



Dailla, a youth from the Nyamaso community in Burundi's Muyinga Province, addresses her peers during an International Youth Day celebration supported by CRS' *Ikawa Yacu* Project. Photo: CRS, 2018.

CRS Burundi & Youth:

ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION IN BURUNDI'S DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there are 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 18 and 25, the largest cohort in history. The category "youth" is often defined as the transition period from childhood to independent adulthood, but its delimitation differs across regions and organizations. The 2013 Burundi National Youth Policy adopts the African Youth Charter's definition of youth as people between 15 and 35 years old, a category representing 52% of the population.¹ These youth face many compounded challenges, including:

- Unemployment and underemployment
- Vulnerability to gender-based violence
- Low socio-political participation and vulnerability to violence
- Low accessibility or low quality of basic services for young people

CRS' FOCUS ON YOUTH

In response to this demographic reality and its impact on development, Catholic Relief Services (CRS)'s 2030 strategy includes a specific focus on youth. Committed to successfully prepare young people for work and the responsibilities of leadership, CRS works to engage youth across its program sectors that include agriculture, social cohesion, and emergency response. In Burundi, CRS partners with local government and NGOs to target youth in livelihood activities while reinforcing their role as drivers of peace.

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% OF
BURUNDIAN
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BETWEEN THE
AGES OF
18 AND 35¹

65
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BURUNDIAN
POPULATION
UNDER THE
AGE OF 25¹

25,154
OF YOUTH REACHED BY CRS
BURUNDI PROGRAMMING IN 2018

**All Youth Are
Empowered to Thrive**

GOAL #5 IN CRS'
VISION 2030 STRATEGY

¹2016 data from the Institut de Statistiques et d'Études Économiques de Burundi

Youth leadership in peacebuilding

Strengthening youth resilience to violence and empowering them to strengthen social cohesion are the pillars of the USAID-funded *Dukire Tubane* Project. Implementing CRS' innovative people-to-people (P2P) approach to social cohesion, the project draws diverse youth from across Burundi's political, social and ethnic divides together to break down divisions by emphasizing commonalities and developing a shared vision of the future. The project also supports exchanges and joint community initiatives between young people and local authorities to restore trust between them. Burundian youth have been challenged by recurring violence, most recently during the crisis following the 2015 presidential election. *Dukire Tubane* activities help youth heal from this past trauma while encouraging a more positive perception of their role as peacebuilders amongst the wider community. Youth are also supported to form savings and internal lending community (SILC) groups which addresses their immediate financial constraints while also establishing a sustainable network within which they can work together to address future needs.

Engaging youth in the coffee sector

The CRS-funded *Ikawa Yacu* Project has supported 1,180 youth to participate in coffee producer organizations. Despite the coffee sector's importance to Burundi's national economy (77% of foreign revenue²) there is little involvement of youth within the coffee value chain which presents a significant sectoral challenge for the future. In response, the *Ikawa Yacu* Project is designed to engage youth in the coffee sector in which the average age of farmers is currently 55. Four youth associations have been formed to target and introduce coffee activities to 140 out-of-school youth, presenting them with alternative livelihood options. Additionally, the project trained and equipped 30 youth to serve as community agents amongst coffee farmers. In addition to modeling improved coffee farming practices, these leaders assist older farmers in filling in record books to monitor their production. To further support the long-term sustainability of coffee production in Burundi, the *Ikawa Yacu* team has also sensitized 961 children in the targeted zone, inviting them to practice their writing skills learned at school to assist illiterate parents in record keeping.

Enhancing youth employability in agriculture

The USAID-funded *Amashiga* Program affirms young people's interest in commercial farming by supporting improved agricultural practices complemented by economic empowerment and marketing skills. The aging of Burundian farmers (the average farmer is 60 years old) is often cited amongst reasons for low agricultural production. Over 75% of Burundian youth reside in rural areas where agricultural support is needed; yet, a consistent exodus to urban cities is observed as youth seek formal employment. In the rural province of Muyinga, 20,450 youth comprise nearly half of *Amashiga* participants, 56% of whom now participate in SILC groups to strengthen their ability to save and invest. Others participate as members of agricultural cooperatives and seed multiplier groups, structures supported by the program to promote improved management and professional business plans. Lastly, 29 youth were selected amongst the program's 230 lead farmers and promote improved farming practices in their communities while providing a model of youth leadership in agriculture.

Transforming gender norms early

The *Amashiga* Program prepares youth to ensure the well-being of future households. Through CRS' signature gender approaches – *The Faithful House* and *Islamic Family House* – model couples (Ab'IRs) are trained to provide targeted support to other couples in their community focused on joint decision-making. The average Burundian is married at age 22 while 20% of women are married before age 18³; thus, many couples reached by *Amashiga* are still youth. By receiving support from Ab'IR couples, young men and women learn the benefits of making joint decisions that affect the household, including the health and nutritional wellbeing of children. After receiving this support, couples interviewed during a December 2018 study revealed that they have since enjoyed improvements of both harvest and income management as well as reduced violence in the household. By supporting equitable decision-making practices amongst young couples, *Amashiga* is sustainably shifting harmful gender norms.

² Office Burundais des Recettes, 2016.

³ UNICEF, 2018.