



Across the world, growing numbers of youth live disconnected from most of society, struggling to survive and make a better future. They are vulnerable to poverty, illness, and exploitation. Searching for security, they undertake dangerous journeys as migrants. They become targets for extremist and criminal organizations. Their struggles grow from deep needs for personal connection, community, and hope.

In Rwanda, a team of young leaders has responded by empowering vulnerable youth in an inclusive, engaged, and entrepreneurial community. Growing up witnessing genocide, these young leaders know the consequences of losing connection and being abandoned by the world. They are showing us a way to build a more hopeful future for all:

“Rungano-Ndota” Initiative: A “Dream Generation” in Rwanda

A model to empower vulnerable youth across Rwanda – and beyond!



“I am Affisa Mukanyandwi, 22 years old. I dropped out in high school due to lacking school fees. My family was poor and life became difficult. I was hopeless and asking myself how can I go back to school. It seemed like dreams. I got a chance to come in Rungano-Ndota and my life changed positively. I learned about love, courage, persistence, thinking big, setting goals and working hard for a target. I learned gender roles, where male and female are complementary in achieving any goal, the development of a country or community. I started having hope for a future. I got to go to vocational school and learned hairdressing with 8 Rungano-Ndota youth. I am doing a professional internship now. I learned entrepreneurship, how to do a business plan and the culture of saving and teamwork. We are working on a business plan for a salon that will help me to get income that will allow me to satisfy my needs, help my mother, and pay for my child’s school. Now my child will not struggle for education like me. I thank Rungano-Ndota for all it did for me and my community!”

Outcomes

Youth create an inclusive, empowering community where they develop leadership skills, learn to lead healthy lifestyles, and practice entrepreneurship. With support from diverse peers, youth work together to start businesses, earn income, and shape plans for their futures. Their success inspires others and strengthens the local community and the nation as a whole.

Our Program

Mentoring by “Near Peer” Leadership Team: Home Visits; Individual Mentoring; Group Mentoring

Experiential Leadership Development: 16 Rungano Days a year - some with field trips or service projects – on topics such as community development, entrepreneurship, public speaking, networking, gender and faith diversity, healthy lifestyles, environmental protection, and balancing development & cultural traditions; Leadership Exchange with delegates from USA

Community Service: Projects like building toilets or assisting genocide survivors; “Umuganda” service with local officials

Income and Livelihoods: Financial Savings Circles; Business Plan Bootcamps; Cooperative Businesses; Vocational School Scholarships; Individual Entrepreneurship; Startup Grants for Cooperatives; Loan Fund For Individuals

Shared Commitment: Lifetime membership in Rungano-Ndota; Rungano businesses give 5% of profits back to the Initiative

Partnerships Make It Possible

- ❖ **The Leadership Team** from the community founded the Initiative and operates it as staff and volunteers.
- ❖ **Benimpuhwe (“Compassion”) Organization**, a Rwandan NGO empowering women and youth for more than three decades, has become the Initiative’s home and provides administration, grantwriting, advocacy, and guidance.
- ❖ **National Youth Council and Local Officials in Ruhango District** identify vulnerable youth to participate in the Initiative and provide space for program activities at the town’s Youth Friendly Center.
- ❖ **Rwanda Youth Partnership** – works with Rungano-Ndota to provide technical assistance, engage individual donor support, and bring delegates for the annual Leadership Exchange program.

Timeline of Growth

July 2016 – The Leadership Team comes together and begins developing the concept of Rungano-Ndota.

January 2017 – Rungano-Ndota launches in Ruhango District with 70 Christian and Muslim youth, plus the Honey Cooperative.

March 2017 – Inspired by the program, Rungano youth form financial savings circles to start cooperative businesses.

April 2017 – Rungano youth honor and support genocide survivors with their first community service during memorial times.

June 2017 – Staff and Leadership Team members start mentoring home visits to Rungano youth and their families.

August 2017 – The Cassava Coop earns start-up funding to add to their savings. They rent land and begin to operate.

November 2017 – 30 more vulnerable youth are selected to join Rungano-Ndota, bringing membership to 100.

December 2017 – The first group mentoring session meets to focus on female youth’s concerns about human trafficking.

The National Youth Council of the Rwandan government recognizes Rungano-Ndota as it awards Ruhango District #1 out of 30 youth centers across the country, for its contributions to economic opportunity, cultural cohesion, and civic engagement!

January 2018 – A team of 8 youth start at a one-year trade school in hairdressing. Rungano-Ndota helps them build a business plan to open a salon for men and women of all faiths – starting as a “pop up” salon for their friends after program days.

July 2018 – Leadership Exchange Delegation visits from the US; Delegates inspire 5-day Business Plan Bootcamp.

September 2018 – The Corn Coop earns start-up funding from a donor and then 12.5 acres rent-free from local officials.

2019 – Fundraising campaign for expansion to neighboring Nyanza and Muhanga Districts in 2020 - and beyond in 2021!