

Healing post genocide generation: Interaction held in Gahanga-Kicukiro



Introduction

The meeting took place on Friday, 17th September 2021, in the main hall of Gahanga Sector's Office in the Kicukiro District. It was organized by GER in partnership with CFOR. The aim of this interaction was to heal and unite the post genocide generation, in order to facilitate a brighter future. 40 youth from Gahanga-Kicukiro participated. The meeting started at 8:30 am by Innocent Musore, the executive director of GER, who began by welcoming all participants and asking them to introduce themselves. After the introduction, Innocent Musore thanked everyone for their participation, and expressed appreciation to CFOR for their support in making this interaction possible, specifically Arlene Audergon and late Jean Claude Audergon, who passed away but will be always remembered in Rwanda for his contributions to the process of unity and reconciliation, "although he is no longer alive, his spirit will be always with us in what we do; JC was interested in engaging youth in reconciliation activities, we will always remember his support and consideration for the youth".



Innocent Musore explained that the purpose of the interactions was to help the youth understand available opportunities and use them to go beyond Rwanda’s history and build a shared future. “You are the agents of change, with hope and support to facilitate the future. We have good leadership and good programs of uniting and reconciling Rwandans, and our wish is to support this work”, he said to the participants.

The District Representative in charge of youth forum’s unity and reconciliation activities in Kicukiro District officially opened the meeting by thanking GER and CFOR for their work to support reconciliation activities in the district. “GER and CFOR have been working with the Kicukiro District since 2016 and have made significant changes that improved relations between genocide perpetrators and survivors, and now they have made the very good move of focusing on the youth, since it aligns with the government’s priorities of engaging the youth, as they compose a big number of Rwandans” he said.

Andrew thanked CFOR for the good lessons taught to communities of the district, “especially to our teachers Jean Claude and Arlene. I cannot finish without speaking of Jean Claude, although he passed away and some of you do not know him, you should know that Jean Claude has helped the District a lot. On behalf of Kicukiro District, I thank Jean Claude as a teacher and mentor who trained our people to maintain unity, reconciliation, love and peace. As far as I am concerned, JC brought a new and innovative way of community healing and conflict resolution”, he said. He requested everyone to stand up and take a minute to honor and pay tribute to Jean Claude before starting the interactive activities.

Meeting process

Participants raised topics that they wanted to focus on and listed them on a flipchart to guide the discussion. These topics were raised by the participants depending on what they need to know, questions they ask themselves, existing challenges of unity among them, and problems faced that are related to the history of Rwanda and the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

The topics raised were as follows:

- The history of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and its effects on the post genocide generation.
- Why Unity and Reconciliation is needed.
- The role of families in teaching unity and reconciliation; sensitizing youth about the perpetuation of genocide ideology and how discrimination among youth arises from genocide ideology.
- Ndi Umunyarwanda (promoting the sense of being Rwandan among the youth)

We used small and large group discussions to facilitate group discussions on these topics, using testimonies and knowledge sharing by elders who experienced history.

Young people born after the genocide have shown that they are very eager to know the history of the 1994 Genocide. “For us born after the genocide, we do not have enough information about it. We need to know what really happened that made people kill other people”, one of the youths said. This topic was facilitated by Patrick, GER’s trained community facilitator who lives in the District. He shared his testimony, how he was a perpetrator of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, as well as the history of genocide mainly in the Gahanga Sector, where they are living now. He also shared with the group how the genocide was stopped by the RPF, and how they began building unity and reconciliation among Rwandans that we are supporting now.



The topic of unity and reconciliation, and the role of families in creating sensitivity and awareness about the ideologies that create discrimination among youth were discussed in small groups. The discussions brought up challenges that young people faced in schools, families and their communities. Their testimonies revealed that the post genocide generation have their own wounds that need to be healed, including the stigma and shame on the side of children from families of genocide perpetrators.

Children of genocide perpetrators said that they carry a stigma for what their parents have done. One of the youth said, “We feel ashamed when we see survivors and youth (our colleagues), from those families that our parents have killed”. Another problem that youth from perpetrators families have is that some parents are unwilling to tell their children the truth about their role during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, which makes children grow up questioning their parent’s prison sentence and their own assumptions about their parents’ innocence.

On the other side, the youth from survivor families say that some parents point to the families of perpetrators who killed their relatives and advise them to avoid associating with those families and their children.

The group decided to meet often to discuss such challenges together - identifying similar problems among youth; trying to break taboos; and breaking the silence around stigmas and shame among them in their respective communities. They acknowledged that this is an important opportunity to meet and discuss their problems aiming at building a shared future.

Andrew, the District Representative in the meeting, helped to respond to questions among the youth participants on ‘Ndi Umunyarwanda.’ He explained how a good understanding of Ndi Umunyarwanda among the youth can be a solution to problems that they discussed in their groups. The main purpose of Ndi Umunyarwanda is healing community wounds, speaking the truth and asking and giving forgiveness. “This is what GER and CFOR are doing. These activities are supporting community healing and promoting reconciliation”, he said. He insisted that youth of today have opportunities that have never been possessed by any other generation in the history of Rwanda. “Opportunities you have exceed the problems you have”, he added.

The representative of Gahanga Sector applauded GER and CFOR for the preparation of the interactions. He reflected on all the lessons learnt from the interactions we had in our previous Forums, and spoke about how the local authorities are going to help the youth. “We have become familiar with each other; we are going to work together for the development of our country. He added that, “Gahanga Sector has a unique program for healing existing wounds in communities, bringing together people with different wounds, including dynamic trauma and with skilled people in healing, are facilitating their healing process.” He said that the Sector will be mobilizing young people to support these initiatives.



Conclusion

The youth have pledged activities that they are going to focus on in their communities, and have established their team leaders who will be working with GER's community facilitators living in Gahanga Sector and local authorities to implement their pledges. They requested that the frequency and duration of interactions be increased to provide more time for communication and to get more people involved.

To continue activities, and to impact on healing existing wounds and building unity, towards a brighter future, the youth have decided on the following activities as a way forward:

- Arrange further youth discussions in communities, and involving other young people who have not yet participated in these interactions.
- Establish supporting activities to help vulnerable communities, especially those affected by the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.
- Establish development activities to help youth employment and better their economic development.
- Meet once a semester to discuss what they have achieved and challenges faced.

A WhatsApp group was also established among the youth and was called "*Ubumwe (unity) initiative-Gahanga*", The group will ease communication for sharing experiences and updates about what they will be doing in their schools and communities, and wherever they meet.