

Trainees applying their learnings to community-level reconciliation



Following the large forum activities and facilitator training, which were conducted by CFOR in partnership with GER to support the reconciliation process in Rwanda, trainees are deeply committed to using their new skills to implement reconciliation activities in their respective communities. We recently organised meetings with these trainees to discuss how they have used their new skills in their own communities, as well as challenges they have faced and the way forward. The interactions were facilitated by Innocent Musore of GER, who appreciated the partnership with CFOR and the collaboration with the NURC, National Unity and Reconciliation Commission.

Reconciliation activities have helped trainees both personally, and within their community, and have received praise from government officials. This report brings together feedback from meetings with trainees and describes how trainees have effectively used their new skills to effect change in their own communities.

The first meeting took place on 15th November 2019 in Kicukiro District with about 60 community facilitators from three districts (Gasabo, Bugesera and Kicukiro). The meeting was also attended by NURC government officials, local leaders, members of the police force and army, religious representatives, and Peacekeepers (Abarinzi b'igihango). In this meeting, team leaders shared the outcomes of reconciliation activities which they have implemented in their communities. The trainees recounted how they have invited victims to share their

painful stories and supported them in asking for and giving forgiveness. Their reconciliation efforts have also helped to locate the bodies of victims, who can now be buried with dignity, and have resulted in repayments for properties damaged during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.

During these interactions, we felt a sense of positive change from the stories of reconciliation and the contribution of the trainees. In the process of encouraging perpetrators to seek forgiveness, Deo, who is a trainee and a member of local leadership, said: “In my community, I invited genocide perpetrators and survivors to talk about the issue of damaged properties, in collaboration with local leaders. The interactions went well as some damaged properties have been paid for and relations have improved within the community.”



Government officials (NURC central Sarah Bawaya, Ret. Col Gerard, NURC Bugesera Canisius and Police representative Seraphine) appreciating the activities of community facilitators (Kicukiro, 15th November 2019)

Jean Pierre, who is in charge of Unity and Reconciliation in Gasabo District, praised the activities of facilitators at a community level. “The activities have been very successful as genocide perpetrators are beginning to step forward and ask for forgiveness. This happened in the Butare Cell in the Nduba Sector.”

According to Hakizimana Patrick from the Kicukiro District, the reason that perpetrators have failed to provide repayment for properties damaged during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi is not because they don't have the money but because they haven't understood the value of the damage they caused. Speaking about how he has used his training to make positive change in the community, Patrick described how he approached individuals in the Mulinja Cell in the Gahanga Sector of Kicukiro District and used the skills he had learnt to facilitate interactions with perpetrators. His efforts saw some perpetrators apologise and agree to pay for the damage they caused, with 8 million RWF already paid. Patrick now hopes to continue to facilitate requests for repayment amongst other members of the community.



Community facilitators practicing the interactions that take place in their communities

Andrew, the NURC representative for Kicukiro, also appreciated the importance of GER and CFOR's work training community facilitators. He said: "when we were facilitating reconciliation dialogues in Kicukiro District and Patrick was giving testimony, a young woman left the room because it was the first time that she had heard someone saying that they had killed people and she could not keep listening. Those types of trauma are often witnessed in communities and they pose a challenge to the process of reconciliation. NURC, therefore, recommends that GER and CFOR continue to reach out to those who are still wounded by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi".

Carine, a survivor of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi from the Kicukiro District, has used her training to facilitate conversations with the wives of individuals who have been imprisoned for their role in the Genocide. “I encourage them to ask their husbands to share the truth with their children. In our interactions, I use the skills I learnt from the training, especially the importance of listening and allowing individuals the time to tell their stories, whilst feeling with and sharing their emotions. I also visit elderly survivors and help them with domestic activities. I have found that this helps them to open up and tell us their painful stories as they no longer feel so isolated.”

Christophe, a perpetrator of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, shared the challenges he has faced trying to locate the bodies of victims. He described how other perpetrators do not understand this process of reconciliation and, therefore, are not willing to provide information on where the bodies are located. “Some perpetrators say to me: ‘You confessed for your sins, and you were released from prison, what else do you want? Better to give up.’ I wish to organise community dialogue with perpetrators who do not understand this process of reconciliation.” Innocent, of GER, invited NURC Central to respond to this. An NURC representative thanked Christophe for the information he provided and his efforts to locate bodies of victims, and said that NURC will follow up on the challenges he has faced and provide solutions in collaboration with security organs in his district.



Perpetrators showing how they ask their children for forgiveness and overcome the shame caused by their role in the 1994 genocide against Tutsi.

Bugesera District Meeting:

On 10th January 2020, we met again with community facilitations from Bugesera. Pauline’s parents survived the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. She described her interactions with parents who neither allow nor encourage their children to participate in reconciliation dialogue and how she applied the skills from the forums and training to facilitate these conversations.

“I remembered the way that Arlene looks at you and shows her feelings and how this makes you feel more open. I used the same practice when facilitating our interactions.” Community facilitators in Bugesera District have since joined together and hope to operate regularly in collaboration with local leaders. They are committed to working together and sharing their experiences and challenges they encounter.

Gregoire, a perpetrator from Bugesera, said: “I decided first to reconcile with my family - I apologized to my children and told them the truth about my role in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi which has caused them so much shame. It was not easy, and I had previously struggled with telling my children about the role I played. However, attending the forum and training helped me to tell them the truth.” He expressed his wish for GER and CFOR to keep promoting, and supporting, reconciliation activities. He also hopes for more forums and trainings for the children of perpetrators to help process their unique trauma.



Small group discussions

Gasabo District Meetings:

On 5th February 2020, we met with trainees and local leaders from the Jabana Sector. In his opening remarks, Jean-Pierre, the representative of the Gasabo District, thanked the Rwandan Government for the process of reconciliation and its efforts to reunite Rwandans. However, he acknowledged that “there are still challenges that may bring us back to where we came from. We, therefore, appreciate the work of partner organisations, like GER and CFOR, who are helping to strengthen the process of Unity and Reconciliation in Gasabo District.”



*Group photo of participants in Gasabo District/Jabana
5th February 2020*

Anita is a facilitator from the Gasabo District who spoke of her feelings of hatred stemming from what happened to her father during the 1994 genocide against Tutsi. “After the genocide, I hated Hutu people. I could not even dare to sit with them in public buses. I have lived with these wounds for more than 25 years. Since attending the forums of GER and CFOR, I have heard the stories of people who have experienced similar trauma. Initially, whenever I tried to share my story, I didn’t feel brave enough to open up. However, because of interactions with other community facilitators, I am now feeling more open and committed to helping others.”

On 11th February 2020, we held our final meeting with community facilitators in the Rusororo Sector of Gasabo District. One community facilitator, Esperance, shared a story related to the dynamics of trauma in their community. They told the story of a Pastor who was married to a Hutu woman whose brother killed the family’s children during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. After the genocide, the Pastor struggled to divorce his wife and instead tried to forgive her. Following the tragedy, the couple had more children and named them after individuals who had killed children during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. “That kind of trauma remains hidden and affects each family member individually. The children were wounded by the loss of their elder brothers and being named after killers. The Pastor’s wife also experienced the pain from seeing her brother killing her children and she re-lived this trauma in the children she gave birth to who were named after other perpetrators.”



Youth in small group discussions

Claude has been able to speak openly for the first time about his past trauma through the forum and training. “I was born from rape during the 1994 genocide against Tutsi. When I was younger, my relatives used to treat me the same way they treated the other children in the family. However, my grandmother told me when I was older, and I felt like I didn’t belong anywhere. I was not a complete Hutu nor a complete Tutsi. I felt alone and did not see my place in the society. The GER and CFOR forums have helped me to open up and I have started to accept the way I was born - that I am Rwandese and that is more important than trying to define my background. I have met with others in my community with a similar story. I have helped them to overcome their shame by showing them that being Rwandese is more important than anything else.”

Recommendations.

Participants appreciated the leadership of Rwanda and the progress in reconciliation efforts but acknowledged that Rwandan society continues to face the effects of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. They recommended that GER and CFOR scale up their interventions in other areas of the country and increase the training and support of the next generation. Local leaders also recommended increased support for the social reintegration of ex-prisoners and returnees from armed groups in the DRC.

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