

Peace Insight

Never Again Rwanda Newsletter

National Trauma Symposium



never
again

– Rwanda –

About Never Again Rwanda

A peace building and social justice organization that arose in response to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Guided by a vision of a society that enjoys sustainable peace, development and social justice.”

05 Opinion: Trauma in a post-genocide context

The experiences of trauma, chronic anxiety, depression and mental illness in Rwanda are vast.

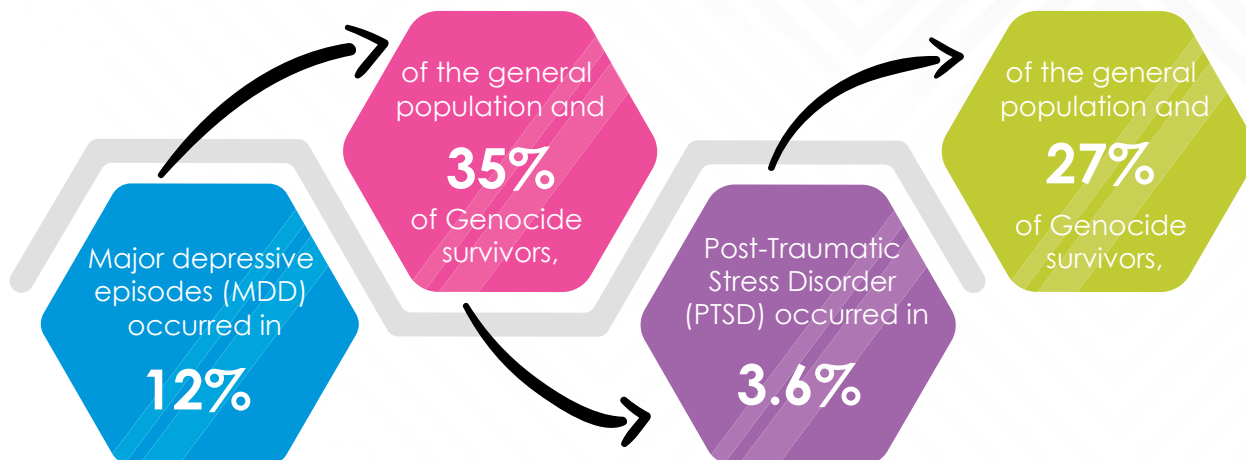
08 Q&A: Life as a NAR intern

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EMBRACING TRAUMA MANAGEMENT

– National Trauma Symposium

The recent Rwanda Mental Health Survey [RMHS 2018] conducted by the Rwanda Biomedical Centre [RBC] revealed the increased prevalence of various mental disorders within the general Rwandan population and within genocide survivors. Results from this survey indicated that:



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Disclaimer:

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Never Again Rwanda or their partner organisations.

It is on this note that on May 8th and 9th 2019, organizations working in the field of mental health and psychosocial support in Rwanda hosted a two-day National Trauma Symposium at Kigali Marriot Hotel under the theme

Embracing Trauma Management from Grassroots Initiatives to Institutional Interventions."

The purpose of the symposium was to jointly discuss strategies to address the lingering psychological damage that was caused by the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The event attracted stakeholders from various institutions organizations in

the sector of memory and healing, youth, mental health professionals and government officials.

Stigma and discrimination are the two biggest obstacles to productive dialogue about mental health. A famous Rwandan proverb says:

"The tears of a man flow inwardly"

Which in other words, implies that pain must not be shared and doing so portrays one as weak. The discussions during this symposium aimed to break the stigma around mental health deterring the psychological recovery process of many.

Feedback

Feedback is important to our work. If you have any message, question or comment about any story in here or even about our work, please write to us on info@neveragainrwanda.org or imulekatete@neveragainrwanda.org

The Guest of Honor, the First Lady of the Republic of Rwanda Jeannette Kagame called on mental health professionals to be strategic as they seize opportunities available in raising awareness on mental health, through holding constructive public dialogue on the issue:

“We have to use different programs that are in place to discuss our history and wounds, because it’s not easy to express emotions in our Rwandan culture that encourages hiding painful feelings which in the end hinders psychological healing.”

Though there exists psychosocial support services, this event called for joint efforts in dealing with trauma. In the words of the Executive Director of Never Again Rwanda and the Chairman of Rwanda Civil Society Platform [RCSP], Dr Joseph Ryarasa

Nkurunziza:

“The journey to reach strong mental health and psychosocial services is long. We need a national strategy on mental health care and healing. With the support of the ministry,

we need to have a council for psychotherapists.”

Questions from participants were in the context of identity, memory, healing, genocide ideologies and the planned release of ex-perpetrators to be reintegrated back in the society that is yet to be prepared to receive them.

Hinged on the recommendations that suggested more research on the issue, more programs to help trauma victims and more collaboration

between trauma practitioners, it was unanimously agreed that:

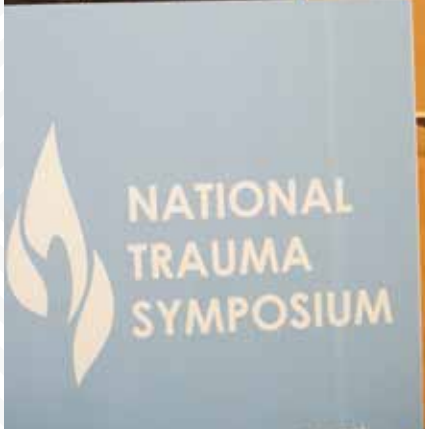
“Trauma healing isn’t an event, it is a journey” –Omar Ndizeye





PICTORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

National Trauma Symposium



No single year of commemoration looks the same in Rwanda. Each year a new challenge presents itself, themes change, conversations start, safe spaces are formed, dialogues are ignited, presentations are made, performances and books are presented and authored.

“This year’s 25th commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi is the period when the National Trauma Symposium, the first of its kind was hosted. The event, along with many other on-going programs can be an impactful shift in how Rwandan communities view mental illness and traumatic stress. By a sort of osmosis, research and personal exploration I can confidently share, from my viewpoint, what traumatic consequences I observe today as a result of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi”.

The experiences of trauma, chronic anxiety, depression and mental illness in Rwanda are vast. This trauma is attributed to many events and experiences including the experiences of refugees, victims and survivors of genocidal crimes carried out prior to April 1994, widows, orphans and children born out of rape, children born after the genocide and children who survived alone amidst large families completely wiped out during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. As time passes, new stories and deeply wounding events are uncovered. New mass graves and evidences are also uncovered each year which can be re-traumatizing for many and raises many questions for others. Psychologists working in Rwanda can account that treating trauma in Rwanda is challenging because the story of how survivors suffered is never fully complete. New information and responsible qualitative data collection can help the next generation and newly trained psychologists and psychiatrists to strategically support Rwandans from all demographics. The ability to share the stories we see published and presented today has only been made possible by the work of brave and resilient caregivers, psychologists, clinicians and trained specialists including those supporting

and working with ARCT-Ruhuka, AERG, CNLG, NAR and the Rwanda Psychology Society.

Mental illness is not uncommon and it is not abnormal yet it remains as one of the greatest mysteries in wellness and healthcare. Not enough is known about the human psyche even after centuries of research and findings. Furthermore, it is human nature to quickly try to contextualize those topics or ideas which we do not understand or agree with. Citizens suffering from mental illness are quickly labeled, judged and ridiculed by peers and family who are uneducated on the topics related to mental health. Rwanda’s experience is unique and therefore, the response must also be contextual taking into account the immense delicacy of the matter. Mental illness, addiction and traumatic wounds for survivors, returnees, post-genocide youth and returned ex-combatants and perpetrators have been a constant snag in familial fabrics. The solutions to Rwanda’s mental health needs must be found within existing structures, safe spaces which have existed for decades and have been laid within small communities across all districts of the country. Experts and leadership agree that a national policy and procedures must be written and abided by not just at large scale institutions and organizations but among local leaders. There are different programs and interventions in different institutions like NAR’s Societal Healing and Participatory Governance for peace Program, which brings together diverse groups to tackle trauma and deep mental wounds through group-trauma therapy.

In the past 25 years since the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda has risen from the ashes not due to the actions of external leaders or international aid but because Rwandans chose forgiveness, unity and lasting change. The healing process is courtesy of the resiliency, brave leadership and a willingness to pave a better future for the next generation as demonstrated by over the last two decades. A community based response to traumatic stress and mental illness backed by teams of trained psycho-therapists for quality assurance and the best chance of sustainability can effectively release current weight felt across communities and families in Rwanda today. Together, Rwanda is stronger; ambitious youth and trained professionals ought to work side by side to make this vision a reality.



Hannah Wood

Assistant Peacebuilding Institute Coordinator

OUR DIVERSITY; OUR OPPORTUNITY

2019 Local Public Speaking Exchange

“Some youth are not able to openly discuss diversity to avoid opening the wounds caused by a traumatic past. This constructive dialogue serves to remind us that our diversity is our opportunity”.



The Public speaking and exchange is a project implemented by a group of partners in equal collaboration including: Ejo Youth Echo, Never Again Rwanda, and Vision Jeunesse Nouvelle in order to discuss issues deterring peace processes in their communities and in turn propose solutions to building peace.

On 12th May 2019 Never Again Rwanda hosted the local public speaking and exchange forum at Groupe Scolaire Officiel de Butare (GSOB). The exchange was organized in partnership with GIZ and other partners and it convened youth from 23 different schools in the southern province thus attracting over 46 students. The overarching theme of the exchange forum was “Our diversity; our opportunity! How can I use my creativity and various ways of communication to promote peace in my daily life?”

In the opening address, Eric Mahoro, Deputy Executive Director at Never Again Rwanda noted that youth are characterized by diversity based on gender, ethnicity, culture, religion and social opportunities urging participants to value diversity and look at differences as an opportunity to create change in their respective societies. He noted: “Some youth are not able to openly discuss diversity in order to avoid opening the wounds caused by a traumatic past. This constructive dialogue serves to remind us that our diversity is our opportunity”.

During the exchange, while presenting their speeches, youth groups highlighted the importance of using diverse talents such as music, art, dance and drama as vehicles of expression, means of reconciling families and communities as well as promoting peace regardless of differences. The students further highlighted the benefits associated with diversity in schools and their communities such as; embracing different backgrounds, using talents, social opportunities in creating change and promoting peace in their families, schools, and communities.

In his remarks on behalf of GIZ, Jean Damascène Mbonigaba underlined that youth participation in peacebuilding is an untapped potential that should be supported to ensure that youth have skills and confidence they need to become agents of change. These remarks were reiterated by Joseph Kagabo, speaking on behalf of Huye District Advisor, when he commended NAR for contributing to the foundations of peaceful societies. Mr Kagabo also urged youth to think critically, tolerate differences, exchange ideas, talk to elders and to read and write books.

Is it possible to build a truly African Civil Society?

Eric Mahoro

Deputy Executive Director NAR



Dealing with trust gaps between CSOs and Governments

In many African countries civil society organisations (CSOs), often referred to as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or not-for-profit organisations are perceived as imported from the Western countries. Often, there is a limited trust between these organisations and the governments of the countries in which they operate. This jeopardises the contributions civil society makes in the development of their nations. Yet, research has demonstrated that CSOs are essential in bridging the gap between the communities and their governments either through service provision, shaping public policies, advocacy or citizenship education [NAR 2019].

In Rwanda for example, during the immediate post-genocide period, many NGOs contributed to the management of humanitarian crises which emerged after the 1994 genocide against Tutsi. Such organisations included international as well as national and community-based entities. Today when you travel around the country, you can tell from observing the sign-posts on public edifices or offices that such support has tremendously contributed to Rwanda's great achievements and the ongoing healing and reconciliation process.

Civil society is largely perceived to be a vehicle for western agendas. As such, their loyalty and sustenance is highly dependent on conditions and

directions laid down by drivers from the west. However, looking at the laudable contributions of CSOs, one may ask; how can we actually promote and sustain a civil society that is relatively African? And if that dream is to be achieved which role is whose?

There is a need to revive the African values of mutual support and social cooperation that we find, unfortunately, in many dying tales. If the CSOs are self-organised entities or implementing activities defined by the community members affected by a certain issue and willing to take action, then there is need for governments to establish sound legal frameworks to regulate these structures without harming their original and voluntary nature.

Although it is essential to collaborate with multinational NGOs, it would be essential for countries to re-assess their own CSOs frameworks and facilitate citizen-driven initiatives and activities to take place. Equally CSO should be guided to orient their contribution to the international and national development agendas which I believe are shared between the states and the CSOs. This would ultimately increase trust among such partners and the states.

In Rwanda, there is a progressive CSO law enacted in 2012. However, small community-based organisations (CBOs) still find it hard to be recognised in that legal framework, yet they are smaller but stronger [NAR 2019]. Should the

legal framework include CBOs, there could be an increased probability that locally initiated CSOs and, in fact, closer to the communities will find it easier to cooperate with governments in full trust.

It is also essential to develop partnerships with International NGOs either for funding or capacity building purposes. However, donors should understand that it is more sustainable to support local CSOs to grow and build systems which enable them to meet universal standards rather than invest extravagant budgets in the direct implementation of projects by the international NGOs. In the latter cases frameworks should be elaborated to ensure continuous skills and capacity transfer to the local organizations so that they can take a lead in the long run.

Reference

Never Again Rwanda [NAR] & Interpeace [2019], The Role of Civil Society in Enhancing Citizen Participation in Governance and Development Processes in Post-Genocide Rwanda, NAR, Kigali.



Q&A:

Life as a NAR intern

Never Again Rwanda has been providing internship placements to university students and young professionals, since its inception in 2002. NAR believes that interns play a significant role in any organization and they are a valuable asset. Their experience allows them to engage directly with the complexities of the professional world and gives them access to various opportunities while advancing their skills to contribute to their personal development, which ultimately empowers them to achieve their goals.

We sat down with Julia Crandell, a Governance and Rights intern at NAR with an interest in NGO work and human rights. She holds a double bachelor's degree in political science & International Relations and Law.

Why did you choose to pursue an internship at Never Again Rwanda?

I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Rwanda for two years and I used to teach in rural areas. I was looking for an opportunity that would allow me to have a broader impact and heard about Never Again Rwanda through a former Peace Corps volunteer. I then did some research and spoke to some people who said it is a highly regarded organization with a real impact in Rwanda. I am passionate about Governance & Rights and its also related to my degree, so when I discovered that this was one of the main pillars of NAR, I was motivated to apply for an internship.

What did you hope to gain from this experience?

Initially I wanted to learn about how NGOs work, the planning and preparations that go into activities, the research that goes into implementing projects and making sure that those projects have an impact. So far I can say that I have been able to experience this and have been learning first-hand what it takes to implement a project, and even see what happens afterwards like the monitoring

and evaluation to find out if there was an impact.

Prior to interning at NAR, did you know anything about peacebuilding or governance & rights or other pillars of development that NAR is engaged in?

Before my internship, I didn't know much about peacebuilding but I knew about Governance and Rights, although I only knew about it from an Australian perspective and not from a Rwandan one. During my internship, I have had the opportunity to learn about how Governance and Rights work in Rwanda.

So far, what has been your favorite experience at NAR?

My favorite experience was when I had the opportunity to attend a community dialogue in Rutsiro District between the citizens and the mayor, which was broadcasted live on the community radio. They were discussing the issue of family conflict and it was very interesting to see how open the citizens were to engaging in debate and exchanging ideas.

Given the unemployment rate among youth, many do not like to volunteer and do unpaid internships. What do you think are the benefits of doing an internship and what would you tell your peers to encourage them to look for internship opportunities?

I know it's difficult because a lot of people can't afford to do something unpaid but I think it's a great opportunity because when you are applying for jobs, they always ask you for experience. An internship is a great way to get that experience; it opens doors that lead to opportunities either to work in that organization or in other organizations through connections and networking. I view it as getting your foot in the door to be able to move into a career.

How is the internship shaping your career and future goals?

I'm still trying to figure out what I want to do as a career, and not just in terms of the area I want to work in, but the kind

of work that I like. For example do I like sitting at a desk or going on the field – those kinds of things. So interning at Never Again Rwanda has been a really good experience for me in trying out different things and seeing what I like so as to help me decide what I want to do in the future.



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May, 2019

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