

Healing the Past: Facilitating the Future

“Interactions with the Post Genocide Generation”

2021 report

by Innocent Musore, GER



Introduction

Global Initiative for Environment and Reconciliation (GER) in Partnership with CFOR are supporting the process of healing and reconciliation through interactions among post-genocide generations in Rwanda. The aim of these interactions is to heal the past and facilitate the future.

In the year 2021, our program focused on the post-genocide generation of youth affected by the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, who were selected in collaboration with local authorities. The participants belonged to families of survivors and perpetrators as well as youth born from rape during the genocide, and youth from historically marginalized groups. The program engaged local authorities, religious leaders, police, and the army.

Our initiatives reached 238 participants, including 98 women and 140 men, from five districts of Bugesera, Kicukiro, Gasabo, Ruhango and Rwamagana, who participated in the interactive meetings. The plan was to work in six Districts; unfortunately, we were not able to work in Musanze due to improved measures to contain the spread of COVID-19; we plan to resume our meeting in Musanze as soon as the situation allows for it.

During the opening of these interactions, the Executive Director of GER explained the purpose of the interactions which is to help youth discover and understand the history and ongoing impact of the genocide, and how they can make use of the available opportunities in the country to go beyond history, prevent future violence and build a shared future.

“You are the agents of change, with full hope and support to facilitate the future. We have good leadership, with a political will of uniting and reconciling Rwandans; we have policies

that do not discriminate, that give equal opportunities to Rwandans. Our work together is supporting and deepening the existing process of unity and reconciliation.”

“The process of healing and reconciliation requires supporting and listening to each other; there is a need to help young people from different backgrounds, as our program implies (Dufashanye).”

The Representatives of unity and reconciliation, in the districts where we operated, appreciated the collective work of GER and CFOR in supporting reconciliation activities in their respective Districts. “GER and CFOR have been working in the Kicukiro District since 2016. They have contributed to significant change, improving relations among genocide perpetrators and survivors. Their current focus on the youth is important since it aligns with the government’s priorities of engaging the youth who are a large percentage of Rwandans” said Andrew, the Director of Unity and Reconciliation in Kicukiro District.

Authorities particularly appreciated these initiatives for the deep learning among communities in their districts; they extended thanks to leaders of CFOR, Arlene and late Jean-Claude for their collaboration with GER in healing and uniting people. “I must talk about Jean-Claude in this time that I am given. For some of you who do not know him, you should know that Jean- Claude has helped the District of Bugesera. On behalf of Kicukiro District, I thank him as a teacher and mentor who trained our people to maintain unity, reconciliation, love and peace. JC brought a new and innovative way of community healing and conflict resolution,” said Andrew. He requested a minute to honour and pay tribute to Jean-Claude before starting the interactive activities in Kicukiro District.

This report highlights the process of interactions in all five districts where we operated. You will find details of how young people expressed their emotions, opening up and speaking about their feelings and the ongoing effects of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. We hope to show how these interactions fostered a healing and reconciliation process among the youth, including ‘success stories’, lessons learnt and the way forward with actions to be taken in the following year of 2022.

The process of interactions

All interactions were facilitated by Innocent Musore. The methodology we used to facilitate interactions involved inviting participants to speak about the topics they wanted to discuss, and writing these on the flipchart. The youth brought topics of concern and questions they have about the history of Rwanda, including the 1994 Genocide, the current effects of the genocide among them and the challenges they face in the process of unity and reconciliation, and to live the concept of ‘Ndi Umunyarwanda’ (‘I am Rwandan’).

Topics were discussed in small and large groups and participants shared the outcomes from group discussions. Some of the youth opened up, sharing painful testimonies about their experiences within their families and communities.

1. Interactions in Gahanga-Kicukiro; on 17th September 2021

Participants are very eager to know more about the history. Those born after the genocide often say that they do not know enough about what caused people to kill other people. One of the perpetrators of the genocide who lives in Kicukiro District shared with the participants his



testimony and how he was a perpetrator in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. He shared with young people the history of the genocide mainly in the Gahanga Sector, where they are living now.

The topics of unity, reconciliation and the role of families in sensitizing and preventing or perpetuating genocide ideologies and discrimination among the youth were discussed in small groups. The discussions focused on challenges that some young people face in their schools, families, and in 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 part of children who were born to genocide perpetrators.

Youth born to genocide perpetrators said that they have a stigma/shame for what their parents have done. “We feel ashamed when we see survivors and youth (our colleagues) from those families that our parents have killed,” a young person said. Another problem for youth from perpetrator families is that their parents are not willing to tell them the truth about their role during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, which makes children grow up falsely believing that their parents were innocent or are in prison for nothing.



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

They decided to meet often and discuss all these challenges together and to identify others facing the same challenges. They felt determined that these problems are not made taboo, and that they can break the silence around those stigmatised and shamed among them in their respective communities. They appreciated the opportunity they had to meet and discuss their problems, aimed at building a shared future.

The youth pledged to do follow up activities in their communities and established team leaders who will work together with GER's community facilitators living in Gahanga Sector and local authorities in order to support the implementation of these pledges.

2. Interactions in Nduba and Rutunga-Gasabo District; on 8th October 2021



Representatives of the Nduba Sector appreciated CFOR and GER's efforts for helping address the ongoing effects of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. "Rwandans have wounds from their history. There is an urgent need to reach out and listen, in order to relieve them from this pain".

Mr. Jean Pierre Gakwaya, who is in charge of unity and reconciliation, in Gasabo District extended his gratitude to GER and CFOR particularly for their unity and reconciliation initiative for young people. He emphasized that it is the right and responsibility of the youth to learn about their country's history, which in turn will enhance their awareness and give them a deeper sense of understanding so that they may help facilitate the future, for the betterment of the country at large. He also appreciated the approach taken, for its effectiveness where those belonging to the families of survivors and perpetrators are given the opportunity to meet, to reconcile and unite as one.

The process of interactions

The participants suggested focusing on the process of unity and reconciliation, history of colonialism and the role of youth in the genocide as well as Rwanda's journey in the healing of these wounds. The interactions also looked at preventing genocide, promoting forgiveness among Rwandans and instilling the concept of 'Ndi Umunyarwanda'.

Claudine Vankurije: "We have defined unity and reconciliation as a way of uniting families of perpetrators and survivors." She also added how her colleague testified that he is still paying for his grandfather's deeds.

Hakuzimana Diogene: "I was only 4 years old during the genocide and despite my young age, the 'Gacaca courts' ordered me to pay for my grandfather's deeds by repaying for the properties he damaged to the survivors he offended. I felt very hurt paying for these crimes I was completely unaware of. My group members advised me to speak to the survivor's families and explain to them how I had no role in my grandfather's crimes. Though this was very difficult to do but I'm glad I took this step forward - today I am neighbours with a survivor's family, and we live in peace, together."

Christopher: "I was 14 years old at the time of genocide; during which I remember how meetings were held to desensitize people into killing the Tutsi. I also killed someone, but no one in my neighbourhood realized what I had done until I confessed my crime at the 'Gacaca Court' and was sentenced to do civil work in prison for a period of 6 months. After my punishment, I felt relieved and now I am a married man with 3 kids; These interactions we have had helped me a lot in this healing journey, enhancing not only a sense of control in me but also finding peace in my heart." I have now spoken truthfully to my children about my role in the genocide.



Mukakora Clementine: The forums helped her speak about her trauma for the first time. "I was eight years old when the genocide happened, we lived near army barracks where some of my relatives were regularly tortured. During the genocide, my mother was six months pregnant, and we fled to a clinic to find safety. I can never forget the awful day the clinic was attacked by soldiers who threw a grenade into the clinic and then entered the clinic, killing their victims with machetes and knives. I fortunately survived but my mother and other siblings did not make it out alive. I had my younger brother on my back. He was beheaded. I

managed to escape, grew up and married, but it still pains me to carry a baby on my back because of the trauma and fear the genocide left me with. However, the interactions we have had today have given me a sense of relief, which has enabled me to talk.” She also spoke about the problems that still trouble her, including how she and other survivors of the genocide remain unaware of where their loved ones’ dead bodies were thrown.

Uwabyeyi Annualite: She shared what touched her the most from her group discussions. “One of the members in my group, who was very young at the time of the genocide, testified that during the genocide his mother facilitated the killing of their neighbours and how the ‘Gacaca Courts’ sentenced his mother to prison, impacting his life.”

Mupenzi: “I lost my dad and most of my siblings in the genocide, leaving me and only a few of my family members.” - Most of the participants are from families of survivors, many of who confess that forgiving people who did them wrong was difficult, but of benefit to both the perpetrators and survivors bringing a great sense of relief from their pain.

3. Interactions in Bugesera Districts; on 12th October 2021



The Head of Good Governance in Bugesera District, Sebatware Magellan spoke about how much they value their cooperation with GER and CFOR, all working together on the unity and reconciliation journey. He said how the history of Rwanda both during and after the colonial period and during the Republic 1 and 2 led to the genocide. He also emphasised that this is the perfect time for young people to speak about this history, he urged the youth to work to create awareness and understanding within their own communities.

He advised the youth to have a positive and constructive mindset towards Rwanda. He added that it was high time that Rwanda’s bitter history was discussed and shared so that wounds can be healed. He also called for cooperation between security and other governmental organs to build a united Rwanda. He reminded the participants that such cooperation is what has brought Rwanda to where it is today.

He requested the young people to pay attention and learn from the living concept and value of ‘Ndi Umunyarwanda’ (‘I am Rwandan’). The youth were also asked to take part in establishing a framework for the training including suggesting topics they wanted to discuss.

Topic suggestions by the youth

The participants suggested focusing on a number of different topics including: the role of youth in the process of unity and reconciliation, the truth of the history of Rwanda and the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, forgiveness among Rwandans as well as the role of social media in disseminating hate, ideologies, denial of the genocide, and the 'Ndi Umunyarwanda' ('I am Rwandan') value.

Pauline Muhawenimana (Rweru Sector): She was born into a mixed family of Hutu and Tutsi and in 1994, during the genocide. "They ordered my father to kill my mother or else they would kill them both. My father found he couldn't and so kept moving one place to another in our neighbourhood without my mom so they wouldn't kill her in front of him. I was raised in a foster home because my mother was taken for treatment. Being a participant in these interactions has been helpful for both of us as I can now also help my mother in her journey to recover from her wounds."

Overall, the group made several different findings including how the genocide affected the unity of Rwandans and how telling the truth was the first step to healing. They also realized and concluded that there is still an existence of discriminatory ideologies in some families. The group's overarching theme was the openness of heart and the truthfulness to heal wounds.

Niyonzima: Was born in Ngoma but now lives in Bugesera. "My father was a participant in the 1994 Genocide and during the 'Gacaca Courts' he was ordered to repay for the damages. I faced many difficulties in my life, I studied but had difficulty proceeding after my O levels. My father was imprisoned and the first wound we sustained was poverty. My family had to pay a lot of money for the damages caused by my father and all of us in the family cultivated lands for people to survive."

Niyonzima's father died, leaving him ashamed of what his father had done. He went on to complete his vocational training hoping to contribute to the reconciliation of these families. "I feel a strong desire and responsibility to give back to the survivor's families through my actions such as the providing free building using the skills I've learnt."

Authorities advised him to seek the truth about his father's role in the genocide, from his relatives, because his father would not have been imprisoned for damaging only properties.

One young person, born into a family of survivors spoke about how only three people in their family survived the genocide and applauded the Unity and Reconciliation Program for bringing peace in their heart. "Young people should learn how to forgive and apologise as some of them still have wounds. While it may not be easy, the lesson I learned is that I can take a step forward even if my opponents don't."

Ntambara J. Claude (Nyamata sector) who had been very involved in our large forums now thanked the leaders for their efforts in calling the youth to learn about their history as part of a needed process of wound-healing. He also spoke openly about his personal history. "I was one of the main perpetrators of the genocide here in Bugesera. The genocide was planned, although I was not one of the organizers, I was one of those who participated in the genocide. I was a police officer in the Kanzenze District, in 1990, when we began capturing and killing some of the so-called 'ibytso', meaning those who we thought worked with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). When we captured someone, we beat them up severely and killed

them. In 1992, some sectors began to persecute Hutus. Tutsis began to be massacred at this time and those involved in perpetrating the violence against Tutsi were not punished because of the support of the administration at the time.

When the aircraft carrying the former president was shot down, people rushed to the scene and started killing the Tutsi immediately. I was also involved as a young person in the genocide we committed for 1 month in Bugesera. We killed almost everyone. The youth force was therefore widely used in the massacre of Tutsis in Ntarama, Nyamata Catholic Church; we were young, and strong, hence used by the organisers for our power to kill. When the RPF took over the country, we fled and went to Congo.

Later, I came back to the Rwanda out of my own will. The country welcomed me to a camp in Mutobo. I now live in Bugesera. The lessons taught in the camp were to forgive and apologize. When I arrived in Bugesera, I met with the ‘Gacaca Courts’, a community justice system set up to try people involved in the genocide. I was convicted, imprisoned, and later released. When they released me, I felt that there was a need to take a step forward and apologize openly. My advice to the youth is to use their strength and knowledge to contribute to the country rather than having discriminatory and divisive mindsets and ideologies.” He apologized to youth.

Sarah from the National Unity and Reconciliation Council (NURC) started her speech by reminding the participants that unity and reconciliation is a journey and a space for healing wounds. Unity and reconciliation is a practice where Rwandans believe that they share the same values, culture, attitudes, and behaviours making them believe that they share a common and equal rights. She also spoke about how communicating with the wounded involves talking about collective and personal histories to facilitate the future.

Sarah also reiterated how the principles of unity and reconciliation focus on uniting Rwandans who share common interests, including the need to fight against genocide and its ideology. She added that the youth are the strength of the country and called upon them to uphold the values of unity and reconciliation.

4. Integration in Ruhango district; 9th December 2021



The Ruhango Sector Administrator extended his gratitude to GER and CFOR for their great support and requested them to continue working together on this common goal of embracing unity and reconciliation by healing the wounds of Rwandans. He praised the administration of Rwanda and the Ruhango District for their contribution to the Unity and Reconciliation Movement. He said Ruhango is making it easier for organisations to implement social change.

Topics discussed

The participants suggested focusing on studying the history of their country; understanding the concepts of unity and reconciliation as well as discussing the difficulties faced by both the survivors and perpetrators of the genocide in their lives today. Some survivors in Ruhango still face violence in their communities. Perpetrators also face difficulties to reintegrate in society once they finish their prison sentences. The values of ‘Ndi Umunyarwanda’ were also discussed.

One of the elders who participated in the interactions, spoke with the youth about the history of Rwanda. He explained how before colonialism Rwandans were united, living together, socialising and intermarrying and how the arrival of colonists in Rwanda led to the division of Rwandans into groups of the Hutu, Tutsi, and the Twa. This was then institutionalized in the form of identity cards, which exacerbated divisions, discrimination and violence that led to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.

He spoke of the strength of the Rwandan people who despite the tragedy of the 1994 Genocide and its existing effects among people, have been able to rebuild their unity and reconcile. He called upon youth to follow and support the unity and reconciliation process; enhancing trust among the people; promoting respect, equality, and supporting the process of healing the wounds caused by the tragic history Rwandans have experienced. “We have great hope in the future of Rwanda because of the country’s policy that gives equal rights and equal opportunities to all its people,” he said.

The plenary discussions reflected on the reasons why survivors of the 1994 genocide in Ruhango were finding it hard to recover from their wounds and trauma. Participants found that one of the reasons for this is that people had little opportunity to openly discuss the truth of the tragedy of the genocide, although they also found that such interactions were beneficial for enhancing processes of healing.



They also said that there are still people with backwards mindsets, unwilling to learn and change. Some genocide perpetrators who were convicted during the ‘Gacaca Courts’ fled abroad and have not faced trial for their crimes.

The group expressed how there is little space and opportunity for people of Ruhango to express their feelings and emotions to help them heal. They requested to have more interactions held for more people, especially younger people, to participate in and have in depth training so that they can help themselves as well as others in their community.

A community facilitator from Ruhango District, Rutabana Damascene, shared his own experience of how these interactions have helped their community. They appreciated GER and CFOR for their great impact on enhancing unity and reconciliation in different communities of Rwanda, sharing their experience and knowledge of ‘Ndi Umunyarwanda’ as a feeling that unites Rwandans, in a spirit that makes them proud of being Rwandan ,coming together for the betterment of the country. “I am proud to be a citizen of Rwanda and I am happy to work with others to improve relations of all Rwandans.”

The discussions in Ruhango ended by establishing small groups to sustain interactions at a community level. These groups will have the responsibility to fight any acts of violence against survivors especially during the commemoration period. The young people belonging to Ruhango also pledged to establish a Unity and Reconciliation Club that will facilitate interactions among themselves and in their local communities.

In his closing remark, the Executive Secretary of the Ruhango Sector said that he was saddened by the people who still have discriminatory genocide ideologies and mindset, despite them being aware of the country’s past and history. “It is our responsibility as Rwandans, especially the youth, to facilitate the process of unity and reconciliation and fight against discrimination and divisionism in all its form so that we may facilitate a better future.”

5. Interactions in Mwurire-Rwamagan; 21st December 2021



The representative of Mwurire Sector opened the discussions by expressing their gratitude to GER and CFOR for their great partnership and willingness to extend their activities in the Mwurire Sector and encouraging the youth to benefit from these opportunities. “I urge the youth of Mwurire sector to recognise the importance and take part in the unity and reconciliation interactions provided because I am sure that these discussions are very important for our shared future.”

Key topics suggested by the participating youth

Participants made several suggestions including: focusing on the concept of Unity and Reconciliation, the truth of Rwandan history, as well discussing as the effects of COVID-19 on the healing process and fighting genocide ideologies on social media. The youth also suggested joint development activities to unite young people, focusing on drug abuse and addiction as signs of intergenerational trauma among youth. These topics were discussed in both smaller and larger groups where they came up with the following findings and testimonies.

Musabimana Thacienne: As one of the many victims of genocide who incurred physical and emotional wounds, he said “I was five years old during the genocide. My parents died and I was raised in foster homes. I suffered as an orphan, becoming responsible for my life at such an early age. Attending these interactions with others, especially with other young people, helped me pull myself together and heal. We realized as a group that it is necessary for us to talk about our past and what we endured so that we can heal and rebuild ourselves.”

Uwamariya Brigitte: Who was also orphaned during the genocide spoke of the little she knows about her father: “Truth be told, I do not know how my dad looks like because I was an infant during the genocide... the only thing I know about him is his name.”

The Genocide in 1994 was the inhumane massacre of Tutsis. The participants discussed the effects of genocide on both perpetrators and survivors. The group discussions in Mwurire sector revealed that among the most difficult existing effects of the genocide is the challenge of those young people born to women who were raped during the genocide, and who are unaware of their fathers. Parents also find it difficult to reveal to their children what happened during the genocide denying young people the right to know the truth of their personal history. Another effect of the genocide is the spread of HIV/AIDS in raped women, resulting in some of the children born to these women also being infected. They suggested that all these issues should be given more time, so that they can be discussed deeply, helping people heal from their painful history and build their future together.



One of the participants of the interactions was a teacher from the Rwamagana District. He shared his testimony as a young person born into a perpetrator's family which meant he used to hide his identity at school from students so that they could not find his origin. He said that these interactions helped him to recover from that shame and stigma that he felt. "I learnt that I have no role in what my parents did, and since then I have felt free to open up and discuss my background and share this experience. As a teacher I will use these lessons I have learnt here to help young people I teach as well as others who have had similar experiences as me."

Building National identity (Ndi Umunyarwanda)

During these interactions, local authorities and representatives of the districts where we operate were given the time to explain to the youth the existing policies of uniting Rwandans and promoting the Rwandan identity (Ndi Umunyarwanda) as a sustainable solution to prevent ethnic discrimination, divisionism and other ideologies that led to the painful history of Rwanda and which resulted in the 1994 Genocide.

Lessons learnt

The interactions have given us many opportunities for learning that we can take forward. We realised the appreciation young people had for their inclusion in the process of healing and reconciliation and expressed their desire to help each other heal and build a better future for themselves. They are proud of having a common (Rwandan) identity because it helps them to address issues of discrimination, divisionism, and ethnicity among themselves.

We also learnt from the testimonies shared during interactions, that when youth are supported, they have the ability to be drivers of the reconciliation process, in respect to reparations, and improving relations in their families among survivors and perpetrators. Youth have shown that the trauma of their parents affects them deeply, and if trauma among the elder generation is not healed, it becomes transgenerational.

Furthermore, when people have joint economic activities that bring them together in cooperation, it facilitates building trust and removes suspicions among people, improving their relationships.

We also learnt that the more time people spend together in such interactions, the more they become familiar with each other, helping them be more open to each other, so that they can express their emotions and heal from the collective trauma of their painful history, being able to build a shared future.

We believe that to ensure the sustainability of our activities, we have to empower and include the youth because they are the majority of the Rwanda's total population and are the future leaders and 'parents' of Rwanda who will carry on these initiatives in the future generations.

The Way Forward

The recommendations from the young people and local leaders who participated in the interactions in the past year will help shape our plans in the year of 2022. GER will put its effort into holding coordination meetings with team leaders from six districts, aiming to have at least three meetings over the year.

We will also increase the duration of these interactions by having two days of meetings in each district instead of having one day like we did in the past.

We will monitor these activities by holding monitoring visits to youth groups in their respective communities, documenting success stories and sharing these with the different districts, our partners and the Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement, while also keeping in contact with policy makers (MPs) representing the districts where we are working.

We are also planning to share the Rwandan Reconciliation model with other post-conflict communities that have been prone to ethnic divisiveness and discrimination, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic, Burundi, Zimbabwe and South Africa.