

Story of change-Reconciliation in Rwanda

Since starting to work with GER in June 2018, I have learned a lot of lessons that was very important in my life, I have seen miracles! When I was contacted by CFOR the first time, I was very excited to get a job as an interpreter during their work in Rwanda; I didn't realize how big the work was in terms of emotions and trauma! I didn't hesitate when they asked me if I will be able to do the job. They sent me all information on what they do with GER in Rwanda, I went through their website and learned what they have done in the past and I said ‘yes, I can do the job’

When the day came, in my life I would never imagine how I can listen to someone who was involved in Genocide, I was able to accept to listen to painful testimonies, it was paining, I had so much feelings. After graduating in Translation in university, I have worked with survivors many years, I worked on different projects as a translator for them, I did different translations and interpretation for testimonies but I didn't want to work with perpetrators as being a survivor myself, I had bad feeling when hearing that someone committed Genocide, I would never attend any event where there are such dialogues between perpetrators and survivors. Even the Gacaca happened when I was young and still in school so I was lucky I didn't have to attend because I was scared and angry at the same time against the perpetrators of 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. But the first day of the forum with GER, I was not believing what I heard, painful stories about survivors and how some of them have forgiven the perpetrators, I told myself maybe this is not real! But the second day I heard more stories and even many were talking about how they have been healed during the previous years.

Every day after the forum, I would have someone to tell stories about the forum and what I am working on, those are the stories that we normally don't talk about in everyday life because some people think it recalling the past and the trust was broken because you never know who you are talking to, how it can affect him or her. After the forum we went on with the training of facilitators and I was amazed to see how courageous people are , how they really want to work in their communities to work on the unity and reconciliation process, I even decided to be part of the volunteers since I said to myself “why not me” . I have learned very good practices in the forum, the way the CFOR trainers conducted the interactions was very helpful. They give the participants the opportunity to raise their own issues and they ask them to propose solutions, working together in small and large group. I like this approach very much because I was able to listen to many stories and to see how the community is eager to be involved in the healing.

For the second forum in November, I went on with the work and that time I had much information on some participants and it helped me to know how to work with them, it was still hard to be able to talk to perpetrators because of fearing to hear the tragic crimes they conducted, I preferred not to approach them

even if I had to translate for them. By the end I found myself forced to do it because it was a job, the things that I couldn't do on my willing before.

In the second forum I was hoping to be strong and hold my feelings and keep the work as it was getting interesting to discover but there were worst stories than even before! Couldn't imagine how someone stand and point out a survivor and said I have tried to kill you but you survived! It was horrible to hear different testimonies from penetrators; it was like it happened very recently. One day I would ask myself why I have to bear with these stories, why would I continue if I feel anger.

The last day of the forum in Bugesera, I felt like I wanted to hear more and more when they announced that the forum came to an end then I started thinking about how helpful can be to hear those stories, there are many untold stories that are being revealed, some people could know where to find the information about their relatives killed in Genocide which is, for survivors, an utmost important step to reaching out the unity and reconciliation.

I said to myself maybe this is an opportunity to be able to hear more information since the ones who killed are the one who are giving information, by the time of Genocide, the survivors were trying to hide, to save their lives, most of them couldn't know how they relatives were killed that is why if it said by the perpetrators, we hope we can get more information, and they can give details on how they have planned Genocide. Young people would know the truth, so I found it helpful and feel some courage to keep doing the work and even do more researches.

Another story that touched me was the testimony of one of the children born from rape, it was my first time to hear such painful story from very young people and I saw how courageous they are, I learned something! Also hearing from young people in general, how ambitious they are, what they are doing in term of reconciliation, what are their plans, their unity between those who are born from perpetrators and those who are survivors, it show that there is a big hope for Rwanda and I want to be part of it!

“The big change is always hard to believe until you test it, I am happy to be given the opportunities to test and it worked out!” Denyse Umuneza, GER and CFOR translator/interpreter!