



SUPPORTING ADOLESCENTS TO COMPLETE SECONDARY (SACS) PROJECT

CARE International in Rwanda Program Strategy

CARE International in Rwanda's Women Economic Justice strategy/WEJ focuses on achieving gender justice for vulnerable women and girls, aged 10–59 years. By 2025, CARE will more than triple its reach, to directly support 1,500,000 women and girls to graduate out of poverty and live in dignity. The strategy is embedded in developing a framework of complementary intervention program models that help women and girls to position themselves in the green economy while enjoying equal rights, voice, leadership, and opportunities

SACS project Background

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world in the early months of 2020, the global population was affected differently. The threat to the health of communities was not the only consequence of the pandemic; other spectrums of life were equally paralyzed, including the education field. In Rwanda, the public health officials enforced a complete lockdown on the country's territory to safeguard the population from widespread contamination. Although the lockdown rightly protected school communities, among others- including teachers and students, the education sector still observed unintended consequences of the COVID-19 protection measures on students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In response to the diverse effects of COVID-19 on adolescents, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) and its development partners implemented several COVID-19 control measures and response interventions. The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) has developed and adapted the COVID-19 response plan titled "Keeping the Doors Open for Learning: Response Plan to COVID-19 Outbreak" with the overall goal of ensuring the continuity of learning for all students.

Through the Covid-19 crisis response campaign, CARE Rwanda secured resources from #StartSmall initiative to respond to Covid-19 effects in education by addressing critical educational needs and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, teachers, and families living in poverty. CARE Rwanda designed the 'Supporting adolescents to complete secondary' (SACS) project aimed at ensuring access to quality education for 71,994 children in 3 districts of the Southern Province (Ruhango, Nyanza, and Huye) and 3 Districts of the Western Province (Nyabihu, Ngororero, and Karongi), targeting particularly at-risk adolescent girls and boys to address dropout rates and support families' economic recovery during the pandemic times from January 2021 until June 2023.

SACS Project's expected outcomes

1. Increased and sustained retention rates of lower secondary students
2. Increased parents' resilience, accountability, and responsiveness in supporting children's education
3. Strengthened decentralized education government systems

Project Updates

SACS project is currently implemented in the 3 Districts of the Southern Province (Ruhango, Nyanza, and Huye) and 3 Districts of the Eastern Province (Nyabihu, Ngororero, and Karongi). The districts have been selected based on the consequences of covid-19 in terms of dropout rates, teen pregnancies, early marriages, and natural disasters such as heavy rains and flooding that affected the population. In addition, the selection was informed by where CARE has community-based structures to be leveraged during project implementation. As testified by Elie Mbanzabugabo, the Head of Groupe Scolaire Mugano,- a school with nursery, primary and secondary levels, COVID-19 had a tremendous impact on the school community. The pandemic affected the learning experience of both male and female students. Fortunately, the project was launched to enhance the school leadership's efforts to reduce the effects

on students' academic performance and capacity to continue attending school. The project's activities prevented school dropouts, improved attendance, and provided face masks and school supplies, which were indispensable for school retention. Other positive factors that motivated students to remain in school were access to school feeding sponsored by SACS as well as the club-based saving schemes, which offered an additional incentive to students to enjoy school. SACS' beneficiaries were also trained on sexual reproductive health, an essential component in youth programs as students are encouraged to take informed decisions that do not harm their future educational and career aspirations.

So far, the project has had a positive and significant impact on the community:



A SACS club during a saving activity at G.S. Ngoma in Karongi District.

A walk back to school

The project targets both in-school and out-of-school adolescent boys and girls. It was anticipated that 10% of the target youth, thus 7,000 vulnerable adolescent boys and girls were at risk or at the point of dropping out of school. When SACS was introduced to schools supported by CARE Rwanda, the pandemic had not allowed adolescent students to attend school regularly. The students' ability to retain knowledge and be alert in class had been reduced by long weeks of absence from school. As part of the program, SACS's peer mentors were present to accompany, coach, and guide the students as they were getting enrolled in the project's activities. They, furthermore, encouraged students about the importance of attending and completing school. Another critical pillar of the project was to listen to the students' struggles and provide psychosocial support to any student going through a challenging situation that could alter their abilities to remain in school. Peer mentors have also managed any cases of misbehavior resulting from students' spending a lot of time away from school as a result of the pandemic.



Verien MUKUZIMANA, a mentor at GS RUSUSA with members of a SACS saving club.



Students and mentor after SACS club activities at GS Rususa, Ngororero District



Jerome BIZUMUREMYI a mentor and teacher G.S. in a classroom activity.

Being a teen mother didn't stop me!



My name is Julienne Umufasha Abayo, I am 18 years old. I live in Karambi Village, Kabagari Sector, Ruhango District. I have one sibling and I study in Senior Two. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, I had a good life because I had not yet given birth. I was a normal student like others and it was as if my life stopped after Covid-19 hit. Schools were closed and I got pregnant. I wanted to return to school when classes resumed, but I was pregnant. I went back to school while I was expecting, I studied for a few days, and then I went to have my baby. I experienced major depression after finding out I was pregnant since I didn't think I would be able to go to school again. It was difficult for me to leave the infant with my mother while I was in class. I had to get the baby some food. She could drink, but she couldn't eat, so I had to find the cash to purchase her milk. During lunch, the school gave me permission to breastfeed at home. I continued to study, and I was informed that there was a project that had come to support us.

The project offered us materials including uniforms and food. Through the groups, I learned how to save money and would buy items that the baby needs as well as school materials. If this project hadn't supported me,

I couldn't have afforded school materials and be able to continue to study. Additionally, when I eat lunch at school, I have enough energy to study in the afternoon because you can't follow when you haven't eaten. The biggest contribution of SACS to my life is that when they give us money to buy school materials, I save a portion of it so I can use that money to plan for a bright life for me and my baby. I also use that money to buy small livestock, a future source of income and I save the rest of it through my saving group. My family has



Julienne UMUFASHA with her daughter at her family's home.

also been a great source of support. There are several young teenagers who abandoned school after giving birth and I am grateful my parents supported my desire to return to school. My aspiration is to study until I reach university and I dream to be a doctor.



Julienne UMUFASHA responding to a question in class during a French lesson.

New job discoveries

The adolescents who were on the verge of abandoning secondary school and therefore ending their education were given the support they needed through vocational training, and they were able to find a new career path through the TVET trainings they are currently attending. Beneficiaries of the project have renewed hope after learning a new technical skills that will secure them a job after graduation. One of the project's main outcomes has been to rekindle in young people the desire to fight for a better future, one filled with opportunities to work and live in dignity. This supports the goal of the Rwandan government to use TVET as a contributing factor to the creation of 1.5 million jobs for youth by 2024.



Students from HVP Gatagara enrolled in a TVet's beautification and hair styling class.



Students from HVP Gatagara attending a beautification and hair styling class with their teachers.



I have found my future in TVET



My name is Chancelline Niyikiza, I live in Akimitoni, Myuga Cell, Kabatwa Sector in Nyabihu District. I currently live with both of my parents, and I study in Level 3 of vocational training, majoring in Tailoring. I graduated from primary school with good grades and enrolled at G.S. Akimitoni for high school, where I studied from senior one to senior three. Even though studying was challenging, it was manageable. It seemed as though life had paused after Covid-19 and during the lockdown. At the time, I believed that was where school life would stop for me. I was just a girl about transitioning into adult life without the chance to complete my education. Luckily, I heard that there was vocational training I could attend and learn tailoring. I joined that class, hoping that I would be able to get educational materials. Because at that time, it was hard to get uniforms or notebooks. I then heard there was a new project and the school leaders suggested my name and I was selected as one of the beneficiaries. They offered me all the materials I needed. That made it easy for me to study, and the project's support helped my performance significantly. I picked up various sewing techniques as I practiced tailoring; even when someone

hires me to make cloth for them, I borrow a sewing machine from school and make that cloth after class, at home. I was able to learn how to sew thanks to the project at a time when I could quit school. We do have savings clubs, and I have acquired some money-saving techniques. We save 50 Frw each day at my club, Tugirumurava (Let us be courageous). My goal is to continue sewing for clients after I graduate and to have earned enough money to buy my own sewing machine.



Chancelline Niyikiza in her sewing workshop, where she creates all of her design concepts.

My dream is to own a successful tailoring shop. The fact that the project was in this location and that I was able to study, greatly benefited me. I couldn't have purchased school books and other materials if the project hadn't invested in my education. There are many street kids out there who did not get a chance to study and who now perform undignified jobs. But once I finish school, I'll be able to work thanks to my abilities, amassed savings, and the sewing machine. The knowledge package I gained has set me up to succeed in anything I set my mind to.



Some of Chancelline's amazing African kitenge design concepts that are ready to sell on the market.

Saving - a skill for life

Students enrolled in the project were encouraged to join saving groups where they learn how to nurture a saving habit. This practice has allowed them to collect a modest amount of money that allows them to buy essential items high-school students need to attend school. They were taught how to start small projects and generate revenue from their savings. They also learned how to avoid wasting money and use it towards their saving contribution. The saving techniques they are learning are not just supporting their current academic activities, they are equally setting them up for a culture of financial self-reliance in the future.



Students at G.S Mugano in SACS saving club's activity with their mentor



Daniel IRASUBIZA Posing with his chickens, which he purchased from the club with his savings; some of them are laying eggs.



Sylvérien SHIMWA He started with one chicken at home and now has seven.



Worries are behind me!



My name is Eric Nshimiyimana, and I am 17 years old. I live with my parents and 6 siblings. I live in Kanyinya Cell, Maraba sector, Huye District. I study at G. S. St Rita Nyarunyinya in Senior 3. Prior to Covid-19 and my participation in the SACS project, I was unable to purchase any school supplies or shoes. Due to a lack of those materials, I used to frequently miss school. However, after saving, I was able to acquire all those items and I started buying

livestock. But at the beginning of the project, I faced a few challenges as I wasn't able to have money to save and didn't understand very well what the project was about. I did, however, succeed in starting my investment. I added another 1,000 Frw I had at home to the 2,000 Frw I had saved at that point in order to purchase a rabbit. She gave birth to seven kittens, each of which I sold for \$1,000. I spent that money on shoes and school supplies totaling 3,000 Frw and 2,000 Frw, respectively. I used the extra amount I kept then to buy chickens, that are now worth 15,000 Frw. When we share our savings again, I plan to buy a pig.

In the past, you would catch me at school with torn-out shoes and without the necessary supplies because my parents or I lacked the money to buy them. It used to have an impact on my academic achievement. Things have changed, I can now resolve my problems. Even on days when I can't, I borrow from my peers or my parents. Coronavirus did affect my studies. I was busy with domestic chores during the pandemic and couldn't revise my notes. When classes resumed, I was able to go back to school and joined the project. What we learn at SACS is extremely beneficial for school or other aspects of life outside of academics. For instance, we study sexual and reproductive health. We learn how to behave, and we get the opportunity for exchanging ideas between boys and girls.

As we look forward...

The students' behaviors are changing, their motivation to remain in school is increasing, and other peers who are not yet part of the project wish to participate in the project's activities as they observe the benefits of the project on their friends. Beyond supporting the education of these students, the project is equipping them with skills that will be impactful for the rest of their lives. They are planning personal projects that go beyond school life. Through the project activities, students enrolled in SACS are not only striving to remain in school, they are preparing themselves for a future they own.



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