



SHALOM EDUCATING FOR PEACE RWANDA

P.O. Box 6210 Kigali . Tel. +250 78840 3868, Email: basajd@yahoo.fr
General Inquiries: shalomeducatingforpeace@gmail.com
Website: www.shalomeducatingforpeace.org

**A report by Shalom Educating for Peace-Rwanda
March 2015, Kigali, Rwanda**

**Reinforcing Capacities of District Forums for Reconciliation in Rwanda
(RCDFR) Project**

**The long journey to reconciliation in Rwanda: The case of the Reconciliation Forums in
Rwanda**

“Icyo dupfa kiruta icyo dupfana”

(Our interconnectedness weighs more than what divides us)

[A Rwandan saying]

Introduction

Enormous efforts have been undertaken to bridge the deep rifts in society and heal the wounds inflicted by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. The journey towards sustainable reconciliation is however undermined by different psycho-social, economic, political and cultural factors. To reinforce the participation of citizens in this process of reconciliation, Rwanda’s National Unity and Reconciliation Commission has initiated reconciliation forums at the district level and a District Forum for Reconciliation was established at the national level. The forums are already

established in 30 districts. However, they need to enhance their capacities in order to be more effective.

In the last policy brief we described the background to the establishment of the forums and indicated the challenges that the forums are facingⁱ. This report is based on the two series of workshops conducted from 22 – 24 February in Rwamagana district and from 25 – 28 February in Kabgayi in the Eastern and Southern Provinces of Rwanda, respectively. The training was organized in collaboration with Shalom Educating for Peace (SEP-Rwanda), the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission of Rwanda (NURC) and the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR). Participants came from eighteen provinces of Rwanda randomly selected. The workshop was based on participatory approach where participants had significant amounts of time to share their experience and achievements, and express the challenges they face in their daily journey to reconciliation. This report is written based on the objectives and expected outcomes of the workshop.

Reported experiences from participants

The shared experience from the participants indicate that political reconciliation is at a satisfactory level, but there remains a significant gap between the political understanding of reconciliation and that of interpersonal reconciliation between citizens. Structures such as those of the Forums for Reconciliation are put in place but the implementation is quite different from what is expected by the population in general. This is caused by the complex relations between the local administration and the Forums for Reconciliation. For example, the budget allocated for reconciliation activities is managed by those in charge of good governance at the district level. The primary person in charge of good governance at the district level is at the same time the secretary of the forums. This gives the person in question power over the president of the forums as long as decisions have budget-related concerns. As one of the participants said “Forums are there but structures are not really functional”. It appeared that there is a need of clarity on the allocation and management of the budget. Even though the forums are well known at the district level, there is a lack of visibility at the sector, cell and village level. The main concern is the persistence of disconnection and lack of collaboration between government representatives at the different levels and forums themselves.

Looking at the work expected to be done by forums and the continued silence related to the wounds caused by historical events, forums need to work with other organisations especially those focussing on healing of the wounds. One example is the *social therapy* organization which operates in different district in Rwanda that forums can take advantage of.

Community reconciliation and social justice

Based on observations, today, Rwandan communities do not need further education on what reconciliation is, but rather they need a room to be heard, to be healed, and therefore actively reconcile. Participants raised their concerns that the ‘culture of silence’ and unhealed wounds have made the journey to reconciliation a long process with unavoidable challenges. For instance, not only are there still those who deny the genocide, but also a numbers of those prosecuted by the Gacaca Courts are still enjoying freedom of movement from one region to another without being held accountable for what they have done. Participants have continuously expressed fear based on people who do not want to tell the truth. Restitution by perpetrators is also not done either because people are unwilling or because those who need to pay are very poor. Even though some perpetrators have little will to pay back, others are not financially or materially capable of paying back. Nevertheless, there is no policy or guideline that can facilitate people in the restitution process neither is there any follow up. Participants think that this has been a hindrance to sustainable reconciliation.

According to the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) there is a need to focus on, and encourage, community dialogue. However, having a community that was once aggressive to the point of killing others, there is a need for nonviolence communication training before the population is engaged in community dialogue.

Looking back to the challenges for reconciliation in Rwanda

In line with a more political understanding of reconciliation, people may sometimes assume reconciliation is the same as cohabitation. In the context of Rwanda, however, people have been living side by side throughout history. Rwandans have been intermarrying. This makes it

difficult to consider cohabitation and intermarriage as a true sign of reconciliation. Yet, influenced by political understandings, many Rwandans believe that reconciliation has been achieved without realising that issues such as the healing of wounds and restitution have not yet been given enough attention. There is also a new trend of increasing violence where on a regular basis, as indicated by one participant, “there will be stories of a person killed by his or her spouse or a child who has killed his or her parent”. Research on this violent trend is necessary to find out whether this could be one of the effects of genocide.

Challenges to reconciliation are many. The main challenges are summarised as follows:

1. **Challenges related to the restitution process:** According to participants, some victims have not accessed compensation for what they lost during the genocide. There is a need for a national policy on restitution. This policy should reflect different categories of those who are entitled to pay the compensations to genocide victims based on their economic situation. This process will help people feel that justice has been rendered.
2. **Challenges related to telling the truth:** Most people are indicating the inability of Rwandans to go beyond and challenge the persisting mistrust among individuals and communities at the local level. This may be a ‘culture of silence’ that is embedded in Rwandan culture, but it makes the journey to reconciliation very difficult.
3. **Challenges related to social reintegration:** Perpetrators who have finished their sentences and are coming back to their communities face difficulties in reintegrating into normal social life. Victims also report feel insecure. The process of social reintegration is fuelling new tensions that lead to terrorism and community violence. This trend of violence is having a negative impact on the reconciliation process. The government needs to not bypass this issue.

Recommendations

During the workshops participants recommended the following:

- Establish and promote community dialogue practices at the grassroots level.

- Forums need to work with other related organizations that could assist them in sustainable reconciliation.
- Shalom Educating for Peace (SEP) and the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) should, if possible, prepare another workshop on community dialogue which will put together small groups of actors of reconciliation together and have a shared knowledge on effective community dialogue.
- SEP should be supported so that it can continue trainings and extend its activities to other levels of the society countrywide.
- Structures of the forums need to be reinforced in a way that will facilitate forum leaders to work effectively.
- There is a need to improve the collaboration between local government and Forums for Reconciliation and clarify their responsibilities.
- The working relationship between local leaders at the district level and the forums needs to be clarified. This will empower forums in their daily work and improve the connection and collaboration of local leaders in the journey towards reconciliation.

Conclusion and ways forward

In the two decades since the 1994 genocide committed against the Tutsi in Rwanda, it is clear that Rwanda has made tremendous progress in many ways, especially in the process of reconciliation. Experiences shared show that the journey has been characterised by crisscrosses, potholes and ups and downs. It is well acknowledged that political reconciliation has been archived with good structures in place. Yet there are still many sensitive stories and attitudes that hinder sustainable reconciliation at individual and community levels.

Some participants thought that having good leaders is guarantee of none repetition of atrocities. However, the question is whether the population is changing into being good leaders and citizens, and feel ownership of the process of state and nation building as well as sustainable reconciliation. Can Rwandans afford to sit back, based on political achievements, especially in the area of reconciliation? The NURC currently focuses on and sensitizes forum leaders to use community dialogue as another way of promoting sustainable reconciliation. Although this is a good idea, the forum leaders are neither trained nor equipped for effective community dialogue.

Educational materials and trainings are necessary in the areas of, for example, communication and effective community dialogue, nonviolence communication and alternatives to violence before the ‘community dialogue’ is implemented. This will help avoid some unnecessary hurt and break the cycle of violence.

ⁱ Uwimbabazi, Hajayandi, and Basabose (2014). Forums for Reconciliation in Rwanda: challenges and opportunities, Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Policy brief No 17.