



"Being part of CIVICUS enabled us to defend the rights of prisoners in Burundi."

On the occasion of the [25th anniversary of CIVICUS](#), SABUSHIMIKE Mamert, President of the [Association of Friends of Nature](#) (AAN) and communication and advocacy officer with the Burundian Coalition of Human Rights Defenders, expresses how being part of CIVICUS - the Global Alliance for Citizen Participation - has allowed its organisation to improve the conditions of prisoners in Burundi and protect their rights. @mamertsabushim

Being part of the Global Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS) has been an important innovation and a very good thing for me, for the members of AAN and for prisoners in Burundi.

I learnt new advocacy knowledge thanks to CIVICUS, which has played a key role in improving hygiene and sanitary conditions of prisoners in Burundi, particularly in the country's main prison, Mpimba, which was holding 3,664 detainees by January 2018 despite having a capacity for only 800 inmates.

We visited Burundi's 11 prisons and found a deplorable situation for prisoners living there in terms of hygiene and sanitation.

- 150 prisoners shared a single latrine, 100 only had one shower and 90 had only one water tap
- Prisoners were living in confined spaces with inadequate ventilation. There were bedbugs and problems with sewage. Some prisoners were sleeping outside at night, even in the rain. Others slept on planks or concrete, shreds of mattresses or mats, parts of blankets and dilapidated mosquito nets. They lacked soap for washing themselves and their clothes.

Faced with this plight, AAN began to advocate to work with the country's Ministry of Justice for the improvement of their living conditions. This included writing official correspondences supported by denunciations to the media, which was unsuccessful.

CIVICUS organised a workshop from 7 to 9 August 2017 on the protection of rights advocates in Johannesburg, through which I gained new training on advocacy that I shared with AAN members.

Thanks to the new advocacy tactics skills that I acquired during this workshop, we approached a Ministry of Justice official who campaigned for us. This has resulted in changes including:

The construction of 10 new toilets and 11 water faucets. Involvement of prisoners in hygiene and sanitation activities. Prisoners have been involved in water and hygiene activities. Disinfectant is now available, and soap is distributed promptly by the Red Cross of Burundi. A number of prisoners have been released.

We sincerely thank CIVICUS for providing us with new advocacy skills that are at the root of these positive changes for Mpimba prisoners. Long live CIVICUS and its members.

[You can watch this video testimonial in French.](#)

If you also want to share your experience as a member of CIVICUS, through written or audio-visual testimony, please send your contributions with the subject: [25th anniversary testimonial], at membership@civicus.org .