

CAPACITAR LETTER from RWANDA

June 2016

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you from Rwanda, the land of a thousand hills. Capacitar Special Projects Coordinator Joan Condon and I are here celebrating the 10th Anniversary of Capacitar Rwanda with Founder Sr. Antoinette Gasibirege SH. Dr. Genevieve van Waesberghe MMM, who coordinated initial Rwandan trainings at her trauma/HIV center, came from Tanzania to be part of the celebration. Seven members of the DR Congo Capacitar North Kivu team also joined in the festivities.

It is hard to believe that over 10 years have passed since we first met Antoinette in a workshop in Chicago. As a genocide survivor she was dealing with all the symptoms of PTSD—flashbacks, headaches and body pain. During the workshop when Antoinette experienced the simple Capacitar practices, she immediately recognized their impact in her body. She soon approached us asking, “When is Capacitar coming to Rwanda?” Our first reaction was one of fear. Capacitar had worked in places of violence and genocide like Guatemala, but we never considered working in Rwanda where there was so much trauma. In 1994, nearly one million people died in 100 days during the genocide and most of the country and infrastructure were devastated. So we responded to Antoinette quite tentatively, “If we can get the funding we’ll go.” The rest is history!

So much has been accomplished since 2006. Over 10,350 people have received training by Capacitar Rwanda’s team in 10 districts of the country. More than 30 partner organizations and 155 vulnerable groups have benefited from the trauma healing and self-care tools. Trainings have included participants from a wide variety of organizations: widows and survivors of the genocide, National University of Rwanda Clinical Psychology Department, Hope and Homes for Children, COTRAF working with civil society, Diocesan Justice Commission, staff of a center for deaf children, hospital staffs, religious, teachers, school children, teachers of the Department of Nursing Science and Physiotherapy, Rwandan Women’s Network working with survivors of rape, organizations working to empower single mothers, SOS Village mothers, National University Social Work Department, HIV groups, cooperatives, and many others.



Joan Condon, Pat Cane, Capacitar Rwanda Founder Antoinette Gasibirege and Genevieve van Waesberghe



Antoinette and Pat lighting the anniversary candle



Gifts for Antoinette celebrating 10 years of service



WE-ACT youth in a psychodrama showing how Capacitar has healed their lives

During the celebration people who benefited from learning Capacitar gave their testimonies. Many spoke of how Capacitar changed their lives giving them effective tools to heal the trauma of the genocide and ways to work with anger and depression. Trocaire Rwanda Director Dony Mazingaizo described how “trauma transformation is a key element for peace and development. Peace and healing are connected. Healing the self is a prerequisite for healthy participation in society.” Trocaire, the Catholic Development Agency of Ireland, has funded Capacitar Rwanda’s different projects since 2006. Trocaire recognizes the impact of Capacitar’s trauma healing and women’s empowerment outreach to communities in Rwanda.

One group, We-ACT, a network of youth who live with HIV/AIDS, offered traditional Rwandan dances during the celebration, as well as a psychodrama showing how Capacitar has given hope and healing to their lives. They formed a circle and did the Tai Chi “Letting Go” move as each one said how they were healed: “I let go of anger, and am filled with peace. I let go of fear and receive courage. I let go of victimhood and recognize my self-worth!”

Sr. Antoinette in her report to us shared some of the unique kinds of outreach that she and her team have done. In one area they worked with 70 couples impacted by family conflict and violence. A Rwandan psychologist did not have positive outcomes using his cognitive therapeutic approach with these couples, so he asked Antoinette for help. In groups and in



individual work Antoinette taught Capacitar practices giving the couples tools to deal with their conflicts, power struggles and anger. As a result, many of the couples were reconciled and over 45 couples decided not to divorce. In the testimony of one man: “Capacitar helped me to overcome my anger and stress. My wife and I were about to divorce. Now, we are working together and are committed to sharing the acquired knowledge with other couples in conflict.”

Another achievement by Capacitar Rwanda has been work with single mothers and their children who face discrimination and stigma in their communities. Often the single mothers reject their children and refuse to give them names or register their births. With Capacitar workshops many of these mothers gained an understanding of the rights and psychological development of their children. They even registered them in the sector office and revealed the names of their fathers giving the children legal status.



During our visit Antoinette wanted us to see the reality of rural Rwanda where the impact of Capacitar is very significant. Over 85% of the population of 11 million live in poverty in the countryside, many without electricity or running water. This is in stark contrast to Kigali, one of the most modern cities of Africa with over 1 million people. Many of the rural communities deal with post-genocide trauma and have little access to healthcare. So we traveled for about 2 hours on red earth roads winding up and down the mountains to the parish of Muyanza near Byumba. Fr. Harelimana Nejamuscene,



Muyanza theater group performing skits showing the impact of Tai Chi, Pal Dan Gum and Acupressure on community health problems

the pastor of the Muyanza Catholic Community warmly welcomed us, happy that Capacitar had come to his people. He described how Antoinette over the last year had trained 30 men and women who multiplied Capacitar to over 400 people with workshops to help them with their stress, trauma and health problems. Fr. Harelimana envisions training 90 other multipliers who would reach out to thousands in the whole area.

In the Muyanza community center a surprise awaited us. Forty men and women leaders were gathered, eager to show us how Capacitar changed their lives. One of the men had composed a song based on our Capacitar prayer that the group sang in Kinyarwanda. The theater club performed several delightful skits re-enacting how the different Capacitar practices are used in challenging situations. An elderly farmer hobbled in on his staff full of aches and pains. His son led him in the Pal Dan Gum movements and soon he was moving like a younger man able to go back to work on his farm. Others offered testimonies. A 70 year-old couple described their back pains and health problems. They demonstrated how they roll an empty bottle and a rock under their foot to massage the reflexology points. They are now living happily without pain. One woman said she was very angry and upset when someone stole the carrot crop that she was ready to harvest in her field. She did the Fingerholds to calm her sadness and anger and after some time even reconciled with the person who did her harm. Another man described his strong flashbacks after being struck by lightning and said he was unable to sleep. He demonstrated how he used deep breathing and the Holds, and now he can now sleep peacefully. An older man who suffered headaches and neck pain from carrying heavy loads on his head found relief with neck and shoulder exercises and no longer needs to use rubbing oil. One young man presented us with his drawing of a tree growing and unfolding, a representation of how Capacitar has grown and flourished in Muyanza. Our visit ended with the presentation of a poem describing how Capacitar “fills us with light so the darkness and negativity are released.” We left Muyanza deeply moved by the strong spirit and commitment of these people. In their poverty and need they found Capacitar as a way to empower, heal and transform their lives. Antoinette said that Capacitar Rwanda is working in 17 other parishes just like Moyanza with equally enthusiastic responses.



The Capacitar Tree of Life in the Muyanza community

During our visit we also traveled to Gisenyi, at the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo. Thirty men and women came from Goma and the North Kivu area of DR Congo to celebrate what they have done as Capacitar North Kivu. Since 1996, a succession of wars has impacted DR Congo. The Province of North Kivu in particular has suffered greatly from conflict, massive displacement of populations, the breakup of families, the burning of homes, corruption, injustice and HIV/AIDS. Many people deal with despair, depression, hopelessness and trauma with all the symptoms of PTSD: insomnia, nightmares, stomach disorders, body pain and fatigue, strong emotions, trouble concentrating, absenteeism in school, prostitution, drugs, alcohol and other addictions.



In this context, Sr. Ingrid Janisch ISB, brought Capacitar to North Kivu in 2013, in collaboration with two young men of Goma, Prince and Daniel Mbonekuba. Antoinette and Genevieve accompanied Ingrid and the team with trainings to form Capacitar multipliers. In two and a half years Capacitar North Kivu has developed outreach in the areas of education, protection of children, health and pastoral work. To date over 3,532 persons have been trained. Trainings have included participants from many areas: teachers and children representing 32 schools in Goma, HIV/AIDS groups, centers for nutrition and maternal health, prisoners, childcare centers, religious, psychologists, counselors of mental health centers and many others. During our visit the leadership team wanted to meet “the originals” (Joan and me) of Capacitar International to ask our advice in developing their organization. CARITAS GOMA, the Catholic Development Agency working in DR Congo, has recognized the effectiveness of what Capacitar North Kivu is doing. CARITAS has given them an office, as well as support for developing outreach and funding sources.

We celebrated with the group of Capacitar North Kivu with song, dance and PowerPoint presentations. During the presentations, the group responded with many good questions. They were especially interested in the report of Capacitar Rwanda, asking: “How did you get to where you are in 10 years?” “What challenges have you faced and how did you overcome them?” We responded to these and other queries. Many North Kivu team members shared how they were able to live with peace after all they had suffered. One teacher described his plans to teach Capacitar to many schools in Goma, so that the children can live with hope for the future. For the occasion one of the team composed a moving song, “Capacitar Has Changed Our Lives.”

As we travel onward to Tanzania with Genevieve, we leave Capacitar Rwanda and Capacitar North Kivu deeply inspired by the enthusiasm and commitment of these remarkable people who have wholeheartedly embraced the Capacitar spirit. Psychiatrist Dr. Simon Gasibirege describing the social and systemic impact of genocide and violence noted that everyone is traumatized so it is important to work using an integral approach with individuals and the community to bring healing to the society. Capacitar is an important part of the interventions used by his team at Life Wounds Healing Association.

In reflecting on Rwanda we have often said, “Rwanda is one of the countries where Capacitar has learned the most. People who have lost everything and who have suffered some of the worst atrocities in human history, often heal more quickly because they don’t have the luxury of many options. All they have is their body and their breath. If Capacitar practices work in Rwanda, they will work anywhere.”



Capacitar is greatly blessed with the hope and vision of the people of Rwanda and North Kivu. With courage and resilience they have not only survived but have transformed their lives with wisdom and grace.

With peace and blessings,

Pat Cane, Capacitar International Founder/Director

Joan Condon, Capacitar Special Projects Coordinator