

Women in projects can build self-esteem

Building self-esteem and confidence in women is a pre-condition for the Rwandan women to actively participate in development. This was disclosed during a recent interview with Agnes Gyr-Ukunda, a Rwandan lady living in Switzerland, who is the founder of Edition Bakame, a publishing company for readers in Kinyarwanda. She spoke to Immaculate Chaka from Women Times and below are the excerpts.

TNT: Could you please introduce yourself briefly?

Agnes: I am Agnes Gyr-Urukundo and I live in Switzerland. I am married with four children.

TNT: When did Edition Bakame come into existence?

Agnes: It was out of compassion for the underprivileged Rwandan children that I started this project. Sometime back as I was watching television after the 1994 tragedy, the Rwandan children had all they needed except joy. I remember my father telling me good stories that would make me happy, so I tried to figure out what I could do for the Rwandan children so that they would experience joy.

I wished I would tell stories to Rwandan children. That is why I came up with a project of this nature. Publishing story books written in Kinyarwanda is our sole mission so that at least every Rwandan child would get a chance to access such interesting stories.

TNT: What are the contents of Edition Bakame?

Agnes: We produce books of love stories, documentaries, proverbs and picture compositions (picture books). Bakame has the capacity of producing 5,000-10,000 copies annually.

Bakame produces educative and entertaining books in Kinyarwanda for children aged between 8 and 11 as well as

those aged 12 years and above. Edition Bakame does not publish its books in English and French because it is quite expensive to translate.

TNT: Where do you get funds for your publications?

Agnes: Edition Bakame is funded by the Swiss people who appreciate our vision of publishing children's books in the Kinyarwanda language. The Rwandan culture and history are reflected in the stories that we write.

TNT: Do you think people love reading your books?

Agnes: Ha! I do not like to sound like I am blowing my own trumpet but our experience is that children do enjoy reading most of our books. For example, Kanyana, a reader in Kinyarwanda. It is a love story. Kanyana is not only read by children but also adults read it because it is educative and exciting.

However, one major hindrance is poverty. Though some parents wish to buy books for their children they cannot afford. The little money they get is utilised to buy food and other basic necessities. Thus, many parents cannot afford to buy books for their children due to high poverty levels in the country.

TNT: What could be your vision as a publisher?

Agnes: As a publisher I wish every Rwandan child to get access to our books, for they are so educative. Basically, my role as a publisher is to publish as many books as possible. I also think it is the duty of government and schools to set up libraries, where everyone can be able to find a book to read.

TNT: What could be the challenges you are facing in



Agnes Gyr-Ukunda

your job?

Agnes: Currently, we lack good writers and consequently we may not have good books on the market. We also lack relevant professionals to handle the production of books; in most cases during printing there is wastage of paper due to use of unskilled manpower. Such material would be recycled if we had the technicians we yearn to have.

TNT: How do you spend your leisure time?

Agnes: (She is all smiles) I am a busy lady. Whenever I get some free time I make sure that I spend it with my family.

TNT: What could be your some of your hobbies?

Agnes: Ha! I love reading novels, travelling and cooking.

TNT: Ha! You have talked about cooking. What types of dishes do you make in Switzerland?

Agnes: So interesting! In Switzerland I make both Kinyarwanda and European dishes.

TNT: Between Switzerland and Rwanda, which one do you love most?

Agnes: I can't say that I love more than the other because I love both of them. However, Rwanda means a lot to me. It is my motherland and I am so proud of being a Rwandan.