

ROSALIE'S STORY

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



[Watch Rosalie's Story on Vimeo](#)



Rosalie poses for a photograph near her home in Bukavu, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Photo: Arlette Bashizi

Rosalie had a tough childhood. Her father passed away when she was just two-years-old and her mother struggled to look after the family on her own.

Then, when she was just 15 years old, Rosalie was forced to join the army. In recent decades, the DRC has experienced ongoing political instability, violence and conflict, and the recruitment of child soldiers is all too common.

Rosalie suddenly found herself forced to transport munitions to soldiers on the battlefield while facing the constant threat of violence inside the military camp. She had to continue to work as a soldier, even after she married and had children because she had no other option – and it was the only life she knew.

“I was in the battlefield with my baby on my back,” Rosalie recalls. “I walked with a child in my left hand, a box of ammunition on my head and another child on my back.”

When Rosalie was finally demobilised from the army after six years, she was eager to start a new life, free from violence. But like many ex-combatants, Rosalie found the challenge to adjust to civilian life overwhelming. With her childhood and education cut short by the war, she had missed out on developing skills that would help her to find secure employment. She struggled to earn a sustainable income to provide food for her children. There was also prejudice towards ex-combatants in the community.

Rosalie was determined to turn her life around and set a new path for herself and her family. She joined the Protection & Re-Integration of Ex-Combatants program, supported by Caritas Australia, and its local partner organisations, Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and Caritas Bukavu. She participated in training in accounting, conflict management, gender awareness and human rights and developed a plan for her own small business.

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Rosalie also joined a Saving and Internal Lending Community group (SILC), which helped her with a loan to start her own small business, selling second-hand shoes and natural remedies. She learnt savings and group management skills and became the SILC group's president.

Through the program, she gained essential skills in generating an income while gaining a sense of belonging and community spirit.

"I can eat, dress, maintain my health and help others. My children study and manage to eat twice a day," Rosalie says. "The program allowed me to break out of my ways of just thinking about myself and I have learnt to work hand-in-hand with other members of the community. Really, there is more joy in sharing with others."

From her life as a child soldier, Rosalie has become an entrepreneur and a respected community leader. She is helping other women to save and to start up their own businesses. Her husband also has a better understanding of gender equality and is giving her more support in caring for their seven children – four girls and three boys - who are all healthy and doing well at school.

She has dreams of expanding her business to also sell ice cream, to diversify her income to help to pay for her children's education. She is determined to give her children the best chance to finish school.

So far, 2500 people have benefitted from this program, and 48 savings and loans groups and five peace committees have been established. The program is set to expand in future, to help young people and other vulnerable community members, in addition to ex-combatants.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns have created significant health and economic challenges for the region, Rosalie is striving to help her family and her community to break the cycle of poverty - to create lasting change for future generations.

"May the Australian people continue to help others as well, so that they can also take care of themselves," Rosalie says. "A really big thank you."

Rosalie is inspiring women and other members of her community to overcome the violence of the past, to work towards a more peaceful and harmonious world for all future generations.

Along with your generous support, this program is also supported by the Australian Government, through Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



Photo: Arlette Bashizi

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TASK 1: Discussion

- A. What were some of the challenges faced by Rosalie growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) ?
- B. Explain how Caritas Australia and their partners in the DRC assisted Rosalie and her family.
- C. How has your support of Caritas Australia changed Rosalie's life?
- D. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Rosalie's story?

TASK 2: Root causes of poverty

- Learn about the root causes of poverty [here](#).
- Choose three of the potential root causes of poverty and explain how they apply to Rosalie's story. Choose from: debt, conflict, lack of education, gender inequality, poor health, environmental factors, and food insecurity.

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A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW (JUDGE)

From those seeds of hope patiently sown in the forgotten fringes of our planet, from those seedlings of a tenderness which struggles to grow amid the shadows of exclusion, great trees will spring up, great groves of hope to give oxygen to our world.

• *Pope Francis*

- How has Rosalie shown great resilience?
- How is the Protection & Re-Integration of Ex-Combatants program upholding Gospel values?

FAITH IN ACTION (ACT)

Our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active.

• **1 John 3:18**

- It would be difficult for us to not be moved by Rosalie's story and the persistent unrest and violence in the DRC.
- How did you feel after hearing Rosalie's story?
- How does your faith guide you to respond?