

Francine's* Story & Testimony

Edited Excerpt

A girl from Home 2 at Patmos Children's Village

*Not her real name — to protect her privacy

Related to the Bushushu and Nyamukubi Catastrophe from May 2023

Story Background

Flooding and mudslides on May 2 & 4, 2023 devastated the localities of Nyamukubi and Bushushu in Kalehe territory in South Kivu province in the D.R. Congo. According a report based upon information provided by UNICEF, more than 443 people had died and more than 2, 536 people were still missing. Overall, 4, 653 households were directly affected.

Of the 3, 371 houses that were damaged, 1,200 were unusable or destroyed. Public water networks were almost totally destroyed. This put the population at risk of waterborne diseases, especially considering the hazards related to un-recovered bodies.

Here is the impact on children as seen in the report concerning schools. A total of 33 schools were affected, representing 9, 342 students (71 per cent primary school pupils) and 311 teachers. More than 1, 000 school-aged children are still missing, and 12 teachers or school staff are reported dead or missing.

The report also stated that – “One of the main challenges remains the identification, tracing and family reunification or placement of unaccompanied, separated and orphaned children.

One such child we'll call “Francine.”

Testimony

Before the catastrophe, we had a relatively good life because our father was living far away from us, in the province of Haut-Congo. He had left us for four years.

There were four children in our family, all girls.

Our mother worked very hard so that we could live like other children who had a good life. She was a vegetable seller, and through this work, she was able to send us to school, provide us with clothes and food, and meet the other needs that every child has.

Our family was happy and peaceful because we were Christians and members of the Adventist Church. Many people, including our neighbors, admired the kind of family life we

had. Our only sadness was not having our father at home.

Every morning before going to school, our mother would organize the work we had to do that day. On the day of the catastrophe, before leaving for school, she told me that after school I should go to my older aunt, who lived a little farther away, to collect some of her things.

When I arrived at my aunt's house, she gave me some small tasks to do to help her. I did those tasks because I loved her and because she was the person who had been taking care of me.

However, while I was returning home, I saw people running down the hill. They were saying that the mountain had collapsed and that it was carrying away many people, with many others losing their lives.

The school was swept into the lake. The hospital collapsed, and the health centers and other facilities were also swept away by the mud and water. The fields and crops were destroyed and carried into the lake. The main Goma—Bukavu road was covered with soil and very large rocks, and vehicles could no longer pass.

There was nothing left to do but run for safety.

I returned to my older aunt's house, where I had come from, but my thoughts were constantly with my mother and my younger sister.

After the catastrophe, everyone was trying to look for their loved ones.

By God's grace, I met my little sister, and she was safe.

That day, however, I lost many people from my family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors.

My mother also died in the catastrophe. Even though it was very painful, I have faith that one day we will meet again in heaven.

Life became very difficult because we had lost our mother, and our father was not with us. The remaining family members decided that I would stay with my aunt, while my sister would stay with another older aunt.

Many things changed. Getting food, clothes, education, and even a place to sleep became difficult.

Because God is good, my aunt later received information that church elders, were registering children who had lost their parents.

My aunt registered both my sister and me because we did not know whether our father would ever return. In addition, the other members of the family had very limited resources

and could not take care of us as their own children.

Being registered was a special blessing, even though at that time we did not know whether we would ever find another family that would love and care for us like our own family had.

After the registration process was completed, people came to visit and assess our situation. Eventually, we were brought to Patmos Children's Village.

Today, I thank God for giving us another family where we can receive love, care, education, food, clothing, and hope for the future.

Although we lost our mother and many other loved ones in the Bushushu and Nyamukubi catastrophe, I continue to trust in God and believe that He has not abandoned us.