

# Evaluation and Impact Assessment of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC)

## Executive Summary

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Between October and December 2005, a comprehensive evaluation and impact assessment of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), was carried out by the South African based, Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), at the invitation of NURC. The project was sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), which has been active in Rwandan reconciliation efforts since 2004, is engaged in reconciliation projects in South Africa, and other parts of the Continent, including Burundi, Southern Sudan, Zimbabwe and Northern Uganda.

The on – site verification of findings and impact assessment were conducted between October 30 and December 4 2005. Mr. Paul Nantulya led the mission, Head: Political Engagement at IJR, and co-ordinator of the Institute's activities in Rwanda. Ms. Karin Alexander, a Senior Researcher at IJR currently working on the Zimbabwe Desk, assisted him. Mr. Didace Kanyugu, a Burundian civil society activist and graduate of the IJR fellows programme supported the team in the field. Two local research assistants, Mr. Gerald Muzungu and Ms. Sonia Rwamamara were recruited.

The consultants brought with them complementary backgrounds in transitional justice and law, field research, political science, project management and conflict resolution. Mr. Nantulya has coordinated IJR's support to Rwandan institutions since 2004.

The objectives of the mission were as follows:

- To assess the impact of NURC activities to date on the reconciliation process in Rwanda, in order to identify best practices; and;
- To establish benchmarks and equip the NURC with a monitoring and evaluation framework, inclusive of indicators, to enable quantitative and qualitative measurement of future NURC activities and their impact on national unity and reconciliation.

The following tasks were performed:

- Reviews of all major reports and documentation pertaining to the activities implemented by the NURC over the past six years and prepare a matrix of the topics examined and resultant findings;
- Interviews with major donors and development partners as well as directors of each NURC programme unit and prepare a summary of past activities and current actions;
- On–site verification of findings as described in the reports and through discussions held with NURC staff and donors/development partners in line with the evaluation methodology;

- Elaboration of recommendations and best practices to contribute to unity and reconciliation in the particular post – conflict context of Rwanda.

### **Key Activities of the Evaluation Mission**

The consultants interviewed officials from the Rwandese Government, civil society, community based associations, NURC staff, media, international organizations, Rwanda Defence Forces and key individuals who had either participated in, or followed the activities of NURC since 1999. They organized working meetings, focus group workshops, random interviews and visited communities in five locations: Kigali – Ngali and Kigali Ville, Ruhengeri, Butare, Gahini and Kibuye. The selection of the sites was based on new provincial demarcations in that country.

The consultants actively participated in a number of NURC activities including a study tour of the Sudan Unity and Reconciliation Commission, recently established by the new Government of Southern Sudan, a community reception in Gahini, a civic education course (*Ingando*) in Ruhengeri; and special meetings with the *Abakangurambaga* (peace mobilizers) in Ruhengeri and Butare. They attended two *Gacaca* sessions in Kigali and Ruhengeri.

The consultants enjoyed the full support of the NURC and the Rwandese Government. The Executive Secretary, Ms. Fatuma Ntangiza facilitated access to documents, senior NURC staff and information pertaining to the Commission. Officials from various arms of the Rwandese Government: judiciary, executive, legislative and military were easily available for meetings, consultations and follow-up.

The consultants found that the structure of the NURC had changed at least three times since its inception in 1999. This was as a result of major policy changes undertaken by the Rwandese Government. At the time of the evaluation, the NURC had reduced its core staff from 92 to 45. It had also phased out its offices and staff at provincial level. Despite these and other cut backs the activities carried out by the Commission since its inception correspond to three broad programme areas: civic education, conflict mediation and support to communities. We found that these activities constituted the main pillars of NURC engagement, and there was a lot of creativity in various projects that were carried out within this main framework.

Because of logistical difficulties encountered in setting up the mission, our random sampling frame of respondents was reduced from 1020 respondents to 765. Despite this variation, we are confident that the data collected provides a reliable measure of the impact of the NURC. To complement the random sample the evaluation team used other research tools: direct participant observation; follow up meetings; and; focus group workshops to cross check and verify the data.

The mission assessed the following: the performance of the NURC in view of its parliamentary mandate; the degree to which the outputs corresponded to the original objectives; the degree to which the objectives had been met; and new concepts, practices and tools that had emerged as a direct result of the NURC's activities. Five indicators of impact were used: the degree to which communities understood reconciliation; the level of willingness of communities to embrace concepts of reconciliation and engage in activities that promoted them; the level of ownership of the reconciliation process and new initiatives; and; threats to the NURC.

## II. TOOLS DEVELOPED BY NURC

### CIVIC EDUCATION

NURC took the lead in mobilizing and training communities on unity and reconciliation and related topics. Four tools were used: *Ingandos*, reconciliation summits; leadership academy; and inter community exchanges and consultations.

- *Ingando*

*Ingando* is taken from the Rwandese verb *Kuganda* that refers to halting normal activities to reflect on, and find solutions to national challenges. In ancient Rwanda, *Ingandos* were first developed by the military. Whenever Rwanda faced disasters (wars, natural calamities etc), the *Mwami* (King) mobilized and prepared the population through *Ingandos*. By the advent of colonialism, it was a well – entrenched practice. As Rwanda sank deeper into postcolonial conflict the institution of *Ingando* lost its relevance and was no longer practiced. Moreover, the royal institutions, which had held Rwanda together for centuries were abolished.

When the NURC was established, it formally developed *Ingando* as a tool to build coexistence within communities. The first beneficiaries were ex – combatants from the DRC. The programme later expanded to include school going youth and students at secondary and tertiary levels. By 2002, the training was extended to informal traders, and other social groups including survivors, prisoners, community leaders, women and youth.

Today, *Ingandos* are carried out countrywide and most are co-facilitated with communities. The provincial and local administrations provide assistance with logistics. The NURC and its partners provide accommodation and meals and transportation is usually covered by the participants. *Ingandos* entail residential camps, bringing together between 300 – 400 people per programme for between 3 weeks to 2 months depending on time available and focus of the sessions. The numbers also vary, although at each prison release, 1000 prisoners undergo *Ingando*. Topics are covered under five central themes: analysis of Rwanda's problems; history of Rwanda; political and socioeconomic issues in Rwanda and Africa, rights, obligations and duties and leadership.

- **Reconciliation Summit**

This is the flagship programme of the NURC. It is chaired by the President and attended by a cross section of Rwandans and dignitaries from the international community. It has become a prominent and more or less permanent national event that draws considerable international focus on Rwanda. The first summit was held in October 2000, which was followed by another summit in October 2002. In April 2004, there was a children's' summit, whose views were discussed at the April 2004 reconciliation summit.

- **Inter – Community Exchanges**

NURC coordinated regular exchange programmes between communities from different regions. The programmes entailed exhaustive analysis and joint solving of problems, and popular activities including sports, cultural celebrations and competitions. They were designed to eradicate the mistrust created by the policies of regional favoritism entrenched by previous administrations.

## **CONFLICT MEDIATION**

Resources went into developing and transferring conflict management skills to communities. NURC staff benefited from training programmes in South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana among other countries. The following tools were used:

- ***Abunzi***

Section 4 Article 159 of the constitution establishes a mediation committee in each sector. The mediation committee members or "*Abunzi*" are responsible for mediating between parties to certain disputes involving matters determined by law prior to the filing of a case with the court of first instance. The *Abunzi* comprise twelve residents of the Sector who are persons of integrity and acknowledged for their mediating skills. They are elected from among persons who are not members of decentralized local government or judicial organs for a term of two years that may be extended. The NURC regularly trained the *Abunzi*, and supported them in their sensitization activities. The NURC also supported the National Service for the Gacaca Courts in training the *Inyangamugayo* (persons of integrity), who preside over Gacaca trials. It is worth noting that 80 percent of the conflicts at local level are handled by the *Abunzi*, thereby freeing up the legal system, and building leadership values at grassroots level.

- ***Abakangurambaga***

The creation of the *Abakangurambaga* was an innovative strategy of the NURC. They are "peace volunteers" who intercede in disputes and mobilize communities to address problems. There are 720 countrywide. The *Abakangurambaga* work voluntarily for the NURC, which provides them with training manuals, reference material and bicycles through the support of the

EU and GTZ among others. Plans are underway to train more *Abakangurambaga*.

In the wake of the institutional downsizing of state institutions, the *Abakangurambaga* could serve as a useful structure through which to decentralize NURC activities and build capacity for communities to implement programmes on their own. There is however a need for a better clarification of the roles and functions of the *Abunzi* and *Abakangurambaga*, which in the opinion of the consultants, tend to overlap.

- **Conflict Management Training**

Conflict management training was used as a tool to equip the *Abunzi* and *Abakangurambaga*. From the interviews we conducted, conflict management training was generally thought of as the dissemination of knowledge and the imparting of skills. It was felt that the NURC should, however, see it more as a strategic tool to promote the development of peace building capacities within communities. In future, the conflict management training approach of the NURC could have two aims: raising awareness about conflict and the need for reconciliation and, imparting skills for dealing with conflict, or sustaining peace. Training programmes would in this case provide participants with an understanding of how conflict operates, the general patterns it follows and useful concepts for dealing with it in constructive and creative ways.

The consultants proposed that the NURC should strengthen the capacity of the *Abakangurambaga* to intervene proactively in conflict situations and to monitor and document conflicts. Attention could also be paid to the technical quality of the courses that could be addressed through institutional partnerships with organizations such as the Centre for Conflict Management and others.

## **SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES**

The idea of supporting communities was to mobilize ordinary people to fight poverty. The thinking was that if people created initiatives together, they would be inclined to nurture those initiatives and to defend them, irrespective of their differences. The growth of several community based reconciliation associations involving survivors, perpetrators, and people with family members in prison is an indicator that reconciliation is taking place at the community level. Three main tools were used: providing grants to selected associations; the creation of NURC Clubs and; promoting culture as a resource for reconciliation.

- **Providing grants to community based reconciliation associations**

Over 60 community-based associations have received grants from the NURC since 2001. Most of them comprise perpetrators and survivors and their activities range from promoting reconciliation in communities to income generating activities. The NURC should however take care not to create

dependency in communities. It should be a vehicle for ownership and empowerment. Equally important is for the grassroots to see themselves as people's structures – a resource in themselves and not an arm of the government or the NURC.

- **Creation of Reconciliation Clubs**

The idea of forming NURC Clubs in schools and institutions of higher learning was one of the outcomes of the *Ingando*. Initially, the NURC took the lead in creating them. In time, however, students formed reconciliation clubs on their own. The clubs provide a space where students from different backgrounds get together promote reconciliation in places of learning. In this way, their teaching does not just end at the *Ingando* but is carried forward constructively.

In future, the NURC should document all Reconciliation Clubs and associations countrywide and mainstream them into its reconciliation activities. This could be done by creating a central database.

- **Culture as a resource for reconciliation**

The NURC has contributed tremendously towards promoting culture as a tool for reconciliation. The incorporation of cultural concepts such as *Ingando*, *Abakangurambaga*, *Inyangamugayo*, *Ubudehe*, *Ubusabane*, and others in its activities are cases in point. Since 1999, the Commission has organized several cultural activities, including plays, songs, poems and dance. As a standard practice, every *Ingando* entails cultural activities and celebrations. The same applies for meetings, seminars, consultations and the annual summits.

It is the view of the consultants that the NURC could take this contribution to a further level. The use of culture to achieve justice that is reconciliatory, and restorative is at the heart of the transitional justice debate in several African countries today. Culture makes justice more accessible and participatory, thus helping to build greater ownership, confidence and legitimacy. Rwanda is regularly cited as an example in this regard. The NURC should in the next programme phase document all relevant Rwandan cultural concepts that have been used in the reconciliation process for dissemination and to share best practices.

### III. SUMMARY OF EVALUATION AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- **The degree to which ordinary communities understand reconciliation**

The NURC's mandate includes discussion around, education about and mobilisation in support of unity and reconciliation. A key impact indicator is the level of comprehension of the concept of reconciliation within the population. In order to evaluate the impact of its activities in future therefore, the NURC needs to: a) regularly measure the knowledge of Rwandans about reconciliation and, their understanding of its processes and implications, and; b) assess the extent to which the NURC has managed to inspire or influence a national vision of unity and reconciliation that is accepted as an individual challenge and owned by communities. This should be done through regular qualitative and quantitative surveys.

- **The level of willingness of communities to embrace concepts of reconciliation and engage in activities that promote them**

In future, it will be important for the NURC not only to obtain a sense of how Rwandese view reconciliation, but to take a step further, by assessing their willingness to embrace and shape their own concepts and to engage in activities that promote reconciliation. Qualitative surveys should be used to measure this.

- **The level of ownership of the reconciliation process and activities by communities**

The future of peace in Rwanda will depend as much on individual Rwandans and their communities as on government policies and direction. This is particularly true when it comes to eliminating genocide ideology. The, impact of the NURC must thus also be studied in relation to the extent to which ordinary Rwandans truly and genuinely own and shape the process of reconciliation. That is, the extent to which they see it as a personal, as much as a national, responsibility. Regular fact finding missions, focus group meetings, evaluation workshops and monitoring tools should be used.

- **New and innovative initiatives to promote reconciliation and peace among communities**

Community and individual ownership of the reconciliation process and their willingness to embrace and engage in activities that further reconciliation is further evidenced in the establishment of new and innovative associations dealing with reconciliation issues. Such initiatives indicate high levels of comprehension as well as the development of capacity as a result of the work of the NURC. In addition, as an indicator, the extent and nature of initiatives taken by communities and organisations can be used as a strategic planning tool for the NURC – highlighting areas for strategic engagement, capacity building and entry points for interventions. Quantitative surveys, field visits

and fact – finding should be used to monitor new initiatives and associations. The NURC should have a system of recording, analysing and supporting new initiatives.

- **Threats to the NURC**

These were included as an indicator for two reasons. First, as a measure of the NURC's monitoring capabilities – in terms of public, private and Government activity in support of the unity and reconciliation process. Second, as a strategic planning tool to identify areas for further research and activity.

These indicators were measured against the following: the results and policy implications of the random sample; the degree to which the NURC had met its stated objectives; the extent to which the agenda of the NURC is shared by other stakeholders; the level of willingness of direct and indirect beneficiaries to participate in activities that promote reconciliation; the level of understanding and discussion of diversity within communities; and; the level of interconnection between the NURC's programmes and activities.

## **OVERVIEW OF RANDOM SAMPLE ANALYSIS**

The results of the sample suggest that younger people (especially between 15 and 25) are more enthusiastic about the work of the NURC than other age groups. This could be a direct function of the type of activities the NURC has run in the communities. However, there were more young people interviewed in the random sample than older ones. The team found that younger people were relatively more willing to be interviewed randomly. Membership in the reconciliation associations however, reflected a much older age bracket (mainly survivors and former prisoners).

The overall sample was slightly under representative of women. Although the study found that women tended to be the driving force in reconciliation activities (especially in the reconciliation associations), there were fewer women who had an excellent knowledge of the NURC in the random sample (69 compared to 144 men). 54 had a poor knowledge of the NURC compared to 18 men. However, 102 women respondents had a good knowledge of the Commission compared to 99 men. Those with a basic and average knowledge of the NURC were 36 and 57 respectively for women and men.

From these results, the knowledge of the NURC among men and women is more or less balanced. The discrepancy reflected in those with a poor understanding (54 women compared to 18 men); and those with an excellent understanding (69 women compared to 144 men), may result from the fact that women have, historically, had less access to education than men. Knowledge of the NURC among respondents between the ages of 26 – 35; 36 – 45 and 55 and above was drastically lower. In the 26 – 35 age bracket, only 39 had an excellent understanding. 60 had a good understanding; 86 had an average understanding and 8 had a basic understanding. The figures drop even further in the 36 – 45 age bracket and lower still in the 46 – 55 bracket.

By their very nature, the *Ingandos* are particularly popular among younger people given their degree of participation, solidarity and engagement. Most of the youth interviewed by the consultants at the National *Ingando* Centre in Ruhengeri were excited about meeting and re-uniting with new and old friends. For some, the idea of attending a “solidarity camp”, far away from home with hundreds of other young people was seen to be “appealing<sup>1</sup>”. Many felt that they would be treated with more respect as a result of their participation in the *Ingandos*.

### **On Reconciliation**

93 percent of the respondents had an average to excellent understanding of the concept of reconciliation. For most, reconciliation simply meant living together and forgiving. As with the previous sample, those between the ages of 15 – 25 had a better understanding of reconciliation than to respondents from the 26 – 35 age group. Respondents from age groups above 35 had an even lower understanding. The relatively fewer older people that were interviewed might explain the discrepancy, but judging from the behaviour of respondents, older people tended to be more suspicious and unwilling to volunteer information. Younger respondents usually gave further explanations without much probing from the interviewers.

The figures suggest that younger people were more confident in their knowledge about reconciliation, and they were generally more forthcoming in the interviews than older people. Although a larger sample needs to be done in the future, one may argue that the NURC is appreciated more among younger people. This might be explained by the nature of NURC activities. 90 percent of the younger respondents knew about the *Ingandos* very well, and had either participated in them, or were planning to do so. Among the older age groups, many either belonged to community based reconciliation associations or had come into contact with NURC staff from time to time.

### **On Positive Change in Rwanda Since 1994**

Overall, younger people are more confident about the direction the country was taking, while older people were more unsure or hesitant. The figures can be explained by the genocide context.

Respondents between 15 and 25 years were between 4 and 14 years when the genocide took place in 1994. They arguably did not have as direct an experience of the genocide as older people. They therefore generally have less reason to be distrustful of Rwanda’s future than more senior citizens. Those in the 26 to 35 age group were between 15 and 24 years in 1994. They had a more direct experience of the genocide and for that reason their views about the current and future situation in the country are arguably more nuanced, but on the whole, they were more confident than those in the 36 – 45 and 46 – 55 age groups. In the latter group, respondents were between 35

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<sup>1</sup> 100 youth were interviewed by the consultants at the National *Ingando* Centre in Ruhengeri.

and 46 years when the genocide took place. They carry more vivid memories of the genocide and are therefore more suspicious.

- **Policy Implications**

From the figures, it is clear that knowledge of the NURC within communities is good. 71 percent of the respondents had an average to excellent knowledge of NURC activities. In terms of the concept of reconciliation, 93 percent had an average to excellent understanding. Excellent understanding was measured in terms of respondents who volunteered more information and offered a clear articulation without much probing from the interviewers. This was the case with the younger age categories. For them, reconciliation meant living together and moving forward. For the older respondents reconciliation was more often than not defined as truth telling, truth seeking, respect for survivors (among widows and survivors), and forgiveness (among former prisoners and perpetrators). For the older respondents, reconciliation was also defined as “remembrance”.

These findings are consistent with Rwanda’s recent historical experiences, and age demographics. Rwanda has a young population. 40 percent of the economically active group are between the ages of 20 – 35. Younger people are generally more ready to accept and promote new ideas. Given the genocide context, the same enthusiasm cannot realistically be expected from older people, who were more directly affected by the events in 1994.

The NURC therefore ought to develop a strategy that focuses on the youth (including students, young professionals entering the job market, and those attending tertiary education). More research, including opinion surveys, needs to be done to understand youth dynamics in post-genocide Rwanda. More effort needs to be made to draw young people into the reconciliation agenda, and to empower them to shape it and to become peace managers in their own right. There is a lot of merit in developing the Leadership Academy, as a programme that could specialise in building leadership skills and creating a spirit of public service among students and youth.

To reach out to the older age groups, the NURC should focus on activities that bring perpetrators and victims together. While the seminars and consultations are useful, their impact is not easy to measure and it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the ideas that are taught are consciously internalised, applied and transferred. To guarantee better results, the NURC should provide more direct support to practical activities that promote actual coexistence and shared interests. These include community-based income generating activities, community based reconciliation associations, clubs and support groups. The Commission should provide critical support (advice, technical assistance, training, grant provision) and regularly monitor these groups.

There is sufficient information to suggest that given the correct amount of support the communities are ready to carry forward reconciliation activities on their own.

#### IV. KEY LESSONS FROM THE PERFORMANCE OF THE NURC

##### a. Culture is a vital tool for sustainable reconciliation

There is no question about the positive role that culture plays in any reconciliation process. In Rwanda, ordinary people are more in contact with cultural institutions than political ones. When disputes arise in the community, the first points of contact are the *Abunzi*. It is only when the *Abunzi* fail, that the cases are transferred to the courts. When prisoners are released, they go through the Gacaca process as a transitional phase before they are integrated back into their communities. When social peace is disturbed, the *Abakangurambaga* intervene directly.

The NURC has succeeded in integrating culture into the reconciliation process. Many of its interventions are modeled on cultural concepts and practices (*Ingando*, *Ubusabane*, etc). It will be necessary to build on this in the next programme phase.

##### b. There can be no sustainable reconciliation without the active participation of communities

From the start, the NURC established itself firmly within communities. It succeeded to popularize reconciliation at the grassroots level. This is indicated by the several associations that have been formed countrywide. Many of the *Ingandos* were demanded directly by the communities themselves and students have taken the lead in forming NURC clubs at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Clearly, reconciliation is not seen as the responsibility of the state, but as a societal concern. The community based reconciliation associations should serve as the basic entry points through which the NURC could institutionalize the reconciliation process in the next project phase. Despite being many, they are weak and for the most part, they rely heavily on the patronage of the NURC. There is a need for the Commission to empower such institutions by developing programmes to build their capacity to fundraise, prepare and run meetings, document minutes, manage finances, prepare reports and raise incomes.

##### c. Reconciliation works best when formal and non formal methods are integrated holistically

The NURC is not an ad-hoc mechanism with a strict mandate and timeframe. It was designed to popularize, institutionalize, monitor and facilitate the reconciliation process at national, provincial, district and sector levels. In the first phase (1999 to the present), the Commission popularized reconciliation. In the next phases, the Commission ought to concentrate on institutionalizing and monitoring reconciliation. The work of the Commission would have come to naught if it had not integrated formal and non-formal methods of reconciliation. It supported communities and actively promoted spontaneous reconciliation activities. It relied heavily on the use of culture and other non-conventional techniques of reconciliation. It has at the same time worked in

concert with other formal and informal structures including the Gacaca courts, *Abunzi* and public and private partners. This orientation needs to be maintained in the next phase.

**d. Political will is vital for the success of a reconciliation initiative**

Since its inception, the NURC has enjoyed political support from all levels of the Government. As was noted earlier, all key Governmental institutions are part of the reconciliation agenda and see themselves as partners of the NURC. There is a lot of coordination at this level. There is a permanent coordination committee bringing together the NURC, Ministry of Justice, Supreme Court and National Service for the Gacaca Courts. There is constant contact and communication between the NURC and key Governmental departments.

The continued support of the Government will be crucial if the NURC is to consolidate its achievements and re-position itself in the next phase. It will no doubt continue to be impacted by developments at Governmental level. The current decentralization policy for instance is going to have an impact on the way the NURC operates in future. All state institutions are expected to decentralize their activities to the provincial, district and sector levels. The Commission will have to follow suit.

**e. Reconciliation can be used to address wider concerns**

One of the most important lessons that came out of the first phase is that reconciliation activities can be used as an entry point to deal with the issues of underdevelopment (poverty, reparations and so on). Many of the associations dealing with reconciliation also engage in income generating activities to sustain themselves. Some associations, such as the *Abiyunze* for instance, mobilize perpetrators to build houses for survivors. In its initial stages, the NURC observed that poverty and underdevelopment were threats to reconciliation. For many communities, improving their conditions of living is seen as a tangible aspect of reconciliation. In short, there can be no genuine reconciliation until the quality of life of Rwandans has been improved.

If coordinated well, community based reconciliation associations can easily become engines for poverty eradication programmes. This should be one of the long-term policy issues that the NURC could address.

**f. Each region in Rwanda has unique challenges requiring unique approaches**

Rwanda is not monolithic. Each region has its own peculiar make up influenced by political history, administration, social makeup, proximity to international borders, policies of exclusion, marginalisation, ethnic privilege and preferential treatment. Population movements have also had an impact on the social milieu in each region.

The NURC should re-focus its strategy by developing operational programme objectives in each region. These should be based on sound political and situational analysis, on-the-ground fact-finding, involvement of communities in shaping programmes and empowering communities to become agents for implementing NURC programmes.

**g. If support is not leveraged well, dependency sets in**

In some places, associations were formed with the hope that the NURC would provide funds. When the funding did not come, demoralization set in. This is one of the threats facing the Commission. To address this problem, the NURC needs to develop a clear policy on providing grants. This should include: a) criteria for funding; b) regional spread of grantee institutions; c) priority activities needing attention; d) expected outcomes of grants; e) accountability and reporting; and f) sustainability. The Commission could identify and work with selected associations in each province to build capacity and transfer best practices that could be taken up by others.

**V. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The time is right, for the NURC to draw lessons from the successes, challenges and limitations of its performance and develop an operational strategy to: a) refocus its interventions; b) institutionalize reconciliation; c) contribute to policy development; d) mainstream reconciliation into other national initiatives; e) empower communities to implement reconciliation programmes and; f) improve its research, documentation, monitoring and evaluation capacity.

The need for new and more innovative institutions, models and processes of transitional justice and reconciliation remains salient in Rwanda specifically and Africa in general, and all national initiatives available to work towards this objective should actively be supported. Rwanda's recovery from one of the worst episodes of genocide in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should be seen as a chance for the Great Lakes Region and for Africa.

With this in mind, the following activities can contribute to reconciliation in the post genocide context of Rwanda:

- **Training and Capacity Building:** This should entail two aspects: a) conflict resolution training; and b) problem solving workshops. The NURC should refine its conflict management approach by raising awareness and impart skills for monitoring, documenting and resolving conflict. Its primary targets should be the *Abakangurambaga* and *Abunzi*. Officials and district, provincial and sector levels should also be included in training programmes. Memoranda of understanding on institutional collaboration with bodies such as the Centre for Conflict Management should be developed to design and evaluate training modules, intervention strategies and monitoring;

- **Problem solving workshops:** These should incorporate grassroots consultations and public seminars. They should be structured to bring communities together to engage in collaborative analysis of the problems facing them and possible solutions. Local officials should as a rule, be part of such workshops. They should be designed to enable communities to interact openly and encourage the development of relationships – a politically inclusive and conducive space for communities to develop and test ideas, which may prove useful in finding solutions to problems. When tensions arise (for instance the problems that were caused by the alleged perpetrators who fled to Burundi), such workshops should be convened, with a view to drawing communities into decision-making. The outcomes should be taken up and integrated into the Commission’s programmes;
- **Community empowerment:** Strategic support to community associations, clubs and groups dealing with reconciliation and peace issues is paramount. To start with, they must be documented comprehensively. They will in future provide the infrastructure for reconciliation in communities. Such associations could also become new entry points in the campaign to raise household and community incomes;
- **Leadership Academy:** bad leadership has caused Rwanda’s civil conflicts and political turmoil. There is a need to develop a *Leadership Academy* as a dedicated programme designed to develop and equip young leaders, managers, professionals, students, youth and others with leadership skills. It could for instance be run along the lines of a core programme (2-3 months) that could in turn be linked to shorter courses at the National University and other institutions;
- **Bottom up approaches:** Grassroots approaches have proved to be more sustainable in the Rwandan context. They however pose challenges that need to be addressed.  
First, at this level are massive numbers of people. At best, strategies can be implemented to touch the leadership working at local and community levels, but more often than not these strategies represent points of contact with the masses rather than a comprehensive programme for reaching and empowering them.  
Second, most of the people at this level are in a survival mode in which meeting basic needs such as water, food, shelter and safety is a daily struggle. It is not possible to tell peasants about elaborate programmes and visions. The NURC should not miss such core issues like people lacking food and water. In sum, the Commission should work with other institutions to mainstream poverty eradication into the reconciliation agenda in a creative way. Bottom up processes and devices that build on the traditions and culture of Rwandans and which concurrently address the challenges of underdevelopment stand a better chance of succeeding.

## STRATEGIC ISSUES TO BE TAKEN UP

- **Decentralize the NURC**

The Government of Rwanda is currently implementing a wide ranging decentralization strategy which will result in the decentralization of major central government functions to the provincial, district and sector levels. The Government's strategic goal is to achieve better coordination of ministries and institutions and better service delivery. The structure is also expected to ease the monitoring of government projects and make more resources available where they are needed. Because it is a statutory institution, the NURC is going to be affected by these changes.

Strategically therefore, the Commission should aim to devolve and gradually transfer the implementation of its core activities to communities. To do this, it has to make structural internal changes, while empowering communities to play a more strategic role in carrying forward the reconciliation agenda. The Commission needs to put in place programmes and policies and it needs to provide guidance. Once these are in place, communities can do the work.

- **Improve Communication and Reporting**

This was a weak spot of the NURC. Although it has achieved a lot in terms of outputs and also in terms of popularizing reconciliation, the Commission has not made its wealth of experience available. Outside Rwanda, its activities are not well publicized or understood, and even inside Rwanda, the consultants found that the awareness of communities about the Commission was not as a result of an aggressive communication strategy. The annual reports do not really do justice to the achievements of the Commission. Internationally, several papers have been presented by the Executive Secretary and the NURC has attempted to sell itself (quite rightly) as a unique model worth studying, but this cannot compensate for a lack of a communication strategy.

The consultants feel that the NURC needs to improve and standardize the quality of its reporting, and it definitely needs to work out and implement a communications strategy to disseminate its work and to raise its profile internationally. Elsewhere, reconciliation bodies have attempted to influence international public opinion on transitional justice issues. The South African TRC is probably one of the most well – studied commissions in the world. Generally cited as an example worldwide, it has succeeded to popularize itself and it is more often than not used as a benchmark for other countries seeking to deal with post war reconciliation.

The NURC should do more to popularize itself as an interesting model of transitional justice that has offered a different approach and developed new concepts of reconciliation. Its experience is directly relevant for the countries of the Great Lakes, which share many characteristics and a common history with Rwanda.

- **Establish a comprehensive database of clubs and associations and quantitative information**

One of the areas that lacked attention was documentation. There is no record on how many associations there are in the country, the challenges they are facing and the activities they are carrying out. There is also no record on the *Abakangurambaga* and the Reconciliation Clubs and partner institutions. The quantitative information about the Commission's work (ie number of people trained, age and gender spread, etc) is not readily available. Given that the Commission works with large numbers of people countrywide, it is important to devise a system where all this information can be centralized, updated and analyzed on a regular basis.

- **Streamline Reconciliation into other National Processes and Monitor Public Institutions**

In order for the Commission to play a more facilitative role in the reconciliation process it will need to streamline reconciliation into other national processes and assist public and private institutions to include reconciliation in their various programmes and projects. This is in line with its mandate. Fortunately a lot of synergy exists between the NURC and other state institutions. There is also a very positive working relationship that exists between the Commission and key institutions and individuals. This should be used as an entry point for the NURC to ensure that reconciliation becomes part of the policy agenda of various institutions. This can be done by: a) spearheading and driving a process of setting up a national policy on unity and reconciliation; b) working with state institutions to develop guidelines on implementing the policy; and c) developing indicators and targets that can be adhered to by institutions through the active help and monitoring of the NURC.

- **Institutionalize Reconciliation by Strengthening Existing Tools**

A number of tools were created as a direct result of the Commission's activities: *Abakangurambaga*, *Abunzi*, *Ingando*, and the Reconciliation Summit. These are entry points that the NURC could use to institutionalize the reconciliation process. In the next phase, the Commission needs to pay special attention to these tools, and to build them up to become more effective in carrying forward its work in communities. The NURC also needs to explore institutional partnerships (written memoranda of understanding) with: the National University of Rwanda; Centre for Conflict Management; Ministry of Education; National Institute for Statistics and the National Museum.

- **Put into place an integrated planning and evaluation system**

The expectations and demands that are placed on the NURC are ever increasing. In order to manage these complexities and increase the efficiency of the Commission, a well – coordinated and integrated planning process needs to be put in place. At the start of each year, all the programmes need to develop activity plans based on agreed objectives, evaluation of past activities and sound political and situational analysis. Each province should then be asked to identify strategic priorities in terms of reconciliation challenges which should be incorporated in the NURC's annual programme. This will help the Commission to better coordinate its activities at provincial, district and sector levels and respond to issues as they arise.

- **Develop a Leadership Academy**

This is one of the tools that could enhance the Commission's capacity building efforts and sustain its training programmes. The Academy should be a programme designed to build leadership skills among young people from all sectors. It should be built around an institutional partnership involving the National University and it could involve external Universities as well. The programme would provide residential training (2 – 3 months); shorter courses, support to practical initiatives; an exchange programme; and; opportunities for young people to undertake internships at the NURC among others.

- **Put into place a mechanism to respond to community requests**

A system needs to be put in place to streamline the process through which communities access support from the NURC. This would not only shorten the response time required from the Commission, but it would give first hand information about the needs of communities.

### **a) Conclusion**

The uniqueness of the NURC lies in a number of factors: a) unlike other reconciliation mechanisms in Africa and rest of the world its mandate goes beyond the formal transitional period; b) its focus is to transfer ownership of reconciliation to communities and establish longer term structures; c) it has promoted reconciliation as a strategic challenge to be taken up by individuals, communities and public and private organs; d) it has developed a broadened notion of reconciliation that includes fighting poverty and raising household incomes; and e) it has encouraged communities to become the primary actors in the reconciliation process.

In summary, it has popularized the reconciliation agenda at community level. Although there is no national programme and policy on unity and reconciliation, it established an innovative approach to restore and consolidate unity among Rwandans through education, mobilization, sensitization and training. It also laid a strong foundation for institutionalizing reconciliation through establishing the *Abakangurambaga*, regular reconciliation summits, *Ingando*, and community based associations.

It however lost the research, analysis and documentation component on the way, and therefore the capacity to base its work on sound political and situational analysis. The NURC lacked tools to check and follow up results systematically. Although attempts were made to evaluate its performance it did not identify benchmarks and indicators that could have been used to assess its performance and inform its interventions.

Its weak research and analytical capacity affected its communication and policy development strategy. The added value of its work has therefore not been made readily available. The development of original reconciliation models and best practices based on integrating traditional values; the database on community based associations and initiatives; the summit recommendations that were supposed to be systematically integrated into the work of the NURC; and the monitoring of institutions to ensure that they addressed reconciliation concerns were lacking.

But despite its underutilization and lack of strategy in these critical areas, the Commission developed a niche for itself in three programme areas: civic education and mobilization; conflict mediation and support to communities. These need to be consolidated in the next phase with a view to: a) empowering communities; b) paying closer attention to quality and follow up of activities; c) institutionalizing reconciliation and developing new initiatives; and d) restructuring the NURC.

In order to realize this, the team has recommended that the Commission cluster its activities into 4 programme areas: civic engagement; conflict management; community support and empowerment; and media and communications. 3 units should support the programmes: research, analysis, documentation and monitoring; training and curriculum development and finance, administration and human resources. It is imperative to restrict the objectives of each programme and make them operational, define the mode of intervention, the type of intervention, the type of situation in which to intervene, expected results and how those results will be followed up. The global strategy of the Commission needs to reflect national, provincial, district and sector challenges. Each programme should be used to build a body of knowledge and turned into a publication on lessons learned, and presentations at policy seminars.

The strategic mission of the Commission should be to: **popularize, galvanize and support the institutionalization of locally conceived, culturally appropriate and inclusive reconciliation and peace mechanisms within communities in Rwanda.**

Within each programme, several new projects could be introduced including the following:

- A comprehensive database on existing associations, clubs, groups, focal persons and peace committees in Rwanda. This is a huge research project in itself which should be led by the Research, Documentation and Monitoring Unit;

- Guidelines for best practices for reconciliation and peace building based on the Commission's experiences, and case studies on unique reconciliation initiatives;
- Leadership Academy to develop young leaders and managers as a way to build up the necessary skills required to sustain Rwanda's peace building processes;
- Institutional alliances with key institutions in order to build up much needed capacity in field research, training, monitoring and communications;
- Annual reports on the state of reconciliation in Rwanda;
- An inclusive national process of establishing a national reconciliation policy and strategy;
- Regional reconciliation summits ahead of the national summits; and;
- Regular (quarterly) qualitative and quantitative surveys to inform and evaluate the Commission's work and to influence public policy.

### **On Process**

- Set up a committee to assess the consultants' mission report, the proposals for the future, and a potential new strategic and operational plan. This committee should be composed of in-house staff as well as officials from Government and selected donor institutions;
- Discuss the philosophy and the design of new programmes and institutional partnerships on the basis of an in depth assessment of NURC's competence and expertise, and a serious analysis of the added value that partner institutions could bring to the Commission;
- Assess the operational and budget implications of introducing new projects and implementing reforms, taking into consideration that the activities of the Commission are still ongoing.
- Develop a road map and a timeframe for the transitional arrangements that would need to be put in place if the Commission is to make the changes that are necessary to implement the findings of this study.
- Set up a Committee to discuss and develop the new projects, and to oversee the transitional arrangements.

Rwanda came into international focus in 1994 for all the negative reasons: one of the worst human rights records on the African Continent; a Government which seriously violated the rights of its citizens with impunity; and the worst genocide in recent history.

Fortunately, that sad chapter in African history is being left behind through forward – looking reconstruction efforts and the will of Rwanda's people to re-shape and re-define reconciliation and social reconstruction from a perspective which places more emphasis on bottom – up approaches and development from within, as opposed to mal – development from without.

The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) set for itself the unenviable task of instilling reconciliation among Rwandans after years of institutionalized discrimination and waves of genocidal killings which

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entrenched fear, hatred and suspicion in the population. With no ready – made experiences to draw upon, the NURC did the most natural thing – consulting communities on the way forward and positioning them as the primary agents of reconciliation.

During its seven-year lifetime, the NURC has registered an impressive record of achievements. Most importantly, it has transferred reconciliation concepts and practices to communities and created innovative tools and institutions based on the integration of ancient Rwandese cultural practices and modern tools. The last seven years should be seen as a phase of popularizing reconciliation. In the next programme phase, the Commission should build on its successes by systematically institutionalizing reconciliation and empowering communities at all levels to carry forward and implement reconciliation programmes.

This evaluation report, has attempted to compress the story of the NURC– no easy task by any means. It is our hope that the successes, challenges and limitations that we reported will provide the Commission and other stakeholders with the insights necessary to move the NURC to a new level, as a unique, innovative and creative peace and transitional justice mechanism on the African Continent and indeed the world.