



GER

The contribution of GER to support the Reconciliation Process in Rwanda; 2020



Global initiative for Environment and Reconciliation

Introduction

This report summarizes activities implemented during the period of 2019-2020 according to GER's strategic objectives to support the existing process of reconciliation in Rwanda. Our approach is to bring together people from different background, affected by the 1994 genocide against Tutsi, to work together on the existing challenge, healing the past and facilitating their future. Our activities target genocide survivors, perpetrators, youth from both sides, historically marginalized groups, religious groups, local government institutions and civil society organizations. We focus on youth as the next generation. We trained community facilitators; facilitated interactions by organizing small and large forums. Since June 2016 when we started using this approach, we have recorded positive changes at individual level, interpersonal, family and societal level. People healed and reconciled and relations were improved. Communities have also created joint development initiatives that help them to work together and restore trust among themselves. Our interventions reached directly to 600 people from five districts; Bugesera, Kicukiro, Gasabo, Ruhango and Muhanga. These people are resourceful persons to facilitate community interactions and experience sharing in their respective communities.



Figure 1 Community reconciliation facilitators' workshop: Kicukiro, 2019

The beneficiaries of our activities have been selected to share their experience on different platforms; On the celebration of the International Day of Peace 2019, two of our beneficiaries, a survivor and a perpetrator, were invited to the parliament and share their experience of reconciliation and how GER's forums facilitated them through the process, how their relations were improved and how they are working together to help others having the same problems. GER has been also selected to share its experience contributing to the development of Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer (RMB); where we hosted researchers to discuss our experience on community reconciliation process and positive changes recorded so far. We also shared our transformative approach with local leaders and stakeholders, and we found out that it is an effective approach in healing, improving relations and lives through joint development activities.

Facilitating intergeneration Dialogues



Figure 2 Youth exchange during the intergeneration dialogues: Gasabo, 2020

As we focus on youth as the next generation, we facilitate their interactions to respond to the problems that youth have regarding their history. Intergeneration dialogues bring youth from different sides including those who were born from rape, those who were born from genocide perpetrators and young people who were born right after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. During their interactions, youth have a lot of questions they ask; some of them carry the shame and stigma for what their parents did during the genocide, others are eager to know their identity and they mostly need to know much about the history of their country. These interventions improved youth knowledge on the history of Rwanda, prevention of trans-generation trauma and future violence.

One of the young people who were born from rape said that he used to spend his time wondering the side to which he belongs; he said that through training they learnt that their identity is Rwandan. *“We learnt that we are Rwandans, we are no longer trying to find our identity wondering if we are either Hutu or Tutsi, we are Rwandans and our country gives us equal opportunity like other Rwandans.”* He said. GER believes that facilitating youth to have the same understanding can help to overcome ethnicity challenges to build a national identity, NdiUmunyarwanda as a sustainable solution to the ethnicity background.

Experience sharing workshops



Figure 3 NURC Representative, Police and stakeholders

We facilitated workshops where community facilitators shared their experience related to reconciliation activities implemented in their communities. The aim of these workshops was to see how planned activities were implemented, positive changes achieved, challenges faced and planning a way forward. Participants included NURC, local leaders, police and Abarinzi b'igihango.

One of the Genocide Survivors who participated in the workshop shared her painful experience and said that only through speaking out what happened to her, it is when she started feeling free and relieved. “When I attended the forums of GER, it is when I understood that I wasn’t alone, that there are people ready to listen to me and others who needed my help too, I opened up and said all what was a burden to my heart. First of all I thank the RPF-Inkotanyi that rescued us and stopped the genocide, and I also appreciate existing platform helping us to heal from the past.” She said. Storytelling is one of the most appreciated approach by survivors who said that the platform to speak out and having people to listen to them facilitated trauma healing and fighting its dynamism which is still a challenge to the process of reconciliation.



Figure 4 Community facilitators demonstrating how reconciliation should start in their family

On the other side some perpetrators of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi, who were trained, have shared stories of how they were falsely taught until they participated in the genocide. They confessed their crimes and asked for forgiveness for their role in mass killings and numerous other horrific acts that were done during the 1994 genocide against Tutsi. “I was 14 years old during the 1994 genocide against Tutsi, and I took part in it. After genocide against Tutsi in 1994 I always felt guilty and a big emptiness and pain in my heart for what I did. When Gacaca courts came, I decided to confess my crimes and surrender myself to justice.” One the perpetrators said.

Despite having admitted their crimes and having finished their jail terms, it was not easy for them to rejoin the society in which they committed their crimes. They had issues with their children who carried shame as long as they were addressed as children of killers. They wondered how they can live with genocide survivors after all what they did to them. “I was very ashamed; I used to stay indoors without attending community works and other community forums.”

As far as GER’s work experience is concerned, the perpetrators of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi had also kind of trauma and wounds from which they first of all needed to be healed before proceeding with the process of reconciliation. Through community dialogues on Ndi Umunyarwanda and forums of GER, they opened up and said the truth about the history. “I remember when I shared information about where to find unburied bodies of the genocide victims. This is when I started feeling relieved.” One of the perpetrators said.

They say that their children played a big role in helping them to ask for forgiveness. “They asked me why I was in prison, I told them that I killed innocent people, they asked me why I killed them, I explained them well about bad leadership which planned, organized and executed the genocide against Tutsi. My young child told me strong words, He told me *“we forgive you, but do not ever kill people again.”* My reconciliation with my family helped me to approach those people I offended and I was forgiven. I am also encouraging others who committed genocide crimes but they are still hiding themselves and do not want to tell the truth.” He said.

A Success story

“When I attended forums organized by GER, I shared my painful story as a child born from rape during the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi, the history that affected me much because I knew it when I grew up, and it affected my education. Leaders who were there advocated for me and I am now doing my University studies at IPRC Ngoma.” Said Diane, she also requested that other young people having the same problems can be supported. “Personally, I thank the President of Republic, HE Paul Kagame for opportunities given for all Rwandans.” She added. Diane is now committed to using the knowledge gained from the training she attended to help other young people, with painful history, to heal from the past, build their resilience and go beyond the history to embrace the bright future they want.

Community development initiatives

Based on our experience, we believe that reconciliation activities should go hand in hand with community development activities to respond to basic need. The 1994 genocide against Tutsi affected the socioeconomic aspect of lives. Our holistic approach that helped to respond to the effects of genocide in various dimensions; we believe that community reconciliation should not only be done through dialogues, we facilitated development activities to increase income and improve livelihoods. These activities helped communities to solve their food problems, malnutrition, contribute to the



Figure 5 Community development initiatives: Muhanga, 2020

education of their children, and improve hygiene conditions and improving environmental health. The outcomes of these activities were not limited to community development, they also helped people to improve their relations and restore trust among them through working together. Perpetrators say that working together with genocide survivors has facilitated their reconciliation and improvement of their broken relations. “When it is time for harvesting, it is really a sign of reconciliation, we share the harvest, we celebrate our achievement together, it removed suspicion and mistrust among us, our relations was vividly improved.” They said.

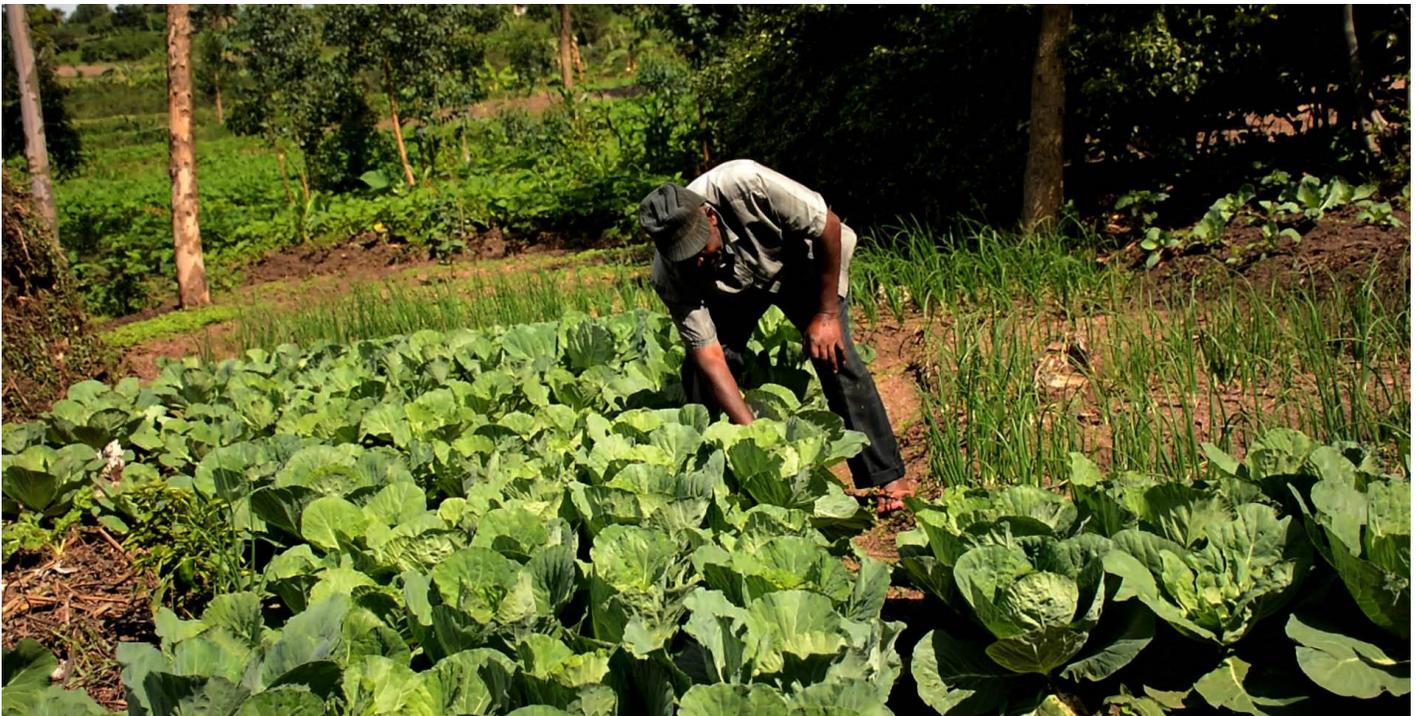


Figure 6 Joint development initiatives contribute to food production and increasing income: Ruhango; 2020

“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.” A citizen from Ruhango District said. GER supported communities to respond to the effects of Covid-19 using agroecology to respond to food problems.

Challenges faced

Challenges faced during the implementation of our activities include:

- Covid-19 crisis
- Limited financial resources to reach more people and document lessons and success stories.
- Lack of capacity building support for our staff

Recommendations

Participants, both genocide survivors and perpetrators, appreciate the program of unity and reconciliation. They requested GER to facilitate more interactions for more people to participate and putting more focus on youth as the future generation. Local leaders requested to train more community facilitators and establish and support more joint development initiatives. GER is committed to support existing process of reconciliation in Rwanda. We will keep documenting success stories and lesson learnt that can help us in scaling up our interventions in other areas of the country. We will assess the effect of Covid-19 to the process of reconciliation and support community recovery.

We appreciate the collaboration with the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) and local authorities of Districts where GER operates, in the implementation of our activities. We thank the Force for Change (CFOR) and the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) for their financial support to our work. We also thank communities that we work with for their commitment to support the process of reconciliation and overcoming the effects of genocide towards the sustainable peace and development.

Organization information

Global initiative for Environment and Reconciliation (GER) is a non-governmental organization created in 2015. It is registered in Rwanda with legal personality certificate from Rwanda Governance Board (RGB): N° 513/RGB/NGO/LP/07/2019. The Mission of GER is to support the process of peace building and community development in Rwanda. Its vision is to see people living in harmony with themselves and the nature within a prosperous environment. Our core values are partnership and working together as a way of influencing positive changes we want. GER currently works in five Districts namely Gasabo, Kicukiro, Bugesera, Ruhango and Muhanga.

Contact Person

Names: Innocent Musore

Position: Executive Director

Telephone: +250783570305/+250788436774

Emails: musore@globalr.org/ musorebita@gmail.com

P.O. Box: 2117 Kigali

Head Office: KN 11 Ave 30; EAR Buidling Remera, Gasabo, Kigali/Rwanda.