

The face of healing in the Aftermath of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda:

Personal Reflections by Eliane Ubalijoro

Introduction

The more I learn of positive community actions in times of disaster, the more hope I have that sharing in these results, will help nations heal. But what is healing and how do we know we are engaging in healing? Should we see healing as a destination as in the French translation *guérison* that would translate better in English as cured? Should we see it as a journey of mind, heart and action beyond the elimination of dis-ease caused by trauma? Should we see it as a door cracked open bringing in light into the darkest moment of a community, a door that could open onto a path of aliveness that was lost or discovered completely anew with the fierceness of having lived the darkest of times? This paper will look inward at what has helped me get beyond the paralyzing effect of resisting to feel the personal and collective pain of what the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi genocide represents. My experience is a minute view/mirror that represents but one experience of a woman from the Rwandan Diaspora on moving forward after disaster. I will share in this paper community and individual actions that are giving me hope that a way forward is unfolding that is growing the healing paths for Rwanda. The paper will be broken down into three sections:

- I. Individual and collective responses to regain dignity and compassion beyond disaster
- II. Incorporation of new technologies and novel design spaces, in community engagement towards the post-genocide rebuilding effort
- III. Community and government dialogue on healing

For each of us participating in the upcoming seminar, whether as an academic, policy maker, practitioner or community leader, we all share the desire for our skills and life experiences to be of service to “Retrieving the Wisdom of Those in Need: Community Engagement and Healing in Times of Disaster.” But how do we engage and act in accordance with the lived experience and dignity of others. As I look inward to find how best to approach this important space, I ask myself what do I bring to the collective that will meet. I am reminded of a story of a grandmother who was helping her daughter care for infant with a heart condition. After the operation, four doctors made their daily rounds into the room but would never talk or engage in eye contact with the family. They would come in and take note of the charts and electronic monitors. The infant died and now a mother and grandmother grieve the loss of a precious child but also the disconnect that separates their hearts from the minds, eyes, hearts and hands of the doctors that worked very hard to treat a medical condition. Can we open ourselves beyond our intellectual skills to feeling the pain of trauma without being lost in it? Would opening ourselves wide open to it make us more compassionate or less able to technically support the healing process? Can we engage effectively if we let others trauma become part of the fabric of our lived

experiences? The perspectives I present in this paper are forged from my grappling with disaster and healing, not theory but feeling, despair and hope. My wish is for my words to add to perspectives from academic theory and analysis, policymaking, practitioner and community views, for our collective experiences to produce a community of healing wisdom.

I. Individual and collective responses to regain dignity and compassion beyond disaster

a. My own journey:

I was born in Rwanda in 1972. At the time, I did not know it but a persecution campaign against Tutsis and opposition to the Kayibanda regime was going on. The tensions in the country led many Tutsis to flee their homeland as had happened in 1959 prior to Rwanda's independence as well as in the sixties. Divide and conquer had been a heritage that Rwanda gained from colonial powers favouring one ethnic group over the other to suit their ambitions. By the time I had finished my first year of university in 1990, a civil war broke out. All the tensions that had been stored and were fermenting for years exploded in a war that culminated in the 1994 genocide that killed close to a million Rwandans. A study carried out by an association of widows against violence on women during the war and genocide revealed that 80% of the victims surveyed showed signs of trauma, with a staggering 66% of these testing positive to HIV AIDS (AVEGA, 1999). Virtually all children had to witness tremendous acts of brutality and many were made vulnerable as orphans. Many survivors of the genocide also had to contend with their homes being pillaged or destroyed during the conflict. It was estimated, at the time, that two million people had been made homeless. More than half a million of the displaced were estimated to come from vulnerable segments of the population (orphans, widows and elderly people). Before the trauma of the 1994 genocide, my life as a graduate student in Canada had a rhythm to it, many hours spent in a lab doing molecular biology research, time debating with my fellow scientists and taking in the joys and pleasures of being from an anonymous little African country most people around me knew nothing about. During and after the genocide, whenever I was asked where I was from? A sense of panic would fill every pore of my body. How could I respond to that question without seeing the person's eyes in front of me take on a startled look and questions probing into my ethnicity and the statistics of what percent of my family was alive vs. killed vs. participated in the massacres would ensue? This scenario didn't always follow my wild imagination. When I think back, my biggest fear was to choke as I announced: "I am from Rwanda". I feared I would not be able to sustain a normal conversation after hearing the intonation of my voice pronouncing those words, a cry bubbling up my throat. It took me time to accept that trauma could be felt afar with legitimacy. What right did I have to be traumatised when I was safe in Canada when all hell broke loose in Rwanda? My first validation that what I was feeling was ok was reading Romeo Dallaire's biography, *Shaking hands with the Devil*. What struck me, beyond the horrific events themselves of his descriptions of the 1994 Rwandan genocide was the trauma his family living in Canada had gone through, reading, seeing and hearing about it and not being able to do anything about it. I found the courage to read Dallaire's book around 2006, 12 years after the genocide but before that I had started on my own journey of expressing what I had felt in 1994 through the below words that took 3 years to spill out of me:

Remembering April 1994

I watched
My father's books burn
I watched
The light go out of my mother's eyes
I watched
My childhood dreams fly away
Sinking deep into the mud of the banana groves
I watched
The air that used to fill with the perfumes of eucalyptus during the day and of fragrant flowering trees at
night, be weighed down with cold, dying and decaying flesh
I watched
The cries of the baby trying to feed on his dead mother's breast
I watched
My people far from the Capitol say: We will not kill
To later watch them joining in the horror
I watched
Pale and familiar faces bow their heads and leave
I watched
My brothers' and sisters' faces right before and right after death
I watched
The machetes lift and with force decapitate love,
friendship, peace, tolerance and respect
I watched
Fear and I did nothing
Seated there, in front of my TV
I did nothing
To dry the hot tears pouring down my cold cheeks
I only had
To press a button to take the images away from my sight
But I did nothing
I watched
Like the rest of the world
The massacre of my people, of my dreams, of my memories and of my past
But even with eyes closed, a thumb pushing down the red button on the remote
I still see my people dying.
(Éliane Ubalijoro, 1997)

I witnessed the 1994 genocide from afar. As such, I am only a mirror to the depth of trauma that occurred. I point to the unimaginable that happened in my birth land. The spring and summer of 1994, I spent months not knowing if people I loved and deeply cared about were alive or dead. I also sadly spent months seeing leaders I had known engineer the killings and destruction of our country. I heard about deaths of other leaders who had stood for unity and finding new ways of moving forward. So when President Paul Kagame asked me to become a member of his Presidential Advisory Council (PAC) when it was created in September 2007, following a full page article that was published on my work linking biodiversity preservation to economic growth and poverty reduction, it was an honour for me. As part of this international group of academics, consultants, business and faith leaders advising President

Paul Kagame, I get to reflect within this group on the ways of bringing prosperity and healing to Rwanda. The PAC is a voluntary advisory group chosen by the President as a sounding board but does not represent, act or speak for the government. PAC members are united by the desire to see prosperous and peaceful Rwanda, in a prosperous and peaceful Africa. The opinions and views expressed in this paper are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of the PAC or the government. Being on the PAC has given me a privileged seat to observe how Rwanda's leadership is working on healing and development. As much as PAC has become for me a space of collective reflection on Rwanda, writing poetry opened me to grieving for the trauma of my homeland as my personal way forward very early after 1994. Another way forward has been taking in the lessons I learned from my mother, from youth and other Rwandans especially women who have shared with me their stories of despair and hope.

b. Lessons from my mother:

As a child, I never knew the depth of resilience and strength in my mother, I only knew the depth of her love and her iron discipline. As an adult, I discovered new layers of who she was and sadly, the greatest lessons I learned from her were all the result of disaster.

*My mother didn't cook
She served you love on a platter
Her love was infectious*

*Her laugh was infectious
Her smile all-encompassing
From the moment I was born
I knew I was special
I was the only girl
The one she always said
She would leave everything
From the time I was small
She would show me all her jewels
And tell me one day
They would be mine
That was a long time ago
Before the war, before the terror
Before the genocide*

*In the span of a few months
Starting April 1994
All our dreams died
Jewels were stolen
Dear friends died cruel deaths
And all that was left was*

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*A few precious photographs
They were left behind
In the banana groves
When everything else was taken
Or purposefully destroyed*

*You see my mom was scheduled
To be killed then
But fate decided otherwise
We were blessed with eleven more years
Of her presence on this earth
During these eleven years
She created opportunities for hundreds
In the form of a good word
Leading to a job
Employment on our home farm in Rutongo
Favors here and there based on trust
She used her business acumen
Not only to create jobs
But to strengthen a community
That did not dare believe in hope*

*During those eleven years
She was a witness to two of her sons' weddings
Three baptisms of her grand children
As well as from a distance
Be part of two of her other children's weddings
Including mine
My mother died March 19th of this year
God gave us eleven extra years
Of her earthly presence
When she took in her last breath
My daughter was nine months*

*I still hear my mother
Whispering to me into the night
Be happy child of mine
Strive for the best
Persevere, and when all hope is gone,
Persevere some more
Because I will always be
A bright light*

*In any darkness
That life will bring onto you
(Eliane Ubalijoro 2005)*

In the aftermath of my mother's death, I realised how lucky I had been to have had those 11 additional years of her presence on this earth. I decided to be thankful for those years instead of focussing on a death that was so sudden it remains a shocking loss, still too soon.

The lessons I learned from my mother are massive waves I ride on, in the ocean of experiences I hold in my heart and mind of how Rwandans are rising up to the occasion to rebuilding their communities.

c. Lessons from youth¹

As blood was spilled what was sought was also to destroy the fabric of community, the stories, myths and folklore that united the Rwanda people. I remember asking myself, why someone would kill a poet. One of Rwanda's great writers, Cyprien Rugamba was a poet, storyteller and director of Rwanda's national ballet. He was murdered with his wife and six of their children on the first day of the genocide. One of his surviving son's, Dorcy Rugamba has been using theatre as a medium for healing whether it is in his 1999 "Rwanda 94, a six-hour piece about the genocide" that toured around the world and was performed in Rwanda or the "recreation of The Investigation - a documentary drama based on transcripts of the 1963-65 Frankfurt trials, which saw 22 German defendants tried under German law for their actions at Auschwitz". Using the direct experience of Rwanda or The Investigation, Dorcy Rugamba's acting and directing is a doorway into a new generation of Rwandans uses of artistic expression to transcend the violent legacy left by 1994 and revivify humanity in themselves and others that had been stripped away.

In the movie *Sometime in April*², there is a scene where Interahamwe militias attack a girls' school. The girls are asked to separate between Hutus and Tutsis. As the girls refuse to do so, and their teacher gives them permission to follow what they believe, they huddle together and die united rather than separate to give away the Tutsi girls to death. This image in the film recounting the 1994 genocide is a reminder of a 1997 Interahamwe attack on a boarding school close to the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo. Students were in their dorms at night when the attack took place. They were asked to separate according to ethnicity. A Hutu girl whose father had been an Interahamwe protected her Tutsi class mates and paid the price with her death. It is harrowing to think of youth making these type of decisions. Now in Rwanda, each year, there is a national Hero day to remember all those who fell while standing for something greater than themselves. In a recent videoconference I participated in, a genocide survivor Steven Shyaka recounted how he was saved by the daughter of a notorious Interahamwe killer. She hid him when he was a young boy at the time, telling him her father was a monster. As I hold onto this story, I take in the opposing forces of dehumanisation and courage they

¹ Gervais, M., Ubalijoro, E. and E. Nyirabega (2009). Girlhood in a post-conflict situation: The Case of Rwanda. Agenda, No 79, 13-23. <http://www.agenda.org.za>

² Raoul Peck (2005). Sometime in April. Distributed by HBO Films.

had. Examples of courageous people who risked their own lives to save others are displayed prominently at Kigali Genocide Memorial but sadly these efforts pale to the realisation that around 90% of the pre-1994 Tutsi population living in Rwanda was disseminated.

At Sonrise boarding school, in the area of Western Rwanda where Interahamwe raids raged into the late nineties, Bishop John Rucyahana has created a haven for many orphans while giving them access to one of the consistently best performing primary schools in Rwanda on National exams since 2004. This was the year the first cohort was able to sit for the exams. As one of the 7 best primary schools out of 2000, Sonrise is now offering high school programs that have allowed many orphans (now 50% of the students there) to advance their education. They are being given empowering paths instead of the vulnerability of being sent back to fend for themselves.

d. Lessons from women's groups

While Rwanda was left in 1994 with 400,000 orphans, many women themselves widowed and in 250,000 cases raped and infected with HIV AIDS from the rapes they endured during the 100 days of the genocide. Many had to take on the roles that traditionally were held by men. Rwanda post genocide had a dearth of free men, many had been killed, fled or were now in Prison. The ratio of men to women was 2 to 3. In a culture where women did not build roofs, they had to climb up on their houses, to bring back insulation to destroyed homes. At first, they did this at night because it was a taboo, they later learned to wear pants underneath their wraps and in groups work together to overcome the fear of transgressing old boundaries and support each other in rebuilding their communities. Women organically came together to share in their losses but also to do the hard work of taking care of the children that had survived. They brought back life to communities that had been decimated.

II. Incorporation of new technologies and novel design spaces, in community engagement towards the post-genocide rebuilding effort

a. Redesigning agaseke

Gahaya links is the producer of *Peace Baskets* now sold at Macy's through Fairwinds Trading. Ms. Janet Nkubana and her sister, Joy Ndunguste started Gahaya links in 2004 to help bring income to rural women in Rwanda including those infected with HIV AIDS. What started as a few women weaving baskets around a tree has become a thriving business that has grown to 4000 weavers across 52 savings cooperatives in Rwanda, producing high end crafts for international markets. Joy and Janet's efforts have given dignity and new trades to women. They run two week training sessions at their headquarters where master weavers teach potential new artisans the art of traditional agaseke weaving while also including training on HIV AIDS awareness, unity and reconciliation, hygiene and nutrition. Visiting Gahaya links during a training session gives a glimpse of the passion and excellence Joy and Janet embody. Job Creation, Unity and Reconciliation and Contribution to National Economic Development

have become the central pillars of their work³. Taking the traditional art form of Agaseke, they have recreated it into artistic pieces and jewellery that are symbols of the healing Rwanda. Gahaya Links has inspired a new generation of designers and artisans in Rwanda that are now exploring how locally produced crafts can become sources of sustainable livelihoods for the most disenfranchised. These initiatives are crucial in a context where young women aged 20-24 have a prevalence rate of contracting HIV-AIDS that is five times the rate among young men of the same age group, where 50% of women deliver at home without any assistance. This is true especially in rural areas where poverty is predominantly a female phenomenon. More than 80% of poor households are living in rural areas and female-headed households are more at risk of being poor. Despite the daunting statistics, when given opportunities, Rural women give high priority to basic services such as health services (including family planning), water, education and social infrastructure when consulted during planning of development initiatives⁴ so any initiative that improves their wellbeing also contributes to societal healing.

b. Redesigning healthcare

Women and girls represent 59 percent of people living with HIV in Rwanda. A “National Accelerated Plan for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV 2010-2014”, was recently launched in parliament in responses with the alarming statistics stated above. The role men and boys can play in reversing the harmful gender norms that enhance vulnerability and human rights violations has been highlighted as key factors to be addressed to decrease rates of HIV infection in women. This accelerated plan follows in the footsteps of China and Liberia, the two first countries to develop such a plan. Rwanda’s plan was developed by the National Aids Control Commission (CNLS). It was launched in Parliament with the support of First Lady Jeanette Kagame, Health Minister, Dr. Richard Sezibera and Dr. Sheila Tlou, the Regional Director for UNAIDS-Eastern and Southern Africa. Local decision makers have also been looking at how to reach the most disenfranchised through redesigned health services. A Universal Health Insurance Coverage (Mutuelles de Santé) now covers 90% of the population and requires a 1000 RWF (US\$2) coverage per family member except for the 10% poorest who are completely taken in charge by the government. This is a crucial measure to bringing health services to the most vulnerable. Rwanda has focussed on building a network of 60,000 healthcare workers to reach the population. These efforts, combined with vaccination and a decrease in home deliveries have been critical to bring progress. The 2005 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) report states that in 2000 one death in six of women of reproductive age was due to maternal causes. Maternal mortality rates were extremely high until 2005 (750 women per 100,000 die in childbirth). They have gone down to 383 in 2009. Under-five mortality has gone from 152 per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 103 in 2008 while under one mortality rate from 86 per 1,000 live births in 2005 to 62 in 2008. Huge challenges still exist in infrastructure, access to health

³ <http://www.gahayalinks.com/about-us/background>

⁴ Myriam Gervais and Claudia Mitchell (2008). The Gender Situation in Rwanda: Challenges and Gaps. Presentation given in Montreal at the McGill “Multidisciplinary Approach to Empowering Girls and Women in Rwanda” workshop.

centers in remote areas and low numbers of highly qualified medical personnel. *“Rwanda has just one doctor per 12,000 people and one nurse per 1,690⁵.”*

c. The role of new technologies in community engagement

Rwanda has put out 4 five years plans spanning 2000-2020 to increase access to Information Communication Technologies (ICT) to all Rwandans. A focus on bringing ICT to all levels of education from primary schools to university and technical institutions are being pursued. Rwanda has committed to acquiring 120,000 computers by 2012 through the one laptop per child program⁶. Infrastructure is being laid out across the country to bridge rural and urban ICT divide⁷. More and more community engagement activities in Rwanda are benefiting from cellphone technology to foster engagement and resilience in daily life and in response to disaster. Telemedicine is being developed in Rwanda to connect hospitals and share vital information that can save lives. Training of nurses using cellphone technologies is accelerating the number of student nurses able to advance in their nursing qualifications. These uses of technology to aid in information sharing are playing a critical role to benefit poor communities’ access to improved healthcare organically in a long-term, sustainable way where limited physical infrastructure is still an important bottleneck. In banking, Uruwigo Opportunity has developed an innovative wireless technology that uses biometrics to securely open new accounts and give out microfinance loans for new clients in the most remote rural areas, giving banking access to vulnerable communities thus helping them secure and grow savings. This is a critical innovation that enhances the rights of poor working women to control their earnings, especially when they are in danger of gender based violence at home.

Technology is also allowing funding for social action to be accessible to anyone globally. The web and social media are helping bring community engagement messages to wider audiences and potential supporters beyond Rwanda’s borders. Last May I attended the first TEDx event held in Rwanda. As the day went by, anyone in the world with an internet connection could watch and listen in on stories about overcoming obstacles from speakers passionately engaged in building resilient communities. One of my brothers who was in Switzerland at the time was one of them. As a member of the Rwandan Association of University Women (RAUW), I am able despite being based in Canada to interact on a daily basis with women in Rwanda and abroad working at peace in their own unique ways. I am constantly amazed by the wealth of information that is shared on this network towards finding a job, a scholarship, an opportunity to march in solidarity with women going through strife elsewhere around the world, an opportunity to access information critical for a new study or the simple joy of sharing in the success of community activities. Every time I open my emails from RAUW, I wonder what exciting news, initiative I will learn about today. Through the research on voices of rural girls and women I have participated in as

⁵ IRIN (2010). RWANDA: Maternal and child health on the right track

<http://plusnews.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=91259>

⁶ <http://laptop.org/en/children/countries/rwanda.shtml>

⁷ Government of Rwanda (2000). An Integrated Socio-Economic and ICT Policy and Strategies for Accelerated Development. United Nations Commission for Africa - National Information and Communications Infrastructure (NICI) Policies. http://www.uneca.org/aisi/nici/country_profiles/rwanda/rwanpap3.htm

a member of the FemStep research team, I have learnt to use participatory visual methodologies to link their voices to forums that engage governing bodies into courageous dialogues about women and girls' roles in rebuilding society after deep collective trauma. This experience has had a regional dimension with the involvement of women researchers from Ethiopia, Tanzania, South African and DRC. This medium allows participants themselves to take photos, make drawings and produce film clips in order to further explore a research topic. Based on the belief that visual media “can help to better explore complex or sensitive topics, photovoice enables the research participants to reflect on their daily lives, to identify problems as they perceive them and to facilitate the formulation of their own solutions to these problems⁸”. A more recent multimedia project I am involved in Ashes to Light aims to produce tools that bring to light the wisdom of elders to support youth in overcoming their history-inflicted painful past. The project explores how dialogue between World War II Holocaust survivors and Rwandan youth on positively rebuilding their own lives after having lived through the unimaginable can be mutually inspiring.

It is estimated that 37,000 informal non-governmental organizations exist in Rwanda while about 319 are formally registered as Non Profit Organisations through Rwanda's Ministry of Local Governance⁹. The worldwide web showcases the work on healing that many of these organisations are doing. One example is the PEACE PLAN. PEACE stands for **P**romote Reconciliation, **E**quip Servant leaders, **A**ssist The Poor, **C**are For The Sick and **E**ducate The Next Generation. The Peace Plan is currently active in all 5 themes in Rwanda.

III. Community and government dialogue on healing

- a. How communities are voicing their needs: Languaging healing into a way of life.

As technology takes a prominent role in community self-expression, language becomes a powerful tool to convey messages of engagement and resilience to government and potential funders. Some of the cooperatives in Rwanda have taken healing as such an important component of who they are it is tied into their name. Haguruka, a local association to defend children and women's right literally means stand up. One of Urgwego Opportunity International's clients Beatrice Uwibambe is a member of a Solidarity Group called “Abanyarukundo” (“Those who have love”). In a place called Save in Southern Rwanda, close to the national university of Rwanda was initiated Duhozanye Association. Duhozanye means “Let's Console Each Other”. The association's founder and President, who lost her husband, three daughters and four sons during the genocide, recalled how the association began: *‘After the genocide, the widows decided to get together. There were 310 of us. At the first gathering it was mostly crying and some talking. We told each other what had happened to us. Little by little we got accustomed to the situation –crying wasn't the solution. We thought about getting lodging and getting houses. A group of four or five would build for one, and then go to another to build a shelter for her. In Rwanda, women are not allowed to go on the roof. That is the man's job. At first we'd go out at night to repair our houses, so*

⁸ Myriam Gervais (2009). The Photovoice Method. <http://femstep.mcgill.ca/photovoice-photovoix.html>

⁹ <http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/ngolawmonitor/rwanda.htm>

*no one would see us. But then someone found out and gave us pants to wear. Then we decided it did not matter if anyone laughed. We went out during the day.*¹⁰ Development and Peace, a Canadian NGO, has funded Duhozanye projects towards rebuilding homes for its members, defending member property rights as well helping the association transform itself into a registered local NGO focused on helping extremely vulnerable women.

One critical element in Rwanda's early recovery I learned from Dr. Vincent Biruta, currently Rwanda's Senate President and former Minister of Health, was the establishment of a central agency that vetted all AID efforts and maintained Rwandan leadership in the establishment of priorities right after the genocide. This mechanism allowed Rwandans to take control very early of the reconstruction process without handing over the vision of the process to funders. This set the tone to build local capacity for decision making related to early humanitarian and later reconstruction efforts. Insisting on local leadership helped bring back dignity and trust in local governing bodies when Post Genocide Rwanda was flooded by International NGOs wanting to help. This critical agency allowed Rwanda to take charge of reconstruction efforts and to ensure citizens would look to local leaders and not foreign NGOs for local leadership. Sadly, this institution was unable to influence the relocation of millions of Rwandans who were in DRC refugee camps controlled by Interahamwe to locations far from the border to minimize Interahamwe's capacity to infiltrate back into Rwanda. This constant threat from Interahamwe's in Goma, on the border of Rwanda translated into the terror campaigns in the late nineties that affected Western Rwanda. The legacy of having refugee camps so close to Rwanda's border was critical in the mayhem that took over Eastern DRC after 1994 and that still haunts Rwanda. What early participation in visioning a new Rwanda did do is promote the 15 000 associations or cooperatives active in the agricultural sector that employs most Rwandans. Women now constitute 40 to 60% of the membership of these associations or cooperatives. Becoming a member of an association and thereby gaining access to agricultural inputs (e.g. access to communal land or marshland as well as microcredit) and social support has been one of the successful strategies developed or used by many rural women to be heard and move forward after the genocide.

After the 1994 genocide, Rwandan leaders knew it would take a lot more to bring on healing and societal wellbeing than AID. From 1998 to 1999, Rwandans engaged in a series of dialogues on transformation, looking at the present, reflecting on past to envision a brighter future. This led Rwanda to the creation of Vision 2020 Umurenge that now includes an Economic Development and Poverty Reduction (EDPRS) strategy. The vision was produced in a participatory process engaging all levels of government and civil society emphasising the meaning of Umurenge: village as in a community development programme. EDPRS was elaborated over 18 months in a consultative manner with strong national leadership and ownership. This process led by a National Steering Committee benefited from a technical committee and 19 Sector Working Groups and Cross-Cutting Issues Groups. Stakeholder involvement included local and central government, International AID donors, CSOs, private sector and

¹⁰ Myriam Gervais and Eliane Ubalijoro (2011). Productive Remembering for social action and change: Girls' and women's rights in post-genocide Rwanda. Back to the Future: Productive Remembering in Changing Time. Transaction Publishers, New Jersey. Publication pending.

citizen participation¹¹. What Vision 2020 intended was to answer the following questions: *“How do Rwandans envisage their future? What kind of society do they want to become? How can they construct a united and inclusive Rwandan identity? What are the transformations needed to emerge from a deeply unsatisfactory social and economic situation?”*¹² What Vision 2020 elaborated was a way to rebuild a country whose social fabric had been shattered beyond the imaginable. What impresses me most is that many of iterations of Vision 2020 are so easily accessible on the internet.

b. Searching for proper balance between community participation and government

The Rwandan government believes that building a prosperous knowledge economy by 2020 will be critical in fostering societal healing and require bottom of the pyramid growth that emphasises environmental protection. Actively engaging community has been a key to restabilising basic wellbeing whether through the Gacaca courts or the monthly umuganda program for social action where all Rwandans give a whole morning from 7 am to noon to a communal activity. Focus on economic growth has been strong and has translated in 6% above growth annual economic growth rates though sustained economic growth is still needed to pull most Rwandans out of poverty. Rwanda is actively exploring how to tap into investment growth strategies that reduce dependency on AID, developing alternative energy strategies, developing high end tourism that focuses on ecosystem preservation for endangered species. Transboundary collaboration by conservation organisations in Rwanda, Uganda and DRC has seen the number of mountain gorillas reach 480 when they were 250, thirty years ago, a critical factor in ensuring long term tourism revenues.

c. Reducing space between communities and government

Women and men in Rwanda have been participating on many levels to change the political system. This has given disenfranchised voices more prominence in community government dialogue. Of the 80 seats in Rwanda’s senate, 27 are assigned to Women and Youth Councils as well as the Federation of the Associations of the Disabled. In the new Constitution, a quota system ensures that women constitute at least a “critical minimum” of 30% in local and national bodies. In the 2008 election, the representation of women reached nearly 56% in the national parliament (compared to a world average of 15%). In 2004, 26% of the posts on the executive council of each province were occupied by women. While these are critical events that took place in Rwanda, they are part of a larger system that has promoted women’s capacity individually and through community to vision and take active roles in peace building in the face of crisis and disaster. One of the most painful legacies of Rwanda’s genocide has been the unravelling of community and the increase of gender based violence (GBV) in communities. Bringing more voices to the table of government discussions has also unleashed a series of laws that are helping the most disenfranchised Rwandans move forward in ways that were not possible before. A Law on inheritance and matrimonial regime (1999) has brought on major changes for women and youth. For

¹¹ John RWANGOMBWA (2007). Achieving the Vision 2020 & the MDGs through Economic Development and Poverty Reduction (EDPRS). Document from Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in Rwanda.

¹² Republic of Rwanda Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (2000). Vision 2020.

http://www.gesci.org/assets/files/Rwanda_Vision_2020.pdf

instance, after the genocide, neither widowed women nor young orphans could inherit their husbands' or fathers' properties. Now they can. A law to penalize acts of violence against women and children (2001) was championed by women parliamentarians and was passed in 2009. National Gender Policy (2004) and National Policy on Violence against women and children (2007) have also been put in place with great support from local police. Recently one stop centers have been deployed all. They house medical personnel, counsellors, and representatives of judicial organs working together as a team to facilitate GBV victims on their journey to healing¹³. Bringing younger voices to leadership is also a critical space that Rwanda is looking at to bridge gap between government and community. The Academy of Leadership in Competitiveness and Prosperity (ALCP) is one example. It has graduated over a hundred young professionals and equipped them *“with the tools to take greater ownership of their country's development strategies, make better decisions, and drive effective execution.”*¹⁴

Conclusion

Responding to disaster with dignity and acting in accordance with the lived experience of others brings on an urgency to our capacity to identify best practices and policy to promote community engagement and healing in post-disaster situations. I am reminded of words from my McGill colleague Professor Nancy Adler: “Do we believe that we have a crucial role to play in shaping society's future? In shaping its success or demise? Do we really believe we make a difference? Do we believe that what we do matters? How would you research and [learn] if you knew that the future of [your] country and the world depended on it? Do we have the courage to see possibility? Do we have the audacity to be hopeful, and the courage to express our hope within our professional domain?” Rwandans have attempted to have the courageous conversations to do so whether through the Gacaca courts inspired from traditional wisdom, through the design and continued implementation of Vision 2020 and through numerous community actions. I have not attempted to mention all the actions that have been taken but to highlight the ones that I have directly or indirectly witnessed.

Within the last 16 years, Rwanda has succeeded in realizing impressive economic growth and development in the aftermath of a genocide that killed close to a million people in a hundred days. Rising from the ashes of such horror has been a complex journey of rebuilding community, relationships with neighbouring countries and foreign alliances. As a nation, the country is making important strides towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). However, there remain many challenges. Rwanda is the most densely populated country in Africa. Land distribution is extremely fragmented and poses a serious threat to food security in a densely populated country. British Ambassador to Rwanda in 2008, Nicholas Cannon recognized this delicate stage when he said "Rwanda could go either way - towards peace and development, or over-population and strife." Healing for Rwanda is still a journey as Rwanda grapples with conflict transformation, forgiveness and reconciliation while rebuilding community. Despite opening of spaces for women to participate, the conflicting demands Rwandan women have with high reproductive workloads, domestic responsibilities and self-esteem issues are still

¹³ Sifa Seraphina Bayingana (2010). Debate on More Women Peacekeepers Is Not the Solution to Military Rape. Rwandan Association of University Women Communication.

¹⁴ <http://www.otfgroup.com/institutional-strengthening/>

heavy especially for the most vulnerable to violence. What this paper has focused on, are the ways Rwandans are engaging in community development first as an act of survival and more and more as a way forward towards healing. *It is in these threads that are being woven into a resilient fabric that will sustain communities, that I find hope*¹⁵.

¹⁵ Kavita Ramdas (2009). Radical women, embracing tradition TED talk
http://www.ted.com/talks/kavita_ramdas_radical_women_embracing_tradition.html