

Title: ***Rethinking about conflict transformation through cooperative organization: A case study of women cooperatives in Western Province of Rwanda.***

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Abstract

Cooperative's role in conflict transformation in Rwanda has been for long time given a less attention. In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide the Rwandan society was deeply divided where people were suspicious towards each other. It was imperative for the Rwandan society to think about how to bring about a climate of peace and harmony among people through community organization. It is in this regard, cooperatives organization played a significant role in bringing together women survivors of the genocide and those of genocide perpetrators in Western Province of Rwanda. Using a qualitative approach, a field research was conducted in agricultural cooperatives of Western Province of Rwanda. The main objective of the research was to analyze the factors that make women survivors of the genocide and those of genocide perpetrators to live together in a climate of mutual help and assistance. The results of the research pointed out the paramount importance of cooperative in transforming the conflicts between women survivors of the genocide and those of genocide perpetrators into a climate of harmony and mutual assistance in Western Province of Rwanda. In fact working together for the common interest in their cooperatives made women to eliminate the climate of hatred and suspicion that was among them and put aside their ethnic and political divisions, and come together to build bridges between divided communities. With constant contact in cooperative, women come to put an end to the climate of hatred and suspicion that prevailed among them and opted for the social cohesion and peaceful cohabitation which culminates into mutual assistance and cooperation. Agricultural cooperatives have thus played a significant role in addressing the negative attitudinal relationship and engendering a climate of trust for cooperation and mutual reliance between women survivors of the genocide and those of genocide perpetrators.

Key words: ***Cooperative organization; conflict transformation.***

1. Introduction

In common settings we experience social conflict as a time when a disruption occurs in the natural discourse of our relationships. As conflict emerges, we stop and take notice that something is not right. The relationship in which the difficulty is arising becomes complicated, not easy and fluid as it once was. We no longer take things at face value, but rather spend greater time and energy to interpret what things mean (Lederach, and Maiese, 2003).

In Rwanda, the 1994 Tutsi genocide is considered as a particular conflict that has killed more than one million people and innumerable material loss. The 1994 genocide has left the Rwandan society deeply divided where the survivors and the members of genocide perpetrators families were in a situation of hatred and suspicion. This situation was a major concern for the Government of Rwanda where it has initiated the program of unity and reconciliation. In order to be fully implemented, the unity and reconciliation among Rwandan, has required the involvement of different stakeholders including community organization such as cooperatives, especially in Western Province of Rwanda, and this has greatly contributed in restoring peace and stability among members of surrounding communities.

To restore peace and stability, the involvement of all Rwandans both men and women in cooperative was a paramount importance. It is in this regard, women in Western Province of Rwanda both survivors of genocide and women from families of genocide perpetrators have shown their ability through cooperative organizations to play a big role in conflict transformation, by engaging themselves in constructive change initiatives that have allowed them to live aside their division and opt for a positive peace. Conflict transformation does not only aim to end violence and change negative relationships between the conflicting parties but also to change the main factors that cause such negative relationships. Women cooperatives in Western Province played a greater role in empowering women to become involved in nonviolent change processes themselves, to help build sustainable conditions for peace and stability.

This paper aims at analyzing the role played by women cooperative of Western Province in conflict transformation focusing mainly on factors that have contributed to the success of that noble mission.

2. Methods

This research is qualitative in its approach. The qualitative approach relying on data gathering techniques such as interview, field note and document analysis is used in this research. The decision of using qualitative approach in this research was influenced by the fact that this approach permits a considerable amount of flexibility (Arisunta, 2010). Grinnell, (1987), points out that qualitative data with its emphasize on people's lived experience is fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings of people, place of events, processes and structures of their lives. This approach is well suitable for this research in order to gather data about lived experience of women in cooperative both survivors of genocide and those from families of genocide perpetrators about how through cooperative organization they have come up to transform their conflict into a climate of peaceful cohabitation and mutual help.

2.1 Selection of interviewees

The research targeted women members of cooperatives in Western Province. They were selected based on their membership of cooperative created with the main aim of bringing change processes in the way of organizing social life between women survivors of the 1994 genocide and women from families of genocide perpetrators. In this regard, two cooperative were targeted such as "ABIZERANYE" "the trusted" and "IMBUTO Z'AMAHORO" "fruits of peace". These cooperatives were chosen because they are very active in the process of conflict transformation in Western Province of Rwanda. In each cooperative, 21 women were purposively selected in order to hear how they have been able to minimize their adversarial interaction and come up with change processes that have strengthened their relationship.

2.2 Techniques of data collection

As this research is a qualitative exploration, the technique used in data collection is semi-structured interviews. According to Neuman (2000), semi-structured interviews are those organized around areas of particular interest, while still allowing considerable flexibility in scope of depth.

Interviews consisted in a repeated face to face encounter between the researcher and informants directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations

as expressed in their own words (Taylor and Bogdan, 1988). Interview has been useful for the data gathering process from active women in conflict transformation, because it allowed an open interview that enabled the subject to speak freely.

2.3 Data analysis

The process of data analysis involves structuring and bringing logical order to the vast volume of data collected. The data was first transcribed verbatim from the tape recordings onto a computer. The researcher analyzed data using a coding process. According to Neumann (2000) coding is the process of organizing the material into chunks before bringing meaning to those chunks. It involves organizing text data into categories and labeling those categories with a term, a term often based in the actual language of the participant called in vivo term (Cresswell, 2003). The researcher used the coding to generate a number of themes. These themes are the ones that appear as major findings in the study and appear under separate headings in the findings section.

3. Theoretical framework

This section is mainly focusing on different approaches and theories that may help the reader to understand the role of cooperative organization in conflict transformation, peace and justice.

3.1 Understanding cooperative in conflict transformation

Cooperatives organizations were initiated in developing countries as a form of economic association that would help them climb out of poverty. The history of cooperatives is full of evidence of their ability to increase their members' incomes, decrease the risks they run, and enable them to become full participants in civic society. The principles on which cooperatives are based, and on which they are distinguished from other forms of business organization, point to a concern with democratic control by the members, the equitable return of economic surpluses, and a desire to share these benefits with other people in similar circumstances (Birchall, 2003). However, cooperatives organizations play a significant role in conflict transformation especially in post conflict countries.

In the aftermath of violent social conflict, cooperatives have often emerged as sources of positive social capital, fostering a strong sense of community, participation, empowerment and inclusion among members and restoring interpersonal relationships and peace. In post genocide Rwanda,

in addition to dealing with structural causes of grievances, cooperatives provided emotional support for members seeking justice (Birchall, 2004). Cooperatives contributed to the creation of an environment enabling conflict transformation in post conflict regions.

Conflict transformation is understood as a process that involves a series of events and approaches, rather than a single act, and can apply at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, at the intra- and inter-, and at the personal, group, community, social, cultural, national and state levels. For it to be sustainable and effective, it must address all the levels and manifestations of the conflict, including the actual causes which gave rise to the war (Cacaya, 2004). Conflict transformation as a process leads to the development of a positive constructive outcome, helping parties to the conflict to move forward and beyond, to transcend the conflict, ensuring that the goals of all parties are respected and the basic needs and rights of all parties to the conflict upheld (Cacaya, 2004). This is facilitated by the hard and systematic work done by these cooperatives organizations in consolidating people, land resources, producing the needed food and providing the needed services to the community (Prakesh, 2013).

3.2 Approaches to conflict transformation

In order to understand conflict transformation (Burthorn, 1990) proposes various changing approaches:

Envision and Respond: A transformational approach begins with two pro-active foundations: a positive orientation toward conflict, and a willingness to engage in the conflict in an effort to produce constructive change or growth. While conflict often produces long-standing cycles of hurt and destruction, the key to transformation is the capacity to envision conflict as having the potential for constructive change.

Response, on the other hand, suggests a bias toward direct involvement and an increased understanding that comes from real-life experience. Both "envision" and "respond" represent the ways we orient ourselves toward the presence of conflict in our lives, relationships, and communities.

Ebb and Flow: Conflict is a natural part of relationships. While relationships are sometimes calm and predictable, at other times events and circumstances generate tensions and instability.

A transformational view, rather than looking at isolated conflict episodes, seeks to understand how these particular episodes are embedded in the greater pattern of human relationships. Change is understood both at the level of immediate issues and the broader patterns of interaction. In this perspective, the interaction of cooperative members creates positive interpersonal relations and fosters mutual understanding (Sentama, 2017).

Life-Giving Opportunities: this approach suggests that life gives us conflict, and that conflict is a natural part of human experience and relationships. Rather than viewing conflict as a threat, the transformative view sees conflict as a valuable opportunity to grow and increases our understanding of ourselves and others. Conflict helps us stop, assess and take notice. Without it, life would be a monotonous flat topography of sameness and our relationships would be woefully superficial. This phrase also suggests that conflict creates life and keeps everything moving. It can be understood as a motor of change that keeps relationships and social structures dynamically responsive to human needs (Burthon, 1990).

Constructive Change Processes: This notion emphasizes the capacity of the transformational approach to build new things. Conflict transformation begins with a central goal: to build constructive change out of the energy created by conflict. By focusing this energy on the underlying relationships and social structures, constructive changes can be brought about. This is done in the context of the cooperative organization through the capacity to effectively provide individuals with access to economic goods/services through an alternative framework to that of the share based company (Davis, 2004).

Direct Interaction and Social Structures: This is about to engage in change processes at the interpersonal, inter-group, and social structural levels. One set of capacities points toward direct, face-to-face interaction between people or groups. The other set underscores the need to see, pursue, and create change in our ways of organizing social structures, from families, to complex bureaucracies, to structures at the global level. This requires a capacity to understand and sustain dialogue as a fundamental means of constructive change. Indeed, many of the skill-based mechanisms that reduce violence are rooted in communicative capacities to exchange ideas, find common definitions, and move toward solutions. But dialogue also plays a crucial role in the maintenance or change of social structures. Through dialogue, these structures can be modified to be more responsive and just (Burthon, 1990).

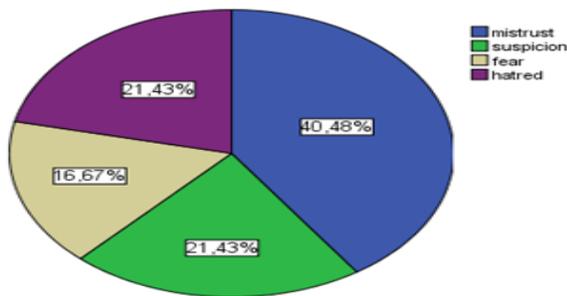
4. Findings

The data are presented here are those from interviews with women members cooperative ABIZERANYE and IMBUTOZAMAHORO. Findings are presented under the following headings: social relations, the existence of the climate of mistrust and suspicion before joining the cooperative, and the role of shared economic activities in fostering the conflict transformation. .

4.2. Women' social relations before joining cooperatives organizations

In this regard, respondents were asked to describe their social relations before joining cooperatives organizations. The views of respondents are summarized on the figure below.

Figure 1: social relations of women before joining cooperative.



Source: Field data, June, 2017.

As indicated on this figure, 40,48% of respondents has said that their social relations were characterized by mistrust among, 21,43% of respondents have confirmed that their social relations were characterized by suspicion, while 21,43% have confirmed that their social relations were characterized by hatred and 16,67% described their social relations as characterized by fear.

This is because the 1994 genocide has left Rwandan society deeply divided, and it was not easy to have people living in perfect harmony soon after the genocide while wounds were still flesh and many people were still suffering from deep psychological wounds. This situation has made

women in Western Province to live in a climate of mistrust, suspicion, hatred and fear. One woman has expressed this in the following terms:

“When I saw a wife of the killer of my family, I was terrified and thought she was to harm me as did her husband. I didn’t have any courage to greet her”.

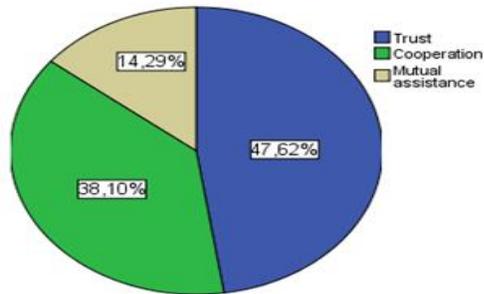
The testimony of this woman shows how the social relations between women survivors of the 1994 Tutsi genocide and women from family of perpetrators of the genocide were deeply deteriorated. During the interview, a woman corroborated this idea in the following terms: *“I was extremely terrified to meet a woman, survivor of the genocide, knowing that it was my husband who had exterminated her family, I wanted to disappear immediately because I was thinking that she was going to take her revenge on me for what my husband has done to her family”.*

To find an end to this situation, it required much effort to bring to the surface in a more explicit manner the relational fears, hope and goals of the two categories of women. This was the role of cooperatives organizations in Western Province.

5.2 Women’ social relations after joining cooperative organizations

After the 1994 genocide, the government of Rwanda has the main objective of promoting unity and reconciliation among members of communities through truth telling and healing. This had to be done in collaboration with community based organizations such as ABIZERANYE and IMBUTOZAMAHORO cooperatives. These cooperatives have been able to change the attitude of women survivors of the 1994 genocide and those from family of genocide perpetrators in the way that they live a peaceful life in a symbiosis climate. When respondents were asked to describe their social relations after joining cooperatives, their responses were as follows described on the figure below:

Figure 2: Social relations of women after joining cooperatives



Source: field data, June, 2017.

Based on the results of this figure, it clearly indicated that after joining cooperative organizations, social relations between women survivors and those from family of perpetrators have improved. These relations are characterized by a climate of trust at 47,62% , cooperation at 38,10% and mutual assistance at 14,29%.

These results show also that cooperatives have played a big role in transforming attitudes and behavior of women survivors of the genocide and those from families of perpetrators through reducing contradictions among them which is the good step towards peace building and conflict transformation. One of the women interviewed has confirmed this in the following terms: *“The ABIZERANYE cooperative has provided us with the possibility of examining our conscience and come up to realize the futility of hating each other and its destructive impact on our daily life, and feel that there is a strong need for breaking down divisions between us, which has increased our capacities for dealing with our conflicts constructively and increase our social relations and cooperation”*.

For the manager of ABIZERANYE cooperative, *“it was not easy to change the attitude of the conflicting parties. It has required rising the awareness of the two groups of women and empowering them for their active participation and engagement in conflict transformation in order to have a positive constructive alternative to the climate of suspicion, mistrust and hatred between them”*.

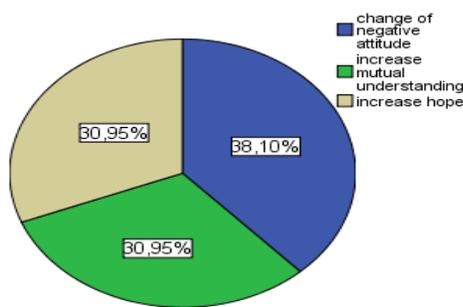
This idea is corroborated by an interviewed woman who confirmed that in the following terms: *“Cooperative has given us an opportunity to achieve what is important and vital for us, by encouraging us to have a positive change of our attitude and behavior towards each other in order to engage in new form of cooperation by creating new forms of women solidarity”*.

This testifies the role played by cooperative organizations in transforming the social relations of women survivors of the 1994 genocide and those from families of genocide perpetrators. In fact, the climate of suspicion, mistrust, fear and hatred that used to characterize social relations on these women before joining cooperatives has been turned into the climate of trust, cooperation and mutual assistance after joining cooperatives organizations.

4.3. The role of contact in conflict transformation

Intergroup contact theory stands as one of social psychology’s strategies for transforming interpersonal relations by reducing negative-dehumanizing attitudes and behaviors, including prejudice, negative stereotyping, or discrimination, while fostering positive-humanizing ones among conflicting parties (Sentama, 2009). In this perspective, respondents have expressed how the contact between them in cooperatives organizations has played a role in conflict transformation. The figure below gives more details.

Figure 3: Contact role in conflict transformation



Source: field data, June 2017.

The results from the above figure show that the contact in cooperative organizations between women survivors of the 1994 genocide and women from families of genocide perpetrators has changed their negative attitude towards each other as confirmed by 38,1% of respondents, while

30,95% have confirmed that contact has increased their mutual understanding and for 30,95% contact has increased their hope.

In fact, greater contact and familiarities with members of other groups may enhance linking for those groups. Therefore, the contact is necessary to produce positive intergroup outcomes and enhance the positive effect of the contact such changing negative attitude towards each other, mutual understanding and hope. This situation is likely to produce positive results when occurring in an environment that is conducive, otherwise contact may also lead to conflict (Linda and Pettigrew, 2006).

One of the respondents has stressed the importance of contact in cooperative in these terms: *“By the fact of meeting several times in different activities of cooperatives, I came up to be familiar with women from families of genocide perpetrators and realized that they didn’t constitute a danger to my life. From that time I started talking and sharing with them some ideas”*.

This shows that contact fosters mutual understanding and reduces tendencies of being away from each other. This has made women (both survivors of the genocide and those from families of genocide perpetrators) to restore their relationships which bring them together and uniting instead of being against each other.

For one of the cooperative members, these women to be able to change the situation, they have fully understood, through different interactions in cooperative, that tensions between them have to be overcome first, by ensuring that all of them recognize that their respective interests are not served by resorting to hatred, mistrust and violence; and second, by seeking consensus on what should be done for a peaceful cohabitation.

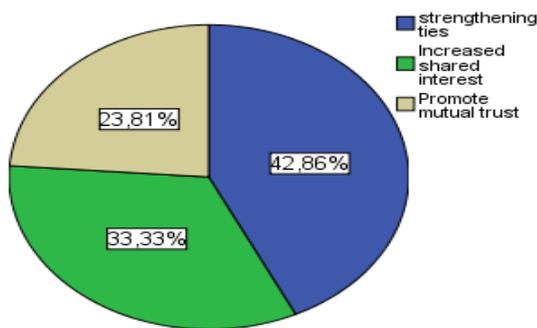
The fact that cooperatives organizations are business and democratic association lead to the success in terms of conflict transformation (Bridault, 1998). In this perspective, shared economic interests are another element for having conflicting parties looking beyond visible issues and establish problem solving initiatives.

4.5. Shared economic activities and conflict transformation

Sharing economic activities in cooperative is an element of conflict transformation. This is because the efforts of the human being are utilized in the production or transformation of

economic goods, which require the ability and willingness to pursue goals by working together rather than striving for personal interest. According to Conway, (1995), individuals who work together rather than against each other will develop bonds of sympathy, caring and affection. In this perspective, respondents were asked about the role of their shared economic activities in conflict transformation. The figure below gives more details:

Figure 4: Role of shared economic activities in conflict transformation



Source: field data, June 2017.

The results of the this figure show that women who shared economic activities have contributed in strengthening their ties, this was confirmed by 42,86% of respondents, while 33,33% have confirmed that shared economic activities have increased their shared interests, and 23,81% have confirmed that shared economic activities have promoted their mutual trust.

In fact, women members of cooperatives in Western Province have initiated common projects in their cooperatives which generate common interest. These projects include hen grazing and growing vegetables. In order to have these projects financed, members of each cooperative take a loan from financing institutions where cooperative members constitute collateral guarantee for the loan. For this kind of loan when one member becomes insolvent, other members are required to reimburse in her place.

Taking loan together and be responsible individually of paying back the whole amount makes women members of cooperatives strengthening their ties and work hard in order to have the

project in which they have invested being prosperous. It is not for all individual to take this kind of loan, because it requires mutual trust, and a certain level of honesty for each person involved.

In this context, conflict transformation by women members of cooperatives in Western Province has passed through effective initiatives that respond to their real needs and situations where by individual initiatives are part of the broader cohesion strategy for mobilization for peace using shared economic activities.

Conclusion

Based on the widely recognized need that conflict transformation requires fully involvement of all members of the community, we set to explore the role played by cooperative organizations in conflict transformation with special emphasize on women members of cooperatives in Western Province of Rwanda. Women selected for interviews are survivors of the 1994 Tutsi genocide and those from families of genocide perpetrators. They were selected purposively based on the membership of the cooperatives aiming at conflict transformation. These cooperatives are “ABIZERANYE’ and “IMBUTO Z’AMAHORO”.

A field survey was conducted in the above mentioned cooperatives for the purpose of gathering information about the participation of women in conflict transformation through cooperative organizations. Using interview as a tool for data collection, the results of the empirical research have revealed the existence of the climate of mistrust, suspicion, fear, and hatred among women before joining the cooperative. But soon after joining cooperatives, this hostile climate has been changed into a conducive climate characterized by trust, cooperation and mutual assistance. To have these women changing their attitude and behavior, shared economic activities in their cooperative have strengthened their ties and mutual trust by initiating income generating activities that are financed by loan taken on collateral guarantee of cooperative members. This has increased the spirit of working together in order to increase the prosperity of their projects.

The role played by women cooperative of Western Province of Rwanda in conflict transformation is a best practice that may inspire all Rwandan community based organizations for conflict transformation, because these initiatives are in line of implementing the Rwandan Government policy of Unity and reconciliation which require every Rwandan to participate actively.

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