

Memorial Sites

A key element of the work of Survivors Fund is the building of memorial sites in Rwanda.



Memorial sites, like the Isimbi, dot the Rwanda landscape everywhere. They are a constant reminder of pain and trauma suffered by the genocide victims. The Isimbi Memorial Centre is a grave for 25,000 people.



This simple memorial site serves also as a mass grave in Nyamashekye and is testament to the scale of the killing. There are 40,000 people buried here.

Many genocide victims were never given a formal burial. In confessions during gacaca trials, killers have admitted where bodies were dumped. SURF is working with survivors to locate the bodies and to give victims the dignified burial so important for allowing survivors a sense of closure.

Memorial sites are often built atop mass graves, and serve as a permanent testament to the events of 1994. They stand as reminders of the genocide for future generations and all people trying to belittle, rewrite or even worse, deny, the genocide.

As well as sheltering remains of the genocide victims, memorial sites often have recordings of testimonies by survivors and perpetrators, clothes and photos documenting the genocide. Others have pangas, machete and tools used by the killers on display.

In some instances, the mass graves remain open, as bodies continue to be discovered and buried. However, a number of mass graves have been sealed, as the coffins stored reached capacity.

SURF, with its grassroots partners, has helped to build over 50 mass graves and memorial sites. Each one is vitally important, for local survivors to pay their respects to family and friends killed in the genocide – whether or not their bodies have been found. As well, the sites give survivors a place to meditate and reflect on their loss.

The burial programme has been made possible largely through funding from Comic Relief. In total SURF has helped to give a decent burial to over 300,000 victims of the genocide.

Even today, many bodies still remain undiscovered in ditches, toilets, bushes and unmarked mass graves. But survivors have not given up hope that eventually they will be able to lay to rest all the victims of the genocide.