

## Livelihood recovery for peace and reconciliation The case of Rukara Reconciliation Village

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### About the Authors

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### Disclaimer

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### Executive Summary

The study examined whether and how livelihood capacities have contributed to peace and reconciliation efforts in Rukara Reconciliation Village. It also assessed the extent and conditions for the transferability of the model to other contexts faced with past or ongoing forms of violence and conflict. Using the constructivism paradigm, the case study design and qualitative research approach, the study analyzed the experiences of the concerned individuals and community at large in their real-life context. The study population comprised members of the Rukara Reconciliation Village, the leadership of PeacEdu Initiative Rwanda, and key informants purposively and conveniently sampled because they hold relevant information on the issue at hand. Data were collected using focus group discussions, semi-structured individual interviews, site observations, and documentary search. The data analysis followed the thematic and narrative analysis technique.

The research identifies the construction and renovation of houses, construction of kitchen gardens, provision of livestock, payment of community-based health insurance, establishment of savings and loan associations, and donating school materials as livelihood activities carried out by PeacEdu Initiative Rwanda in Rukara Reconciliation Village. Such activities generally contribute to asset acquisition and income generation, all of which contribute to the well-being and financial capacity of target individuals and groups.

The study shows that the above-mentioned livelihood capacities lead to a number of peace and reconciliation outcomes, mainly, enhancing societal belonging, putting common interests above private ones, mediating healing and fostering inner peace, acquiring different values through role modelling, nurturing collaboration and healthy relationships, rediscovering a sense of self-worth and dignity, and creating spaces for discussion, reflection

and story sharing. The study argues that the livelihood activities have a significant positive impact on social cohesion, healing history-related wounds among genocide survivors and perpetrators, addressing different forms of violence, upholding peace-led values and active citizenship, restoring a sense of self-esteem, fostering forgiveness and building trust in the community. It shows that members of Rukara Reconciliation Village have been able to define, share, develop and sustain healthy and meaningful relationships through the activities carried out together from 2019 to date. The study indicates that the model is sustainable chiefly because community members have developed a sense of ownership of the livelihood activities and are committed to sustaining the achieved outcomes. Also, the model has become part of residents' life and is seen as enshrined in their culture.

The study argues that the results obtained in Rukara Reconciliation Village in terms of promoting peace and reconciliation through the development of livelihood capacities could be scaled up to other parts of Rwanda, and even communities outside the country may also draw lessons from it and devise exit strategies for the conflict prevailing in their respective communities. Nevertheless, there is a need to contextualize and tailor the livelihood capacities to community needs and goals.

## Introduction

The study sought to document the contribution of livelihood activities to peace and reconciliation in Rukara Reconciliation Village. Carried out in Rukara Cell, Rukara Sector of Kayonza District in the Eastern Province of Rwanda, this study attempted to show how livelihood capacities have contributed to peace and reconciliation among genocide survivors and released perpetrators.

After the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, Rwandans had to face the task of rebuilding and reuniting the country. In this regard, different peace-led initiatives were created at different levels in an attempt to heal wounds and restore social cohesion. PeacEdu Initiative Rwanda is a national non-governmental organization dedicated to preventing genocide and mass atrocities. It does so through education, enhancing reconciliation and improving the socio-economic conditions of the community, poverty reduction, and provision of basic needs. The idea is to assist and train people about several programmes that would take them out of violent conditions.

The study was informed by the constructivism paradigm, where people's understanding and knowledge of the world are constructed through own experiences and reflection. It also adopted the case study design, which involved an in-depth analysis of a small group of individuals in their real-life context, and used the qualitative approach. Data were collected using six focus group discussions, four of them conducted with members of Rukara Reconciliation Village, one carried out with youth members of the village, and another with members of Mbyo Reconciliation Village. A total of five semi-structured individual interviews were also conducted: with the executive director and founder of PeacEdu, the programmes manager, and the community mobilizer, a representative of a donor organization, and one key informant from Prison Fellowship Rwanda, an organization that runs similar reconciliation villages in other parts of the country. Furthermore, six household visits were conducted onsite to validate the personal stories shared by members of the village. Data analysis was done using both narrative analysis and thematic analysis.

## Research findings

The following are the key research findings:

### *Identified livelihood capacities*

Ranked in terms of importance, the livelihood capacities in Rukara Reconciliation Village comprise the construction of kitchen gardens, construction or renovation of residents' houses, supply of livestock and school materials, creation of savings and loan groups, and providing free health insurance. These capacities serve to empower individuals or groups in the community, help beneficiaries increase the means of securing the necessities of life, and improve their overall well-being.

### *Enhancing societal belonging*

First, members of Rukara Reconciliation Village have been able to define, share, develop and sustain healthy and meaningful relationships with one another through the livelihood activities carried out together. Second, non-discriminatory participation in all the activities makes everyone feel valued as a member of the village and connected to a wider community.

### *Putting common interests above private ones*

The village members have developed a sense of putting common interests above individual ones, and this strengthens their connection within the group and extends to those outside of the group. In addition, the outcomes of the livelihood activities benefit not only the village members, but also the community outside of the coverage of the organization, thus promoting a sense of empathy and social responsibility.

### *Mediating healing and inner peace*

Living and working together as a family has been an important healing strategy. The example of the activity to construct a kitchen garden bears significance in terms of solidarity and empathy towards vulnerable people, which matters more than simply responding to an economic need.

### *Acquiring different values through role modelling*

The community members agreed that the livelihood activities promote different values such as nurturing unity, cohesion and solidarity, collaboration and caring for one another, which has inspired the youth to imitate their parents and neighbours.

### *Nurturing collaboration and healthy relationships*

The village members described the positive mood that prevails among them during the livelihood activities, especially those which require them to be together for a joint effort, always characterized by enthusiasm, team work, and responsibility. For the youth, clubs have made a space for friendship and leisure at school. Meeting and interacting outside their lessons and academic activities constitutes an opportunity for exploring outside realities, especially for students in boarding schools.

### *Rediscovering self-worth and dignity*

Livelihood capacities such as the construction and renovation of houses made people, especially the genocide survivors, feel valued and respected in the community. Former perpetrators expressed their gratitude to the survivors who accepted receiving them in the community and welcoming them in their homes, while they thought they did not deserve it, due to atrocities they had committed.

## *Creating spaces for discussion, reflection and story sharing*

The livelihood capacities have constituted a suitable place for meeting, discussion and reflection for the community members. Moreover, engaging in livelihood activities evidences that former perpetrators are no longer prone to wrongdoing; instead, they are committed to promoting a community that is free from hatred and violence. Genocide survivors were also able to trust their neighbours, mainly former perpetrators, as a result of a long period of journeying together and working together.

## *Sustainability and transferability*

Members of Rukara Reconciliation Village have developed a sense of ownership of the livelihood activities initiated by PeacEdu Initiative Rwanda. They consider them as their own activities, especially because they are part of their daily life. PeacEdu Initiative Rwanda has also established community-based monitoring and follow-up mechanisms to the extent that, when the beneficiaries meet for an activity, they check on the status of members, either present or absent, inquire about challenges met and try to find solutions by themselves. In addition, investing in the youth guarantees the sustainability of the reconciliation village and its activities. Furthermore, the livelihood activities carried out in the village are enshrined in the members' culture, and this is likely to contribute to the initiative being perennial. Last, the results obtained in Rukara Reconciliation Village in terms of peace and reconciliation, through the development of livelihood capacities, may be scaled up to other parts of Rwanda and even beyond. It is necessary to scale up the initiative to accelerate unity and reconciliation in Rwanda. In this regard, Rukara Reconciliation Village has been receiving guests from different corners of Africa and the world, especially those from areas torn apart by conflicts such as South Sudan, the Central Africa Republic, Ethiopia and the United States of America. After sharing the village experience and success stories in relation to peace and reconciliation, the guests express their wish to see a positive change happening in their respective communities.

## **Conclusions**

The research identified six livelihood activities carried out by PeacEdu Initiative Rwanda in a social context of a community of genocide survivors and former perpetrators living side by side in the same zone within a dispersed settlement structure. Besides bringing about a generation of assets, property or resources, improving the health status of the community members, and increasing their financial or social capital, the livelihood activities have contributed to enhancing societal belonging, putting common interests above private ones, mediating healing and inner peace, nurturing collaboration and healthy relationships, creating spaces for discussion, and prompting reflection and story sharing among the people. Members of the village have developed a sense of ownership of the livelihood activities, and established community-based monitoring and follow-up mechanisms. Further, as the livelihood activities carried out in their village are enshrined in their culture, this is likely to contribute to the sustainability of the initiative. Lastly, the experience with Rukara Reconciliation Village has the potential to be applied in other social contexts, provided that contextualization and customization of the livelihood capacities are done to fit individual community needs and goals in terms of peace-building and reconciliation.

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## Policy Recommendations

Based on the research findings, this policy brief recommends the following:

1. The livelihood activities carried out in Rukara Reconciliation Village have yielded results at a certain level in terms of peacebuilding and reconciliation. Their impact would be more significant if they were upgraded to a higher level, to offer more chances for socio-economic development.
2. The community expressed the need to integrate a larger number of people, given the interest and outcomes of the livelihood activities. The challenge pointed out was limited financial means. Therefore, PeacEdu Initiative Rwanda should be supported to invest in increasing its capacities to serve more people.
3. Rukara Reconciliation Village has been practicing peace and reconciliation in action, where the village members nurture their experience within their community and context. Thus, these same people should be empowered so that they may transfer their experience to peers in other parts of the country, considering individual contexts, needs and means.
4. Considering that the Rukara Reconciliation Village model is established and functions within the community following the dispersed settlement structure where people live according to their ordinary lifestyle, it should be explored whether this model is more beneficial than other models of reconciliation villages constructed in the integrated settlement structure.
5. An integrated approach to peacebuilding, where livelihood activities are combined with training sessions, seminars, healing sessions, religious teaching, policies and law literacy programmes, should be explored so as to assess their added value in promoting peace and reconciliation in Rukara Reconciliation Village.
6. It would be useful to document the success stories of the Rukara Reconciliation Village. These stories could serve as lessons for humanity, especially for the younger generation. Also, they could be integrated into the wider literature on peace and reconciliation in post-conflict contexts.