

# Albinos decry discrimination

MONDAY AUGUST 13 2018

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People living with albinism in Rwanda decried discrimination, stigma, extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education and basic services like healthcare. PHOTO | FILE

### **In Summary**

- In an interview with Rwanda Today, Nicodeme Hakizimana, executive director of people living with albinism, said most people living with albinism in Rwanda are poor because of lack of education and discrimination.
- Discrimination, stigma, extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education and lack of to access basic services like healthcare are some of challenges that Mr Hakizimana said should be addressed.

People living with albinism have appealed for help as most of them not only face

discrimination but also living in extreme poverty.

Albinism is a rare group of genetic disorders that cause the skin, hair, or eyes to have little or no colour.

Albinism is also associated with vision problems. In an interview with *Rwanda Today*, Nicodeme Hakizimana, executive director of people living with albinism, said most people living with albinism in Rwanda are poor because of lack of education and discrimination.

“The price of sunscreen lotion is Rwf10,000 and rwf6,000 for adult and children respectively to be used for two months. This he said too expensive for people living with albinism to afford.

“If we could get subsidies from the government so that the prices go down to Rwf2,000 for skin lotion, it would be a big step ahead for us,” said Mr Hakizimana.

He said persons living with albinism face social and health challenges.

“For instance, traditional herbalist in our neighbouring countries have created and spread a myth that blood and body parts of people with albinism can cure some diseases. This has resulted in attacks, abductions and killings of innocent albinos and theft of their bodies from the cemeteries.”

Discrimination, stigma, extreme poverty, unemployment, lack of access to education and lack of to access basic services like healthcare are some of challenges that Mr Hakizimana said should be addressed.

## **Disorder**

“We have people living with albinism in the association who graduated from universities but cannot get jobs because of stigma,” said Hakizimana.

According to Charles Komezusenge, a member of OIPPA association, the disorder has also caused family tensions.

“My father always quarreled with my mother, why she gave birth to an albino, and whenever I heard this I would immediately run to my room and stay indoors the whole day. He also dropped out of school after primary because of bullying and stigma.

“I even thought it was useless to go to school since even my parents considered me a curse. This exceptional treatment could make me feel excluded,” he says.

However, women also face multiple challenges with one having been left by her husband after giving birth to an albino.

According to Legine Mukamana who got married to Munyaneza Damascene in 2006, she claims she was abandoned after giving birth to a baby that was “extremely” brown.

However, with time, the child started to have blurred vision, lazy eyes, rapid involuntary movement of the eyes, and lost skin colour changed when exposed to sunshine. He also developed scar and wounds on the entire body.

### **Quarrel**

“When my husband realized he was an albino, he could always quarrel with me saying that I should take the child to his father,” she said.

When the child was 8, he left home, saying that he can’t live with an albino. Four years on, he has not returned home.

“I decided to go back to my family. That’s how my marriage ended,” Ms Mukamana said.

OIPPA said it has resolved some of the challenges through quite a number of actions.

It visits some families that have children living with albinism, give advice and ensure that they take them to school.

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