

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



# About Paper Crown

## Who We Are

Paper Crown Rwanda is a feminist Rwandan non-profit organization founded in 2014 by gender specialist, Katie Carlson Akron, and officially registered in Rwanda since 2020. We are a leading voice in using gender transformative approaches with a feminist lens to solve some of the world's most critical socio-economic challenges.

## Our Vision

A world in which the beliefs and attitudes that enable gender discrimination and violence are permanently transformed for the better.

## Our Mission

We equip adolescents, especially girls, to be vocal community activists through participatory, transformative community-based projects, so they are empowered to challenge gender norms and break the inter-generational cycle of discrimination and violence.

## Who We Serve

- Adolescent girls and boys age 14-19 from rural areas
- Parents and caretakers from rural and urban areas
- Couples (men and women aged 30-50 years old)

## Our Approach

Through our program My Voice, My Power (MVMP), we empower boys and girls with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to challenge gender inequality, promote positive relationships, and create safer, more inclusive communities where women and girls can thrive free from discrimination and violence using different approaches, such as:

### Youth leadership and engagement

Through training, dialogues, and advocacy, we engage young people, communities and decision makers in critical thinking and in-depth reflection on gender and social norms, gender roles, power dynamics, human rights, activism and leadership. Through this process, young people gain the confidence to act as strong advocates for gender equality in their communities, and become influential role models for their peers.

### Thought leadership

Paper Crown plays a key thought leadership role on feminist thinking and feminist advocacy within the women's rights, feminist movement and civil society in Rwanda; fostering inclusion, diversity, equality and transformative social change on a broader scale.



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Right: MVMP Kayonza Club during their community activism.

# Letter from the Executive Director

First and foremost, on behalf of Paper Crown, I would like to express my gratitude to the partners who supported our work this year, to our board of directors and our Global Advocacy Committee and, to the staff, without whom, none of the incredible impact in this report would be possible.

A decade ago, Paper Crown was founded by gender specialist and feminist leader Katie Carlson Akuno, who I am humbled to succeed in the role of Executive Director. She set out to do the impossible (well, the near impossible): transforming harmful norms that limit the potential of girls; perpetuate gender inequality, discrimination and violence; and impact our society in devastating ways. Every year, through our annual impact report, we take stock of how far we have come in honoring this incredibly audacious vision. Through this practice, we honor our

accountability to the young people we serve, to our donors and partners, to all our supporters, and to ourselves. Year after year, we invite you to celebrate with us our impact on the ground, but also to reflect on the serious challenges and threats facing our work and our organization in the current political and funding context.

The work Paper Crown does is not just necessary in the fight towards achieving gender equality; it is vital. Work like ours will ensure future generations of men and women equal in the household, equal in the workplace, and equal before the rule of law. Our unique model, My Voice My Power (MVMP), both builds agency and voice for girls to claim their rights while also building men's allyship and fostering leadership and activism among young people of all genders. These transformed young people will go on to

become leaders, parents, partners, entrepreneurs, educators; and in whatever path they choose, we hope they will be first and foremost activists and champions for a more gender equal and inclusive world.

With the support of our incredible partners like Kvinna till Kvinna, Shooting Touch, Ambassade de France, and Segal Family Foundation; we have expanded our flagship program My Voice My Power to more regions in Rwanda, impacting the lives of hundreds of adolescents and young people this year, as well as their communities.

Looking ahead, we are determined to raise the visibility of our work, as well as the work of fellow feminist organizations and activists in Rwanda. We will continue to contribute to feminist movement building in Rwanda and to advancing gender advocacy.

In the words of our founder, "Here's to a future world without gender violence, discrimination, and inequality, may we dream it, know it, and one day, truly and completely live it."



Gisèle Umutoniwase  
**Executive Director**

# Our Impact in 2023

## Milestones

2023 marked a pivotal moment in our organization's growth journey, both in the financial health of our organization and our operational capacity. With new key staff on board including the Executive Director, we have implemented crucial policies and procedures to strengthen organizational efficiency, transparency, and governance.

### hiring more staff

Paper Crown Team has grown from a team of 2 to 5 full-time employees.

### expanded programming

Paper Crown established its presence in 2 sectors of Bugesera District, Nyamata and Rilima, after initially piloting MVMP in Bugesera. This expands Paper Crown's reach to 3 districts and 2 provinces (Kayonza, Bugesera, and Gasabo Districts in Western and Kigali City Provinces). Additionally, the new initiative COFP was launched.

### increased visibility

Paper Crown has positioned itself as an organization and thought leader, including through new presence in mainstream broadcast as well as social media.

### expanding partnerships

Paper Crown added partnerships with local partners and donors, such as Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and French Embassy

**350 direct**  
beneficiaries

**225 hours**  
spent on training  
across 3 cycles

**5,000 reached**  
through published  
articles

**480 indirect**  
through  
activism  
events

**1,102 reached**  
through social  
media platforms

## Geographical Reach





Above: Participants of MVMP at Bugesera, Maranyundo working in groups.

# My Voice, My Power

My Voice, My Power (MVMP), Paper Crown's gender transformative program, is a pioneering initiative designed to tackle the underlying causes of gender inequality. By challenging harmful gender norms and fostering youth leadership and activism, MVMP creates a powerful platform for transformative change. Through a variety approach, MVMP integrates gender equality education with violence resistance strategies, notably girls empowerment self-defense, sexual reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence education, while engaging both boys and girls in the journey towards sustainable societal transformation.

At its essence, MVMP empowers girls and young women to realize their agency and challenge

prevailing societal constructs. Through critical thinking exercises, leadership development, and collective action initiatives, participants are equipped to navigate decision-making processes, confront harmful gender norms, and reshape power dynamics within their communities. By addressing the interlinked issues of gender-based violence, structural inequalities, and entrenched beliefs, MVMP serves as a catalyst for fostering positive relationships and creating an environment where women and girls can fulfill their potential, enjoy their rights, and aspire toward their dreams without fear of discrimination or violence.

In 2023, we've achieved significant milestones with our "My Voice, My Power" (MVMP) program.

## Cycle 1

In June, we wrapped up a successful cycle of MVMP Kayonza in partnership with Shooting Touch Rwanda that started in February. Both girls and boys who took part in the program gained valuable knowledge and shifted their attitudes towards gender, gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, community activism, and girl self-empowerment.

## Cycle 2

In November, we concluded another cycle of MVMP in Maranyundo, Bugesera District, in collaboration with Kvinna Till Kvinna that started in September. Participants embarked on their activism journey within their school, spreading awareness on critical topics such as gender equality, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health and rights among their peers, teachers, and parents.

## Cycle 3

In September, with the support from the French Embassy and Shooting Touch, we kicked off a new cycle of MVMP in Rilima, Bugesera District, under the project titled "*Tinyuka! Ose!*" (Dare!) We're eagerly anticipating the conclusion of this project in June 2024.

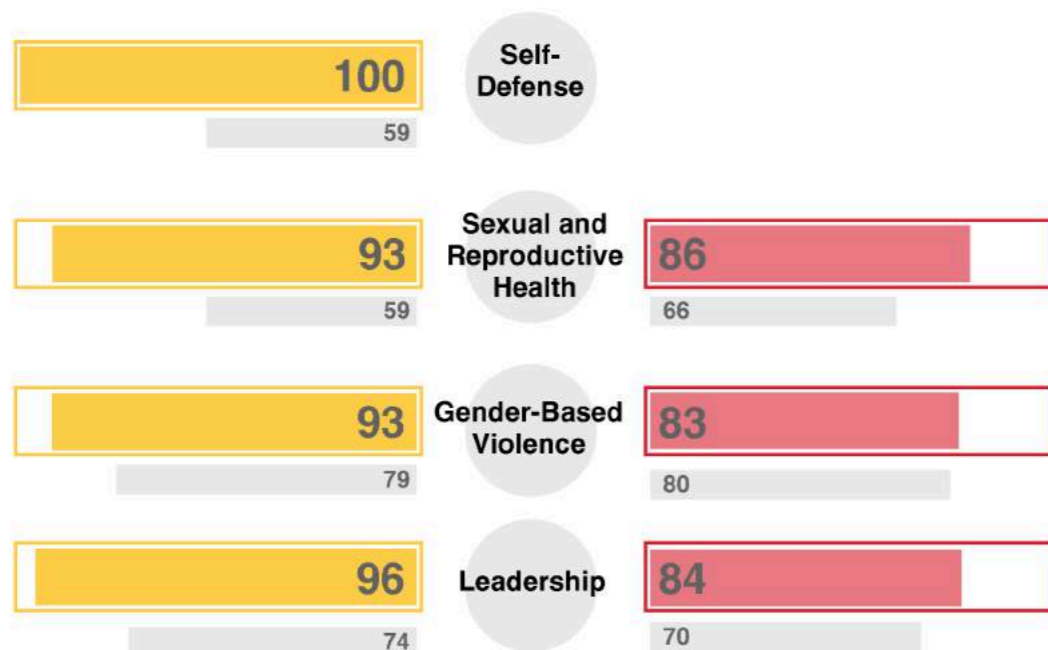
Through these initiatives, we reached over 350 direct participants and engaged with over 480 communities in Kayonza and Bugesera Districts. We're thrilled to witness the impact of our programs and the commitment of young activists in driving positive change within their communities.

Below: MVMP-Kayonza: Boys in Confronting and healing ourselves session.



# Impact

Average improvement in knowledge and attitudes among participants in My Voice, My Power (MVMP)



# Testimonials

“ One day I was at school standing with a boy whom we study together and he tried to touch my breasts. At that instant, I remembered a technique I learnt from My voice, my power in GESD. I stepped on his foot intentionally and he immediately stopped touching me.

- MVMP girl participant, Bugesera

“ I used to believe that I could not tolerate a girl denying me sex. I thought that she should always be ready to say yes, whenever I ask. But now, I know that she also has the right to say no if she doesn't want to, we can only have sex if she consents to that. I've also learnt how to put on and remove a condom properly.

- MVMP boy participant, 17 yrs, Bugesera

“ We also learnt about positive relationships and it really helped me. I used to have a friend who could always ask me to take notes for her even when I am not done with mine. After learning this session, I realized that she actually was exploiting me by using power over and not power with, so, I spoke out and claimed my rights and she stopped it, now we have equal say and power in our friendship.

- MVMP girl participant, 13 yrs, Bugesera

“ My elder siblings are male and female, but I used to imitate my brothers. They couldn't perform any domestic chores, only my sisters were responsible; and sometimes my mother could do some while we were all seated. At evening time, I used to follow my elder brothers to hangout while our sisters were busy with domestic chores. After the training, I realized that my sisters were burdened and decided to get involved in the chores though my elder brothers are unhappy.

- MVMP boy participant, 15 yrs, Kayonza 2023

“ During the training I learnt more about Human rights and what one can do and where to get support in case of GBV. There was an important part of self awareness that inspired me to recognise my strength and how to better use them to improve my life which boosted my confidence. After the training I was able to do some things I used to believe to not be able to do, I've also expanded my farming business from a smaller to a bigger portion. I also noticed that since my brother participated in the training he now takes care of the child when his wife is not around.

- MVMP Adult training, man participant, 40 yrs, Kayonza 2023

“ One important thing I learnt about GBV is that it is never the victim's fault, because before I used to believe that when someone was violated at some point, it was her fault. ex: When a parent maltreat the child, the child might have done something wrong. I also liked learning the steps of reporting violence which includes talking to a trusted adult, keeping evidence and where I can call to ask for help. I only knew the RIB number 116 because we heard it on the radio but we learned more numbers such as 3029 for Isange One Stop Center and 3512 the GBV prevention line.

- MVMP girl participant, 13 yrs, Bugesera



MVMP Bugesera, Maranyundo - boys in SRHR session



Girl participant in GESD session at Bugesera-Rilima



# Community of Feminist Practice

We were excited to introduce "The Community of Feminist Practice" (COFP), a groundbreaking initiative developed in partnership with Kvinna Till Kvinna in December. This platform is designed to unite thought leaders, gender practitioners, and feminist activists from diverse backgrounds in Rwanda. Our goal is to foster knowledge-sharing, best practices, and tools to advance gender equality and combat gender-based violence in Rwanda.

COFP consists of two main components:

- 1 Learning Hub**  
This website is where gender practitioners can access valuable resources to enhance their gender programming skills.
- 2 Feminist Cafés**  
These recurring events in the format of discussion forums promote collaboration and knowledge exchange among gender practitioners and feminist activists.

We've established a Steering Committee to ensure the smooth operation of COFP. Last December, during WHO's annual campaign 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, we officially launched COFP with a special event focused on the theme "Invest to prevent violence against women and girls." The event aimed to deepen participants' understanding of feminist practices and gender transformative approaches in designing effective and sustainable programs against gender-based violence. It also served as a celebration of the 16 Days of Activism campaign.

We're proud to report that the event reached over 50 individuals from various organizations with local and global impact all working with women and girls all with presence in Rwanda. This event - and the media coverage of 3 newspaper articles - marks an important step forward in our collective efforts to combat gender-based violence and promote gender equality in Rwanda.



**“The Community of Feminist Practice’s learning hub, hot topics discussions and actions can demystify feminism.**

**It is also a method to address root causes of [gender-based violence] that have been deeply ingrained in our societies, mindsets and habits.”**

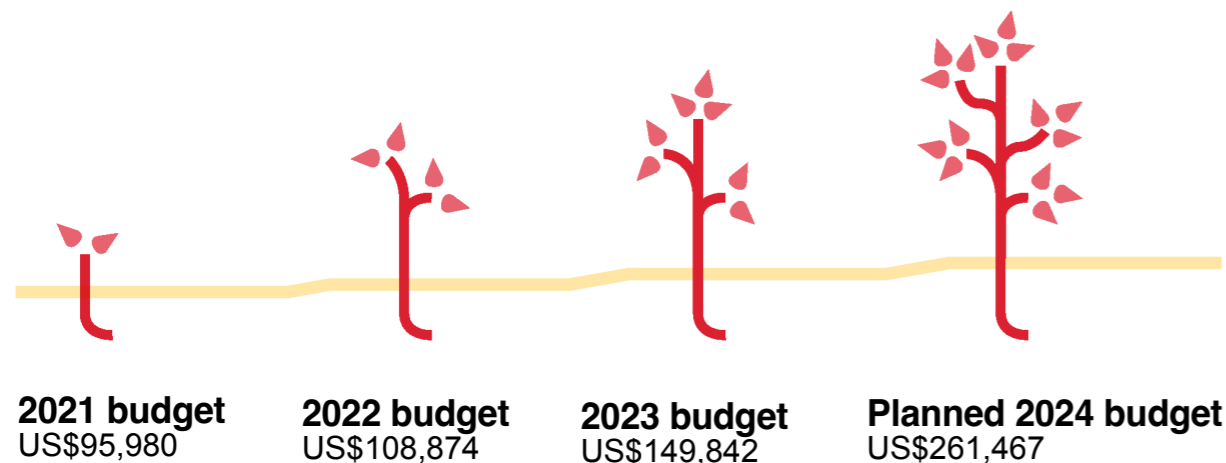
**- H.E Johanna Teague**  
Swedish Ambassador in Rwanda

*Above: H.E Johanna Teague officially launching the COFP*

*Right: Partners, donors and other guests’ group photo, COFP launch.*

# Organizational & Financial Growth

## Financial Growth



Despite the consistent growth in revenue over recent years, our organization still faces significant challenges stemming from our heavy reliance on restricted grants, which comprise over 98% of our total revenue. While we deeply value the trust and support of our donors, the constraints imposed by restricted funding limit our operational flexibility and can hinder our ability to fully realize our mission.

With our new strategic plan for 2024 onward currently under development, we plan to reduce dependence on restricted grants and cultivate a more sustainable funding model to strengthen our financial resilience and long-term impact. With your continued support and partnership, we are confident that we can overcome the challenges ahead and create lasting positive change in the communities we serve.

# Partnerships

## Appreciation

Paper Crown Rwanda extends heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you who has contributed to making this year truly memorable by supporting our cause. Your dedication and generosity have been instrumental in advancing our mission and creating positive change in the communities we serve.

Our special thanks goes to our funders and program partners, including:



And other partners like:

### Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Rwanda (FES)

For their leadership and collaboration on feminism advocacy.

### National Union of Disabilities' Organisations of Rwanda (NUDOR)

For bringing in their expertise in disability and inclusion to strengthen and improve our projects reach and impact.

### Bugesera, Kayonza and Gasabo Districts

For allowing us to work in their communities and their valuable support (recommendations & presence) to facilitate and enable the implementation of our projects.

### Teachers and Parents of MVMP participants

For various support either participating in MVMP or entrusting their children to us for the whole project period.

### Youth Advocacy Council

These enthusiastic young individuals are committed to finding solutions to the challenges facing both themselves and their communities. We can't wait to see what they can achieve with PCR!

### Global Advocacy Committee

We are grateful for volunteers abroad who helped us grassroots fund raise over US\$5,000 in 2023, including through hosting a screening of the film Neptune Frost and Rwandan craft sale in Zürich.

# Our Team - Staff



## **Gisèle Umutoniwase**

*Executive Director*

Gisele is a young feminist leader with over 6 years of experience leading programs and supporting organizational growth in the women's rights and public health sectors. Before joining Paper Crown Rwanda as the Executive Director, Gisele occupied program and project management roles in local NGOs focused on women's rights and empowerment. Gisele has a bachelor's degree in Pharmacy, holds a global project management certification (PMP), and has been a recipient of prestigious fellowships and training in business and leadership, including the Mandela Washington Fellowship. She is a passionate feminist who believes that the key to creating sustainable social change is by fostering full and equal participation of women and girls in all areas.



## **Martine Uzamukunda**

*Project Coordinator*

She handles Paper Crown's Project Coordination in Rwanda from 2020. Martine graduated from Akilah Institute in 2017, and is a passionate activist for gender equality and the meaningful empowerment of women and girls. She has a background in Human Resources management and extensive experience with administration, project coordination and customer care. Martine has previously worked as a Community Coordinator for social change projects within Akilah, where she deepened her dedication to supporting girls in Rwanda to know their rights and achieve their dreams.



## **Clementine Nyirarukundo**

*Programs & Partnerships Manager*

Clementine leads Paper Crown's activities in Rwanda, and a passionate activist for gender equality in Africa and around the world. She has been working with Paper Crown since 2014 and is a skilled gender trainer. Clementine is also a member of the UN Women's National Gender Youth Activist Task Force in Rwanda.



## **Rahmat Umuhoza**

*Communications Officer*

Rahmat is a dedicated gender activist, international multimedia journalist, and communication professional, boasting nine years of expertise in journalism, media, and communications. Starting her career as a radio presenter in both public and private media, Rahmat later transitioned her focus to behavior change communication. In this role, she adeptly created, developed, and disseminated strategized content for a desired outcome across different platforms. Passionate about Gender, Rahmat has collaborated with numerous institutions and NGOs to empower women, young people, and girls through training on gender, Sexual reproductive health and rights, leadership, public speaking, and storytelling. Recently, she has shifted her attention to corporate communications, utilizing her skills in strategy and campaign design, alongside her storytelling skills, to leverage and amplify the work and impact of different organizations.



## **Judith Dusabe**

*Finance Officer*

Judith Dusabe is a professional Accountant and Finance with more than ten years of experience in successfully executing finance and accounting work in different organizations

# Our Team - Board



**Juliette Karitanyi**

*Board Chair*

“Juju” is a health communications specialist, women’s rights activist and vocal advocate for the promotion of gender equality in Rwanda. She began her feminist activism hosting her own talk show on Hot FM as a radio presenter in 2015, raising awareness around different issues such as unpaid care work, rape, teenage pregnancy, child defilement, unsafe abortion, GBV, intimate partner violence, and sexual and reproductive health rights. Juju believes in changing and challenging social norms and culture to foster an enabling environment for meaningful gender equality.



**Sylvie Nsanga**

*Board Vice Chair*

Sylvie Nsanga is a social justice activist and radical feminist with a passion for ICT for Development and more than 13 years’ experience in digitization policies and strategies. Sylvie formerly worked as a digitization specialist with the Government of Rwanda. She is passionate about digital and inclusive innovations to solve society’s most pressing challenges.



**Katie Carlson-Akuno**

*Founder of Paper Crown*

Katie is an international gender specialist and a vocal advocate for the rights of women and girls around the world. Katie has been participating in gender study and feminist activism across many different contexts for over 20 years, and has been working on gender issues in Rwanda for over a decade. Katie served as Paper Crown’s Executive Director until 2020 and has been providing technical and strategic advisory on the Board since. Katie is now regional gender advisor for East Africa for the World Food Programme.



**Virgile Uzabumugabo**

*Treasurer of the Board*

Virgile is the Feminist Movement Building Coordinator at OXFAM. Virgile also serves as the Chief Commissioner of the Rwanda Scouts Association, and over the last 25 years has developed a passion for working with children and youth in the areas of rights and livelihoods development. Virgile is highly skilled in influencing and networking and communications.



**Theophile Zigirumuga**

*Member of Conflict Resolution Committee*

Theophile has an impressive career track record of over 23 years in the areas of project management, gender equality promotion, child protection, inclusive education and development. He is an experienced trainer in gender equality, the promotion of positive masculinity and gender-based violence prevention across various sectors and contexts.



**Dominique Uwase Alonga**

*Member of Conflict Resolution Committee*

Dominique is an entrepreneur and a feminist who is passionate about the intellectual growth and skills improvement of her fellow Africans. She is the Founder and CEO of Imagine We Rwanda, an award-winning social enterprise and publishing house with the aim of empowering the reading and creative writing culture in Rwanda.



**Ilaria Buscaglia**

*Board Member*

With a Ph.D in anthropology from the University of Siena, Ilaria has been working as a qualitative research specialist in Rwanda since 2007, and has carried out both academic and applied research projects, mainly in the field of gender, women’s rights, youth and SRHR. She has worked for different universities, both in Italy and Rwanda, as a lecturer and researcher in cultural anthropology and gender studies.



### **Grace Nyakanini**

*Board Member*

Grace is a digital development professional with 15 years of experience in digital development programs, having worked with the Government of Rwanda and Smart Africa Secretariat, a Pan-African organization on digital development. She has delivered various digital transformation programs for the Government of Rwanda and Smart Africa including the Smart Africa Digital Economy Initiative, Kigali Innovation City project, and Digital Government Programs, among others. Grace is passionate about social justice programs especially for women and girls. This passion was inspired through her mother who took part in the 3rd World Conference on Women in 1985 in Nairobi, an event that was considered a tipping point for global feminism and gender equality. With her experience in digital development, Grace became increasingly aware of the fact that the internet is both an opportunity and a challenge for women's empowerment and equality. She has therefore been on the forefront of bridging gender digital divides in Africa and is currently working with Smart Africa to support a program on Smart Women and Girls as well as an advocate for reducing this critical divide in Africa.



### **Shamimu Mukeshimana**

*Board Member*

Shamimu is an educator with more than 19 years of experience. She is a mentor passionate about children's education.



### **Prudent Gatera**

*Advisor to the Board*

Gatera is a gender activist who holds a Master's degree in Project Planning and Management. His passion for the promotion of gender equality grew when he joined Rwanda Men's Resource Centre as a member in 2010 and later as an employee in charge of capacity building from 2013-2017. Prudent has extensive experience in Project management and Monitoring and Evaluation.



  
**PaperCrown**  
R W A N D A

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