



PEACERISING

STORIES OF YOUNG PEACEBUILDERS IN
THE WORLD

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THE STORY OF MELYSSA

BY KRISTOFF KOHLHAGEN

The crowd grabs hold of the man. “Fish thief!” someone yells. “Thief!” the crowd echoes back. Several tires are forced over the beaten and subdued man. The frenzied crowd, acting as judge, jury, and executioner, puts fire to the petroleum based treads now wrapped around the doomed victim. Black smoke and forked tongues of fire obscure the alleged thief writhing in pain. Death, like the fury of the mob, comes all at once and he is still.

Melyssa, stands beside her father, an off-duty police officer. Tears stream down the child’s face, she looks up to her father, and asks, trembling, “Is there nothing we can do?”

Taking Melissa by the hand her father leads her away from the scene of the killing. The mob is breaking up and those that held the man still and those that lit the fire walk past the father and daughter. These men return to their everyday lives, their professions, and their families. They will never be punished or face justice.

Soon, investigators come to Melyssa’s home, asking her father about the killing. Fearing for his family’s safety he keeps quiet. When the investigators leave, Melyssa demands her father explain why he hadn’t denounced the killers. Her father uncomfortably explains that even as a police officer it is not easy to stand up

and say something. *Sometimes one must know the background and how things really work in a society, he says. Sometimes, to protect your family, you have to accept things as they are.*

Melyssa grew up hearing echoes of her father’s words, as she witnessed other cases of street lynching in her community. But a voice told her that she mustn’t just accept this, that things could change, that she would be different.

Now 18 years old and in her final year of high school, that’s exactly what Melyssa is doing. She has found like-minded young people at the youth center in Rumonge, on Burundi’s southeast coast of Lake Tanganyika. The small semi-urban Rumonge is filling up as Burundians return home, sometimes after more than 20 years living in refugee camps in Tanzania. Having fled cycles of ethnic violence between 1972 and 1993, their return often triggers conflicts around land, property or social integration after being away for so long.

“Returning refugees are often seen as wanting to take the land of the people who didn’t flee,” explains Melyssa. “I see some of the returnees’ children going to the market, and whenever something bad happens the people always first accuse the returnees. Sometimes they beat these

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children. When I see these children laying-down, beaten, I feel terrible.”

Through a partnership with Search for Common Ground, Melyssa had the opportunity to be trained to facilitate dialogue, using non-violent communication approaches. This meant that she was able to get people listening to each other, with less judgment and more empathy. Common interests were identified between people that had been ready to fight. She was proud of what she’d learned, had already tried it with her friends and family, but wondered if she could try it with people beyond her immediate circle.

“One day something happened,” continues Melyssa. “Two local children died and the community blamed the deaths on a refugee who came back from Tanzania. People in the community began to tell us that we should not visit the former refugees and that we should not approach them as they were bad.”

“As a peacebuilder, I think it is our differences that truly leads to harmony. ”



Melyssa jumped into action, and confronted these growing stereotypes by initiating dialogue between youth from both the returnee and local communities. By bringing youth from both groups together she was able to help dispel some of the false accusations against the returnees and to demonstrate that all the youth of Rumonge had far more similarities than differences.

At first, her parents did not support Melyssa’s efforts of peacebuilding. They worried that she was spending so much time at the youth center. “But day by day they began to understand when they saw what I was doing,” says Melyssa. “Now they tell my siblings to also become peacebuilders.”

Even though the majority of returning refugees are Hutu, and Melyssa is Tutsi, this is not an issue, she says.

“Yes, I am a Tutsi, but that is not important. What is important is that I am a Burundian. For me, being a peacebuilder means that I love my country, and I want others to also live well. For me, ethnic groups are not important. As a peacebuilder, I think it is our differences that truly leads to harmony.”

Melyssa doesn’t only talk about understanding, but actually

converts her convictions into action. “When I see [former refugee] girls of my age, I give them clothes and sometimes welcome them at my home to share food and drinks. I see them as my brothers and sisters because they are Burundians like I am. I do not see why people should not welcome them when they are Burundians.”

Melyssa still remembers watching her father powerless in the face of grave injustice. She’s determined to be different, and exudes hope and confidence as she speaks about her future. **“I have great hope for the future of Burundi from starting with what I am doing. I know the youth will lead the change in this nation and make it a great country,” she adds.**

Like her dreams for a peaceful Burundi her ambitions are unlimited. “I dream first to be an administrator of my commune,” she says, and then without hesitation adds: “and why not go even farther and change many things in the whole country, not just the commune?” Through leading by example and striving to bring together those that history and circumstance have driven apart, **Melissa actively challenges her society’s inequalities and violent biases. Having witnessed so much violence and injustice in her eighteen years, it is her unbridled optimism for the future and in the peaceful potential of her youthful generation that sings the loudest for a bright prosperous Burundian future.**

I HAVE GREAT HOPE.

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THE STORY OF PERRYSAXE GATEKA

BY KRISTOFF KOHLHAGEN

Hippopotamus and Rhinoceros pulled stoutly on their ends of the rope. Obscured from one another by high bushes, both animals stood convinced they battled the long-eared hare that had earlier challenged each to a test of strength. After an epic struggle both Hippo and Rhino dropped their ends of the rope to see how the hare could possibly be so strong. Upon discovering one another they began laughing at how they had been duped.

Due to hare's clever ruse, Hippo and Rhino, both longtime enemies, entered into a discussion. Having laughed together and been tricked together, they discovered their commonalities and forged an agreement. For all time henceforth, Rhino was welcome to drink from Hippo's river and Hippo was welcome to graze Rhino's land.

Thanks to the cunning and good nature of the hare, a dialogue was created that empowered peace to flourish.

Of all the animals, it is this cunning, industrious, peace-creating hare of African folklore that Perry Saxe Gateka identifies with. A nimble yet hardy creature with long antennae-like ears, it is a suitable symbol for the founder and director of Radio Humuriza FM in Gitega, Burundi.

Orphaned at the age of 11, Mr. Gateka grew up in a small town with his four sisters. He loved listening to programs on the radio, but the struggling siblings could not afford one.

Fascinated by technology and tired of venturing to neighbors' homes in the hope of getting a chance to listen to their radios, Gateka began watching the village radio and electronic repairmen. "I asked them about the parts of the radios, and I watched them repairing and asked them what is the use of this, and what does this do? Then I would write down the different names of the parts of the radios. This is how the idea came to me to create my own radio."

To afford the bits of wire and metal to make his own radio, Gateka gathered bricks for workmen, fetched water for neighbors, and tended to cattle. Once he earned enough money he didn't stop at simply fashioning a radio. Instead he decided to attempt to make his own transmitter and create his own station. His neighbors were the first to hear his voice through the airwaves.

"People were disturbed when they listened to their radios, and they were like 'what is that?' And then they knew that somebody was around making their own radio.... But the youth were really interested in my radio, so I told the young people to turn on the radio and listen to me speaking and they were amazed and word began to spread."

Gateka, ever industrious, sought a larger audience and, after studying how to construct an FM transmitter, built one in order to reach an

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area encompassing approximately one square mile. Braving a tricky climb, he affixed his homemade antennae to the highest branch of an avocado tree and began broadcasting to more than 100 households.

Word of the young broadcaster spread, and it wasn't too long before government officials arrived at Gateka's home and Makeshift Studio. They were both curious and alarmed by the young man's ability to fashion his transmitter and reach an audience – all

without adhering to any regulations. The officials demanded that he buy a real transmitter and properly register like other stations.

Luckily, the government officials were not the only ones to have heard of Gateka's radio exploits, and a telecommunications company hired him. On August 5, 2013, he moved to Gitega, Burundi's second-largest city. Using all of his savings, coupled with hard work and

perseverance, his Humuriza FM was up and running within two months. Today the station has a staff of 30, comprised of 10 full time workers, 15 volunteers, and 5 trainees. Apart from music, in partnership with Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and other local and international NGOs, Radio Humuriza FM broadcasts programs focusing on peacebuilding, issues affecting today's youths, and the rights of women.

"From SFCG trainings I learned about nonviolent communication. ***I learned how to unite people and build peace without violence and fighting. I also learned about being a visionary and a leader***

where you live; that you don't have to wait for someone to come help you – you have to be the visionary to initiate the change.

"Like me discovering and building this radio ... many people here didn't have a radio, but nobody dared to try to build their own, but I dared to try.... With no finances and no money, I built it."

After attending SFCG trainings, ***Perry in turn trained the station's journalists and staff and began to spread the trainings to the surrounding population through the airwaves.*** It is difficult to know exactly how many listeners the station reaches, but the broadcasts can be heard on radios throughout local markets, and when DJs have their audiences call in, it is not unusual for the station to receive more than 250 calls in an hour. When asked what is the greatest challenge facing his generation in Burundi, Gateka answers that it is their antiquated way of thinking. "They believe to get a job it has to be a certain way. They don't think how to innovate and create jobs.... People have to see that all things are possible. If you feel your talent or know that you are passionate about something, you can make it and achieve it."

Gateka dreams that his station will soon reach the entire Burundian

nation ***"to help the youth be creative, to get jobs, and to be active."*** But the challenges can be daunting.

"For our radio to reach my dream we need some computers, as our current ones are old, and some materials like a good transmitter and microphones. I hope that people from different countries all over the world, like those from the Burundian Diaspora, will come and visit us and see that we are doing something great.... It makes me happy to see the youth learning from my experience and saying, ***'Yes, even the young people can initiate something, build it, and succeed.'***"

On Thursday, 14 May 2015, one day after reports of an attempted movement to oust sitting President Nkurunziza began to surface, Radio Humuriza FM's broadcast capabilities both through the airwaves and streaming online ceased. This is also the case for other private stations in Burundi. Perry Saxe Gateka is doing as well as can be expected under these trying circumstances and as always remains positive, viewing this most recent test of adversity as a possible opportunity. When asked if he felt comfortable with this article being published even during these dangerous and uncertain times, in true entrepreneurial fashion Gateka replied that, ***"I hope the publication might lead to future partnerships that will help us to improve our media company."***

"Yes, even the young people can initiate something, build it, and succeed."



INITIATE THE CHANGES.

“From SFCG trainings I learned about being a visionary and a leader where you live; that you don’t have to wait for someone to come help you – you have to be the visionary to initiate the change.”





THE STORY OF JAPHET BIGIRIMANA

BY KRISTOFF KOHLHAGEN

Local members of the ruling party tear down the opposition's flag. Cheering their victory they triumphantly shake the captured prize on a hillside above the small village market. Now only their flag flies over Sororezo, a neighborhood located on the steep mountain side rising above Bujumbura, Burundi. An opposition member hearing the clamor rouses his fellow supporters, who, following him into the market, tear down the ruling party's flag. Taunts and jeers between the

Japhet Bigirimana, an eighteen-year-old economics student and local peacebuilder hurries up the rutted main road to the sounds of the growing melee. Knowing that alone young man can't physically separate the two sides, Japhet instead pleads with the groups' leaders to move away from the contentious spot. "Just let's quit," he says, "let's leave this place and go somewhere and discuss what's happening." Miraculously, the crowd agrees.

"And this is when we began our dialogue," Japhet explains. "We chatted and we had a dialogue and we talked about different ways [to solve the situation] and after I showed them that they are all the children of Sororezo, they are all natives of this place and they have to live in love and be in a mutual friendship. After discussing for a long time they saw the truth; that even if they want to fight they are from the same families, they are from the same background, they are from the same place, they could not fight. After that they saw even those political leaders who are sending them here were not from Sororezo, they could see that really they were lying to them it was not really true that they [the leaders] were going to help them after using violence and fighting."

Following the discussion, both sides agreed that the leaders of the two political parties would not only exchange flags, but that each, in turn, would raise the other's flag to where it had previously been. "It was a way of helping them to be united and to see themselves as friends...all the population from around here, the neighborhood, all people were so happy to see people from different political parties hugging each other, greeting, shaking hands and laughing."

This recognition of commonalities and the blurring of political lines so eloquently espoused by a young man on a hillside, demonstrates the real possibility of a peaceful Burundi. This humble young leader whose favorite drink is water (as it is all he can afford), who every night lulls his seven brothers and sisters to sleep with inspirational tales of peace, believes strongly that Burundi can be a stable and peaceful country. At the time of the interview, the 2015 presidential election was drawing near, and there were concerns that political violence, often carried out by youth and youth wings of differing parties, would drive the country into a reoccurring cycle of bloodshed.

"That is what is serious these days, as we're approaching elections, as it is getting closer, all politicians are trying their best to approach the youth and convince them to be theirs.... They use the youth especially

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“ We think about the future of all the youth of Sororezo, not just one political party. ”

to go and destroy the opposition.... Most of the youth are so poor that they face the problem of poverty so they are easily manipulated by people who want to use them. They see that they [the youth] don't have money or jobs and they manipulate them for such gifts.” But Japhet believes there are ways to stop this cycle of youth violence. He points to the trainings that he received from Search for Common Ground as a powerful force for increasing his knowledge and helping him to build peace. “The most important

thing I learned was fighting for peace with non-violence. When people have to communicate they don't have to use violence. Now I know how I can help people to find peace without violence.” Japhet identifies SFCG's trainings focused on communication as paramount to the improved ability of local youth to reach out to one another. “When they [the youth] communicate they have to motivate people, they have to encourage people, not just coming with negative communication but a positive one. That also

helped me when I was teaching the youth of my neighborhood. Sometimes the young people might feel rejected or see there is no way to communicate, but when I learned that type of communication from SFCG, it is easy to approach young guys and settle misunderstandings when they can't understand each other.” “In our neighborhood we are enjoying peace because of the trainings that we received from SFCG.... ***If we get more trainings and lessons and political leaders come and want to manipulate the youth, they will not be able, because I see that those youth who have been trained, it is not easy to manipulate them.***”

To further their dream of a peaceful Burundi, the youth of Sororezo have formed a neighborhood youth association. The association, composed of 36 local youth leaders between the ages of 15 and 30, embraces the full spectrum of competing political groups. The association has an agreement that whenever politicians come to Sororezo and speak of only assisting their direct supporters they are to be challenged.

“We say, ***'No, tell us what you are going to do for all the youth of this neighborhood not just one political party. Tell us what kind of dreams do you have for the youth of Sororezo.'*** That is what we are doing by being together and thinking of a

project for all the youth of Sororezo not just one political party.”

“When they [the politicians] come and find how we are united now they are surprised and they see that we are no longer blind about political parties but that we can see far. ***They see that we think about our future. We don't just think about one political party, but we think about the future of all the youth of Sororezo.***”

Japhet's mother, Daphrose, a subsistence farmer and mother of eight, at first feared her son's choice to be a peacebuilder. “When I saw my son being a peacebuilder the first time I was fearing that maybe they could kill him because he was doing something that was different in this neighborhood. But now after I saw what he was doing, how he was uniting all the youth of this neighborhood, I was so happy. Now I encourage him everyday. I say, ‘Go forward do your best. I see you are doing great things in our neighborhood.’”

Standing in the doorway of his family's mud-brick two-room home, arm around his mother and a smile across his face, Japhet speaks to the world. ***“I tell them to come and help the youth in Burundi. The future is in our hands and the Burundi of tomorrow is up to us. I would like to tell the world and the international community to come and join in our project to help us build peace to see a bright Burundi in the future.”***

THE FUTURE IS IN OUR HANDS.

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THE STORY OF VIATEUR & JUDITH

BY KRISTOFF KOHLHAGEN

The red brick walls of Nyakiriba Prison tower above Viateur, his wife Judith, and their nearly one-year-old daughter Liliane. Liliane, sound asleep and tied securely to her mother's back has been silent for most of the family's several mile trek. Stoic-faced guards usher the family through the first wall of the prison towards the man waiting inside: Viateur's father, a convicted perpetrator of the Rwandan genocide.

Sentenced six years ago by the Gacaca traditional court, Viateur's father was found guilty of commanding a roadblock where Tutsi and moderate Hutus were raped, sexually humiliated, and killed.

Judith and Viateur sit down across from him. Viateur presents his father with some potatoes that Judith has grown and a card with inspirational messages. But this visit has more important things to deliver than potatoes or well-crafted words of encouragement. Today Viateur's father will meet his granddaughter for the first time.

Viateur holds his daughter out to his father. Her perfect fingers reach up to the bright sky. Born of a Hutu – Tutsi union, she symbolizes what the genocide attempted to destroy. Her bright eyes and shock of curly hair stand as living proof of the failure of 1994's orchestrated mass murder to kill off a people and permanently drive tribes apart.

Viateur's father reaches out his calloused hands and takes hold

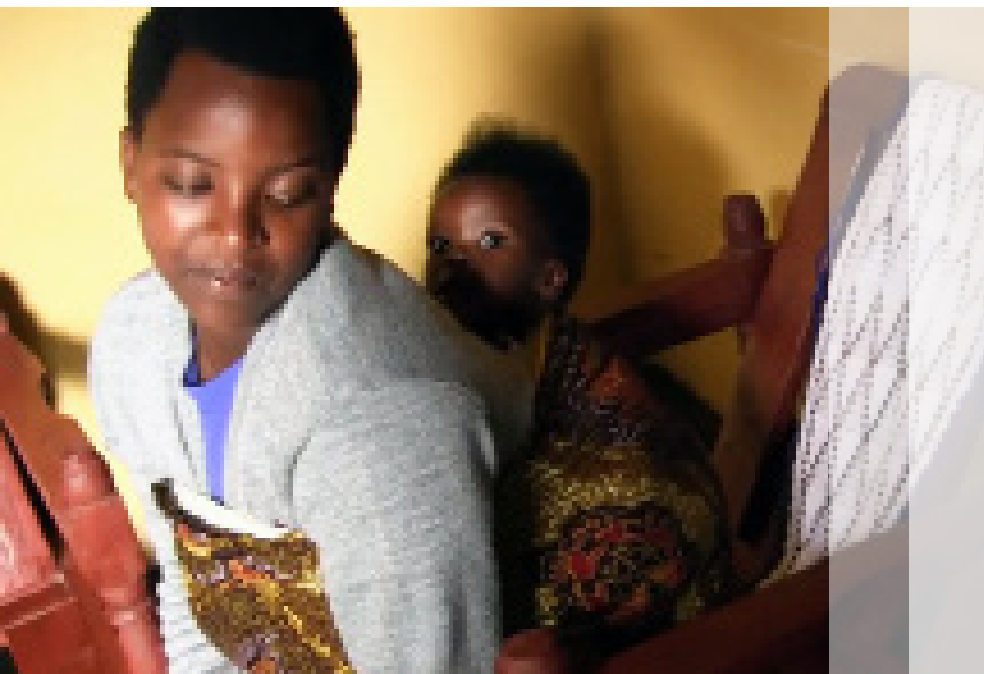
of his granddaughter. She is light and full of promise. She coos at him. He looks at her, pausing for a moment. *"Imanizabikora,"* he calls her. It is his special name for his perfect granddaughter. A granddaughter whose possible existence he once fought against. Imanizabikora translated from Kinyarwanda means, *"God will do it."*

Judith, whose father was killed during the genocide, immediately catches the power of the name. Miracles can happen. Like the birth of her daughter who ties two people together, or perhaps even the commuting of a life sentence so that Liliane can grow up alongside her grandfather.

A guard signals to the family that the five-minute visitation period is over. Liliane is handed back to her mother and she and Viateur begin their hour and half walk home. Next week they will likely make the same three-hour trek for the chance to bring some hope to his father for another five minutes.

Back in town, Viateur, 25, and his wife Judith, 20, are local entrepreneurs. Utilizing space rented from their neighbor and money for initial supplies borrowed from his older brother, the couple operates a pub in the town of Kabumba. Their meager

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The couple's true passion is helping to build peace in their country and continuing the important work of reconciliation. Their love for one another and willingness to traverse difficult societal boundaries has led them to join a local reconciliation group that strives to teach tolerance, acceptance, and to heal old wounds.

"Our great great grandparents, Hutus and Tutsis lived well together," Viateur says. Some of our elders thought that we could and should bring back this tradition." This concept of harkening back to past generations of Tutsi and Hutu living in harmony was the inspiration for "Inyenyeri," Kinyarwanda for "star," a reconciliation-focused

with members ranging from 13 to 70 years of age. Partnering with Search for Common Ground in 2013, Inyenyeri engages local villages in dialogues centered on peace and forgiveness, and participates in joint collaborative action, including the building of ten houses in the community. Six of the houses were given to survivors of the genocide; the other four houses were given to the wives of genocide perpetrators. By recognizing the needs of all members of the community, including families of perpetrators, the association has built strong relationships of trust and support networks. For the deep and powerful work of Inyenyeri, Viateur and others were recently honored by Rwanda's President Paul Kagame for their reconciliation work. It was a moment of pride for Viateur.

Both Viateur and Judith view themselves as peacebuilders. "It is not important to continue going back to what happened," says Viateur. **"I married a Tutsi, yes. But I married by love, not by looking to the past."** The sincerity of his ability to look forward and not dwell on the past can be seen when he welcomed into his pub the very man whose testimony secured the imprisonment of his father. Judith says that she does not always find support for her choice to marry a Hutu. They even claim that she is not a peacebuilder, and should have married a Tutsi. But she sees that love is more

important. "I think being a peace builder means that I live with my husband regardless of if he is Hutu or not." Her hope is that others will feel empowered to imitate her and her husband's example of crossing cultural divides for love. And that others too, will in turn imitate this next group of lovers, and so forth, and that through such acceptance and love, peace will be secured.

A week later, Viateur's father sits at the prison with his son and daughter-in-law. For these simple five minutes out of each week the weight of his life sentence feels somehow lighter. "Keep it up." He says to his son. Viateur knows that he means his work with Inyenyeri and building peace. His father believes that his son's reconciliation work is, in a way, helping to atone for his own wrongdoings.

He looks down into the face of his lovely granddaughter. "Imanizabikora," he whispers to her. "God will do it." The five minutes of visitation are up and he is led deeper into the prison. "Imanizabikora," he whispers again. And perhaps he is right, perhaps God will do it. But divine intervention or not, **it is through the dedication, example, and striving of youth such as Judith and Viateur that divided groups are brought together and old wounds begin to heal.**

"I married a Tutsi, yes. But I married by love, not by looking to the past."

earnings from the pub help them to afford rent for their small two-room home with an outdoor pit latrine shared among neighbors. To help supplement their diet, earn extra money, and share with those that are in greater need, Judith also grows corn and potatoes.

The pub, while crucial to their survival, is not their true passion.

association of which both Viateur and Judith are members. Based in Rwanda's northwestern Gisenyi province, Inyenyeri's name was born because as Viateur explains, **"a star shines for everyone, no matter what group they belong to or the color of their skin."** The group brings together genocide survivors, perpetrators, and their families. More than 80 people participate in their activities,

A STAR SHINES FOR EVERYONE.

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THE STORY OF JEAN DE DIEU

BY KRISTOFF KOHLHAGEN

The rain is relentless and the temperature is dropping. Jean de Dieu Sayinzoga's family and several others hide in the thick vegetation carpeting the hills of Cyangugu, Rwanda. The Rusizi River is so close that the families can see the boatmen steering their crafts along its banks. Across the river is the Democratic Republic of Congo - a possible escape route away from the mass killings enveloping their native land. But, the

sun is high and the families dare not move. Foot soldiers and perpetrators of what will be known as the Rwandan Genocide patrol roadblocks by day, making night the only possible time to escape, especially for families with small children. Jean de Dieu's parents travel with five children. Jean de Dieu is only eight years old; two of his siblings are even younger. The family has taken two full weeks to travel only a few miles from their home. Sleeping in the elements by day and moving with caution by night has taken its toll on their mother. She is now sick and must muffle her coughing to avoid being heard. Jean de Dieu's aunts and uncles who lived near the family home in Cyangugu have already been murdered.

For the next two nights the family moves steadily toward the river. Making contact with a Rwandan boatman, an old friend of the family, they sneak across the border under the cover of darkness. Jean de Dieu's two eldest brothers follow a different path. Their path leads back

into Rwanda, to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the frontlines in the battle against the extremist Hutu-led government forces.

Even the Congo is unsafe for Jean de Dieu's family. Killers cross the border in search of refugees to murder, forcing the family to push on to Bujumbura, Burundi where they find temporary respite in a refugee camp. Four months later, after the RPF captures the Rwandan capital of Kigali, Jean de Dieu and his family load into a truck and make the long journey back to their home country. Instead of returning to Cyangugu, the family settles in Kigali, sharing a small house with four other families. "It was a tough life," says Jean de Dieu. "My parents were unemployed...we could eat only once a day."

Jean de Dieu returned to Cyangugu for the first time when he was fifteen in order to certify his status as a survivor of the genocide and gain eligibility for a national scholarship. Taking advantage of his scholarship and pursuing his passion for computer design, Jean de Dieu earned his college degree in computer science. However, a degree and a job do not always go hand in hand. "When you finish university in Rwanda it is very difficult to get a full time job." He says. "You can get a part time job, and you may work for two months and then become jobless for five months. This is where I came up with my idea of raising chickens."

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Utilizing a small plot on his older brother's land, Jean de Dieu managed to raise sixteen chickens. By selling their eggs and nutrient-rich droppings, Jean de Dieu earned around thirty dollars per month. The steady income was an improvement, but Jean de Dieu still struggled to better his life. Opportunity came in an unlikely form: a reality TV show, produced by peacebuilding NGO Search for Common Ground.

Jean de Dieu first encountered Search for Common Ground when one of his friends sent him an e-mail detailing an opportunity to participate in a reality TV show focused on developing young Rwandan entrepreneurs. The show, *Zamuka*, which translates to mean "Rise up," was the brainchild of SFCG's Rwandan office staff. In casting for its second



// Push forward the prospects of creating lasting peace through economic prosperity. //

season, the show sought Rwandan entrepreneurs between the ages of 18-34 to submit business plans. The applicants with the most promising ideas were selected to compete during a seven

episode, three-month season for a 1,000,000 Rwandan Franc prize (approximately \$1,500) to help kick start their business. Out of 52 applicants, Jean de Dieu won one of three spots to compete on the show.

The first six episodes followed the young entrepreneurs as they tackled important steps in laying the groundwork for a thriving business. In one episode contestants performed a market study to discover how much demand existed for their product. In another, they met with a prominent banker who evaluated the feasibility of their plan. The seventh and final episode culminated in a three-person panel debating the merits of the different businesses and awarding one the grand prize.

Jean de Dieu submitted a business plan that envisioned boosting his flock of chickens from 16 to 1,000. "The dream that I have is for my project to be very successful and to be a big supplier of eggs even outside of the country," he says. According to the show's producers, Jean de Dieu was selected as the winner because his project was realistic, he understood his business, and the risk was low.

To help further Jean de Dieu's understanding of the chicken business, one episode followed him as he explored a major chicken producer's facilities. As Nicolas Niyibizi Gatambi the show's executive producer points out, "This is also what they [the contestants] gain. They meet people they couldn't easily meet. The show gives them the push."

When the panel of judges announced Jean de Dieu as the winner of

Zamuka's second season he was thrilled. He immediately invested his winnings into building a new facility designed to hold more chickens. Currently he has raised his flock to fifty. But Jean sees success as more than just building a profitable business. After experiencing the trauma and horror of the 1994 genocide, he is devoted to being a peacebuilder. ***"By helping others, such as starting my project...I may provide my friends with jobs...I am looking for a solution to their unemployment and I think in this way I am building peace."***

In fact Jean de Dieu has already hired on one young man from the countryside with little education and scarce prospects. When asked how he would change the world Jean de Dieu says, ***"I can't change the world but I can change people. I can change people and tell them they should not be job seekers but job creators."*** Through creating jobs and providing struggling youth with employment and opportunities, opportunities that steer youth away from the frustration and disillusionment that makes them vulnerable to hateful propaganda and the illusion of power through violence, ***both Jean de Dieu and projects such as Zamuka continue to push forward the prospects of creating lasting peace through economic prosperity in a nation moving beyond war.***

ICAN CHANGE PEOPLE.

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THE STORY OF MICHELLE IRADUKUNDA

BY KRISTOFF KOHLHAGEN

You will not be a journalist.” This was the simple but powerful message Michelle Iradukunda received from her university upon enrollment. With limited equipment and space available in the journalism program, the university instead slated Michelle to study languages and focus on translation and interpretation.

Having graduated in 2012 with her Bachelor’s degree in translation and interpretation, Michelle proved her university admissions dead wrong. ***Today she is a journalist and a powerful voice for peace, reconciliation, and empowering people through information.*** Each week her voice broadcasts throughout the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa as a co-host for the popular Generation Grand Lacs radio program.

Twenty-five year old Michelle exudes a confidence that belies the turbulence of her family history. Born to a Rwandan father and a mother who traces her lineage to both Burundi and Rwanda, Michelle was born in Burundi where her family fled ethnic violence in Rwanda in 1973. Following the genocide, Michelle’s family returned to Rwanda when she was only five years old. Growing up, Michelle gained confidence through beauty pageants, even

competing in the nationwide Miss Rwanda competition. Soon she found a position with Rwanda’s Isango Star radio station, hosting Isango Relax Time, presenting a variety of topics ranging from the mating behavior of snakes to the horrors of modern day slavery.

When the team from Search for Common Ground’s Generation Grand Lacs brought Isango Star into the partnership, Michelle was thrilled to be selected as a host. Initiated in 2006, the Generation Grand Lacs (also known as Great Lakes Generation or GGL) is a pioneering radio program, coproduced by journalists from stations based in Burundi, Rwanda and the DR Congo. By combining webstreaming with FM broadcast and phone-in participation, GGL is the only live radio program broadcast simultaneously across all three countries, every Saturday afternoon, tackling issues at the heart of young people’s experiences.

Michelle overflows with enthusiasm for her work as a journalist and radio show host. ***“The responsibility of a journalist is to say the truth, to be neutral, and to fight for something that you know is a good thing for your people and your country,”*** she says. ***“I’m fighting for peace. I’m fighting for the development of my country... as [a] journalist, I am trying to put something on the house that is being built --- like a small stone. I am trying***

RWANDA



conflicts and also their common ground. Search for Common Ground trains the journalists, and coaches them to jointly plan upcoming topics, produce pre-recorded inserts, and identify studio guests.

“We talk about conflicts going on in each of our countries, and between them.” Iradukunda says. **“But it is not just about political conflicts. We also talk about social conflicts. When we share what is going on in one country, then we ask the young people, maybe we have the same situation in another country, so how can we deal with these conflicts?”**

“We are all Rwandans. We share the same culture, the same language. ”

to contribute to the bettering of our country, our region.”

Each week, two journalists from Burundi, DR Congo and Rwanda co-host the radio program, rotating the actual hosting between stations within the three countries. The program opens new conversations with youth about the region’s most pressing issues. Every week for the last eight years, this conversation has shaped a new generation of young people across these three countries, discussing their

One example is women’s empowerment. Rwanda is a world leader currently having more women members of parliament than men, and the government actively encourages girls to study sciences. Michelle is proud of this, but doesn’t hesitate to talk about the invisible barriers of Rwandan culture that can block women’s empowerment. “Sometimes culture can be like a prison. Like sometimes you talk and you have an audience and you talk and

they say, ‘it is a girl it is not important what she is saying.’ But still, girls have to speak up. We need to be spontaneous and confident.”

Michelle not only tackles these cultural taboos, but also delves into overarching political issues as well. One GGL show focused on presidential elections, with Burundi set for an election in 2015 at the time, Congo in 2016, and Rwanda in 2017. It was a key moment for the region, with all three sitting presidents ineligible to run for another term. And yet, there were rumors and controversies around potential changes to the constitution to allow a third term.

Michelle pointed to this as perfect food for discussion in GGL. “People are trying to say this president he has to go. Some others are saying he should stay. So we talk about all this – is the problem how to change the constitution? Or is it about how the president is trying to benefit from changing the constitution? Others think that keeping the same president will be better for development. So we ask our guests and our listeners and talk about it together, as young people from all three countries.”

A recurring subject for the program is tackling poverty and building an economically advanced East African region. Michelle is energized by the potential of technology, like the proposed integrated East African Community (EAC) train network. She looks

to Singapore as a model, hoping that one day Rwanda will become the center of a technologically and economically advanced Africa.

“They say that before Singapore was a small country without anything, they don’t have natural resources. Like Rwanda, we don’t have natural resources, but we can develop.”

Michelle is full of hope for Rwanda, and feels that a national identity surmounting ethnic identity is becoming a reality. **“We are all Rwandans. We share the same culture, the same language. The genocide that happened, it’s the past. But in the present, we learn from the past and do better in future. We don’t have to stay always in the ethnic groups and everything --- no. That’s the past. What actually makes us feel connected – is it our ethnicity? Or is it what we want to do for our country?”**

Each Saturday, with pride and curiosity, Michelle takes to the airwaves, building bridges through dialogue and reaching millions of young people across the region. Much like the topics she discusses, GGL Radio’s signal crosses both physical and mental borders, helping to both shape and define the future path of the entire region. With powerful and insightful women like Michelle Iradukunda leading and fostering these continued youth dialogues, the future appears very bright indeed.

A POWERFUL VOICE FOR PEACE.

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