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Transcript of an Audio-Recorded Conversation in Post-Conflict Rwanda

Participants:

- **Anunciata Nyirasamaza** **Relation: Mother**
- **Byiringiro Alexis** **Relation: Son**

Facilitator:

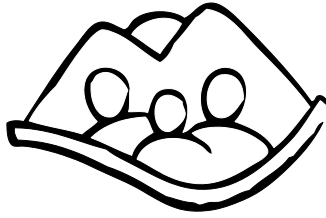
Date: August 2011

Recording Location: Kigali

Story Number: SFH0078

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(Anunciata Nyirasamaza & Byiringiro Alexis)

Story Number: SFH0078

Facilitator: Good afternoon.

Anunciata: Good afternoon

Facilitator: As I told you, my name is Laurette Rudasingwa. I work with this project. To start with, you can begin by introducing yourselves. What are your names and what is your relationship?

Anunciata: I am called Nyirasabimaza Anunciata and this is my son Alexis: And I am called Byiringiro Alexis and that is my mother

Facilitator: Thank you. Alexis I don't know if you have any questions you have prepared to ask your mother or mum, I don't know... do you have any story for your child?

Alexis: I have questions that I want to ask my parent for which I need answers. I would like her to tell me about her life and how she grew up from when she was young to the time when she gave birth to me.

Anunciata: The life I lived... I had both parents who took care of me but I also had my grandmother who I lived with. I lived with her but this did not stop my parents from taking care of me. They did everything possible that parents would do for a child until I lost them in 1994.

Alexis: What is the reason you did not study?

Anunciata: The reason I did study cannot be blamed on my parents. I had my own problems in my mind, I did not listen.

Alexis: Mother, I would like to ask you the reason why I never got to know my father. The war happened without me knowing him and to this day, I don't know him.

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Anunciata: The problem I had that caused you not to know your father was that I and he did not get to stay together. We had to separate because of his family. After we separated, I sat at home and it became necessary for me to remarry. When the war occurred he also died. That is the reason you grew up without knowing him

Alexis: You tell me there was a problem with his family and yet I am told that I resemble him. What was the reason that I did not get to know this family?

Anunciata: I don't know what caused it because I was also young and could not be patient with the way they mistreated me. We were supposed to be married legally but he did it without the family's knowledge. This is what caused problems.

Alexis: I am told that I look like my father – do you see the resemblance? And if I do look like my father who did he look like?

Anunciata: His father – even though I didn't really I can't really say, maybe there are other family members he might have looked like. I only knew his father, mother and their children. I didn't know the rest.

Alexis: However, I look like my father, and yet other people say I look like you, and then others say that I look like my grand father, your father. In your opinion who do I look like the most between my father and my grandfather?

Anunciata: Both because you have their blood but you look like your father the most but as you grow older you look like my father because I looked like him too.

Alexis: Drawing you back a little bit, you mentioned that after you separated from him, you got into a second marriage. Was this because you did not want to raise me alone or because it is what you wanted?

Anunciata: It is not because I did not want to raise you. In fact I went with you (to my new husbands home) but my family refused this and felt that they needed to raise you as their child, in fact even your grandfather had given you a cow.

Alexis: To go to my place of birth, had you been sent by the parents or you went out of your own free will.

Anunciata: There was no other reason except that we fell in love as youth. Everyone knew that we would get married even at home. But it was shocking because we were all one family. My mother was his aunt. I used to often go to their home. We were all not prepared to get married. He decided to go on with it even though his family had refused.

Alexis: We had gone past that. You know that the war happened when I was young and I survived. After the war, you tried to put me back in school. Why is it that up to this day am still in senior one and yet at my age I should be completing secondary school. I don't understand

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the reason for this.

Anunciata: The reason is the poor life we went through after the war. You know that I was unable to put you through school. You attended primary school free of charge because I could not afford to pay for it. In the midst of all that, I expect you to also know the reason for this because you were also in school. You were never interrupted. Even though you had to stop for a year, it was not my fault.

Alexis: Sometimes I sit down and think of how am studying with younger students. You might not understand it but I am the one who is out there with them. Even though there are a few students who are met the same challenges as I did. It hurts me and I feel empty, unhappy and stressed by my life, how I grew up. I ask myself what might have caused all this. Was it because I was not smart enough or was it the poverty in my family? Maybe you can explain.

Anunciata: Poverty was my problem but your family was not impoverished. The problem you had was that your father was not even alive so that we can discuss your challenges. What I would wish for you is some heroism and patience. Be patient with everything you have seen and gone through. Try to live well with your younger siblings without being stressed. With my current means, I can do my best to take care of you but you know the limit of those means. With that, I wish that you could pray and be at peace with God because you know who the father of orphans is and who the husband of widows is. He has to take care of you.

Alexis: Well, you know that even if I pray, God helps those who help themselves. This does not mean that He does not help the helpless but He needs a starting point. Right now my age requires that I dress well and live well so that my future is bright. But when you look at our way of living in poverty, it does not allow this. Do you really think I would have the heart to draw towards God and pray when there is nothing God has never done for me that I can take as a starting point so that He can also take it from there? You can see from the quality of life we have at home. I get home after school and am not happy with the situation. It is depressing to the point where I consider even stopping school – not because of I don't like it and not because it is your fault but it just depresses me. In the midst of all that, you could also lose your life – With this kind of situation, what hope or advice would you give to me as guide – so that I can also develop that spirit and achieve something for myself.

Anunciata: You need to build that spirit so that you stay in school because you don't know how God works but God knows how he works. God always makes a way. Even being here to this day is not of our making. You know that I fell sick and was hospitalized on many occasions but God protected you and took care of you. I came back and found you well. All I can tell you is be patient, forget the past and face the future. In your studies a person of goodwill can help to support you. God will dress you up using other people. I am also hopeful of the future because am learning how to weave baskets and once I have mastered it, we shall be blessed. These baskets are marketable. We got an overseas market and they will be sold and we shall develop. I survived with you when you were 6 years old. You are now 20 years old. Where you came from is the hardest part where you are going is up to you. Look to your future and study that I

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the legacy I leave you. Gain knowledge so that when I am no longer alive you will have a way to survive and live. You will also be able to support other families. Be patient and strengthen your other relatives. Live well with them and be hopeful. Tell them that even though we have only a mother, be strong because we have a father in heaven who watches over us night and day and takes care of our needs. Now, aren't you dressed up? Has your father ever bought you clothes? Have I ever bought you clothes? All I can tell you is that God knows you and before I gave birth to you, He knew you -- because I went through a really horrid life. Don't you know that you were alone, did you think it would end or that you would see me? You know who you were left with; your grandmother was killed right before your eyes. You were patient and you survived, those who were with you were taken by death. You know the difficulties I went through. In Gatenga, things were hard, people were on the roads with machetes, guns and knives but I went through them. All the ones I was with were killed but I survived. I was not educated and nothing saved me but only God. The fact that I pray and you pray will come together will unite us and if one of us is sad they will be strengthened. You are not the only one who is sad, my mother and father were not ageing, and they were young. Our families all perished, you remember that I took you to see yours. All the wealth they had was left behind but the wealth in heaven is all that we pray for. You may live a difficult life but eventually God will change your fortunes and you will be able to live well. You will even forget what you went through.

Facilitator: Mother, without interrupting you. You told us the life you went through as a girl and you told us what you went through from the war to this day. I would like you to tell me now in that adversity you went through and are still going through, what strengths aside from prayer did you, as Anunciata, use to overcome all those challenges and rebuild your life?

Anunciata: The strength I have in these difficult times is avoiding things that hurt me and reminders of my past. I try to live well with all people peacefully.

Facilitator: When you tell me that you avoid things that hurt you, I understand but when search yourself, what qualities do you possess that strengthen you? Aside from prayer what is it in your personality that keeps you moving forward and raising your children? What do you do to keep on – you can share this with Alexis so that he can also be able to go by that and achieve something for himself.

Anunciata: The strength is seeking others and harnessing all your abilities, be it with your hands or understanding the abilities of others don't close yourself out and try to be independent. That the my source of strength.

Facilitator: Alexis do you have any other question for your mother that will be helpful or build you in the times to come?

Alexis: The question I have for her is just one. She has just reminded me of the value of getting and education and she reminded me of where I came from and I realize that the past was much harder than the present because, since the war ended, I was indeed a child but getting here was not my strength or hers but because of God and her help. My question for her, after

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hearing the importance of education – my question for her is that, within her abilities, does she accept to help me with all the problems I will face, both unforeseen and foreseen?

Anunciata: I accept this.

Alexis: As you can see now, I am approaching my puberty (reproductive age), as a parent you know how this age can be difficult. I don't wish for it or plan for it (having a child), but in the event that it occurs would you accept it or what advice and example can you give me in the event of this?

Anunciata: The advice I have for you is to try as much as possible to avoid anything that will cause you difficulties. If you have a child and not take care of them, this is difficult because she will face the same problem you faced – always asking for their father. It is therefore not a good cycle of repetition. What I would advise you is to pray to God to help you through this because everything you ask him for he will do.

Facilitator: Alexis, following your conversation with your mother, the advice she has given you, are you satisfied with the answers she has given you?

Alexis: Yes, I am satisfied and I am very happy because, there is a saying that goes “He who does not speak to their father does not learn what their grandfather said.” It may not be my father but or my grandmother's words but I am very satisfied and thank her very much.

Facilitator: What lesson have you drawn that will help you in your life?

Alexis: The lesson I have obtained – well she has shown me her strength and bravery that will help her to develop in the future. Her lesson to me is that I have to free myself (from my past) and live well with others. I should not be depressed despite my problems. I also need to use all the knowledge and arms that God gave me and in my life I should also help others in every way I can.

Facilitator: Thank you Anunciata. I don't know if there is anything advice or lessons you have to give to the youth who will listen to you or what advice do you have for other parents?

Anunciata: The advice I have for other parents is patience. After one has been widowed, they should not have more children without the ability to take care of them. The lesson for my child is to patience and humility to think and advise others his age and his younger siblings when they don't behave well.

Facilitator: Of what benefit has this conversation with your son been?

Anunciata: It has been really beneficial to me because I got to know what he thinks and what hurts him that he does not share.

Facilitator: Thank you. Unless anyone has another question, I feel that we are done here.

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Alexis: I am satisfied and I am very pleased that all my questions have been answered.

