



ASPIRE stories

Gisele Hirwa

At GS Nduba in Gasabo District, a quiet transformation is taking place - one that begins not in textbooks, but in listening, care, and human connection. At the centre of it is Gisele Hirwa, a teacher and Peace Ambassador trained by the Aegis Trust in 2022 under the ASPIRE Programme.

Gisele was already committed to her students before the training, but Peace and Values Education (PVE) reshaped how she understood her role not only as an educator, but as a mentor, a listener and a builder of peace.

"After the training, I realised that teaching is not only about delivering lessons; it is about understanding what children are going through and helping them heal."

Seeing what others missed

Inspired by her training, Gisele took an unusual step: she conducted a simple survey among her students to understand their lives beyond the classroom. What she found was alarming. Beneath the surface, many students were carrying heavy burdens of trauma, family conflict and isolation invisible to most, but subtly shaping everything.

Rather than look away, she acted. She worked with mental health professionals to ensure the most affected students received proper support. And those same students, the ones society might have written off, became the founding members of something new: the Peace and Anti-Violence Club.

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A club that became a safe space

The club quickly grew into far more than an extracurricular activity. It became a place where students could speak honestly, support one another, and learn to resolve conflicts without violence. Through peer discussions, guided activities and shared storytelling, they began to rebuild confidence and trust in themselves and each other.

The results were visible. Students who had once struggled academically due to emotional distress began to improve, some reaching the top of their class. Their behaviour changed. Many became role models, extending a hand to others facing the same struggles they had once faced alone.

The Harmony: Giving Peace a Voice

As the club grew, so did its ambition. Students and parents wanted to reach beyond their meetings to speak to the whole school, and beyond it. So they created The Harmony, a teacher student-led newspaper dedicated to peace and non-violence.

Each edition carried messages on conflict resolution, gender-based violence, and the importance of living peacefully together. The Harmony quickly became one of the most visible signs of change at GS Nduba. It gave the club's values a wider audience, brought quieter voices into the conversation, and reminded the entire school community week after week that peace is more than a one-time lesson - it is a practice.



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Changing the whole school

The influence of the club and The Harmony together spread through every corner of school life. Peace messages were woven into morning assemblies, classroom conversations and daily interactions, reshaping the culture of the entire institution. A message installed visibly within the school said it plainly: "Let us live in peace, free from violence especially gender-based violence."

Teachers and school leadership embraced the shift, and what had begun in one teacher's classroom became a whole-school movement. "We have seen a real change not only among the club members, but across the whole school," says GS Nduba Headteacher Edouard Nizeyimana. "Students are more disciplined, more confident, and their relationships have improved. Even those who were struggling academically or personally are now performing better and engaging positively."

Beyond the school gates

The impact did not stop at the school fence. Students carried these lessons home, and parents began to notice not only better grades, but changes in how their children communicated, handled conflict, and cared for those around them.

For some students, the support came at a critical moment. Young people facing severe challenges, family breakdown, unintended pregnancy or personal crisis found in the club the encouragement they needed to stay in school and rebuild their future.

A foundation for lasting change

What started with training has grown into a movement. Gisele's story shows that peace begins with a teacher who decides to truly see her students. Who asks the questions others don't. Who creates a space where the most vulnerable feel safe enough to grow. From classroom to community. From silence to conversation. From struggle to strength.

