

RECONCILIATION- HEALING THE PAST AND FACILITATING THE FUTURE -GER&CFOR –RWANDA REPORT



In 2015, Innocent Musore made contact with CFOR’s directors 2015, which led to an invitation to the UK to attend their training. During his time in the UK, he learned a lot and eventually invited them to Rwanda, seeking ways to collaborate and bring their activities to the country.

We aimed to support the existing process of reconciliation, healing the past and facilitating the future. We gathered Genocide survivors, perpetrators, youth born from rape, women and religious leaders and local leaders to talk about what happened to heal. Reconcile and build a shared future through transformative dialogues. We have implemented 4 projects named: Beyond Conflicts-Rwanda, Healing the past and Facilitating the Future, Youth-Reconciliation and the Future, and Gender and Reconciliation.

Since 2016, about 1600 have participated in reconciliation training and interactions. Our interventions focused on youths and women because they were the most affected by the Genocide against the Tutsi and related violence than other populations. The project was implemented in 6 districts of Rwanda, Bugesera, Gasabo, Rwamagana, Kicukiro, Ruhango, and Musanze in collaboration with National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. The following projects implemented:

1. Beyond Conflicts-Rwanda Project 2016

Since 2016 we organized the first forum in June 2016, attended by 35 participants were survivors of Genocide against the Tutsi and perpetrators, at Foyer de Charité, Kicukiro. CFOR directors also attended this meeting. By November 2016, another forum took place, attended by about 50 participants, which also consisted of Genocide survivors and perpetrators, religious leaders, local authorities, and representatives from the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission. The facilitators of this event were Arlene and Jean Claude (CFOR directors), while Innocent coordinated all activities during the forum. As it was uncommon for Genocide survivors and perpetrators to come together for conversations 22 years after the Genocide, achieving this was significant. It remains challenging to this day, especially when discussing the Genocide, as some participants share their experiences while others confess their roles in the atrocities. The forum addressed various topics, including the country's history and the events of 1994. These were difficult discussions, but thanks to the facilitators' experience and expertise, participants were able to open up and share their painful experiences.

“I remember that in this event, one perpetrator who took part in the Genocide killings at Gahanga, where more than 5,000 people were murdered, shared his testimony. He was unaware that a survivor of his ruthless acts was among the participants. At the forum, the two met, got to know each other, and had a conversation. This resulted in the perpetrator publicly asking for forgiveness, which the survivor granted. Together, they began the journey of unity and helped others in their communities take similar steps. Due to the rarity of such acts of unity and reconciliation, their story was deeply touching and inspiring. I remember that they were later invited to share their testimony at parliament during National Peace Day in 2019,” Innocent recounted.

In 2017 June 2017, a three-day forum was held at Bon Espérance, Kicukiro, attended by 76 participants, consisting of Genocide perpetrators, survivors, youths, religious leaders, and local authorities. Following the forum, we conducted a two-day training for community facilitators. Among the participants were also refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi, whom we had invited to attend alongside our already existing participants. We had expanded our activities beyond Kicukiro District, and soon, we had participants from Gasabo and Bugesera as well.

During this time, some participants also requested that discussions be held in their communities and invited GER and CFOR directors, Arlene and Jean Claude, to visit. They went to the rural area of Rutunga Sector, Gasabo District, where they observed various community activities.

In November 2017, another forum and training were held at Bon Espérance. Over seven days, we organized a three-day general forum attended by 50 participants, a one-day forum specifically for women with 40 participants, another one-day forum for religious leaders, and a two-day training for community facilitators tasked with helping others in their communities. During this forum, it was when we started developing a training module for community facilitators



In 2018 June 2018, we held an event in Bugesera District at Savannah, a three-day forum that brought together 186 participants, consisting of Genocide survivors and perpetrators, youths (those from survivors' and perpetrators' families, those born as a result of rape, and those from historically marginalized communities), local leaders, community facilitators, and religious leaders. The forum facilitators were Arlene (PhD) and Jean -Claude. Following this, we conducted a two-day training at Bon Espérance, Kicukiro, attended by 50 participants from the previous year's forum, completing their designated six-day training program. During this meeting, we also distributed the handouts containing the community facilitators' training module to help them conduct reconciliation activities in their respective communities.

Additionally, in the same month, refugee participants from the 2017 forum invited us to visit their community. We went to Nyabiheke Refugee Camp, where we held a one-day interaction with refugees. They shared their testimonies and painful experiences of war in Congo and Burundi, expressing the need for a specific program designed to address trauma in refugee camps. They highlighted challenges beyond war experiences, including conflicts within the community, domestic abuse, and unsustainable living conditions.



2. Youth-Reconciliation and Future project:

From the interactions we had had with the adult participants that we worked with in the past, the general recommendation was that the program should shift the focus to the youth in the country to increase their knowledge about the country's past and how they can navigate the trauma and be able to build a sustainable future not only for themselves but also for the country as a whole. The main reasons for the focus to be on youth include, but is not limited to: -Youths compose the majority of the population of Rwanda, making up 75% of the population below 35 years of age.

Youths face intergenerational trauma stemming from 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi with some coming from survivor's families, others from the perpetrators side, while others are results from rapes that occurred during the Genocide. The trauma from their parents gets transferred to their children and can damage their lives if they are not taken care of or shown the different ways on how they deal and heal from it, and be able to reconcile and support their families in the reconciliation process as well.

During some interactions with the youths, one youth gave his testimony about being impacted by the trauma of his parents. He said “my mom is a Genocide survivor who has trauma as a result of it. Whenever it’s during the commemoration period or she goes through something that triggers her, life kind of stops at home because she is not able to do anything like she usually does, and instead I have to step up and be the one to take care of her and make sure she is okay. Whenever she is like that, I can’t even go to school or go anywhere else, and I feel like the situation she goes through affects my daily life a lot”. Youths are potential future leaders, we must support them, build their capacity, build their resilience, and make sure that we give them a voice and the resources needed to develop and hopefully contribute to the development of the country.

The youth interacting training on reconciliation, youth leadership, resilience, gender and prevention of domestic and gender based violence, trauma healing and facilitating reparations on the properties damaged and destroyed were the main focus of the discussions during this period. Additionally, the discussions were not the only activities that took place, but there was also another activity of facilitating the youths to visit a memorial site with 60 youth team leaders brought together from all the 6 districts represented.

The youths were very happy about this trip as they gave feedback that it was a very impactful learning experience, they learnt a lot from it, saw lots of things that they believe they would not have been able to reach to that level of fully understanding what happened during the Genocide if not for that trip (how it was prepared, how it was executed, how it was stopped, and the political will of the nation to reconcile it’s citizens after such horrible period). The others who were not able to attend have been requesting to be given the opportunity as well.

There were also mentorship sessions between Innocent and Gimu being mentored by Arlene. The purpose of the mentorship was to help them be able to develop and grow personally as experienced facilitators who can execute and lead the interactions well. The sessions involved discussing about the challenges that were currently being faced at the time, how to better facilitate the interactions and discussions for large groups, work on managing and addressing hotspots, learn about how to conduct themselves and manage their emotions during sensitive discussions, and how to take care of themselves and grow individually as a facilitator.

3. Healing the past and Facilitating the Future project

In July 2024, we held a 2 day meeting with women leaders at Centre Christus, Remera. It was attended by 45 women and we had an opportunity to discuss with them in different issues that women said they are usually afraid to talk about such as domestic and gender based violence, rape, family conflicts etc., which burdens them and leads to them developing trauma. It was a very impactful and learning experience for everyone who was involved in the event, and being able to give the women a safe environment to voice their concerns and daily challenges and build their capacity in developing themselves and empowering their fellow women in their respective

communities was a great achievement. During this period, most of our activities were centered around working with leaders (local authority, women, and youth leaders).

The district of Bugesera invited us to work with leaders in the district and in early November, we trained up to 60 leaders at in Bugesera district at Sunrise hotel on the topics of reconciliation, conflict resolution, peace building and how they can better support the community members in healing from the trauma from the past and build a sustainable future not only for themselves but for the whole country. In this meeting, the participants also raised concerns regarding the prisoners being released from prison after being convicted for their roles in the killings during the 1994 Genocide, and how there are no designated programs for reintegrating them back into the society, and requesting that there should be some.

Most of the time, these people are released without knowing how to navigate life after prison, and the community members are not prepared to receive them as well, especially if there are some survivors of the 1994 Genocide, it's especially hard for them. There must be programs in place to help not only prepare the prisoners to live in normal society, but also prepare and train them to live well with their survivors, and for the community members to get trained on how to incorporate them in their daily lives and facilitate their new life in the society.



Additionally, late last year, in early December, we participated in a workshop that was conducted by Berghof Foundation where they brought women from Somalia to come learn from Rwanda about its journey of resilience and how it managed to rebuild itself after going through such a horrible period during the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. In this workshop, we did presentations about the history of Rwanda from pre-colonialism to now, an overview of what GER is, its mission, and role in facilitating the peace-building and reconciliation activities in Rwanda. The women from Somalia deeply resonated with the presentations' content because they said that what happened to Rwanda is somehow similar to what is currently happening in Somalia, where the atrocities done affect the whole country, but women in particular, as they are most vulnerable and don't have the means to defend themselves.

They thanked GER so much for the activities it has been doing in Rwanda and for instilling hope in them and showing them the Somalians can achieve peace and uplift women in the country. In addition to this, in November 2024, we had an opportunity to present our activities to individuals from Australia in an online meeting, which was a very great way to spread awareness on what we do to other countries as well and make sure that our impact can reach further beyond the Rwandan borders with its impact.

At a Personal Level, bringing together the Genocide survivors and perpetrators to come together and discuss the history and painful experiences of what happened during the Genocide, with more than 500 people attending the forums and leadership training. Personal reconciliation with the activities and interactions bringing in hope within individuals and giving them a safe environment to open up and share their painful experiences. Individuals were able to reconcile with one another, with some owning up to their roles in the killings and asking for forgiveness while the survivors granted the forgiveness.



Attending the forums and interactions helped the participants heal from the trauma of what they went through. For the perpetrators, these interactions allowed them to cast aside the fear, shame, and embarrassment for their role in the Genocide and were able to share with their families and others what they did. These activities proved that post-Genocide reconciliation is possible, which was made possible due to the country's visionary leadership and political will to reconcile the citizens. The perpetrators were able to open up and name the different places where some of their Genocide victims are buried, allowing the bodies to be found and held a respectful burial and give their families closure. Gasabo district went on ahead to be the national memorial site for the whole country.

At Community Level

The community facilitators took part in making reparations in regards to the properties that were destroyed during the Genocide. They also helped in improving relations and community building among the community members. We connected the community facilitators with the government authorities so that they work together as resourceful individuals to create big impacts for their activities and help out during commemoration periods. The training increased the skills, and knowledge of the community facilitators in terms of holding discussions and interactions, soft skills like being empathetic, and learning how to address different social issues appropriately. People in their respective communities formed groups where they would support one another to carry out different projects, which would in the end improve their living standards.

These groups also helped in resolving conflicts and other challenges that the members are going through. Our activities have served as inspirations for different people all over the world and not just in Rwanda. We've had different women and youth groups from other countries come to visit and learn from our beneficiaries and the projects we've been involved in. The interactions and discussions helped people get rid of their fears where for example, one participants among the youths told others that before him attending the forums, he used to be so scared of going in areas where there are lots of people because of his grandfather's role in the killings during the Genocide, as he felt shameful and responsible for what his grandfather did. After attending, he learnt that he had no role in this and that his grandfather's life is his and he has his own to build unrelated to that.

Another youth from the survivors' side, who she never knew that the children from the perpetrator's side have any challenges that they go through, as she felt that they had it better, but was proven wrong when she would hear their testimonies of the various challenges they go through. We discussed the topics of collective trauma, talking about healing trauma, fighting Genocide ideologies, asking for forgiveness and granting it, stopping inter-generational trauma, resolving community conflicts that stem as a result of Genocide consequences, and supporting leadership among youths.

From 2023 till now, the impact of the project has expanded to other districts (gasabo, Ruhango, Bugesera, Rwamagana, and Musanze) where we've worked with over 500 individuals consisting of youths, women, religious leaders who were trained and are now supporting the reconciliation process in Rwanda as a whole and in their respective communities. There have been community initiatives established in each district that we operate in, which have helped in addressing social challenges and improving the community livelihoods.

Testimonies of participants:

The youths were able to understand what it means to work together towards a shared common goal and address the challenges that they were going through, seeming as it was a shared challenge as well. For example, in Rwamagana district, there is a remarkable story of one of the participants who shared that after the Genocide, he was afraid and scared of going back to his hometown after the horrors of what he saw happening there. However, when he started attending training and was able to open up and share his fears with the other participants, he was amazed at how supportive and comforting they were. They helped him work through his fears and right now he is proud of announcing that he has finally gone back to his roots, has reconnected with old friends over there, and no longer dread going there as he feels like he is at a place where he has come to terms with what happened, navigated the grief and trauma from his lost loved ones, has healed, and is now able to move forward and build his future all thanks to the other youths he engaged with during the discussions and interactions facilitated by GER. The participants shared that they are now able to discuss Genocide-related matters freely without feeling shame or fear of how they will be perceived by society.

One participant, a school teacher from the perpetrator's family, recounted how before attending the training, he used to be very shameful and didn't want to discuss any Genocide related topic with his students and would instead brush it off, as he was ashamed for the role that his family had in the Genocide and thought that his students would judge him if he was to even talk about it a tiny bit. However, after attending the training, he quickly realised that with a great support system, he can work through his problems and had been instead depriving his students of the knowledge that would have helped them learn more about the past and how to make sure that the same thing never happens again in the future.

He was stunned at how, when he went back to school and started discussing the Genocide, his students were very interested to learn more. It is easy to heal from your trauma when you have people supporting you and are in an environment where you can open up and share about your burdens judgement free which is what happened to most participants as most said that it was their first that they have ever been able to fully talk about what they have been going through -Most youths were able to learn a lot from the training that the majority went back to their families and have now been helping their families to heal from their trauma and have facilitated several reconciliations acts between the survivors and the perpetrators -The youths have been trained to help integrate the ex-Genocide convicts being released from prisons back into the society and have been playing a huge role in helping them navigate their new life free and ask for forgiveness from the Genocide survivors that they wronged and live with them in harmony in their respective communities.

Esperance's experience with GER and CFOR training in 2017, I was fortunate to be part of the training that was being conducted by GER and CFOR on the themes of reconciliation, unity and resilience. The main purpose of the training was to learn how to facilitate discussions and interactions as facilitators to help the participants heal from the wounds of the past. What I learnt from training: Knowing how to be humble when interacting with the participants as a facilitator to create a safe space for everyone to open up. Being a good listener as it helps the person I'm communicating with to feel heard and know that whatever they are telling is being valued. Being empathetic and knowing how to put myself in somebody else's shoes, which I think has helped me look into someone's problem through my lenses and put myself in the perspective of if it was on me. Arlene (PhD), of CFOR, said that the history of the 1994 Genocide is not just things of the past, we are still going through and experiencing their consequences, which if not addressed, could continue to be passed down from generation to generation. Innocent of GER, said that being a leader is not just a title, it's knowing deep down that you are capable and that the others are also able to work together on things that can benefit all. The training helped us believe that there is something we can do for the society, especially helping the women who were widowed as a result of the Genocide against Tutsi and those who lost their children as well.

So far, I've visited 60 families of such women and have listened to their very inspiring and heart-touching testimonies, and I believe that it has helped me learn how to be empathetic and

sympathetic. So many of them need and desire to be shown love and to have somebody around caring for them and I'm very grateful to be one that they can depend on and have a shoulder to cry on. I'm very thankful for GER and CFOR for their training because they have helped me gain my sense of humanity and know how to use it properly towards those in need and make everyone feel valued

In 2017, during discussions on unity and reconciliation, various testimonies were shared. In an extraordinary situation, someone who had participated in the genocide committed in Gahanga gave testimony about their role in the genocide against the Tutsis who had sought refuge in Gahanga, where 5,000 Tutsis were killed. While giving testimony, among the attendees was a survivor of the Gahanga massacre. The person giving the testimony did not know that there was a survivor in the audience, and the survivor did not know they would encounter someone who had participated in the killings. This deeply moved those attending the discussions. However, afterward, the perpetrator asked for forgiveness, and the process of unity and reconciliation continued. The NYRC invited the GER Rwanda organization to share this testimony on unity and reconciliation with others.



In Bugesera in 2024, when the Bugesera District requested Innocent of GER Rwanda, to share insights with leaders responsible for unity, reconciliation, and healing historical wounds, as well as those leading unity and resilience groups, including genocide survivors and perpetrators, he shared his expertise in facilitating unity and reconciliation discussions. Among the group leaders,

one genocide survivor shared testimony about the importance of attending the training and discussions organized by GER and CFOR. The survivor recounted an incident where they were washing clothes by the river when an elderly woman approached, asking for directions. They were surprised that she did not know the way. She explained that she had been imprisoned for genocide-related crimes and had just been released.

Due to the country's development, including new buildings and roads, she could not recognize her surroundings. During their conversation, Claudette realized who the woman was and asked if her name was BAZIZANE, to which she confirmed. BAZIZANE was one of those who participated in the genocide against Claudette's family. Claudette suddenly remembered the atrocities BAZIZANE had committed against her family and her during the genocide. She struggled with emotions, debating how to react. However, recalling the discussions she had attended with GER Rwanda and the guidance on unity and reconciliation, she gathered strength and helped the woman find her way. Claudette emphasized that since many perpetrators are now finishing their sentences, it is crucial to organize training for them to help them reintegrate peacefully into society. She noted that many things have changed—some returning prisoners find that the wives they left behind have had children with other partners, and other societal shifts have occurred, which, if not managed well, could lead to conflicts, including violence.

During a unity and reconciliation discussion in Ruhango, a female leader representing genocide survivors requested that special discussions be organized for widows who lost their husbands in the genocide against the Tutsis. She mentioned that many still suffer from trauma and isolation due to what they experienced and need support through discussions that help them overcome loneliness and despair.



In Musanze District, youth from different backgrounds were trained, including those from families of genocide survivors and those from families of genocide perpetrators. They came together to support each other in overcoming the consequences of the genocide against the Tutsis and to contribute to building a better future. They helped families dealing with property disputes by facilitating dialogue and conflict resolution. Due to their contributions, the youth requested that more young people receive training so that they can collectively contribute to the country's rebuilding efforts, as only a few have received training so far. They appreciated the opportunity to interact with government officials, who assisted them in addressing the challenges they face.

They also highlighted trauma as a major issue among the youth due to the genocide against the Tutsis. They emphasized that the discussions they attended helped them heal emotional wounds, learn the truth, understand history, visit memorial sites, and engage in development activities aimed at improving well-being. Participants expressed their worries about the intergenerational trauma among the youths from the survivors, perpetrators, and those born as a result of rape as challenges including Genocide ideologies in some areas of the country where the Genocide survivors are still targeted in some cases and integration of the prisoners being released from prison back into the society has not been easy and limited number of skilled people to facilitate deep reconciliation dialogues at community level. We are planning to scale up the project in Eastern DRC to work with communities affected by the conflicts and violence to facilitate deep reconciliation and healing.

GER-RWANDA