We are pleased to share with you a summary of the work achieved by GER based in Rwanda. We are committed to empowering communities and engaging stakeholders in conflict transformation and sustainable development. The mission of GER is to contribute to peace building, conflict transformation and ecosystem management for a peaceful and sustainable community with the participation of children, young people and adults.

Through dialogue, community interaction and training, we promote the use of indigenous knowledge in environmental conservation and climate change mitigation. These events have brought together community practitioners, civil society organisations and religious leaders. Beneficiaries of our learning and sharing experience plan for collective actions (planting trees, hygiene and conservation) and develop skills and abilities.

We engage stakeholders in addressing environmental issues which affect their livelihoods and find solutions in a participatory manner. We work with farmers, youth clubs, elders’ groups and mining associations. We have facilitated numerous community forums to raise awareness and to bridge the knowledge gap by facilitating integration, learning and concrete actions towards achieving sustainable environmental protection.

During various interactions with communities and stakeholders, the key message from GER is to protect the environment as a way of preserving our life and humanity; the environment is our source of food, drinking water and oxygen. Therefore people have to know that preserving the environment is necessary for our survival and even for the future generations.

We have facilitated dialogue through integrated learning which has allowed young people to interact with elders as a way of bridging the knowledge gap between the young generation and elders. This has improved the young peoples’ understanding of the importance of the ecosystem and its connection with nature. Furthermore we believe that the outcomes are contributing to meet national goals and global targets (SDGs).

We work with community representatives (men, women and youth groups as well as indigenous people). We plant trees in collaboration with local leaders in our operational areas. We conduct supervision of the planted trees alongside community volunteers and discuss the issues of deforestation in order to encourage people to use renewable energy to fight deforestation.
During this process, we have learnt that there are a lot of stories and traditional knowledge regarding environmental conservation at the community level. However, it is imperative to build on this by documenting evidence, advocacy and increasing the participation of communities in the process of defining sustainable solutions for the protection and use of natural resources.

Innocent Musore appreciated the experience of FH in promoting agro-ecology; he also extended his gratitude to farmer’s shares their experience which helped to deepen understanding of agro ecology. He commended the use of local knowledge together with scientific knowledge from Agronomists to increase production and protect the environment. He highlighted the inclusion of all in the program as gender balance and young people are part of it.

GER worked with ABN and partners for learning and skills exchanges with other partners. It has also helped in the capacity building of staff, as well as the provision of financial resources. In the organization and implementation of some interventions in three districts of Rwanda namely Bugesera, Muhanga and Ruhango ABN helped and sustained that.

Thanks to ABN’s financial support, more than 150 farmers and members of environmental
clubs were trained in environmental conservation and agro-ecology practices. Trainees include elders, men and women as well as youth (girls and boys) who are using the skills learnt in their daily activities. With ABN’s help GER documented indigenous knowledge, stories and practices in Rwandan environmental conservation mainly in the districts of Bugesera, Muhanga and Ruhango.

GER developed agro-ecology activities with farmers which are being implemented in the three communities. We established farmers associations which brought together Genocide survivors and perpetrators; they practices agriculture which support the reconciliation process in Rwanda, trust building, improving broken relations, social cohesion and increasing socioeconomic. Therefore, we initiated women forums to resolve post-harvest conflicts within households.

GER is at the intermediate level of engagement as we use ABN methodologies in our practices; we use intergeneration learning where we facilitate elders and young people to interact and be connected with the nature. Intergeneration learning was used in the communities where we implement our activities; elders shared experience with youth to bridge the knowledge gap.

In November 2018 GER held an awareness rising in Ruhango District, whereby more than 9000 trees were planted in collaboration with communities. Through the interaction of elders and young people we documented indigenous trees and animal species which are in extinction. We are making advocacy calling upon partners including ABN to help in the restoration of those species for the sake of biodiversity conservation.

In our activities we held in the promotion of Agro-ecology, one of the participants adapted a way of making his pesticide from different kind of plants and he developed the technique of making his organic fertilizer. This made him shift from the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides which were harmful on the biodiversity and he says that his production increased. The community especially youth are learning from him.

Another story of change is that one of the young people who were involved in the activity of planting trees came to realize the strong relation between him and the nature. He said
that he used to think that he could not be interested in the activities of environmental conservation, but now he leads the environmental club of youth where he helps colleagues to get knowledge from old people to know indigenous plants and their roles in people’s life as well as in the Rwandan cultural history.

We recommend that ABN influence African institutions such as AU, EAC and so many more to have friendly policies that can help in integrating ABN approaches in the development plans of different nations. We still need to partner with ABN for the networking opportunities, experience exchange, joint-advocacy and capacity building. We need to establish a country node for more civil society organizations in Rwanda to be engaged to restore values in respect with nature. GER still needs a joint financial resource mobilization to implement its activities and scaling up in other communities. A youth representative said that environmental protection should be everyone’s concern and people had to put a great deal of effort into educating young people about the environment.

They recommended that environmental education be taught in schools to increase understanding and bridge the knowledge gap among young generations.

Participants were highly inspired by the way one of the farmers uses traditional knowledge to make organic fertilizers which is relevant to agriculture and animal husbandry. “Ubuhinzin’ubworozinink’umuenyeron’umwitero” he said meaning that agriculture and animal husbandry should not be separated. Environmental interventions and discussions on nature help the community to interact and enhance social cohesion. After the interactions participants cerebrated through cultural dances.

**As a way forward**

Raising awareness to change people’s mindset is much needed. Stakeholders should be engaged to work with the community on environment issues such as climate change, deforestation, wetlands as well as ago-ecology. We have to document stories and practices on indigenous knowledge and solving conflicts related to natural resources management. Sensitization of the use of renewable energy (Biogas, Solar energy, cooking stoves, innovation) is needed, along with facilitating advocacy dialogues on environmental peace building and capacity building of available community initiatives.