

## STORIES FOR HOPE

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

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#### **Participants:**

- Mukayiranga Verena **Relation:** Elder
- Mugisha Gabriel **Relation:** Youth
- Sharangabo Jean de Dieu **Relation:** Youth

**Facilitator:** SFH0049

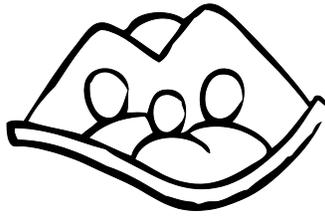
**Date:** 7 May 2009

**Recording Location:** Kigali

**Story Number:** SFH0049

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### Mukayiranga Verena & Mugisha Gabriel

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**Verena:** I reside in Remera here in Kigali. I want to speak to my children, that one is called Sharangabo Jean de Dieu and this one is called Mugisha Gabriel. I adopted these children, so this is the opportune time to talk to them. Before, we couldn't get time to talk with each other like this because of different daily challenges. Something important I want to tell them is that I became an orphan when I was still young. My father died in the 1963 war, and this made me grow up as an orphan. This is why I like to adopt orphans even though I don't have enough financial means. I do this simply because I know the suffering of orphans. I grew up as an orphan and I tried to study, but because of the lack of financial means I couldn't complete my studies. At that time, there was mistreatment of the Tutsi people. It was a very serious problem to me because I originated from the people who used to have power before the colonial period. I did not have a marriage similar to others. I got married at an early age simply because I was an orphan, and I had a child when I was 18 years old. There were people who were trying to force me to get married to them and yet they were the ones who had killed my father. They would try to convince me that if I got married to them, I would be okay. But I refused because, to me, I thought I couldn't have peace. So I refused. Later on, I accepted to get married but soon after marriage, my husband died. Most people from my family died because of war, but I decided to take heart in order to bring up my children. I was doing a business that could help me bring up my children and even take them to school; now my children are educated and they can even speak some foreign languages. They are currently working in Rwanda and in other foreign countries. I had a business of making sambusa (type of snack), and revenues helped us survive. At the start of the business I could make around 20 sambusa and those children could help me sell them. This was the only way we earned a living. The business grew from 20 to 300 sambusa and even more, so that business also helped me to buy other things, such as a small house that could help me sell charcoal. So what do I want to teach these children? What I want to teach these children is not to despise any business, however small it may be, because you may do a certain business, and at the beginning it may look small, but in the end it can grow and help you earn a lot of money. Your business may become big and help you earn a lot of money. I used to

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adopt my orphans, but some of them could find their relatives or friends who were their neighbors. Some people would come and take some orphans to their homes because they could see that I had many challenges from adopting so many orphans. What I want to tell these orphans is that they should not always wait for other people to help them, but instead they should try to use their strength and knowledge in order to develop themselves. These children should use the knowledge that they get from schools in order to earn their living. I also used the business of making sambusa like my school, which helped a lot. Even other people learned from me and got skills that helped them earn their living. Some people started doing that business and now they are rich. They got many things from that business. People started that business without knowing that it would take them to the next level. I want to tell these children that they should carry on studying in order to get an education that could transform their lives so that they may provide Rwanda and the world with their different skills. Even though you went through many hardships I would request that you try to develop yourselves. Keep on studying so that you may fit in Rwanda and pass on your knowledge to other people. Never say that "I will not study because I have no person to help me or I have no foundation." You should always remember that tomorrow belongs to you. Try also to comply with Rwandan culture because from long ago Rwandese used to love each other. Our ancestors used to say: "A good Rwandese is someone who attends your burial ceremony, one who feeds you when you are hungry, one who keeps secrets, and one who keeps a friendship with you that will be passed down from generation to generation." My children, even though I am not very educated, I did a business that transformed my life. So you should never say that if you are not employed by the government, then you cannot do any other business. Whatever you do, do it with all your might and it will be very useful to you, your country, and the world in general. So let me stop so that you have time to ask me some questions.

**Gabriel:** Thank you our mother. As your children, we want to ask you something about your useful story. We did not know this story but now we know it. The question is this: Didn't you meet some people who discouraged you when you wanted to start that small business of yours? I mean that business which was despised because it was making sambusa?

**Verena:** Before starting the business I had some mops, brushes, and weighing machines that were not being used. One day I decided to sell those things. I sold them and got money as capital, and after getting that money I started the business. There were some people who discouraged me and they would say: "What are you going to do?" People would think that maybe I had a mental illness but I would tell them that the past should not dominate our future. There were so many people who would come to discourage me and others would just say: "These are works of widows." Other people would despise what I was doing; they would see those children selling and they would say: "These are the children of poor people." Many people would think that you were children of poor people and they would not think that you could achieve what you have achieved so far. Now you can speak English, you know many things, and so forth.

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If one would come to discourage me, I would just keep quiet because I had decided to deal with only my business.

**Gabriel:** You said that you did not complete your studies because of discrimination problems. But we could hear people say that Rwandese used to live at peace with each other. So why did some Rwandese decide to kill your parents to the extent of making you remain alone? What is the source of the killings? We know that Rwandese had unity and love among themselves. Could you please tell us the source of those problems so that we may know how to prevent them from happening again?

**Verena:** You have raised a very good question. Rwandese loved each other. Houses were near each other, and families used to give cows and brides to each other. Rwandese would meet to sing, dance, and learn how to shoot. For example, one would go to the area called Bicumbi and then he would pass by many homes, where he would greet different people he would meet. They could say: "Who is your father," and he would identify himself. This was done because they loved each other. If one would go for a long trip he or she could not become hungry because he or she could get food from different homes, and if it was at night they would give him or her someplace to sleep. One would spend a night at a home of any Rwandese without being afraid of being killed. No one could harm you. But there came a time when bad things happened. They were started by our parents in 1959; this is the year mentioned in history, and at that time I was 3 years old. It was hard for me. Before Rwandese were united, there were three ethnicities and people were identified through their noses. This was caused by colonial masters; Rwanda was colonized by Germany and even Belgium. At that time people started saying: "This is my enemy because of his or her ethnic background." During the colonial period, people used to cultivate for those who were rich in order to get money and they did this willingly. But after the coming of the colonial masters they started saying: "You know these people are Tutsi." They wanted some people to think that they were not working for rich people but for those who wanted them to be slaves. They wanted people to think that it was slavery or forced labor. The colonists made people have division, and when division came, people started committing murders, destroying other people's houses, and looting. I am telling you what brought division among Rwandese, so try to avoid it.

**Facilitator:** Thank you very much mother. I have actually studied many things from you. Even my mother was born in 1952, but she was born in exile. She doesn't know Rwanda, she only came to Rwanda recently. Now I am eager to talk with my mother because I have a grandparent who died and she loved me so much but I know nothing about her life stories. It cannot be denied that most Tutsi were killed. I want to know your strongest quality that helped you overcome problems. Where did you get your heroism from? Both me and these children need to know that heroism. Could you please tell us so that we know how we can face such problems?

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**Verena:** There came a time when I had sorrow, and at that time I said: "It does not make sense to be wealthy without having people to share that wealth with." This is why I decided to adopt orphans. Among those orphans there includes a boy who studies at University and a boy who studies in secondary school plus others. The strong quality that I have is endurance, especially after my husband died. At that time I would think that he was there for me to help me get food and everything but now the situation has changed. I am now in a family in which I am the only person who survived, because other 8 people died. All of the people in my family died because of genocide. After the war, we were told to use any house that was available. But after entering the house I had chosen, it was difficult for me to be stable. I could not sleep well; I would think that people would come to kill us. I would even stand near the door and scream, and the children would come and ask me: "Whose house is this?" I would ask myself a question: "Is this house ours?" But finally I had to comfort them and tell them: "This is our house and it is safe." I was somehow traumatized because I would stand up and go for a long trip aimlessly and people who knew me would take me back to my home. Finally I decided to become like a soldier. Soldiers used to walk through forests, and they had no restaurants in the forests. Soldiers could not easily get food and even though they could get food they could not find a restaurant to buy food. So I decided to become like the soldier of my family in order to help the children survive. I decided to become like soldiers who had much endurance because they could walk a very long distance without planes and cars. They became my role models. I was a child from my relatives and friends; I could see children and become traumatized. But after that I decided to stand tall in order to comfort those children. I started serving my family as a person serves the army.

**Facilitator:** Thank you mother. I have been here since the morning and I have listened to many stories but this one seems special to me because it has changed me. According to what you have told me, we have to stand tall and work in order to earn our living. We should work hard so that our enemies are not happy about our situation. Sorry, I have a question for you: Which name can you give to this story?

**Verena:** I can name it "guhara amagara" which means overcoming fear.

**Facilitator:** Please what does it mean?

**Verena:** This means that I had to sacrifice for whatever I was doing in order to attain my objectives. If you don't have any other questions, I would like to welcome questions from these children, especially Mugisha because at that time he was a very small child.

**Gabriel:** I have learned many things from this parent of ours, but I have something to ask you. Is it good for us to sacrifice for our children as you have been doing? Or for us, do we not need to do what you have been doing maybe because that is not done by each and every person? Which piece of advice can you give us so that we can become soldiers of our families as you did?

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**Verena:** I think that you will not need to go through the hard way that I have been going through simply because you have studied in schools and you hope to complete your studies. You may, for example, become a minister or a bank governor at the end of your studies. What I can tell you is that you should always be hard-working in order to serve your family and the country in general. This requires a lot of effort. What you should do is not only adopt orphans, because the government also tries to help them. For example, the government has funds to support orphans and other associations exist to support orphans. At the completion of your studies, orphans will have grown up, so I do not think that you will need to take of them as I did. Some of them will have gotten married. I can advise you to live at peace with all people.

**Gabriel:** I think that we will talk about these issues in the coming days; we will do it bit by a bit. I have a question of curiosity: You told us men and women used to dance and sing, which means that Rwandan culture had its particular characteristics. What can I do in order to know that culture? Even though I may become a tycoon I don't think that it is good to forget my culture. What should I do to learn about the culture of the past?

**Verena:** Thank you for asking me such a question because I think that development should not eliminate the culture of the country. Don't worry because we have old people, even though they had fled to other countries they have not yet forgotten our culture. You should consult those old people in order to learn from them. We are very lucky because those old people fled to other countries with the culture and came back to Rwanda with that culture. If you consult those old people you may even be able to write books that can help the future generation. You should consult those old people and ask them for example: "What is Rucuncu? Where is Rucuncu located?"

**Facilitator:** Mother, thank you for your talk, for you have told us many important things. The more you talk, the more you remind me of my family. I have an old person who was born in 1930, and he went to settle in Uganda at the time known as Ikiboko. I don't know exactly how to define that time, at that time he was 6 years old. They lived in the area called Muroro, which is at the border of Uganda and Rwanda. That old man can tell you nothing about history. It would be better to tell us about our history of our country. Mother, without cutting you short I have a question to ask you: Would you like to give us a proverb related to the story you have told us? We want to get a proverb from you that will remind us of what you have told us.

**Verena:** There is a proverb that goes "Urugamba rutinze ruhinyuza intwari," which means: "When a battle lasts for a long time, some forceful people may become lazy." This means that few people can manage to endure problems they face. So whatever you do, do it quickly and with a lot of courage so that you may not become tired. I cannot finish without telling you the story about my father. My father was a traditional dancer called Intore. He was a good dancer, and he was also a police person, and

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before doing all of that, he had become a hunter. He was a very strong person who knew many techniques of self-defense. You couldn't easily target him while shooting. Before dying, my father tried to resist those who wanted to kill him simply because he had some techniques of a traditional dancer and a hunter also. He fought against those who were killing people at that time. First of all, he tried to protect his people but in the end he failed and they killed them. He remained alone because those killers were afraid of him; he killed two people before they killed him. Those killers said: "We want to torture you before killing you," so they took a bow and broke it using their knee, which was a taboo. This is against Rwandan customs, and this is an event that haunts me all the time because it is against Rwandan customs. Breaking a bow using a knee means that Rwanda is defeated so I urge you not to break a bow using a knee because it is a taboo to do so. Please, you should always endeavor to serve your country; this is why I am still serving my country. Please bear this in mind and even if you happen to write books do not forget to say what I have told you: "It is a taboo for a Rwandese to break a bow using a knee." Let me finish by thanking you for what you have done. Before, we couldn't find the time to talk with each other because we wake up in the morning, go to work, and we come back at night very tired and then we fail to talk with each other like this.

