

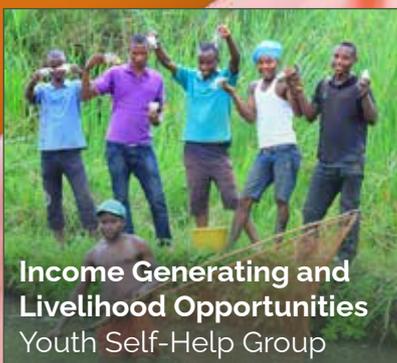
Building Bridges in Burundi

to mitigate the root causes
of conflict and instability

“ I couldn't stand
to be near my
sister-in-law
after the death of my
husband.

My children were
forbidden from going
to her home.

Now, **we share food**
from the same pot.

”

Stories of change

Broken trust, lack of economic opportunities, polarization, unhealed trauma and a justice system deeply affected by reprisals, corruption and civil war. This is the challenging context faced by young Burundians looking for a livelihood, a future. The Building Bridges in Burundi (BBB) programme has offered these young people a multidimensional approach to overcoming those barriers. This changed the life of Juba and Marie Chantal, both BBB participants.

Marie Chantal:

“Healing the heart without getting tired”

Marie Chantal lives in Murwi municipality, in Burundi. She has to support her family with the crops she grows. But after every harvest, her husband claimed the earnings and spent the money on alcohol. Her children didn't go to school. Marie Chantal could just manage to make ends meet by doing many other chores. “My husband and I argued a lot. My children and I regularly spent the night outside, on an empty stomach.”



From bad to worse

Her husband became more aggressive every harvest time. Until things got so out of hand that others advised her to file a complaint with the court. “I was very reluctant to do this,” admits Marie Chantal, “after all, he is my husband.” One of her neighbours benefitted from the BBB programme and is now a trained mediator. He advised Marie Chantal to try to settle the dispute by engaging mediators.

A long conversation

Together with the chief of the village, two mediators talked to Marie Chantal and her husband. After long conversations, her husband realized that he is obliged to support his family, but his behaviour did not fulfil that obligation. He confessed that he is to blame for the difficult living conditions of the family and promises improvement. Things have improved since then. Marie Chantal is allowed to use the earnings from the harvest for the family. Her children go to school. “When I run into someone with similar problems, I recommend not going to court, but confiding in mediators,” says Marie Chantal. “They can heal your heart without getting tired.”

In Burundi, the administration of justice is slow and corrupt. Most Burundians can't afford to bring their dispute to court. A mediator, on the other hand, immediately intervenes in small-scale conflicts. Together a solution is sought. The result? A restored relationship - instead of a fractured one with a winner and a loser.

Juba:

“I have overcome my past wounds”



“My father was kidnapped and died when I was 8 years old. My mother had no job and could not take care of a family of six children. This bad situation pushed me to tell myself that if my father was still alive, this would not have happened. Thus the hatred against the other ethnic group increased further to the point of wanting to take revenge. Then, through the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services (THARS) mission, I was introduced to the BBB programme. The listening, discussion and reconciliation sessions positively changed my life and vision.”

“United, we are the living force of our country.”

“This kind of training has been beneficial for me. I have overcome my past wounds and together with others, even young people from different ethnic groups than mine, we are doing common projects and focusing our vision on a better tomorrow. We were also made aware of integrating savings and loan associations. Today, I have my own vegetable patch and I do my own soap business. This programme proves that together we can build something solid. United, we are the living force for the development of the country.”

BBB programme duration:

December 2016 – November 2021

BBB programme locations:

15 communes in 6 provinces:
Cibitoke, Bujumbura, Makamba,
Rutana, Kirundo



“Before BBB came, I was living on a day to day basis, and I did not think I could have hope for a better future. Now, with the trainings received and the implementation and taking actions in different business activities, I later invested in livestock, in land and I am hopeful I will still invest and grow.”

- Female BBB participant



“I am no longer a problem in my family.

I got trained in non-violent communication. I brought clean water to my community. Now I am a mediator and a supporting husband.”

- Male BBB participant

“I thought I was the only one with a broken heart, until I met Immelde from the BBB programme. She became a sister I didn't have before. I got healed and now, I own a small cafeteria.”

- Female BBB participant

“ I couldn't pass near the road where my family got killed. I was considered as a fool. After several consultations, I became more sociable and open. I now volunteer at Ecofo Nyange 1, as a teacher in Primary 5.

- Male BBB participant

“ I was a worthless man who abused his wife, who spent all the family's money on alcohol. But today I'm a better man. We have formed two groups; that of adults and young people. We started saving and the young people made plans. Now they buy crops and fruits and sell them on the market. They save the profit.

- Male BBB participant



“Now we are living in peace with each other, we belong to different structures, but we learn from each other.”

- Male BBB participant



Youth present a play social skills and conflict resolving.

The Building Bridges in Burundi (BBB) programme is developed to mitigate the root causes of conflict and instability in Burundi. The programme aimed at transforming the lives of young men and women between 15 and 25 years, by giving them the means to become responsible and resilient citizens. The three result areas of the BBB programme are 'Income Generating and Livelihood Opportunities', 'Functioning Rule of Law', and 'Human Security'. Arts, sports and music were used to help youth to reflect on these issues.

Impact and Results



Building Bridges in Burundi

The BBB programme reached **10,511 women and 7,925 men** in **15 communities** in **six provinces** between 2017-2021. As a result, **18,436** adults and youth joined in community structures and individual focal points to address root causes of conflict and fragility in Burundi.



91.3% BENEFICIARIES report that **justice institutions have settled their disputes**



84% BENEFICIARIES report that the **level of violent conflict reduced**



99% BENEFICIARIES report **growth within their business activities**

Outcome 1: Youth from diverse political and ethnic backgrounds have improved social and economic resilience



68%
BENEFICIARIES report that their personal **grievances regarding income and livelihoods have reduced**



INCOME OF YOUTH has increased from **BIF 30,650** at the end of 2018 to **BIF 181,548** at the end of 2021



BENEFICIARIES report a **reduction of negative socio-economic interactions** across intrasocietal divides

The BBB programme has created **894 Self-Help-Groups and 99 Cluster Level Associations**, **1,936 youth and women** successfully completed technical vocational training (TVET)

Outcome 2: Increased social cohesion and capacity to mitigate and address conflicts among youth and communities from diverse political and ethnic backgrounds



86%
BENEFICIARIES report they **feel more secure** at night in the area they live in

64%
CONFLICTS are **addressed and resolved by community structures**

42%
BENEFICIARIES report **trust and cooperation within the community**

The BBB programme has trained **154 Psycho-Social Assistants (APS)**

Outcome 3: Local administrative authorities, civil society, and citizens live and witness an improved social contract through active participation and tangible downward accountability



54%
CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS report they have the **capacity to influence human security authorities**

73%
BENEFICIARIES report **meaningful participation in government consultation to respond to their needs**

In 2020, **216 LCGGs** have raised awareness among **58,307 people** including 19,899 men, 21,894 women, 9,048 boys and 7,466 girls

Outcome 4: Burundians extensively make use of informal justice systems at the local level and take part in transitional justice



93% BENEFICIARIES have **confidence in transitional justice mechanisms**



92% BENEFICIARIES have **confidence in communities to address injustices**



BENEFICIARIES have access to **justice institutions to resolve their disputes**

In 2020, **21,067 people** were reached through **sensitization on transitional justice sessions**



11 DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS were involved in **inter-generational dialogues** to support communities to reconcile among themselves

The BBB programme has trained **130 Mediators, 130 Paralegals, 38 Transitional Justice Focal Points, and 300 Local Actors for Community Reconciliation,**

Valuable lessons learned

In Burundi's judicial context, with often an unhealed past, the BBB programme was able to identify some solid foundations suitable for building bridges. Despite fragile circumstances, these can serve as starting points for youth and community empowerment, both in Burundi and abroad. The BBB programme has delivered valuable lessons:

1

Mixed youth groups are bridge builders par excellence

BBB established Self-Help Groups as a structure for training, savings and loans know-how and joint income generation. Where possible, the groups were composed of youth from various backgrounds.

2

Informal justice systems and processes have the potential to foster the rule of law

The BBB programme supported various traditional bottom-up mechanisms to play a role in conflict resolution. Independent research conducted in 2021 showed these informal justice systems and processes make a significant contribution towards restoring the rule of law.

3

Putting learning above logframe opens ways for meaningful adaptation

Adaptive programming, which responds to a changing context and lessons learned, has allowed the programme to be highly relevant and to capitalize new insights. For example, by adding more trauma healing interventions.

4

A peaceful future can only be built upon a healed past

BBB linked community members to trauma healing and reconciliation services (THARS), helping youngsters and communities to deal with the legacies of a violent past. Throughout the programme, it clearly showed that psychosocial care and peacebuilding are interconnected.

5

Patience in participatory approaches pays off

Improving the social contract between local authorities and civil society has been another focal area. In all, nine different stakeholders were involved in intergenerational dialogues. This long-haul commitment to bottom-up mobilization was definitely rewarded by the willingness and confidence of the participants.

Youth Self-Help Groups

A young man proudly shows the products of the fish pond maintained by his youth group. With the BBB programme, youth developed all kinds of economic activities such as fish farming, beekeeping, sewing, and many more. The youth Self-Help Groups have a twofold effect: it helps youth to earn an income and at the same time breaks down walls of distrust between young people from various backgrounds.



Back to school thanks to mediation

"During the crisis in Burundi in 2015, I fled to Tanzania with eight schoolmates. When things got quiet, we returned home and wanted to go back to school. The directors were afraid of us, thinking we were rebels. We tried several times but were refused over and over again. We started on losing hope. Everyone seems to turn their back on us, except for the members of the Local Committee for Good Governance (LCGG). When they heard about our story, they helped us by convincing the directors to take us back to school. Now we can finish our education and build our future."

- Fulgence from Rutana (light blue shirt).



The BBB Consortium

The BBB consortium comprising Help a Child (lead), American Friends Service Committee, Cord and Stichting CMC Mensen met een Missie, and nine implementing organizations successfully achieved the outcomes of the programme.



For more information, go to www.helpachild.org/BBB

Help a Child

As a Christian non-profit organization Help a Child wants every child – regardless of their social, political, religious, ethnic or economic background – to have a life in dignity, with love and with a promising future. Help a Child provides a future for children in need, their family and their entire community.

"We are proud of the Self-Help Group approach, as this has been an entry point for the BBB programme to tackle root causes of conflicts including intergenerational conflicts. It promoted tolerance among youth from different ethnic, political, social, and religious backgrounds. Youth acquired new skills that enabled them to create livelihood opportunities and engage in relationships with key stakeholders in the community. We thank all youth involved as they chose to fully participate in security meetings, conflict mediation, and management meetings.

In addition, the BBB left behind community mediators and paralegals whose work is to support vulnerable community members to access informal and formal justice and to mend the broken social contract between authorities and communities."



Clement Nkubizi, Country Director Help a Child Burundi:
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The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light of each person, AFSC works with communities and partners worldwide to challenge unjust systems and promote lasting peace.

"The community reconciliation in this programme touched us, because it has a big impact on the future of the country. The stories parents are passing on to their children determine how they will continue to live in the painful experience of the country. Children who have been fed with divisive and murderous ideas become the perpetrators of violence in the future. To break the cycle of violence, it is important that parents reconcile and learn to live positively with the trauma caused by the loss of their loved ones. This change influences the message that will be transmitted to their children.

We had the opportunity to follow this change in the lives of the BBB participants with limited resources and sometimes with a psychological baggage that hinders their well-being. It gave us more energy to work hard for more impact. And we would like to encourage all BBB participants: "Keep working hard to maintain the change the BBB programme has brought to your life."



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Cord

Cord is an international charity that works with people in highly sensitive and oppressive contexts to transform dysfunctional relationships into those that create peaceful and inclusive societies. Inspired by the Christian faith, our vision is a world where all people live in the fullness of peace (shalom), having the freedom to flourish and live free from fear.

"We celebrate the successes achieved by young people from despairing contexts, that have believed in themselves and undertaken initiatives, creating families and are now showing they have confidence in the future. For example, when we started BBB in Bujumbura Province, we encountered two groups of young people from different ethnic group and political affiliation. They refused to work together, due to their differences. After sensitization sessions by the BBB programme, areas of mistrust and fear have been alleviated and they came together, undertook initiatives and created a multiplier effect within the community to scale-up social cohesion in their environment. This story really touched us.

We thank all BBB participants, for their dedication and trust in taking a positive perspective despite the diversities and barriers that initially existed. The achievements that BBB has realized could not have become a reality without this attitude!"



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Mensen met een Missie

Mensen met een Missie is a Netherlands-based organization for international cooperation. We are committed to changing beliefs that lead to discrimination, exclusion and violence across the globe. To overcome these beliefs, we facilitate and inspire dialogue, provide a platform for positive role models, make people aware of the other side of the story and, of course, support victims of violence.

"We celebrate the dialogue in the BBB program. Most strategies included bringing opposite sides together around the table: whether it was bringing together conflicting parties through the intervention of mediators; or local authorities and local communities through Local Committees for Good Governance. This shows that opening up spaces for dialogue, interaction and cooperation works. That is a hopeful message!

In the entire country the influence of the ruling political party is very strong. Yet, change was possible. Activities to promote good governance worked best where there were courageous community leaders and parish priests, that had a certain authority, charisma, and a strong commitment. They worked tirelessly to ensure a culture of fairness, justice and promote people's voices, in particular those of women. In those cases, a real impact was felt. So, we would like to say to all BBB-participants: 'Courageous people really matter!'"



Frans Davelaar, Head of the programmes department:

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“I learned that to live better,
we should tell the truth
and dare to ask forgiveness.
[...] I understood that I could not continue
to carry the load, that I might foster peace with my
neighbours and to arrive at this stage
I must acknowledge my errors.”

“Today, peace and security reign in our colline.
Young people from different political parties
coexist peacefully and take care of
their country activities and their self-help groups.”

“I am closer to others and my self-esteem has increased.”

The BBB Consortium, comprising Help a Child (lead), American Friends Service Committee, Cord and Stichting CMC Mensen met een Missie as well as nine implementing partners.



**American Friends
Service Committee**

Cord



In cooperation with:

ALM, Biraturaba, CEJP, Centre Ubuntu, Fecabu, Geste Humanitaire, Help Channel, Kaz'ozah, and THARS.

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
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