

The Never Again Fellowship

Is it difficult to believe that Rwandan survivors can work in harmony with those who hurt them during the genocide? Doubt can be cleared by hearing testimonies from the Never Again Fellowship, a cooperative made up of 120 Hutu, Tutsi and Twa members based in the Kayonza district of East Rwanda. In this cooperative you find genocide survivors, killers who pled guilty, marginalized Twa people and women whose husbands are in prison due to their crimes during the genocide.

The Never Again Fellowship was launched by Pastor Gaston. People of different ethnic groups within his church and community were living in constant conflict with one another. In 2007, he approached Justin for advice about how he could make a difference in this horrible situation. Justin suggested they gather in a cooperative, develop themselves economically first, then socially and spiritually. Motivated by financial needs, the community supported the idea and the cooperative was formed.

Members of the cooperative work in sub-groups such as agriculture, handcrafts and prison ministry. They work together in harmony without the conflict they previously experienced and understand and practice the true process of forgiveness. The crops produced help them with food for their families and a portion is sold at market to cover financial needs. Even though there is not a good market for the handcrafts, they earn a little here. The prison ministry reaches a large number of perpetrators seeking forgiveness of survivors and the community. Finally, a youth choir writes and sings songs of unity and reconciliation; their message powerfully shows the process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The cooperative faces challenges. It desires to start a livestock breeding program but has no means with which to start. Travel costs limit their ability to preach in prison. The market for handcrafts is not strong. Limited skills in agriculture technology affect production. And a large number of orphans in the community do not have the means to attend school.



Here is the testimony of Gratienna, a genocide survivor:

I am a widow of genocide. All of my children and my family were killed by our neighbors. Soon after the genocide, those who killed my family went to Tanzania. After some time, they returned to Rwanda and from the time they came back, I started suffering a lot psychologically.

It was not so easy for me to live in the same place with people who participated in the massacre of my entire family and destruction of our property. I was homeless by that time because my house was totally burned. My feeling was that my heart could only relax when I made revenge on them. I could not sleep due to much anger I kept in my heart.

With Gacaca court we were effectively taught to forgive those who hurt us but I was not in a position to do so. I had the intention of revenge but as I participated in trainings on unity and reconciliation and in healing workshops by different organizations, my heart was relieved and I could begin applying forgiveness from my heart. The man who killed my family was in prison but he pled guilty and asked for forgiveness. I forgave him and he was released and now we are working together peacefully in this cooperative. Even in our homes we help each other like relatives. With my experience in the forgiveness process, I was elected to be a mediator.