

Female Caregivers: Kinama Camp, Burundi

Aldine (mother of three children with disabilities)

"I am happy to share my story, as it is one of positive change. I have three children; all three of them have disabilities. My oldest child is blind, the middle child is partially blind and my youngest child has an intellectual disability.... So I am a very busy mother, but I am a very proud mother.

"The IRC [International Rescue Committee] has helped me very much. Before, I used to have a lot of worries about money and I used to feel a lot of stress, I would feel sad, lonely, and like I was not a very good parent. I would be tired and unhappy. The best part of the activities so far have been the group discussions and the movies. The movies make me feel so happy, they change my bad ideas and they make me leave thinking good ones. They make my heart lighter and happier, which I think makes me a better mother. I am able to go home and tell my children the stories. It gives me more creative ideas to share with them. They cannot see things like others, but now at least I have better words for them, ways to describe images to them, better ways to share hope with them. I have made friends watching these movies, I feel less alone. I feel like I am calmer and a better mother. My heart feels proud that I can keep these children safe."



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Involving the Family: My'Ayni Camp, Ethiopia

The Beshir Family

Beshir Seid (Father): “My wife and I have been together for 26 years. We have six children. We are both living with disabilities; my wife is blind and I have a physical disability. But we try to be very good parents, we work to keep our children safe and to make sure they have opportunities to learn and to be healthy. My wife is a kind mother, she is patient with the children, she is able to teach them many things, like how to have respect and how to share.”



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Seida Ibrahim (Mother): “It is important to me that we have good relations with our neighbors, often I am home alone, which can be difficult, but it is good that I can trust them. [International Rescue Committee] has done activities that have allowed us to get to know our neighbors better. We have hosted coffee discussions in our home, right here. This has brought people closer to us. When they come to the home we discuss many things, things that are really important, but they also have a chance to see that we are good parents even though we are a bit different. Now, people understand us better, they even come to say hello and see how we are. It makes me feel safer having neighbors that I know now.”

Oldest Daughter: “I love my parents, they are kind and caring. They teach us all many things. My mother tells us stories, she teaches us about our culture and our language, and she always asks me questions about things too. My father teaches us the Quran and he makes sure that we go to school.”

Adolescent with Disabilities: Bujumbura, Burundi

Bolia (16 years old)

"Sometimes we are just not included in activities or discussions, but there are things that are really important to us, as a group. For example, we want to learn things, we want to go to school, we want to make friends, we want to be productive. Someday, some of us want to be wives and mothers, but people forget about girls with disabilities. They forget we have goals and dreams sometimes.

"I really feel grateful to the staff at the IRC, they have done a lot for me. Over the past year, I have most enjoyed the recreational activities, like learning to sew and make bed sheets. I saw that there is a lot that we can achieve. I can learn, I can work, and I can do professional training. I can be more than just a wife to someone; I can be a better version of myself. The activities have been inspiring and the friends I have met were very important to me. We have set goals together."



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Women with Disabilities: Kinama Camp, Burundi

Diane (24 years old)

“When I became disabled my family disowned me. They were ashamed of me, which made me ashamed of myself. I lost all of my self-esteem, I felt like I had no value in my family or my community. Everyone abandoned me, and why? Because I was walking with a crutch? It didn’t seem fair. They no longer saw me as a person who could be successful.

“I received a call that IRC [International Rescue Committee] was looking to have women with disabilities included in their VSLA [Village Savings and Loan Association] programs. I was so excited to register, to be included, to have a chance to prove myself. As the program started and people saw that I was part of it, people started to respect me more. I gained confidence. Before I couldn’t speak in front of a crowd, even talking to others made me nervous. Now I am very proud to share my story with others, to talk in front of people to make sure that my experience is heard. I have my self-worth and self-esteem back.

“I feel so happy, I am a mother to two children now, I can take care of them, I can provide for my needs. My family may have abandoned me, but I will not abandon them. Now, even, I feel it is my obligation to reach out to other people with disabilities. To raise awareness, to share my story, to tell them that they can be included, too.”



Female Caregivers: Bujumbura, Burundi

Esther

"I am the caregiver of my husband, who lives with a disability. But that is not my only identity. I am a mother, a leader, and someone who takes pride in her role as a community mobilizer with IRC [International Rescue Committee]. I have learned many things over the past year, but the biggest lesson I have learned is that the key to everything is empowerment. Empowerment is what has allowed us, as women, as caregivers, to better advocate for our family members and ourselves. We know what it is that is best for our families. We know that there is a certain way to encourage other people to better understand our situation. Now, we are more confident in ensuring that the needs for of husbands, parents, siblings and children with disabilities have their needs met and that we, as caregivers, are respected, not exploited in that process."



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The Girls' Group: Northern Caucasus, Russian Federation

"This is our story. Our wish was to sing with Makka Mezhieva [a famous Chechen singer]. [When we performed] there were people there, people with disabilities and people without disabilities. They were all crying. And we learned about other people with disabilities – we met them. It was very pleasant for us to know them, and to know their type of disability and problems. When I come to the event and I see there are persons with disabilities, I feel like I am not alone. And when see other [non-disabled] people there, I feel equal.

"Through sign language we understand each other. The girls without disabilities learn things and us too. We can have a common language through these sign language classes. We also use phones, we text and we write notes to communicate with each other. We really like drawing. We think about things and everything that we think about, we show in our pictures. We also really like to play different types of games. It is important to us that people are listening to us. Sometime people don't pay attention to our opinions."



"These are our ideas that we would like to see in the future.... The first one is [making] pictures, drawing together. The second one is fun sketches that we can do together. We would like to meet with some girls at a café or a place for just girls with and without disabilities – just girls, without adults. This picture [below] shows sign language classes. We would like sign language lessons. These girls can teach us. We already know a bit, because my sister



has a hearing disability. [We like to play] the crocodile game. In this game there are two groups. One person from one group is shown a word, and she uses signs to show this word. The rest of the team has to guess what word this is. This picture [below] illustrates the joint dances. These two photographs are my classmates. We would like them to join us and participate in these activities. We will need some paper and markers ... a space to meet ... transportation."

Adolescent girls with disabilities: Irbid, Jordan

Hanan (16 years old), Marwa (15 years old) and Hiba (17 years) are Deaf and use sign language to communicate.

“The most important thing is providing activities which the girls can benefit from. Their favorite activity is the beauty activities, especially for Hanan and Marwa who like to do hairdressing. The training is practical and the trainer and participants are nice. It gives them the chance to meet with other girls who are not disabled, as well as those who have similar disabilities as them. They feel that they are like other non-disabled girls, they can go out of their homes, learn new things and find a job in any salon. They feel like they are like their non-Deaf siblings when they can go out of the home and engage in activities. They wish that the center would provide more activities for Deaf girls, like photography, drawing and computer courses. Additionally, they wish the center would provide them with the tools that help them to continue practicing these activities, such as cameras, painting paper and colored pens. They have become happier because they feel like they are like other non-disabled persons and that they are valuable.”



Women with Disabilities: Kinama Camp, Burundi

Maipendo (43 years old)

“Over the past year the most important thing that has happened to me was being included in the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) program. I have a small [shop] now; you can see it in my photo. I am better able to support my family and my husband. He respects me more now. Before I was not good about standing up for myself, but now things have changed. You can see, I even look better! I dress better, I like myself more, I respect myself more. I look like a woman who is proud. For example, before, I could not go to church, I could not dress for it and I could not get there because it is too far. Now I can save a little for a moto-taxi and I can go. Each week now I have people to talk to at the church; it is a group that I feel listens and understands me. It makes me so happy that because of this program and my hard work I can be a part of something that makes me happy.”



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Mawazo & the WPE Team: Kinama Camp, Burundi

International Rescue Committee (IRC) community mobilizers in Muyinga used creative, supportive and holistic case management to build trust with women with disabilities.

Mawazo's Story

Mawazo lives on her own and moves differently than others, crawling rather than walking.

"I live alone, I always have, I try to be very independent and I do many things by myself, I can clean, cook and wash my clothing, and I spend time trying to help my neighbors by taking care of their children.

"I have home visits regularly; the people from IRC are like my family. They come to check on me almost everyday. When I have a problem, they know about it very quickly and they come to see that I am okay. I feel so much happier, I feel like I have someone to talk to. I love sharing stories and it makes me feel good when someone asks me how I am feeling.

"My name, in my language, means both problems and ideas. I have a lot to talk about and a lot to share with others. I am a very open person; I think this is why the children like me so much. I am open to them, I smile with them, and I share stories. There is a lot that I can teach them, I have seen and learned many things in my life. I can teach them about their culture, I can teach them respect and I always teach them to share. If someone brings me porridge, for example, even if it is a small amount, I do not drink it all myself, if there are children here, we all share it together. Even if I am very hungry, I know that this is a chance for me to teach something, to help someone, just like others are helping me.

"If I could tell the IRC team one thing, it would be to keep remembering the people who are at home, who can't easily come to programs. We have needs too and we have dreams as well. I am getting older now, I think it is important though to focus on the young people, those with disabilities, to make sure that they are included from a young age, so that people can stop discrimination and see us all as equal."



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Engaging Women with Disabilities as Community Leaders

Mieraf, Social Worker – My'Ayni Camp, Ethiopia

“There is so much I enjoy about my role with the [International Rescue Committee] and there are so many stories that I could share with you of things that we have accomplished. But, I think it is important to share with you that I am a woman who has a disability. I walk with a crutch and sometimes I have a lot of difficulty getting through the camp. This doesn't stop me though, even though it can be challenging. I feel I have a very important job to do.

I am working to make women and girls safer, especially those who have disabilities, those who are not always

included in activities, those who are often forgotten about. I can remember times when that was me, when I had so much pain that I couldn't leave my house, or before I had my crutch to walk. I felt really alone. Now, I am very active, I am a leader in our community. I am part of the disability association and I work as a social worker. I feel like I have valuable things to add and that I can advocate for women and children with disabilities and their caregivers as well, because I understand their needs well. Also, I think people look up to me, they see me working hard to do my job.”



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Female Caregivers: My'Ayni Camp, Ethiopia

Rahel (age 5) and Her Mom

"We have lived here for the last six years, Rahel was born here. I have four children, two boys and two girls, I no longer have a husband. I carry my daughter with me on my back wherever I go anywhere. She is getting bigger, but still, it is like she is a part of me.

"Because of my situation, IRC workers come to my home to visit. We make coffee together. We discuss what it is like to have a child with a disability. They also talk about violence and the risks that my family can face. They always remind me that my child deserves to live in a safe and secure environment. They say that all children should be free from violence, abuse and neglect.

"What is very important to me is that the IRC activities help me to better care for my daughter. They also help the community to be more accepting of her. Now, children from our neighborhood do not insult her. They do not call her by her disability, they call her by her name. Some of the neighbors even come to visit and help me now. It is nice to have people who care about us and want to make our lives better."



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Adolescent Girl with Disabilities: Kinama Camp, Burundi

Sifa (16 years old)

"When I was in the Congo, I lost my leg. It was infected and they put me in the hospital. I remember overhearing conversations when I was there. They thought I was unconscious, but I could hear them talking, saying that I was 'lost cause' and that it was not worth trying to save my life. I used to think about this often and it made me very upset."

"When I first got connected with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) they advocated for me in many ways. First, they ensured that I got a prosthetic leg. It was so important to me then. I remember that feeling when I could first start to walk around with ease, and it made me feel like I was part of the community again."

"After that, the team from IRC made sure that I could start to go to school again. Since going back to school I have made many friends. I work hard in school. I am a good student and I really enjoy studying. In school, I can work hard and I can prove that despite what they said in the hospital in the Congo, I am not 'worthless.' Instead, I am a girl with a lot to share and to offer."

"Over the past year, I have most enjoyed going to awareness sessions. It is important to me that the community sees me as not just a girl without a leg, but as a person with rights and a future. I also really appreciate the materials from IRC, especially sanitary napkins and supplies, because often people forget that girls our age need them. With my new leg and my chance to have an education, I feel safer, smarter and less likely to be taken advantage of."



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Women with Disabilities: Kinama Camp, Burundi

Sitymayi (26 years old)

"I am proud of my photo because it shows my success in economic activities, which I never thought I could be a part of. My story, at first, sounds difficult, but it shows that there is hope.

"I am a mother of one child, and that child was a result of rape. When I was pregnant, no one would help me, I gave birth alone. Everyone abandoned the baby and me; we were all on our own. But I knew that I needed to care for my baby and to find a way to make sure we were both okay.

"I came from a family of five people, but I was alone. I started the Village Savings and Loan Association and I was able to sell cassava flour and my business started to go well. I was able to have money to take care of myself and my child. We started to feel better. The harder I worked the more independence I had. And now, would you believe that I am helping and contributing back to the family that at first abandoned me? Now that I am able to take care of them, they see me as a human being, as a mother, and a person of value. Now, in my community, I am seen as a person who can do anything. This makes me proud."



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Adolescent Girls: My'Ayni Camp, Ethiopia

Alem Measho and her daughter Tsigab Reda (14 years old)

"My daughter is growing up. She is getting bigger, so taking care of her can be challenging. But we do it together, my oldest daughter and me.

"Sometimes when I feel like I really need help, I talk to someone from the IRC team. They always listen to me. They invite me to discussions. They ask me to come and talk with other women. I enjoy this.

"Sometimes they also help me get things that are important, like soap and supplies to take care of my daughter. I feel like I can trust them and I feel like they care about me and my family.

"I love my daughter very much. I want her to be safe and happy. I want to take good care of her. She loves to be outside and to see things and greet people. Sometimes it is hard because she is getting bigger, but I know she enjoys this, so I try hard to take her out. People in the community treat us better now. They are more used to her. They know how she is and they greet us kindly when we are walking. Hopefully, someday everyone will treat us this way."



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Woman Caregiver of Persons with Disabilities: Irbid, Jordan

"I am a 27-year-old Syrian woman, married to a 26-year-old man with four types of disability. We have been in Jordan for the past 2.5 years. We have two sons and one daughter. I have a lump in my stomach and I need surgery to remove it.

"I am responsible for financing the family because my husband cannot speak or hear, has weak vision in one eye, and is blind in the other. I am fully responsible for the family inside and outside the house. I perform house work, and fulfill all the household needs. Currently, I receive a 100 Jordanian dinar financial assistance card from the International Rescue Committee, but this is not enough for our daily needs. My 65-year-old mother-in-law lives with us and suffers from several ailments. I have to provide care, attention and service to all the family members, including my husband, children and mother-in-law. I alone am responsible for all the family's needs.

"In spite of the great effort I put in serving and caring the entire family, I am often beaten by my husband because he faces great difficulty in communicating with me. Because of his hearing, speech and visual disabilities, he is unable to express himself. I also face problems communicating with him. His temper is very high. I always used to escape my house to my parents' house to stay with them for a while. But I used to be pressured to return to my house.

"I participate in discussion groups held by the women's center on household economy and family financial planning as part of the financial assistance program, and in the psychological and social sessions. After attending the first two sessions, I began contemplating solutions to the problems I am facing instead of becoming sad, depressed, attempting to escape and complaining to my neighbors... I began thinking of ways to communicate with [my family]. I now wish for us to have a foundation caring about the family and that women will have courses on disability ... I wish to attend more sessions with the psychological counselor because I benefit a lot from her advice on how to deal with household chores and daily worries.

"The women's center offer a space to express one's opinion and conduct discussions on many family, women's and personal issues. My husband is deaf and suffers from weak vision and my mother-in-law is ill, so the adults in my family do not communicate with me and do not talk with me. I am in need of someone to listen to me. I feel comfort because I have found a venue to express my troubles and worries. I am certain that the specialists at the center are trustworthy, experienced people who will maintain the secrecy of the information I share. I enjoy social life and knowing new people. I am in desperate need for this due to my family situation. I benefit from constructive experiences, ideas and participations offered by the trainer, psychological counselor and friends during discussion sessions. When I share my worries with others I feel that I am not alone.

"I want all people to listen to my story so they can contemplate finding solutions to escape their worries and try to achieve a happy family that is appreciated by those surrounding them, instead of being harmed."



Mother of a son with disabilities: Ramtha, Jordan

"I've been in Jordan for 1.5 years living with my husband and three children. Initially we were living with my in-laws -- sisters-in-law, their children, brother-in-law, his family, and my husband's nephews because their parents were still in Syria. We were living in one house, and then we moved out to live by ourselves. I have a disabled son. He is 19, and suffers from brain atrophy, a mental disability. However, he is very smart.

"I am taking a class on wool [knitting]. I like it very much and I am benefitting from it. I also attend discussion group sessions because I take an [ATM] card. While I am participating in these activities at the center, I feel happy. I forget all of my worries. When I learn about other women's problem and see that they continue to attend the sessions in spite of these problems, I feel that my problem is minor. I feel strong.

"Despite my son's problem, I am determined that he continue to study with other non-disabled students. In fact he is currently in 6th grade, and he is very interested in electricity and computers. Anyone who deals with him would realize how intelligent he is. I've trained him on many things so he becomes self reliant. Although I was young when I had my son with the disability (I was 15 at the time), I continued to learn how to improve his condition. I was keen on watching TV shows related to the disabled.

"I get angry at my children often because of their studies. I want them to complete their school and become successful. Once I was about to get angry at my young children, then I remembered Ms. Haneen's session on communicating verbally without scolding. So I told my children that I wanted them to be the best of all the people, and that I was not scolding them because I enjoyed doing so. Now they listen to what I am saying better than before.

"I want people to hear about how I've changed my attitude toward my children and how this change paid off, so that they would also change their ways in treating their children as well. No matter the circumstances, we can always improve our attitudes. It is important that people learn that there is no such thing as a disability, or being impossible, and that when a person is determined to do something, then he will certainly achieve it, especially if he is close to His Lord. Allah forgets no one."



Mother of a son with intellectual disabilities: Za'atri refugee camp, Jordan

"I've been in Za'atri for two years with my husband and we have three sons and one daughter. I used to visit my sister all the time, and usually I come to the Women's Center because there are not many places to visit in the camp. We are facing challenge as we have one caravan [trailer] for the whole family, which is not enough at all. My husband works and one of my daily roles is to take the responsibility of getting all we need from the market.

"One of my children has a mental disability and this is the biggest challenge that I'm dealing with. He needs surgery on his leg and we can't afford it – it puts more pressure on me. I am attending awareness sessions; recreational and handcraft activities; and reproductive health awareness sessions. My son sometimes attends the painting sessions and sometimes I ask for individual psychological support.

"Three months ago, I was dealing with my son in an inappropriate way. I used to tie him up in the caravan if I went out because I didn't want him to damage the caravan and to go out in the neighborhood as he would be mistreated by the neighbors. When I started to come here I felt like there was an opportunity to change my life and to make myself more comfortable. I used to send my son to the center most of the time, and I had a good counselor who advised on how to deal with him... It was a turning point in my life: it helped me to feel more comfortable, and it gave me hope... One of the most important things is that here you don't have problems dealing with disabled people, which made me feel safe for my son."

