



# GER

## Report of activities related to Peacebuilding, Reconciliation and Community-based Conservation; 2019-2020



## Global initiative for Environment and Reconciliation

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## **Acknowledgement**

The Global initiative for Environment and Reconciliation (GER) with pleasure presents the 2019-2020 annual report and performance review of all activities accomplished in this period. This report summarizes all work implemented in this year, documents stories of change and lessons learnt and highlights challenges faced and how they were overcome.

On behalf of GER, I would like to acknowledge the individuals, groups, and organizations who have contributed to the successful implementation of all these activities throughout the year. We recognize that this report would not be the same without your contribution and support.

I extend our gratitude to the Government of Rwanda, particularly the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), for their collaboration in our peacebuilding and reconciliation activities.

I am grateful for our partners, without whom our activities would not have been completed successfully. We thank CFOR, ABN, AEF, GAIA, ACORD, IPEN, GFC, religious leaders, local authorities of the districts where we operate and other partners.

I acknowledge and congratulate the GER team for their teamwork and perseverance to achieve all these activities.

Innocent Musore  
GER Executive Director

The image shows a handwritten signature in blue ink to the left of the GER logo. The logo is circular with a blue border and contains the text 'Global Initiative for Environment and Reconciliation' around the perimeter and 'GER' in the center.

## Executive Summary



Figure 1 GER and facilitators on discussing how communities are coping with Covid19.

This report summarizes activities implemented during the period of 2019-2020 according to GER's strategic objectives: Community-Based Conservation (CBC) and Conflict Resolution Facilitation through the program "Beyond Conflicts Rwanda". GER is operating in five districts of Rwanda: Gasabo, Kicukiro, Bugesera, Ruhango and Muhanga.

In 2020, GER in collaboration with African Biodiversity Network (ABN), implemented the "Emergency Response to Covid-19 Rwanda Project" funded by Agro Ecology Fund (AEF). The project was implemented in the five districts stated above. The direct beneficiaries of this project were 300 households; 250 farmers and 50 vulnerable households of elderly, disabled and poor families from semi-urban areas. This project helped farmers get seeds and learn skills to adapt domestic farming as a way of fighting food scarcity and unnecessary movements during the Covid-19 pandemic. The project also provided emergency food support for vulnerable communities of elders and people living with disabilities.

GER, with the support of its partners (GAIA and AEF) and local authorities, has distributed food support to the most vulnerable communities living in the districts where it operates. These communities were facing food scarcity as one of the impacts of the Covid-19 lockdown.

In partnership with ABN, GER hosted regional dialogues held in Bugesera on the promotion of Agroecology. Participants were farmers and community stakeholders from 5 countries (Kenya, Togo, Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa). The discussions aimed to engage more youth and elders in reviving indigenous seeds that are at risk of extinction, reconciling people with nature, and bridging the knowledge gap between generations.

In supporting peacebuilding in Rwanda, GER organized forums and training for community facilitators to support the existing process of reconciliation, conflict resolution and improve community relations. Feedback meetings were organized which brought together all community facilitators for experience learning and sharing with local leaders and stakeholders at the grassroots level in respective communities. The participants were

community reconciliation groups in Gasabo, Kicukiro and Bugesera. Local leaders appreciated the community interactions to heal the past and improve relations among communities.

In the period of 2019-2020, GER staff also received capacity building training from distinguished partners. Particularly, staff received training and study tours on agroecology from ACORD Rwanda and ABN. In the last two quarters of 2020, our staff followed virtual training from IPEN on planning, monitoring and evaluation, financial management and reporting. GER staff has also received capacity building by CFOR on planning and reporting.

Lastly, I call upon individuals, groups and organizations around the world, who may be interested in supporting our work. We also welcome anyone who wishes to learn from our experience.

## Activities related to Community-based conservation

### Community dialogues

Community-based conservation activities aim at empowering communities to improve environmental conditions



**Figure 2 Nyirajyambere one of the beneficiaries of this program in Ruhango District**

through ecosystem management and agroecology practices. This program enables communities to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, maintain community seedsystems, improve food systems and encourages better use and conservation of natural resources. GER documented stories of change from communities, where this program has contributed to alleviating poverty,

improving food systems, as well as conservation of land and water.

*“I have learnt a lot of skills from this program. We are doing domestic farming, we make our own organic fertilizers and pesticides that are nature friendly, and so on...as you can see, I have grown a lot of vegetables at my home. My children cannot starve nor can they face malnutrition. Moreover, we cannot eat and finish all that we grow. I started delivering vegetables to one boarding school. I was very excited when they gave me the check to withdraw money. I paid school fees for my children and solved domestic needs. It is helping us a lot.”*

Prisca Nyirajyambere from Ruhango District.

GER in partnership with ABN hosted community dialogues, which brought together conservation experts, elders, local authorities and youth. The main purpose of the dialogues was to facilitate community knowledge exchange, bridge the knowledge gap through intergenerational learning and revive indigenous seeds that are at risk of extinction. Dialogues took place from the 20th to 24th of January, 2020 and were hosted in Bugesera District.



**Figure 3 Youth learning from Elders' experience**

Participants of the dialogues were 36 farmers, 15 youth representatives and 9 local authorities from three districts: Bugesera, Ruhango and Muhanga. Young people who participated in these dialogues learnt skills that they pledged to use in developing their farming projects.

*“I have gained a lot of knowledge from elders and experts in agriculture. I am usually a model farmer. I am going to change my farming approach and switch to agroecology practices, and use organic fertilizers. I hope to get quality production.”* Said Safari Desire from Bugesera.

## **Response to Covid- 19**

The project entitled “Emergency Response to Covid-19” was implemented in Rwanda by GER funded by Agro



**Figure 4** During Covid19 lockdowns; communities were facilitated to grow vegetables at their home.

Ecology Fund (AEF) in collaboration with ABN. The four-month project activities included mapping the most vulnerable communities as beneficiaries, providing emergency foodsupport, providing seeds and materials, monitoring activities, and advocating for the market of their agricultural production. This project was implemented in the five districts where GER works. Using

advocacy meetings, GER met with local authorities and community representatives who helped in the provision of the market for agriculture production; by linking the production demand in urban areas with farmers.

The direct beneficiaries of this project were 185 women, and 115 men, of whom 50 are vulnerable households of elderly, disabled and poor families from semi-urban areas in Kicukiro and Gasabo Districts of the City of Kigali who faced extreme food insecurity during the total country lockdown. Elders received food packages containing rice, maize flour, beans, and oil, along with hygiene materials to facilitate them in hand washing to help them contain the transmission of Covid-19. The total beneficiaries of this project are 250 small farmers’ households from rural areas in Bugesera, Ruhango and Muhanga Districts who received seeds.



**Figure 5** Local leaders and stakeholders who helped the distribution of food support

## **Conservation**

GER in partnership with Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) are implementing a “Zero Waste Project”, where we work with groups of waste collectors to ensure proper waste management and advocate for waste collectors. Our main focus is on women waste collectors who are interested in turning waste management

into entrepreneurship through recycling and making organic fertilizers used in agriculture. This group of waste collectors is composed of women who have been affected by the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. Most of its members are widows who have been trained on organizing and facilitating reconciliation dialogues at the community level. They carry out reconciliation activities in their respective communities. Income-generating work is involved in their daily activities of reconciliation, and this is how they started engaging in waste collection and management.

GER in partnership with GAIA has conducted and developed a case study named, Rwanda plastic bag ban case study, aimed at showcasing Rwanda's effort and experience in the fight to beat plastic, as well as expanding lessons to learn worldwide since plastic is considered a global issue. GER has also provided food to 100 waste collectors in Bugesera District. This support was collected to cover essential needs of GER affiliates working in waste management, to sustain their lives in a situation of high vulnerability due to Covid-19. The support was distributed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2020 at the Bugesera District Office. *"The support comes at the right time; many of us were in need of facemasks and soap, while we had no money to buy it ourselves. GER provided us with these hygienic materials along with food support and we very much appreciated it,"* said Théodette one of waste collectors in Bugesera.

## Activities related to Peacebuilding



Figure 6 Youth group discussions

### Beyond Conflict Rwanda

Since 2016, GER has been in partnership with CFOR to support the existing reconciliation process, community recovery and the prevention of future violence in Rwanda through the Beyond Conflict Rwanda Program. We facilitated forums, trained and mentored trainers who are implementing reconciliation activities at the community level. Our aim is to facilitate inherent

capacities within communities to reconcile and facilitate deeper dialogues at individual, interpersonal, family and societal levels of diverse society.

The outcomes of this program supported communities to recover from collective trauma and the aftermath of the genocide, and contributed to the prevention of violent conflicts in Rwanda. The project was implemented in three districts: Gasabo, Kicukiro and Bugesera. Genocide survivors who participated in this in this program showed positive change through how they were healed and helping others to heal.

*“I participated in different GER forums which gave me a chance to share my story and my pain with others. In the forum I understood that I wasn’t alone, that there are people ready to understand and others who need my help. I built up herself. Now I am a happy woman. I have a family; my kids are my treasure and I am happy that now I can share my testimony anywhere with anyone. I am a facilitator in peacebuilding and reconciliation activities. I am glad that I am doing activities helping survivors and perpetrators to reunite and develop themselves and their country in general.”* Said Solange;, a genocide survivor.

### **Feedback Meetings**

In the last quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, we carried out feedback meetings to capture stories and achievements of community facilitators who are contributing to the process of reconciliation together with local authorities of their respective communities. Four meetings were organized. Feedback meetings began with a large meeting, which took place on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019 in Kicukiro District bringing together all community facilitators. It brought together 60 community facilitators from three districts: Bugesera, Kicukiro and Gasabo. Feedback meetings were extended through visiting all districts, where we worked with NURC and community facilitators to identify progress made and make joint plans for how community facilitators will keep helping local leaders in the process of reconciliation at their respective community level.

### **International Day of Peace 2019**

Through this Program, GER also worked with NURC and partners in celebrating the International Day of Peace 2019, which was celebrated on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, 2019 in parliament, where community facilitators shared their stories of change from the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi, up to their peace and reconciliation now.

This program is working with groups of community facilitators. There are 60 total beneficiaries of this program, who were trained and helped in facilitating dialogues and interactions towards peacebuilding and reconciliation. They are also contributing using the skills learnt, testimony and experience to improve relations, healed community trauma and wounds related to the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. They are also supporting communities to identify unburied bodies of the victims, raise advocacy for children born from rape, and paying damaged properties during genocide.

Participants including local leaders and NURC recommended that the program be scaled up in other areas of the country in order to contribute to the existing process of reconciliation with a focus on the next generation. Participants recommended that the program support reintegration of ex-prisoners, who were genocide perpetrators, into their families and the community as well.

To ensure sustainability of the program activities, GER mentored trainees and met participants at the grassroots levels by linking them with local leaders to make collaboration easy and smooth. In addition, GER identified challenges faced by trainees and feedback meetings are organized in order to share experience in order to overcome the identified challenges and plan for future activities ahead. GER will continue to contribute to the existing process of reconciliation. We appreciate the political will, which helped Rwandans to reconcile, though it is still a process and communities are still facing effects related to the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi.

## Challenges faced

The major challenge faced during our implementation period of 2019-2020 has been the Covid-19 pandemic. Since March 2020, physical meetings, forums and field travels were prohibited in order to contain the spread of the Coronavirus. This has strongly impacted implementation of our projects, since our work involves community engagement, meetings, and dialogues. Despite our office facing temporary obstacles, we have managed to continue working remotely and connecting with our field coordinator and community facilitators.

Relating to our program of conflict transformation facilitation, we face challenges of the dynamism of trauma; which refers to the variation of trauma over time and how it affects young people and the next generation. We respond to this by facilitating more interactions and engaging young people in intergenerational dialogues to help people speak about their painful story and get involved in the healing process. We plan to train more trainers who will facilitate dialogues at the community level to deal with the dynamism of trauma.

A challenge for most of our programs whose positive stories are recommended to be scaled up in other areas of the country is limited financial resources. Rwandans share the effects of genocide, effects of climate change, and nature degradation. There is a need to expand our activities, but there is a lack of funds to do so. GER is strengthening its fundraising strategies and mobilizing partners.

The work of GER is solving social issues that are being faced in every corner of the country. The way trauma



Figure 7 Participants from NURC, Police and local leaders

appeared in two or three years after the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi is not the same as the way it appears today, it keeps changing with time. And communities are still face fresh wounds of genocide. GER is called to all parts of the country to facilitate society healing, however it faces financial challenges where there are not enough resources to implement those activities.

The reconciliation of Rwandans is challenged by many people

coming from DRC forests and armed groups, as well as genocide convicts who are completing their jail terms and joining society. There is a need to facilitate their reintegration in society, in order to help them catch up with the process of reconciliation. GER's main challenge to support their reintegration is limited financial resources. There has also been a challenge of limited funds to support community reconciliation initiatives that has been created by GER's community facilitators. Moreover, there is a need for capacity building for GER staff.

## Lesson learnt and success stories

GER believes that conservation and post-genocide reconciliation is possible when communities are empowered and engaged in the process. With our activities, change begins with an individual, from the individual to their family, and then to the whole society and nation in general. It is in this regard that our interventions engage communities from the grassroots level.



Figure 8 Communities say that working together improved their relations

From our work experience, we learnt that agroecology is not only an approach to end food problems and alleviate poverty, but also a method to help improve relations within Rwandan society as it keeps people working together with the same goals and sharing their harvest.

We also learnt that the collaboration between communities, local leaders, and stakeholders is a relevant approach to address issues facing communities. Further, we refer to youth involvement as the best way of knowledge transfer and bridging knowledge gap within generations.

Our activities throughout this period have reported very positive stories of change, and communities have expressed their changes from before joining GER programs and the way they are now helping others. Our joint activities have helped improving relations and community development as well. *“When we are working with perpetrators of genocide, it gradually removes suspicion among us. During the time of harvesting when we are sharing our yield, it is a good example of reconciliation. Our relations have been improved.”* one survivor said.

On the other hand, perpetrators who finished their jail term and are working with others in agroecology activities

they say that, *“Being together with others helps us to build our trust through solidarity and helping each other. We attend their weddings and other family parties. The more we work together, the better we reconcile.”* One perpetrator said.

Another success story recorded is that community initiatives of domestic farming have not only helped our beneficiaries with food needs and financial income, but has also helped them to protect themselves against the contamination of Covid-19.

*“As you know, children need vegetables in every meal, and we parents used to rely on markets to find them, which could create frequent movement that could put us at risk of getting infected with Covid-19. I have vegetables at my home. I get them whenever I need, so I can stay home safely.”* Said Mukandamage, a citizen of Ruhango District.

These activities have consequently contributed to community awareness and involvement in nature conservation, as they are planting trees of various indigenous species, planting fruit trees and practicing community knowledge sharing and experience learning. Participants, including youth, recommended extending the interactions for more people to benefit.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

GER is determined to build on the results of the past achievements to strengthen community solidarity and improve relations and food systems. We are committed to empowering communities to solve issues affecting their lives including conflicts, climate change, poverty, hunger, and inequalities, as well as the effects of Covid-19.

GER will maintain community dialogues as a way to experience learning and knowledge sharing and identify community problems and ease advocacy to influence the policy process.

It will support existing community solidarity initiatives through the celebration of special events such as *Umuganura*, where the community eats together and shares diverse food; and community seed fair, where communities will exhibit and share indigenous seeds. We will facilitate interactions to resolve post-harvest conflicts. We will promote our values (partnership and working together) as a way of helping the community solve their own problems. There is a need to train more trainers, and increase capacity to document positive stories that will help the younger generation and experience sharing to other post-conflict communities around the world.

GER will keep empowering communities to share knowledge and experience learning, and scale up the agroecology movement in other areas of Rwanda. We will focus on engaging youth in community dialogues with elders in order to bridge the knowledge gap between generations.

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