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REPORT OF ACTIVITIES ON PEACEBUILDING AND ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION IN RWANDA IMPLEMENTED BY GER-RWANDA IN 2022

Introduction

GER-Rwanda created in 2015 with vision to see people living in harmony with themselves and the nature. Our mission support the process of peace-building and community development in Rwanda, and the Great Lakes region. Our mandate is to improve people's relationships and lives.

We support the existing reconciliation process, community recovery and conservation initiatives. We facilitate training and interactions with communities, policy makers, religious leaders, and young generations for healing, improving relationships and livelihoods, ecosystem restoration and connecting people with nature to support social cohesion in Rwanda and the wider region.

Our programs facilitate community knowledge exchange and intergenerational learning dialogues; it helps environmental reconciliation. Working with communities allows us to learn from their experience and program interventions that will meet the needs identified by communities.

YOUTH DIALOGUE ON HEALING AND RECONCILIATION.



A one-day consultative dialogue was organized by Global Initiative for Environment and Reconciliation (GER-Rwanda) in partnership with Community Force for Change (CFOR) and was aimed at bringing together youth group leaders in unity,

reconciliation and development activities to see together how members can positively contribute to the implementation of planned activities during the 28th Commemoration of Genocide against the Tutsi.



Above: Innocent Musore, The Executive Director of GER-Rwanda Opening the event

In his opening remarks, the Executive Director for Global Initiative for Environment and Reconciliation, Mr. Musore Innocent, welcomed dignitaries from different organizations including: Ms. Murebwayire Josephine, a Unity Champion at the national level, Rev. Dr. Antoine Rutayisire, from the Anglican church of Rwanda, a Gasabo District representative, representatives of Security bodies (National Police and the RDF), GER representatives at District level, and Youth Group Leaders.

Mr. Musore urged the youth leaders to be well versed with transformative leadership for the sake of decent unity and reconciliation among them. He also advised them to act as agents of change for the betterment of the society. "If you are to be good ambassadors of change you need to first change, be healed and then help others to heal" he observed. The aim of this program is preventing trans-generational trauma, support youth to go beyond their historical wounds and build a shared future we want. He thanked the leadership of the Rwanda for reconciliation vision and highlighted that the model is helping others countries.

He told participants that GER Rwanda had for the last six years been involved in contributing towards unity, reconciliation, social and economic transformation of the country aimed at ensuring unity, reconciliation and healing which has had a positive impact in helping others within the country and region to heal and live harmoniously with their neighbours.

"You need to first take care of yourself to heal the wounds, to reconcile and unite, then you be in position to assist those you live with in your families and the communities around you and this would give a positive change to the whole country" she said. Rev. Dr. Antoine Rutayisire made a presentation on transformative leadership during a consultative meeting.

"As youth you should not be tails of social media and telephone but rather strive to become heads as you convey reconciliation messages to the rest in the community in

order to heal the hearts of many”, he said.

He also noted that to become a good leader does not necessarily require someone to have been elected on any leadership level within the government, but a good leader is any person who decides to become an agent of a positive change wherever he or she may be and those changes should be those that are beneficial to every individual in community. "Let us endeavour to become the agents of change and for the sake of peace and development", he emphasized.

Rev. Dr. Rutayisire also testified on his life-challenging situation where he passed through during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. How he survived, how he reconciled with those who killed his family members through the word of God and how he has decided to fight any kind of divisionism in the country. He went on to say he has been involved in mobilizing and sensitizing Rwandans about the need for reconciliation and unity which he said has made a positive impact to the victims of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

In his presentation to the Youth Group Leaders who attended the dialogue, Rev. Dr. Antoine Rutayisire (Pictured on the left) tackled transformative Leadership deeply and urged all the youth to have a sound mind and positive ideas to be easily driven away from their beliefs as this would enable them to be good future leaders.

During the question and answer session, some youth revealed their



heartfelt love and honour they accord to Rev. Dr. Antoine Rutayisire by saying that he was among a few elders the youth regard as a living example and an icon of hope, peace and love, and how it was like a dream to have met him. At this time, some of the youth shared the challenges they face in their families and he took this opportunity to advise them on how best they could address and overcome such challenges. "The journey is still on, I say this as a pastor who receives a lot of such problems from different circles of people; in some instances, there are some families that refuse marriages of their sons and daughters on the grounds of ethnic differences" he observed. He said that some come with such words and say: "pastor uzi ko nasanze wa muntu ari ikivange" Literally meaning "pastor do you know that the other person is mixed blood" and he or she decides to decline a marriage offer. He then said that if we could have many organizations that work as GER-Rwanda, we can change the perceptions of many.

Murebwayire Josephine shared her painful and resilience experience during a consultative meeting.

Ms. Murebwayire Josephine, the unity champion at the national level, was also given an opportunity to testify before the youth where she used the opportunity to share her life story before, during and after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.



"I was killed and resurrected but within the

unbearable pain, despite of the fact that all my children were killed, I decided to stand in the gap by raising and taking care of the children of those who had been killed, I picked them from the dead that were littered lifeless. I accepted all those children who came to me, I took care of them, raise them up until they grew up and got married" she said in agony.

She explained that her life was characterized by a strong heart and zeal that helped her to forgive those who killed her family members and children. She said that she forgave the children of those that killed her families. She urged the youth to be the new generational heroes by changing their mind-set and engage themselves in helping others to reconcile and heal.

"If you are to change alone, it will be useless because the activities you are engaged in will be fruitless. The best thing is for you to change and participate in changing others in all your endeavours" she noted.

While exchanging their experiences and interventions around the country, Dative Mushimiyimana, a Youth Group Leader of "Ubumwe buzira Imbereka group" that operates in Bugesera District, extended her thanks to GER-Rwanda for the training



and knowledge acquired and the mobilization she received to help others in her community which she said has yielded positive results. The group now uses films, poems and plays to convey unity and reconciliation messages to the rest of community members including children and family members.

One Clementine Mukarutesi from Rwamagana District applauded GER for excellent work towards inculcating unity and reconciliation among the youth.

She observed that the initiative has given her hope and strength to convey the

message of love in Rwamagana community. "GER Rwanda has done the needful in line with supporting reconciliation activities across the District. We have benefited a lot because the initiative has enabled us attain holistic development", she said.

In Gasabo, Rutabana Damascene revealed that after forgiving those who killed his family members, the money he was paid in damages were used to invite local leaders and neighbours to have a get-together party in which he initiated a group that united all his community aimed at improving unity, reconciliation and sensitizing the rest in the community. He attributed the success to the support from GER-Rwanda, that not only trained him, but helped many to help others with the social and financial support extended to them. "Our group was given a donation of Rwf400, 000 which we used in our interventions."

In Kicukiro District, Hakizimana Patrick, the one who participated in carrying out the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi revealed that he lived a life of regret and cursed within the Rwandan community "After training and sensitization by GER-Rwanda, I started a healing process, starting with my own family, I asked for forgiveness from my wife and children because I ashamed them; when I tasted the benefits of reconciliation, I started a group and looked for those who took part in the Genocide to accept their role and we now have the same agenda to change others after we had changed, this is because there are many who complete their sentences and return to their families while still harbouring Genocide ideologies".

In Ruhango District they said that they had started unity and reconciliation agenda through farming. One Matabaro David, the Leader of Ruhango group says GER-Rwanda started by sensitizing him about what he does to today, he could not realize what it really meant he told the audience.

He says "Since 2017 we started small, and we continued participating in various trainings, organized by GER-Rwanda, but now we have expanded to a community learning centre, where others come to learn from us about entrepreneurship which in the end improves unity. We currently work with some of the people who had a role in Genocide against the Tutsi, Genocide survivors, the youth that were born after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, where we all jointly work together for a common goal, with GER-Rwanda sponsoring us, without discrimination."



Youth in small group discussions

On his part, Gakwaya Jean Pierre, Gasabo District representative commended GER-Rwanda for a strong partnership enjoyed for such a long time of five years in contributing to reconciliation and unity among Rwandans who were torn apart due to bad history.

He requested the youth to follow the strides already achieved in promoting and observing the unity of Rwandans. "Dear Youth, the task ahead is simple, it is to continue in the foot-steps of our elders, the heroes of our time.

The President of the Republic of Rwanda, who always reminds us on how to live a Purposeful life, let us learn how to prevent ourselves from any adversary from outside or a watch among us"

He observed that we need to remain alert of our enemies either from outside; colonizers who sowed the seeds of hatred among Rwandans and they are still actively affecting our governance or those who have continued to propagate hatred within our communities by inculcating bad ideologies among Rwandans.

The dialogue provided a platform for sharing positive testimonies of various individuals who showed a strong milestone taken to heal from the wounds sustained from the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, reconcile and live harmoniously with each other in families and the entire Rwandan community, despite of hard times experienced by Rwandans before and during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

Notably, the youth leaders pledged to create sensitization clubs in their schools and communities meant to change their peers for the betterment of their country. They further vowed to interact with the elders in their communities and offer orientation in line with transformative leadership geared to fighting genocide ideology in families and neighborhood as well.

The youth more so pledged to use a church as a communication platform to convey reconciliation messages through, evangelism, poems and songs all of which will transmit the messages of hope to the masses.

Throughout 100 days of commemoration of the 28 Genocide against the Tutsi, about 250 Youth participants in our program (Beyond Conflicts Rwanda) carried out reconciliation activities community level including home visit care, cleaning houses for survivors elders. The program is being implementing in 6 districts: Kicukiro, Gasabo (City of Kigali) Bugesera, Rwamagana (Eastern Province) Ruhango (Southern Province) and Musanze (Northern Province).

PROMOTING AGROECOLOGY PRACTICES

The community-based conservation program brings together all activities aimed at empowering communities to improve environmental conditions through ecosystem management and agroecology practices. This program enables communities to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, improve food security, maintain community seed systems, and encourages better use and conservation of natural resources. We promote agroecology practices where our staff empowers famers to reduce chemical use (pesticides, fertilizers) by promoting use of organic fertilizers and herbal pest management system. We empower our farmers in preparing organic compost using compost pits and promote a proper waste management by transforming domestic degradable waste into decomposed organic fertilizers. Moreover, we do these activities as community initiatives to support the healing and reconciliation process and ensure that our interventions are improving relations and lives. We regard environment as one of the factors influencing community peacebuilding and wellbeing of the society.



Agroecology practice

Reviving indigenous seeds story!

“My name is Mpamyabigwi Aphrodice. I am a farmer by profession that deals in both crop and livestock farming. I am 75 years old. I have always loved this occupation since I was young. I have also done other occupations, that is to say I was once a pastor but this did not stop me from doing crop-farming nevertheless because of the passion I have towards this occupation. I have experienced seasons of drought, deadly pests throughout the years in this occupation and the various ways of dealing with all these because of the longtime of expertise. In collaboration with other farmers, we could always look out and source for expertise in the agricultural sector so that they would guide us on the modern ways of farming but keeping in mind biodiversity and indigenous-seeds conservation.”

Insights on the spraying of artificial crop pesticides and vigorous application of inorganic fertilizers that he says that not only results into toxicity of the soil for plant growth but also lead to extinction of nutrients responsible for crop growth.

He further points out that “...from my experience and research conducted, the reason as to why most of the farmers use these artificial fertilisers and pesticides is all due because of lack of access to supply of natural fertilisers (manure). I only use organic manure to enhance soil-fertility and add nutrients in the soil to boost crop-growth, organic materials and fertilisers improve the soil- texture, allowing it to hold water longer, and increase the bacterial and fungal activity in the soil which is not the case with artificial fertilisers.”

We visited his banana plantation farmland where we witnessed large bunches of bananas per tree. He attributes this to the application of organic fertilisers (manure) rather than inorganic fertilisers and pesticides.

Advice to the youth

He says, “This should not just be all about words, but first do it and impact them with your actions. The youth passing by my farms and asking me curiously how I did all this and I redirect them melts my heart every day. Farming offers the younger generation a chance to make a difference by growing enough food to feed the world. Those who become farmers now have the opportunity to be the generation to end world hunger and alleviate malnutrition, as well as helping the country adapt to climate change,” he adds.

“During our last training sessions provided by GER-Rwanda in Bugesera we were advised to enhance growing back of the indigenous crop species. The crop that I selected was sorghum which has had periods of extinction over time because, truth to be told, the young ones know nothing about sorghum. This was proven by the youth grazing the sorghum grass that I had planted. I am trying as much as I can to sensitise people in my community about how sorghum is grown and am so very sure as time goes by, am looking forward to promote sorghum growth in my plantations.”

GER-Rwanda in partnership with AFSA, produced a video documentary for the five champion farmers of Agroecology in Rwanda who are improving the food system and

building community resilience to the effects of climate change with Agroecology practices. Champion farmers are among the beneficiaries of GER-Rwanda's Agroecology Projects which are based in Ruhango District, Bugesera District, Gasabo District and Musanze District. These farmers were awarded as champions to help them keep promoting agroecology practices and making their work places as community learning centres. They are helping communities to acquire knowledge through practices and communities gain some indigenous seeds from these champions.

Agroecology Farmers awarded as champions in their communities



The output is a mini documentary (55 minutes) that clearly presents farmers' efforts in adapting and mitigating effects of climate change, improving food-security and trying to alleviate poverty among small-scale farmers. The documentary is available on the YouTube channel of GER-Rwanda.



Community dialogue

Six interactions were facilitated at community level. These interactions have yielded fruitful impacts so far, like:

- Communities are playing a role to restore their relationship,
- Activities are bringing them together and improving their relations broken by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. People open up and share painful experience to heal and reconcile.
- It is helping to restore trust and working together to overcome its long-lasting effects.
- Communities are also working to revive indigenous seeds, and they advance their knowledge on agroecology as they are also teaching others in their respective settings through their community dialogues.
- GER Rwanda carries out advocacy for communities based on recommendations from community dialogues

In addition to the above, they further highlighted that activities bringing them together thus fostering improved relations at household and societal level. Since the Rwandan society is facing gender based violence (GBV) and family conflicts, the project improved the collaboration of men and women for their family development. The project also improved community relations through sharing the production of their vegetables with those who were not reached by the project.



Experience learning

Conclusion for agroecology

In 2021, we most focused on activities such as community dialogues, training, coordination meetings and field visits.

GER-Rwanda participated in ABN's bi-annual and inception meeting in 2021, and we also carried out a baseline study on ABN-SIDA Cultural biodiversity project in Rwanda in the above mentioned three Districts. We have also had discussions with organizations willing to join ABN Rwanda node.

GER-Rwanda started initiatives of improving nutrition within schools using agroecology practices and improve nutrition; where we seek to instill this knowledge among young generations and ensure that children will scale these practices in their respective families.

Other GER-Rwanda initiatives are geared to sustaining cultural-biodiversity whereby linkage of activities to key national events such as “Umuganura” Day a public holiday in Rwanda, observed on the first Friday in August. Also known also as Thanksgiving Day or National harvest day, it is a celebration of the beginning of the harvest. These initiatives also convene the youth to engage and contribute to social- cohesion and biodiversity so as to ensure a sustainable future led by the youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS: AGROECOLOGY

We highlighted that it is necessary to keep supporting the promotion of agroecology practices in grassroots communities, evaluating their impacts in improving the food-system and livelihoods, climate-change resilience and supporting knowledge transfer between young people and elders.

We have also to assess how these agroecology practices enhance social-cohesion, gender-equality, and resolve conflicts between people and nature. We need to engage men and women for dialogues on post-harvest conflicts and pay attention to gender-issues in conservation activities. We need to raise advocacy to mainstream agroecology in the existing policy and District Development Plans (DDPs).

In order to further foster ownership and sustainability of the project activities and initiatives, GER-Rwanda will use practical knowledge and skills from beneficiaries' i.e Small-scale services and synergize them with skills and knowledge of youth in agricultural higher institutions of learning to share knowledge from grassroots levels and use it in boost cultural bio-diversity engagements from grassroots to national levels.

This will further documentation of evidence-based results to be used for research on community research-centers and stakeholder engagements. Moreover, there should be strengthened mechanisms to use community-based centers, success stories and testimonies as benchmarks for members of the academia and researchers to scale-up advocacy for bio-diversity. Thank you ABN for our work together.

NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS -GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE APPROACH



Women in ecosystem conservation

We contacted the local leaders and identified the beneficiaries. As facilitators, we set up the place and organized the training with the beneficiaries, conducting both the theoretical and practical parts of the training. In our training, we focused on the challenges that are especially related communities such as climate change and deforestation. We have also talked about the role of the women in doing the activities that are not harmful to the environment; planting trees, agro-ecology practices including organic fertilizer or compost. We raised awareness on protecting the right of the nature.

After the training, people made commitments on what they will do in the community after the training. I invited someone to share the experience as they are working in that field. In our activities we work with different people from different background, based on our history, especially the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. We bring people together, those who are survivors of genocide and others who are perpetrators. We do those activities as channel to give space to people to work together again and build the community, which was devastated by the history.

After giving the beneficiaries the training on farming practices, we distributed the agricultural materials, facilitated by agronomist in collaboration with the sector office's agronomist. We distributed the tanks to the vulnerable families where they live. Before going on the field we called them to meet at the sector office and we discussed the use of those tanks. In all activities, we work in collaboration with the local leaders because they are the ones who know and can identify the families who are in need. For the fruit sampling, we also worked with the agronomists who helped in choosing those trees and explained to them how to plant and take care of them.



Agroecology practices and harvest

We brought the technical staff who demonstrated to participants how to make a kitchen, and all the participants were gathered in one household to make one kitchen garden as a sample. Then they went in their families to practice what they had learned and make their own kitchen gardens. Our agronomist has been monitoring the process and the progress of those kitchen garden project. The seeds are bought and distributed to the families but the families also do their nurseries in collaboration with the local leaders.

CONTRIBUTION OF GER-RWANDA

The beneficiaries are equipped with knowledge in the field of climate change and agroforestry practices. Those practices include taking care of the planted trees and knowing what trees are appropriate to their lands, doing affordable irrigation systems and making homemade organic fertilizer.

Also they learned how to manage their vegetable fields in order to improve the harvest. This project supports community environmental protection and soil conservation using agroforestry to protect soil from erosion, slides and surface runoff, support water retention, and improve soil fertility.

The fruit trees planted will help families to eradicate malnutrition. As Bugesera community is affected by climate change more than any other part of the country, this project is contributing in building small farmers' resilience to the existing issues of climate change mostly the draughts and soil drying.

Though this project is crucial to women farmers as they are the most affected by climate change and are the one taking care of the households the most of the time. These women were happy to be given water tanks as it was very hard to find water and sometimes they could face violence while they are far away from home to fetch water. Small farmers are working to improve their food system therefore to improving their livelihoods, by having enough food for their families.

The beneficiaries of this project have started to harvest the vegetables to improve their food system especially it will help during the summer season when they used to starve. "Our area has a very heavy summer season where everything dries out, it would be hard to find vegetables to eat and when they are found they are too expensive to afford, that is one of the climate change effect we used to face.

"Now we are able to overcome those challenges thanks to GER-Rwanda, we are keeping rain water in tanks you have given us and water will be used eventually for irrigation in summer. We are also happy that we were connected to the local leaders and they said they would help us to find markets to deliver our vegetables once we have enough harvest." Said NyiramanaTriphine, one of the project beneficiaries.

Abimana Theresse says that despite the role of planted trees in soil protection and mitigating the effects of climate change, planting fruit trees was a good idea as fruits will also help in improving nutrition and fighting malnutrition diseases among their children. Food deficiency was normally caused by seasonal changes and affects their small scale extensive agriculture and ended up starving.

The group of women beneficiaries as a peace and reconciliation group consists of women survivors of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, and women of the perpetrators whose husbands had a role in the genocide. Through their group, they used dialogues to foster unity and reconciliation among them. Activities of this project have improved their relations and the frequency of meeting and discussing their relations during activities. They work together and help each other through the healing and reconciliation process; hence the project is improving their relations and lives simultaneously.

SUCCESS STORIES

My personal experience is that when women are supported in their domestic work, it makes the family happy and reduces domestic violence when men also understand their role in domestic care work. If the cooking stove is there to make the life easier, most men will help their wives in cooking.

I also found that mindsets have changed because before, women considered environmental conservation as a concern of men because women focus more on family wellbeing, but now they understand their role in the protection of the environment. I also appreciate how the community gets involved in environmental protection. I believe that impacting the community in sustainable change and more people to benefit, you have to work with women. They are households' care givers, and they should be environmental friends as sustainable solutions to the global challenges by challenging cultural mindset.

Silas said: "our vegetables and fruits are growing well, even the fruits trees we have planted have grown up. I think that the malnutrition problem is going to be solved in my family as a result from planting these fruit trees and vegetables. I will have enough vegetable and fruits for my family and I will also have the remaining produce to sell at the market and will generate income to my family."

I thank GER Rwanda for changing our lives. Before it was very difficult for us to get vegetables but now we have enough. You have paid the health insurance for us now my family and I we get health treatment without any problems. We had a problem to get water for our crops but they have bought rainwater harvesting tanks to help us to water our plants.

They have also given us the cooking stoves that helps us to cut down the use of fire wood. We used to go buy expensive woods in the market or we would go in the forest to find woods which was difficult and was against the protection of the forests. Now we have those stoves that will help us in our daily life. I am a member of the group called "duharanire amahoro, ubumwe n'ubwiyunge" (preserving peace, unity and reconciliation).

First of all, I would like to thank GER Rwanda who have supported us in getting the trees to plant and vegetables. They have also given us the tanks to harvest the rainwater for a long time and in a sustainable way. We had a problem of water scarcity because in Bugesera area because it is a dry are because of a lot of sun and the water is a big problem. Now we are very happy because we have got the tanks that will help us to save water and will be used to water our fields. We will be able to have a good harvest and eat healthy food.



The stove are being used and have changed the people's lives especially the women because I know how they are most affected by domestic work which also result in domestic violence in many cases. The women are the one who are in charge of cooking in most of the Rwandan families so they have to find the fire wood for cooking. When you give them the cooking stove it helps them a lot as they don't have to go far to find woods and also they don't have to cut trees which is again the reforestation conservation.

CONCLUSION

Our work contributes to improving community livelihoods and their resilience to climate change and participation in peacebuilding process. It has also involved women in reforestation. The beneficiaries were trained in nature rights and protection and they increased knowledge to sustain the natural resources including the use of organic fertilizer for the soil degradation. As this is a big impact on the community and the country, the local leaders appreciated this initiative and have committed to monitoring the activities. As a recommendation, the number of beneficiaries is still small compared to what is needed. Our aim is to reach as many households as we can with a long term plan. More details on the action plan and the sustainability of the project will be described in the final annual report.

GER-Rwanda 2022