Evaluation Summary Report

Final Evaluation: Maximizing the Impact of Reconciliation in Rwanda

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MEASURING WHAT COUNTS

The Project

This report summarises the findings of the final evaluation of the USAID funded project "*Maximizing the Impact of Reconciliation in Rwanda"*; a two and a half year project implemented by Search for Ccommon Ground (SFCG) together with National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) with the overall goal to "*improve coordination and use targeted bridge-building activities to catalyze meaningful reconciliation in Rwanda"*. Furthermore, this report attempts to make recommendations to contribute to the improvement of future Rwandan unity and reconciliation focused initiatives.

The project sought to improve coordination among key national level actors in unity and reconciliation in Rwanda as well as to increase the participation of targeted communities nationwide to enhance the ownership of unity and reconciliation at the grassroots level. The project also aims to establish forums to support dialogues between diverse groups around unity and reconciliation. The project, which uses a coordinated people-to-people approach, supports a range of capacity development as well as bridge-building activities to encourage the widespread public participation in reconciliation activities, namely solidarity events, participative school theaters, radio programs and their listening clubs.

The Evaluation

The project evaluation, which aims to measure and document the project against its intended and unintended results, to report on best practices and lessons learnt and to make recommendations to support the improvement of future programming, was carried out by a team of three international consultants between November and December 2013 with the data collection process occurring in November. Several tools were employed, ensuring a mixed methods approach to the investigation. Tools include: a) a listenership survey targeting 600 people across the general population as well as among NURC district forum members, b) key informant interviews and c) focus group discussions with NURC representatives at national and district level, as well as other partners involved in unity and reconciliation, e.g.: INGOs, CSOs, FBOs, clubs/associations, radio stations, schools, etc. Despite the different sampling methods applied to each study group, i.e.: random for the quantitative survey but purposive for the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, all five of Rwanda's provinces were represented in the study samples.

The Results

Coordination Mechanisms

In terms of coordination of unity and reconciliation activities, when asked to rate NURC's coordination, over 94% of those interviewed responded that NURC's coordination was either "very helpful" or "helpful" to reconciliation in Rwanda. The evaluation focused on assessing SFCG's assistance to NURC's coordination by looking at the support given to the establishment of the national NGO forum and to strengthening NURC district forums. The national NGO forum experienced some delays in launching as a result of earlier hurdles in finalising the MoU between SFCG and NURC. Whilst this caused delays in the establishment of the NGO forum, which is now set up but still too young for its functionality to be assessed, the delays, and the discussions therein, could be the reason for the strong partnership that now exists between SFCG and NURC and, potentially, for restoring a long-lost trust in effective collaborations with INGOs in matters of Rwandan unity and reconciliation. The NGO forum requires further support to ensure its efficacy and sustainability although, according to those involved in its inception, its relevance is undoubted.

The NURC district forums and selected NURC national level representatives state having learnt new skills as a result of the SFCG trainings they attended. The main topics enjoyed by forum members were conflict management and resolution, as well as performance monitoring and evaluation, which they were immediately able to implement within their respective district. Systematically, members who attended trainings congratulated SFCG on the quality of the content and the professional delivery of the training.

District forum members - who feel imbued with the responsibility of being the conveyor of unity and reconciliation values across grassroots communities - unanimously voiced a keen interest in attending further trainings to stimulate the quality of the work produced by district forums. The wide geographical spread reached through NURC district forums together with their keenness to learn and be equipped with adequate tools should be encouraged, supported and maximised in future unity and reconciliation initiatives.

In terms of overall NURC coordination, there is no doubt that with more coherence between the strategic alignment and the operational capacities of NURC at national and at district level, NURC's coordination capacity, and thus the impact of its work, will greatly benefit. In addition, it would be advisable to develop and implement standardised tools, in addition to, or instead of, the Rwandan Reconciliation Barometer, which experiences some criticism, to assist NURC representatives in measuring progress in unity and reconciliation across Rwanda.

Bridge-Building Activities

The project supported a range of bridge-building community or school-based activities. One such bridge building activity includes solidarity events. In this case, SFCG supports proposals put forward by CSOs planning a targeted community-based activity focused on promoting unity and reconciliation. Another such activity was the participative school theatres in which SFCG trained actors to choreograph and direct theatre performances in schools, the theme of which specifically revolved around locally tailored peace-building messages. Another bridge-building activity was the establishment of listening clubs through community radios producing and broadcasting SFCG supported programs among others. Club members listen to the program together after which, they discuss the topics raised by the program in relation to their own communities. Feedback from the discussions is used to inform the content of following programs.

When both participants and organisers of these bridge-building activities were asked to rate their satisfaction with the extent to which the event reached its objective, most stated that the activity had been relevant, enjoyable, as well as helpful in contributing to bringing people together, enhancing tolerance and creating a common vision. The activities were effective in creating platforms from which individuals and groups can exchange experiences and thoughts on the genocide in Rwanda. Each bridge-building initiative seeks to promote a localised lens to the event in an attempt to enhance the relevance, and thus effectiveness of the activity to that locality, a quality recognised by interviewed participants. Unanimous was the sentiment that one activity contributes one step in the long road to achieving unity and reconciliation hence more activities are required to reach the objectives of unity and reconciliation. It is very feasible and highly advisable to replicate and further develop these bridge-building activities across communities nationwide.

Radio Programming

The project supported the production of a radio program called "Turumwe", specifically developed to address unity and reconciliation issues. Radio is seen to be particularly popular and thus an effective media

for widespread audience reach. This is more applicable to rural areas or areas outside the capital where more households own TVs. Around 14% of the general population interviewed report listening to Turumwe, of whom, most (87%) “like” or “strongly like” the program and almost the same proportion could correctly describe the program content being about unity and reconciliation. More than half of listeners feel the program is relevant to their community, almost half discuss the issues raised by the program, and 44% feel the program has created change, especially around forgiveness in the community. The listening clubs attached to the radio programs are greatly enjoyed by both members of the club and the radio producers. The members feel they have an outlet in which to discuss unity and reconciliation issues within their community. Radio producers admit benefitting from the club feedback for it allows future radio programs to be tailored to the needs of the communities it broadcasts to.

The Conclusion

The project was designed for a long-term goal and objectives that are an ongoing piece. While the deliverables in terms of outputs were achieved the more outcome-oriented objectives are more difficult to assess. The implementation of the project was achieved at the activity level and many opportunities are developing at the strategic level which SFCG is well positioned to take advantage of. The impacts were positive and there were many achievements that were unintended.

Relevance

Twenty years after the genocide Rwandan history still affects most Rwandans on a daily basis it seems. The work of reconciliation is long term requiring investment by government, international and local NGOs fostering the relationships of peaceful coexistence both at cell, district and in the national political space. Continuing vigilance is required. This project is but one step along that journey. In evaluating the project goal and specific objectives, it is clear that this project has important relevance to ordinary Rwandans and to the efforts of the Government of Rwanda on reconciliation and unity. The partnership between NURC and SFCG and other operational stakeholders both at national and sub-national level is important and a dynamic network is in its formative stage.

Effectiveness

While the project was slow to get started, it was time invested mainly in finding agreement around key priorities, the project design and building relationships with NURC staff and understanding of the NURC approach. NURC national stakeholders interviewed indicated reconciliation is highly sensitive in Rwanda, as is the involvement of INGOs. These two factors required a degree of trust-building and mutual understanding that needed time to develop. NURC indicated that the partnership with SFCG, documented in a Memorandum of Understanding, was considered to be a unique and positive experience for NURC. Their experience with INGOs had been one of maintaining arm’s length from operational stakeholders who were seeking approval on paperwork requiring attendance at events only. They were skeptical of its efficacy. Working in a collaborative mode, learning and directing, balancing two very different organizational cultures, it was ultimately considered to be a beneficial experience by NURC and SFCG staff members building confidence and trust between the two organizations. Thus an unintended impact of the project is that it affirms the role of a variety of organizations including INGOs in this sensitive issue area and sets a new standard for partnership for NURC.

Impact

This project offered into the sensitive loci of reconciliation and unity work a focus not on the compartmentalized groups of survivors, perpetrators, bystanders, and the concomitant ideation, rather one

on building relationships between these groups. It created platforms for these groups to come together and effect the bonds that can forward healing in communities where people have few choices but to live together. The focus on relationships began with a government institution (NURC) and an INGO (SFCG) who developed a working relationship, building trust and confidence, and making a breakthrough in what is possible for networking and cooperation. This is a good basis for NURC to work from and needs to be strengthened at district level for it to be effective.

The project was innovative in that it partnered directly with a government institution and NURC seemed to benefit the most from this project, as did SFCG through the partnership. Having overcome their initial skepticism, NURC has proposed to adopt two new tools into their work in the next phase of reconciliation and unity in Rwanda. These participatory tools which initially generated a lot of uncertainty about their impact have proven their value as tools to generate real and authentic dialogue raising important issues and voices from communities and will contribute to NURC's goal of engaging in dialogue from hill to hill in the next phase of reconciliation and unity work. Thus another unintended impact of the project is that it contributes directly to the sustainability of the action – raising diverse voices among the population in maximizing the impact of reconciliation work in Rwanda.

The Recommendations

Strengthening and Aligning the Network

In this public space of what is a controversial and difficult subject, it is vital to make connections and communication, foster discussion and relationships to help heal individual and collective wounds of the genocide and other brutalities which have occurred in Rwanda. This project began that process and the network which is in its formative stage needs further investment and expanded opportunities. SFCG should continue its work with this designing the next effort directly with NURC and other key operational partners.

According to NURC, the next phase of the strategy of reconciliation and unity focuses on dialogue. For NURC to carve out its role will be very important as it can bring in the operational partners through its coordination and collaboration mechanisms. NURC would do well to support the convening of this group to forward the dialogue strategy and ensure all the operational stakeholders including CRS, WVI, Alarm, International Alert, etc. are contributing to the achievement of the strategy. Ensuring buy-in to the strategy, exploring what dialogue means and reviewing what it can accomplish – sharing participatory tools and approaches could be a very valuable next step for NURC and bring some strategic alignment among the operational and key national stakeholders around reconciliation and unity issues.

District forum members were asked for their recommendations to make the Forum coordination more useful and they had a few ideas to offer. Provision of enough funds was number one, which supports the earlier recommendation of how NURC could be more helpful, followed by more training, better coordination, to be more proactive, and for advocacy by NURC for District Unity and Reconciliation Forums.

Keeping Unity and Reconciliation on the Agenda

While development indicators are improving in Rwanda, many interlocutors suggested these are visible signs of political will but not necessarily of reconciliation and unity. Mainstreaming the long-term work of reconciliation and unity runs the risk of burying it in more immediate and pressing urgencies around education, health care and perhaps regional issues. A further risk to this work in this sensitive and core issue area is that concrete results are hard to gauge, and the intangibility threatens interest of donors and others with investment into this issue.

However, there is a need to ensure long-term investment into the intangible work of reconciliation and unity. This project raised the issues again, and the Rwandan barometer is another step in that investment which seeks to find a way to guide the work. However, the need for a loud and singular voice to call out for investment into this sector is urgent. Without the documentary evidence of achievements, and with the intangible outcomes that can change due to context, keeping reconciliation and healing work on the donors' agenda is an imperative. By working together, bringing together the group of operational stakeholders and forging a joint strategy, the national forum can be the beginning of advocacy work that could result in more long-term investment. INGOs, national NGOs and CSOs and NURC need to work together to ensure that social and economic investments are available for the important and continuing work of reconciliation in Rwanda and all stakeholders need to speak in one voice to keep this issue area on the agenda of major donors and corporations as well as regional interlocutors.

Generational and/or Youth Issues

While people under 18 years of age were not part of the study, from the interviews at national and district level it was apparent that the post genocide group of young people who are a large demographic have a strong story to tell. This was apparent through the theater work in schools, as well as through youth-led listening clubs and solidarity activities where their level of enthusiasm and commitment to the cause of unity and reconciliation in their communities was extremely high; a sphere well worth maximizing in any future intervention. A generational gap exists between the 'authority' level of the population (i.e. the people who are in charge) and the post genocide populations who are young people a lot of them students and who make up a large part of the demographic. This generational gap needs examination and work as it further confounds an already complex issue in Rwandan society.

Diversifying Tools and Agency

The network is sowing the seeds of partnership and strategic work with other organizations doing unity and reconciliation work in Rwanda. For example, IRDP is conducting valuable work exploring on key controversial issues through research and dialogue. Already IRDP participated in a regional SFCG meeting and further value can be found to inform both SFCG and IRDPs work by working together. As the project shows, SFCG has some unique tools to bring to the table including the radio programs, participatory theater and listening clubs. Of those who participated in the organisation of an event supported by SFCG, they unanimously requested further activities; a testimony to the success of the initiatives. Tools must be employed strategically to focus on specific target groups or target locations identifying the shift that is being sought and working with the groups to make that happen is important.

There is an opportunity with participatory theater to move from the pilot level to working at the national level. In this instance, building skills in districts to work with this tool could be an important contribution. The valuable and innovative trainings and skill building sessions that SFCG provided should be continued for national and district stakeholders looking into conflict management and mitigation and building skills based on expressed needs of this strategic group. Further follow up to see how stakeholders are using these skills and how further they can be reinforced will be important.