

NOW I AM HUMAN:

TESTIMONIES FROM THE HEALING
COMPANIONS PROGRAM
IN RWANDA AND BURUNDI

Rwanda: *By Bethany Mahler and Florence Ntakarutimana*
Burundi: *By Adrien Niyongabo*





The African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) of the Friends Peace Teams strengthens, supports, and promotes peace activities at the grassroots level in the Great Lakes region of Africa (Burundi, Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda). To this end, AGLI responds to requests from local religious and non-governmental organizations that focus on conflict management, peace building, trauma healing, and reconciliation. AGLI sponsors Peace Teams composed of members from local partners and the international community.

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Editor's Note

People have questioned HROC's previous testimonies which were taken on the last day of the HROC workshop or at the follow-up event a month later. The criticism was that the positive results of such testimonies were due to the "high" of being in the workshop. These testimonies were taken six to nine months after participants attended the workshop. Each person interviewed talked extensively about what they have done with what they learned in the workshop thus putting this criticism to rest.

The HROC workshop requires a lot from participants: they have to take the abstract concepts presented and apply them to their own situations. The workshop content never introduces the topic of "Forgiveness." Yet, as these testimonies illustrate, this topic comes up consistently among HROC participants who then decide on their own who they want to forgive and how to go about it. This is the only way true forgiveness can happen: innately.

HROC workshops do not organize people into support groups or, to be more culturally appropriate, into "associations". Yet many people seem to find this a logical course of action as they comment on joining a multi-ethnic "association", for example, a multi-ethnic traditional women's dancing group.

Many of these testimonies indicate the interconnectedness of personal healing with community healing. Personal healing is not in isolation: participants desire, perhaps even feel compelled, to use their new-found knowledge to nurture healing within their families and communities.

All participants—victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and those in more than one of these groups—used their learning to improve their lives and those in the community. In other words, everyone finds they have the ability to help heal these wounds.

David Zarembka

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Healing from Genocide: Quaker Response in Rwanda by *Cecile Nyiramana*

If you would like a CD of Cecile's excellent presentation at Friends General Conference, please send \$12 plus \$4 postage to:

Quaker Books of FGC, 1216 Arch Street 2B, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Northern Yearly Meeting invited Cecile Nyiramana, founder of Women in Dialogue, which brings Tutsi survivors of the genocide together with Hutu wives of men in prison accused of participating in the genocide, to be one of the keynote speakers at the Friends General Conference in River Falls, Wisconsin. Her talk covers her experiences during the genocide, her healing journey, the beginning and vision for the Women in Dialogue together with the work in healing and reconciliation by Rwanda Yearly Meeting of Friends after the genocide. By the end of her talk there was hardly a dry eye in the audience of about 750 people.

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Executive Summary

“*Now, I am human,*”

said Komezusense Samuel, a thirty-seven year old released prisoner from southwestern Rwanda who had attended a Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) workshop last summer. We had been traveling around Rwanda for two weeks and were just finishing up our interviews, when Samuel’s statement filled the room with a tender stillness. The simple phrase struck a cord, articulating the complex feelings of many people that we had talked to in our assessment of the impact of HROC. It simultaneously alluded to a newfound ability to feel all that had been made numb and forcibly forgotten in the past thirteen years and also to a basic kinship between all human beings which had been long abandoned in Rwanda, since the genocide. Samuel sat before us that day a different man, and he was not alone. As we interviewed more and more people, it became clear that HROC had had a transforming influence on the lives of all of its participants; influence which precipitated inner changes and defied quantification. Thus the results we present here are not displayed with charts or graphs, but lie in the voices of those touched by HROC. They point to an undeniable spirit that is steadily building throughout the country and bringing with it a new Rwanda.

With funding from the United States Institute of Peace, the Thomas H and Mary Williams Shoemaker Fund, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s Bequest Funds, the American Friends Service Committee, and individual donors plus support from the African Great Lakes Initiative’s general funds, the Friends Peace House of Rwanda has held 75 Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) workshops throughout Rwanda since 2003. To evaluate the impact of these workshops, we have interviewed 25 past participants, facilitators, friends of participants, and community members to see how HROC has touched people’s lives and how it can be improved upon in the future. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Those who were interviewed described significant changes in their lives since attending the workshop as well as the lives of those around them. From a decrease in trauma symptoms to a newfound desire to seek and grant forgiveness, participant after participant recounted personal transformations precipitated by HROC.

Throughout the interview process, there were five main themes that emerged. The first relates to culture.

Although the program was developed in the Great Lakes region, some of the teachings are derived from Western psychology, and we wanted to assess how the culture of HROC and Rwandan culture interacted in the workshops. What we found was that HROC both complimented the national culture and simultaneously encouraged it to embrace reconciliation. By gathering people to discuss their problems, incorporating song and dance into the lessons, and having a shared meal everyday, interviewees felt that HROC faithfully reflected their culture. They further commented that the workshops represented their hopes for the future. In the words of Mukagakwandi Amina, a released prisoner from Kibuye, “Workshops were *better* than Rwandan culture”; comprised of values such as mutual respect, peace, and unity, they signified what many hoped Rwanda could one day become.

The second theme concerns the trauma-healing aspect of the program. For most participants, the workshop was the first time they had heard or understood the word trauma. Being able to identify and put a name to the physical symptoms of trauma that they had been experiencing since the genocide validated many unacknowledged feelings. Furthermore, it helped to bridge the divide between survivors and released prisoners by enabling them to see one another in a different light. Instead of hatred, there was a new sense of commonality and mutual understanding, which then led to the third theme of rebuilding relationships. Using the images of the Tree of Mistrust and the Tree of Trust, participants examined the processes of destroying and rebuilding trust and said they found a renewed hope.

This increased awareness about trauma and trust gave way to the fourth theme: forgiveness. Although forgiveness is not one of the main goals of HROC, it was nonetheless a welcomed by-product of the workshops. Interviews revealed that participants, who had vowed never to forgive, now felt empowered to release their lingering anger and reconcile with people who had killed their loved ones.

The last theme concerns the long-term effects of the HROC workshops. In addition to the great individual transformations we saw during the interviews, we also found that HROC had effected entire communities.

From counseling others, to educating friends and family about trauma, to resolving neighborhood conflicts, to forming associations, HROC participants took what they learned and brought it into their communities.

In the end, participants recommended more workshops and further support for participants following the three day trainings. "I wish everyone could attend," said Komezusense Samuel, a released prisoner. "Do more workshops," echoed Mukayiranga Béatrice, a genocide survivor. Throughout the two weeks of interviews, these sentences were the foremost recommendations we

heard from people. The praise for HROC was overwhelming and so was the demand for more - more workshops, more participants, more days, more facilitators, more help! Some interviewees suggested targeting specific groups of Rwandans to more efficiently spread the message; some stressed follow-up visits from facilitators; still others suggested a certificate program. The point was abundantly clear; we could not stop here or be satisfied with what had already been accomplished. No, we needed to push beyond the praise and go deeper, improve our methods, and take the program farther.



Salvator Ndayziga, a Tutsi, is a single, Catholic man, 37 years old, living in Ruhororo IDP Camp. When the war occurred in his community he was in his twenties. Although he did not suffer too much at the time, he had to flee for his family was targeted. He then got enrolled in the national army.

saying: 'My neighbor Timothy, you are maybe asking yourself why we are sharing this beer today. You well know the cows' issue that is between us. I have taken enough time thinking on it and thought that we may end it and live as bothers as we used to. My intention today is not to catch you, not at all! It is rather a way to tell you that I need that we can start building our broken relationship. Beginning now, feel peace; never get worried about the cows. Nobody will charge you to pay back any more. This is true: I tell you the pure truth!' I am sure that he was not expecting me to behave that way. He took a deep breath like the one who finishes a marathon race and said: 'I would never believe that you could take good care of me that way!' I was overjoyed to fulfill my objective, which was to give him forgiveness. We are now reconciled and have become good friends.

I got demobilized in 2004. Since I arrived here in the IDP, I have been designated as responsible for Ruhororo demobilized people. So, when I attended the HROC workshop, I got precious skills that I keep using up to now. Look at my notebook; I read it at least once per day for I need to remind myself about what is in it.

Something I remember having gained from HROC is love and compassion. During the crisis, Hutu ate our cows and one of them, who took the lead to our home, is named Timothy. Since I learned that he was the one who caused my family misery, I would not want to meet him and, often, I planned to take him to court. It was after the workshop that I heard a voice in me asking how many cows I would want Timothy to pay me back. Then, I started thinking about Timothy's life. I am not sure if he could be able to pay for even one cow. And he is still my neighbor because our property is beside his. I, then, decided to go and meet with him. I had called two wise men to accompany me. We went to Timothy's home and together to a bar and I ordered beer for both of us. I wondered what Timothy was thinking by that time. I first opened the dialogue by

I am very optimistic for the future. There are more and more people who decide to take the lead in changing things. We adults, we ought to find ways to get along together as different ethnicities so that our children would start from there. One day, my next-door neighbor went to his fields with his children. While parents were busy working, the kids took advantage playing with other kids in that community. When it came time to go home, one of the Tutsi children asked his Dad: 'Why are you taking so long to rebuild our house so that we may get enough time to play with our friends here? This would save us from this every day tiring journey with the firewood on our head. Dad, when are coming back to live here?' This is a big reminder to us, adults. We may stay be stuck with our burdens while the new generation wants to roll the ball again. That is why I would want many workshops to be conducted on every colline [community] so that different people could get time to meet, exchanges views, share their sorrows. I am fully confident that this time constitutes a crucial turning point in our way of thinking, relationships and education given to young people. It has to be a group work!

“*The person I love is in this room.*”

On a typically warm day in September 2006, a group of twenty Rwandans sat side by side on bare wooden benches in the district office of a small village called Kayenzi, near Lake Kivu. It was the second morning of a Healing and Rebuilding Our Community (HROC) workshop, and the tension between the genocide survivors and the released-prisoners was slowly beginning to melt into the tired white walls of the background. A few minutes ago the facilitators had instructed everyone to think about a person they loved, and one by one the participants were standing up to tell the others about their older sister who had been killed or a neighbor who had kept them safely hidden during the genocide. When it was his turn, François Ndangamira rose to face the rest of the workshop participants. “The person I love is in this room,” he said with both profound sorrow and a small glimmer of pride. A known killer who had spent seven years in prison for murdering two people and leading another five to their deaths, François now looked toward a woman on his right and quietly told her that she was the one he loved, because she had forgiven him for doing the unforgivable and taking away the family she once had. It was her mercy and benevolence that had transformed François, which gave him the power to love.

It was a compelling moment, an extraordinary and rare glimpse into the heart of reconciliation which is found all too rarely in post-genocide Rwanda, but one that is wonderfully ordinary in the HROC workshops taking place around the country. For many, it is the first time they have been able to talk about what happened during the genocide; the first time they have felt courageous enough to be around other people; the first time they have understood the symptoms of trauma that have assailed and badgered their bodies and minds; the first time they have asked for or granted forgiveness; the first time they have even spoken to the “other” in over a decade. The effects of the trainings are literally transforming. As more than one of the participants stated, the HROC workshops brought back fond memories of their country before the war: a time when Hutus and Tutsis feasted together, intermarried, helped and supported one another, and lived peacefully as neighbors and friends.

The goal though, of course, is not to go back. Rwandans know all too well the dark skeletons of the past century and do not wish to return to them. They alone have been host to what experts have called the most “efficient” genocide in world history with one million dead in 100 days, far surpassing the speed of the Nazi gas chambers or the Cambodian killing fields. Mass participation by everyday men and women was the key to such simultaneous quickness and breadth. When the Rwandan Patriotic Front finally swept through the countryside in the summer of 1994 overtaking the Hutu Power government and putting an end to the carnage, the remaining Rwandans were left with a deeply divided society infused with fear, anger, and resentment. In the most densely-populated country in Africa, no one was left untouched. In a period of months families were destroyed, relationships were shattered, countless children were orphaned, infrastructure was devastated, jails were overflowing, and all trust between countrymen seemed permanently broken.

Today, thirteen years after the genocide, Rwanda is once again a stable country. All the bullet holes have been painted over; the buildings rebuilt, the fields replanted, but just underneath the surface lays immeasurable pain. The Rwandan government is attempting to bring both justice and reconciliation to survivors and perpetrators through a modern day version of an ancient form of arbitration called *gacaca*. Thousands of prisoners have been released and are now trying to reintegrate into their old communities alongside the survivors. Suspicion is widespread and many people still live in fear of being killed. Relationships are fragile and strained. With no time during the war to adequately mourn what was lost, overwhelming grief threatens to consume people. A small provocation can change grief into hate, allowing it to become the fuel for future violence rather than the grounds for reconnection.

With support from the African Great Lakes Initiative of the Friends Peace Teams, the United States Institute of Peace, the American Friends Service Committee, the Thomas H and Mary Williams Shoemaker Fund, and the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s Bequest Funds, the Friends Peace House of Rwanda has developed a

program to address the hidden wounds of Rwanda. Over the course of three days, genocide survivors and released prisoners from the same communities are brought together to explore and discuss the consequences of violence in their lives. These Healing and Rebuilding Our Community workshops begin with a day to examine the definition, origins, symptoms, and consequences of trauma. The second day is devoted to Loss, Grief, and Mourning, and gives participants a chance to open up about their own experiences. It also provides survivors and released prisoners an opportunity to recognize the anger that many still carry around and generate constructive ways to deal with it. The last day of the workshop focuses on trust and mistrust, helping participants to reflect on how to build trust and connections in communities with histories of betrayal. Based on the principle that every person - victim *and* perpetrator - can experience trauma and has the innate power to heal and help others, HROC teaches Rwandans that hope can exist even in the most desolate of hearts.

In the past four years, over 75 Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities workshops have been held throughout Rwanda. To evaluate the overall effectiveness of these efforts, we interviewed twenty-five past participants, facilitators, and friends of participants to see how HROC has touched people's lives and can be improved in the future. What we found was both encouraging and instructive. The results were overwhelmingly positive, and it was amazing to see how many participants had since created their own vehicles of peace by applying what they learned in the workshops. Associations were formed, trainings were planned, prison visits were made, friends were comforted, and truths were told. Many wished everyone in their community could attend HROC and wanted to go to further trainings themselves. The only criticism was that the workshops were not longer and more widespread. The people interviewed wanted everyone to experience the changes that they had. In the words of a released-prisoner from Kibuye, the people of Rwanda are "thirsty for reconciliation" and need HROC



Muhutu Juvenal is a Hutu man, living in Gisorora. He is around sixty years old and is married.

I was put into prison in 1998 accused of having participated in the killings of Tutsi in my neighborhood. My wife, knowing how false that accusation was, could not resist and got seriously depressed. Up to now, nine years later, she is crazy. I am not sure if she will recover! Though I was waiting for the death penalty, I got released in 2005. Really this was a miracle for me! I could not believe that I was acquitted.

I attended my first HROC workshop in July 2006. This was my first time to be face to face with Tutsi, after my release from prison. It is true that no Tutsi came to my home and said that I should be arrested again. But inside of me, I kept this grudge in my heart against them. The time we met in HROC workshop, I could not tell you how it came to me to think that we would be arguing over my issue. Contrary, we were led in wonderful discussions where we learned about things that wounded us, shared our burdens, and so on. I discovered that it is when you sit with someone and share with him that you understand that the person is not garbage. Once you have stored sweet words in your heart, they stick there and they help you to eliminate the bitterness. It is amusing to see how people in the community started trusting me. They often come to me asking for advice in the conflicts they may have because they are, for sure, witnesses of the goodness that is within me. They are the first ones to obviously notice the real change that took place in me. I want to keep being the model in my neighborhood. I committed myself in assisting those in conflicts for I know what prison is like and I would never wish that any one else would live what I lived there. It is woeful!!!

It is not that often we get an opportunity to share with those who did not have a chance to attend the workshops. Sometimes, I share with my wife and kids about what it was from the workshop that helped me. Still, my wife needs more advanced intervention for she is too depressed!

I would want to address my thanks to God and HROC facilitators for their generosity. I address my thanks to those from abroad that constantly are empowering us to help each other overcome these dreadful conflicts in our country.

It was too difficult for Leatitia to express herself. A short time after our discussion, she fell in tears and could hardly tell many things. Her only interest in HROC workshop was to learn how she could help her husband, a Tutsi man, to recover from his craziness. Periodically, her husband experiences such hard time. As a consequence, poor Leatitia is innocently beaten and many times she is obliged to spend the night outside of her home.

So many times I planned to divorce this man but remembered that it is the illness that he himself can't control that is causing all this. I know how loving a man he is. I would like to do all I can to help my husband to recover. As in the trust walk exercise, I will be holding him. I know that it needs a sacrifice; I am ready for it!

Leatitia liked the idea of continuing to meet with some of the HROC facilitators who have been greatly useful in comforting her.



Leatitia Kwizera is young Tutsi woman, 25 years, living in Gisorora with her three children.

workshops in every village, every community, every corner of the county. Simply put, they too need a person in the room to love.

Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities

The Healing and Rebuilding Our Community workshops began in 2003 when the African Great Lakes Initiative, the American Friends Service Committee, and members of Friends Church in Rwanda and Burundi came together to jointly develop a program that would address the consequences of violence. After years of colonization, civil war, ethnic hatred, and genocide, the need for healing on both an individual and community level in the Great Lakes Region of Africa was paramount. The curriculum was created to introduce participants to the concept of trauma, build a sense of trust and community within the workshop, facilitate initial expressions of grief and mourning, and establish concrete ways to deal with anger. Using Judith Herman's stages of recovery as a conceptual framework, HROC participants are moved through the four stages of Establishing Safety, Remembrance and Mourning, Reconnection with Community, and Finding Commonality. It is a participatory approach which utilizes culturally appropriate games, song, prayer, and discussions to empower people to find their own meaning within the teachings. Participants are asked and encouraged to share their experiences, which then become the basis of the learning. It is an environment where there are no wrong answers; where even if you cannot read and write your knowledge and opinions are valid and real.

Designed as the cornerstone in a larger program to build community capacity, the hope was that HROC participants would use what they learned to respond to the widespread trauma in their villages, strengthen interconnectedness between their neighbors, and reduce the isolation which keeps many people from seeking help in the first place. Many participants move on from the basic workshop to advanced trainings to become "Healing Companions" who are skilled in the art of active listening and can accompany family members and neighbors through the healing process.

Implementing Organizations

The Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities program is administered by Friend's Peace House of Rwanda (FPH), a non-governmental organization which was founded in 2000 by the Evangelical Friends Church of Rwanda to work for peace, reconciliation, human rights, and conflict resolution in Rwanda. The organization's vision is a unified Rwandan society that has a vibrant culture of peace, respects human rights, and is working to improve the living conditions of all its members. Its three overall goals are 1) to build a sustainable and durable peace in Rwanda; 2) to restore the relationships that were destroyed by the war and genocide to ensure peaceful co-existence; and 3) to reintegrate back into society the people who have been touched by the tragic events of the country. The Friends Peace House works with all sectors of Rwandan society regardless of religious affiliation, gender, ethnicity and focuses particularly on women, widows, youth, genocide survivors, prisoners, community and religious leaders,

and grassroots and religious associations. The organization works throughout Rwanda and has offices in Kibuye, Kigali, and Byumba. In total, FPH has trained 37 HROC facilitators and served approximately 1500 participants.

In addition to FPH, the African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) has been integral in establishing the HROC program in Rwanda. Started in 1998 by the Friends Peace Teams, AGLI seeks to strengthen, support, and promote peace activities at the grassroots level in the Great Lakes region of Africa. To this end, AGLI responds to requests from local religious and non-governmental organizations that focus on conflict management, peace building, trauma healing, and reconciliation. Since its inception, AGLI has worked with people of the Great Lakes region on a wide variety of projects ranging from international volunteer efforts, to the creation of Alternative to Violence programs in Kenya, Burundi, and Rwanda, to the introduction of trauma healing work in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda. AGLI has also sponsored work camps in Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, and Kenya, established a school scholarship program, and sent long-term volunteers and consultants to work with local partner organizations.

Methodology

In Rwanda: For two weeks in late February and early March 2007, we met with twenty-five past HROC participants (consisting of 5 facilitators, 9 participant survivors, 6 participant released-prisoners, 3 non-participants who live with a participant, and 2 non-participants who do not live with a participant) to evaluate the impact of Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities in the Nyamata, Kibuye, and Cyangugu

regions of Rwanda. Gathering in a facilitator's house, the FPH office in Kibuye, and the cell office in a small village outside of Cyangugu, we sat and interviewed survivors and released-prisoners, youth and elderly, males and females, killers and victims, Hutus and Tutsis. Through in-depth interviews, people shared personal testimonies about their lives before, during, and after the genocide, and imparted their opinions about the HROC workshops. Some interviewees had attended their first workshop in 2003, which helped to assess the more long-term effects of the program and how the lessons had resonated over the years. Others had taken part in HROC as recently as later summer 2006, which allowed us to gather opinions while the workshops were still fresh in people's minds.

All the interviews were conducted through translation, and both interviewers actively posed questions. Working together and using each other's strengths, Florence and Bethany carefully inquired about people's experiences during the genocide with Florence providing support and consolation when necessary. Although both interviewers were foreigners to Rwanda, Florence is an African from neighboring Burundi, which has shared many of the same violent struggles and ethnic tension as Rwanda, and speaks fluent Kinyarwanda (the native language in Rwanda). As someone familiar with the Rwandan culture and a HROC facilitator herself, Florence was essential in gaining the interviewees trust and enabling them to be open about their feelings and opinions. A list of interview questions and interviewees can be found on the AGLI webpage, www.aglionline.org in the appendices under "Now I am Human."



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Unfortunately, there were some limitations to our interviews. In almost all of our encounters, it was the first time that the interviewers had met the person being interviewed, which can sometimes make a person more reserved and less open, especially with a white foreigner present. Although we tried to make everyone feel comfortable, there is always the possibility that some interviewees held back their true feelings, particularly about a subject matter as sensitive as genocide. It is also worth noting that much of the data we collected relies on the self-reports of participants without external verification. Although we did interview 5 non-participants who knew participants, it was impossible to corroborate every detail of someone's story. There was one occasion when we interviewed a released prisoner from Cyangugu who told us adamantly that while he was with people who had killed others during the genocide, he personally did not kill anyone. Yet later we were told by a facilitator that he had in fact confessed to killing another participant's mother at a *gacaca* tribunal and had asked for forgiveness. In instances like this, it is difficult to know what really happened or what someone's motivations were for saying what he did. Despite this example, we were able to confirm much our data through our interviews with non-participants who provided invaluable insight into how participants had changed after attending HROC, and we are confident that the evaluation is reliable and accurate.

Additionally, the language barrier posed a problem. No matter how good a translator, nuances in both the questions and responses are often lost or changed when communicating across languages and cultures. To address this, thorough notes were taken throughout the interviews and recordings were also made, which were then translated by an additional person. Each direct quote in the report was recorded and checked, and the testimonies of Samuel and Béatrice were translated twice by two different people in order to get the most accurate translation. Both these testimonies have been edited slightly for grammar to ensure that the intended meaning is clearly understood.

Despite these challenges, we found that much of the feedback we were receiving was very similar. Time and time again, the same themes arose in our interviews, and we were struck by the many correlations between people's testimonies. We are confident that this small sample of HROC participants is an accurate representation of many others and provides remarkable insight into HROC's impact in Rwanda.

In Burundi: Three weeks before the interviews, the HROC staff in Burundi asked the lead facilitators from the first cycle of the Healing companions program — Ruyigi, Mutaho and Cagura — to choose four participants—1 female and 1 male from the IDP camp (Tutsi), 1 male and 1 female from the village (Hutu) and the four healing companions in each site. This was six to nine months after the participants participated in their first HROC workshop. The same questions were used as in the Rwandan assessment. I conducted the interviews in Kirundi and translated them into English.

While planning for this assessment, the HROC staff thought that it would make a difference if they traveled to people's homes instead of them coming to a site to be interviewed. During the assessment, I managed to go to participants' homes, except for those in Gisorora (Ruyigi). I sensed clearly that folks were much more natural; I felt they were more open, became more engaged. Visiting the homes definitely turned out extremely well.

Findings

Cultural Appropriateness

Almost everyone interviewed stated enthusiastically that the HROC workshops fit in well with Rwandan culture. Many people pointed out that Rwandan culture involves talking through one's problems, which is a practice the workshop encourages and utilizes. As Munyeragwe Epimaque, a facilitator in Nyamata, said, "The main thing in the teachings [of HROC] is to talk and listen. Rwandans like to talk. Having a solution doesn't matter. The important thing is to talk." Musoni Eric, another facilitator from Cyangugu, agreed, "The workshops are similar because in Rwandan culture, we teach people to meet and talk about their problems, so that they can solve them together." For many people HROC was a means of achieving this. Either because of anger, fear, shame or countless other personal issues, taking that initial step and reaching out to others was extremely difficult. For many the workshop was the first time that they had been around people on the other side of the conflict, and it provided them with any opportunity to finally talk to the other and work at resolving the issues of the past. This was especially true for some of the

released prisoners who had wanted to seek forgiveness but did not know where to begin; HROC gave them a way to approach survivors and a space to reconcile.

Another theme that came up repeatedly was sharing and unity: a remembrance of days gone by when Rwandans helped one another and shared what they had. Although Rwanda has struggled with ethnic divisions for some time, participants of HROC, and particularly the older ones, talked about a time when Rwandans supported each other and gave what they had when someone else needed it. Relying on one another and working as a united community was simply how people survived. Since the genocide this system has disintegrated due to mistrust, suspicion, and fear between neighbors. But according to participants, HROC has brought it back. “In Rwandan culture, we loved each other for a long time,” said Ibyiyigoma Hassan, a released prisoner who attended a workshop in late 2006, “there was a culture of sharing and no division, people shared their food. In the workshop we learned to be kind and gentle to one another and to share anything good.” Similarly, Ndangamira François, a participant and released prisoner, commented that HROC was similar to Rwandan culture “because the workshop shows us that we must live in peace in good relationships. HROC showed us that all of us are Rwandan. Even before in our culture, we were one.” Several people connected the idea of sharing to eating together, which occurred every day at the workshops as well as during large celebration with all the HROC participants in the area several months later. In Rwanda, *ubusabana* means sharing a meal together and is thought to be key to reconciliation; it is a way of connecting people that has been observed in many other cultures as well. When asked if the workshop was similar to Rwandan culture, Nirere Régine, a survivor and past participant, immediately starting talking about the lunches people ate at HROC. “In Rwanda,” she explained, “when we have a feast, we used to invite people of different ethnicities. [The workshop] reminded me of Rwanda before the war.” Since the genocide, an integral way that Rwandans bonded – through sharing meals – has deteriorated, and the Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities workshops reintroduced this common cultural practice to several interviewees.

In addition to applying aspects of the old Rwandan culture, participants commented that HROC also stood as an example for the future culture of Rwanda. “HROC was good for Rwandan culture because it was

about reconciliation and now Rwandans are being reconciled. I wish I could stay in the workshop,” said Nyirabyimana Vanancie. “HROC is about reconciliation, to stop division and rebuild unity of Rwanda, to show that each person is part of the country, to help others through grief, to help those who lack things,” explained Komezusense Samuel, a released prisoner from Cyangugu. “[HROC] brings light to Rwandan culture,” said Nshirizirana Jean. In the words of Mukagakwandi Amina, released prisoner from Kibuye, “Workshops were *better* than Rwandan culture.” Again and again, interviewees expressed the idea that the culture of HROC represented the kind of culture they wanted in Rwanda; it represented the kind of world that people wished their country could one day be.

Only two people interviewed had comments about the differences between HROC and Rwandan culture. While the workshops encouraged people to talk about their painful experiences and share their feelings, for many Rwandans to be publicly open about their emotions was a foreign concept. As Musoni Eric put it, “to be open is not really Rwandan culture. It is not bad to be open, but when you are trying to explain it [what goes on at HROC] to others, they don’t understand.” Similarly, Pasteur Nyirinkindi Theophile, a survivor from Cyangugu commented that “we do not like people to be open, but in HROC people could say anything, they could talk about bad things. I didn’t think it was good the first time, but after seeing the results I now think it’s good to be open.” Although different from traditional Rwandan culture, talking about one’s experiences and telling others how one feels about these experiences is a fundamental part of the trauma-healing process which HROC teaches and is a crucial step in moving forward.

Trauma Healing

The first day of Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities is devoted to lessons on trauma - what it is, how it happens, what its symptoms are, and how to handle these symptoms. Although “no one knows how prevalent PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome] is in Rwanda,” a study four years after the genocide asserts that “its prevalence may approach 20% in the adult population – much higher than in other war-torn countries.” Yet even without full-blown PTSD, there is still psychological suffering in the form of depression, anxiety, phobias, nightmares, hallucinations, hyper arousal, shame, unexplained anger or aggression, apathy, and countless other symptoms throughout the country. According to a Harvard School of Public Health Report,

there is a major mental health crisis in Rwanda consisting of “the general population who are experiencing emotional difficulties as a result of the genocide; individuals who have developed trauma-related problems as a result of violence, including rape and torture; and the chronically mentally ill whose mental health problems were exacerbated by the 1994 events.” Currently, the resources needed to address this crisis are limited. Psychology in general is a fairly new concept to most Rwandans. Prior to 1994, talk therapy and counseling had not been utilized in Rwanda and were more or less foreign ideas. While psychological

counseling is not the express purpose of the HROC program, as you will see in the testimonies below, the workshops have had a profound effect on the participants and greatly helped to diminish people’s trauma symptoms. For most, the very idea of experiencing or witnessing something take place and then having it affect their state of mind and mood was totally new. It was often the first time that they had ever been told that the isolation, anxiety, and depression that they had been feeling since the genocide were normal, appropriate emotions to have; and, this telling went a long ways in healing the wounds of the past.



Sylvain Toyi is a 43 year old Hutu man, married, with 8 children, living in Gisorora (Ruyigi).

Before the 93 crises in Burundi life was very enjoyable though problems always exist. It is no more the case as now drought and heavy rains have destroyed our crops. I hear that this is for many regions in our country.

When the war reached our area, I managed to flee to Tanzania with all my family. But, I could not stay there for more than three months. Life was so terrible there that I decided to come and die in my country. But, God saved us.

I attended my first HROC workshop in July 2006. When I got the invitation, my heart pounded fast because of fear. I finally said to myself that the person who brought it to me would not plan to harm me and I decided to attend it.

Before the workshop, I liked to be alone most of time. My heart was exhausted from carrying all the bad stuff I had. After the workshop, I remember that is when I slept more deeply than any other single night since 1993. The group sharing revealed to me that I am not the only one. On this earth, if you do not join others in groups, you would assume that you are the only one in sorrow. Never have I had time to laugh while in group until I participated in the HROC workshop. In that workshop, I renewed my relationships with Tutsi and now I feel like nothing would prevent me from spending a night in their homes in case I would be in such need. I am a Hutu and I believe that a Tutsi is not a monster. The proof is that there are Hutu who got married to Tutsi and vice versa. The problem is that people have been overwhelmed by the atrocities done and got broken in their hearts. Still, there is hope that things will change. I am now able to work for a Tutsi and get a nice pay. I recall one day that it had rained too much and it was impossible for school children to cross the stream. I helped all of them, Tutsi and Hutu, without distinction. It is very exciting to hear from my children that they are friends of my Tutsi neighbors’ children. Another day, on my way to the fields, I reconciled two boys who were going to beat each other. I am sure, if this had happened before I attended the workshop, I would not have paid attention to it. Nowadays, I find myself interested by community life.

How do you share what you learned in HROC with those who did not have a chance to attend?

There are many opportunities to meet and share. Even now, they know that I came to conduct this assessment and they will be asking me how it was: what were the results. Any way, as I have my notebook whenever I came from the workshop, I gave it to them. They read it and ask for clarifications: of course they can’t understand all of it, especially since the biggest part of the workshop is group sharing. Thus, I just told them what was the sharing and they were extremely attracted. These HROC teachings are really touching. I myself learned how to react constructively in time of anger. I used to overreact. I would keep silent for a week whenever some thing angered me. But now, I take time to talk to my wife and children whenever there is an issue between us.

Honestly, I am ready to stand on the roof and tell every one that I have been healed. My heart was like a dirty cloth and now HROC has washed me. I know that my behaviors will tell it clearly. My wife and my children can testify to it.

Through the workshop I saw that everything may change, and the workshop gave a power of handling the life however it is. Because before attending the workshops I would come back to a bad life, I had nothing to please me, but after attending the workshop I started to lead a new life, a good life. Even in the inside of my body I felt good, because before attending the workshop I could not sleep well, but now after the workshop I sleep well. And I had many other sicknesses, but now I am healed... I could not eat, I lost appetite and would go whole days without eating; I had headaches everyday; I scratched my skin, but after the workshop I did not scratch... I can say that [my trauma symptoms] can finish sometimes, but what is very important, when it comes I know that it is a symptom of trauma and I know how to treat it. They do not come like they did before the workshop. Sometimes I used to think that trauma was good to stay in. The workshop was the first time I was open about my feelings, it was the first time I understood trauma. – Pasteur Nyirinkindi Théophile, survivor

I could not sleep, I could not eat and feel satisfied, I had chronic stomach pain and could not speak - thinking about what happened, and had headaches. Through HROC, I discovered I was traumatized. I had heard of trauma through the government prisoner program, but this was the first time I understood it. I was free to ask what I didn't understand and the facilitators were compassionate...Now I have peace within myself and talk and I have no fear. Now I am human. I have stopped losing trust and my trauma has healed and when the trauma comes back, I remember the workshop. - Komezusense Samuel, released prisoner

Before the workshop, no one could come to my home, even for salt. I hated them so much. I had fear to meet those people. I could not talk to them and thought they might put me again in prison. And even for the first day of the workshop, it was like a dream, it was beyond my understanding. I was angry at them, and as the workshop moved on I understood them, because they taught us to live with others. And I saw, yes, it was possible, and I changed my heart. I would not have changed without the workshop; I would have stayed angry... [Before HROC] when somebody was knocking, I was thinking that they were coming to beat me. If

somebody said 'Oh, I need you,' I thought 'He's coming to beat me.' I could sleep during the day, the night I could not sleep. I would stay home because I feared being beaten. I had no appetite. I was thinking they would come back to take me again to prison. I had fear to see a soldier... The Friends Peace House touched me, touched my heart. If I had not gone to the workshop, I would be like somebody useless...I would have stayed with anger and fear and a heart of revenge if the Friends Peace House did not come...[Before the workshop] I did not know about trauma. I felt fear only; I had no good understanding of trauma. - Mukagakwandi Amina, released prisoner

It was not like this before. Now, I have a loving wife. The killers come and visit her, and she talks to them and doesn't flee. She does not have so many flashbacks and can sleep better. Before she was easily angered and we fought, but since the workshop it has diminished...My wife told me the workshops were good and diminish trauma. I feel changes in my soul, because I had bad ideas and I learned from my wife what they really were. - Mutahazi Laurent, husband of participant

In prison, it was bad, beyond understanding. You could not sleep lying down, there was only room to sit; many died from disease. Even sometimes there was no water, and once I went four days without food...I realized I had many symptoms along with the others who had been in prison. When I remembered sleeping among the dead in prison, it made me want to be alone and not speak. Even though I was released, I still felt imprisoned and didn't trust others...I was only doing my thing, I could not talk to people about my problems. I thought I could only live with prisoners. But after the workshop I felt free in my heart, it let me release my fears and helped me to form relationships with survivors... even if I have a conflict with someone, it no longer destroys the relationship. - Ibyiyigoma Hassan, released prisoner

Lessons Learned

In addition to learning about trauma, another lesson which resonated strongly with participants was the message of trust using the Tree of Trust and the Tree of Mistrust. On the last day of the workshop, facilitators use the image of a tree with its roots, trunk, branches,



Capitoline Burakuvye is a HROC facilitator.

Since we finished the series of workshops, I kept being available for folks in my community. Sometimes, married couples, or individuals who felt the need, would call me. I am proud of the achievement and being a HROC facilitator. My concern is that there is a great number of people who would like to talk to me. I see that starting support groups would be the answer in my community. For the sake of my community I am thankful to HROC and the fascination it creates. I am staying in the IDP camp, but whenever I go to my property Hutu come and help cultivate the fields. Then we share food, drinks. They keep my materials and I even store some of my harvest there. It is a question of logistics still; I am ready to go back to my propriety. If we could develop the mutual visit between IDP people and those living in the villages, soon the IDP camps would remain deserted.

To our supervisor, I would recommend that you schedule enough in-service trainings so that we may remind ourselves about what we learned and have time to help each other as facilitators.

and fruit to show participants how trust can be built and destroyed. As ninety percent of Rwanda's population is engaged in agriculture, the image of a growing organism like a tree is powerful and easy to grasp. It is a clear illustration of the foundation of trust, how it can be nurtured, and what will eventually come from it. After learning about the tree, participants often use the metaphor regularly and look to it as a guide to future relationships. Participants see that it is indeed possible to create trust in the wake of the genocide and build relationships which will foster peace. For many, the Tree of Trust is the first sign of hope for the future of Rwanda.

What I remember most are the two trees: The Tree of Mistrust with its roots and the Tree of Trust with its roots. I found that the Tree of Trust must replace the Tree of Mistrust. - Ibyiyigoma Hassan, released prisoner

What I remember most and what I use to help others is the Tree of Trust and the Tree of Mistrust. And even when I am preaching I use those Trees. - Pasteur Nyirinkindi Théophile, survivor

I learned about reconciliation and I remember the Tree of Trust with its good roots, leaves, and fruits.

The Tree of Mistrust is like the desert, it is a tree that has thorns and is good to remove. Through the Trees, I saw the difference between a good person who wants to live in peace and a bad person who hates. - Ndarisamye Esdras, survivor

The Tree of Trust and Tree of Mistrust touched me. It is a good lesson for everyone – both perpetrators and survivors – about life in the future. People had no trust, but the Tree gave people hope of a better future. - Ndamage Corneille, facilitator

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

While having survivors forgive those who offended them and having released prisoners seek forgiveness from those they offended is not one of the main goals of HROC, it is a welcomed by-product of the workshops. To choose to forgive someone is a deeply personal and tremendously difficult process. No one knows how a person will react after learning about trauma, grief, and trust or hearing the truth of what happened to a slain relative. The Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities program recognizes this and does not outwardly promote forgiveness or even discuss it directly; rather the program seeks to empower its participants to make their own choices and creates a unique place for people to begin rebuilding broken

relationships of the past. At the end of each workshop, facilitators set aside a time for individual testimonies, where participants can talk in a more personal way about what the workshop has meant to them. During this session, it is not uncommon to see a perpetrator stand up and ask another participant for forgiveness, or watch a survivor tearfully forgive the person who killed her family members. Of course, not everyone is moved to pardon others or seek absolution, and that is alright. But for those who are ready to go down this path, it brings tremendous relief and closure. While HROC on its own cannot bring reconciliation, as you will see in the testimonies below, it has indeed created a space wherein reconciliation is finally possible.

Before we [survivors and released prisoners] could not even talk to each other or sit next to each other; but after the workshop we could talk. The one who killed my family asked for forgiveness, explained what he did and accepted it. It was not easy for me to forgive him, but I did and little by little he became close to me. And then, the killers told us where the bodies of our lost family members were, and then we could go find the remains and bury them properly. After HROC, I found out where my sisters were and buried them, and many others were found.
- Zinucinda Simon, survivor

Before the workshop, I didn't think I could ever forgive the killers, but when one of the released prisoners told the whole truth in the workshop I was able to forgive and gained many things. The killers asked for forgiveness, they got down on their knees and asked God, the government, and the survivors for forgiveness... Many of my friends in the workshop forgave the killers. My anger has diminished. When I have drinks, I share them with the killers... I remember the trust walk when the person who killed my family was my partner. [During the genocide, she witnessed this man kill her two brothers with a machete and her younger sister with a spear.] I was shaking before because my partner was a known killer and very strong. I thought he might throw me down, but he also had fear and he took me gently, kindly. I asked him 'will you lead me in peace.' After the trust walk with him, I felt it was not good to stay in my grief and had no fear against him. - Nyirabyimana Venancie, survivor

I have known the Pasteur [Nyirinkindi Théophile, participant] since childhood and he is a neighbor... In my area there were 28 people which I helped to

kill. I did not kill anyone myself, but brought people to a place where others killed them, and among those were the Pasteur's mother and 2 of his children... After the genocide, the Pasteur was very bad. He lost his family and was angry and could not talk to the killers. He could not talk to me. Now he is our friend and has helped many people who did wrong during the war to accept what they did. He told me that in order to be free I must accept what I did and seek forgiveness. Now I live with survivors in peace. I share with them, help on wedding days, build houses together, cultivate together. Everything because of the Pasteur... [Since HROC] many things are changing; killers are asking for forgiveness; people are living in peace. I know two other released prisoners who have attended the workshop, and they have changed. They kneel down and ask for forgiveness. They admit they did wrong and promise to never do it again. - Damaceni Jean, non-participant who knows participant

[I have forgiven] everybody I met. After the workshop I had received 12 letters from killers who asked for forgiveness and I forgave them. I baptized my child this last day and four among [the people who helped with the ceremony] were among the ones I had forgiven... I have peace in my heart... In my daily life, people say they are surprised by how I have changed, surprised to see me go to prisons, share food at my home with killers, hire killers to work in my garden. In the meetings of other cells, I have been invited to resolve conflicts. Through my teachings, there have been many killers who have asked for forgiveness and survivors who have forgiven. - Pasteur Nyirinkindi Théophile, survivor

When I came to the workshop I had difficulty seeing the killers. For the first day people were angry and saying bad things to them. I refused to sit with the released prisoners, but as the workshop continued and we did the Big Wind Blows exercise, we were mixed together... I think I was chosen because I was among the survivors who could not be changed. Even the first day I resisted, but as time went on I changed. The man who killed my sister was at the workshop. The first day we couldn't talk, but on the third day he asked for forgiveness and I forgave him. - Kanyabashi Anastase, survivor

Long-Term Effects

Perhaps one of the most important questions posed during the interviews was whether or not people had



Margaritte Butoyi is a Tutsi who is married to a Hutu. She is 52 years old and lives in the village with her 9 children.

I am deeply thankful to the person who started these workshops. Things were going from bad to worse if it were not for the HROC workshop I attended. I had begun to see images and hear voices like what I lived through during the war. It was like a movie! Then I even started to consider my husband as an animal. It was hard for me to live with him. HROC gave me a relief! It was hard for my husband to believe it. He is now convinced that it is real.

When the war took place, I was pregnant. One month later, I went to hospital for delivery but my child died just after birth. There was no need for me to stay in the hospital for nobody from home could come and visit me. I chose to return home though I had not started feeling well. When Hutu began lynching Tutsi in our community, all my in-laws left me and some of them would have been happy seeing me dead. We were in very difficult relationship, my husband and me. He gave himself pleasure to beat me so often. My children and one of my brothers-in-law were the only ones who understood my sorrows and comforted me. One time I was going to be killed. A group of Hutu came to my home with traditional weapons. While they were going to beat me on my head, the chief of sector, a Hutu man, showed up and all of them disappeared immediately. He then recommended that my son would never me leave alone at home until the situation was back to normal. Listen, I remained alone in my community as a Tutsi; all the others were killed! Being able to share with those I met in HROC workshop tremendously helped me. I have been able to let it go. I have no more flashbacks; neither nightmares. Helped by my children, we worked on issues with my in-laws. My mother-in-law is now my mum. We got reconciled. May HROC last forever and ever!

seen any changes in their neighborhood since the workshop. The answers were astounding. In addition to the great individual transformations we saw, we found that HROC had, in fact, had an impact on entire communities. During the second day of the workshop, facilitators lead a discussion on what participants can do to help others. Participants are asked to think about what has helped them heal personally and to consider ways to relieve the pain of others. A brief lecture is given on the best ways to listen to someone who is traumatized and how to deal with volatile emotions, either their own or someone else's. It is clear from our interviews that this lesson resonated with the participants. From counseling others, to educating friends and family about trauma, to resolving neighborhood conflicts, to forming associations, HROC participants have taken what they have learned and brought it into their communities with great passion and enthusiasm. Participants have become role models to friends, family, and neighbors and are finding innovative ways to spread the message of HROC to those around them.

People come to me for help. One woman who was very angry and disturbed came to me to talk about

her problems. She was staying in bed all day and got in fights with people. I talked to this woman. Both Hutus and Tutsis come to me. I help them by showing them a good heart, by listening, by talking together, and by telling them about my own trauma.
- Kansayisa Clémentine, survivor

They [HROC participants] have been very helpful. People now greet each other. Now we live as we were before the war. The participants have acted as examples and taught people what they learned. Before the war, we could not imagine meeting with the other ethnicity or the people who have wronged us. They have brought light to our community. - Nahontuye Jean Pierre, non-participant living with participant

Even before the workshop, there were some things I was doing, helping the killers to understand the crimes they committed and showing them that the government was wrong to encourage them to kill. After HROC, I continued to do this. I advised those going to gacaca to speak the truth gently so they do not hurt survivors and traumatize them more. Everywhere I went I tried to tell people to put

themselves in the place of the survivors. Even many people have accepted their sins because of what I told them...People feel like they can come to me for help. - Ndangamira François, released prisoner

They [facilitators] helped us make an association called "Let Us Make Reconciliation and Truth"...they elected me as president and a released prisoner as vice president... Everyone is really involved. We've talked to a facilitator, had six meetings, and formally asked FRP for more workshops. We want to be trained as trainers and then we can help the killers tell the truth. We want to go to different sectors and help others...The association is a seed, which we hope will grow and it is a result of the workshop. Many people now want to be participants of the workshop. This will help bring reconciliation.

- Kanyabashi Anastase, survivor

To see people with such a hunger and thirst to rebuild things here was very important to me. The workshop helped me to change my feelings. It helped me to feel like I could marry a woman from a different ethnic group. I was talking to my friends and they were saying how they could never marry the other group. Now my girlfriend is of the other ethnicity and people give me a hard time, but I have changed some of my friends' opinions...I feel like I can be a model to others...I use the HROC in my life when I am with youth.... I try to get people to accept what has happened to them. I try to help people find their own solutions. - Nshirizirana Jean, facilitator

When I am holding cell meetings, I show people what they lost and what they did, and they understand. I told my wife and friends about what I learned...I am the first vice president of gacaca and a judge. The workshop helped me; what I learned in the workshop helped me in gacaca. I learned to forgive from HROC and I learned compassion and not to take sides...I try to tell survivors to forgive and not seek revenge and show them that what happened is not the end of life. Now I have a compassionate heart and even bring food to people in prison. I like to talk to them...There are many

changes in the community. Now people invite each other to baptisms, weddings, feasts, and bring people together more and build love. Even Hutus are now saying that Tutsis are good, because they have lost many and can still forgive...We started an association and have collected money for it, elected a survivor as president and a released prisoner as vice president. We want to teach unity and reconciliation, we will cultivate gardens together, do income-generation projects and help people with their finances, help the very poor among us. We will share, welcome each other, and live in peace. - Ndarisamye Esdras, survivor

Many changes can be seen in how men say their wives are behaving better. When there is peace in families, there is peace everywhere. There were problems in the community before, bad relationships. People are different and behavior is different. People used to have fear and relationships were broken. People feared their friends and neighbors. Now people ask for help from one another and there is a good atmosphere... Each day is a good step. You see people of different ethnicities getting married, people have formed associations. Learning does not finish. It is a continuous process. - Mukeshimana Laurent, non-participant who is a district leader

I asked the government to use a room in the sector building once a week on Wednesday to counsel people – released prisoners, survivors, people in conflict. Some come for trauma, others for conflict, and many widows come and I help people with their problems. The National Committee of Unity and Reconciliation saw what I was doing and trained me in reconciliation...Now there are three associations in the community, there are survivors and killers together, but before the workshop it would not be like that...After the workshops people put into practice what they learned. When they come home, even the men had to play the games they learned in the workshop. When you go at school, you see the children playing the same games. – Pasteur Nyirinkindi Théophile, survivor

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Perils of Practicing HROC's Lessons

After attending a HROC workshop in the summer of 2006, several participants encountered perilous resistance from locals in their village. Filled with new ideas, fresh hope, and a desire to see reconciliation, others in the community who hadn't attended the workshop did not understand the changes and felt threatened by it. There were stories of people who denounced others and then found their houses burned down or their food poisoned or were even killed. Some participants were harassed and ridiculed when they were seen with participants who were supposed to be enemies. Mukayiranga Béatrice's fellow survivors told her she was foolish and stupid for forgiving the released-prisoners. She now lives with government-supplied guards watching her house at night. Similarly, Komezusense Samuel was threatened with death after encouraging other released prisoners to tell the truth and inevitably implicate others. Their testimonies are below. The participants of the HROC workshop in Cyangugu changed so much that it created a great rift between those who wanted to tell the truth at gacaca and those who would not. Pasteur Nyirinkindi Théophile said that it took two or three days of negotiating between people before the fighting in the community dissipated. While it is to be expected that not everyone will understand or welcome the new mind-set of the participants, it is clear that additional support would be helpful to many participants in the months following the workshop.

Mukayiranga Béatrice

Tutsi survivor, 43 years-old

Life before the war was good; there was enough food; I had friends, my family, and good neighbors. My father was a veterinarian, and my husband showed people how to cultivate. I had a rich family. I got married in 1984, and had my first child a year later. My whole family lived near me.

When Habyarimana who was the president died, they announced that no one could go out, and they started burning houses. Me and my husband and kids fled to the [Shangi] parish church and the killers came with guns and grenades and killed people. We stayed with the bodies of dead people for over one month in the church. The women were collecting stones and giving them to their husbands to hit those who came to kill us. So then the killers called for help from other killers, because we were many. The Sous Préfet came with officers and a priest, and they asked the people of the place to give them a list of Tutsis in the church who were educated and rich, and they took them to Cyangugu to kill them. My husband went in the team that went to Cyangugu. They came and killed every day, but they couldn't finish because we were so many. So they sent for Yusuf, who was the one who was intervening where others failed to kill. They had three cars filled with guns,

traditional weapons, and killed all the people who were outside the church. [They] shot up the church doors and killed many people.

I looked around at all the kids in the church. One of my children was already dead. I don't know how my other three children survived. I felt I had to run, but I knew I could only take one of my children with me. I didn't know whom to choose to save. My heart told me to take my son. I will never know what kind of death my other children had; if they called out for me when they were dying. Sometimes, I ask God why He chose my son.

[When Beatrice and her 5 year-old son tried to leave the church,] the killers blocked the door. Then, I was raped...I was violated in the presence of my child. I can't know how many they were. I counted until five, after that I lost my conscience. Later I met my husband while the war was still happening. Somehow he had survived, but had been made handicap. And I told him what happened to me and I told him, "Please, I don't want to have sexual relations with you, so that I don't contaminate you if I have HIV because there were many men." So he told me that HIV kills after many years, and he was not even sure that

we would reach tomorrow, so we stayed together, and after the war I gave birth to two more children. I kept telling my husband to go for an HIV test, but he refused. Finally I convinced him and we went for a test and found out that we were both contaminated, and eventually my husband died from it. We have no choice that it happened, and we didn't wish it to happen.

I am now taking drugs, I have more other sicknesses like asthma. Sometimes I am allergic to the drugs; my legs get swollen, and my belly gets swollen. I try my best to get food and clothing, but we eat only once a day. I try to grow some crops, because I know I will leave my children behind. When you are sick you should be taken care of by your family, but I have no family left. Before [the genocide], my family was many. But my four children, my father, my mother, six brothers, and two sisters, uncles, aunts, and many others in my family died.

Before the workshop we [the survivors] couldn't talk with them [the released prisoners]. I used to have a continuous headache, and deep sorrow. I was angry when I saw people who were happy, I wet the bed, I always felt grief. But then I was with the people who hurt my family in the workshop. I can't remember all of them but they were many at the workshop. They killed people, and many of them asked for forgiveness, and we forgave them and now they are our friends. I personally forgave those who killed my people... [Since the workshop] my anger has calmed down. My trauma symptoms are not finished, but they are not as strong. I thought I would seek revenge if I ever

got the chance, but my sorrow has lessened. I can now sleep and the fears that they were coming to kill me are all finished... I have accepted myself and accepted living with the killers. Other survivors who have not attended the workshop condemn us. People cannot understand how you can live with someone who killed your people; they say we are fools; they ask what the killers have given us to be forgiven.

Now we are one; the survivors and the killers who have asked for forgiveness are together. The people who hate us do not differentiate. I am not angry with these people, but I am afraid of these people, because they want to kill those who may denounce them to keep the truth hidden. There is still much hatred from those who do not accept what they have done. Those who denounce others have been killed or their houses have been burned or they've been poisoned or threatened with death. I have been threatened, but the government has people guard my house at night.

Now I help others in trauma. Many of them come to me. Some even come to stay at my house when they are in bad situation. They get traumatized saying that they are seeing people killing them. I help them to be back in the normal mood, and if I fail I call for help and take them to the hospital. We also have an association, URUMURI RW'AMAHORO [Light of Peace]. We encourage people to accept their sins and ask for forgiveness. They are many who have confessed and asked for forgiveness because of our teachings. So now we have inner peace. We all feel free towards others.

Continued on page 20

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Now we are one; the survivors and the killers who have asked for forgiveness are together. The people who hate us do not differentiate.”

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Komezusense Samuel

Hutu released prisoner, 37 years-old

In the war, the killings broke out. In fact it started in my cell. The first person to die was killed by my family members. I went to the government leaders and denounced the killings, but they told me it would continue. Many people were involved in it, and I withheld myself, but later they told me that I had to help. And because it was my family telling me that, I joined them, and many people died when I was there.

After we stole the dead people's belongings, burned their houses and divided everything. Those who remained fled to the Shangi Parish. I went there one day when the Interahamwe ["those who stand/fight together"—the Hutu-extremist youth militia and main force behind the genocide] attacked, and they said that those who were still alive must be killed. More than 1,000 people died, and I was watching so that no one would escape.

I fled to Congo in August 1994, and came back in May 1996. I was with my wife and two kids at this time. I got imprisoned after exile in 1996 and spent six years and three months in prison. In prison life was difficult, because food was not enough; there were many diseases, not enough space to sleep. Life was hard there. Some died of those diseases, and even myself I fell sick many times. I had severe stomachaches and had toothaches. I have few teeth in my mouth and am still poor because of my long imprisonment.

After examining my testimony, I was provisionally released in 2003. My family hated me because I mentioned what they had done. They poisoned my child, and he died in 1999. They killed him when I was still in prison, because they had heard what I had testified. They wanted to kill me with my wife, and they even threw stones through my windows. Once I was released, I had to move around a lot to escape from being killed. I had to move to Nyamasheke, where I am now. Now I don't talk to my family, because I fear that they will kill me. It is the survivors who helped me to find a new place to live. Those I live together with now and the genocide survivors love me very much.

But many also hate me because of what I am doing. When I am together with other released prisoners I try to show them that peace of heart is so important, but they say that I am the one who caused them to be arrested, so they don't love me. You always hear on the radio that people who give testimonies of Shangi have many problems. Many times people who tell the truth are violated, and I am among them. The government has given me people to protect my house at night, because there are many who want to hurt me, and I fear for my life.

I was trained [in HROC] for the first time in August 2006. I think I was invited because by that time I was a leader of those who accepted their sins. I was so impressed by these workshops. In fact I made a decision to seek the people I sinned against and ask forgiveness and help the survivors because I had caused their pain.

[Before HROC] I could not sleep. I could not eat and feel happy because I was always upset. I always had stomachaches, headaches, and after FPH trained us I realized that I was traumatized. I had heard about trauma before through the government workshops, but this was the first time I understood. I was free to ask anything I didn't understand, and the facilitators were compassionate. Since then, the trauma is reduced. I can't say that it is finished, but I am not lonely. I have some people I can go to and tell them my problems, and I don't have the same headaches because I no longer spend sleepless nights, and I don't fear those I offended because Friends Peace House united me with them.

Now, if someone has a problem I can help him. If someone is asking for forgiveness I try to help him. In the church when I preach and in meetings, I tell people about what I learned. Each day I apply what I learned. The workshop has awakened me to teach others. I love genocide survivors and want to help those traumatized as I can. I put myself in the place of the survivors and look inside at my participation in what happened, so now I can be close to them and see their problems as my own. I have peace within myself and talk and have no fear. Now, I am human.

Recommendations

Iwish everyone could attend,” said Komezusense Samuel, a released prisoner from the Cyangugu area. “Do more workshops,” echoed Mukayiranga Béatrice, a genocide survivor. Throughout the two weeks of interviews, these sentences were the foremost recommendations we heard from people. The praise for HROC was overwhelming and so was the demand for more - more workshops, more participants, more days, more facilitators, more help! Bring the messages of HROC into every village, every home, and every heart; do not stop until all Rwandans have been reached. The point was abundantly clear - people want change; Rwandans are yearning for it, for a way to cope with what they have been through. All they need is someone to show them the way.

It was a truly moving experience. Not only did we leave Cyangugu on the last day of interviews inspired, but we also left with a momentous sense of responsibility. We could not stop here or be satisfied with what had already been accomplished. No, we needed to push beyond the praise and go deeper, improve our methods, take the program as far as it can go. Thankfully, those who were interviewed imparted their suggestions. Some recommended targeting specific groups of Rwandans to more efficiently spread the message; some stressed follow-up visits from facilitators; still others suggested a certificate program.

Community leaders need the trainings.

Mukeshimana Laurent, non-participant, district leader

Me and the other facilitators try to meet three times a year, but there is no budget...I would like to see HROC strengthened and spread. Many people need them, but don't have the chance. I wish HROC would work with the people in gacaca.

Munyeragwe Epimague, facilitator

It's hard to train all the people, because there is a lack of funding. I would like the participants to go on and train others in what they learned and then that person will go and help another. I want facilitators to get together and exchange ideas on how to facilitate, how to improve their skills. To have many facilitators would be better.

Nshirizirana Jean, facilitator

They need more workshops, so that others can be reconciled. Three days is not enough... In AVP [Alternatives to Violence Program, another Friends Peace House workshop], I got a certificate and card about twelve ways to resolve conflicts, which would be good in the HROC workshops. If many people were trained, then reconciliation would be strong. Everyone – killers and survivors – needs to be trained, because the war touched everyone. Zinucinda Simon, survivor

I wish everyone could attend. The teachings are good, but the days are few...Instead of training 20, train 200, so that people can know about it and keep changing. I also want a follow-up, and I want Friends Peace House to advocate for our association.

Komezusense Samuel, released prisoner

I wish the workshop would have been more than three days. I would like it if my neighbors could have come with me...I would like more workshops and more people attending them. Three days was just the beginning.

Kansayisa Clémentine, survivor

In addition to recommendations for longer and more numerous workshops like the ones above, there was also an incident in Cyangugu which merits attention (see pages 18 to 20). Although none of the interviewees offered any specific suggestions on how to address this issue, the problem points to a need for more post-workshop support. While it is to be expected that not everyone will understand or welcome the new mind-set of the participants, it is clear that additional support would be helpful to many participants in the months following the workshop.



Mediation training in Burundi 2006

Before I attended the HROC workshop, I considered life like a burden: worthless. I was every time thinking how I could revenge the killing of my husband and relatives. You know, during the war, the Hutu killers came and selected all males in my in-law family. Afterwards they came asking for money and used the threat of rape. We then moved to the IDP camp with our children. Life is not easy here. Well, I do not know how I got invited to a HROC workshop. Surprisingly, I met some of my former neighbors there. It was not that easy after roughly ten years of separation. I was too suspicious. The openness and compassion I saw in everyone in the workshop touched me. I then slowly began to accept that Hutu did suffer also during those days! I have decided to join a traditional dancing group; something which is unbelievable for Tutsi here in the IDP because there are Hutu in the group. I do get discouraged for I know on which ground they stand. Every week I go to the community for practice. Those women and girls have greatly helped me to bind my wounds. I feel different now. I am very proud of it. It is so sweet to hear folks saying that my face has changed from looking foggy to joyful. It is like I am a symbol of change! The cohabitation with Hutu in the community has improved as well. They now watch over my crops so that nobody will destroy them. I am sure that I would return as soon as I am able to have my house built. I am confident that life in the community is possible.



Spes Ntirampeba is a 38 year old Tutsi widow living with her three children in the Mutaho IDP (Internally Displaced Persons') camp.



Pascasie Nduwimana, a Tutsi, is a 43 years old married woman, living in the Mutaho IDP camp.

Telling the truth, this HROC has been more poignant than a repentance gospel. I am conscious of how far I have come. My marriage was going to be destroyed. HROC saved me from that failure! Until now, my children have not stopped asking to attend that workshop that has made me a new mother. I hope that they will get a chance to do so as my husband recently did. HROC has strengthened me and I am now able to participate in rebuilding the destroyed unity between Hutu and Tutsi. Our visit to Gitega Prison is a real treasure for me. As a woman, HROC made me an important tool in the community and I will keep the flag up. I will never give up!

Conclusion

There is Béatrice who endured unimaginable suffering and still found the strength to forgive. There is Pasteur Théophile who could not even speak to his neighbors before the workshop but is now counseling them. There is Samuel who gave up his family, friends, and safety for the truth and now lives with government guards surrounding his house. There is Venancie who took the hand of her enemy and let him lead her through darkness to come out fearless on the other side.

These are just a few of the remarkable people that HROC has touched since it began four years ago. There are hundreds more whose stories are too numerous to fit into these bounded pages. They stand as proof that another way *is* possible, that with the right vehicle and inspiration, healing and reconciliation *can* take place.

After years of oppression, division, and bloodshed, the task of deconstructing the ideology of genocide and

breaking the cycle of violence in Rwanda is enormous. Healing and rebuilding communities is indeed an uphill battle, but one that needs to be undertaken. For the first time in decades Rwandans are attending HROC workshops and going beyond ethnicity to a place where labels do not represent who a person is or could be. Within the walls of barren rooms across the country, people are becoming more than just “Hutu” or “Tutsi,” more than just “survivors” or “released prisoners;” they are becoming human beings who refuse to be defined by a single part of their identity.

Alone the HROC program cannot achieve reconciliation, but as François and others have testified, it *can* create a space where two people – two people who have every reason in the world to hate each other - choose to love one another instead. It is not happening quickly, but workshop by workshop, person by person, Rwandans are choosing love.

I remember the trust walk when the person who killed my family was my partner. [During the genocide, she witnessed this man kill her two brothers with a machete and her younger sister with a spear.] I was shaking before because my partner was a known killer and very strong. I thought he might throw me down, but he also had fear and he took me gently, kindly. I asked him ‘will you lead me in peace.’ After the trust walk with him, I felt it was not good to stay in my grief and had no fear against him.

Nyirabyimana Venancie, survivor

HROC's Philosophy

Healing and Rebuilding our Communities (HROC) is based on an underlying philosophy and a set of key principles listed below:

Principle #1: In every person, there is something that is good.

Principle #2: Each person and society has the inner capacity to heal, and an inherent intuition of how to recover from trauma. Sometimes the wounds are so profound that people or communities need support to reencounter that inner capacity.

Principle #3: Both victims and perpetrators of violence can experience trauma and its after-effects.

Principle #4: Healing from trauma requires that a person's inner good and wisdom is sought and shared with others. It is through this effort that trust can begin to be restored.

Principle #5: When violence has been experienced at both a personal level, and a community level, efforts to heal and rebuild the country must also happen at both the individual and community level.

Principle #6: Individuals healing from trauma and building peace between groups is deeply connected. It is not possible to do one without the other. Therefore, trauma recovery and peace building efforts must happen simultaneously.

HROC's approach to learning grows directly from these six underlying principles. HROC workshops rely on participants' own experiences of violence, trauma, and healing to provide the backbone of curriculum content. Rather than provide multiple didactic lectures, HROC facilitators invite participants to discover their own existing knowledge and their own inner wisdom about how to heal and how to help others. This approach builds a strong sense of community among group members, instills a new confidence in a wounded self, and ensures that the lessons learned are steeped in the context of the particular conflict and the post-conflict recovery process. The fact that the program relies on eliciting actual experiences enhances its adaptability to varying contexts and cultures.