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**NATION- WIDE GRASSROOTS CONSULTATIONS  
REPORT: UNITY & RECONCILIATION INITIATIVES IN  
RWANDA**

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**COMPILED BY:**

**NATIONAL UNITY & RECONCILIATION  
COMMISSION (URC)**

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## **NATION-WIDE GRASSROOTS CONSULTATIONS REPORT : UNITY AND RECONCILIATION INITIATIVES IN RWANDA**

### **1.0 Background**

Inspired by the Arusha Peace Accord, the government of National Unity, considers unity and reconciliation of Rwandan people to be the basis for durable peace, security, human rights, and development - hence the promulgation of legislation establishing the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (URC).

The establishment of the URC is a major milestone in fundamentally changing the effects of governance based on discrimination and sectarianism; a factor that contributed to the 1994 Genocide.

### **2.0 The Grassroots Consultations - Justification**

The justification for the grassroots consultations is based on the belief that the journey towards unity and reconciliation in Rwanda must be led by Rwandans themselves using participatory methods to enable Rwandans from all walks of life to influence and design appropriate methodologies of achieving sustainable national unity and reconciliation. To this end, the URC held nation-wide grassroots consultations that targeted a wide range of Rwandans. The consultations provided a platform upon which Rwandans could air their views on what has divided them in the past, and how to build a lasting, united, and reconciled Rwanda.

### **3.0 objectives of the Grassroots Consultations**

The objectives of the Grassroots Consultations include the following:

- 3.1 To bring the initiatives of the URC to the people of Rwanda, and to promote ownership of the Commission by the people of Rwanda;
- 3.2 To enable Rwandans to identify the causes of disunity among themselves;
- 3.3 To enable Rwandans to actively participate in generating solutions to the problem of disunity;
- 3.4 To enable Rwandans to set-up structures and channels through which unity and reconciliation programs can be channeled;

- 3.5 To consult with Rwandans themselves on how to steer Rwanda on a more productive path toward a range of developmental socio-economic activities, including wealth generation, culture, sport and development of a positive national identity.

## **4.0 Expectations from the Grassroots Consultations**

### **4.1 Global Expectation**

The results of the grassroots consultations, in terms of views, ideas and suggestions, will be assembled in a report form, and will be used as a basis for launching and steering the activities of the URC.

### **4.2 Specific Expectations**

By the end of the grassroots consultations; the URC will be able to:

- a) develop strategies for facilitating unity and reconciliation;
- b) formulate an agenda and sequence of activities for facilitating unity and reconciliation;
- c) coordinate a civil society network of unity and reconciliation throughout Rwanda, and;
- d) facilitate the formation of formal and informal representation of URC in Rwanda's Prefectures and Communes.

## **5.0 Methodology**

### **5.1 Research Design**

URC used a qualitative method of research with the aim of soliciting people's perceptions of the issue of national unity and reconciliation. This research methodology was chosen because it would enable the Commission to fully and deeply engage the different stakeholders in this peace, unity and reconciliation initiatives. Therefore, open discussions were encouraged to promote a sense of freedom of expression.

URC avoided the use of tape recorders or wide spread use of video coverage (with the exception of occasional, limited Rwanda Television coverage) to avoid biasing or intimidating participants.

The consultations were done with large, selected groups comprised of Prefecture Leaders, Commune leaders, and leaders and representatives of various groups of people.

## **5.2 Sampling**

We employed a stratified purposive random sampling framework in order to access a target group considered representative of Rwandans from different walks of life. The sample was stratified in a sense that the different socio-economic and political strata (sections) of Rwandan communities in the different Prefectures were involved in the formulation of ideas during the grassroots consultations. The sample was purposive in the sense that it was predetermined that selected individuals in certain sectors or with certain responsibilities would be involved in these consultations. At the same time., however, the sample was random in the sense that URC did not pre-determine the specific participants drawn from these sectors. The Prefecture and Commune authorities selected and determined who would participate.

The target groups, therefore, were comprised of representatives of the following categories of Rwandans:

- Prefets;
- Sous prefers
- Burgomasters
- Elected leaders
- Women's committees
- Government officials at the Prefectures
- Religious leaders
- Head teachers
- Medical officers
- Youth Committees
- Sports Association leaders
- Cultural groups' leaders
- Artisan
- Business people

Representatives of the above groups met at prefecture halls, with an average of 200 participants per meeting. The meetings usually lasted 4 - 5 hours.

## 5.2 Grassroots Consultations in the Prefectures

5.3 The following is a schedule of the meetings:

Date	Prefecture	Participants
10/8/1999	Gitarama	Representatives from all communes
28-29/10/1999	Cyangugu	Representatives from all communes
8/10/1999	Gikongoro	Representatives from all communes
13/10/1999	Ruhengeri	Representatives from all communes
15/10/1999	Byumba	Representatives from all communes
18/10/1999	Kigali Rural	See Kigali Rural Schedule on page 5
25/8/1999 – 13/7/2000	Kigali Ville (PVK)	See PVK schedule page 4-5
1/2/2000	Kibungo	Representatives from all communes
16-17/2/2000	Umutara	Representatives from all communes
18/2/2000	Kibuye	Representatives from all communes
24/2/2000	Gisenyi	Representatives from all communes
28/10/2000	Butare	Representatives from all communes

Meetings were opened with brief presentations on the goals, genesis, functions, structure and programs of the URC. Participants were then invited to openly and freely give their views on the following issues:

- 1) In Rwanda's past and recent history, what has led to the disunity among Rwandans?

This question addresses the second objective (3.2) of the grassroots consultations, i.e., **"to enable Rwandans to identify the causes of disunity among Rwandans":**

- 2) What can be done to solve the problems identified, so as to promote participation and involvement on the part of all Rwandans?

This question addresses the third objective (3.3) of the grassroots consultations, i.e., **"to enable Rwandans to actively participate in generating solutions to the problem of disunity."**

In all cases, the views of the participants (the findings) were recorded in form of minutes. As previously indicated, URC avoided the use of video and tape recorders. This was done to put participants at ease, to enable them express themselves freely, and to add to the validity of the responses and any recommendations based on those responses.

In a few circumstances, Rwandan television did film and compile highlights of the proceedings. These programs were compiled to inform the general public on the progress being made by URC. (Videotapes of these broadcasts will be available for viewing.)

#### 5.4 Exceptions in the Arrangements of the Grassroots Consultations ...

5.4.1 In Kigali Town Prefecture (PVK), consultations were done with slightly different groups than those in other Prefectures. Due to the nature of the population, with people of diverse capacities, professions, activities, interests, classes, etc., it was not possible to call together the same representatives. Consultations were conducted with the following groups:

##### Schedule of Grassroots Consultations in PVK,

Date	Venue	Participants
25/8/1999	Kigali Prefecture Hall	Local elected leaders
1/9/1999	Kigali Prefecture Hall	Elected Youth Leaders
4/9/1999	Kigali Institute of Science, Technology and Management Hall	Elected Women Leaders
14/9/1999	Lycée Notre Dame de Cîteaux Hall	Head Teachers and teachers of Primary and Secondary schools in Kigali town.
Sept. 1999	Kigali Prefecture hall	Pastors and followers of the Seventh Day Adventist Church
28/9/1999	Nyamirambo Islamic Centre	Leaders and followers of the Islamic faith.
10/10/1999	Nazareen Church, Kicukiro	Nazareen Church Pastors and their followers
12/10/1999	Kigali Prefecture Hall	Demobilized soldiers
23/11/1999	Kigali Prefecture hall	Pro-Femme Twese Hamwe members
9/12/1999	Kigali Prefecture hall	KORA and JOC club members
17/12/1999	Protestant Church hall, Biryogo	Pastors and followers of the Protestant Church in Kigali
13/7/2000	Association of Journalists	Journalists, both government and private

5.4.2 In Gitarama and Kibungo, due to the presence of a URC representative, consultations were first conducted at the Commune levels, and later ideas from the Communes were discussed at the Prefecture level. This gave more people a chance to participate and give their views.

5.4.3 In Kigali Rural, the Prefet decided to hold the consultations in 4 groups. The Communes were organized at "Sous/Prefecture" basis resulting in 4 meetings as follows:

#### Grassroots Consultations in Kigali-Rural

Date	Venue	Participating Communes
18/10/99	Kanzenze	Kanzenze, Ngenda, Gashora and Bicumbi
18/10/99	Rushashi	Musasa, Shyorongi, Rushashi Tare
Oct. 1999	Gikoro	Butamwa, Gikoro, Rubungo, Kanombe
Oct. 1999	Mugambazi	Gikomero, Mbogo Mugambazi, Rutongo

#### 5.4.4 Consultations with Selected Schools

At the invitation of the UNITY CLUB, an association of women ministers and wives of cabinet ministers, URC conducted grassroots consultations with students in twelve secondary schools. Consultations with the students included the theme of Child Abuse and Poverty in Rwanda. Following is a list of the twelve schools that participated in the consultations:

#### Schedule of Grassroots Consultations with Selected Secondary Schools

Date	Venue (Prefecture)	Secondary School
15/03/2000	Gisenyi	Lycee de Nyundo
15/3/2000	Cyangugu	Groupe Scolaire de Shangi
21/3/2000	Gikongoro	Groupe Scolaire Marie du Verbe
24/3/2000	Umutara	Umutara Polytechnic
27/3/2000	Kibungo	Ecoles des Sciences Infirmieres
27/3/2000	PVK	College APEHOT
28/3/2000	Kibuye	College Ste. Marie
28/3/2000	Butare	Groupe Scolaire de Nyanza
28/3/2000	Gitarama	Groupe Scolaire Notre Dame de Lourdes de Byimana

28/3/2000	Kigali Rural	Groupe Scolaire de Bicumbi
29/3/2000	Ruhengeri	Groupe Scolaire de Rwaza
29/3/2000	Byumba	Groupe Scolaire de Bon Conseil

#### 5.4.5 The Batwa Community

Following completion of the grassroots consultations described above, it was noted that one group of Rwandans was not represented in any of the consultations, i.e., the Batwa community. The Batwa, a marginalized group, frequently has been left out of Rwanda's political, economic and social developmental discussions. To correct this omission, the URC then decided to target the Batwa communities in 20 Communes selected from 8 Prefectures as follows:

Date	Prefecture	Participating Communes
16/03/00	Umutara	Karangazi, Rukara
17/03/2000	Kibungo	Rutonde, Rusumo
21-22/03/2000	Gitarama	Mukingi, Ntongwe Masango
23-24/03/2000	Gisenyi	Kayove, Mutura
28-29/03/2000	Ruhengeri	Nkumba, Kidaho, Nkuri, Mukingo
30-31/05/2000	Kigali Rural	Mugambazi Kanzenze
10-11/5/2000	Butare	Nyaruhengeri, Mugusa, Muyira
	Gikongoro	Mudasomwa, Rwamiko

### 6.0 Findings of the Grassroots Consultations

During the consultations, participants were asked:

**In Rwanda's past and recent history, what has led to the disunity among Rwandans?**

The following is a summary of the participants' responses:

#### 6.1 Governance

In all the discussions, the problem of bad governance was sighted as the leading cause of disunity in Rwanda. Governance based on self-aggrandizement, nepotism and opportunism was said to have characterized all regimes from colonial times.

Participants cited examples of leaders who based their leadership on divide-and-rule principles; dividing Rwandans along ethnic lines, religion, regions and later, even family lines. Even in schools, children were often reminded of who they were (Hutu, Tutsi or Twa).

For example:

One of the participants in Kibuye Prefecture consultations, gave her personal experience as a young girl in primary school and later as a teacher. She talked about how one day their teacher came into her class and asked all the Tutsis to stand up. As a young girl, she did not know whether she was Tutsi or Hutu, so when her closest friend and neighbour (a Tutsi) stood up; she too stood up. Her teacher immediately rebuked her and ordered her to sit down. The teacher told her that she was Hutu. The participant explained that that experience hurt her very much and made her begin to view her best friend as being different. As an adult, the participant became a teacher by profession. As a teacher, she too began to repeat the behaviors of her teacher. She separated her students occasionally and reminded them of who they were ethnically. She commented about how she regretted having done this as it contributed to disunity.

In Mutara Prefecture (Murambi Commune), an old man (a 1959 refugee returnee) described his experience around 1956 when he was a chief. He explained that he often whipped his subjects when he saw his boss (a white man) approaching. He explained that he did this for fear of being whipped himself.

Divisive leadership has resulted in neglect and marginalization of the Batwa. Although some of the local leaders have shown interest in solving the problems of Batwa, there are still leaders who do not see the seriousness of the Batwa problem and have dismissed it as impossible to solve. This was evident in some Communes where the leaders first reacted to the issue of Batwa by laughing it off as irrelevant.

As a result the Batwa have been left out of leadership roles in the country. For example, the highest level of leadership a Mutwa may reach is a 'Mayumba Kumi' (head of ten homesteads). Generally these ten homes belong only to Batwa, constraining the influence of the leadership to within the Batwa community and promoting marginalization of the Batwa.

Most of the participants cited the problem of hypocrisy among the present leaders. Many leaders were said to be preaching what they don't practice.

Corruption, another aspect of bad governance, was also mentioned very many times. Corruption is said to have existed in past regimes and also in the present regime.

## 6.2 Colonization

Colonization was blamed for many of Rwanda's problems. Citing religion as the tool used by colonialists, this was said to have increased divisions among Rwandans. Up to the time of the genocide, certain religions were blamed for having taken sides and in exacerbating the divisions.

It was generally agreed that.

- Before colonialists arrived in Rwanda, Rwandans lived in relative harmony; living side-by-side as brothers. When the colonialists came, they favored one group and promoted the notion that members of the favored group were superior and meant for leadership. This group was referred to as Tutsi. Members of the other group (the Hutu) were led to believe they were inferior and destined to be led.
- Divisions along ethnic lines started by the colonialists were said to have been entrenched more and more by subsequent regimes culminating in the 1994 genocide.
- Later, the Colonizers began to bestow favor on the Hutu and began to provide them with formal education. However, the Batwa never featured in these improvements; leaving them largely uneducated. It is this legacy of lack of formal education that was said to have contributed significantly to the lack of development of the Batwa. Even today, when Batwa try to send their children to school, the children are often sent back home either for non payment of school fees or lack of proper school uniforms, which their parents cannot afford. Although children from vulnerable families are getting free primary education, the Batwa children in most cases do not benefit from these advantages. The parents are either ignorant of the procedure to access the opportunity or simply do not follow it up. As a result, most of their children drop out of school in primary grades 2 or 3.

## 6.3 Poverty and Ignorance

Poverty and ignorance were viewed as hindrances to reconciliation. Discussions on this issue focused on different regimes which kept the vast majority of people ignorant, preferring to show Rwandans that their problems were mainly ethnic-related.

It was generally agreed that:

- Most of the killings during the 1994 genocide were done with a promise of getting the victims property - a promise for better livelihood.
- Persistent ignorance was said to be causing continued hindrance to unity and reconciliation. With some people living in new houses, and others in no houses at all, it is difficult for them to reconcile.

- Poverty and ignorance in the Batwa communities was even more evident. Most of them have no land to call their own and most of them have been excluded from communal settlements. This is a historical problem as Batwa have historically survived on pottery and hunting. They never required land for permanent settlement. Instead they mostly lived near a chief's home for protection.
- Several participants mentioned the problems caused by the Genocide Survivors' Fund, which is said to favour a certain group of people, while other vulnerable groups are not given similar assistance.

#### **6.4 Justice**

Most participants raised the following ideas, demonstrating how improper administration of justice has divided Rwandans from as far back as independence:

- From the time of independence in 1962, no proper justice was practiced in Rwanda. The government encouraged commission of capital crime. Individuals were offered immunity and reward for capital crimes against whomever the government viewed as the enemy. Several people gave examples of the genocide crisis, when people killed their wives and children and leaders lost their jobs or were killed because they would not participate in the killings.
- Presently many people are in jail for their crimes against humanity, but still justice has not been realized. Participants cited problems of corruption and nepotism as major hindrances to administration of justice. It was said that most of those released from jail are not necessarily the innocent ones, but those with money or relatives to assist them. Some innocent prisoners are not released simply because they can not afford the bribes, or have no relatives or friends to help them out.

#### **6.5 Aid Given to the Vulnerable**

The participants cited how the poor management of aid given to the vulnerable has disunited people, instead of helping them:

- Foreign and local aid, through NGO's and projects was said to sometime produce divisive results. The major form of aid which was cited as divisive was the Genocide Survivor's Fund which caters for Genocide survivors only. The other many widows, orphans and other vulnerable groups are not receiving similar assistance. The main complaint was that this fund is benefiting even well-to-do survivors, and not other genuinely vulnerable groups of people.

- Most of this assistance does not reach the Batwa either because the authorities concerned do not list them among the vulnerable or the Batwa themselves make no attempt to reach the authorities for such information. This was revealed during the meetings with the Batwa. They blamed their local leaders for not including them on lists of the vulnerable, and the leaders too blamed the Batwa for not reporting their problems and for not attending community meetings.

## **6.6 Religious Groups**

Religion in Rwanda was said to have preached and encouraged divisions along ethnic lines. Even among the different religious organizations, there exists no unity. People following certain denominations are not expected to collaborate with others from different denominations. Religion was reported to have created divisions even among family members.

Some of the participants even suggested a ban on certain religions. In Kibungo Prefecture (Nyarubuye Commune), an elderly lady referred to the scare of the "end of the world" which was preached by certain religious groups towards the end of 1999. She talked of the many young people who were encouraged to marry at a young age so that the "end of the world" may find them married. These examples were given to show the influence religion has on people. That if used positively, a lot can be achieved but if used negatively, the harm caused can be immeasurable.

## **6.7 Mass Media**

The Media was mentioned by many as having been used by previous regimes to promote hatred among Rwandans. Radio stations such as RTLM which openly incited Hutus to kill Tutsis were mentioned.

The foreign media was also said to be contributing to the disunity with its constant reference to ethnic differences among the leaders of Rwanda.

## **6.8 Rwanda History Teaching**

As another factor contributing to disunity, participants cited the fact that, in schools and during meetings held by politicians, divisive history was taught.

For example:

- Children were taught in schools that Hutus, Tutsis and Twas were different, that they originated from different places, and therefore, could not live together. They were taught that for years; the Tutsis had oppressed Hutus, therefore a Hutu should see a Tutsi as an enemy.

- History was generally used by the politicians to divide Rwandans more, and they actually instituted the divisions by continuing to use identity cards, which showed one's ethnicity. In most of the consultations, many participants expressed happiness at the removal of ethnicity in the present identity cards.
- The Batwa cited a major historical problem, which has for years hindered their integration into the rest of the Rwandans society - being stigmatized. Since pre-colonial times, the Batwa were stigmatized as people who ate the wrong kinds of food (e.g., their habit of eating mutton, which to other Rwandans, both Hutu and Tutsi was taboo). As a result, other Rwandans have viewed them as people with whom they could not share food or even sit next to. This has led to their continued discrimination and isolation.

## 6.9 New and Old Expressions used to Divide Rwandans

Many of the participants expressed disapproval of the labels being given to different people by fellow Rwandans. Examples included the following:

- Before the war and Genocide, a Tutsi was referred to as a "cockroach", "snake". etc.
- After the war a Hutu is referred to as "Interahamwe"; "Igipinga", "Tingitingi" etc.
- Different labels are used to describe 1959/1960 Rwandan refugees who returned from exile from different countries, and those who never went into exile:
  - *Abasaja* (those from Uganda),
  - *Abarundi* (those from Burundi);
  - *Abajepi* (those who have been in Rwanda);
  - *Abacongo* (those from Congo).

Participants viewed the major problems with these labels as being the negative implications associated with them. Such labels were said to be serving to divide Rwandans even further.

## 6.10 Political Parties

These too, were said to have divided Rwandans further. From the time of independence, parties were formed along ethnic lines. Instead of promoting programs for the good of the people, Parties promoted ethnic differences and exploited these to gain power. Take for instance, PARIMEHUTU. Even before you look at the Party's political agenda, the name itself is divisive in a sense that it directly appeals to the Hutu

Vs Tutsi sentiment for its acceptance and support. Some of the participants even suggested that political parties should be abolished in Rwanda. Others wondered why top politicians are calling themselves heads of political parties yet these parties are not heard of among the masses.

## **6.11 Genocide**

Genocide was viewed as a significant setback to the unity and reconciliation process. Although unity and reconciliation of Rwandans was envisaged as a necessity even before the 1994 war and genocide, the mass killings that took place worsened the situation and pushed the possibility of unity and reconciliation years back. As a result; most of the talk on unity and reconciliation tended to revolve around the genocide and most people viewed reconciliation as a problem only for the Hutus and Tutsis who were in Rwanda at the time of genocide.

Talking about genocide, the Batwa's first reaction was to claim no involvement at all saying that the problem is only between Hutus and Tutsis. But as they discussed further, it was revealed that many Batwa are among those held as prisoners (suspects of genocide), that some Batwa were killed for protecting Tutsis, and that others have kinsmen who joined the RPF in the liberation struggle.

## **7.0 Suggested Solutions to The Problems of Disunity Identified**

The suggested solutions address the third objective (3.3) of the grassroots consultations: "to enable Rwandans to actively participate in generating solutions to the problem of disunity." It also provides the answers given by the participants to the second question, "What can be done to solve the problems identified, so as to promote participation and involvement on the part of all Rwandans?" Following is a summary of the possible solutions identified by participants:

### **7.1 Identify and Promote Unifying Factors**

This solution is based on the belief that Rwandans have more in common than divides them. Participants, therefore, insisted that people should identify and promote uniting factors among the Rwandans (e.g. cultural activities like dancing troops, poetry, songs etc.). Communal work should also be encouraged to promote a sense of oneness as people solve their problems together, as it is said to have been done in the past.

### **7.2 Promote Good Governance**

Several people suggested that good governance could be promoted through the following mechanisms;

- Fighting against corruption, nepotism etc. People want leaders who serve the people instead of those who want to be served;

- Promoting equal opportunity for all regardless of ethnic, religion, regional differences etc. This was mentioned especially in terms of job opportunity, and access to education;
- Promoting a system of governance that has no favourites and no excluded groups, including ensuring the integration of Batwa at all levels of society;
- Instituting the rule of law where all are equal before the law.

### **7.3 Provide and Promote Civic Education**

Most participants agreed that Rwandans need to be re-educated on several issues:

- Human rights for all and a sense of respect for other peoples' rights, along with the ability to advocate for one's rights peacefully.
- The need to speak the truth. There can be no true justice without people willing to say the truth on what they know without any form of prejudices or fear. Truth was viewed as the shortcut to unity and reconciliation and would require some people to repent genuinely and others to be able to forgive.
- An accurate record of the history of Rwanda to ensure that the truth is written without dividing the people more - truth with no sweeping biases. Rwandans need to be made aware of the fact that before being Hutu, Tutsi or Twa, one is a Rwandan. Our elders need to be able to tell the true history as they saw it or learnt about it.
- Include civic education on the curriculum at all levels of education from primary to University level. Others suggested including lessons on unity and reconciliation in schools.
- Promote a culture of free discussion of the past through debates and conferences focusing on factors that have divided Rwandans.
- Divisive language and labels on certain groups of people e.g. Interahamwe, snakes, cockroaches, Baganda, Basaja, Barundi, etc. should be discouraged. Ensure equal and fair opportunity for all.
- Promote unity and reconciliation through all possible channels of communication; e.g., schools, churches, leadership structures, associations; media; cultural troops; etc.

#### **7.4 Promotion of a Culture of Hard Work**

Most participants pointed out that the energy and effort that was put into destroying this country could be turned into a positive force to rebuild the country. If Rwandans could work hard and own property, differences would be reduced. Rwandans should also be helped to identify micro-projects and activities that can help them fight against poverty and work towards development and self-sustainability, as a basis of promoting unity and reconciliation. Support for such projects should be free from any biases, discriminations or prejudices.

#### **7.5 Equal Opportunity for the Vulnerable Groups**

Participants suggested that the Genocide Survivor's Fund should be used fairly. It should not benefit survivors of genocide but also vulnerable orphans, widows and other needy people. Many participants suggested creation of another fund that would assist vulnerable individuals such as: children and wives of those in prisons, children and widows of war victims, families of soldiers who die on the frontline; the elders with no one to take care of them; etc. Without a fund to benefit these groups, the vulnerable often view each other with suspicion, jealousy and hatred. The Batwa also requested that they be considered whenever such a fund is created.

It was also noted that there are still many people with no shelter over their heads (many of them Batwa) and that this is a factor contributing to disunity. Most of those with no houses are too poor to afford the materials required and yet live side-by-side with those already living in ready-made houses in the new settlements (Imidugudu).

#### **7.6 Decentralize the URC**

Participants stressed the importance of decentralizing the URC. This is in line with the fourth objective (3.4) of the grassroots consultations; which is "to enable Rwandans to set-up structures and channels through which unity and reconciliation programmes can be channeled."

The URC has started the process of decentralizing the commission's activities, in order to allow all Rwandans to determine the direction and goals of unity and reconciliation activities and to fully participate in carrying them out. The URC has representatives at all levels of Rwanda's local administration. At the Prefecture level, the URC has two staff members, while at the Commune levels there are URC committees consisting of four people per commune. This process was started before the consultations were completed, as the need to have representatives at Prefecture levels was felt early in the program. (e.g. the presence of URC staff in Gitarama and Kibungo even before the consultations had reached them)

## **7.7 Promote "Gacaca" System of Justice**

Most of the participants saw hope in the "Gacaca" System as a way of promoting truth and justice. The "Gacaca" system of justice is a community-based approach of involving the local people in trying the 1994 Genocide suspects.

Promotion of sensitization programs on the "Gacaca" system of justice should, therefore, be encouraged and people should be encouraged to freely participate in Gacaca.

## **7.8 Political Education**

Participants felt that political parties should be encouraged to define their programs in line with the promotion of unity and reconciliation.

Political education sensitisation programmes should be initiated in the different Communes so that the masses are empowered with skills that can be used to distinguish between divisive politics and development-driven politics.

## **8.0 How The URC Has Used The Information Gathered**

To date the URC has undertaken several activities intended to respond to the suggestions of the participants and to the other information gathered in the consultations. Following is a summary of those undertakings:

### **8.1 National Peace and Leadership Training Program**

A National Peace and Leadership Training program has been started. In this training, national problems affecting the unity and reconciliation of Rwandans are identified, discussed, and possible solutions are sought. This training mainly targets leading politicians, government and private sector workers and university students.

### **8.2 Civic Education Department**

A Civic Education Program has been set up. The program has several sections addressing different issues as follows;

#### **8.2.1 Solidarity Camps**

Organizing solidarity camps in all Prefectures to discuss national problems affecting the unity and reconciliation of Rwandans at all levels of society. This targets local leaders, women and youth groups, opinion leaders and all the grassroots population.

### 8.2.2 Syllabus Unit

A syllabus unit has also been set up to address the issue of civic education in schools. This is to ensure that civic education is taught from primary to university level and to inculcate a culture of love for one's country and respect of human rights in the young generation.

### 8.2.3 Debates and Conferences

Debates and conferences are also organized and encouraged all over the country to enable all Rwandans to participate in the unity and reconciliation process. In these conferences, issues affecting unity and reconciliation are discussed.

### 8.2.4 Cultural Activities

Cultural activities, in form of music, dance, drama and poetry, aimed at promoting the unity of Rwandans are also encouraged all over the country. The URC has already organized a competition on the national level based on all the above cultural activities. The winning pieces are to be used to promote unity and reconciliation countrywide.

## 8.3 Community Initiatives Department

A Community Initiatives Department has also been formed to address the poverty issue. Local initiatives addressing poverty, but also promoting unity and reconciliation among Rwandans are identified, encouraged and supported. NGO's and other government departments dealing in poverty eradication are also identified and encouraged to promote unity and reconciliation of Rwandans in their activities and programs.

## 8.4 Conflict Mediation Department

A Conflict Mediation Department has been established to identify and monitor mechanisms of prevention of latent and potentially dangerous conflicts in society. This department also monitors government departments, political parties and the mainstreaming of URC activities in all their programs.

## 8.5 Marginalized Groups

The issue of marginalized groups like the Batwa has also been addressed. All levels of leadership have been urged to consider them in their different programs.

## **8.6 The Genocide Survivor's Fund**

The Genocide Survivor's Fund is now receiving more attention to ensure that it is used more equitably and fairly.

## **8.7 Decentralization of URC**

The URC has been decentralized as was the wish of most participants. Each Prefecture has two URC representatives, whose task is to ensure that all the URC programs are implemented in the Prefectures and that the communities are involved. In addition, URC committees have been formed at the Commune level.

## **9.0 Problems Encountered During The Grassroots Consultations**

- 9.1 It was not possible to reach each and every Rwandan. The URC only met with leaders representing different categories of people. One cannot say that their views wholly represent the views of the people they serve. More grassroots consultations, debates and discussions, therefore, need to be continued at lower levels.
- 9.2 In all the meetings, the URC had large groups of people present. On average, each meeting had about 200 participants. With meetings lasting approximately 4 hours, not all the participants were able to participate and to give their views. Now, with URC representatives at all Prefectures, more consultations can be done at the lower levels, and involving fewer people.
- 9.3 Because the consultations were done before URC Prefecture representatives were in place, it was difficult to organize these meetings. URC relied on the assistance of the Prefet and Burgomasters, who in most cases were busy with other duties and meetings. It was only in Gitarama and Kibungo, where URC had representatives that we were able to have meetings at much lower levels; giving more people a chance to participate.
- 9.4 Some policy-related questions were difficult to answer. For example, "What can the URC do if its recommendations to an organization, political party, religions group etc. are ignored?" This was difficult to answer because the law that institutes URC does not state clearly what the URC can and cannot do if its complaints and recommendations are ignored.
- 9.5 Although the written record was used to make people more comfortable and feel free to give their views without any form of intimidation, the writer's biases must not be ruled out of the recorded minutes. Future consultations should consider the use of tape recording techniques.

9.6 At the time of the grassroots consultations, other new institutions were also engaged in similar exercises. These included, the National Human Rights Commission, and Gacaca sensitization process and the usual local meetings and activities. This sometimes resulted in more than one agenda in one meeting; giving little time to the URC discussions.

### 10.0 The Budget Used and Funding Sources

During the consultations, money was spent on the following: fuel, per diem for URC staff, refreshments for the participants, and materials (paper, pens, folders, photocopying, etc.). The Italian Cooperation funded the fuel, per diem, and materials. The refreshments were funded by URC.

The following is a breakdown of the budget:

ITEM	QUANTITY	COST PER TOTAL	TOTAL COST	FUNDER
Fuel (diesel)	75.5 trips x 2 cars x 80 litres = 12,080 litres	240	2,899,200	Italian Cooperation
Perdiem (160 URC staff)	110	10,000	1,100,000	Italian cooperation
	50	10,000	500,000	URC
Stationery (pens, paper, folders, etc)			2,038,720	Italian Cooperation
24 meetings (150 people per meeting)	Food, soft drinks, beer and mineral water  (2,000 Frw per person)	300,000 per meeting	7,200,000	URC
<b>TOTAL COST</b>				<b>13,737,920</b>

## **11.0 Conclusion**

The nation-wide grassroots consultations has been an invaluable activity as the URC endeavours to carry out the functions for which it was established. The exercise has been very instrumental in bringing the people closer to the commission and in enabling Rwandans to contribute to its success. The long journey, however, has only just begun.

The findings centered mostly on the fact that unity and reconciliation of Rwandans will be a process with many problems and probable setbacks. It is in view of this that every Rwandan has the duty to play his or her part in ensuring that the dream is realized.

During this exercise, it was most encouraging that all those consulted saw this process as inevitable and invaluable. This was based on the view that Rwandans were once united before colonialism. That before the white man came to Rwanda, the issue of Hutu, Tutsi or Twa had never featured as a problem. There had never been a war or conflict among Rwandans based on ethnic differences. This offers the hope to Rwandans that if they were once united, they can be united once again.

This process has been very useful to the URC as it has led to the development of several programs to address the issues affecting the unity and reconciliation of the Rwandans. This confirms that the URC is on track and will be helpful to Rwandans.