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

Participants:

- Kajuga Augustin
- Nkurikiyimana Ignace

Relation: Father

Relation: Son

Facilitator: Kalisa Benon

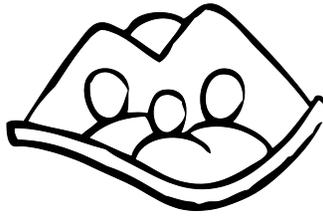
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Story Number: SFH30045

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Kajuga Augustin & Nkurikiyimana Ignace

Story Number: SFH30045

Augustin: My name is Kajuga Augustin, I was born in 1939 and I am 70 years old. Both my father and mother were farmers, they used to cultivate and keep cows. Our parents used to teach us how to obey parents and live in good terms with our fellow children by playing with them. Any person who would see a child not behaving well would cane him or her. Our parents also taught us the culture of loving each other. There came a time when I grew up and went to school, and I would interact with other children and play with them. They had taught us the traditional Rwandan culture. After becoming an adult I got married and gave my children education similar to the education given from my father. Briefly this is what I can say.

Facilitator: You have tried to tell us concisely but I think that you have more time, you have between 20 or 25 minutes. Could you please tell us how you went to school because as we know Rwanda had few schools in 1939.

Augustin: I was born in 1939.

Facilitator: You were born in at that time and we know that schools in Rwanda were very few, how did you manage to study?

Augustin: Long ago, schools were located far from our homes, they were located in remote areas. My father used to tell me that in his childhood, they used to hide and refuse to go to school because schooling was done only by people who were poor. For us, we went to a school that was located very far away and it was not easily accessed. I used to walk 11 kilometers, and one would go with a provision.

Facilitator: You mean you used to walk.

Augustin: I used to walk 11 kilometers. I used to start walking at 6 a.m. and I would go back at 6 P.M. One would go with a provision because if you had no provision, you would not be allowed to enter the classroom. They would send you back home.

A conversation between Kajuga Augustin and Nkurikiyimana Ignace

Facilitator: Please what do you mean by provision?

Augustin: The provision was a packed lunch to be eaten at school. At that time it was not easy to go to school. Contrary to children from needy families, children from rich families would go to school.

Ignace: We learn from history that people at that time lived on farming. I would like to know if you used to pay school fees. Was there money like today?

Augustin: At the start of our schooling, studying was free of charge and even notebooks and pens were given by them. There were also chalkboards that would help us write notes. But it was up to us to buy clothes. In secondary school one had to pay school fees. The government would pay some subsidies for us, this is to say that we used to pay a little amount of money and they would give us school uniforms, medication, and other needs. This is what makes the difference between the education system of long ago and the current education system

Ignace: Did you used to put on clothes or you were naked? I think that at that time there were no clothes

Augustin: At that time after the Second World War, I used to wear a cloth that cost 5 Rwandan francs. One would start wearing school clothes, but in the countryside one would even attain 5, 7, or even 8 years old being naked without clothes.

Ignace: You mean that both girls and boys used to be naked?

Augustin: Yes. At that time girl children used to put on skins [animal skin] whereas children from rich families used to put on clothes called Indengera. Indengera are clothes of long ago. Girls used to have only long top hair that was called amasunzu.

Ignace: You have just said that children did not used to put on those skins at the age of 6. I would like to know the age at which one would start putting on those skins.

Augustin: Girls would start putting on those skins at the age of 6 or 7. I put on the first cloth when I was 8 years old.

Ignace: You mean that a poor person could not put on clothes at that time.

Augustin: Poor people would attain the age of around 10 or 12 without putting on clothes.

A conversation between Kajuga Augustin and Nkurikiyimana Ignace

Ignace: Could you please tell me about marriage affairs? Currently we know that if you want to get married you can approach a girl and court her in order to get married to her. Was it like that at your time? How was the situation?

Augustin: One who wanted to get married would approach his mother and tell her that he wants to get married. He would approach his mother in order for his mother to address that request (to do advocacy for him) to the father. Children used to fear their parents. A boy would approach his mother because the more your mother feeds you, the more you get familiar with her. Your mother would address your request to your father and then your father would come and say: "My child, I was told that you want to get married, so I have to help you get a bride. I will court for you."

Ignace: Was it up to the father to court for his son?

Augustin: Your father would go and court for you. He would go to the family of somebody in order to get a bride. Long ago they would say: "This is a family friend where I can get a bride." They would go to court in a home where there are hygienic, hardworking girls. One would pass by a clean home and say: "This home has good girls, so I can go and find a good bride there."

Ignace: How about the girl?

Augustin: A girl was taken away like that, and even the boy could not see that girl. At that time of our great-grandfathers and grandmothers, one would get married to somebody he or she doesn't know. It was up to the families to establish a marriage between a boy and a girl. A boy and a girl would get married and they would spend about three months in a home without knowing each other's face, they would only meet at night in the darkness. After that time they would take the girl outside the house and would present her to you. You could for example find out that she was a one-eyed girl and then sometimes conflicts would rise because of that. This is how they used to split up.

Ignace: Ahh! I am amazed. I can see that there is a great difference between today and before.

Augustin: In our times we could meet and talk and agree to get married, but before it was not like that. Even I wonder how people used to have stable homes because one would get married to somebody he or she doesn't know. It was culture, but as time went on that culture disappeared.

Ignace: Yes.

Facilitator: You've done something great because you are telling us about the culture of long ago. Would you like to tell us some positive elements of that culture that can help us currently?

A conversation between Kajuga Augustin and Nkurikiyimana Ignace

Augustin: At that time a bride and a groom would get married without knowing each other but they had stable homes because their parents would advise them to live together in good terms, saying: "You should live in good terms because even we build our homes like that. You should obey your parents and your partner's parents." At that time it was a custom that had to be followed, but today this is a custom of long ago that is portrayed negatively because it was not good for example to get married to someone you don't know. This is where the difference is. There are both positive and negative elements in the culture of long ago.

Ignace: As we learn from history, people of long ago used to get married to many women. Even when one wanted to get married to the second wife, was it up to his parents to get him a bride?

Augustin: It was up to a man to get a second bride for himself because at that time he had many friends who could give him brides. At that time, people were very few. For example, Rwanda had a population of one and a half million when I was still young.

Facilitator: In which year?

Augustin: In 1948.

Facilitator: You think that in 1948 there was a population of one and a half million?

Augustin: Yes. My brother did not go to school, they only got some teachings from the Roman Catholic Church. I am the only person who managed to go to school in my family. My sisters knew only how to read and write, they did not go to school.

Ignace: According to what you have said, after getting married a man had the right to get married to a second wife. Was it allowed to meet a girl and talk with her before getting married?

Augustin: It was a taboo. You couldn't approach a girl and say "I want to get married to you." It was up to your parents to get you a bride.

Ignace: I notice that there is a difference between today and before.

Augustin: Yes, it's there.

Ignace: Before, people used to be naked and they couldn't commit fornication, so I think they were more well-behaved than today.

Augustin: It was their culture at that time and they were satisfied with it, but it has been changing with time.

A conversation between Kajuga Augustin and Nkurikiyimana Ignace

Ignace: I would like to know if all children were well-behaved. Couldn't they meet and play sex?

Augustin: It used to happen in rich families. Some girls and boys would meet and have sex and sometimes a girl would become pregnant. A girl who became pregnant would be thrown in the water and that was the end of her life here under the sun. They would take her for example and throw her in Lake Kivu because it was a taboo for a girl to become pregnant without getting married. It was against culture to give birth to a bastard. This was done in rich families, but in poor families they used to hide that. Among rich families a girl could not be allowed to give birth to a child before she gets married.

Ignace: This means that in Rwandan culture, no person was allowed to give birth to a bastard.

Augustin: Fornication was not allowed, it was against culture.

Ignace: It is noticeable that fornication is pervasive, so I would like to know its root cause. What is the root cause of fornication? Is it because culture is no longer respected?

Augustin: Contrary to the Rwandan of long ago, there is fellowship today. People like to socialize, hence they succumb to temptations. Long ago boys and girls were not allowed to socialize. They only used to meet when they were still young as they were looking after calves. When a girl became adolescent after growing breasts she was not allowed to socialize with girls.

Ignace: Why was it easier for a child to socialize with his or her mother than to socialize with his or her father?

Augustin: A boy would start socializing with his father after becoming an adult. That is when his father would start giving him some pieces of advice. A father would teach him how to play football, how to shoot arrows, and the traditional dance known as Intore. A girl was given education by her mother; the mother would tell her how to deal with her menstruation period and she would tell her how to behave after getting married. A girl was supposed to be educated by her mother from her childhood up to the time of getting married. A boy was given education by his father or his elder brothers or his fellow boys who were the same age.

Facilitator: I have a question. Ignace, is this your first time to hear this story from this old man?

A conversation between Kajuga Augustin and Nkurikiyimana Ignace

Ignace: It is my first time to hear this story because normally you can't easily approach a parent and ask him or her such things. We only learn this from outside.

Facilitator: Are you pleased with this?

Ignace: I am very pleased with this story, I wish it could be a continuous process.

Facilitator: What is the importance of this story in your future life?

Ignace: I will endeavor to tell my children about the past, I mean my personal life history and my family stories. I will do this in order to help them not face the problems that are similar to the problems I faced. I will be telling them the rules they should follow in order to have a happy life. I will tell them about people who were heroes and people who were dishonest. I will be showing them that the future is gradually becoming opposed to the past.

Facilitator: Okay, I would like to ask him a question about political regimes. Why doesn't Rwanda have kingdom as it used to? What is the difference between a kingdom and the current political regime? How was a king appointed? People used to say that a king could be born with a seed of power in his hand and then after he would be appointed a king. Was that true?

Augustin: The first Rwandan king was called Gihanga. He founded Rwanda. A king who died would have a successor from his family, and the successor was chosen by a group of people who were thought to be wise in the society. There were midwives who were in charge of helping a king's wife give birth. Among king's wives there was one wife who was highly favored by the king because of the special love he had towards her. As they were helping a highly favored king's wife give birth, they would open the hand of a child and put a seed there. After doing that they used say that there is a baby who is born with a seed of power. That was kept as a secret among the wise people who were in charge of palace affairs, who were called Abiru. In the kingdom, a king was supposed to obey his mother; this is why a king and his mother were ruling together. A king had also advisers and he had absolute power, so no one could stand against the king's decision. A king used to kill people because there were some people who would betray others, they would go and tell the king that there is a wicked person and then the king would allow people to kill that person. This is why there is a wise saying that goes: "umwami ntiyica, hica rubanda," which means in its direct translation: "a king does not kill, but instead a person is killed by local people." If a person was accused of being wicked they would kill him because they would say that if we don't kill this person he will betray our country. In some cases people used to tell lies in order to have the person killed.

Ignace: Was a person able to seize courts?

A conversation between Kajuga Augustin and Nkurikiyimana Ignace

Augustin: There were no courts; the lives of people were in the hands of the king.

Ignace: You mean he was the one who was the ruler of all affairs.

Augustin: Yes, he had absolute power; he was even the one who was an army chief because a king had an army. For example there was a king who was called Rwabugira who had different groups of army, namely Ingangurirarugo, Ibisumbanyi and Inkotanyi. A king had an army. A king used to attack other countries by using his army. There were specific words that were used while referring to a king. For example, when a king died they could say "Yatanze" which in its direct translation means: "He has given his power to another person." As you know, when a person is old he becomes unable to carry out his activities as before, so when wise people wanted the king to die because of his old age, they would tell him to drink milk containing poison, which means he should commit suicide. Or he would go to the battle so that he dies there in order to pass on the power to another person.

Facilitator: I have some true simple questions to ask you. Why have you chosen to tell Ignace this story? What will he gain from this?

Augustin: I have a book of history because I studied history. One day I told him things concerning history and he said: "I wish you could tell me this all the time because I have no other person to tell me this."

Facilitator: Briefly, you want to make him like history.

Augustin: Yes, because I like history.

Facilitator: Please what kind of name can you give to this story? This is a nice story, so I would like to know the name you can give to this story.

Augustin: I can call it: "Umuco mboneragihugu nyarwanda" which means in its direct translation: "Good Rwandan culture."

Facilitator: Which proverb is related to this story? As you know, Rwandese like to use proverbs in their daily life. This proverb will help Ignace remember what you have told him. So which proverb can you give us? I mean a proverb related to this story.

Augustin: I can say: "U Rwanda ruratera ntiruterwa kandi ntawe uruhiga ubutwari." This means in its direct translation: "Rwanda can attack other countries but it cannot be attacked and no country can defeat Rwanda."

Facilitator: What does "ntawuruhiga ubutwari" mean?

Augustin: This means that Rwandese are strongly united.

Facilitator: Thank you very much.

Augustin: Thank you also.

Facilitator: Thank you very much indeed for this story you have given us.

