



REBUILDING RWANDA:  
"A STRUGGLE MEN CANNOT DO ALONE"  
Delegation report  
Winter 2000





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## MISSION STATEMENT

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children seeks to improve the lives of refugee women and children through a vigorous program of public education and advocacy, and by acting as a technical resource. The Commission, founded in 1989 under the auspices of the International Rescue Committee, is the only organization in the United States dedicated solely to speaking out on behalf of women and children uprooted by armed conflict or persecution.

## Acknowledgments

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Delegation members were Women's Commission board member E. Jacqueline Winston, Director of Victim Services at the Child Advocacy Center in Brooklyn, NY; Dina Dublon, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of The Chase Manhattan Bank, New York; Joanne Omang, a former Washington Post reporter and foreign correspondent, now a Washington, DC, freelance writer; and Maha Muna, Women's Commission Deputy Director. Their visit was coordinated by consultants Anna Keys and Julie Nsanzurwimo.

Photographs: Maha Muna, E. Jacqueline Winston and Joanne Omang.

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## I. Introduction

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (Women's Commission) sent a delegation to Rwanda in early 2000 to follow up on the findings of a 1997 Women's Commission mission (see box below). It also sought to examine four current areas:

1. Women's role in rebuilding Rwanda in the wake of the 1994 genocide;
2. The social and economic status of women and the particular concerns over access to education for adolescent girls;
3. The role of and current challenges faced by local women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
4. Women's role in reintegration and both national reconciliation and regional peace making.

## MISSION KEY FINDINGS

o Women are beginning to play key roles in politics, community building and socio-economics in Rwanda, but still have many challenges ahead. A potentially transformative national dialogue on gender has been engaged at all levels of government and in community settings.

o The key to Rwanda's continued progress is in recognizing human rights, including women's rights, increasing access to land economic productivity and basic education, including vocational and remedial or non-formal programs for returned adolescent and adult exiles, especially girls and women.

o As international involvement shifts from emergency humanitarian assistance to development aid, investment credit programs for start-up and medium-sized businesses, especially for women entrepreneurs, are essential.

o Donor nations provided only \$5.7 million of the \$10 million pledged for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Rwanda Women Initiative and UNDP Trust Fund for women. Projects managed by local

### THE 1997 DELEGATION VISIT

A Women's Commission delegation first visited Rwanda in September 1997 to investigate conditions facing women and children survivors of the 1994 genocide which claimed an estimated 800,000 lives, saw massive violations of women and girls, including rape and abduction, displaced nearly three million people and left economic and emotional devastation in its wake. The delegation looked at progress in reconstruction and reintegration in order to identify gaps in policies and basic services for women and children and to make policy recommendations on those issues.

The 1997 delegation findings were:

- o Government and local organizations needed more participation by international NGOs in providing education, training in management skills, equipment and resources for human development;
- o Local women's NGOs and their international partners needed to improve coordination with one another and among themselves;
- o Programs to protect vulnerable populations of women and children and to monitor human rights needed great improvements in capacity as well as additional funding for legal assistance, education and training, particularly for adolescent heads of household and children; and
- o Tension arising out of years of civil conflict and the genocide needed to be considered in distribution of donor assistance to reduce resentment among groups not targeted for special help.

The delegation also expressed support for efforts by the Rwandan government to heal ethnic tensions and bring reconciliation to its divided people.

NGOs have sought to remedy aspects of the gender inequity and promote national reintegration. A comprehensive review is warranted in order to continue effective programs and replicate them throughout Rwanda and ultimately in the region.

o Women are forming networks and collaborating to pursue economic development, non-governmental assistance activities and initiatives for peace. It is critical that these Rwandan grassroots initiatives be linked to and supported by international programs that promote exchange and local capacity building.

## II. Executive Summary

Rwanda today is visibly more relaxed than it was in 1997 when the Women's Commission dispatched a delegation to review concerns of women and children in the aftermath of the genocide and refugee returns. In the capital, Kigali, one now finds lively street activity at all hours, and much construction and development. Even outside the capital, uniformed children file along the roads on their way to school, and local markets seem adequately supplied with food and basic consumer goods. However, the negative effects of a colonial past and years of conflict are not yet fully repaired. Although some 5,000 orphans have found homes and 70 orphanages have closed, vast numbers of orphans and widows have not recovered psychologically or economically. Follow-up with foster families must be increased for children who were not reunited with immediate family members. Some 370,000 families remain living under U.N.-supplied plastic sheeting in refugee-like conditions—nearly 1 in 5 Rwandans, according to UNHCR figures—and more than 70 percent of the population lives in poverty. Disputes over farmland between current occupants and returned former owners have the potential to become redefined in ethnic terms, and reform legislation is slow in coming. There are only 120 Rwandan doctors to serve the entire country of 8 million. And what has been referred to as a World War in Africa still rages in the Democratic Republic (DR) Congo and Burundi, impacting on the security of Rwanda's Northwestern prefectures and destabilizing the broader Great Lakes region.

Despite these factors, Rwandans and NGOs agree that the need for emergency relief programs in Rwanda has largely passed. The focus in Rwanda is on a transition to economic development and the development of a broad-based civil society. Rwandan government representatives, citizens and members of the international expatriate community agree that Rwanda has just started down the road to reconstruction and reconciliation, but solid first steps have been taken. It is critical that the transition from humanitarian assistance to development continue to address women and children's concerns, as the baton is passed from the lead humanitarian agencies, UNHCR and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA), to the development agencies, the UN Development Program (UNDP), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and UNICEF.

In this new phase, encouraging women's participation at all social and political levels will be crucial. As Rwanda's Minister of Gender and Promotion of Women, Angelina Muganza, put it: "It is a struggle to take the country to development, and men cannot do it alone."

This report highlights the voices, accomplishments and current struggles of women from all walks of life whom the delegation interviewed in its travels in Rwanda, from Kigali to Gisenyi. While an in-depth exploration of complex and controversial topics such as villagization was not part of the delegation scope of work, the report does provide a survey of the humanitarian landscape from the perspective of women and their organizations active during the post-conflict period. It also highlights the critical need for education for an entire segment of a generation of children, now adolescents, who had little access to education during the conflict and emergency phase of Rwanda's history. Finally, women's role in regional peacemaking and Rwanda's national reconciliation is examined.

### WOMEN ON THE MOVE

Women<sup>1</sup> are visible at every level of government, the result of an apparently genuine official commitment to women's advancement.<sup>2</sup> Rwanda has been a signatory of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) since January 23,

1981. Rwanda sent representatives to the Fourth International Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995, and has completed the country questionnaire for Beijing Plus-Five, to be held in June 2000. A new law sponsored by women in the appointed legislature enables women to inherit property for the first time, and the process of government decentralization has made a cautious start with elections of local and township women's committees. Everywhere, women expressed a strong desire for education, training, credit and investment programs having moved beyond the single-shot financial and food assistance of the past five years.

However, Rwandans are not deceived into thinking that their goals for gender equity have been realized. It is clear that for women, their share of real power remains small. Rwanda's predominately spring- and rain-fed rural agriculture-based economy supports a largely conservative social fabric in which women's primary role is defined within the household rather than in the public sphere. A 1999 working paper of the Rwandan government and an inter-agency group notes that "with fewer than six percent of its Ministers being women, Rwanda is below the world average and the Sub-Saharan African average. Women hold only 4.6 percent of managerial posts in the civil service and parastatal sector."<sup>3</sup> Addressing gender equity is clearly a priority for Rwandan NGOs, government and UN agencies. This report examines policy and program initiatives designed to remedy gender inequities.

#### KEY ADOLESCENT CONCERNS

Thousands of orphaned adolescents have become the heads of household in Rwanda as a result of the genocide and are responsible for their younger siblings and other children. They have few rights and limited access to educational opportunities to support themselves and their families. These adolescents and others who returned from refugee camps, especially those in rural settings, are some of the most at-risk children in Rwanda. Non-formal education opportunities, such as life skills training and apprenticeships to promote their livelihoods, are essential. Rwanda signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on January 24, 1991.

#### PEACE, SECURITY AND REGIONAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

To begin bridging Rwanda's still-sharp ethnic and economic divisions, the government has established a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission and named a woman to head it. Secretary-General Aloysia Inyumba, the former Minister of Gender, Family and Social Affairs, consistently includes women's concerns and gender issues in commission workshops and "solidarity camps" that educate Rwandans on their past and the need for mutual forbearance. Although the delegation did not hear of harassment or persecution of returned Hutus, Inyumba acknowledges real resistance to the idea of reconciliation. In Rwanda this involves personal forgiveness. Observers say that the process of reintegration may take at least a generation.

Security concerns remain a top government priority. Continued war in the region threatens development. Despite expansion and stability in the economy and falling inflation rates, Rwandans note that the "government's military and police spending remains high, accounting for 37 percent of recurrent expenditures in 1997 and 43 percent in 1998."<sup>4</sup> Some humanitarian aid workers refer to Rwanda as surrounded by "a circle of fire" since conflict laps against all borders:

- o Tensions are highest in the western border areas where militant Hutu guerrillas still stage armed raids from Congolese territory and UN workers must travel with armed escorts;
- o Men are recruited for Rwanda's military involvement in DR Congo, further encumbering a disproportionately large number of households headed by women and adolescent girls;
- o Approximately 35,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo are hosted in two large UNHCR camps in Rwanda as they await conditions favorable for return to the Kivu region;
- o Contingency plans have been developed for accommodating a potential flow of refugees from Burundi at up to four entry points in Rwanda;
- o Rwandans who traveled to DR Congo and some who continued to Congo-Brazzaville con-

tinue to trickle back to Rwanda.

It is critical that the voices of women be included in regional peace efforts. They are, after all, the mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of military who must be demobilized. Women also have strong community networks that can translate and mobilize behind peace building and the establishment of civil society. Women leaders from seven countries in the Great Lakes region have rallied behind an initiative called “Partners in Peace” to urge implementation of the Lusaka Accord cease-fire agreement and creation of opportunities for women’s involvement in the peace process.



*The Women’s Commission delegation visited a UNHCR reception center in Gisenyi, a two-day transit location for refugees returning from DR Congo that manages an average weekly caseload of 125 people. One woman interviewed was returning with her family from the North Kivu region of eastern DR Congo. She was born in DR Congo when her family moved there in the 1950s. She will return to her family’s home commune, taking refuge in the relative stability that Rwanda affords.*

### III. Historical background

Rwanda was created in 1886, an arbitrary construction of the Congress of Berlin for colonial administration by the Belgians. Its history since then has been one of internal conflict and power struggles. In 1994, Rwanda experienced a genocide which took the lives of as many as 800,000 people, including an estimated 300,000 children. As the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took control of the capital, Kigali, and established a government in 1995, a stream of refugees, ultimately numbering more than two million, fled into neighboring Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi. At the same time, an estimated 800,000 “old caseload” refugees who had fled the country in the late 1950s returned to Rwanda. A further 300,000 people were internally displaced. The international community, caught off guard in protecting civilians during the fighting, launched a massive post-conflict humanitarian assistance relief campaign.

By the end of 1996, Rwanda had received more than one million returnees. Relief work transferred from refugee camps into Rwanda, and programs were developed to help rebuild civil society. Humanitarian assistance was to be structured in accord with lessons learned in previous complex emergency responses. UNHCR, UNDP and the U.S. government responded to human rights reports on pervasive rape and sexual violence during the conflict, and to the fact that in the predominately agrarian post-genocide society, 34 percent of households were headed by women. At that time, about 70 percent of the population was female. UNHCR deployed the Rwanda Women’s Initiative, modeling it on the Bosnia Women’s Initiative, with the aim of mainstreaming gender perspectives while helping to rehabilitate “a post-genocide society and a nation of victims and of actors of genocide and violence.”<sup>5</sup>



## IV. Women in Rwanda

The government in Rwanda recognizes women as a resource and is seeking actively to improve women's status and to mobilize their talent and capacities for the country's benefit. Rwanda's Country Progress Report for Women 2000, prepared for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session of June 2000 to review progress on women's issues, notes an impressive list of achievements in "women's promotion or gender equity promotion."<sup>6</sup> For example, a table which compares women's participation in decision-making posts in 1985, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997 and 1999 demonstrates the historic role that women have played in political life in Rwanda. Women's representation has increased in most posts, except the Prefet, with double-digit increases in representation in two posts, Members of Parliament and Secretary General.<sup>7</sup> During the Women's Commission delegation visit, Honorable Drocella Mugorewera was appointed as Secretary to the Parliament.

Below are some other examples that Rwandan women highlighted to demonstrate gains on the gender front, and the obstacles yet to overcome.

**1. Inheritance law:** Initiated by the government and under the mandate of the Ministry of Gender and Women's Promotion, the government recently promulgated legislation giving Rwandan women the right to inherit property for the first time.<sup>8</sup> This law has been passed and enacted; however, issues regarding private ownership of land remain unresolved as land reform legislation is still pending. A woman can now inherit property from her parents as well as from her husband, and may also manage property on behalf of her children if her husband dies. Widows and refugees whose late husbands' brothers or families had already taken their property will now be able to recover it under the new law's de facto retroactivity. However, the challenge in implementing this law will be in overcoming custom, which only provides women with limited, usufruct rights to use and benefit from land and property, without owning it.<sup>9</sup> A high rate of illiteracy (national adult literacy rate is 53 percent for men and 28 percent for women),<sup>10</sup> particularly in rural areas, requires creative public education campaigns using radio programs and community-level initiatives.

Monitoring women's access to channels for legal recourse will also be essential. The Ministry of Gender plans education through Women's Committees elected last year at the community ("cellule") and township ("sector") levels.

### Women in Rwanda hold key decision-making posts:

17 out of 70 appointed Parliamentarians

4 out of 54 appointed "burgomeisters" (county-level political leaders)

2 Cabinet posts: Minister of Gender and Minister of Lands, Human Resettlement and Environmental Protection\*

4 Cabinet-level Secretary Generals: of the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Industrial Development, the Commission for National Unity and Reconciliation, and the Ministry of Lands, Human Resettlement and Environmental Protection

\* Note: In the new government that was sworn in on March 20, 2000, there are three women ministers out of 22 Cabinet ministers.

**2. Reclassification of the charge of rape, and conviction of rape as a crime against humanity:** Brutal acts of sexual violence were common both during and after the genocide, but the society has long conditioned Rwandan women to silence on such matters, blaming the victims and subjecting them to ostracism and shaming as soiled property of their menfolk. The women parliamentarians were instrumental in advocating to change the categorization of the crime of rape during the genocide (Organic Law on Criminal Proceedings, enacted June 1996) from a category four crime—like common theft—to a category one offense.

Several charges of rape as a crime against humanity have been levied through the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) which was established in 1995 and based in Tanzania. In 1999, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, former Rwandan Minister for Family and Women's Affairs, was convicted "as the first women ever to be charged with rape by



*Rwandan women debate challenges faced by widows, especially the problems of housing, at the Polyclinic of Hope.*

an international criminal tribunal.”<sup>11</sup> As Rwanda formulates a bill to develop a tribunal court system based on the traditional Gacaca process, parliamentarians must consider whether this public forum can provide the anonymity and witness protection essential in rape cases. However, since rape is classified as category one, it very likely will be eliminated from the purview of the Gacaca process.

**3. Gender Awareness:** With UNIFEM support, a Gender Desk has been established in Parliament. The Minister of Gender and Women in Development (MIGEPROFE), headed by Angelina Muganza sponsors gender-awareness workshops for government officials at all levels, including civil servants, parliamentarians, ministers and secretaries-general. The aim of the Gender Desk and the gender awareness workshops is to define gender in the Rwandan context, promote women’s rights and arrive at strategies for addressing gender inequities through legal reform and national development programs. Minister Muganza recognizes that, in order to promote women’s full participation and freedom of choice, some traditional barriers must be overcome at all levels of society.

Each Wednesday, Minister of Gender and Women’s Promotion Angelina Muganza holds a

formal “Listening Day” when she opens her doors to any woman who wishes to speak to her. Women come by the hundreds and bring complaints large and small, tales of woe and triumph, requests for loans or help with recalcitrant husbands or uncooperative banks. This provides her with “a little taste” of women’s broad reality in Rwanda today, she said. “Often I cannot do anything for them except listen,” she added. “It can be very frustrating.”

“In 1995-1996, the word ‘gender’ meant [to men], ‘Ah, you want to take our place.’ We needed to find other ways to say it. So we use the word *ukuzuzanya*, which means ‘complementarity,’ rather than *uburinganire* or ‘equality,’ now.”

*Letitia Kayisire, Program Officer/Gender Focal Point, UNDP*

**4. March 2000:** Grassroots women’s organizations joined forces to commemorate March 8, 2000–International Women’s Day–with simultaneous marches, special events and public campaigns in Burundi, Rwanda and DR Congo. The Ministry of Gender is helping to coordinate a year-long nationwide Campaign 2000 to Stop Violence Against Women and the Girl Child. On March 8, local jurisdictions held celebrations, dances, discussions, marches and other events to raise public awareness of the issue of violence against women. March 2000 in Rwanda focused on issues of domestic violence against women and children, and rape. Minister Muganza noted that funds are needed to help women pay for the medical examination that police require in rape cases, as well as to run gender awareness and sensitization courses for police, doctors and other officials involved in rape prosecutions.

**5. Community-based, popular elections:** Initiated as part of a government program of decentralization<sup>12</sup> managed under the Ministry of Local Administration and Governance and in coordination with the MIGEPROFE, the election of Women’s Councils and the channeling of development resources through Women’s Community Funds (WCF) represent an important first step in Rwanda’s recent experiments with electoral politics.<sup>13</sup> The first elections generated high voter turnout, by men and women. These elected delegates represent women at the

township ("cellule and sector") level, and elect representatives to sit on the sector committees and county ("commune") level committees.<sup>14</sup> At the cellule level, community development funds are used to support micro-credit systems, and at the sector and commune level, local committees allocate resources for infrastructure projects. The Minister of Gender and Women's Promotion anticipates that these councils will also raise issues for national dialogue. Thus there is a potential for a channel of two-way communication, both to communicate information upward about women's needs and downward about their new rights. The councils meet regularly and discuss national and regional topics and reforms that are then communicated to their constituencies.

Significant strides have been made over the past five years in addressing gender issues and women's rights; however, there are clear challenges still ahead. A Constitutional Commission is receiving proposals on the nature of a new constitution, elections and citizen participation. Legislation has been drafted that would clarify Rwanda's land ownership. Members of the Women's Forum of Parliamentarians told the delegation that "time, money and a culture that devalues women's needs" are their chief obstacles in achieving passage for the land reform bill and other reform measures.

#### Haguruka

The Haguruka organization of more than 100 prominent women, many of them lawyers, offers women's groups and individuals counseling, training and advocacy in claiming their rights under international human rights and Rwandan law. As most of Rwanda's elite women are members, Haguruka was instrumental in drafting the reform legislation above, lobbying for it in Parliament and in publicizing it where possible. Working closely with the Ministry of Gender, Haguruka hopes to post one woman trained in the law to act as a legal advisor to women at every unit of the Rwandan government. Coordinator Edda Mukabagwiza told the Women's Commission delegation that "when there is funding for staff and equipment," Haguruka will begin to initiate legislation on its own.

## V. Field Visits From the Perspective of Rwandan Women

Despite some gains for women, particularly at the national level, discussions and field visits revealed critical areas requiring greater gender analysis and attention to women's rights: infrastructure, economic development and health. Below are delegation observations based on meetings with Rwandan women.

### BASIC SHELTER, WATER, SANITATION AND ACCESS TO LAND

UNHCR estimates that 370,000 families (about one in every five Rwandans) still live under plastic sheeting in refugee-like conditions. Although the extent of homelessness before the genocide is not known, the existing situation clearly requires continued major attention and funding from international agencies. However, most agencies are reducing their shelter funding, in large part due to controversy over the government policy on *imidugudu* (grouped village settlements), which has brought landless rural populations, genocide survivors and old caseload refugees, particularly in the northwest, into newly constructed villages on previously unoccupied land. The government highlights various practical reasons for this model, including security, efficient land use and reintegration. Services such as water, health care and education were promised, and the government said the settlements would make provision of these services more efficient. But some *imidugudu* settlements remain without these basics.

Similarly, some resettlement camps lack basic infrastructure. UNHCR estimates that housing occupancy has substantially increased and that most homes constructed in resettlement sites are owner occupied. However, in some sites, plans for services such as clinics, schools and often basics, including access to land and potable water, have not been realized. A UNHCR/UNDP/GOR (in collaboration with WFP) Joint Reintegration Programming Unit (JRPU) workshop held in September 1999 highlighted the need to ensure that settlements be made more self-sufficient, with inputs in economic investment, environment and agriculture, "in order to

secure the long-term sustainability of the resettlement programs.” This would translate into an estimated \$29 million needed immediately, above the very high investment that has already gone into these projects. The JRPW workshop paper highlights the need to consider the context in which investment decisions must be made: “It is noted that the projects in this sector are geared towards a specific target group. However, and in order to progress from relief to development, the needs of the entire population have to be put into perspective because despite massive investment of funds in the reintegration sector, it is alarming that so many people have no food, home or land. Macro-economic policies need to be developed to guide investment in this sector.”<sup>15</sup> If settlements are not made more self-reliant, single heads of household, particularly widows raising young children, will continue to rely on community charity and may ultimately have to sell their houses to support their families.

### **A Returnee Struggles to Survive**

The delegation met with a Rwandan woman named Matilde, in the Mbungangari resettlement site in Gisenyi and learned first hand what the day-to-day implications are for a family when services are not readily available. Matilde, now 63, fled conflict in Rwanda “as a very young girl,” later returning to attend boarding school in Butare. Her family fled again in the 1950s, and she returned again two years ago, bringing four orphans, ages 13 to 22, all related to her sister and cousins. Matilde said she has no steady income and often depends on charity from associations in Gisenyi. She has no access to farmland, and the youngsters in her care attend school and cannot work to support the family. Matilde cultivates a small garden outside her mud-brick three-room home and is sometimes able to sell or barter her produce. She often finds it hard to come up with the 10 Rwandan francs (about \$0.03) required to purchase a jerry can of water from the municipal supply. She said she feels safe in the resettlement site, but finds it hard to travel the 2 km. to the health center or the 5 km. to the market. She relies on the small camp clinic, which has given her medicine for a stomach ailment, but the clinic staff, she said, also urged her to go to the health center for further evaluation.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**

As has been noted above, Rwanda is one of the poorest countries in the world with over 70 percent of its population below the poverty line. The high rate of illiteracy (the national adult literacy rate is 53 percent for men and 28 percent for women),<sup>16</sup> particularly in rural areas, threatens to continue well into the future with high drop-out rates for girls over thirteen years of age.<sup>17</sup> With more than 100,000 prisoners (mostly male) held for crimes against humanity committed during the genocide, and countless others still refugees in neighboring countries, women are carrying a larger than traditional share in supporting their families.

While women throughout Rwanda encounter hardships, there are specific difficulties in being a woman and a returnee. According to UNHCR: “Female returnees who may have access to land, are often confronted with the problem of a shortage of labor in the family, payment for outside labor is not possible and so much of the land remains under utilized. The problem is further compounded by lack of seeds, tools and technical assistance... The urban refugee women are even more helpless. They are faced with the expensive and demanding urban life, yet they have no form of employment.”<sup>18</sup>

Microcredit programs for Rwanda’s refugee and widowed women, primarily to support agriculture, animal husbandry and home-based enterprises, were among the first kinds of assistance to be offered by the international community. The Women’s Commission delegation visited several small-scale income generation or credit projects. These projects had the immediate result of supplementing household income. Community groups and women’s associations point to these programs as an example of tangible benefits available to their members. Credit programs were also seen by women leaders as a vehicle for developing networks among women from different communities or social groups with the long-term aim of promoting national reconciliation. A closer review of the impact of credit programs for promoting development and

increased gender equity would be very valuable in the Rwanda context. The delegations observations were:

1. Credit without training, at the very low levels often provided to women, is more of a welfare support than a vehicle for development. Within a credit or microenterprise scheme, women are often given limited opportunities to learn trades or invest in high earning products.

### **CASE STUDY: Brooms and Notecards in Kanama**

In one shed a bandsaw shrieks, spewing sawdust on two men muscling tree trunks into boards for furniture. In the next shed a group of men and one woman push big needles into strips of leather, making shoes and belts and bags, repairing soccer balls. Elsewhere, men make upholstery, grind car and machine parts and carve wooden sculptures. The Kiaka cooperative of 135 men and 22 women opened in Kanama in 1986, funded by a Belgian philanthropist to train some of Rwanda's unskilled rural poor. Prospective members must volunteer for six months, get along with others there, and then pay RF 1,000 (about \$3) to join. Workers share only in the earnings of their own work.

One large, well-lit room holds several men seated, gluing broom heads onto handles. This is the co-op's most profitable work. Another room reveals a tableful of women pasting bits of banana fiber onto white paper, making lovely note cards. The notecards are the co-op's least profitable product. Why aren't women making brooms too? "The work is too heavy for them," one man says.

2. Credit provided as a single infusion to a smaller group, or subset, of a larger association can prove detrimental to unity and camaraderie between association members and ultimately undermine the association's goals and sustainability.

### **CASE STUDY: The Polyclinic of Hope**

The Polyclinic of Hope is a project that was initiated and is supported under the Rwanda

Women's Network for Development (RWN).<sup>19</sup> The name polyclinic is appropriate since the facility provides free medical services, a meeting place for women who were victims of rape or violence, psycho-social therapy/counseling and micro-credit financing to 504 registered members. The members of the polyclinic participate in a "merry-go-round" group savings activity in which each member contributes to a collective pool of funds. This pool of funds is given to one member each month for their personal needs or to support new entrepreneurial activity. A group of four widows, one of six groups of active members at the Polyclinic of Hope, received a loan through an account set up separately by the US Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives. The loan was given to the group of widows, to be returned to the account managed by OTI, rather than to the established RWN collective savings fund. In essence, this set up a parallel system for financial support over which the established RWN program had no control. According to RWN Program Coordinator, Mary Balikungeri, this caused some tension within the larger group. When the loan recipients were unable to repay the loan, they stopped coming to the polyclinic. Balikungeri is monitoring the situation closely to prevent further dissent, or erosion of the peer group pressure that is the basis for trust and prompt repayment in the "merry-go-round" project. Rather than setting up independent systems, WIT could have established a partnership with the RWN to strengthen the local NGO and at the same time accomplish the WIT objectives.

3. Credit for agriculture that is not provided with considerations, such as logistics to market, marketability of produce and storage facilities is not sustainable.

### **CASE STUDY: What's More Valuable, Land or a Husband?**

The six women left a meeting of local farmers on the edge of the potato field to talk to visitors. Yes, they said, the Women in Transition (WIT) program of the U.S. Agency for International Development was a great thing because it funded women, even very poor women like them. It had loaned them money for

the seed potatoes they had planted near this village a few miles outside Gisenyi, in western Rwanda. Last year their crop did not sell at prices that supported the transport to market, and WIT had not only forgiven the loan but renewed it. This year things looked better.

All the women said their children are in school, and that they would sell anything they had, including their houses, to keep them there. Two of the women said they had husbands but no land; four said they had land but no husbands. Which is more valuable? They burst out laughing. "Land!" they said. "Land!"

## WOMEN'S HEALTH

Rwanda's poverty means that health care for most people is rudimentary at best. Rwanda has 120 doctors for its 8 million people. According to 1999 government statistics: "There is a significant shortage of trained health workers and

the ratio of population to doctors and nurses is significantly higher than the averages for sub-Saharan Africa. They also show significant regional disparities."<sup>20</sup> HIV prevalence rates are 11.3 percent on average, and very likely higher in urban settings. A JRPU workshop held in September 1999 found that, "the provision of health care throughout the country has not yet regained its pre-1994 level...with residents in rural community being the most vulnerable victims" (page 7). In several field visits to a model village and resettlement sites, the Women's Commission delegation noted that women had access to some kind of clinic facility, but the women said that hospitals or better-stocked health services were up to an hour's walk away. Within the Rwanda context, this is not unusual, but it does pose particular hardships for the elderly and for women who require urgent care during childbirth, for example.

### **ASOFERWA: The Nelson Mandela Peace Village**

The three women rested from the heat in the shade of the tiny clinic's porch and talked about their lives. "We are here because we had no homes," said one, rubbing a red eye. Now they are among the 400 Rwandans living in 80 identical mud-brick bungalows built on this dusty hilltop by ASOFERWA,<sup>21</sup> the Association Feminine of Rwanda, which was established under the patronage of Rwanda's current First Lady, Mrs. Kagame. All the houses, "even the ones that aren't finished," are occupied by families headed by widows whose husbands died in Rwanda's 1994 genocidal civil war.

In Rwandan society, widows have no status, no rights and a grim future. Banned from construction work, the nation's tens of thousands of war widows often worked secretly, at night, to rebuild their ravaged homes. This new village near a suburb of Kigali, another of 115 houses in Gitarama province, and a third of 38 homes nearby, are ASOFERWA's effort to help. It has a school for the village's 120 youngsters, an elected social worker who visits three times a week, and a training center to teach the women health practices, sewing and craft work for the nearby market town.

But it is raw yet, with no trees to break the sandy wind. Another woman coughed as the women looked out over the empty square, where a boy wearing nothing but a Miami Dolphins t-shirt was the only other person in sight. Everyone else was "away visiting" on a Sunday afternoon, she said. The clinic was closed. It is open several times during the week. A quick look inside revealed a limited supply of pharmaceuticals and several rooms with only the bare essentials. "Most people here suffer malaria," said the third woman. In Rwanda, malaria and chronic malnutrition are the two biggest killers.<sup>22</sup>

In Africa, it is not uncommon to find the elderly taking care of the very young, as HIV/AIDs decimates an entire generation. In Rwanda, where HIV/AIDs rates are highest in Kigali (.45 percent detection rate), it is the genocide that has left an entire segment of the elderly population with primary responsibility for the youth. One widow said she had only one child of her own but was raising four others too. "We all do. Sometimes they are relatives, sometimes orphans," she said. "We send greetings to America. Tell them we want to work but we have no money, even to rent space in the market. Our hopes are for our children. If we can keep them in school, then they will grow up and have a future."

1. Violent crime: It is estimated that 250,000 women were exposed to sexual violence during the Rwanda genocide. A survey published by AVEGA “AGOHOZO” in December 1999 reveals that 374 of a total 951 (39%) female respondents had directly experienced sexual violence. A total of 838 out of 1,125 (74%) said they knew that sex violence had occurred during the genocide. The researcher attributes the higher percentage to a reluctance by women to confirm first hand experiences because of societal and cultural constraints.<sup>23</sup> The study examines violence against women in Rwanda from a cultural, legal and historic perspective. The survey confirms a recent surge in reporting of violence against women, which was also reported to the Women’s Commission by women in leadership positions including Minister Muganza and the heads of women’s organizations. It is not however clear if the increase in reporting is due to increased incidents or more openness on the part of victims. In either case, there is clearly a need to respond to this epidemic of violence and ensure increased prosecution of rape in order to give Rwandan women a sense that justice is being extended to them as well as to men.

Although the formal punishment for rape is six to 20 years in prison, “lawyers and judges are men and rape is usually managed at home,” Gender Minister Angelina Buganza said. Traditional justice views rape less as a crime to be punished than a disgrace to the girl or woman and an insult to her family, not to be discussed in public. The perpetrator is expected to make reparation to the family in the form of a goat, beer or some other tangible good. Once that is accomplished the matter is considered settled. If no reparation is forthcoming, the rapist may be expected to keep and provide for the disgraced girl—a de facto forced marriage. In addition, accused rapists must be fed by their accusers while in jail awaiting trial, because an accused man who goes hungry for three days is automatically freed. (Interview with Minister of Gender Angelina Buganza, January 22, 2000.)

2. HIV/AIDS: Treatment costs \$450 per month, but one doctor estimated that only about 150 of the affected people might be able to afford that. Public awareness campaigns have begun under UN and local NGO programs, but more needs to be done. A successful condom promotion

campaign carried out by UNHCR in the Byumba refugee camp offers some lessons. There are 45 children born, on average, per month to the population of approximately 17,000 refugees from DR Congo. Ten traditional birth attendants (TBAs) were provided training and supplies. The TBAs visit families in the camp’s 72 “departments” or sections and offer counseling and Prudence condoms. Burgundy caps with the Prudence name-brand can be seen throughout the camp health section. According to UNHCR, condom use is up significantly.

## EDUCATION AND ADOLESCENTS.

Children under five years old represent 20 percent of the country’s total population. Youth under 20 years of age constitute half the total population.<sup>24</sup> A third of Rwanda’s population is between 11 and 20 years old. This adolescent population holds the future for Rwanda but is in many ways unprepared and particularly vulnerable. Adolescents head thousands of households composed either of their siblings or friends or both. Economic opportunities for improved livelihoods is limited and the need for improvements to access to and quality of education, including trained teachers, educational materials and books, is acute.

Public schools may have 75-80 students per classroom, and few have any school supplies or books. School libraries barely exist. While Rwanda has a relatively high primary school enrollment of 87 percent (1998), enrollment in secondary education at 7 percent (1998) is below the sub-Saharan average of 26 percent. A government of Rwanda study<sup>25</sup> relates this poor performance to:

- o Poor quality of primary education due to lack of qualified teachers, lack of teaching materials and a high rate of dropouts;
- o A low rate of qualified teachers (31 percent for first track secondary education); and
- o Large number of youth entering the labor market (1996 study indicates 24 percent of children from ages 10-14 are economically active).

The Government of Rwanda has set high targets for primary and secondary education by 2005, and has made a commitment to improving

teacher training and the quality of materials. The education budget in 1998 was increased from 2 percent of GDP (1997) to 2.5 percent (1998), and a new national syllabus and school examination are being developed.

#### Educational costs

While primary education is nominally free, students must purchase books, paper, pencils, school uniforms and other supplies. While the Rwandan government's objectives are to increase rates of completion of primary education to 80 percent by 2000 and 100 percent by 2005, the 1999 rate was 65.3 percent.<sup>26</sup> All secondary schools are residential boarding facilities that levy a fee for "basics," including bed, tuition and food, but those "basics" do not include mattresses, blankets or linen, towels or uniforms, not to mention books, transportation, recreation, etc. Scholarships that cover basic fees are available for genocide survivors under the Survivors' Fund, but this fund is limited in scope and is not sufficient to meet the needs of adolescents countrywide.

"For 300 American dollars we can supply everything a girl needs for one year of education."

*Emeritha Nzouramba, headmistress, Kigali model secondary school, Forum for African Women Educationalists.*

#### Girls' education

Most secondary schools have few facilities dedicated to girls, so girls enrolled at integrated schools must stay with nearby family members or board with strangers, and they are said to be badly regarded and treated as servants. Although girls' school enrollment rates seem relatively high, in practice they attend less, achieve less and drop out much more than boys do, often as the result of pregnancy. Reproductive health education is nominally provided in schools, but more could be done in this area. For example, educational facilities may be a venue for reporting and addressing issues of sexual violence.

### A Model School for Girls

"My name is Umugwemeza Epophia," the girl writes in neat letters in a visitor's notebook. "I come from Umutara." She is 14, her short hair, white shirt and green skirt identical to those of the 39 other girls in this biology classroom. She wants to become a teacher or a doctor, and this is her favorite subject. Hers is among the hands shooting up to identify, in English, the three main traits of insects. No one has any books, not even the teacher.

In the second of the four classrooms at the school, built by the UNHCR in 1996, an algebra class is proceeding in French. The girls' boarding school, a project of the Rwanda branch of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), has four teachers and 160 students selected from all over Rwanda—girls who passed elementary grades but might not have continued without this opportunity. They speak either French or English in addition to Kinyarwanda, but not both. Headmistress Emeritha Nzaramba is doing her part for national reconciliation by requiring French for the English speakers and vice versa.

She also favors modern pedagogical techniques over rote memorization, another break with tradition. She picks her way across eroded red gullies between the 21 brick buildings, saying here will soon be a small dairy, there a vegetable garden, there an experimental agriculture plot. The library is a vast room that holds only four tables along one end, bearing no more than 25 books, most tattered relics from the 1960s. The white-tiled laboratory is empty of any equipment whatever.

"My dream," Mrs. Nzaramba says, "is to have a textbook for every five students in every class." Next year, she says firmly, 160 more girls are coming here, and another 160 the year after that. "I hope we can attract quality teachers," she said. "It isn't easy."



### 15 Years Old, and Head of a Household

The ragged lace curtain quivers at the window while the resettlement camp coordinator is inside, trying to persuade Stefanie to come out and talk. She is small and shy and only 15 years old, and she is the head of this household of seven people.

Three boys and four girls share the three rooms of this mud-brick house, which is identical to the other 730 homes in the muddy Mbungangari camp outside the western town of Gisenyi. When Stefanie emerges into the barren yard, her voice is barely audible as she describes the death of her father in 1992 in the Congo, where the family had fled to escape growing violence. Her mother brought the seven children back into Rwanda to the camp as soon as it opened in 1997, but she sickened and died the following year. Stefanie looks off toward the conical gray volcano looming on the horizon.

Like most of the 2,000 families trying to build new lives here, Stefanie depends on UNHCR and other relief agencies for all the necessities of life. She attends high school classes "sometimes," walking an hour into town, but mostly she looks after the six other children in the house. They are all "brothers and sisters, cousins, friends," she said. It didn't seem to matter. Asked about her future, she shrugged. "It's difficult to say. The moment I became an orphan my life stopped."

#### Informal education

Baseline data are lacking, but no provision is made for the thousands of returned adolescent refugees who were unable to attend school in exile. Placed in classes at the grade level they last attended, with children many years younger, they commonly drop out and are lost to the educational system. Vocational education is almost totally absent, an especially critical problem for adolescents who are heads of households. Unfortunately, a workshop held by the JRP in September 1999 neglected to mention the need for construction of secondary schools and informal education. Instead, \$380,000 was proposed for the construction of primary

schools in order to address "unmet reintegration needs in the education sector."<sup>27</sup>

"What the society expects of someone is what happens to her."

*Anne Gahongayire, Coordinator, FAWE*

## VI. Gender in the Transition From Relief to Development

National women's organizations are critical to well-developed civil society, and can aid national development. Because they are based in the capital, and to the extent that they have outreach to the general population, they are able to translate policy level gains into community-level change. Three important programs, which have supported local women's organizations in Rwanda, were the focus of the Women's Commission field research—the UNHCR Rwanda Women's Initiative, the UNDP Trust Fund/Support for the Advancement of Women project, and the United States Agency for International Development/Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI) Women in Transition (WIT) Initiative. A brief summary of each is provided below and is followed by an assessment of the role that local NGOs played in these initiatives and the perspectives of local NGOs for future gender awareness programming and local capacity building.

UNHCR Branch Office Rwanda has identified a lack of economic potential, discriminatory legal practices, (impunity) and violence against women, (and) illiteracy as the main constraints that hinder the full participation of women in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Rwanda.

*"Refugee and Returnee Women in Rwanda," UNHCR (January 2000)*

It is important to note that local NGOs expressed mixed reactions to the Women's Councils that were put in place as part of a nationwide effort at decentralization. This topic merits deeper attention than was possible within the scope of the Women's Commission delega-

tion. It is imperative that the growing divide between NGOs and the Women's Councils be bridged. Some NGOs have members active in the communities and welcome initiatives like the women's community funds (WCF), as it ensures community-based participation and assistance. However, where links between NGOs based in the capital and in major cities to community-based development is weak, the potential to draw on experience, networks and resources developed by local NGOs is lost. Other NGOs

fear that community based developments lacks a national perspective and a unified front with which to influence national decision-makers. As the level of funding for international assistance decreases, NGOs are not unified on the question of which is the best channel for promoting development and gender equity in Rwanda.

## INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE AND GENDER

### USAID/OTI

The USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Response (BHR), Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) developed a Women in Transition (WIT) program in 1995 through the United States Embassy in Rwanda and in partnership with the Government of Rwanda to "strengthen women's economic and political position so that they can rebuild their lives and promote a society built on tolerance and respect." An initial fund of \$1 million was supplemented over the five years of program implementation to a total of \$5.2 million. Initially, resources were funneled through national Rwandan NGOs and to rural community women's associations; however, by October 1996 the main focus of funding shifted to rural women's associations due to "somewhat mixed" results on NGO projects. This is attributed to "lack of capacity to deliver programs" and at least one longstanding NGO's "ranks (being) decimated during the post-genocide period."<sup>28</sup>

"From May 1996 to May 1999 WIT has worked in 86 communes, and funded 1,460 projects. These projects have reached 29,254 association members, providing assistance to a total of more than 160,000 beneficiaries." Director Buddy Shanks described projects in which 30 women may buy 15 goats at \$25-30 each, for example, and share the milk and the offspring; or four women may buy one \$100 pig and share the piglets. The program suffered in the past from lack of administrative follow-up, so that loan repayment rates were as low as 50 percent in five projects. Shanks said training in bookkeeping and credit concepts was addressing the problem, but that final results are not yet in.

WIT has turned its focus on western provinces that have received lower levels of assistance than other regions of the country due to lack of access and security considerations. Their focus is

### Decentralization and Good Governance Programs

In 1999, the government of Rwanda initiated programs and policies aimed at encouraging reconciliation and sustainable self-managed development and democratic processes. The strategy employed under the Ministry of Local Administration is to decentralize authority to the local level, with decision-making power endowed to elected committees. Ten members are elected to cellule (the smallest community unit made up of 150 families) level committees, with six functioning as "community advisors and representatives in the areas of women, health, education, development, finance and youth" (Common Country Assessment, Rwanda). Elections are also held for the community units above cellule, at the sector and commune level. Several NGOs—the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Africare and SNV (Nederlandse Ontwikkelings Organisatie)—support this process. IRC, for example, works in seven communities in Cyangugu Prefecture using a participatory approach to stimulate change in attitude and behavior through participation and accountability of the local populations, to encourage their involvement in identifying, prioritizing and managing their own credit and infrastructure development projects. The beneficiary population is over 250,000. To date, cellule level committees have been provided training on self-managed micro-credit funds and loans are now being disbursed. IRC anticipates that that majority of loan recipients will be women who have no other access to credit. Sector level committees will manage funds for infrastructure improvements prioritized by the community.

going to be on WCF with a strategy of providing small-scale enterprise credit support to vulnerable women. "WIT's field experience indicates that 98 percent of rural women requesting loans from WCFs would not be considered for loans under Rwanda's present banking and credit system because of lack of collateral or any credit history. Even if collateral were not a factor, 90 percent of rural women are not literate and have never entered a credit institution or had access to credit via international credit programs. For the vast majority of women, WCFs are the first time anyone has discussed the possibility of a loan or being considered for one."<sup>29</sup>

#### UNHCR

Launched in 1997 with a pledge of \$7 million in UNHCR funding, the Rwanda Women's Initiative (RWI) has received only \$4.2 million between 1997 and 2000, because of low donor support. Working through 10 partners including the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (and previously MIGEFASO (Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs)), Pro-Femme, Haguruka (Association for Protection of Women's and Children's Rights), and the Ministry of Health.

RWI beneficiaries include "female survivors of the genocide collectively, with their children born as a result of rape, and Rwandese women who work in association with them and returnees."<sup>30</sup> The UNHCR country representative, Guenet Guebre-Christos, notes that the RWI received a much-needed boost in 1999 after being cut severely in 1998. UNHCR sees the value of the RWI and the work of local NGOs, as the RWI is the only program it has continued through its transition from relief to reintegration and rehabilitation work. A total of 50,000 direct beneficiaries have received assistance in four objective areas:

- o To enhance the integration and active participation of women in the economic, social and cultural development process;
- o To promote women's rights and women's role in the political, legislative and justice arenas;
- o To combat impunity and violence against women; and
- o To promote and facilitate national reconcilia-

tion and peace.<sup>31</sup>

While initial obligations were slow in being disbursed, mechanisms for allocating grants, implementing projects and monitoring progress were in place by the end of 1998. Projects that were funded included shelter, income generation, health (e.g., midwife training), promotion of girl's education, human rights training and legal assistance to rape victims, public information campaigns on a variety of topics including local elections and campaigns against violence toward women. One of the most significant areas of work, which remains an area of need, is capacity building. Because grants are now channeled through MIGEPROFE and ProFemmes, there is an opportunity for strategic planning and greater coordination. UNHCR has sponsored seminars on leadership, planning, monitoring and evaluation of women's projects and has supported gender training workshops and networking opportunities.<sup>32</sup>

#### UNDP Trust Fund

The United Nations country team has assigned UNDP and ECA as co-lead agencies for gender; however, a gender thematic group which includes UNFPA, UNHCR, ECA, UNIFEM, World Bank and UNICEF meets regularly in consultation with the Minister of Gender and Women in Development. UNDP, in collaboration with the regional UNIFEM and ECA offices, has supported training and technical assistance to the Government of Rwanda, primarily through programs with the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development. Within UNDP, gender programming falls under the Justice and Human Rights Unit, Governance Unit, Reintegration and Community Development Unit, and Economic Unit.<sup>33</sup> UNDP anticipates the arrival of a Senior Gender Advisor by Spring 2000, after nearly a year's delay.

UNDP has both targeted assistance through a "Special Window for Women" in Governance programs to support women elected to local committees (see box, Decentralization and Good Governance Programs, page 14) and provided assistance to women through poverty alleviation programs. This includes the construction of villages (including housing, latrines and water supply) built for widows and other vulnerable pop-

ulations, and the promotion of goat farming, income generation and literacy/training projects. UNDP supports NGOs through ProFemmes and also provides assistance to the Unity Club, Rwanda Women's Network and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE).<sup>34</sup> Of the initial \$3 million commitment by UNDP, the Ministry of Gender and Women Communal Funds (1995-2001), only \$1.5 million has materialized.<sup>35</sup>

In 1997, the international community began a shift away from humanitarian assistance and toward reconstruction and rehabilitation. UNHCR and UNDP (and later the World Food Program (WFP)) established the Joint Reintegration Program Unit (JRPU) to manage the transition from humanitarian assistance to reintegration and rehabilitation. The JRPU focused its efforts on Area Rehabilitation and Development Planning, and together with the commune leaders and government ministries developed community-based rehabilitation strategies. UNHCR continues through 2000 to implement some humanitarian assistance and

reintegration programs, but there is high-level discussion on strategies to hand off UNHCR program areas to other UN agencies. Some frustration was evident in conversations with UN staff due to delays in this process and severe funding shortfalls. A UN Issues Paper points out, "It is important to note that the UN System missed important opportunities to develop cross-institutional arrangements among the different agencies to better tackle the multidimensional problems of resettlement and reintegration from the beginning."<sup>36</sup>

Initiative Title	Target Beneficiaries	Programs
UNHCR/ Rwanda Women's Initiative	Widows, women heads of households, single mothers, victims of sexual violence and foster families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Income generation pro</li> <li>* Animal husbandry</li> <li>* Support to GoR with legal reform</li> <li>* Legal training to local authorities and women's associations</li> </ul>
UNDP Trust Fund/ Support for the Advancement of Women	Vulnerable groups in 15 communes of return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Strengthen community organizational capacity and participation</li> <li>* Infrastructure rehabilitation/development</li> <li>* Income-generation</li> </ul>
USAID/OTI	Women and vulnerable groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Civil society: by meeting basic needs, women could contribute to reduction in social tensions and foster peace</li> <li>* Create opportunities for women's political participation.</li> </ul>

## NATIONAL WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Against this backdrop, the current status and role of local non-governmental organizations must be examined. Because of limitations in the scope and duration of the Women's Commission delegation, further examination of the local organizations is warranted. However, several points can be made based on field visits to local NGO projects and meetings held with 16 of the 35 NGOs that work under the ProFemmes Twese Hamwe umbrella organization.

1. One lesson learned in the Rwanda scenario is that pledges promised during the height of an emergency which do not materialize can demoralize and undermine local capacity building. Initial Rwandan news reports mistakenly implied that larger sums were already en route, so that the shortfall was widely misinterpreted to be the result of government corruption or diversion or UN mismanagement. Clear communication from and more coordination between key donors funding gender programs—OTI, UNHCR/RWI, UNDP/Trust Fund—may have better managed expectations of local NGOs. **Today, clear communication and coordination regarding future flows of support are essential and will prompt strategic planning by local NGOs as funds decrease.** Rwandan NGOs can draw important lessons from their counterparts in DR Congo and Burundi, where NGOs have received less international aid and instead have generated community-based support and depend on voluntary contributions.

2. The trend at the UN has been to focus “upstream” over the past two years. Emphasis is on “support to policy development and program elaboration.” The UN is downsizing, “both in terms of diminished resources and number of staff.”<sup>37</sup> The bottom line for local NGOs is that they have fewer resources for assistance to those who require a safety net, or for those who can benefit from small-scale credit and income generation programs. **Increased funding for local NGOs through or by the government should increase.**

3. Accomplishments such as the UNHCR Rwanda Women's Initiative and the support provided to local organizations under the UNDP Trust Fund can be consolidated and enhanced.

Through the humanitarian assistance phase, many NGOs were engaged only as contractors with little support for organizational development and capacity building. Some NGOs remain active and support a defined beneficiary base through income generation, training and education projects. **These should continue to be supported over the long term and the capacities of organizations should be enhanced. Pledges made when the initiatives were established should be fulfilled.**

4. There is an opportunity and a need to improve systems for local NGO coordination. There is no database of local NGOs that identifies contact personnel, outlines their scope of work, location of program implementation and strategic plans in the context of national priorities for development. As international NGOs leave Rwanda, they spin off local NGOs to sustain their programs and links to beneficiaries. Networks such as ProFemmes have a responsibility to engage all local NGOs, including the newer organizations. At the same time, the leadership of ProFemmes is aware of the need to consolidate the capacities of members to ensure solid programming, a unified voice and prevent redundancies. **The Ministry of Gender can play a key strategic and leadership role in enhancing greater coordination among women's associations and ensuring their long-term viability and efficiency.**

5. **Rwandan NGOs have been and should continue to reach out to other African and international partners.** UNDP and the Economic Commission for Africa has hosted several meetings which provide an opportunity for networking and resource sharing among NGOs in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. NGOs such as the Rwandan Women's Network are independently exploring regional alliances with women's organizations in Burundi and elsewhere in the Great Lakes region to begin publishing newsletters for international circulation, and plan eventually to launch their own website. Some local NGOs have been able to establish links with international organizations, such as CECI (Canadian Center for International Study and Cooperation) and Planned Parenthood, and have benefited from these groups' long-term commitment to supporting national capacities.

6. One concrete area for collaboration between Rwanda's local NGOs and international agencies is through improved gender programming. Local NGOs have received plenty of the theoretical "gender training" offered through international conferences and locally sponsored workshops; however, several **NGO representatives noted the need for practical implementation of gender strategies in the Rwanda context and information on relevant evaluation tools that include indicators to measure changes the impact of programs on gender relations, women's rights and access or participation.**

**7. The lessons learned and skills developed by local NGOs can help ensure the success of the newly elected local women's councils.** Local women's councils have representation from the cell to the national level, but a measure of their effectiveness will be the extent to which resources are allocated to addressing women's needs and promoting women's participation.

## VII. Reconciliation and Peace Building

The National Commission on Unity and Reconciliation, whose Secretary-General is a woman, Aloysia Inyumba, holds workshops, seminars and "solidarity camps" nationwide. Participants examine Rwanda's history, discuss their attitudes towards ethnicity and traditional gender roles, and share personal stories. Inyumba cautions that reconciliation is not readily accepted and that participants in workshops sponsored by the commission often express real resistance. However, the government has a clear plan of action "in the spirit of The Arusha Peace Accord," she said, and a commitment to carry out the commission's mandate. That mandate is actively to "promote peace among Rwandan people" as well as to "denounce ideas and materials seeking to disunite Rwandan people" and to "monitor closely whether the government organs respect and observe policies of national unity and reconciliation." She defines reconciliation "in terms of political structures and poverty alleviation" highlighting some of the complex challenges Rwanda faces:

### "A Miracle of God"

D's\* mother and father, hiding with her in a swamp, were killed before her eyes when she was nine, two of the estimated 800,000 dead in Rwanda's 1994 genocide. With the help of another family, D. escaped into neighboring Congo, where her helping family abused her as a house servant before she escaped again. Last year, visiting International Rescue Committee workers found her in an unaccompanied minors (UAM) camp for Rwandan refugees in Congo/Brazzaville. She told them her entire family was dead and she was terrified of returning to Rwanda, although she longed for home. She wanted to go back to school, she said; she had missed five years of study.

After a search, the IRC workers found a surviving sister and an uncle in Kigali, videotaped them and brought the tape to D. in Congo, along with letters begging the girl to return. "It was a miracle of God," she said. She now lives with her family in their comfortable home in the capital.

The IRC program that repatriated D. is expensive by conventional standards. To interview D. and others like her in the Congo camps, locate their relatives in Rwanda, videotape them, bring the refugees the tapes, persuade them to return to Rwanda and then arrange the trip home costs an average of about \$2,000 per refugee. The alternative is children raised alone without nurturing and guidance, with the potential of becoming entangled in abusive power relations and the cycles of violence. What is the cost of that?

When she is asked about school, D.'s glance slides away. She is in a crowded fifth-grade classroom with 52 other students, she says, but she is 16 and the rest are children. They are still jumping rope. Does she like school? She shrugs. But she says she will stay.

\* The child's name is not disclosed to protect her identity.

- o Refugee-like conditions for some Rwandans, particularly with respect to shelter;
- o 75 percent of the population under the poverty level;
- o a high rate of illiteracy among women;
- o No teacher-training institutes up until one year ago;
- o 0.3 percent of government officials have graduate degrees.

Solidarity Camps have thus far focused on demobilized soldiers and university students.<sup>38</sup> The commission's current challenge is to bring leaders of Rwanda's non-governmental community together for a workshop, part of a series that make up the "nationwide grassroots consultations." Women's groups and human rights organizations will be included. Inyumba feels that local organizations should have an opportunity to "air their views," and discuss important issues such as the needs of their beneficiary base. Some NGOs that met the delegation were skeptical of the exercise. But because of their experiences in projects such as the ProFemmes

Twese Hamwe Peace Campaign, coordinated by a number of member organizations, local women's organizations have the potential to play a leadership role in the civil society, and as a "forum for advocacy." After all, as Inyumba herself recognizes, the success of the commission will ultimately be measured against its role as a "consultative body and its ability to measure how national policies are implemented.'

Secretary-General Inyumba is optimistic about a justice instrument for review of genocide cases called Gacaca, which is being developed based on traditional, dispute-resolution mechanisms. However, she notes that women did not traditionally participate. She is encouraged by exercises she ran in Gisenyi and Ruhengeri where women were supporting other women to speak about their experiences during the Genocide, "Theresa we are here to cheer you up – explain your case." It is important to Inyumba that women are involved in all aspects of national reconciliation. Out of the 300 participants in the national reconciliation workshops, 58 were women. Some brought their children to the workshops. Foreign observers outside the aid

"Children are never given as an index of reconciliation, but to us it is something very tangible."  
*Aloisea Inyumba, Secretary-General, National Commission on Unity and Reconciliation*

When Rwandans speak of reconciliation and progress toward national unity since the genocide, they invariably raise the issue of orphans. Most Rwandan families seem to have taken in children orphaned or abandoned in the conflicts. Of 100 orphanages established in 1995-96 with 50 to 100 children each, 70 have been closed, according to Reconciliation Commission Executive Secretary Inyumba. She said the children were placed with remaining family members or foster families. However, follow up has been erratic, and some children placed with families too poor to care for them have returned to street life.

### **Therapeutic Drawing for Orphans**

The stick figure on the page looks like any child's drawing except for the eyes: two huge black circles, like holes dug in the paper. "She saw awful things," explains Sérafine Utamuliza Bizimungu, founder and president of the Tumurere Foundation and Rwanda's former First Lady. She started the street kids' assistance program in her own home in 1996, offering a few youngsters education and a sympathetic ear to the stories from the genocide. With friends' support, it soon expanded to an orphanage for 200 children.

"Therapeutic drawing helps them express what happened to them," she said. Long-silent kids open up, remember where they once lived, and let themselves be taken back to where some family members may be waiting for them. "That is why we don't allow adoption, only fostering—so many children may be claimed at any time," she said.

Mrs. Bizimungu never hesitates to chide Rwandans reluctant to foster children of mixed marriages or of the opposite ethnic group. "We have to educate the people to change this mentality and unite these families," she said, "the whole family of Rwanda."

community praised the government's effort, but said it will need to persist for a generation in order to succeed.

National reconciliation in Rwanda can only be understood within a regional context. The Canadian organization, CECI, has been active in the region since 1984, working with Haguruka in Rwanda as well as human rights and civil society groups in national and regional networks. The CECI program builds local capacity to manage sustainable reconstruction and reconciliation within the region. More recently, women leaders from seven countries in the Great Lakes region have begun an initiative called "Partners in Peace" to urge implementation of the Lusaka Accord cease-fire agreement and creation of opportunities for women's involvement in the peace process. Three Rwandan women joined 13 others from seven neighboring African nations in February 2000 on a joint mission to the Summit on Africa in Washington, DC, where they asked that women be included in ongoing talks on implementing

the Lusaka regional cease-fire agreement. The Women's Commission co-hosted a meeting for part of the delegation at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York and introduced their initiative to US-based organizations working on peace and justice programs. Participants in the Partners in Peace Initiative have adopted a joint resolution for peace, and have drafted an action

Two "Peace Buses" provided by UNHCR have gone many miles in promoting reconciliation. They brought people to the National Stadium for millennium Christmas celebrations; they took a Kigali women's team to Gisenye for a football match; they brought residents of the provincial capital of Buyumba to Kigali Rural province for Mugunora (Thanksgiving) celebrations.

plan which includes meetings in Kigali (June 2000) and Harare (September 2000), national and regional advocacy initiatives and the publication of a newsletter.



*Children at the Imbabazi z'i Mugongo orphanage. The name means "Mugongo is a place where you will receive all the love and care a mother would give" in Kinyarwanda.*



## VIII. Recommendations

**1. The Government of Rwanda must consolidate its very impressive gains in increasing women's representation and participation in national development and reconciliation.** The Ministry of Gender can play a key role, but sufficient funding and resources must be made available to support local women's organizations, continue to amend discriminatory legal practices, support programs that address violence against women and improve access to secondary or non-formal education.

**2. Local NGOs must improve their coordination and strategic planning.** This should include an expansion of the ProFemmes network to incorporate new NGOs, locally elected Women's Councils and regional organizations. The Women's Councils may offer greater opportunities to broaden the beneficiary base for development programs and to replicate successful projects. It will require redoubled, coordinated support by major donors, and technical assistance from UNIFEM, UNDP and ECA.

**3. The Women's Commission strongly advocates establishment of a Great Lakes Women's Initiative to consolidate gains made under the UNHCR-sponsored Rwanda Women's Initiative, and to ensure mutually reinforcing advances in local capacity development.** A regional initiative such as a Great Lakes Women's Initiative can enhance sharing of regional lessons learned and effective program models, while strengthening

regional networks of women working for social change and gender equity.

**4. Rwanda's hopes lie in its adolescents, who weathered the horrors committed by the adult generation. Adolescents must receive adequate care and attention at all policy levels, beginning with universal access to education of ever-improving quality.** The Government of Rwanda's admirable commitment to education must be broadened to include non-formal and remedial education, including life-skills training, particularly for girls.

**5. International women's organizations and "Peace and Security" initiatives must continue to extend support to sister organizations in Rwanda, particularly in advocating for women's voices at regional peace tables.** As technology now can support these international links; access to information must extend to women throughout the Great Lakes Region, and ultimately throughout Africa. The Women's Commission has supported and will continue to support the Great Lakes Initiative: Women as Partners in Peace by linking it to US-based technical and advocacy organizations.



*Women's Council representative in Kanama*

## IX. Women's Non-governmental Organizations and Key Ministers Met in Rwanda

### **Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism**

Agnes Kayijire, Director of Industry  
Tel: 011.250.76608/73902/74725  
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### **Ministry of Gender & Women in Development**

Angelina Muganza, Minister of Gender & Women in Development  
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### **National Assembly of the Republic of Rwanda**

Jacqueline Muhongayire, Member of Parliament  
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### **ASOFERWA**

(Association Feminine de Rwanda)  
Immaculee Mukarurangwa, President  
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### **Centre Canadien D'étude et de Coopération Internationale (CECI)**

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### **HAGURUKA**

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Edda Mukabagwiza, Secrétaire Exécutive  
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### **Imbabazi z'i Mugongo Orphanage**

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### **Liprodhor**

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### **Profemmes**

Fatuma Ndangiza, Vice President  
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Jeanine Kambanda, Secrétaire Exécutive

Tel: 011.250.71948  
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### **Rwandan Women Community Development Network**

Mary Balikungin, Program Coordinator  
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### **SONARWA**

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### **Tumerere Foundation**

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## ACRONYMS

ASOFERWA	Association Feminine de Rwanda
CECI	Centre Canadien D'étude et de Coopération Internationale
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
GoR	Government of Rwanda
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JRPU	Joint Reintegration Programming Unit (UNHCR, UNDP and GoR, in collaboration with WFP)
MIGEPROFE	Ministry of Gender and Women in Development
OTI	(USAID) Office of Transition Initiatives
RWI	Rwanda Women's Initiative
TBA	Traditional birth attendant
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WCF	Women's Community Funds



*Students at a primary school at the UNHCR refugee camp in Byumba.*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The female population of Rwanda is estimated at 54 percent of the total population of 8 million in 2000. Rwanda Development Indicators, No 2, July 1999, Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Department of Statistics, Rwanda, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Four recent policy statements, issued from April 1998-December 1999, all included “enhancing the role of women,” “gender dimensions of human resource development” and “empowerment of women.” Issues Paper, Profile of UN Programmes 1998-2000, United Nations, Kigali, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Rwanda and the UN’s Global Agenda, Government and an Inter-Agency Working Paper on an Integrated Follow-up to the Global Conferences, p. 19. Note: by January 2000, 17 out of 70 members of parliament were women.

<sup>4</sup> Country Commercial Guide, Rwanda, Fiscal Year 2000, U.S. Embassy, Kigali, pp. 3-4. Also note: over 94 percent of the population earns a livelihood through subsistence agriculture, and the Rwandan government depends on foreign aid for up to 75 percent of its annual budget (16 percent of GDP).

<sup>5</sup> “Rwandan Women’s Initiative, A Challenging Practice of Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives in the Rehabilitation Efforts Within a Post-Genocide Society: Report from January to December 1997 and Perspectives for 1998,” UNHCR, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Country Progress Report on Implementation of Women’s World, Regional and National Action Platforms, prepared by the Republic of Rwanda, Kigali, July 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Women Members of Parliament (MP) as percentage of total Minister of Parliament increased from 15.7 percent to 21 percent and women holding Secretary General posts increased as a percentage of the total from 0 percent in 1985 to 17 percent in 1995, to 33.3 percent in 1999. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Article 50 of Law No 22/99 to supplement Book 1 of the Civil Code and to Institute Part 5 Regarding Matrimonial Regimes, Liberalities and Successions, in “Rwanda’s Women: The Key to Reconstruction,” Heather B. Hamilton, *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, January 10, 2000, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> “A royal (pre-colonial) law denying women the right to engage in any commerce without her husband’s permission was repealed in 1992. However, Rwanda was in the midst of a civil war and multi-party reforms at the time and there was no educational campaign undertaken to inform people of the

change. Today, women in Kigali regularly engage in commerce, but in rural areas, women often do not know that the law was modified and are therefore unwilling to do so.” *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Rwanda and the UN’s Global Agenda, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Common Country Assessment - Rwanda, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Some of the first pilot projects which promoted community-based development were done as a collaborative effort between the Government of Rwanda, international NGOs and either the World Bank or UNDP. UNDP projects are discussed above. The World Bank managed Community Reintegration and Development Projects (CRDP) in 12 vulnerable communes with the aims of (1) revitalizing rural economies and (2) investing in human capital resource development and capacity building, (3) infrastructure investments and (4) support to policy and regulatory reforms.

<sup>13</sup> “More than 30 percent of leaders elected in grassroots local committees, set up by the Presidential Decree of 24th December 1998 on the reorganization of local administration at the secteur and cellule levels, are women.” Study on the Involvement of Women in Decision Making Organs, Réseau Des Femmes Ouvrant Pour le Développement Rural, Kigali, July 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Their decisions remain subject to veto by the “burgomeister,” the appointed political leader of each commune. (Of 54 burgomeisters, only 4 are women.)

<sup>15</sup> JRP September Workshop Report, Kigali, September 1999, pp. 5-6

<sup>16</sup> Rwanda and the UN’s Global Agenda, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> According to government statistics, school enrollment by sex and age (1997) shows a dramatic downward turn for girls after 13 years of age with splitting from approximately 50-50 percent to 30-70 percent (girls-boys) by age 15 to 10-90 percent by age 17. (Rwanda Development Indicators, No 2, July 1999, Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Department of Statistics, Rwanda, p. 193.)

<sup>18</sup> Refugee and Returnee Women in Rwanda, Kigali, UNHCR, January 2000, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> RWN also provides shelter, support to secondary schools, food security, training on human rights and gender awareness, as well as income generation programs. Their work is placed in the context of peace building and reconciliation goals. One of their pamphlets carries the quote, “If development is not engendered, it is endangered, and if poverty reduction and eradication strategies fail to empower women, they will fail to empower society.” At-A-

Glance, RWN.

<sup>20</sup> Rwanda Development Indicators, No 2, July 1999, Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Department of Statistics, Rwanda, 3-6 p. 169.

<sup>21</sup> ASOFERWA is a dynamic organization. In addition to integrated model villages, the organization provides psychosocial and economic programs for vulnerable women and children, including programs for people in Rwanda's prisons and following their release.

<sup>22</sup> HIV/AIDS is listed third in importance in a discussion of "burden of disease," after malaria and chronic malnutrition. Incidence rates are 12.8 percent of the population aged 15-49. Rwanda Development Indicators, No 2, July 1999, Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Department of Statistics, Rwanda, p. 139.

<sup>23</sup> Survey on Violence Against Women in Rwanda, with financial assistance from the Canadian Cooperation, AVEGA "AGAHOZO," Kigali, December 1999, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Country Progress Report on Implementation of Women's World, Regional and National Action Platforms, prepared by the Republic of Rwanda, Kigali, July 1999, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Rwanda Development Indicators, No 2, July 1999, Republic of Rwanda, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Department of Statistics, Rwanda, p. 139.

<sup>26</sup> Rwanda and the UN's Global Agenda, Government and an Inter-Agency Working Paper on an Integrated Follow-up to the Global Conferences, Kigali, Rwanda, March 1999, p. 1. The paper also notes that "Adult literacy rate is 53 percent for men and 28 percent for women. A large number of school-age children join the work force each year without any type of qualification. 15-20 percent enter labor market without completing secondary school. The number of students receiving post-primary vocational training in Youth Technical Colleges has dropped substantially since the war, with around 1,000 students in five colleges at the beginning of 1997, compared to 6,500 students in 76 colleges in 1990," p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> JRPU September Workshop Report, Kigali, September 1999, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Women in Transition, Program Summary, OTI/Kigali.

<sup>29</sup> Women in Transition (WIT) Program Summary, OTI/Kigali.

<sup>30</sup> "Rwanda Women's Initiative: A Challenging Practice of Mainstreaming Gender Perspectives in the

Rehabilitation Efforts within a Post-Genocide Society," UNHCR, Kigali 1998.

<sup>31</sup> "Refugee and Returnee Women in Rwanda," UNHCR, January 2000, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp. 2-5.

<sup>33</sup> Rwanda Report, Sub-Regional Gender Workshop, Kampala, October 3-6, 1999

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> The entire UNDP Trust Fund totals approximately \$100 million. \$1.5 million was made available between 1997-1999 through a Special Window for Women.

<sup>36</sup> Issues Paper, Profile of UN Programmes 1998-2000, United Nations, Kigali, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Inyumba recognizes that there has been some international concern regarding the fact that camps were held in police academies and participants were dressed in fatigues provided by the academy. She explains that this is due to lack of space available, and that often the alternative is worse, a school. World Food Program provides basic food supplies. A panel of Rwandan and South African university professors developed the curriculum.





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