

# EMPOWERING SURVIVORS

10 SUCCESS-STORIES THROUGH  
ICC-FUNDING





The following document outlines 10 success stories from the “*Support for the physical rehabilitation, psychosocial assistance, and socio-economic reintegration of conflict victims under the jurisdiction of the ICC in the Central African Republic*” in the Central African Republic. The project is supported by the International Criminal Court. Thanks for their support in making this happen.

The stories are told directly by the beneficiaries and one of them is told through the perspective of one of the project-staff. All names have been anonymised, as have locations – mentioned names are fake-names. A final disclaimer is that the pictures may not necessarily depict the person in the stories to protect the persons depicted.

## Success story 1 – interview with a project-staff

### 1) In your opinion, what is the greatest strength of this project?

The greatest strength of this project is, first of all, its implementation: the best approach to engaging with people and the quality of the services provided; Restoring the human dignity of victims through medical and psychological support; Promoting their autonomy through economic support (IGA, training); And reinforcing restorative justice, by ensuring that survivors are not forgotten. It is a powerful lever for resilience, peace, and social cohesion.

### 2) In your opinion, what is the “secret ingredient” that encourages people to move forward and become empowered?

We have communication to facilitate understanding, holistic care, and socio-economic recovery activities.

1. Active and non-judgmental listening, which values each person’s story and choices;
2. Access to tangible resources (healthcare, training, IGAs) to rebuild autonomy;
3. Peer role models — seeing other victims succeed inspires confidence;
4. A safe and encouraging environment, where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process.

### 3. Do you think this project had such a deep impact on people, despite its limited budget?

Because of the way the project was presented and understood by local and administrative authorities, and by the identified beneficiaries. The goals set by the project and the strategies implemented allowed for an adequate and appropriate response, supported by excellent collaboration in executing the activities.

The project for physical, psychological, and socio-economic rehabilitation of conflict victims under ICC jurisdiction had a significant impact thanks to its human-centered approach and active listening to the beneficiaries' needs. Despite a limited budget, the actions were strategically targeted, prioritizing the most urgent and essential interventions.

### 4) What surprised you most in the process of empowering survivors and providing psychosocial support?

The resilience of beneficiaries in taking care of themselves and reintegrating socio-economically. Regarding psychosocial support, it was the commitment of the beneficiaries in psychotherapeutic activities, their willingness to leave painful experiences behind and move forward. Their decision to forgive themselves, reconcile with others, and work toward lasting peace.

What surprised me the most in this process was the survivors' capacity for inner transformation. Despite lives marked by extreme trauma, many people demonstrated remarkable resilience and a genuine desire to rebuild their lives.

Simply being listened to, having their suffering acknowledged, and receiving personalized support was often enough to reignite hope that had seemed extinguished.

**5) Do you have a particular memory from this project that left an impression on you or holds special meaning?**

It was the self-determination of the beneficiaries and their advocacy for those in other areas who didn't receive this assistance — asking that the scope of the project be expanded.

Personally, I gained a great deal of experience through this project. I took part in a training on the couples' curriculum and a practical study trip to Kigali. I also participated in training on EMAP. All of this constitutes valuable assets and leaves me with particularly meaningful memories from the project.

Yes, a striking memory is the testimony of a survivor who had remained silent for a long time due to stigma and trauma. During a group workshop organized as part of psychosocial support, she found the strength to publicly share her story for the first time. This moment was not only liberating for her, but deeply moving for all participants, who realized they were not alone in their suffering.

That day, I understood that, far beyond material aid, listening, recognizing someone's pain, and valuing human dignity can have an immeasurable impact. It gives profound meaning to our work and reminds us that every step toward resilience begins with an act of humanity.

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## Success story 2

First of all, I am a girl, an orphan of both father and mother. After what happened with the Séléka (2012–2013), I wasn't doing anything at the time; I used to sell things by the roadside. One day, on my way back, I came across the Séléka, who had their base nearby and at the town hall. One day, as I was returning, they called out to me, 'Woman, come here! Woman, come here!' I refused. I had a small tray with a plate on top on which I displayed my goods on my head. So, they came toward me and kicked me. I fell to the ground, and they all raped me, then left. I was in 9th grade at the time and ready to move on to 10th. After that incident, I was traumatized, I kept thinking a lot, and I realized I was losing weight.

I went on to get married and gave birth to a child. The child was always sick, he wasn't healthy, and neither was I.

At that time, I heard that DCA operated and had a project (2021), which at first was said to be for victims of the Banyamulenge. But one day, an uncle of mine came to me and explained that the project also concerned me as a victim. I was hesitant, but another person encouraged me to go and tell my story so I could be included in the project.

I went with my child and explained my story, and how despite trying to continue with my life, I still had aftereffects. I also told them that I was a girl who had gone quite far in school (up to 10th grade), but I had no support at the moment, and seeing my classmates continue their studies made me want to return. They asked me if I would agree to go back to school, and I said yes, because I did well in school, and they accepted to re-enroll me. So, I continued into 10th grade, then 11th, while also taking part in the project's activities. I joined a VSLA (Village Savings and Loan Association), and after receiving IGA kits (Income Generating Activities), I did all these activities alongside school until I reached 12th grade.

Thanks to my savings and the profits I made in the VSLA, I prepared for and passed my high school diploma (BAC) successfully. After the BAC, I wanted to go to university, but an older sister advised me to continue with my business and save money to prepare for the teacher recruitment exam. I followed her advice. I took out large loans that allowed me to invest by buying cassava to sell in Bangui and repay the loans. When the profits were shared that year, I received 800,000 XAF in my envelope because I was contributing with 3 notebooks. With part of that money, I bought a piece of land for 350,000 XAF. At the same time, the teacher recruitment notice came out, so I submitted my application and passed the exam. While going to the training, I kept running my business.



*Here Clarisse is standing in her house, which is still under construction*

I have a man in my life now, but he doesn't do much—he does street manicures. But thanks to the skills and advice DCA gave me, I'm managing well, and I know the roof of my house will soon be finished.

Today I am a very happy person. Before, I never imagined I would become the person I am today. I no longer have those thoughts about the violence that used to traumatize me. I am joyful, and even if the memories try to come back, they disappear quickly. I feel at ease, even the respect that people never gave me before—they respect me now. Even older men and women greet me as they pass: 'Hello madam!'

I hope that in 4 or 5 years, I will be even more than this, because today I have a lot of dignity in front of people.

My request is that if the project continues here, my other friends who are in similar situations and who have not yet come out of them be supported by the project. Give them advice and ask them—as was done for me—whether they want to go back to school or start income-generating activities and support them like me so they too can change their lives.

Currently, in my teacher training course, I've completed the first and second stages. I also went on an internship (semi-responsibility), and now I'm back at school for a month, after which I'll do three months of full-responsibility internship. Then I will receive my diploma and officially become a teacher.

I started to gain more confidence in myself when I joined the VSLA and began handling large sums of money. Because with the IGA kits from DCA, I started doing business and making good money. That made me forget my stress.

I am much more comfortable than before. I know that from here, I can only move forward. I'm building a house that's my own, and I'm doing better than some government-employed men who still don't have a house. I hope that when I get my diploma, I will celebrate in my house, because I plan to move in before receiving the diploma.

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## Success Story 3

In 2003, when I was 23 years old, I witnessed the brutal assassination of my father by armed groups led by Banyamulenge. That same day, I was also a victim of a gang rape. Without medical follow-up, I discovered a few years later that I am HIV-positive, transmitted during that assault. This tragic event plunged my life into despair, fear.

I found myself alone, carrying the weight of immense pain. Insecurity, social rejection, and poverty followed. I thought nothing would ever be possible for me again. I was unable to rebuild my life.

I was registered on the list of victims after the leader of that group was transferred to the ICC. We later heard that he had been acquitted and that the harm should be repaired.

That's how, shortly after, thanks to the project funded by the ICC and implemented by the NGO DCA, I was able to attend therapy, then receive vocational training in IGA and benefit from medical care as well as food support up to this day.



Today, I manage my small business which allows me to provide for my family. I go about my activities freely without worrying about the wounds of the past.

I thought everything was over for me. Thanks to DCA, I found my dignity, my strength, and a new meaning in my life. I am no longer a victim; I am an agent of change.

My advocacy is for those women who went through the same events and are not being taken into account. I request support for them within the framework of this project.

I thank very much those who have helped in my recovery.

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## Success Story 4

My name is Juliette. I am a farmer during the rainy season and a vendor during the dry season. I became vulnerable following the 2003 violence. In that year, armed men from the Bayamoulengué group, originating from Zaire, attacked my city. Two men broke into my home, caught me while I was fleeing, raped me, and beat me with their weapons. My face was injured, and I lost teeth. Hospitals were closed, so I treated myself with traditional plants.



*Juliette is a street vendor - here she sits by her shop selling meals to people passing by*

In 2012–2013, during another wave of violence led by the Seleka, my house was burned down, and my husband was nearly killed at a bridge. I had no resources, and my children couldn't go to school. When DCA arrived in 2021, I was identified and supported with psychosocial services and IGA tools. Thanks to this, I started farming and trading again. My children were able to go back to school, and one of them is now a police officer.

I was part of the victims' association led by a famous lawyer. After, there were no reparations, but DCA used the victims' list to offer support. I was included in Phase 3 of the project.

At first, people mocked me, but through DCA's awareness-raising efforts and government declarations condemning such mockery, I started to feel accepted again. I am now a leader in my church and can work joyfully with other women.

One of my sons gives me strength. But we still need more support for our other children. Theft of livestock has slowed our progress, and I can't say I'm fully optimistic. However, I encourage other survivors not to hide—come forward, reach out to NGOs, and share your story. There is help. I was hiding too, until DCA helped stabilize me. I hope DCA continues to support those victims who have not yet received psychosocial or economic support.'

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## Success story 5

I am very happy today to tell you my story: My life was ruined during the attacks that took place between the loyalist forces supported by the and the Liberators of the former president François Bozize at the time. I was raped when I was still a child and, following that assault, I became pregnant. I had a lot of difficulties after that. Despite everything, my father was my greatest support. Thanks to him, I was able to get through those dark times.

However, none of the NGOs present at the time in our area reached out to me. Over time, the stigma grew, especially toward my son born from the rape. As for me, it was the worst case. This situation made me more and more nervous and pushed me away from the community. Participating in community life, or even appearing in public, had become difficult for me.

In 2021, the NGO DCA arrived, and my hope began to be reborn. Several opportunities were offered to me thanks to the different services of the project implemented by DCA. First, I was listened to and participated in "memory-cleansing sessions.". That allowed me to free myself from the heavy wounds of the past. I, who didn't want to take my ARVs, started again, and day by day, thanks to the follow-up from DCA staff, hope was reborn in me and my confidence was restored. Also, thanks to the IGA kit I received, I started my small business. Today, I am independent, I am the head of the "AVEC group ZO KWE ZO" set up by DCA, which is doing amazing things today. I built my house and continue to run my small restaurant at the bus station.

It wasn't easy for me. Thank you to those who reached out to help.

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## Success Story 6

I am Eliane. I have been married since 2003, and I am 40 years old. I gave birth to four children, but sadly only one of them is still alive.

In 2013–2014, I was a victim of sexual violence by a member of the armed Seleka group. They attacked me in my field and raped me in front of my tied-up husband. It is thanks to DCA that I am alive today. I was identified and supported as a project beneficiary.

DCA provided me with healthcare, medical check-ups, and support for income-generating activities (IGA). This allowed me to take care of myself and provide for my family. The violence I endured led to stigma from my community—people referred to me as "Seleka's woman," which caused immense stress and shame. I had to live in hiding.



But once I was supported by DCA, I received counseling and guidance that helped me and my family regain dignity and respect in the community. With the support of an IGA kit that included flour, oil, soap, coffee, peanuts, rice, and sugar, I started a small business. It helped pay for school fees, healthcare, seeds for farming, and raising goats and pigs. I also had access to prenatal care.

Today, I feel stronger. I hope DCA can continue to support us with additional financial assistance. And to others who have lived through similar violence: use me as an example. If I was able to move forward, so can you. I am no longer rejected by my community, and I am deeply thankful to DCA for their continued work in the area.

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## Success Story 7

My name is Denise. In 2003, I was 25 years old and living with my elderly mother. That year, the city was under the control of the Bayamolengué armed group.

One morning around 10 a.m., I saw an armed man approaching our house. Despite the fear, I couldn't flee because I refused to leave my vulnerable mother alone. He pointed his gun at me, forced his way in, and raped me. That horrific act left deep physical and psychological scars that upended my life.



It wasn't until 2008 — five years later — that I found out I was HIV positive, contracted during the assault. The news was devastating. I felt condemned, isolated, and hopeless.

But thanks to the support, listening, and guidance I received, I found the strength to go on. My name appeared on the official list of victims, which gave me access to psychological, medical, and socio-economic services through DCA.

I participated in psychosocial support sessions, received medical care, and underwent training in income-generating activities (IGAs). Little by little, I rebuilt my life, regained self-confidence, and began to dream again.

Today, I stand tall, strong, dignified, and useful. I am living proof that even after the most painful trials, it is still possible to rebuild and move forward.

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## Success Story 8

I am Didier, 48 years old. Before being considered a beneficiary by the project, I faced many social and psychological difficulties. I was a victim of physical violence – torture - during the armed conflict in the area, specifically during the 2003 coup d'état led by General Bozizé.



*Today Didier is a teacher and a respected member of his community*

When the project came to assist victims, I came forward to ask DCA for help. Thanks to their support, I received IGA kits, participated in the creation of savings groups (AVECs), received training, and benefitted from mindset and post-crisis counselling.

I am a farmer and also raise small livestock. In addition, I work as a parent-teacher, currently teaching 72 students in subjects like geography, history, vocabulary, and conjugation.

Through the support of DCA, I have regained my footing. I started with goats, and now I rear sheep as well. I even managed to purchase construction materials and am building my house. I feel like I am progressing and no longer dwell on the past. I hope others in similar situations can also receive this kind of help.

I dream of peace, stability, and security, which would allow true development. I hope DCA continues providing training, counseling, and mindset sensitization. To those who have suffered atrocities as I have: life does not stop there. Turn the page and move forward.

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## Success Story 9

In 2003, I was 21 years old and living peacefully with my two younger sisters. One evening, the sound of gunfire grew closer and closer, spreading terror in our community. Out of fear, we hid inside our home, hoping to escape harm...

Soon after, five armed men from the Bayamolengué group broke in and subjected us to brutal sexual violence. Each of us was assaulted, leaving lasting physical and psychological trauma.

Six months later, my sisters and I began falling ill — persistent fevers, weight loss, and constant fatigue. At a local health center, tests confirmed that we had all contracted HIV. The news was devastating and plunged our family into despair.

Despite stigma and hardship, I refused to give up. I sought help from local organizations, but none were available. One of my sisters couldn't bear it and passed away.

Thanks to psychological support, proper medical care, and IGA training provided by DCA, I managed to rebuild my life. Today, I thank God for the path he placed before me. I am now 45 years old and still hold hope for a better future.

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## Success Story 10

In 2003, I was 19 years old when I followed my father, a pastor, on assignment. We settled in the area. One day, around noon, as I was out running an errand, three armed men intercepted me. Two of them raped me, leaving me broken, both physically and psychologically.

In the months that followed, I began to suffer from recurring fevers and other ailments. My parents thought it was just temporary illness. However, a year and three months later, my condition worsened. I was rushed to the hospital, where the doctor ordered thorough tests. That's how I discovered I was HIV-positive.

The news spread quickly, making me the target of mockery and stigma. In this ordeal, only my faith in God sustained me. At the time, there was no support structure, and my parents, already in need, did their best to help me.



In 2021, the organization DCA arrived. During an awareness session, I shared my story with a focal point who referred me to their services. Thanks to DCA, I received psychological support, appropriate medical care, and assistance with income-generating activities (IGAs).

Today, I'm a mother of three children, all receiving treatment. However, I worry about my husband, who refuses to take his antiretroviral medication. I constantly have to encourage him to follow his treatment. I advocate for training programs aimed at couples to improve understanding and commitment to care. In addition, further support for my small business would help me better provide for my family.

I will never stop thanking those who supported me, and especially for the help received through DCA.

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DCA is grateful for the support from ICC to carry out this important project. Many of the success stories will be made into articles and shared online.

*Please note that this document can only be shared/used through the consent of DCA.*