



Training of Youth on Gender Awareness, Reconciliation and Violence Prevention in Bugesera District

Far in Far Out Project for GER-Rwanda in partnership with CFOR 2022

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Group photo of youth with district leaders after workshop in the Bugesera District.

About 20 youth members from the sectors of Nyamata, Mayange, Ntarama, Rweru, Gashora and Juru were brought together in a three-day workshop on gender equality, unity and reconciliation, with an aim to combat violence. The workshop was organized by GER-Rwanda and took place **from 1st – 3rd June 2022**, in the Nyamata Sector, at the Savana Hotel. The

workshop was conducted by gender experts Mr. Shyikiro Gimu Ntayoberwa (principal facilitator) and Francine Muteteri (co-facilitator).

a) The aim of the workshop:

The aim of the workshop was to give youth the capacity to address and prevent violence among themselves in the Rwandan community.

In his official opening, **Mr. Nkurikiyimana Osee**, in charge of Unity and Reconciliation in the Bugesera District, reminded participants of Bugesera's unique history of the Genocide against Tutsi where the community was devastated by the 1994 mayhem. Notably, the research indicates that about 20% of youth were severely affected by the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi.

He commended GER-Rwanda for their effective partnership, which he said has continued to convey messages of hope, unity, reconciliation, and prevention of violence among youth for the sake of peace and stability in their communities.

“Your actions are commendable and visible in the community. The youth who were previously trained in your programs have done needed work, transforming the relationships between perpetrators and survivors of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi,” Osee’ said and added, “The perpetrators are now asking for forgiveness from those whose family members were killed. These acts of reconciliation have positively transformed community members, hence putting in place a solid foundation for peace and stability in the society.”

b) How the workshop proceeded:

Those who attended the training shared and acquired information about different programs focused on preventing all types of violence, and programs focused on unity and reconciliation. The participants were also graced with an opportunity to receive lectures from Unity Champions who are well-versed in Rwandan history in regard to Unity, how Rwandans lost the element of togetherness and their hard path to recovery.

Mr. Ntayoberwa Gimu SHYIKIRO facilitated the training in such a way that each and every participant was given adequate time for sharing ideas and suggestions. During the training, the youth heard different stories and accounts of the events that survivors lived through during the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. They also got a chance to present what they do in their respective groups, particularly the work they do in the areas where they live.

It is important to note that listening to testimony and facilitating these conversations allows the youth to learn the real history, to not forget the Genocide that befell our nation and to choose **‘Ndi Umunyarwanda’** (‘I am Rwandan’), with an aim to rebuild shattered communities.

It was also revealed that sometimes the youth do not know Rwandan history in regard to the 1994 Genocide. It is against this background that GER-Rwanda conducts training for the youth where it brings in experts in Rwandan history and Unity Champions to share their own experiences and testimonies so that they can help the youth to clearly understand and take full responsibility in rebuilding a strong Rwandan community.

After the workshop on gender-based violence, some of the girls who had faced gender-based violence and who had kept silent until now, felt the urge to speak out about the terrible experiences they had faced. They opened up and shared their own traumatic experiences, where some of them revealed that they will never forget the terrible experiences and the names of those responsible.



Principal facilitator Gimu interacting with participants in process

c) Testimonies:

One of the participants, who shared her painful experience, said that she was only 16 years old during the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. It was a very trying time as she desperately tried to save her life, like anyone who was being targeted at that time. She survived the killings by hiding amongst dead bodies. After two months of running from the violence, she felt exhausted, and decided to go back to her home where a neighbor saved her life by hiding her. Unfortunately, she was later betrayed and men used to come and rape her. She was luckily saved by RPA Inkotanyi and was raised in another family. She noted that at that time she never knew that she was already pregnant, and she never knew who the father of the child was.

“I lived with a hurting and sorrowful heart”, the participant said. “I could not forget and forgive. I never liked the child and I never wanted anyone to know what happened to me. I warned my daughter not to tell anyone the way that she was born. During the forum sessions with GER-Rwanda and CFOR my daughter received training and she shared with me how she had opened up and shared the way she was born.” This participant said she had been eager to learn how her daughter was healed by opening up about her experiences. She then said that she now wanted to open up and share her own stories in this training.

“During this training, my daughter was the one invited as it was designed for youth, however she was at the University, so she requested me to represent her in the training. That is how I have come here. I have been following other people’s testimonies and I finally opened up and gave my own testimony of what happened to me during the 1994 genocide against Tutsi. In the past 28 years, it is my first time talking about the sexual violence I underwent.”



Youth Group discussion

A young girl, born in 1996, also shared her testimony to the participants of how she was raped by a close relative, but kept silent. “I was 17 years old when I was raped, I did not tell anyone that I was raped. I went back to school without knowing that I was pregnant. When I realized that I was pregnant, I came back home and I gave birth to a child. I wasn’t able to breastfeed him and I went back to school. The child is 8 years old and until now, he cannot speak, he cannot walk. Due to all of these factors I did not take care of my child. He has never received any of his rights as a child, yet now after this training I have learned to accept what happened to me, and the rights of my child. I am going to take care of him and I will start celebrating his birthday,” she said. All the participants of the training pledged to help her celebrate the birthday of her child despite the disability he has.

Another young girl, born in 1999 was impregnated by a boy called Olivier while she was still young. The family tried to cool down the situation so that the boy could keep taking care of her. “But when I was about to give birth, I gave birth to a dead child due to a miscarriage. After the miscarriage Olivier decided to cut ties with me. He hated me and left me with the suffering. Because of this, even until now, I hate the name ‘Olivier’. I don’t want to hear such names; whoever has this name I think must be a bad person,” she said. She and other participants say

that the trainings help them heal from the wounds received from the violence they have experienced.

A young boy of 21 years old revealed how the effects of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, including gender-based family violence, have made some children vulnerable to the extent that they grew up without having the right to live with their parents. “My mother was married to a genocide perpetrator who was later imprisoned for his crimes. When he was in prison my mother had affairs with an unknown man and she gave birth of me. When her husband (my step-father) was released from prison, he said he didn’t want to see me in his house. My mother took me to my grandmother where I grew up. I did not get the chance to know who my father was, nor get an opportunity to be raised by my mother. But trainings like this help us to heal and to understand what we went through in order to rebuild ourselves,” he said.



Youth expressing and breaking silence

It was noted that many of the youth whose parents and close relatives were responsible for the 1994 genocide, found it hard to connect with the rest of the youth. This youth expressed their need to be disassociated from their past history and background since they no longer carry the negative mindset that their relatives had.

One of the Unity Champions, Gasore Serge, shared his own experience of the 1994 genocide during his presentation to the youth. He first shared the kind of discrimination young people had faced at school due to the divisionism that had gripped Rwanda at the time. All these

experiences had traumatized him and he had faced serious problems until he was given a chance to express and process his experiences and work towards forgiving those who were responsible.

He cautioned the youth to be mindful about some of the hate campaigns that parents and guardians perpetuate at home, that promote hatred and tribalism, as this leads to conflict in society.

He also advised them to be vigilant and promote mutual respect for each other's rights, including gender rights, and to continue encouraging others and their families to respect gender equality.

Some of the youth vowed to step up and fight for the promotion of unity and reconciliation, through continuing to be ambassadors and advocates for their peers who are facing such discrimination but who continue to be silent. The youth also took a decision to be actively responsible for peace building, unity and reconciliation, starting from their own families, communities and among their fellow youth within the villages where they live.

Various security organisations also participated in the youth training organized by GER including the National Police, the army, and authorities from the Bugesera District. All were optimistic that they would see positive results from the workshop.

Shyikiro Gimu Ntayoberwa who facilitated the training on promoting gender equality, reconciliation and prevention of gender-based violence, said that there have been very positive results registered from such trainings so far, for the Bugesera District and for youth around the country.

He said that after these trainings the youth acquire relevant skills and practices that they teach to other youth, thus positively changing their mindset about gender related issues and any kind of violence. This paves the way for a brighter future.

During his closing remarks, **Innocent MUSORE**, the Executive Director of GER-Rwanda extended his gratitude to **Arlene Audergon (PhD)**, Co-Founder & Director of CFOR, for her strong support of unity and reconciliation activities in Rwanda.

He noted that on the agenda of CFOR, the work with young people was serving as a catalyst for fundamental change, enhancing unity and reconciliation and empowering families. He observed that many of the 1994 Genocide survivors who participated in the forums and workshops had already shown love by forgiving those who killed their family members and relatives.

Mr. Magella Sebatware, the Director of Good Governance Unity, from Bugesera district, commended GER-Rwanda for training the youth and pledged the district commitment to

support the youth to continue as the agents of positive change, promoting unity, reconciliation and gender equality rights in their communities and families.

d) Some of the workshop themes:

- Gender concept/equality
- Gender stereotypes
- Gender and power imbalance
- Basic human rights and gender equality
- Diversity and rights, promoting respectful relationships
- Parents legacy and cycles of violence
- Role and use of gender rights
- Identifying violence and Gender based violence (GBV)
- Breaking silence of Gender based violence
- 'Ndi Umunyarwanda' 'I am Rwandan' program.

e) Challenges

During a three-day workshop, it was noted that there is a:

- lack of sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Rwandan history among youth
- limited knowledge about human rights
- lack of enough knowledge on sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

f) Recommendations:

The youth drafted a detailed plan on how they will prevent gender-based violence, human rights abuse, domestic violence and any forms of violence in their respective communities.

g) Key lessons learnt:

It was found that GER-Rwanda has a systematic approach for training and orienting the beneficiaries, because the approach helps them to understand one another fully and fosters trust, enabling them to talk together wholeheartedly.

"As per our Rwandan culture, I had not believed that women would be able to reveal what befell them in connection to rape. Disclosing this is usually unthinkable, moreover to people that one has just met for the first time and who are not of the same age," said Ntayoberwa Gimu SHYIKIRO a social scientist expert. He observed that this showed him that the approach was effective and could heal those with scars inflicted during the 1994 Genocide in a constructive manner.

It was also learnt that the positive collaboration between the Bugesera District and GER-Rwanda has had very strong results, enabling youth to experience opportunities for exchanging ideas towards building their futures.



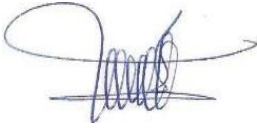
Mr Magella Sebatware, representative of the Bugesera District, officially closing the workshop

All district authorities including the police and the army attended the workshop and vowed to collaborate in any upcoming workshops in their respective districts. Following the training, Mr. Innocent MUSORE, the leader of GER-Rwanda, delivered a message of hope to those who attended the workshop.

It was also learnt that lack of enough information on a gender transformative approach (gender equality, gender equity, gender-based violence and rights etc.) are still a significant problem among youth and this has remained a stumbling block to the unity and reconciliation process.

Last but not least, the participants and the facilitators appeal to GER-Rwanda and CFOR to continue these trainings and to increase the number of beneficiaries receiving the trainings. There is work to be done, to support youth in their learning and facilitation skills needed for preventing negative attitudes and preventing violence related to gender. GER-Rwanda and CFOR should continue to think about how to effectively support further activities geared to increasing the capacity among youth, to benefit their lives and future.

Ntayoberwa Gimu SHYIKIRO, Rwanda program facilitator, GER-CFOR.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'G' followed by several loops and a horizontal line at the end.