

Youth Reconciliation and the Future GER-RWANDA and CFOR Force for Change



Introduction and welcome

Since 2016 GER-RWANDA, has been conducting an extraordinary project to support the process of reconciliation in the country, and the healing of historical wounds, in partnership with CFOR Force for Change. Almost eight hundred (800) people have participated in our interactive training and forums and many of them are contributing to reconciliation activities at a community level.

The current project, with CFOR's Far in Far out Projects, www.cfor.info, has focused especially on the young generation, by training them as our future leaders and agents of change, able to contribute to the healing process – especially among youth affected by the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi.

To share and review this project, we organized a meeting among youth leaders, held at the Centre Cristus-Remera on April, 28 2023. 60 people participated from six districts, where the FIFO project was implemented.

The purpose of the activity

Our purpose was for the youth teams to share and learn from one another's initiatives at the community level, working together to facilitate the healing of wounds, and building a future

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without discrimination. We also wanted to engage the post-genocide generation in participating in the 100 days of commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi.



Innocent Musore from GER-Rwanda spoke about what made it possible, as human beings, for some Rwandans to have shown humanity in the face of Genocide. He spoke about UMURINZI W'IGIHANGO, people who performed and are still performing outstanding deeds in restoring unity and reconciliation among Rwandans. He gave an example from the Ruhango district. He asked one of the men from there how he'd found the strength to hide Tutsis. The man replied that it was his humanity that made him able to save the Tutsi, and that genocide perpetrators had lost their sense of humanity during that time. Musore went on to invite the youth to reflect on their own humanity as leaders.

Mrs. Josephine Murebwayire's husband and six children were killed during the Genocide against Tutsi. She was invited by Innocent Musore to speak about what had made her strong, and able to go on. (Photo on left of Josephine Murebwayire and Innocent Musore.) She talked about how the survivor's strength comes from being heard. She was able to forgive the perpetrators

who killed her family and she now lives peacefully among them.

Josephine also became the parent of many orphans who lost their parents during the Genocide. This humanity led to her being awarded UMURINZI W'IGIHANGO. Musore spoke out the words of Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, "We cannot turn the clock back, nor can we undo the harm caused, but we have the power to determine the future and to ensure that what happened never happens again."

Youth from the Musanze District (Bunani, Martin, Musanze, Shingiro) shared their initiative and how it has brought about transformation at a personal, family and community level.

- Unity and reconciliation youth clubs have been formed with members from families of Genocide survivors, from families of perpetrators and also members of marginalized groups in Rwanda (Abatwa).

One of the biggest issues that youth speak about is that young people from families of perpetrators feel ashamed of their parent's deeds.

Miss Chantal said, "*My parent was a perpetrator in the Genocide and was even punished by the court, but still, that didn't bring me ease. I was always carrying a big shame, to the point that when I was called to attend the GER-Rwanda trainings, my mind first told me that I was being called to finish my father's punishment — he died before completing it.*"

- The youth club meets 2 times a month. Each member contributes one thousand five hundred Rwandan Francs (1500Rwf) to buy small domestic animals, both to develop themselves, and to continue strengthening their relationships. They also cultivate a garlic plantation, and the harvest is assisting them.



Above: Youth participants

Youth from Rwamagana District

Jerome Rutabingwa, Gertrude Furaha, and Bizimana Christophe are youth representatives coming from the families of Genocide survivors and the families of perpetrators. Different activities were presented:

- They organized dialogues, aiming to reinforce National unity, and to assist in healing our wounds.
- Events were facilitated by Rwandan youth who are part of the National service (Urugerero). They also contributed to building a house for those who are vulnerable and provided for basic needs.
- They also focused on agricultural activities and making organic fertilizer. Following the agricultural activities, they sat together, in dialogue about their situation, and building the future.

- A club of girls was also formed, to care for youth who get pregnant, (teenage pregnancy) and providing medical insurance.

While presenting this, they appreciated the support of the Rwandan government to the young generation and appreciated the mayor of Rwamagana district and members of the parliament who paid them a courtesy visit to see their reconciliation activities.

They concluded by expressing their gratitude to GER-RWANDA for their tireless support, facilitating dialogues that fight against their loneliness. They promised to help others.

Youth from Ruhango district

Francine Nyirabugingo, Matabaro David and Nzambazamariya Delphine started by appreciating the trainings, and sharing the impact of those trainings, related to their reconciliation activities at the community level:

“We formed a club to mobilize every home to adopt kitchen gardens as a viable solution to address the problem of malnutrition in rural areas. We also focused on finding ways to facilitate and resolve conflicts in families, conflicts related to consequences of the Genocide. This is not easy, but now we can discuss these issues on a community level among survivors, perpetrators and ex combatants. People from DRC and youth were able to meet one another in dialogue.”

Youth from Bugesera district

JURU Sector: Youth representatives from the Juru sector shared reconciliation activities such as:

- The Banana plantation — The banana plantation contributes to their wellness. They said the reason for choosing to cultivate Bananas was to show the young people born from families of survivors and perpetrators that “*the banana tree grows everywhere, regardless of where it came from.*” This was to support unity and reconciliation, and that Rwandans are all equal.
- The initiative of making organic fertilizer for their Banana plantation was linked with training in community living and community dialogues. “We have dialogues together among young people — mainly those born after the Genocide against the Tutsi — in order to heal our wounds.”

GASHORA Sector: Rutagengwa Jean Pierre said, “*In 2017, I was invited by the Bugesera district to attend the forums and trainings coordinated by GER-RWANDA and CFOR. The lessons learnt is those interactions assisted in healing our wounds caused by the Genocide against Tutsi.*”

Sometimes you feel that you are the only one with wounds but when you hear others interacting, you manage to know how to overcome that loneliness and trauma.”

They spoke about their club called “**Twiyubakire amahoro iwacu**”, supporting the young generation Gashora Sector, in unity and reconciliation activities.

He highlighted that as survivor, it had not been easy to organize people in dialogues. But, he said now this is possible! He said that we are “mobilizing the community in Gashora District to support the Kitchen Gardens community to plant fruits trees, with the understanding our area is dealing with the strong consequences of the Genocide, and also with Climate Change.

Kicukiro District

Kamayirese Carine one of the Genocide survivors from the Gahanga sector started by thanking the Rwanda patriotic Army/Inkotanyi that rescued her. She also appreciated GER-RWANDA and CFOR for the facilitated dialogues that healed her wounds caused by the Genocide.

It was during a Forum that Carine met with Hakizimana Patrick, who, during the Genocide against Tutsi, had been a perpetrator — in the Gahanga sector where Carine had lived and survived. During that forum, Carine recognized Patrick, as he was testifying about how he was a perpetrator during the Genocide. She came forward. Patrick did not recognize Carine. But, in a powerful interaction together, he acknowledged the horrors that she had seen, and took accountability, asking Carine, and all Rwandans for forgiveness.

Following that Forum, Carine formed an Association named **Femmes en Dialogues** (Women in Dialogue) with the aim of uniting women who survived the Genocide and women whose husbands perpetrated the Genocide. They also interact with the young generation, those born from survivors’ and perpetrators’ families.

After sharing these reconciliation activities with the attendees of the meeting, a Genocide survivor called Mukandemezo Colletta testified, *“I live in the Ndera Sector, I am the last born in my family. In February 1994, while sleeping, I dreamt that people were running after my father trying to kill him. When the Genocide started, I realized the meaning of my dream. During the Genocide against Tutsi, I was working in the National University of Rwanda’s Library.”*

She said *“I always felt so sad when I thought about my father and my mother. I felt so alone, to the point that I used to ask myself why I didn’t go with them...”* She shared her journey of how her wounds caused by the Genocide were healed, and how she has reunited with the perpetrators who killed her family.

Gasabo District

Rutabana spoke about his appreciation for the forums and training coordinated by GER-RWANDA and CFOR. He said that these facilitated dialogues supported him and others to coordinate a range of activities in the Gasabo district — agricultural activities and unity and

reconciliation activities. The unity and reconciliation activities involved dialogue about the consequences of the Genocide with the aim of strengthening good relationships.

One very significant result of these dialogues was that one of the perpetrators indicated where he had thrown the body of someone he killed during the Genocide. This led to finding many bodies. He urged the young generation to attend the commemorations of the Genocide against Tutsi and to know more about Rwandan history.

The representative of GASABO District GAKWAYA Jean Pierre appreciated the interactions among young people and advised them to promote dialogues that assist in conflict management and to reinforce and renew the Rwandan community. He also asked youth representatives to help those who are repatriating from the forest of DRC to attend such dialogues.

Mr. NYIRIMANZI Gerard presented the history of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi, its preparation and execution. He also spoke about rebuilding the Rwandan community. The effort made by the Rwanda patriotic Army (RPA), commanded by H.E Paul Kagame, to stop the Genocide was valued by the team representatives. The youth requested more sessions to process the history of Genocide and to facilitate these kinds of interactions in their schools.

During the meeting, we pointed out the effects of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda as well in our neighboring countries; we highlighted the similar situation that is now happening in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where Tutsi, and Congolese, KinyaRwandan speaking people are now facing Genocide. The youth group representatives were urged to denounce such atrocities happening in the Eastern DRC.



Recommendations on facilitating the youth in the healing process:

The participants summarized the importance of interacting and listening; writing your own testimony; dialogues; self-love; getting to know the role played by one's parents during the genocide; development activities; study and learning the truth about history and the consequences of the Genocide against Tutsi.

The attendees appreciated the leadership of Rwanda, in respect to the Unity and Reconciliation program, but requested that these trainings and dialogues on Unity and Reconciliation could be held on the sector level.

We are grateful to Arlene Audergon (PhD) and the CFOR team for the positive changes resulting from our work together. The reconciliation model in Rwanda, and these activities, should be well-documented and shared in other post conflicts countries.

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