



A
SSIST **a.s.b.l.**

Children in Especially difficult Circumstances

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INTRODUCTION BOOKLET

for

ASSIST [a.s.b.l](http://assist.org)

Plan for Improving the Situation of Rwandan Children in Difficult Circumstances

**Reviewed by Evariste Karangwa
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Introduction of the Booklet

This booklet has been prepared to highlight the origin, programs and activities of ASSIST a.s.b.l. , a Rwandan NGO, restricting its mission and services to young Rwandan in difficult circumstances, notably the most disadvantaged orphans and the disabled.

The booklet explains the two important aspects to which ASSIST owes its origin: The basic needs and vulnerability of many young Rwandans following the 1994 genocide, and the inadequacy of services to young vulnerable people offered by a few better funded international NGOs.

ASSIST a.s.b.l. unlike many others, was a concept of orphans who have gone through the nasty experiences of vulnerability, and was launched by them with the moral support of those who urge for improved services. The booklet shows that ASSIST does not aim at any other gains, but on services valued best by the target groups who are also its members.

The booklet shows how ASSIST a.s.b.l. started with lots of difficulties, mainly because it lacked its own support and the know how, but with 5 years experiences now, its orientations are better focused and its leadership more confident.

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Plan for Improving the Situation of Rwandan Children in Difficult Circumstances

Part I:

Introduction

ASSIST a.s.b.l. is a non-profit making organisation founded by four Rwandans who had been involved in various social services concerning vulnerable children's welfare since 1994. The names of these four founders are: NTAGOZERA Thomas; MUSABYIMANA Hilary; SHAMAKOKERA T. Emmanuel and KARANGWA Evariste

Background

ASSIST was founded in July 1999 as a result of a generalised outcry of many young Rwandans (especially girls heading families), in the aftermath of the genocide war of 1994 and the subsequent economic situation. Its major tasks was to respond effectively to the needs of these young people, who had fallen victims of a situation that was not of their own making.

ASSIST programs involves (in general terms), attending to their needs by supporting and promoting their plans and aspirations, advising and counselling,. Within the background of fostering mutual respect and support, ASSSIST raises an awareness of the dangers of the prevalent hazards that the Rwandan youth face, with special consideration of the vulnerability of unsupported youth vis a vis the H I V/ AIDS pandemic.

ASSIST responds to the current Rwandan soci - economical situations that directly or indirectly affects the Rwandan youth. It takes into consideration the big number of young Rwandans who are deprived of opportunities to acquire school based skills because they are orphans, have profound or mild disabilities, and end up as dependants to distant relatives, or more often than not, are exploited in different ways by older people.

Morbidity and disability are characteristics of many Rwandans in deprived communities in which these young people live, where the level of health conditions and nutrition are low. These characteristics are apparently the causes and the consequences of poverty in the communities and is therefore the major origin of their difficulties. ASSIST has been prompted by over 10% - 12% of Rwandans who have disabilities (The Rwandan Republic, World Bank project, 1998, p.40-41); and over 90 % of its population that still live in poor rural areas and surviving on subsistence agriculture. This situation has given rise to over 65% of them who still live below the poverty line, and the Poor Rwandan economy that still has to service over 65% of its GNP that represents external debts (Rwanda E F A Plan: Version 021218, p. 9).

ASSIST is specifically concerned with the Plight of Rwandan Orphans. It was actually conceived, launched and remains the only Rwandan NGO largely run by orphans despite

their numerous limitations. Though it is estimated that the 1994 genocide war could have left over 400 000 orphans and over 190 000 of them still live in child run homes; HIV/ AIDS continues to claim victims among these young vulnerable people, as it continues to create even more orphans with the death of parents. The Rwanda HIV/AIDS prevalence is currently estimated at 11.2%, compared to 1.3% in 1986 (Programme Nationale de Reduction de pauvreté 2002, P. 25).

ASSIST activities have also been prompted by a high number of young people who are unschooled. Though about 72.2 % of young people account for the national primary school enrolment, over 27.8% (in 2000) do not go to school and the rate of dropping out at primary school age is still rising (over 17.5% in 2001, according to Rwanda E F A Plan 2002, p. 18). Whereas about 64.8 % of pupils are enrolled at the right age of Primary school level, only 16.2 % of the girls reach primary 6, as compared to 19.4% of the boys (Education for all Action plan for Rwanda, 2002, p. 15). Though Handicap International had put the number of Rwandans with Disabilities to about 600 000 in 1995, the statistics concerning the disabled youth are not yet available and there are no provisions for them in government aided educational institutions. Only about 337 lucky young people go to special schools supported by missionaries.

Concerned that the youth are the future of Rwanda, and an alarming number are endangered, ASSIST is already working directly or indirectly with the following targeted categories of youth:

- ❑ Children who are unsupported (Orphans, especially those who lack the basic needs and are in charge of homes)
- ❑ Street Children locally known as “Mayibobo”. (Resulting from genocide of 1994, rural poverty push factors as well as HIV/AIDS)
- ❑ Children with disabilities and other Special Educational Needs

Objectives of the Organisation

ASSIST a.s.b.l. was started in order to help the young Rwandans in difficult circumstances to address numerous problems they face, owing to the situations seen above, and the following are some of its objectives.

- ❖ Help young people in difficulties due to oppression and discriminatory experiences, victims of poverty and deprivation, as well as those who are unsupported notably orphans in difficulties to access skills and conditions of life and hope
- ❖ To instil self confidence and self reliance in the young vulnerable people, and awaken in them a spirit of self and community development
- ❖ Provide health education services, guidance and counselling services to all the beneficiaries of ASSIST, with specific attention to those who are at risk or experienced sexual and other traumatising abuses, as well as those who witnessed violence and conflicts, with specific attention to the demobilised young soldiers (Kadogos)

- ❖ Help young people with disabilities develop daily living skills and basic technology skills that would lead them towards social and functional integration (with sensitiveness to the most vulnerable especially girls)

The Organisation's Mission

The mission of ASSIST a.s.b.l is mainly to rejuvenate self - confidence in the vulnerable, needy young people living in difficult situation. This involves the following:

- The targeted group is taught basic and life skills; help them to acquire team work and organisational skills, so that they team up into strong and competitive income generating ventures. This includes cleaning services tailoring and others mentioned below in part two.
- Experience and analysis made by ASSIST has always demonstrated that the majority (over 95%) of its beneficiaries do suffer from various degrees of psychological trauma, depending on the experiences they have gone through. Hence guidance and counselling is one of its major activity to which all its young active members are beneficiaries, with the objectives of building their self confidence and harmonious relationship with one another.
- ASSIST is also committed to promotion of children's rights. A lot is taught to the beneficiaries in line with basic rights (rights to education for all, to life and health, to shelter and protection etc.....)
- ASSIST is also involved in advocacy for the vulnerable and marginalised young people. It works closely with other NGOs, Social Ministries and other government organs and individuals to advocate for the rights and against the plights of the young people.
- ASSIST instils a sense of unity and solidarity in her beneficiaries. It discourages the sectarian and ethnic tendencies that had characterised the Rwandan society, and builds a spirit of mutual benefits and support, that is also characteristic of the Rwandan youth peer culture, as a way forward towards self confidence and meaningful success.

Main target groups

(i) Returnee orphans:

There has always been in Rwanda since 1994, a large group of young people who had been orphaned or lost support during their period in exile due to wars in D. R. Congo since 1994 and in Uganda since 1980s. These have always found themselves back into their country with others, but their vulnerability was little known. They lack shelter, food, education and other basic needs. In addition, they have little knowledge of the new environment, culture and the local language ("Kinyarwanda"). They are usually characterised by a state of confusion, fear, distress and behavioural difficulties. They are usually victims of exploitation, poor guidance by adults and other dangers.

(ii) **Young survivors of the 1994 Genocide:**

Most of these lost their parents, brothers, sisters and other close relatives in 1994. They support their young siblings who survived genocide, some of whom have disabilities. They usually lack the interest in education due to general deprivation, but more so because they have lost the motivation and hope. They lack all the basic needs such as shelter, correct feeding, clothing, health services etc.... Due to lack of proper parental support and emotional difficulties, they easily fall victims of street life, sexual and drug abuses and other associated behavioural or social evils.

(iii) **Young people victims of rural ignorance and poverty Push factors**

The Rwandan rural families and deprived communities in general are characterised by ignorance and poverty. This usually leads to polygamy, domestic conflicts and divorce; malnutrition and poor health, giving rise to low motivation and under achievement in school age children. The common results are the children who run out of their homes at young age to look for jobs in urban centres like Kigali and Butare as house workers; or as cheap labour in tea and sugar plantations; they are usually prey to early marriages, sexual and drug abuses; dangerous gangs at young age etc...

(iv) **Young people with disabilities**

ASSIST is also aware that all the categorised vulnerable groups mentioned above are characterised by young people with disabilities owing to the experiences they have gone through. They usually have physical, sensory or emotional and social impairments. ASSIST target them specifically, because they are among the Young Rwandan who are most marginalized and least provided for by the society.

N.B. It is expected through its mission that ASSIST targets the most endangered of the young people, especially those who are least attended to by other N G Os. In that way it will not have only accomplished its mission, but it will have also set a challenge to the Rwandan society and government organs that would have the obligation to support their cause.

Part two

Current Activities of ASSIST a.s.b.l

The ASSIST activities are valued in form of projects. This is because it owes its foundation on the basis of individual or collective initiative of members, which gave rise to activities, that are proposed or are on going. Among the activities that were proposed include:

- (i) Creation of employment opportunities for child headed families notably in cleaning and house keeping projects.
- (ii) Skills training in :

- ❑ Tailoring
- ❑ Catering
- ❑ Information technology
- ❑ Carpentry
- ❑ Mechanics
- ❑ Shoe making
- ❑ Art and Design
- ❑ Electro-mechanics

- (iii) Micro- finance projects
- (iv) Guidance and Counselling
- (v) Children rights program (advocacy)
- (vi) Cultural troupe (music, dance and drama)
- (vii) Peace building and conflict resolution
- (viii) Medical care
- (ix) Rehabilitation and training of young people with disabilities.

Initial activities

Cleaning services project

The cleaning services project was given the initial priority due to its positive problem solving influence among the children headed families. ASSIST signs cleaning services contracts on behalf of the children on renewable terms. The financial incomes made monthly is managed by them and caters cater for the needs of their families and the day to day running of the project.

This service involves both indoors and out door cleaning services. It builds a spirit of sharing and unity, which is instilled in them through counselling services. It develops the sense of mutual understanding and support among the young people irrespective of their individual differences. They feel empowered with self confidence and hope for a better future.

Contribution and organisation

ASSIST expects contribution from its members who are involved in various activities. It has so far registered 275 members and 100 young people heading families who are already actively involved in the cleaning service project, which offers services to the following places:

- (i) ORINFOR (Radio Rwanda, Television & Imvaho) in Kigali
- (ii) PRIME MINISTERS' OFFICE at Kimihurura
- (iii) NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OFFICES at Kimihurura
- (iv) IMMIGRATION & EMIGRATION OFFICES at Kimihurura
- (v) HEALTH UNLIMITED (URUNANA – BBC)

(vi) INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL TRIBUNAL FOR RWANDA (ICTR) the Kigali office in Remera

(vii) THE NATIONAL POST OFFICE at Kimihurura in Kigali

It is through the success of the cleaning services project that, not only do members benefit, but also are able through their contributions to generate renewed impetus within ASSIST which gave birth to a more focused orientation of its activities.

Part three Organisation and decision making processes

Organisation Structure

ASSIST a.s.b.l is composed of 275 members, categorised as follows:-

- ❑ 4 founder members;
- ❑ 8 executive members;
- ❑ 261 ordinary members and
- ❑ 2 honorary members.

The following are the major components of ASSIST organisation:

a) General Assembly:

It is composed of all members of ASSIST and are categorised into three:

- Founder members (Initiators)
- Ordinary members (elected to represent the ordinary members)
- Honorary members

The General assembly is the supreme level in which important decisions are made that would determine the activities and orientations of ASSIST a s b l.

b) Executive Committee:

It acts as a governing board of the organisation

This body plans and controls all the activities of the organisation

It also takes decisions of the organisation on behalf of the General Assembly

It implements all the decisions made by the general assembly and furnish reports promptly

Their roles and terms of service are determined by the general assembly

Executive committee is composed of 6 members as seen below:

- 1) NTAGOZERA Thomas: Chairman of the organisation

- 2) UWIMANA Aline: V/chairman
- 3) MUSABYIMANA Hilary: General Secretary, Legal Representative
- 4) SHAMAKOKERA T. Emmanuel: General Treasurer, Vice Legal Representative
- 5) MUJAWAMARIYA Jeannette: Advisor
- 6) RUKUNDO Jean de Dieu: Inspector

c) Management Committee:

This organ is charged with the responsibility of implementing what has been planned by the executive committee, as approved by the General Assembly

It directs the organisation's activities and protects the interests of the organisation in all its day to day operations.

It is composed of qualified staff in their respective fields of responsibilities

(a) Meetings

- The General Assembly meeting takes place once a year as indicated in the organisation structure
- The Executive Committee meets once every two months, except for some cases of emergency
- The Management Committee meeting occurs once a week

(b) Decision Making Process

All the decisions are programmed and planned by the Executive Committee, but these are subject to the review and approval by the General Assembly which is the supreme decision making level

(c) Criteria for election

The election for representation in the executive committee is based on majority votes and is done by show of hands or secret ballot depending on the members' choice

**Part four
Membership**

Membership is open to the general public (Nationals and Foreigners) who are potentially genuine supporters of ASSIST's cause and objectives, in its campaign and efforts to address effectively the problems of the Rwandan youth in difficult circumstances

Anyone is legible as a member of ASSIST a.s.b.l when s/he understands its constitution and accepts to abide by the rules and regulations of the organisation. So far, this is the

case with the 275 registered members, of which some are already actively involved in ASSIST administration or in its income generating services

However, membership ceases through:

- (a) Voluntary resignation of the members
- (b) Dismissal when the leadership (executive committee through the general assembly) finds that the member's activities are no longer in conformity with the rules, regulations and code of conduct of the organisation

In both cases, the final decision is taken only by the General Assembly

What ASSIST expects from members

ASSIST expects to achieve its goals, aims and objectives through the visionary planning and active involvement of its members in the following ways:

- (i) Members who are within or outside the country always represent the organisation and are expected to offer their services directed or indirectly towards the fulfilment of the organisation
- (ii) To look for or even initiate relevant income generating projects, that can lead to the development and sustainability of the organisation
- (iii) To give advice, information and moral support to the organisation through the channels provided by the organisational structure

Targeted members

ASSIST a.s.b.l restricts its activities to young members between the ages of 0 to 18, living in especially difficult circumstances. They include:

- Orphans
- Young victims of genocide and AIDS
- Young people unprotected from deprivation
- Young people with disabilities

The targeted group are expected to receive counselling services, skills training, support to education in an integrated setting, micro-finance projects, advocacy and employment depending on each individual's situation, aspiration or is recommended for by the organisation.

Part five Organisation's Finance

ASSIST a.s.b.l is not yet well established financially due to inadequate finance, but some of its projects are already established: examples include cleaning services, revolving fund (for working young people) and skills training

Cleaning services project was given priority due to the fact that it accommodates many youth who are unemployed and enables the organisation attain financial facilities for its

development and upkeep. Here the priority is given to child headed families' cleaning project, which is successfully functioning in offices already mentioned.

This income generated is used to pay child headed families, purchase cleaning materials and equipment; subsidise staff monthly wages, as well as monthly house rent for ASSIST a.s.b.l Head Office. The project has the potential to establish other service sites, generate more income and support more deprived child headed families

Financial Control and Bank Accounts

The financial control mechanism largely lies in the hands of the General Assembly and the Executive Committee. Financial budget is prepared, periodical financial reports are given and internal accounts records are kept by the management committee under the supervision of the executive committee.

Both internal and external audit systems are open to ASSIST financial accounts, this is done after prior notice to both management & executive committees and when need arises.

All the reports dealing with finance are submitted to the General Assembly for consideration or approval.

ASSIST a.s.b.l has two (2) bank accounts, one at BCDI 010-11064-01-32 and another at Bank Populaire 118-010914-01. The signatories to both accounts are the Chairman, General Secretary and General Treasurer of the organisation.

The organisation opened bank accounts for beneficiaries in U.C.T Banks, whose banking operations involve less complications, so that they can get their monthly salaries through bank system and make necessary personal savings as well as acquiring simple loans.

The financial situation

ASSIST a.s.b.l is basically a service organisation that targets the most vulnerable people of the Rwandan society and therefore not a profit making venture. It for this reason that projects proposals are prepared for given targets depending on the arising needs and solicit funds for the given services.

The currently pending projects include availing two centres:

1. For vocational training of unskilled young people
2. For inclusive basic education and rehabilitation for young people with disabilities

N. B. Each of these is expected to include elements of guidance and counselling

ASSIST affirms that though the organisation's financial stand in not yet strong enough, its emphasis should be restricted into services to the targeted beneficiaries, and less on financial accumulation. It is expected that the financial strength can only be realised through the commitment of the members to the planned activities.

Part six
The Organisation's success and setbacks

Achievements

- (i) The organisation has managed to prepare and organise necessary documents like the constitution, now approved by the Ministry of justice and local government, and to which all members have to abide fully. It has obtained official registration from Kacyiru sector, Kacyiru district, Kanombe district and Umutara Province despite the rigorous registration process in the local government and the Ministry of Justice.
- (ii) It has established and formed necessary administrative committees (Management, Executive Committee forgetting and the General Assembly)
- (iii) ASSIST has managed to register over 350 (three hundred fifty) children with various difficulties. This registration has enabled us to know various problems facing young people, and this will enable us to lay appropriate strategies to respond to the needs.
- (iv) Among 350 children registered, ASSIST a.s.b.l has managed to employ 100 child headed families in cleaning services project since low income and unemployment is one of the major source of their difficulties. We are planning to help more in this field and others will be involved in skills training project.
- (v) The organisation has managed to open an office, which is situated in Remera near Alpha Palace hotel. This office is relatively well equipped with the minimum essentials and opens regularly from Monday to Friday and on weekends when it is necessary.
- (vi) ASSIST has managed to engage five staff members who manage the day to day affairs of the organisation and are paid salary on a monthly basis.
- (vii) The registered children of ASSIST were all sensitised in line with conflict resolution and in a spirit of unity & reconciliation. Despite their ethnic and other differences, they work and share harmoniously their common interests, and have new outlook into the future plans.
- (viii) The identification of disabled children & adults who deserve special care has been done, and projects of rehabilitation, literacy lessons and vocational training are underway, in collaboration with Kigali Institute of Education department of Special Needs Education.

Organisation's Set Backs

Despite the achievements made, ASSIST a.s.b.l has been preoccupied with the survival of the needy members that most of the income has been directed towards their needs and this has greatly set back the development of the organisation. This includes:

- (i) Lack of sufficient income (finance) to reinforce the organisation's internal capacities (in terms of sufficient personnel and equipment)
- (ii) Lack of transport (vehicle) to facilitate the daily running of activities of the organisation and contacts with others
- (iii) Lack of communication line to ease the organisation's operations and link.

Organisations impact and contribution to the country

ASSIST's impact and contributions to the country (Rwanda) are indeed significant and have been demonstrated in the following outcomes:

- (i) Since ASSIST has been appreciated for its program self employment to youths in difficult circumstances, which is not only in line with the government policy, but also sets a good example to other similar organisations.
- (ii) The self employment has generated self confidence and hope for the vulnerable young people and has attracted the attention of others with similar initiatives and interests
- (iii) ASSIST is highly supportive of the government policy of unity and reconciliation since it admits youths and children without discrimination, and are taught to live and contribute in harmony as Rwandans.
- (iv) ASSIST programs of counselling offered to all its beneficiaries develops confidence and generates hope, especially those affected by the trauma during the war.
- (v) ASSIST instils discipline in her beneficiaries so that they may live responsible life in their services, families and communities.
- (vi) ASSIST instils a spirit of self-reliance among her beneficiaries. Those employed in cleaning services are given monthly salaries, which in turn enables them start small income generating projects.

Conclusion

ASSIST a.s.b.l hopes that this brief document highlights the renewed orientations of the organisation in its determination to respond to the plights of some of the post genocide young Rwandans. It will help all the well intentioned supporters to appreciate how the later is doing its best, to empower them within its minimum means by promoting their own potentials, so that these young people can live a better life.

The ASSIST a.s.b.l entails provision to Rwandan youths and children in difficulties , with the opportunity to reflect on their present situation, develop confidence and hope with acquired knowledge and skills, that would change their future for the better.

ASSIST's cause is certainly shared by many individuals and organisations on local and international scale and is open to mutual exchange and support with any partners.

ANNEX 1
Summarised ASSIST a.s.b.l's schedule of activities

Activities	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004			
Section A								
1. Vocational training								
Cottage industries								→
Tailoring								→
Mechanic								→
Welding								→
Carpentry								→
2 Child support program								
Education (sponsorship) for primary								→

Provision of scholastic materials									
3 Young people with Disabilities									
Literacy programs - Braille & abacus skills - English or French sign languages									
Mobility & orientation for the visually impaired									
Education support - Scholarships - Educational materials									
Skills training									
Counselling									
Section B									
4 Agriculture									
Animal Husbandry									
Crop farming									
Environment protection related activities									

5 Rehabilitation & medical care								
Rehabilitation services to the drug addicts								
Centre based medical services								
Centre Based and Community Based Rehabilitation services to the disabled								
Family planning & reproductive health Training								
Production of Training & awareness manuals								
Training of personnel (trainers and field workers)								
6. HIV/ AIDS programs								
Awareness raising								

Extension of ASSIST's programmes in all Province								
Contacts & Consultancy								
SECTION D								
9 Construction of the centre								
1 Multipurpose Hall								
1 Library								
1 Guest house								
1 Restaurant								
10 Offices								
5 Training centres								
1 Health centre								
Play grounds for (football, volleyball & basketball)								

ANNEX 2

ASSIST ORGANISATION MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

