



ASPIRE stories

Sandrine Gisèle Irakoze

Sandrine Gisèle Irakoze's journey began as a youth champion with Aegis Trust, where her curiosity about memory and history steadily grew into a clear sense of purpose. What started as participation soon became deeper engagement, especially after she partnered with a senior researcher who introduced her to the discipline and responsibility of research.

With this foundation, she was selected as an ASPIRE Cohort I research grantee. The programme provided mentorship, structure, and space to turn her passion into meaningful work. It was during this time that she developed and published her first research paper, focusing on second generation survivors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Her study explored how young people understand and live with intergenerational trauma, an area often overlooked. Using dialogue-based methods, she created safe spaces for participants to share experiences and reflect. In some cases, this process led them to write letters to their parents and guardians, opening conversations, asking questions and expressing feelings that had long remained unspoken. The approach was powerful, and the response from participants was positive.

The impact extended beyond the research itself. Junior researchers involved in the process described it as eye-opening, while organisations began to see new ways of addressing trauma through evidence-based approaches.

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Sandrine's work helped shift intergenerational trauma from a distant concept to a familiar and discussable reality, especially among young people. Her voice quickly reached wider platforms. She was recommended by the Aegis Trust to present her findings on panels and at major international events, including the 6th International Conference on Genocide organised by California State University, as well as forums on intergenerational justice in Africa. These opportunities expanded her influence and affirmed the relevance of her work.

Her research also strengthened her professional path. Already the founder of Ndabaga Impact, she enhanced the organisation's work by integrating research-based decision-making into its programmes. She also works as a consultant with Never Again Rwanda (NAR) and has collaborated with institutions such as University College London, contributing to research and supporting the training of other researchers. Her work reflects a clear commitment not only to study issues, but to apply practical, evidence-based solutions.

From her findings, new initiatives emerged. Organisations and institutions began developing programmes focused on intergenerational trauma, using her research as a baseline. She reflects this as a milestone helping transform a sensitive topic into one that is now actively addressed by communities, institutions and policymakers.

As she puts it, "Having authors and books being published is one of the ways that I believe can help us young people to know the history of the Genocide and pass down its memory." Her work continues to echo this belief, connecting knowledge with action.

Today, Sandrine stands as a strong voice for youth. Her journey shows how one idea, when nurtured, can grow into impact that reaches far beyond its starting-point, shaping conversations, inspiring initiatives, and strengthening understanding for future generations.

