

One Book, More Legacies
Bujumbura, Burundi
Vassar College
Breille Irahoza, Vassar College, Burundi
https://instagram.com/manoir_d_livres

Summary

One Book, More Legacies, aimed to engage 45 exceptional young people aged 18 to 25 in a three-day literary salon at the United Nations Information Center. Consequently, the project donated 60 books to 15 public and private educational institutions to promote access to indigenous literature for future generations.

Project Description

One Book, More Legacies, took place in the capital city of Burundi, Bujumbura. Burundi was relevant for this peacebuilding initiative because it is still recovering from the colonial legacy and the ills of the following civil wars. The central conflict that this project aimed to resolve was the need for more access to indigenous Burundian literature as it maintains evidence-based knowledge that promotes preserving Burundian identity and contributing to development action. This project is committed to decolonizing the human mind within this strategic framework by encouraging self-knowledge to promote peace and resilience.

In light of this, *One Book, More Legacies* decided to start with the youth, as they represent the country's future. An exceptional program was designed to equip young people interested in literature with the social and intellectual tools to understand past and contemporary experiences and serenely embrace their future. Indeed, the project had initially proposed five eminent authors: Perpétue MIGANDA, Augustin NSANZE, André NIKWIGIZE, Michel KAYOYA, and Déogratias NIYONKURU. However, due to the unavailability of three authors for the summer, a new series of well-chosen and remarkable works has been restructured as follows: *Trésors du Burundi ancestral* by Perpétue MIGANDA, *Pour la Dignité paysanne: Expériences et Témoignages, Réflexions et Pistes Méthodologiques* by Déogratias NIYONKURU, and *Les Paillettes* by Jeanne d'Arc NDUWAYO. More importantly, thanks to the rich network of Ms. Chantal NTIMA, the project's local support and the Maison de l'Entrepreneur (MDE) director, the desired authors and three famous social network pages found confidence and trust in collaborating with a young person like me. As a result, on 11th Juillet, *One Book, More Legacies* launched the application form for a literary salon.

Moreover, the organizing team selected 45 exceptional young people aged 18 to 25 across the country for a three-day critical reading adventure about the book series. During this phase, the project faced three unforgettable challenges: the limited number of academic institutions equipped with a library, the availability of young people, and the increased cost of services and goods due to inflation. The project

successfully took adaptive measures, including reducing the program length from ten to three days because these young participants had part-time jobs and other responsibilities that made them reluctant to commit to the program schedule. Instead of 25 initially intended public and private educational institutions, the project got only 15 with functional libraries. As indicated in the program participation agreement, any selected young person had to invite two guests from among relatives, friends, colleagues, or acquaintances to make the program more accessible and supportive. The program engaged 15 selected participants, their 30 guests, and the authors' distinguished guests in a three-day critical reading adventure. So, the challenges encountered did not discourage us; on the contrary, they demonstrated the complex accessibility of literary works, even in the economic capital.

Thus, the literary salon took place at the United Nations Information Center from August 8 to 10, where the authors presented the fundamental themes chosen and enlightened young people on critical points of their books. The discussions and reflections allowed young people to collectively explore indigenous conceptions of life, spiritual and moral ideals, environmentalism, cultural values, customs and taboos, and resilience, to name a few. Hence, at the end of the program, each selected participant received the same book series to donate to their chosen institution's library to stimulate legacies that promote inclusivity, mutual respect, solidarity, and the exchange of ideas related to contemporary life experiences and ideals. That is, the project donated 60 expensive and remarkable books: each of the 15 public and private educational institutions received three books, and each participant had one book gift package. Henceforth, the project benefited many Burundian generations by providing access to critical books that are often unavailable in most educational environments or too expensive for most young people. Hopefully, this endeavor will later generate solutions that will contribute to the development of Burundi.

The sustainability of this pilot project is anchored in the vision it channels through future generations: young people equipping themselves with the social and intellectual tools necessary to examine various aspects of society. This will be made possible by two factors. First, the privilege of meeting and working closely with influential people whose work I have long admired will connect me to potential sources of future funding. For example, Perpétue MIGANDA has held several positions in human rights, peace, and national reconciliation fields in Burundi. Déogratias NIYONKURU is the co-founder of ADISCO, winner of the King Baudouin Prize for the development of Africa 2014-2015, and Jeanne d'Arc NDUWAYO hosts literary salons at Institut Français du Burundi (IFB) and the Alliance française de Gitega. Their support and mentorship will be crucial in my development project journey. Second, the project developed a network of young participants engaged in the search for self-knowledge. Before returning to the USA, I established the *One Book, More Legacies* project into a new vision of the *Manoir d'iLivres*, which means manor of books. This transition stems from my understanding that the culture of reading indigenous works is a way of life, and this *Manoir d'iLivres* will be an inclusive, honorary, and diverse space where young

people can examine the socio-cultural heritage anchored in literary works to promote peace and resilience of the nation later.

Reflection

One Book, More Legacies was a genuinely enriching and stimulating experience. The project enlightened me that a similar program should be organized for adults. My target audience was young people aged 18 to 25, but I was surprised by the touching candidacy of a 48-year-old person. I understood uncomfortably that perhaps people, older or of the same age as my parents, born in the postcolonial context, live with this feeling of being disconnected from the Burundian identity. This possible reality explains the positive feedback from adults because the project dared to engage young people in complex conversations, which is almost unknown to parents themselves. This application form alone challenged me to consider that this was not just an issue of access to books but also a culture of reading. It allowed me to see the world from another perspective, where reading a book is a luxury many people do not possess. I will always be grateful for this project because, through dialogue, young people understood themselves better and respectfully challenged each other with their different ideas, beliefs, and visions, which is a fundamental basis for promoting peace. For this reason, I have come to understand peace as the freedom to know ourselves through the eyes of those around us.

Personal Statement

This project was a rewarding and life-changing experience engraved in my heart forever. It improved my problem-solving and critical thinking skills and, more importantly, taught me the importance of networking and teamwork. Coordinating such a colossal initiative was possible because I dared to try to make a difference in someone's life. I dared to look beyond my anxiety and lack of confidence. I didn't assume the young people the project impacted had a problem, and I was simply looking for a shared sense of loss and disconnection from our roots and ideals to imagine a cure together. And guess what? I was not alone, and I felt comforted. This was beautifully expressed in the title of one of the books written by one of the amazing participants: *mpore ku mutima*, which means "peace to your heart" in Kirundi. Peace to the Burundian youth's hearts. It was a short but memorable peaceful moment, perceiving ourselves in the most unexpected ways. Today, more than ever, I have confidence in my abilities as a leader and visionary. I look forward to seeing the vision of *Manoir d'iLivres* become a reality: creating an inclusive, honorary, and diverse mini manoir where young people can explore the socio-cultural heritage entrenched in literary works. I am deeply grateful for this unique opportunity Projects for Peace has offered me.