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

Participants:

- Uwamariya Victoire
- Kabuto Noah

Relation: Neighbor

Relation: Neighbor

Facilitator:

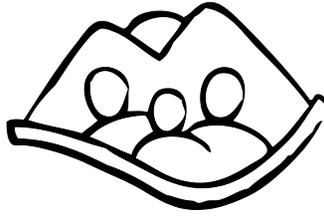
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Uwamariya Victoire & Kabuto Noah

SFH0118

My names are Kabuto Noah, I have come with my relative so that we may have a conversation according to what I see and the days we passed through of genocide which took place in Rwanda in 1994.

Thank you, my name is Uwamariya Victoire, I am Noah's neighbor and he wished to bring me so that we may have a conversation.

Noah: The Genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994 left a lot of problems in Rwandese, but most especially in youth. So I asked myself a lot of questions on the trauma which I see in youth, which is seen through what they say, what they do and what happens to them. It is one of those problems that I want to start with. In this country, most especially at school or in normal life, there are some children who have trauma. I ask myself why? Those children were not there, I think one gets trauma according to what he/she passed through or what he/she sees. These children were not there in 1994 when genocide was taking place, what is the cause?

Victoire: Yeah its true, trauma, normally. You have asked me a good question, we usually see young children who are traumatized and have hard feelings because of genocide, most especially when we are in days of remembering, the other first week of mourning. Generally, trauma can start during the creation of a person; a person is created the first day he is conceived, he/she can have trauma when he is still in the womb because of what happened to his mother and it affects him. Again what happens to those children like you, who is 20 years old, genocide took place when you were 4 years almost 5, you normally hear children who saw it at a young age and again there are some conversations made by adults. There are some who saw it at a young age, some hear adult conversations and others see war conversations through the television. When a child hears all that and sees on television or in a film a person killing another when he/she didn't see it himself, he cannot know the reason. He/she cannot understand why a person kills each other, all that stirs up and goes beyond his/her capacity of holding them, then he gets heart feelings, he becomes traumatized. I think that is the reason

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that causes it most, that's what causes it to young children—TV programs, adult conversations, books. There are many books, some stories told to the children on what happened to their families, to their brother, to their aunts, to their grandparents. He can be told "your grandmother was killed in this way; that is where we were living; those houses were broken down," and when he combines all those with what he sees in films and what he reads, he fails to understand them. He fails to have that capacity of holding them. When he sees people laughing, loving each other, he might think that "this neighbor of mine might disappoint me and kill me." That is the most reason why children get traumatized in school.

Noah : Another concern I always have...

Victoire: But have you understood? Otherwise let me first explain it better to you so that you may be able to help other children with the same problems.

Noah: I think the explanations you have given me are enough, I can't add more. When I see in Rwanda where we live, there are some families which are poor, you find children cannot go to school because of failing to get school fees. I think it is caused by genocide period that we passed through. Was it like that before? I normally ask myself if it was like that before.

Victoire: Thank you. Poverty was there before, and families with problems were there too, but it increased after war. But let me talk about before, even before there were poor families but because they were still united without hatred, people could help each other. I remember when a child could pass in school while his family is not capable, families could come together and get him school fees; or when there was a party, people could contribute. Poverty was there, but people knew how to handle it—in families, in neighbors, in sectors. But when the war started, people started fearing each other and every one handled his problems, and again people were killed, and you could find in the area people who used to share problems were killed and sharing problems was not easy. You could find people are left alone with no family, and have no one to share problems. I think that's the difference of before war poverty and the current poverty. Presently, people fear each other and you find very little people in the village and you find people are not encouraged to support each other. Only that there are some programs that are teaching people about Unity and Reconciliation, that's why you see people have started to know that it is important to support each other, from what they were taught. To support each other, to love one another, to see your fellow person as a person, not see him as a different tribe or from different area of origin, to see him as a person and help him. I think people have started to build themselves to reduce poverty. Poverty cannot be over in Rwandese families, but it is reducing according to how people live together and what they see.

Facilitator: Thank you mother. As the child asked about the question, he started with trauma and he sees it after war and the genocide of 1994 and asked a good question about poverty. Is it possible that poverty also can be reason of trauma? Can it have some connection with war and destroying a Rwandese family? I want you to give him more explanations so that if he sees children with trauma and see its signs, he may know how to connect them and its causes.

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Victoire: Yeah, it's true. About the trauma of children and adults, poverty also is a great impact. Sometimes one could remember about his wealth before war, but, due to the war, presently has nothing. And you find a child thinks of how they were capable before war, and presently goes to school without food; sometimes fails to get school fees, goes to school with torn clothes and finds it as a source that provokes heart feelings that causes trauma. It is not only children, but even adults who were well off and finds themselves begging, it's not easy for them to take it—how his wealth was gone, how his people who could support him were killed (because for us in Rwandan culture when you have relatives, or when you have people, you are rich). Before there were people who could support each other but recently, one has nobody to tell his/her problems, which can also cause trauma. Again some people are taken by grief and you find they have no morale of working; you find them saying, "I even had wealth before, so it's all the same," and you find a person held by that. You find a person is taken with grief and sorrow and thinks that, "even what I had was gone, so let me sit," which also causes trauma.

Noah: If I base myself on the explanations you have given me: with my little capacity as a student, is there anything I can do to assist my fellow child if I see him with trauma, what can I do?

Victoire: Thank you. There are many things you can do, if a person has a problem of trauma... if you come to know it, because knowing it is another step. There are some people who live with trauma and they hide it. But you find him alone, quiet. There you try to be close to him, converse with him, care for him and make him your friend so that he sees that he is not alone. There is another one who always cries, that one you can say, "this one I cannot manage," because there are some people who were educated, experts on trauma. If you see him like that and he accepts you, take him to the trauma counselors. There are many things you can help him with. If it is a problem of poverty—for example, when he has no book, or his uniform is old—when you are capable, we bring back our culture of supporting each other, caring for each other and do some advocacy if you are capable. To have eyes of seeing the one who is in sorrow or grief, to have eyes of seeing someone you can help. Maintain the preservation of our dignity by supporting and helping each other. Not to [just] watch over things, to have a helping heart. To have a heart of listening to him, that is a great job; to listen to him, and have a heart of seeing one who is in sorrow and ask yourself what you can do. The first answer I can give you is to first understand it, others. Then, follow slowly by slowly, if you see it is beyond your capacity, you take it to experts or make some advocacy either to the school management or to your fellow classmates, if you can contribute and buy him a book. There are many things you can do slowly by slowly; the first thing is to understand it yourself.

Noah: When I see the life I grew in, I didn't have someone who could advise me or help me in my education, at least someone to tell what I need, but again when I see other children at school who have parents that give them everything they need, you find their manners are not good. I ask myself if it is because they have parents, I don't understand its reason. I want you explain to me in short its reason.

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Victoire: In your first question, you said you had no one to care for you since you were a child. I also ask you, did you feel you have love to anyone? Did you feel you could go and live with someone?

Noah: Yes, I had it. When you are child, you have many things to ask, but there are some neighbors you are not free with, and cannot ask the questions you have, so you feel fear and not free to ask or to come close to him. It also happened to me.

Victoire: But you tried to come close to him, but failed to talk to him.

Noah: Yes, I could feel I had an aim of asking him but I could have fear inside me.

Victoire: What do you think could cause that fear?

Noah: It depends on how you live with each other; you see there is a way of respecting the elders and you cannot ask him everything you want to. It is good when you live with a person, knowing his character and asking him your question freely and feel that you are close and the answer he will give you will be satisfactory.

Victoire: In short, even that habit of fear depends on how a person grew up. It is all about the impact of what you passed through, you passed in a hard life, while you were still young; you grew up knowing that nobody listens to you, maybe because of where you were born or because of your historical background, then you grew up knowing that nobody listens to you. But when you try to be open, you just try to be close to him and talk to him, that's what used to show our ancient parents and children. Before, parents could punish children and children could know that so and so is a parent and he can assist me but that depended on how they grew up, but currently children grow up fearing people because of what happened and the history that one passes through. Maybe one grew knowing that nobody listens to him or maybe grew up an orphan and could solve problems by himself, maybe could have talked to someone who didn't care. You could have met some hindrance and thought everyone was like that. But try to talk to someone, although he cannot help you but he can listen to you, you converse and tell him what is inside you, and then he can advise you. Even keeping a lot of things inside your heart can cause trauma, but if you talk about them, it can help you.

Facilitator: One of the things that helps people with trauma is to share their stories with others and what a person has inside him gets out of him. I wish you advise the child on which person he can be open to and tell him his problems. As he asked in the question. In Kinyarwanda, they say "you see a big bird from where you keep. He was interested in what he sees comparing himself with other children of his age and share experiences, as he says, he grew up without any one to tell his problems. You can help and advise him on which type of person he can be open and talk to that can help him in his sorrow and his daily life.

Victoire: Before we reach the answer, I want to ask you, are there any parents from where you live who talk to children who have the same problems like yours and converse about their

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problems? Or are there any children who have the same problems like yours from where you live?

Noah: Yes, they are there. Even at school, there are some clubs which help children with trauma and can advise them in normal life.

Victoire: Like those children who go to people for advice, on what do you think they based [their decision] to choose them?

Noah: To me, apart from clubs at school, I think a child to select someone to talk to, is because maybe he grew up knowing him, or maybe if he used to visit his family and could feel free with him. That's what I think is the way one can choose someone to advise him or help him in his problem.

Victoire: What about you? What type of a person do you think you can talk to or which qualities should that person have?

Noah: To me a person who can help me in my problems...

Victoire: The one you can talk to, be open to him and if necessary you cry? And who can help or orient or see together how you can solve the problem?

Noah: Generally, people are different. There is a way you see a person and feel you can tell him your problem but the most hindering fact is to think that "if I tell him my problem, he will tell it to others," that is also a problem. Mostly, a person I can choose to tell my problem is the person who cannot tell my problems to others. It is hard to know someone's brain, but you can choose him according to how you see him and what he does. I think one can choose him in that way.

Victoire: Are there some people of that nature you see?

Noah: Yes, I see them.

Victoire: Do you think you can manage to go to them and tell them? What stops you from talking to them while you need someone to talk to?

Noah: Maybe you will advise me on how I can approach a person to advise me and be open to him and tell him all my problems because that is the problem which I usually face? The one I can ask the questions which I have?

Victoire: It is good that you can choose that person and the problem remaining is how to approach him, and start talking to him. It is good to be brave. There is a word they usually say that the first bad thing is fear, the first disabled is fear. If you see that he is a person who can help you go to him and talk to him without fear, there is no reason of having fear when you see that he is a trusted person. But if you have a thought on that person, all the other thoughts you were talking about, there is no need of telling all your problems and grief. So go to that

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person, talk to him, join all those clubs at school, join discussions and don't fear. The first thing which pleased me is that you yourself feels to tell what is inside you. Very many people keep their problems with them and say, "there is no need of telling them no problem, I can keep quiet with them." But if you have problems of trauma, and keep them with you, you may not cry or act as we usually see, but it can create other problems, like chronic headache or stomachache, you should also know that. [If] you find you are always sick and at the hospital they don't get the disease, it means it is the other problems trying their way out; you refuse to look for someone to talk to and get them out; if you need to cry, you cry, but if you keep them they will look for their way out. That is how it goes. When they are full, that's when you see a person is developing rash, suffering from headache, stomach ache, arm pains, leg pains, and problems trying to get their way out. Try to get someone to tell, get them out to help you. That one you choose and you have him, isn't it [true]?

Noah: Yes.

Victoire: Don't fear him, go to him and I know very well he will help you.

Noah: Thank you for the explanations. There is one you mentioned of suffering from headaches, it used to happen to me due to a lot of problems and I could not help myself or solve them by myself, so I could keep quiet with them. Thank you for the explanations and I promise you I will get someone to talk to. Again, as I have got this chance of telling what was inside me, there is something else I can ask you: I have an aim of studying and complete my studies but, because of the life that I passed through, am sometimes unable to get school fees; it draws me back and sometimes feel I will not achieve my aim. So you can advise me on what I can do. I even have faith and say that God will help me to achieve it, but when I see how the life is, I feel weakened. So, I want you straighten my mind to know that I will achieve my programs without any problem.

Victoire: Noah, if you recall on your life during the war, the war started when you were four years almost five and before the war. I want we recall on your life since then up to today. Tell me, how is it since then? Is it changing to the worst? I want you to tell me.

Noah: Ok. When I see my life since I was five years and how I continue with studies, there is something changing.

Victoire: Good or bad?

Noah: Good up to today.

Victoire: Won't it mean anything to you?

Noah: What it means to me is to have hope and reach on something as a person.

Victoire: What I can tell you also is to struggle for living, let not what happened to you draw you back. Although we have to remember them, they should give us strength to move ahead,

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they should not pull us back. Let our history teach us and push us to see the future is good. It could be a problem if it was going bad, but if it is good, it gives you hope to live as you mentioned. As you said, you should believe in God who got you from the other situation up to today. There is a saying, which says that; "even the other night became morning", even another night will become morning. You have hope, look forward, work and have hope for the future.

Facilitator: The child asked a good question, where he asked the way you can advise him how he can have hope of living and not to draw back. But he has a lot of things, there is a family which he lives in, the school, the church where he prays from and the neighboring youth and the neighbors. About the weakening and drawing back, how can you advise him about his studies and living with others? Isn't it [a question], Noah?

Noah: It is good if she advises me.

Victoire: As the facilitator has told us: there is a family you live in, there is school. So, I will start with the school because it's where you spend a lot of time. If we put aside studies and we talk about normal life, there are discussions, clubs at school, there are Anti-AIDS Clubs, Therapy Clubs...

Noah: Yes they are there.

Uwamariya Victoire: they sensitize about HIV/AIDS, the clubs of Unity and Reconciliation. That is where a person studies about life. You can't tell me you need good life when you don't protect yourself against HIV/AIDS, that's not possible. You are still young you should know about HIV and other things that may destroy your life. You cannot tell me that you need good life when you go in drugs because of the problems you have, or smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, that cannot take you anywhere. Even at your school, you have clubs which sensitize about them and how one should abide by example someone in sesiotorapy, the way you should reconcile and live well in the problem and solve it well. That is about school but it is what comes back into families. We normally see children from where we live who go in prostitution, in alcohol; you should put an account on that, and say, "my life is my life, I want to reach somewhere," you should not only say it but you should have the base. If you go in drugs today, what will help yourself tomorrow? Nothing? That is in normal life, but in school, even though school fees are got hardly, try to study and have vision in life. Don't work saying "it will not last," not having vision. Have vision and say "I want to be a hero in this and this." Have vision, drop certain things and maintain others. Isn't [it true] Noah?

Noah: Yes.

Victoire: Yeah, your life is your life. It is you to guide it. Nobody will come to tell you, "Noah go this way;" no it's you who will orient your own life. If you want to become a man and help your family which got problems, you should have vision. There is another thing you mentioned—that you had no one to talk to while you have relatives. It means there are some conflicts...

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Noah: Yes

Victoire: That should not take you back; you should fight for good things because you will be rewarded. Never think that, "because someone didn't listen to me, I should revenge." Never think about it in your heart because you will not achieve anything. In any way, never think about revenge, even in history, whoever wants revenge is never blessed. What you need to do is to fight for the future and do good to the one who did bad to you and show him that you didn't give it a credit. You should always say, "when will I reach my target?" That's what shows a real man.

Noah: Thank you for the explanations you have given me. It is good to have someone to talk to when you have problems. There is another question I have. I hear some stories that people rape young children. I sometimes think it is because of the problems we passed through, sometimes they lie to them with small things, showing them that they have a lot of money, and finally, they rape them. What causes it? Was it there before war? To me, what I think, people were well-off before war and children were given all the necessities by their parents. Was rape there before war? Especially those people who rape children are married, what is the cause? I want you explain it to me because it worries me also.

Victoire: Thank you Noah for that question, have you ever seen them or you just hear about it?

Noah: Most especially, I hear about it. I hear some people are arrested because of rape, I hear people raping young children, but I have never seen a person raping.

Victoire: Thank you. We cannot say that it wasn't there before war, it was there, adults were raping young children. But let us base ourselves after war because that's when the number increased—women raping boys and men raping girls, but the big number is men raping girls. In Rwanda, there were many orphans who had nothing. So men would use them because he could tell her, "in exchange of school fees or any other thing, you should do it in return." They could not give value to the child. Sometimes, they rape kids, which is also an impact of genocide. Due to many things that happened to people, you find, psychologically, the brain is not fit, and [he] finds the solutions of his problems in that act, not caring about the outcome. But it increased due to [the] many orphans that were in the country; people would use them. That is a strong impact of genocide—the law deals with them, but very few are known because Rwandese culture is still keeping quiet as not to make both families enemies. They keep them quiet. For example, the child might be raped by her uncle. Will the sister report her brother? No, but the government is going to make sensitization[help us] to be able to speak up, because speaking up is healing the community. Also, children should have discussions to know their rights.

Noah: Thank you for the explanations you have given me. I had a lot of worries, but you have given me explanations. I have got an aim also for my target to be a person who will help others. I thank you for your explanations you have given me. You had given me an advise of getting someone who I will be talking to, I promise you, I am going to do it. Thank you.

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Victoire: There is another question you asked me, which I didn't answer you, about the children at school who have parents are the bad mannered children. Is it because they are rich?

Noah: I am not getting it well, but I asked for it.

Victoire: Yes, I wanted to explain it to you. At your school, children who have parents or who have capacity of getting things; explain it to me.

Facilitator: He asked that, accordingly, children without parents could behave badly because they do not get requirements easily, but instead, children who have parents and who have the capacity of getting things are the ones with bad manners. He asked why should those children behave in that way while they don't miss anything?

Victoire: I don't think it's children who have parents only, I think there is one reason that causes it. The problem which causes that is that although the child has parents, they are not with him, especially these days; parents leave their children and go to work and some go to school. Before, a neighbor was a parent and would punish a child whenever he does a mistake, but children of today do not accept [a neighbor's punishment], people do things by themselves. Due to the child growing alone without parents, a child grows doing what he wants and goes where he wants. Sometimes they hide things from their parents; it is the same as the orphan who see things without an advisor. So, you find a child cannot balance the society, what he sees, his friends and what he does. Then you find a child cannot select by himself what to do, you find him in drugs, prostitution, because he missed the charity of the family. You find that is the main problem. Thank you. Noah, thank you very much, it also assisted me, the discussion we had reminded me of a lot of things. I am happy we discussed openly. I was really happy, and I have learnt some things. Although you learnt, I also learnt. I've really learnt a lot. May God bless you!

Facilitator: Thank you Noah and Victoire, to meet and converse. I think it is not the last time, but a beginning of conversation, asking questions and asking for advises, and they will be helping you as parents. Thank you.

