

Hope from the Fields

A bi-monthly Ikirezi Newsletter

The story of Alphonsine

Alphonsine Mukanziza is in her early sixties. Over two decades ago, she moved to Gahara from the Southern part of Rwanda running away from an abusive husband who used to beat her up badly especially when he was drunk. Alphonsine was welcomed by a relative who was living in Gahara near where Ikirezi's farm is located. A few months after her arrival in this new countryside she got remarried to a man who had just lost his wife. The man was raising two children from his previous marriage and with Alphonsine they got three children but 2 of them died. The husband became chronically ill and his family became extremely poor and for a long time Alphonsine had to "work for food": to be paid the meal of the day; a practice locally known as "guca inshuro", that signifies a level of poverty that deprives oneself of his/her dignity. Alphonsine, however, didn't lose hope; she kept fighting on for the survival of her family.

When Ikirezi started its activities in Gahara in 2007, Mukanziza was among the first people who came to work on Ikirezi's farm. She quickly learned how to grow geranium, a new and very demanding crop and her hard work was rewarded by a regular generous wage Ikirezi pays to his field workers. As new techniques of geranium farming were being demonstrated by Ikirezi technical team, she learned the techniques and was soon among the best farmers. As I was talking to her this month she was among the five farmers Ikirezi pay the top wage of about \$ 1.70/day.

Asked about what was the most valuable achievement she realized while working for Ikirezi; without hesitation, Alphonsine talked about the decent house she built for her family, thanks to the monthly wages she receives from Ikirezi.

In the countryside, a strong house is not only a shelter but it's also a statement of status. She now has plenty of food for herself and her family; she pays herself the annual health insurance for the entire family and pays labor to work on her own fields, some of which she bought from her earning from Ikirezi.



She supported her step children and her own son to go to school. Alphonsine is now a very secure, confident woman, who can't tolerate to see her field invaded by weeds. For her, to have a well kept geranium or rosemary field is a must, and an acknowledgement of what Ikirezi means for her.

Buying essential oils from Ikirezi will put more poor women like Alphonsine to work and help them live again.

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