

GITAGATA Grant Proposal
100 Projects for Peace
Submitted by: Bates Students for Peace in Rwanda

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Peace is more than the absence of war. We find it most inclusive to consider peace a harmony of people and interests in the pursuit of wellbeing. We believe our peacebuilding efforts can be most productive by fostering cooperation, human security, and personal stability. We seek to foster sustainable peace through improving the lives of the children who continue to suffer the consequences of Rwanda's 1994 genocide. Having lost their families, tens of thousands of children struggle to support themselves and their siblings in Rwanda. Children are forced to sacrifice their dignity simply to survive. We believe that Rwanda's success as a post-genocidal state depends on the future of its children.

With these objectives in mind, our group, "Bates Students for Peace in Rwanda" (BSPR), has initiated a relationship with GITAGATA, a state-administered home for street children in the particularly devastated Bugesera region of Rwanda. By collaborating with a pre-established organization, we can best fulfill our goals, and theirs, of improving access to education and critical resources for the street children. We can simultaneously raise domestic awareness of the continued difficulties facing children in this forgotten corner of the world.

Another reason for our focus on Rwanda is our concern that humanitarian operations quickly suffer from donor fatigue as other issues become seemingly more pressing. Forgotten too are the victims. Our project aims to be sustainable; the ties we establish with the initial grant are meant to survive long after the original funding has been spent.

We selected GITAGATA based on its need and a personal connection with two members of BSPR. The first individual is a Rwandan student whose family remains in the country, deeply committed to the reconstruction efforts. The other is a professor whose personal interest and academic research focus on the Rwandan genocide. Such individual connections lend us better insight on the situational needs of the organization and will help ensure the sustainability of this project.

GITAGATA performs several constructive roles in the region. It cares for and raises hundreds of street children, many of whom are orphans. The organization houses, feeds, educates, trains, and nurtures these particularly vulnerable children, thereby preparing them to become valuable members of tomorrow's Rwanda. However, both human and financial resources are scarce. BSPR plans to support these needs in ways to be detailed below.

Our proposal has three major components, all playing equally important roles in the long-term sustainability of our project. The first is the creation of a campus group, BSPR, intended to raise awareness of and maintain interest in the project we will initiate. The second component is one of intercultural exchange between Bates College and GITAGATA. The final portion will help to fulfill some of GITAGATA's most pressing needs, namely providing teachers, transportation, and housing.

I. Bates Students for Peace in Rwanda

BSPR will serve as the base of communication and coordination between our domestic and Rwandan work. We will raise awareness of the plight of Rwandan street children and conduct fundraising events for GITAGATA.

II. Fundraising through Cultural Exchange

GITAGATA teaches young women important skills such as weaving, sewing and knitting so that upon reintegration into the larger Rwandan society they are able to support themselves and their families. We propose to import some of these crafts to our campus where they can be sold locally and in the campus bookstore. The money generated from these sales is to be returned to GITAGATA for facility maintenance and the purchase of medicine, books, and other supplies.

In order to help the children reconcile their traumatic pasts, we will give them disposable cameras and ask them to take pictures of their community. After developing the pictures, the children will be asked to explain the significance of the picture. This process is cathartic for the children and allows us to learn from their experiences. These pictures will be displayed in campus galleries and reprinted for sale on campus and in the community. This will help raise domestic awareness and fund future projects while aiding the psychological recovery of affected children.

III. Material Support

In correspondences, GITAGATA has specifically cited its pressing need for a vehicle with which to transport sick children to the hospital. They currently do not have a vehicle and any sick child must walk or be carried many miles to the nearest medical facility. Additionally, the growing number of street children in demand of GITAGATA's services has outstripped its ability to provide and maintain housing. Our funds will contribute to the construction of an additional new residence for the children.

Finally, we intend to use a portion of our funding to send three students, in addition to our Rwandan student who will already be there, to GITAGATA. The organization is desperately in need of personnel to help teach and care for the more than three hundred orphans currently under the supervision of only six caregivers. By temporarily fulfilling a pressing organizational need, visiting Bates students will provide relief to GITAGATA's employees and critical additional support to the children there.

Our project will provide awareness, and financial and personal support necessary to better the lives of GITAGATA's children. By envisioning peace as a socio-cultural issue both locally and internationally, we can help disadvantaged children in Bugasera pursue a better life for themselves. As future productive members of society, they can contribute to the rebuilding of a stable and peaceful state. These children are victims of circumstances beyond their control, but with our help their future can be brighter than their past.