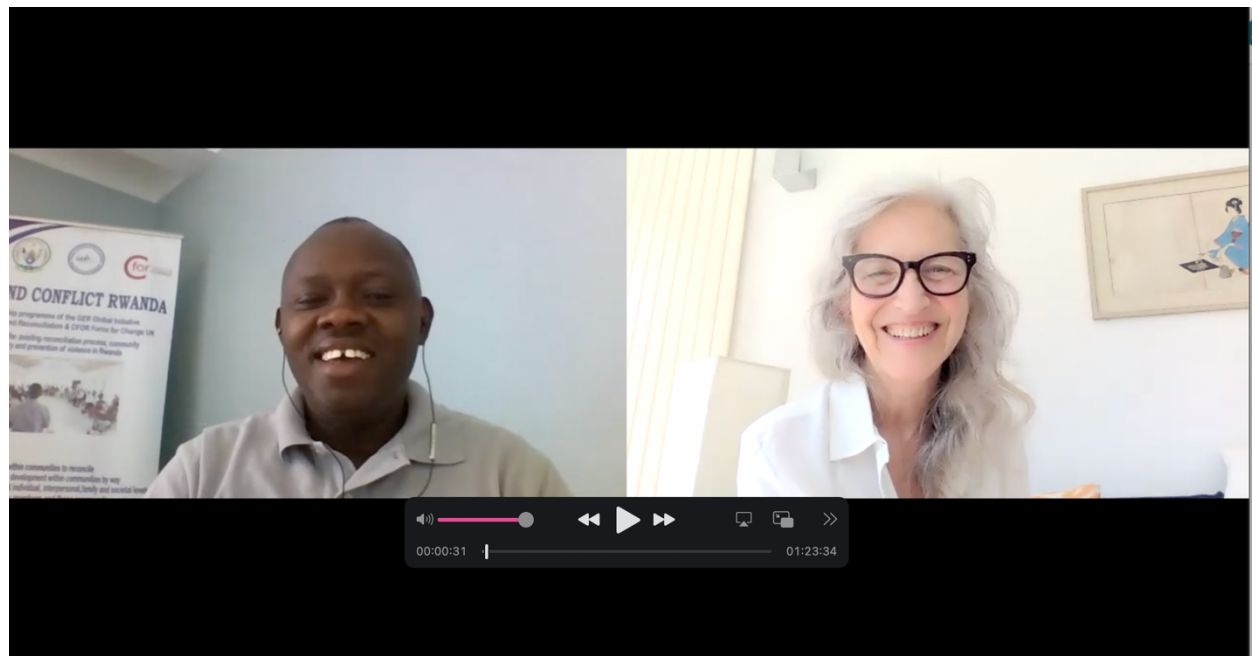


Mentor Sessions, Innocent Musore with Arlene Audergon GER- CFOR, FIFO project: Youth and Reconciliation



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The mentorship sessions have helped in increasing my skills, my learning and practice, facilitating and supporting the healing and reconciliation process in Rwanda.

During the mentor sessions, one of the things I spoke about is the impact of intergenerational trauma on youth, and how they sometimes don't realize what is going on. For example, when I was facilitating the interaction sessions in the Ruhango district, I asked one of the participants, how the young people are facing the effects of the Genocide against the Tutsi. She said that during the commemoration period, because of her mother's trauma, her mother cannot cook or take care of the children. She said they will wonder why their mother is crying or why she is so sad during that period.

My concern is that trauma shouldn't be only addressed during the period of commemoration, because people live with it in their daily life, throughout the year. Young people have the right and need to know what happened, the history of Genocide and this can help them in finding ways to deal with the trauma.

Another young women in a Training forum gave us testimony with a lot of tears and emotions. She told us how her life has become miserable because her parents are in prison. They are perpetrators of the Genocide and their children face lifelong problems because of their absence. She also talked about the shame that she lives with because of her parents.

In my personal experience, I think the best way we can work on this issue is to support people to meet in small groups, as well as gathering in the plenary session, so more people are able to share with one another. This refers to the method Arlene and Jean-Claude used in facilitating our large forums.

Talking together about trauma and its effects, I continued learning in the mentor sessions about dynamics of trauma. How part of us goes forward to survive, to develop, to try to forget. And a part of us cannot forget. The traumatic experience is inside of us, in our bodies, in dreams and we live with it in our daily life. And that it can be useful, as a facilitator, to talk about how both tendencies in us are important - it is important to be able to go forward, to move on, and it is important to have opportunities to process the traumatic history, to help us move forward and build the future.

Commemoration month, for example, is an extremely important way of having a space for processing the trauma every year during April. But, I feel that during the other 11 months, there is a tendency to identify more with just going on with life, and there is still the part of us that needs to process this history together.

It is important to note that the young generation inherits the intergenerational trauma, often not even aware of how much it impacts them. For example, the children of perpetrators and the children of survivors feel the division among them.

Then through their meetings, there is a shift, a kind of healing. And through this, they are able to go to their families. Then parents of perpetrators are more able to take accountability, and heal those relationships, which in turn helps to free the younger generation.

In a mentor session, I also shared some of the transformational stories that were told at the meetings. One of the participants shared how three young men had asked to use her house for a film shooting over several days. She arranged for them to have meals together, which they appreciated, but she soon noticed one of the boys was not there. She then found out that these colleagues would not eat together, because one of the boy's grandfather had killed the family of his colleague.

She told the group how she recalled her feeling of inspiration at the end of the large forum she attended, when someone spoke about how each of us are part of the reconciliation process. So, she found a way to bring the boys together to work together planting bananas, and for a conversation. This led to a deep interaction about accountability and apologies. The boys then decided to form a club. This club is now helping families to reconcile, and young people are playing a big role in motivating their parents.

During the mentorship I also shared how painful it is, as I listen to testimonies, and how it is hard to listen and be able to facilitate at these sensitive moments. It requires a lot of ability and energy to continue to facilitate interactions.

I learned that this is important that you, as a facilitator are human, with feeling, that you are affected as a human being by what you are hearing. That this is a good thing.

I remember how during the large Forums, the facilitators took a moment to stay close to their feelings that were very very deep...and it brought a slower feeling, and tears to their eyes.

As a facilitator, one useful thing you can do, in that moment, is to show and share your feelings, and to continue to facilitate. For example, to say in a few words something about how you feel deeply saddened by the terrible things the survivor giving testimony has endured, that it brings up strong feelings in you. And that you are staying deep inside your own feelings, finding the energy to stay close to your own feelings, because it is important to be able to listen, and to also hear the pain of the person sharing their testimony. And, to also care for and appreciate the group who is listening and witnessing, knowing it touches on the pain for everyone.

During the mentorship sessions, we spoke about dynamics of trauma, that people often feel that they don't want to talk about such painful things, because they are concerned that it will only hurt again, and bring it all up again, or make it worse. This is important to be aware of and to support the need for care and protection, and choice. At the same time, to bring a warm invitation and opportunity for someone to share the experiences that have been so traumatizing and often isolating.

We also spoke about how, if one tells one's story or testimony and no one cares, or just goes silent because they don't know what to say, or they have heard so many stories like yours, then it feels even worse. That's why, as a facilitator, your feeling, is so important, that you do care, and it shows. And others see that, and feel that, and know that this is real, and it matters to you, and to them.

This connects to the extraordinary experience from our forums - having seen what is possible. Having seen what is possible gives you a skill, and an attitude, that helps you to be able to stay with and transform difficult situations. This changes people's outlook, and then they go on to do the impossible.

In the mentor session, we also spoke about the belief system that normally prevents this level of processing and sharing. There is a belief system in many of us, that it is better to be quiet, than to share. The belief system can be expressed by the 'role' that says: "If you tell your story, it won't help, no one will care." It's a feeling that you'd rather be quiet, than share your story if no one cares.

We talked about how it is a useful facilitation skill to be aware of such belief systems, and be able to frame the belief system, or represent it like a role.

We talked about how important it is, how life-changing it is, and many people have said, what a difference it makes that someone listened. Before thinking about any other support, just listening, is so important.

The facilitator might show their interest, their interest to listen, and care for the whole group. The facilitator can even show understanding for the 'role' that says, this is too difficult, and questions if and how to talk about such painful things.

We talked about facilitating in moments of such sensitivity. Participants will naturally feel uncomfortable. And sometimes will even appear to not care, or they get distracted, or go to their phone. This may be for a range of reasons. It can help, as facilitator, to say to the group that this is a sensitive spot, that needs all of our awareness. That talking about traumatic experiences touches each of us in our personal and family trauma - and ask everyone to take care of themselves and each other.

We touched again on how it's important to not only listen, but to also feel - to be alongside the person - showing that it touches you, that you feel deeply by what they are sharing. And that although it is so painful, you want to be here alongside them, and in community.

Based on the leadership and political will to reconcile among Rwandans, we can say that Rwanda is a model for reconciliation. It demands great resilience, because of the painful experience of the survivors, how they have accepted to live with the people who killed their families. There is a great need for ongoing processes of accountability and deeper dialogue, as part of accepting to forgive the perpetrators and accepting to live with together in the same community.

Thank you.