



1st April 2012

SURF and AVEGA announce a new three year project to alleviate the poverty of genocide widows in Rwanda through a grant from DFID

Survivors Fund (SURF) is honoured to announce the agreement of a new grant funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development (DFID) of £966,360 for alleviating the poverty of genocide widows in Rwanda in partnership with AVEGA Agahozo.

The three year grant will transform the lives of over 12,000 genocide widows in membership of AVEGA in the Southern, Northern and Western Provinces of Rwanda, as well as over 50,000 of their dependants. It is anticipated as well, that the project will enable AVEGA to extend their support to double this number of genocide widows and their dependants in the Southern and Northern Provinces of Rwanda where to date they have not been operational and the continuing need of genocide survivors for healthcare, education, shelter and livelihoods is still overwhelming today.

The three year Widowed Survivors Empowerment Project (WSEP) will enable AVEGA to recruit a professional staff for the first time for new offices to be established in Nyanza, in the Southern Province, and Gicumbi, in the Northern Province, and provide support to genocide widows across all seven districts in each Province to secure ownership of their land and property, develop viable livelihoods and access available health services. It will also ensure that the dependants of the widows can access education.

On the announcement of the grant, Odette Kayirere, Executive Secretary of AVEGA Agahozo, commented:

"This project will be critical to build the capacity of AVEGA. Through the recruitment and training of competent and skilled staff, the grant will enable AVEGA to provide services for the first time to widows in the Southern and Northern provinces, where we have many beneficiaries who need support. It will help us to reach, engage and mobilise them, and offers a solution for those that have legal, psychological and economic problems to improve their lives. Ultimately, it will contribute to poverty alleviation and sustainable development among our beneficiaries and thus the future will be bright."

David Russell, Chief Executive of Survivors Fund (SURF) adds:

"For many years, we have explored with AVEGA the opportunity to extend its vital work to the Southern Region of Rwanda in particular, where there is the greatest concentration of genocide widows anywhere in the country. This grant funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development (DFID) will lay the foundation to strengthen the work of AVEGA even further in the Northern and Western Regions too, through a proven model of livelihood development support for the genocide widows in membership of the organisation, as well as benefiting also thousands of their vulnerable dependants."

The project has been developed on the successful model of wraparound support that has enabled genocide widows and their dependants to rebuild their lives in the Eastern Province of Rwanda through support from AVEGA and funding from SURF.

It will also enable AVEGA to strengthen its existing office in Cyangugu, in the Western Province, to scale up support to genocide widows in the districts of Rusizi and Nyamasheke, and extend its services currently funded by Comic Relief, through the HIV+ Survivors Integration Project, which is due to conclude in September 2012. Additional funding for the project has been secured by SURF from the Sigrid Rausing Trust and Foundation Rwanda, and by AVEGA from UN Women and FARG.



Ultimately, the project will transform the lives of genocide widows, and their dependants, by eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and empowering them to integrate into Rwandan society. This is critically required as there is an estimated 49,656 genocide widows in Rwanda, many of which are marginalised and living in poverty in rural areas, and ageing, but who are still the primary caregivers for orphaned and vulnerable children.

Also, a significant number of widows are infected with HIV, as a result of rape during the genocide. Through an earlier grant of £4.25 million grant from DFID (from 2006 – 2010), AVEGA was the principal local partner that delivered a Care and Treatment Project for 2,500 HIV+ Women Survivors made possible through advocacy from SURF in the UK. The project concluded in 2010, and support has been extended through the Comic Relief funded HIV+ Survivors Integration Project. However, the need of this particularly distressed group is still great.

Notes to editors

Survivors Fund (SURF) has been a principal funder of AVEGA Agahozo for fifteen years through grants from Comic Relief, and an array of other international donors. SURF's funding enabled the establishment of the Eastern Province office of AVEGA Agahozo in 2001, under the leadership of Odette Kayirere. Odette is now Executive Secretary of AVEGA Agahozo, and her work in the Eastern Province has been recognised with the Guardian International Development Achievement Award in 2010. AVEGA was awarded the Gruber Foundation Prize for Women's Rights in 2011.

The founder of Survivors Fund (SURF), Mary Kayitesi Blewitt OBE, helped the group of fifty founding widows of AVEGA to legally establish the organisation in 1995 in Rwanda, and secured its first grant from Comic Relief in the UK in the same year. On formally establishing Survivors Fund (SURF) in 1997 as a charity registered in England and Wales, with offices in London and Kigali, SURF has continued to support AVEGA to date.

A comprehensive evaluation of SURF's work with AVEGA from 1997 to 2009 published by Comic Relief in 2010 concluded: *"The achievements of SURF as a catalyst and advocate on behalf of survivor organisations have been remarkable."* The organisation maintains its streamlined approach, with one full-time staff member in the UK and a team of ten staff in the Rwanda working to build the capacity of nine survivor-led local organisations, of which AVEGA is the principal partner

Between April and July 1994, over one million Tutsis and a number of moderate Hutus were killed in genocide in Rwanda. There is an estimated to be over 300,000 genocide survivors in Rwanda, of which AVEGA's work reaches over 100,000 of them. A survey it undertook last year, determined that in membership of the organisation there are 8,398 widows and 1,388 orphans in the Southern Province, 690 widows and 196 orphans in the Northern Province, and 3,780 widows and 728 orphans in the Western Province.

For further information on Survivors Fund (SURF), see www.survivors-fund.org.uk

For further information on AVEGA Agahozo, see <http://www.avega-agahozo.org/>

For further information on DFID, see www.dfid.gov.uk

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