not forget anything that I had previously learned. I had faith in myself and knew I could accomplish my goal of finishing my studies as a stepping stone towards me reaching my dreams.

Additionally, I tried to do some other activities while I was home, like cooking different foods such as rice, beans, cassava and porridge. I also completed other domestic duties like washing clothes, plates and mopping the house. The time spent on these activities was well worth it- I am happy to know all of these household chores, because before the pandemic I was not able to do most of these things properly. After lockdown, I visited my friends and

we reflected on this period of time. I learned to be proud of who I am and what I have in life.

In addition, I began working at a job with my parents' consent in order to help my family solve some problems at home. My parents advised me to work so that I could have experience knowing what it's like to work after school. After working, I gave my parents the money I had earned so that they could buy what we needed at home instead of wasting it. I used some of it to solve some of my personal problems and also saved some of it to use in the future. I am proud of myself for helping my family, and it's satisfying to know that my parents are also proud of me. While COVID-19 has presented its challenges, I am very happy to reflect on all of the positive things that I did during lockdown. Each activity that I did taught me a lesson in investing in my future, which I'm very grateful for.

I'd also like to express my gratitude to Generation Rise, an organization who has taught me a lot about being a young woman. In this time, I've learned about being confident and feeling agency to express my opinions, know my rights, set goals for myself, and gain crucial knowledge about my body and reproductive help. Generation Rise has helped me tremendously and has given me knowledge that will continue to benefit me in the years to come.

In conclusion, I want to tell girls one single word. They are bad people in society who can promise them help but really they want to abuse them sexually. Please be careful.

*Kayinsenge Assumpta*

## Period of Lockdown

COVID-19 has affected all of our lives in profound ways we've had to stay home, and in doing so, many of us initially had to stop working or attending school. It's been a very difficult situation for me, particularly because all of my plans to finish school during this academic year were shattered.

I still remember the morning of 15th March 2020, when my parents came to me and said "my daughter, now is an unusual time, different from any other, therefore be careful and stay here as we continue to observe how the situation wraps up."

Time had passed and one day my friend called me and told me that she had a job for us so that we could continue to earn money despite the pandemic. I asked my parents for their permission and to my surprise, they agreed that it could be a good opportunity for me. I went with my friend to begin working and began to save some money for myself. It was then that I realized I could use this money to invest my future. For instance, I bought a goat that I planned on selling in order to get more money to start a business.

With this extra money, I was also able to pay a contribution towards a saving group that my parents usually helped me pay for. Despite all of these seemingly positive opportunities that having additional income provided me, I was still deeply unhappy about the way my friend was trying to earn her money—she often met her boyfriend and got money after having sex with him. This was only one example of instances that made me uncomfortable, where I knew my morals were being compromised. I remember one day, a male friend of my housemate visited us at night, and my housemate wouldn't tell me why he was visiting during night hours. I later found out that he wanted to have sex with me, but I completely refused. He tried and tried the whole night, but it was in vain. Later, my housemate woke up and started shouting at me, telling me that I was stupid, all because I wouldn't sleep with her male friend. She had planned to sell me to him. The following morning, I secretly prepared to go back home in order to protect my life.

When I got home, I did not tell my parents what had happened,

but instead talked to my elder sister because I was afraid of my parents' reaction towards my friend who actually is also a family member. Then, after reflecting on my experience, I gave advice to my friends so that they would avoid sexual abuse and stay at home. Because of my experience of learning not to compromise who I am or my values for anyone, I've been able to not only help myself, but also other young girls who may be vulnerable to these situations. Now I am preparing for a better future by saving money and making sure that I will not be put into a compromising situation again.

Beyond this, Generation Rise has contributed a lot to the strong person I am today. I have grown tremendously through being involved with Generation Rise, and now know how to be empowered as a young woman and how to take good care of myself. In particular, I've learned more about my body and reproductive system through Generation Rise's trainings. I am grateful to be able to empower myself and other young women through my own life experiences with the help of Generation Rise.

*Izere Fabienne*

## Struggle with Covid-19

COVID-19 stands for Coronavirus Disease 2019. It is a contagious respiratory disease which originated in Wuhan, China in 2019. It spread quickly throughout the world in early 2020. The first person infected with COVID-19 was found in Rwanda on 13th March 2020. Consequently, the government of Rwanda established lockdown, where no one was allowed to leave their homes, as a preventive measure to stop the spread throughout the country.

Personally, I struggled with several challenges due to COVID-19. During lockdown, my parents had to stop their business activity, on which our family survived

on. Because my parents weren't able to work, we faced the issue of food scarcity. I spent some days without eating. Not having food to eat was extremely difficult, so much so that I will never forget this period in my life. If it weren't for the government providing us with assistance, I would have died of hunger. Beyond hunger, COVID-19 has affected my education. I thought I would finish my secondary education by late 2020 and then continue on to university, but this has been postponed up to 2021 due to schools closing for seven months. We recently resumed studies and I still believe that I will complete senior six and continue with university, as it is my future dream.

In addition, the impacts of COVID-19 caused both unwanted pregnancies and early marriages for young girls in my community. On my side, I managed to overcome these challenges because I was trained through Generation Rise and learned many things, such as empowering myself to have a specific goal in life, as well as fundamental education about the female reproductive system, which has allowed me to be more well-informed about my body, and motivated to accomplish my dreams. Despite all of the challenges that COVID-19 brought upon me, I achieved a lot before returning to school. I began cutting sugar cane and harvesting different crops as a way to earn money, which allowed me

to pay my school fees on my own and buy clothes. I saved the remaining money that I earned for future use and also invested in rearing hens. I've learned the value of hard work and investing in my future, and hope to be a millionaire in future.

All in all, despite COVID-19, I have confidence in myself and hope to realize my future dreams and make a better future for myself. I encourage everyone to continue fighting against COVID-19 by washing hands, wearing face mask and social distancing, and when you can, pursue activities that will help you secure a better future.

*Ruth Nyirahavugimana*

## Life During Covid-19

**P**rior to the pandemic, COVID-19 was a virus that had not been previously identified in a human being. It was first detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province in China in December 2019. The virus spread very quickly, and soon after, many cases had been identified in a variety of countries throughout the world. Today, the pandemic has spread out all over the world and there have been few places who have not been drastically affected by it. Nonetheless, the pandemic has brought upon both challenges and achievements in my life.

Before COVID-19, I had planned to finish my studies and run a business that would change my life and that of my family. I was inspired to do this because of Generation Rise's training, where I was taught about the rights I have as a girl and how I can be or achieve whatever I want in life. However, these dreams and

hopes were interrupted by the arrival of COVID-19 in Rwanda in March 2020, which was followed by the enforcement of lockdown. The government stopped many activities including education, which was very difficult because I had lost hope of achieving my future dreams. However, after time had passed and we were able to resume our studies, the confidence and hope to achieve my goals returned to me. Beyond the disruption of education in lockdown, my family and I had a challenge as we could not eat as we had in normal times. My parents and I did our best to find food until the lockdown was over.

Despite the challenges we faced together, we tried to use our time in lockdown in a positive way. My family and I had time to pray to God so that He could continue to protect our lives from the pandemic. Additionally, I had time to revise my lessons and think about the knowledge and

skills I learned from Generation Rise. I reflected on each lesson that I learned through Generation Rise and how to apply it into my daily life. Generation Rise helped me set goals and strategies for how to overcome the challenges I faced during COVID-19, and I succeeded. I cannot finish without emphasizing how Generation Rise has given me the confidence to shine like a candle!

Now that I've returned to school to resume my lessons, my biggest priority is to abide by the governments' regulations that were set in order to abolish the COVID-19 pandemic completely. I am studying diligently as well. I continue to have hope in my future dreams, as I will finish my studies in 2021. I am confident that I will realize my dreams and have fruitful future and am thankful for all that I've learned throughout the pandemic with the help of Generation Rise.

*Jacqueline Nyirahabimana*



## The Duality of Covid-19: Positive and Negative Impacts It's Had On My Life

The Coronavirus Pandemic is a global issue. On 14th March 2020, it was announced that the first person in Rwanda had tested positive and everything from there on out changed dramatically, not only at home but on a national level. For me, my standard of living at home changed quite severely because my parents spent a month without working. Despite the hardships that this brought onto our home life, COVID-19 has taught me many things, mainly how to cope with and overcome challenges that life might bring.

When COVID-19 hit Rwanda, life immediately became tough. It was extremely difficult to get food, and it was often the case that we could only afford one meal per day. As a community, we had to face the challenges of getting accustomed to being at home all day—many of

us were used to running businesses, going to work, and attending school. Not only did this affect people's daily activities but it also led to an increased rate of teenage pregnancies as a result of school closures.

As a student, COVID-19 negatively affected my academic performance because there weren't any televised programs facilitating students' learning with regards to what I was majoring in while we were in lockdown. Despite all the setbacks that were caused by COVID-19, I learned to cope up with the challenges thrown at me. Though it wasn't easy, I continued to remain positive and hope for the best by not giving up on myself. I was able to stay optimistic with the help of Generation Rise who taught me to be positive minded and to have the confidence to speak up about my ideas. This confidence and optimism helped me advise my

mother on starting a small clothing business since her job had stopped due to COVID-19, and this helped in covering different expenses and needs that we had at home.

Even though COVID-19 had many disadvantages, it had a positive side. During the lockdown period, I had more time to spend and talk with my parents. These discussions not only helped me to learn a lot from their life experiences but also brought answers to many questions I had concerning reproductive health, adulthood and life in general.

Beyond all of this, I encourage everyone to continue with the fight against the Coronavirus pandemic by putting into practice all the preventive measures that have been set so that we can resume normal life. By working together, we can overcome this pandemic and achieve our goals.

*Nyiramugisha*

## — Me Via Covid-19

It's been 11 months since COVID-19 was discovered in China and we are still living with it and facing its consequences.

When I learned that the first person in Rwanda was infected by the coronavirus on the 14th March 2020, I became depressed and began asking myself many questions, like how life would change with this pandemic, how we would survive, when the pandemic would end, among others. I also wondered if we were going to die. In the beginning, I was really worried about how we would manage through, but as the days went by, we started to familiarize with living with COVID-19 and respecting all of the preventive measures recommended to us by health and government officials.

Despite doing all of this, we lost a lot. Mainly, before the COVID-19 pandemic, I had set many goals for myself after completing my high school, but the pandemic delayed many of these. For example, I was expecting to finish high school in 2020 and start university in 2021, but unfortunately, because of the pandemic, I won't complete high school until 2021. Beyond this, the pandemic greatly affected our country's economy, where important developmental activities, like international trade, completely halted because borders and airports were closed.

Nonetheless, I've learned a lot in the past 8 months. I have experienced life outside of school. The pandemic afforded me the extra time to sit down and deeply think about myself, what I want and how to get it. I've also read different motivational books which have strengthened me mentally. Two of my favorite books that I've read are Strategies of Positive Thinking and Secret of Success. While I was in school, Generation Rise educated us on the positive impacts of reading and how it helps us develop our critical thinking skills that are integral to success. Through these books, I've learned from experiences of others, which has informed me on how to make the right decisions for myself. While at home, I've had the time to talk with my parents about these learnings and also hear from them on their advice regarding important life decisions.

In a nutshell, COVID-19 has been a very difficult time for everyone because we have lost a lot and have been faced with many struggles. However, this is not the time to lose hope for the future. Let us keep working hard so as to re-build what COVID-19 has destroyed. While we are at it, let's respect every preventive measure as strong weapons to fight this pandemic.

*Vanessa*

## — My life during Covid-19

COVID-19 is a virus that spreads rapidly and has taken the lives of many in just a short while. It was first discovered in late 2019 and has since become a pandemic throughout the world. It has affected everyone, but has affected me quite a lot as a girl.

In the past year, I've spent eight months without going to school and it has delayed the time in which I was supposed to complete my studies. Being out of school for so long resulted in a lot of young girls in my community having unwanted pregnancies or contracting sexually transmitted diseases, which has delayed their development academically. Beyond this, for my family specifically, we had a difficult time finding food and sanitary products.

Even though these challenging times initially made me lose hope, I thank God that I made it through successfully. I was lucky to have my parents, who gave me advice during the pandemic and advised me on how the reproductive system works and how to manage my body through his time. With their advice, I made the decision to not engage in sexual activities and instead found productive hobbies to keep myself busy, such as hair dressing, which is a departure from the Math, Computer, and Economics that I usually study at school. I also gained a lot of knowledge through Generation Rise about how to identify opportunities and set positive goals for myself to invest in my future. They also taught me to stay strong and be patient despite the challenges that life throws at you.

The pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the lives of many. It has made me reflect on what I wish to see in the future, which is for families to have the resources to provide for their children, for our government to invest in technological trade and online markets, and for girls to follow the advice of their parents, because as the Kinyarwanda proverb says, "words of the elders might take long, but they come to pass." As Rwandans, I ask all of us to follow the regulations put in place by our government, like wearing facemasks, washing our hands often and social distancing, because "as a fact, life is poured but not picked" (Rwandan proverb that means that if you don't take care of yourself and you get sick, you can not reverse it).

*Gihozo Alice*

## I Will Never Forget My Covid-19 Situation

**C**OVID-19 reached Rwanda on 14th March 2020, and immediately disrupted every element of our country, ranging from our social interactions to our economic situations. It also affected students, whereby some even dropped out of school.

Despite all of this, I have spent the past months learning productive habits and hobbies as a way to invest in my wellbeing. Beginning in lockdown, I learned how to save money and realized how beneficial it is to save early so that you can have extra funds in the event that a challenge presents itself. I became acutely aware of this during lockdown, when many people suffered a lot because they could not work. For others who had jobs, their salaries were reduced and even stopped for some.

Beyond learning the importance of saving money for the future, I also had more time to spend with my parents. I used that opportunity to ask them a lot of questions about confusing things. For instance, I got to know more about the reproduction system, and this knowledge kept me from early pregnancy and marriage. These were very important learnings

for me, as many of my classmates did not come back to school after lockdown because of this.

Moreover, I took time to enjoy my hobbies, such as reading books. I read one called A Bad Girl, which informed me on which decisions I should not make in life. I also spent time watching movies and talking to my friends on the phone

Despite the all of the good things I spent time doing during lockdown, I cannot forget to mention that COVID-19 was among the reasons why I have not achieved my dreams, like finishing up my studies and looking for a job once I finish my studies.

COVID-19 has negatively affected many people and all sectors in the country. However, I'm grateful for the many lessons I've learned, as well as the quality time I've had to spend with my parents. We can continue to have hope, abide by the guidelines related to COVID-19, and fight together so that we can overcome this pandemic triumphantly.



# How teachers cope with COVID-19 Pandemic

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected people's lives in many different ways. Back in March, when the government was forced to initiate a nationwide lockdown (that many called "Stay at Home"), no one left home unless they were going to buy food. Many people's jobs had to stop and those who still had their jobs worked under uncommon conditions or at half pay in order to earn an income so as to provide for their families. This was really a difficult period for anyone who did not have savings.

COVID-19 negatively affected Rwanda's economy due to the fact that many jobs and businesses in general did not run as usual. Hence, there were no taxes generated. Additionally, due to the fact that borders were closed, imports and exports also stopped and impacted the economy of the country. To add on, the revenue usually generated through tourism decreased and all of these factors influenced the overall development of Rwanda.

Furthermore, the outbreak of this pandemic greatly affected the Rwandan society at large. More greatly, the youth population, being the future of the country and mainly including students, encountered many challenges. Among the challenges facing Rwandan youth were the fact that schools where they acquired skills and education were closed for a long period. As a result, many lost their academic focus and turned to looking for small money-generating jobs, others became idle and only spent their days watching movies, going from one place to another

purposelessly and a significant number of young girls had unwanted pregnancies. The New Times wrote about these issues on the 21st October 2020, where they reported more than one hundred and seventy young girls were impregnated only in Rwamagana district. There is a great fear that this number would be much larger if the research were to be conducted all over the country and a report were to be published. The government has done a lot to fight these crimes against young school girls through sensibilisations and strict punishments to the perpetrators; I hope it will save more young girls.

As I conclude, mainly as a teacher, I am doing all possible to help pupils fight the pandemic by ensuring that the measures that our government has set forth are adapted in all corners of the school as most of the students have come back to school and we are expecting more very soon. I believe that prevention is better than a cure and we can overcome this pandemic together.

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**Among the challenges facing Rwandan youth were the fact that schools where they acquired skills and education were closed for a long period.**

■ Teacher Clemence



**W**hen COVID-19 hit, all of the students delayed their expected school year end, which demotivated most of the students to the extent that some even dropped out of school and shifted to other fields like starting businesses, and picking up masonry. Some female students had unwanted pregnancies or got married despite their young age. Some of the students will completely lose their chance of coming back to school.

Both teachers and students alike lost focus on their main goals: Teaching and learning, respectively. Some teachers and students felt discouraged to continue with their responsibilities at school because they became focused on other careers they started during lockdown. For example, some teachers started selling groceries during lockdown, and it's hard to believe that they would spare their time teaching and marking as usual, rather than running their respective businesses. This would cause poor quality of education and therefore, students won't be able to succeed as typically expected.

Both teachers and students have felt the loss of excitement when it comes to school environment. For instance, when I wake up in morning, I don't feel the way I used to prior to COVID-19 and the stay home initiative. It took more motivation than usual to recognize that it is my responsibility to teach and take

care of the students. However, students don't believe in school or trust that it's important to study in the same way that they did before the pandemic. When we returned to school, I spoke to one student who told me that he no longer felt years of schooling were necessary for him to achieve his life goals. He believed that owning a business would be more profitable than wasting years in school.

To overcome some of these challenges that the students are facing, there is a need to increase psycho-social support such as counseling sessions and availing role models to motivate students, to support the provision of basic needs to students, and to improve the relationship between teachers and students. Teachers, on the other hand, need to recognize their call to teaching through awareness sessions or refresher trainings, such as how to build a fruitful relationship between a teacher and their students, how to write an inspiring story, and more. I believe that school partners like Generations Rise can continue to provide leadership trainings that build resilience for both the teachers and students.

Though COVID-19 has caused negative impact to many, it has taught me to be grateful for what I have, to save no matter what I gain and what I have to spend and most of all, to do any job without fear and with confidence of future success. I am looking forward to life returning to normal, despite the scars that COVID-19 will leave.

■ **Teacher Angelic**

**A**t the time, when an unusual announcement demanding us to stay home was published, we all got really scared. Eventually it was written that there is neither a treatment nor a cure, and it would destroy whosoever jokes around with it. Putting on a facemask and washing hands often was hard at first not knowing that it was also a way to prevent against the virus but also other sicknesses that attack the respiratory system or are caused by bacteria.

Most of the families were assisted by their neighbors and the government in order to find food to eat, mostly because the virus came as a surprise and many families had no savings to support them during these tragic times. Schools were closed and the youth turned to casual work so as to be able to help their families find what to feed off. Some raised domestic animals and forgot about school and changed their manners and behaviors. Most of the students went to try to find money and

when they got money they started thinking that they no longer needed school– even those who were in the final year dropped out. Some went to masonry work and others went to commercial businesses, and many have decided not to return to school. So on that note, teachers, head teachers and the government itself should join hands and put effort in returning these students to school.

As a teacher, COVID-19 hindered a lot of my plans, but on the positive side, it made me learn more about how to use technology, because when schools were closed, most of the lessons were taught online. Students who did not have the will to increase their knowledge about technology were left behind, but as a teacher, I adapted. Now I have learned a lot and can contribute a lot in the future in the event of similar cases. Also, in general, I've learned more on how to be wise with my money and save it because one can never know what the future has in store.

■ **Teacher Celestin**

**O**ne of the biggest consequences of COVID-19 is that it has increased the number of school dropouts. This is due to the fact that many students lost interest in their academics during the lockdown period and decided to engage themselves in different money-generating activities such as starting small businesses, masonry among many others. Consequently, a significant number of students are no longer as attentive as they used to be in class as their minds are more focused on earning money than academics.

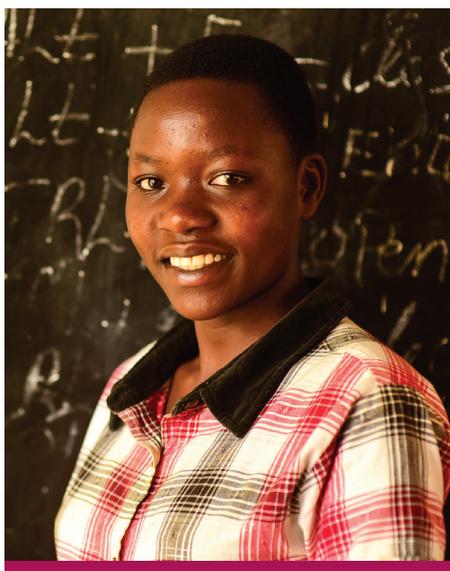
Thus, the participation of students in class has been highly affected by the. Additionally, the rate of teenage pregnancies and early marriages has increased because many looked for an easy way out for survival due to economic challenges that were caused by the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not only affect students, but teachers also. It is now hard for teachers to get back on track with regards to their lesson planning and delivery to students as many have started other businesses as well.

As a result, it has now become tough for them to balance teaching and their side activities. This in turn negatively affects the students' academic performance. Nonetheless, though COVID-19 had its disadvantages, one of its positive effects is that we learned how to use technology in teaching, which was not the case before the outbreak of the pandemic.

This being said, the government should still enforce inclusive education and reach out to those who dropped out of school.

■ **Teacher Thadde**



## She Believed She Can, So She Did !

**Rwanda has put in a lot of effort to uplift women from its old cultural norms that previously left them behind in every aspect of the progress of the country. The government has mainly put a lot of effort in inclusive education for girls. Even so, there are still significant challenges that remain. Teen pregnancy, persistent discriminatory norms, and the expectation of domestic care work for girls still affect their performance in schools, causing less women to continue to higher school education.**

**M**y name is **Louise Uwiringiyimana** and I live in Kabuga, Gasabo District, which is a peri-urban part of Kigali City. I completed my secondary school at a public school in the city, Kabuga High School. Due to the fact that there are a large number of students at this school, some the students attend classes in the morning while others come in the afternoon. The school provides basic provisions to facilitate the students' education. As a young girl from a family with limited finances, I experienced the same challenges that hinder many girls' educational experiences more broadly. For instance, before going to school or doing revision; I first had to do house chores which left me with limited time to focus on my studies or even read a book.

In 2019, Generation Rise started the Her Voice Matters (HVM) program in my school. Volunteer teachers and selected students were trained, age appropriate books were made available and a safe reading corner was provided. Pushed by my dreams and an interest in reading, I joined the HVM program. Through HVM, we

were provided trainings about self-confidence, goal setting and reading books that boosted our potential and abilities as young girls. As a result, not only my English speaking and reading skills improved but I also became more confident and goal-driven. Before attending HVM trainings, I did not prioritize my study time as I first had to do house chores when I got back from school and revised in my spare time. This negatively affected my academic performance because we didn't have electrical power at home; so it was really hard for me to revise my notes during the night. When we learned about goal setting during the trainings, I set a goal for myself that I wanted to be among the top 5 students in my class. To achieve this goal, I talked to my parents and told them that the reason I didn't perform well in the previous semester was because I don't get enough time to study whenever I came home from school. Fortunately, they were very supportive and told me that school should be my priority. As a strategy to achieve my goal and still be able to help out at home, I talked to my mother and told her that during week days I would concentrate on my

studies by revising my notes when I got home from school and then would help out with the house chores in the weekends. Eventually, this was a success. Surprisingly, I was the student with the highest grades at my school during the national examinations. I was equipped and learned a lot from the HVM program; the two main lessons I carried with me and still use in my daily life are self-confidence and living for a purpose through effective goal setting. I believe that with these two I will not only be outstanding in my family but also be able to make a difference in my community.

Eventually, before the outbreak of the COVID-19, I had the goal of starting a small livestock business and was planning on raising the money from a job I was expecting to get. However, due to the pandemic, I was not able to get the job as expected. As a result, I had to change the timeline I had set to attain my goal but I am still hopeful and working hard towards achieving it. I have not lost hope because if there is something that I have learned from life, it is that nothing is impossible when we believe, pray and have a vision towards the goal.

*Louise Uwiringiyimana*



**M**y full name is **Sano Shingiro Aline**, my artist name is **Allyn Sano** and I am a female Rwandan artist. I am the third born in a family of five and growing up, we were raised by our mother. It has now been two years that I graduated from Akilah Institute in Hospitality Management and Leadership, and now I am a professional performer, an award-winning artist and entrepreneur.

As an entrepreneur, I have chosen to be my own manager. Being an artist not only involves singing and performing, but also requires being able to manage one's activities related to the art itself. For instance, I schedule meetings, record invoices for different financial transactions, create flyers, plan for shooting sessions, organize performances, and take care of tax payments, among many others. Doing this is not easy, but thanks to a book called "How to Make It in the Music Industry", I learned that instead of starting up with a large management team, it is often better to start independently and bring a team on board later once one has fully discovered themselves, acquired skills, and gained experience. The benefit of being able to make it independently as an artist is that a management team can back down and decide to leave. In order to avoid that risk, I've developed my own management skills. It has allowed me to sustain my growth and overall development as an artist. However, as my music craft is expanding, I am looking forward to eventually hiring a management team so that I can focus my energy solely on my music.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I would describe my experience as mainly positive because I was able to learn a lot from it. One of the effects it has has is that many people, myself included, stopped working and had to rely on savings for survival. However, as the lockdown continued to be extended, many started running out of the savings they had put aside. Fortunately for me, the savings I had, though not plenty, sustained me throughout the lockdown as I was able to afford food and other basic needs. This being said, this period helped me realize how important savings are and to be grateful for every minute that I get to spend in life because we never know what might happen in a blink of an eye. Though we were in lockdown, this period served as an inspiration and allowed me to write more songs and to be innovative. For example, there was a time during the lockdown when I did a live performance on my social media platform, requested financial support from my followers and I was able to raise a considerable amount of money at the end. This showed me how much people value and appreciate my work as an artist. Thus, when it was announced that the lockdown was over, I grabbed the opportunity and rushed to the studio to release ten songs that I had been able to compose during lockdown because I was afraid that we would go back into lockdown for the following weeks. I made sure to make the most out of this opportunity so that share my music with my fans, as well as allow for more financial security moving forward.

Nevertheless, most of the plans and goals I had set for myself with regards to my music career were negatively affected by the outbreak of COVID-19. For instance, I had planned to release my debut album and travel for "The Voice Africa" music competition as I was a contestant, but I had to postpone due to the pandemic. Moreover, I wanted to open up a studio from my savings which unfortunately did not happen as I used all my savings during the lockdown period. However, I choose to stay positive so that I can continue on and achieve my goals in the future.

I would like to thank everyone who loves and appreciates what I do. My advice to young Rwandan girls who are aspiring to become musicians is to clearly set their standards and not compromise them for anything. To my fellow sisters out there who have gotten pregnant without planning to during this period, please do not give up on your dreams or abort because children are blessings. Whether pregnant or not do not let anything or anyone pull you down or stop you from pursuing your goals, stay positive, be the best version of yourself and do not compare yourself to others.

*Allyn Sano*

## AGR vs. COVID-19



**The Association des Guides du Rwanda is the national Girl Guides organization of Rwanda. The association served 13,807 members. Founded in 1962, the girl serving organization became a full member of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in 1981.**

**C** COVID-19 didn't stop us from Guiding; it inspired us to do things differently. Edward de Bono once said, "Creativity involves breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way." This has inspired Rwandan girl guides to do things differently amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Association des Guides du Rwanda is one of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts member organizations. Currently AGR serves more than 16,000 members classified in four branches which are: Brownies of 5 to 11 years old, Guides of 12 to 17 years old, Route (young leaders) of 18 to 35 years old and Cadres who are 36 years old and older.

The pandemic hit Rwanda in March 2020 and soon after, the lives of citizens everywhere completely changed. The streets had never been so empty. Who would believe that one day we would cease marching proudly in our uniforms? Exciting events, our 2020 summer camp, the training for young leaders, international travels to World Centers, local girl guides meetings were all put on hold.

Although 2020 has been a year like no other, it kicked off on a good note. From the start of the year to late February, the association had several events, debuted by "UMURUNGA," an annual event organized by the youth committee to celebrate and plan for the New Year. Some of our guides were sent abroad in the YESS program and guides from other countries were welcomed to AGR. The association trained "assistant trainer of trainers" and "animatrices". Further, AGR had a magnificent World Thinking

Day celebration in collaboration with Rwanda Scouts that was preceded by a week campaign on various initiatives, including education on sexual reproductive health, fighting against violence, campaigning against alcohol and drugs, sensitization about good nutrition, protection of the environment and so on.

However, the joys didn't last. A few days after the WTD, Rwanda got its first COVID19 case, a moment of panic and uncertainty. The Rwandan Government set prevention measures, which involved a total lockdown.

So how did AGR cope with the lockdown? First, the girls' safety was the most important aspect; therefore, all programs were put on hold. Secondly, a new communication strategy was designed to preserve the culture and outreach to the Guiding community. We shared weekly content focused on various themes in order to educate, advocate, inspire and change the lives of girls. They were channeled through social media (WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook), radios, TVs and online newspapers. Through this online adaptation, the association held conversations on COVID-19 prevention, anti-drugs and alcohol abuse, mental health, Guiding experience, violence prevention, kitchen gardening and menstruation hygiene and pride, etc.

Though things are not back to normal yet, Rwandan girl guides still engage with the content through the media. Receiving feedback from AGR members signals that we are adapting to the new normal gracefully and we intend on keeping the good energy and spreading it.

We are in this together!

 For more information: [www.rwandagirlguides.org](http://www.rwandagirlguides.org)

## SGO vs. COVID-19



**Save Generations Organization (SGO), is a Rwandan development Non-Government Organization (NGO) dedicated to promote and advocate for child and women's rights in order to prepare, empower and equip the future generations. Save Generations Organization has been established in 2015 and is registered at Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) with legal personality number 008/ RGB /NGO/2016, issued in 2016.**

**S**ave Generations Organization, a Rwandan NGO that works to prepare, empower and equip the future generations, intervenes in different domains working with children, youth and women.

Since 2018, we have been implementing a project on empowerment of adolescents and young girls in school on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), through increasing their knowledge on the topic and information that is available to them. It is a school-based project that targets adolescents and youth between 10 -19 years old, funded by Kvinna Till Kvinna.

Since March 2020, our work with adolescents and youth in the school couldn't continue as usual due to COVID-19. The schools were closed and the students were based at home as one of the preventive measures. This was a very big challenge to our work as well as to adolescents and youth in our programs.

So, we had to think about new approaches we could use to reach to adolescents and youth with accurate information on SRHR while they were staying at home. Among the approaches adopted was to replace our school-based

activities to a radio program called "Tuganire ku Buzima bw'imyorokere" where from there, adolescents and youth were able to continue accessing information on SRHR, sharing their views and inspiring their peers on that channel.

Apart from that, we developed a mobile technology app called SRHR 845 service, where adolescents and youth can access accurate information on SRHR and ask any question related to their SRHR for free, and in respect of their privacy. We also distributed booklets that contain SRHR information to adolescents and youth in our program to enable them share with their peers in the community and family members, accurate information on SRHR from the reliable source.

In addition to that, as we conducted a needs assessment to our right holders, we realized that period poverty was among the main issues that affected adolescents and young girls, especially the ones from the low income families during the COVID-19 period, as most of them accessed sanitary pads from their schools and when the schools closed, it affected them greatly. In response to that, we provided sanitary pads and soaps to facilitate adolescents and young girls in need for their menstrual hygiene management.

 For more information: [sgorwanda.rw](http://sgorwanda.rw)



**K**epler is a non-governmental organization working in Rwanda since 2013 and in partnership with Southern New Hampshire University, Kepler combines in-person seminars, job readiness training, and coaching with Southern New Hampshire's internationally recognized online degrees to provide students in East Africa with access to an affordable degree through their innovative competency-based approach. Students gain skills that are necessary in today's market. In order to be able to apply at Kepler, applicants must meet basic requirements and these include successfully completing secondary school and passing the national exams, providing scores for the last two years of secondary school, being interested in the majors that are offered at Kepler, having English and Leadership skills, having the willingness and commitment to repay a student loan and having identification papers that are in order.

As an organization, there are different strategies you can implement to help girls in your program become eligible for admission at Kepler as well as other Higher Learning Institutions. You can provide additional trainings that aim at encouraging young girls to express their ideas, improve their writing and public speaking skills. Not limiting ourselves only to Kepler eligibility, I believe that in order to enable these young girls to be successful in general; it is vital that we help them discover their passions and goals in life. As a quick example, when I was finishing my secondary school, I did not know exactly what I wanted to do in life or the difference I could make in my community though I was performing well academically. This was mainly due to lack of guidance and necessary conversations to inspire me. Consequently, it was hard for me to connect well with where I wanted to be. This being said, it would be greatly helpful if **Generation Rise** engaged these students in thinking about whom they are and where they want to be in the future. Start thinking and planning in advance on what practices and strategies they can learn and use to get there.

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 For more information: [www.kepler.org](http://www.kepler.org)



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*Happy New year 2021*  
From Generation RISE team



