



'Restore Dignity for the Poor' Ministry Report

From 2020 to 2021, CEDAR Fund has collaborated with 46 Christian organisations and churches globally to implement various relief and development projects. Within this time, CEDAR has successfully carried out 82 projects, from which more than 940,000 people have benefitted. Some of the more notable areas include three projects in Rwanda that have aided about 6,000 people; our efforts included: providing relief and aid to combat the pandemic, church and community mobilisation, supporting religious education, assisting with the restoration of peace and order for residents still affected by the Rwandan genocide, and revitalising the bodies, minds, and spirits of the Rwandan natives such that they can live a life of dignity once again.

The project introduced below was carried out by CEDAR Fund's Rwandan partner Christian Action for Reconciliation and Social Assistance (CARSA), which pushes for the complete restoration of the Muhanga region of Rwanda's southern province.

Introducing CARSA

Established in 2004, CARSA facilitates and expedites communal reconciliation, rehabilitation, and improvement in areas most affected by the 1994 Rwandan genocide of Tutsis. Since 2019, CEDAR has funded CARSA's ongoing rehabilitative endeavours, hosting week-long trauma treatment workshops for survivors and perpetrators. Our efforts include helping the affected form a Restoration Fellowship in the community and caring for cattle with CARSA's beneficiaries, who would gift each other calves as a symbolic way of repairing their relationship.

Project Information

Project Name: Cow for Peace: Providing Sustainable, Holistic Reconciliation and Poverty Alleviation

Project Implementation: Second year of the project, from March 2020 to September 2021 (currently discussing 2022's plans with partners)

Project Goal: To enable the genocide survivors as well as their perpetrators to recover from their respective traumas and actively participate in each other's journey of rehabilitation, reconciling with each other and improving their living standards

Beneficiaries: Genocide survivors, perpetrators, and their respective families



Project Contents: In 1994, the world was shocked by the news of a massacre against the Tutsi in Rwanda. In a mere 100 days, around 1 million people were killed in this horrific genocide. The number of Tutsis whose lives were lost accounted for roughly 70% of the ethnic minority's population. As of now, more than 27 years have passed since the tragedy. Most of the genocide's perpetrators have been released from prison, having served their sentences, returning home next to genocide survivors once again. This has inevitably caused tensions to run high once again, with the coexistence of abusers and victims stretching the tightrope of community safety to its limits, both sides experiencing immense psychological pressure. To remedy this, the first year of the 'Cow for Peace' project held workshops and other activities to provide trauma therapy to both the genocide's survivors and perpetrators. In the second year, the project focused on providing select residents (25 pairs of perpetrators and victims, totalling 50 people) with training in cattle breeding, giving each survivor a dairy cow that would remain in their home until it gave birth to a calf, which the survivors would then gift to their paired perpetrator. Doing this allowed both families in each pair to share their produce (with the milk providing nutrition and income for the families and the manure providing fertiliser). Through working together to take care of their cattle, this project facilitated a gradual, holistic reconciliation between the two parties.

Project Status

During the implementation of this project, the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed the local area, which has unavoidably affected the rate of the project's progression and its subsequent development. However, most of the activities were able to be completed as planned.

Responding to pandemic preventative measures:

- The locally implemented preventative measures for the pandemic did hinder the project slightly. Still, CARSA was able to work around the restrictions by dividing the cattle breeding training into five small sessions and cooperating with the local authorities to provide training in suitable places. Unfortunately, the original ceremony of gifting the cattle to beneficiaries, which was supposed to occur outdoors, was cancelled. However, we arranged trucks to transport the cattle directly to the beneficiaries' homes.
- The restrictions made it difficult for us to physically go into various districts and follow up on the beneficiaries' situations. Instead, we provided bicycles and communicative equipment to volunteers in every district, such that they could visit and care for the beneficiaries and their families and simultaneously report their progress and situation to our partners.
- During this pandemic, members of the Restoration Fellowship helped the families of infected members, such as providing them with food supplies and taking care of their children and livestock, amongst other acts of kindness and generosity. This experience of

facing and overcoming adversity as a community has subsequently fostered a sense of solidarity and unity between the two parties that were once at odds.



(Members of the community form a Restoration Fellowship)



(Genocide perpetrators and survivors collaboratively building a cowshed)

In aiding restoration and improving quality of life:

- The beneficiaries of the donated cattle were selected by CARSA and the community restoration fellowship. The beneficiary must have participated in the trauma treatment workshop, joined the Restoration Fellowship as a member, and be willing to take a step forward, embarking upon the challenging journey of reconciliation with the perpetrators and their families. During the selection process, members of the Fellowship will discuss and nominate suitable beneficiaries according to their living conditions and needs (including their economic conditions and emotional and mental state, amongst other considerations) and look out for each other as they set out on this journey together.
- The beneficiaries of the donated cattle (genocide survivors and perpetrators) and their families built a cowshed together to raise dairy cows. During this process, the distance between both sides had greatly diminished, a newfound mutual connection and understanding having superseded the previous disconnect.
- For many of the beneficiaries, this was their first time coming together and interacting for the greater good. And from this point forwards, the cattle have become a symbolic bridge of reconciling the relationship between both sides' families. Children of the beneficiaries' said that upon learning their parents and neighbours were on this journey of restoration and healing, along with seeing the two sides talking and visiting each other, they felt a sense of safety, comfort, and joy in their community and when playing with their peers. It was everything they had longed for.



- The quality of life for the beneficiaries and their families has also improved, for example, A. Through using cow manure as a fertiliser, the beneficiaries' agricultural productivity has tripled; B. The milk produced by the cows served to improve family members' nutrition and the beneficiaries' income – selling the milk generated enough profit for the beneficiaries to afford health insurance for themselves and their families.

In regards to spiritual health and improving self-esteem:

- In Rwanda, possessing cattle was indicative of social status and wealth. Some of the beneficiaries reported that their self-esteem and self-regard had increased upon receiving the donated cattle.
- Most beneficiaries reported having experienced improvements in coping with trauma and stress and reducing physical symptoms of their psychological burdens, such as headaches, stomach pains, and other chronic ailments. The occasional 'flashbacks' (an unavoidable recreation of past traumatic events reappearing either in dreams or in the form of intrusive thoughts) have also gradually diminished. Some beneficiaries can now join others in participating in communal activities, having regained their hope of survival and healing.
- Many survivors believed that the Lord had abandoned them during the genocide, consequently resisting the Lord and their faith and being unable to return to the church in the 27 years. Through CARSA's programme, they received a holistic rehabilitation of their bodies, minds, and spirits. Moreover, they were able to restore their relationship with the Lord, rebuilding their faith in Him and once again participating in church gatherings.



A Life-Changing Story



(Diane and Emmanuel raise a cow together)



(Diane and her children, photographed with Emmanuel)

Genocide survivor Diane and her family live in the Muhanga area. They used to be good neighbours and friends with Emmanuel, a perpetrator; in Diane's eyes, however, Emmanuel was no different from his father. In the unexpected event of the Tutsi genocide in 1994, a gang of thugs killed Diane's father, which shockingly included Emmanuel. More outrageous was the fact that Emmanuel had looted all of Diane's family's possessions, killing her family's cattle during the process.

This brutal massacre caused Diane to lose her beloved father and feel a sense of desolation and hopelessness. Even as she grew, all that accompanied her was grief and loss. Although Emmanuel was punished by law and even completed his sentence, Diane still hated him, considering him a traitor. On the other hand, Emmanuel was enveloped by fear, guilt, and shame, feeling outcast even though he had returned to society and his home.

Seeing this situation, CARSA invited Diane and Emmanuel to join their seven-day trauma therapy workshop. They went from being unable to face each other initially to gradually talking and having a shared experience of learning something together. Throughout the workshop, they came to terms with some deeply-rooted burdens that had marked impacts on their lives. They realised together that dark histories could not be erased, and one can only move forward.

The workshop allowed Diane to find inner peace. By acknowledging her anger, grief, and the root of all her other emotional reactions and stress, she learned how to express them and live with these feelings – even though she cannot prevent intrusive thoughts and negativity from breaching her in everyday life, she learned not to let these negative emotions take hold of her



life. More notably, Diane rebuilt her faith in the Lord and re-established a new relationship with Him. For Emmanuel, he realised that the only way to be released from his guilt and great sin was by repenting for his actions and seeking forgiveness from Diane. He took the initiative to plead for Diane's forgiveness. Diane simultaneously decided to embark on a journey of healing and reconciliation with Emmanuel, the two joining the Restoration Fellowship together.

Amongst the other Restoration Fellowship members, Diane and Emmanuel were selected to be beneficiaries of the 'Cow for Peace' project. Together, they worked to build the cowshed. Through this collaborative activity, they were able to rebuild trust with each other as their family members also participated in the building process in a symbolic gesture of rebuilding their relationship. They established a common goal of doing what they could to care for the cow and maintain its health while sharing what it produced. Additionally, they also shared their gratitude for the 'Cow for Peace' project that allowed them to be brought back together as companions in this journey of healing. They hoped to share what they learned in the workshop with others, starting from their own family and relatives and eventually working their way to other community members.

Diane said to us: 'When I forgive, it feels as though a burden that's been weighing down on my heart has finally lifted, and I am free. I am so happy and proud to raise this cow with Emmanuel. Today (as it was before the genocide), Emmanuel feels like my father... our families have become friends.'