



## Overcoming cultural differences for community reconciliation in Rwanda

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### Abstract

This abstract explores the importance of overcoming cultural differences for community reconciliation in Rwanda. The history of Rwanda's community reconciliation efforts is briefly discussed, and the various cultural groups in Rwanda and their unique characteristics are described. The challenges of cultural differences in community reconciliation efforts are explained, and strategies for overcoming cultural differences in Rwanda's reconciliation efforts are proposed, including education and awareness programs, cultural exchange and interaction, and the integration of cultural traditions and practices. The successes and challenges of overcoming cultural differences in Rwanda's reconciliation efforts are also discussed. Examples of successful community reconciliation initiatives in Rwanda are provided, as well as the remaining challenges and obstacles in these efforts. Lessons learned from Rwanda's experience in overcoming cultural differences for community reconciliation are explored, with implications for other countries facing similar challenges in reconciliation efforts. Overall, the abstract highlights the importance of understanding and addressing cultural differences in promoting successful community reconciliation efforts.

**Keywords:** cultural differences, community reconciliation, Rwanda, challenges, Hutus and Tutsis

### Introduction

The people of Rwanda have endured immense suffering due to a history of violence, division and mistrust. The scars of the 1994 genocide, which claimed the lives of approximately 800,000 people in just 100 days, continue to impact individuals and communities to this day (BBC News, 2014). It is important to note that the genocide was largely fueled by deep-seated ethnic and cultural divisions, which were exploited by those in power to advance their political and military interests (LeBor, 2008, p 11) <sup>[2]</sup>. In the wake of this tragedy, Rwanda has demonstrated tremendous resilience and determination to heal and rebuild. Through comprehensive and ambitious community reconciliation efforts, the country is working towards a more united and peaceful society that celebrates its diversity while overcoming cultural differences. It is crucial to recognize the importance of these efforts and to support them in order to create a brighter future for all Rwandans.

An integral aspect challenges in achieving community reconciliation in Rwanda has been the need to overcome cultural differences among different groups (Zorbas, 2004) <sup>[3]</sup>. The country is home to a complex mosaic of ethnic and cultural identities, with the largest groups being the Hutus, Tutsis, and Twas including other small groups (LeBor, 2008, p 138) <sup>[2]</sup>. Each group has its own unique cultural practices, language, beliefs, and values, which have been shaped by centuries of history and interaction. However, these differences have also been a source of conflict and division, as different groups have often viewed each other with suspicion, mistrust, and animosity.

Overcoming cultural differences is crucial for community reconciliation in Rwanda for several reasons. First, cultural differences have been one of the primary drivers of conflict and violence in the country. During the genocide, ethnic and cultural identities were weaponized by political and military leaders, who used them to mobilize their followers and demonize their opponents (Verwimp, 2006) <sup>[4]</sup>. This led to a

situation where people were killed, not because of any individual wrongdoing, but because of their ethnic or cultural identity. To achieve community reconciliation, it is essential to overcome these divisions and build a more inclusive and united society.

Second, cultural differences can also create barriers to communication and understanding between different groups. In Rwanda, many people speak different languages and have different customs ((LeBor, 2008, p 61) <sup>[2]</sup>, which can make it difficult for them to communicate effectively with each other. This can lead to misunderstandings, stereotypes, and prejudices, which can perpetuate divisions and hinder the process of community reconciliation. Overcoming cultural differences can therefore help to promote better communication and understanding between different groups, and help to break down barriers to social cohesion.

Third, overcoming cultural differences can also promote the healing process and help to build trust and respect among different groups. Cultural practices, traditions, and rituals can play a crucial role in the process of healing and rebuilding after conflict (Zorbas, 2009) <sup>[8]</sup>. For example, in Rwanda, traditional ceremonies such as Gacaca courts and Umuganda community service have been used to promote reconciliation and foster a sense of collective responsibility for building a better future (Wielenga, & Harris, 2011) <sup>[10]</sup>. By incorporating cultural practices into community reconciliation efforts, it is possible to build a more inclusive and sustainable process of healing and rebuilding (Breed, 2008) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Overall, the importance of overcoming cultural differences for community reconciliation in Rwanda cannot be overstated. It is essential to build a more inclusive and united society, to promote better communication and understanding between different groups, and to foster the healing process after conflict. While the task is challenging and complex, Rwanda's experience shows that it is possible

to overcome cultural differences and build a more peaceful and prosperous society. By continuing to work towards this goal, Rwanda can serve as a model for other countries facing similar challenges in the pursuit of community reconciliation.

### **Brief overview of the history and context of Rwanda's community reconciliation efforts**

Rwanda's community reconciliation efforts are a response to the country's tragic history of violence and division. The most infamous event in this history was the 1994 genocide, which saw the systematic killing of an estimated 800,000 people in just 100 days. The genocide was primarily driven by ethnic and cultural divisions, with the majority Hutu population targeting the Tutsi minority, as well as moderate Hutus who were perceived as sympathizers with the Tutsis. After the genocide, Rwanda faced the enormous challenge of rebuilding a society that had been torn apart by violence and hatred (Zorbas, 2009) <sup>[8]</sup>. In response, the government launched a comprehensive effort to promote community reconciliation and healing. This effort has been characterized by a number of different initiatives, including legal, educational, and cultural measures.

One of the key legal measures was the establishment of the Gacaca courts (Reuchamps, 2008) <sup>[11]</sup>. These courts were designed to provide a mechanism for justice and accountability for the crimes committed during the genocide (Clark, 2014) <sup>[23]</sup>. They were based on traditional Rwandan dispute resolution mechanisms, and involved a community-based approach to justice. The courts were staffed by lay judges from the local community, and involved a process of confession, apology, and forgiveness (Sabala, 2019) <sup>[15]</sup>. While the Gacaca courts were not without controversy, they played a significant role in promoting accountability and reconciliation in the aftermath of the genocide (Wielenga, & Harris, 2011) <sup>[10]</sup>.

In addition to legal measures, Rwanda's community reconciliation efforts also involved a significant educational component. This included initiatives to promote greater understanding and respect for different cultures and ethnic groups in the country (Kayisharaza, 2019) <sup>[14]</sup>. The government invested heavily in education, with the aim of fostering a new generation of Rwandans who would be more tolerant, empathetic, and understanding of others (Bentrovato, 2017) <sup>[18]</sup>. As part of this effort, Rwanda also introduced a new curriculum that emphasized the importance of peace, unity, and reconciliation.

Cultural measures were also an important part of Rwanda's community reconciliation efforts. Traditional practices, such as Umuganda (community service), were promoted as a means of building solidarity and a sense of shared responsibility (Zorbas, 2009) <sup>[8]</sup>. This involved regular community-based clean-up days, during which citizens would work together to maintain their local environment. Traditional ceremonies, such as the Kwibuka (genocide commemoration) and the Ingando (reconciliation retreats), were also used to promote healing and a sense of collective responsibility for building a better future.

Overall, Rwanda's community reconciliation efforts have been comprehensive and far-reaching. While they have not been without controversy, they have been widely recognized as an important example of how to rebuild a society that has been devastated by violence and hatred. While challenges remain (Hudson, 2009) <sup>[13]</sup>, including ongoing issues of

justice, accountability, and reconciliation, Rwanda's experience shows that it is possible to build a more peaceful, united, and prosperous society, even in the wake of the worst atrocities.

### **Statement of problem**

What is hindering the achievement of community reconciliation in Rwanda? One of the key challenges is the need to overcome cultural differences among different groups. These cultural differences have historically been a source of conflict and division in Rwanda, perpetuating violence and creating barriers to communication and understanding. The scars of the 1994 genocide continue to impact individuals and communities, making it essential to build a more inclusive and united society. This involves promoting better communication and understanding between different groups in Rwanda, and fostering the healing process after conflict. Therefore, what is needed to foster the healing process after conflict in Rwanda, and how can better communication and understanding be promoted between different groups in order to build a more inclusive and united society?

The analytical descriptive methodology is used in writing the research. It involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data to describe and understand the reality of overcoming cultural differences for community reconciliation to reveal what is hindering the achievement of community reconciliation in Rwanda? Or what are the challenges to do?

### **Literature review**

The issue of community reconciliation in Rwanda has been a subject of considerable academic interest and research, particularly in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. The country's history of violence, division, and mistrust has left deep scars that continue to impact individuals and communities to this day. One of the major obstacles to achieving community reconciliation in Rwanda is the need to overcome cultural differences among different groups, which have historically been a source of conflict and division.

Numerous studies have investigated the role of cultural differences in perpetuating violence and hindering the process of community reconciliation in Rwanda. For example, Gourevitch (Gourevitch, & Andrews, 1999) <sup>[37]</sup>, highlights the cultural divisions between the Hutu and Tutsi communities, which were exploited by the government and other groups to incite violence and perpetrate the genocide. Similarly, Melvern (Melvern, & Caplan 2001) <sup>[38]</sup>, argues that the historical construction of ethnic identities in Rwanda has been a significant factor in the country's conflicts and that these identities continue to shape social relations and political discourse.

In addition to examining the causes of cultural differences, researchers have also explored potential strategies for overcoming them and promoting community reconciliation in Rwanda. For instance, Rutayisire (Byanafashe, & Rutayisire, 2016) <sup>[39]</sup>, argues that effective reconciliation requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses not only cultural differences but also economic, political, and social factors. The author suggests that strategies such as dialogue, education, and economic development can promote better communication and understanding between different groups.

Other studies have emphasized the importance of local-level initiatives in promoting community reconciliation in Rwanda. For example, Ntaganda (Ntaganda, 2018) <sup>[40]</sup>, highlights the role of traditional mechanisms such as Gacaca courts in promoting accountability and fostering the healing process. Similarly, (Ingelaere *et al.* 2018) <sup>[41]</sup> emphasize the importance of grassroots initiatives that aim to build trust and foster social cohesion.

Overall, the literature suggests that overcoming cultural differences is a critical component of achieving community reconciliation in Rwanda. The studies reviewed here highlight the need for a multi-faceted approach that addresses the historical and social roots of cultural differences and promotes better communication and understanding between different groups. Local-level initiatives and traditional mechanisms may also play an important role in promoting accountability and fostering the healing process.

### Understanding Cultural Differences in Rwanda

#### Description of the various cultural groups in Rwanda and their unique characteristics

Rwanda is a country with a rich cultural heritage and diverse population. While the country is best known for the ethnic divisions that contributed to the 1994 genocide, it is important to recognize the diversity and complexity of the many different cultural groups that make up Rwanda (Breed, 2006) <sup>[7]</sup>,

The two largest ethnic groups in Rwanda are the Hutu and the Tutsi (Adekunle, 2007, p 4) <sup>[24]</sup>, The Hutu constitute the majority of the population, and are primarily agriculturalists. They are known for their strong sense of community and hospitality, and traditionally place a high value on land and cattle. The Tutsi, on the other hand, are traditionally pastoralists, and are known for their strong warrior culture. Historically, the Tutsi were the ruling class in Rwanda, and were associated with wealth and power. However, after Rwanda gained independence in the 1960s, the Hutu came to dominate the government, and this power shift eventually led to the tragic events of the 1994 genocide.

In addition to the Hutu and Tutsi, there are also smaller ethnic groups in Rwanda, including the Twa (Adekunle, 2007, p 6) <sup>[24]</sup>, who are a minority group traditionally associated with hunting and gathering. The Twa are a marginalized group in Rwanda, and have historically faced significant discrimination and social exclusion. Efforts have been made in recent years to promote greater understanding and inclusion of the Twa within Rwandan society.

While ethnic identity is an important part of Rwandan culture, it is also important to recognize the diversity of other cultural groups within the country (Clark, 2014) <sup>[23]</sup>, Rwanda is a linguistically diverse country, with three official languages: Kinyarwanda, English, and French. Kinyarwanda is the most widely spoken language, and is the language of everyday communication for most Rwandans. Other languages spoken in Rwanda include Swahili and a variety of local dialects (Chevan, *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[26]</sup>,

Religion is another important aspect of cultural identity in Rwanda (Longman, 2001) <sup>[25]</sup>. The majority of the population is Christian, with Roman Catholicism and Protestantism being the two largest denominations. However, there is also a significant Muslim population, as well as followers of traditional African religions.

Overall, the cultural diversity of Rwanda is an important and unique aspect of the country's history and identity. While ethnic divisions have contributed to conflict and violence in the past, it is important to recognize the many different cultural groups that make up Rwanda, and to promote greater understanding and appreciation of this diversity (Breed, 2006) <sup>[7]</sup>. By celebrating the unique cultural heritage of each group, and promoting greater unity and shared values, Rwanda can continue to build a more peaceful, prosperous, and inclusive society.

#### Explanation of the challenges of cultural differences in community reconciliation efforts

Cultural differences can pose significant challenges in community reconciliation efforts, particularly in contexts where there has been a history of conflict or violence (Staub, 2014) <sup>[31]</sup>. In Rwanda, the ethnic divisions between the Hutu and Tutsi have been a major source of tension and conflict, and have made it difficult to achieve reconciliation and healing in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide (Breed, 2006) <sup>[7]</sup>,

A critical component challenges in overcoming cultural differences is the deep-seated nature of identity and cultural heritage (Hudson, 2009) <sup>[13]</sup>. People's sense of cultural identity is often closely tied to their sense of self, and can be a source of pride and belonging. This can make it difficult to overcome cultural differences, particularly when those differences have been associated with violence or trauma.

In Rwanda, the legacy of the genocide has contributed to ongoing divisions and mistrust between the Hutu and Tutsi (Adekunle, 2007, p 24) <sup>[24]</sup>. Many people continue to identify strongly with their ethnic group, and may view members of other groups with suspicion or even hostility. This can make it difficult to build trust and foster meaningful dialogue between different groups, which is essential for effective community reconciliation efforts.

Another challenge in overcoming cultural differences is the potential for misunderstandings and miscommunications. Different cultural groups may have different ways of communicating, different values and beliefs, and different understandings of what is important. This can lead to misunderstandings and conflict, particularly when there is a lack of shared language or cultural understanding (King, 2007, p 99) <sup>[27]</sup>,

In Rwanda, language has been a significant barrier to communication and reconciliation efforts. Kinyarwanda is the most widely spoken language in Rwanda, but there are also significant populations of people who speak French or English (Chevan, *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[26]</sup>. This can make it difficult for people to communicate effectively with each other, and can limit the effectiveness of reconciliation efforts.

In the end, cultural differences can pose a challenge in terms of power dynamics and social hierarchies. In many cultures, there are established hierarchies and power structures that can be difficult to overcome. This can make it difficult for people from different cultural groups to work together as equals, and can contribute to ongoing tensions and conflict.

In Rwanda, the historical power dynamics between the Hutu and Tutsi have contributed to ongoing tensions and mistrust. The Tutsi were traditionally the ruling class in Rwanda, and this power imbalance contributed to the marginalization and discrimination of the Hutu. After the Hutu came to power in the 1960s, this power imbalance was reversed, and the Tutsi were subject to significant discrimination and violence.

These power dynamics have continued to contribute to ongoing divisions and mistrust between the two groups, and have made it difficult to achieve meaningful reconciliation and healing (Adekunle, 2007, p 21) <sup>[24]</sup>,

To sum up, the challenges of cultural differences in community reconciliation efforts are significant, and require a sustained and dedicated effort to overcome. It is important to recognize the unique cultural heritage of different groups, and to work towards greater understanding and appreciation of this diversity (Staub, 2014)<sup>[31]</sup>, At the same time, it is important to build trust and foster meaningful dialogue between different groups, in order to overcome misunderstandings and work towards shared goals. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, it is possible to build a more peaceful, inclusive, and united society in Rwanda and beyond.

### **Strategies for Overcoming Cultural Differences in Rwanda's Reconciliation Efforts**

#### **Education and awareness programs to promote understanding and tolerance**

Education and awareness programs can play a critical role in promoting understanding and tolerance between different cultural groups, particularly in the context of community reconciliation efforts. By providing people with information and opportunities to engage with different cultures, these programs can help to break down stereotypes, overcome misunderstandings, and build bridges between different groups (Utterwulge, 1999) <sup>[5]</sup>,

A Primary benefit of education and awareness programs is that they can help to promote a more accurate and nuanced understanding of different cultural groups (Bentrovato, 2017) <sup>[18]</sup>. Many people may have limited exposure to other cultures, and may rely on stereotypes or incomplete information when forming their opinions. By providing people with more in-depth and nuanced information about different cultural groups, education and awareness programs can help to break down these barriers and promote greater understanding and appreciation of diversity (Clark, 2014) <sup>[23]</sup>.

In Rwanda, education and awareness programs have played a critical role in promoting reconciliation and healing in the aftermath of the genocide. For example, the Unity and Reconciliation Commission (URC) was established in 1999 to promote national unity and reconciliation, and has played a key role in promoting education and awareness programs (Clark, 2014) <sup>[23]</sup>, The URC has focused on promoting initiatives such as community dialogues, cultural exchange programs, and historical education programs, in order to promote greater understanding and tolerance between different cultural groups.

Another key benefit of education and awareness programs is that they can help to promote greater empathy and understanding between different groups. By providing people with opportunities to engage with different cultures and learn about the experiences of others, these programs can help to build bridges and promote greater understanding and tolerance. This can be particularly important in contexts where there has been a history of conflict or violence, as it can help to promote healing and reconciliation (Bentrovato, 2017) <sup>[18]</sup>,

In Rwanda, empathy-building programs have played a key role in promoting community reconciliation efforts. For example, the "Journey into the Past" program, which was

launched in 2014, provides young people with the opportunity to visit genocide memorials and learn about the history of the conflict. The program is designed to promote empathy and understanding, and to help young people develop a greater appreciation for the importance of tolerance and respect.

At last, education and awareness programs can also help to promote greater dialogue and communication between different cultural groups. By providing people with a shared language and cultural understanding, these programs can help to promote more effective communication and collaboration. This can be particularly important in contexts where there are significant language or cultural barriers to communication (Bentrovato, 2017) <sup>[18]</sup>,

In Rwanda, language education programs have played a key role in promoting greater communication and understanding between different cultural groups. For example, the Rwanda Language Academy was established in 2008 to promote the use of Kinyarwanda, the most widely spoken language in Rwanda. The academy has worked to develop language materials and promote language education programs, in order to help people from different cultural groups communicate more effectively with each other (Bentrovato, 2021)<sup>[19]</sup>,

As a final point, education and awareness programs can play a critical role in promoting understanding and tolerance between different cultural groups (Bentrovato, 2021)<sup>[19]</sup>. By providing people with more information and opportunities to engage with different cultures, these programs can help to break down barriers and build bridges between different groups. By promoting greater empathy, understanding, and dialogue, education and awareness programs can help to promote healing and reconciliation, and to build a more peaceful, inclusive, and united society.

#### **Promotion of cultural exchange and interaction among different groups**

Promoting cultural exchange and interaction among different groups is an important aspect of building understanding and tolerance, particularly in the context of community reconciliation efforts (Zorbas, 2009) <sup>[8]</sup>. By creating opportunities for people to interact with others from different cultural backgrounds, cultural exchange programs can help to break down stereotypes, promote mutual understanding, and build bridges between different groups.

A significant benefit of cultural exchange programs is that they provide people with opportunities to learn about different cultures in a more personal and immersive way (Uvin, 1996) <sup>[28]</sup>, By interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, participants can gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity of human experiences and perspectives. This can help to break down stereotypes and promote greater empathy and understanding.

In Rwanda, cultural exchange programs have played an important role in promoting reconciliation and healing. For example, the Rwanda Cultural Heritage Academy was established in 2010 to promote cultural exchange and awareness (Bolin, & Nkusi, 2022) <sup>[29]</sup>, The academy has organized a range of programs, such as cultural festivals, traditional dance and music performances, and heritage tours, to promote greater understanding and appreciation of Rwanda's diverse cultural heritage.

Another key benefit of cultural exchange programs is that they can help to promote greater intercultural

communication and collaboration. By creating opportunities for people from different cultural backgrounds to work together and exchange ideas, these programs can help to break down barriers and promote more effective communication and collaboration. This can be particularly important in contexts where there are significant cultural or language barriers to communication (Chevan, *et al*, 2012) <sup>[26]</sup>,

In Rwanda, cultural exchange programs have played a key role in promoting greater intercultural communication and collaboration (Adekunle, 2007, pp 104-105) <sup>[24]</sup>, For example, the Rwanda-Congo Youth Dialogue Forum was established in 2019 to promote dialogue and collaboration between young people from Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The program has brought together young people from different cultural backgrounds to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas, with the aim of promoting greater understanding and cooperation.

Ultimately, promoting cultural exchange and interaction among different groups is a critical aspect of building understanding and tolerance, particularly in the context of community reconciliation efforts. By creating opportunities for people to interact with others from different cultural backgrounds, cultural exchange programs can help to break down stereotypes, promote mutual understanding, and build bridges between different groups. By promoting greater intercultural communication and collaboration, cultural exchange programs can help to break down barriers and promote more effective communication and cooperation. Ultimately, by promoting cultural preservation and heritage awareness, cultural exchange programs can help to preserve and promote the rich and diverse cultural heritage of different communities.

### **Integration of cultural traditions and practices into community reconciliation efforts**

The integration of cultural traditions and practices into community reconciliation efforts can play a significant role in promoting understanding and healing in conflict-affected communities. Cultural traditions and practices are often deeply rooted in people's identities, and by recognizing and honoring these traditions, communities can help to build a sense of shared identity and belonging, which can be critical in promoting reconciliation.

In Rwanda, cultural traditions and practices have played an important role in community reconciliation efforts following the 1994 genocide. The Rwandan government has implemented a range of programs and initiatives to promote the integration of cultural practices into community reconciliation efforts. One example is the Gacaca Courts, which were established in 2002 as a way to promote reconciliation and justice following the genocide (Wielenga, & Harris, 2011) <sup>[10]</sup>, The Gacaca Courts are based on traditional Rwandan practices of conflict resolution (Sabala, 2019) <sup>[15]</sup>, and they aim to promote truth-telling, forgiveness, and healing in affected communities.

Another example of the integration of cultural traditions into community reconciliation efforts in Rwanda is the use of drumming and dance as a means of promoting healing and reconciliation. In Rwandan culture, drumming and dance are deeply embedded in people's daily lives and have a long history of being used in community events and celebrations. In the aftermath of the genocide, the Rwandan government has promoted the use of drumming and dance as a means of

promoting healing and reconciliation, with many communities holding drumming and dance events as part of their reconciliation efforts (Drumbl, 2002) <sup>[35]</sup>,

The integration of cultural traditions and practices into community reconciliation efforts is not unique to Rwanda, and similar efforts have been implemented in other countries affected by conflict and violence (Nantulya, 2006) <sup>[36]</sup>, For example, in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission used traditional African rituals and practices to promote healing and reconciliation in the aftermath of apartheid. These practices included the use of song and dance, traditional healing ceremonies, and the burning of herbs to cleanse and purify.

One of the challenges of integrating cultural traditions and practices into community reconciliation efforts is the need to ensure that these practices are respectful and inclusive of all members of the community. It is important to recognize that cultural traditions and practices can be exclusionary, and care must be taken to ensure that everyone feels included and respected in the process (Nantulya, 2006) <sup>[36]</sup>,

To wrap up, the integration of cultural traditions and practices into community reconciliation efforts can play an important role in promoting understanding, healing, and reconciliation. By recognizing and honoring cultural traditions, communities can build a sense of shared identity and belonging, and promote intercultural understanding and cooperation. While there are challenges associated with integrating cultural practices into community reconciliation efforts, the benefits are significant and make it a worthwhile endeavor for communities seeking to promote reconciliation and healing.

Efforts to address past injustices and promote healing through culturally sensitive approaches

Efforts to address past injustices and promote healing through culturally sensitive approaches can be a powerful tool for reconciliation and building trust in communities affected by conflict and violence. These efforts recognize the important role that cultural traditions and practices play in people's lives and seek to incorporate them into the process of addressing past injustices and promoting healing (Staub, 2004) <sup>[9]</sup>,

In Rwanda, efforts to address past injustices and promote healing have been grounded in the country's cultural traditions and practices (Staub, & Pearlman, 2006, p 217) <sup>[31]</sup>, Following the 1994 genocide, the Rwandan government implemented a range of programs and initiatives to promote healing and reconciliation. These programs aimed to address the trauma and loss that had been experienced by individuals and communities, while also promoting intercultural understanding and cooperation.

One of the essential programs implemented in Rwanda is the Gacaca Courts. These courts, which were established in 2002, use traditional Rwandan practices of conflict resolution to promote truth-telling, forgiveness, and healing in affected communities (Wielenga, & Harris, 2011) <sup>[10]</sup>, The Gacaca Courts provide a space for individuals to come forward and share their experiences of the genocide, while also allowing perpetrators to acknowledge their actions and seek forgiveness. The courts also promote intercultural understanding by incorporating traditional practices and rituals, such as the use of storytelling, song, and dance.

In addition to the Gacaca Courts, the Rwandan government has implemented other programs aimed at promoting healing and reconciliation. These programs include support

for survivors of the genocide, efforts to promote dialogue and understanding between different groups, and initiatives to promote economic and social development in affected communities. Many of these programs incorporate cultural traditions and practices, such as the use of drumming and dance to promote healing and reconciliation (Reuchamps, 2008) <sup>[11]</sup>,

Efforts to address past injustices and promote healing through culturally sensitive approaches are not unique to Rwanda, and similar programs have been implemented in other countries affected by conflict and violence. For example, in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission used traditional African practices, such as the use of song and dance and traditional healing ceremonies, to promote healing and reconciliation in the aftermath of apartheid (Staub, 2004) <sup>[9]</sup>,

One of the challenges of promoting healing and reconciliation through culturally sensitive approaches is the need to ensure that these approaches are respectful and inclusive of all members of the community. It is important to recognize that cultural practices can be exclusionary and may not be relevant or appropriate for all members of the community. Care must be taken to ensure that everyone feels included and respected in the process (Staub, 2014) <sup>[31]</sup>,

To conclude, efforts to address past injustices and promote healing through culturally sensitive approaches can be a powerful tool for promoting reconciliation and building trust in communities affected by conflict and violence (Zorbas, 2009) <sup>[8]</sup>. These approaches recognize the important role that cultural traditions and practices play in people's lives and seek to incorporate them into the process of healing and reconciliation. While there are challenges associated with implementing culturally sensitive approaches, the benefits of doing so are significant and make it a worthwhile endeavor for communities seeking to promote healing and reconciliation.

## **Successes and Challenges of Overcoming Cultural Differences in Rwanda's Reconciliation Efforts**

### **Examples of successful community reconciliation initiatives in Rwanda that overcame cultural differences**

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda left the country deeply divided along ethnic lines, with Hutu and Tutsi communities torn apart by violence and trauma. Reconciliation has been a long and difficult process, but there have been successful community initiatives that have helped to bridge cultural differences and bring people together.

One example of a successful community reconciliation initiative is the Gacaca court system. The word "Gacaca" means "grass," and refers to the traditional practice of holding meetings on the grass to discuss issues and make decisions (Wielenga, & Harris, 2011) <sup>[10]</sup>. After the genocide, the government of Rwanda established the Gacaca court system as a way to provide justice for the victims and survivors of the genocide, while also promoting reconciliation and healing (Staub, 2004) <sup>[9]</sup>,

The Gacaca courts were community-based tribunals, made up of ordinary citizens who were elected by their peers to serve as judges. They were tasked with investigating and trying cases related to the genocide, with a focus on promoting truth-telling and reconciliation. The courts encouraged perpetrators to confess to their crimes and ask for forgiveness, in exchange for reduced sentences

(Reuchamps, 2008) <sup>[11]</sup>. They also provided a forum for victims to share their stories and seek reparations.

Despite some criticisms of the Gacaca court system, it has been widely regarded as a successful initiative that helped to promote reconciliation and healing in Rwanda. The system helped to address the massive backlog of cases related to the genocide, and allowed many survivors and perpetrators to move on from their trauma.

Another example of a successful community reconciliation initiative is the "Icyizere" program, which was launched by the Rwandan government in 2012. The program was designed to bring together survivors and perpetrators of the genocide in a series of workshops and dialogues, with the goal of promoting forgiveness and reconciliation (Kabisa, *et al*, 2021) <sup>[12]</sup>,

The Icyizere program was based on the idea that forgiveness is a powerful tool for healing and moving forward. The workshops were led by trained facilitators, who encouraged participants to share their experiences and emotions in a safe and supportive environment. Through these dialogues, survivors and perpetrators were able to develop a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives, and to begin the process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Icyizere program has been highly successful, with participants reporting significant improvements in their mental health and well-being (Kabisa, *et al*, 2021) <sup>[12]</sup>. Many survivors have been able to find closure and forgiveness, while perpetrators have been able to seek forgiveness and make amends for their crimes. The program has also helped to promote greater understanding and empathy between different ethnic groups in Rwanda (Adekunle, 2007, p 110) <sup>[24]</sup>,

A third example of a successful community reconciliation initiative is the "Peace-Building and Reconciliation" program, which was launched by the Aegis Trust in Rwanda in 2003. The Aegis Trust is a non-governmental organization that works to prevent genocide and promote reconciliation in post-conflict societies (Hudson, 2009) <sup>[13]</sup>.

The Peace-Building and Reconciliation program was designed to provide education and training on conflict resolution and reconciliation to communities affected by the genocide (Sabala, 2019) <sup>[15]</sup>. The program included workshops, seminars, and community outreach activities, with a focus on promoting dialogue and understanding between different ethnic groups.

The program has been highly successful, with participants reporting significant improvements in their relationships with members of other ethnic groups. Many participants have also been able to develop skills in conflict resolution and mediation, which has helped to prevent further violence and promote peaceful coexistence in their communities (Sabala, 2019) <sup>[15]</sup>,

In summary, the process of reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda has been a long and difficult journey, but there have been successful community initiatives that have helped to bridge cultural differences and promote healing and forgiveness. The Gacaca court system, the Icyizere program (Kabisa, *et al*, 2021) <sup>[12]</sup>, and the Peace-Building and Reconciliation program are just a few examples of the innovative and effective approaches that have been developed in Rwanda to promote reconciliation and build a more peaceful and inclusive society (Hudson, 2009) <sup>[13]</sup>,

Challenges and obstacles that remain in efforts to overcome cultural differences for community reconciliation Efforts to

overcome cultural differences for community reconciliation are often challenged by various obstacles that can make the process difficult and complicated (Destexhe, 1995, p 29) <sup>[20]</sup>. In the context of Rwanda, where a genocide tore apart the Hutu and Tutsi communities along ethnic lines, these challenges and obstacles have been particularly pronounced. Some of the major challenges and obstacles that remain in efforts to overcome cultural differences for community reconciliation in Rwanda are discussed below (Hudson, 2009) <sup>[13]</sup>.

The first major challenge is the lack of trust and communication between different ethnic groups. The genocide was characterized by a breakdown in trust between the Hutu and Tutsi communities, and this mistrust has continued to linger long after the genocide ended (Adekunle, 2007, p 109) <sup>[24]</sup>. This lack of trust makes it difficult for members of different communities to engage in open and honest dialogue, which is crucial for overcoming cultural differences and promoting reconciliation.

Another challenge is the trauma and pain that many survivors and their families continue to experience (Bagilishya, 2000) <sup>[30]</sup>. The genocide resulted in the loss of over 800,000 lives, and the survivors and their families continue to suffer from the trauma and pain of the atrocities that were committed. This trauma and pain can make it difficult for survivors and their families to engage in reconciliation efforts, as they may find it difficult to forgive the perpetrators of the genocide.

A third challenge is the prevalence of negative stereotypes and attitudes towards members of different ethnic groups. These negative attitudes and stereotypes can create barriers to understanding and empathy between different communities, and can make it difficult for members of different communities to work together towards common goals (Stephan, and Stephan, 2013) <sup>[32]</sup>. For example, the Hutu and Tutsi communities in Rwanda are often characterized by negative stereotypes about each other, which can make it difficult for members of these communities to trust each other and work together towards a shared future.

A fourth challenge is the ongoing political instability in the country. Rwanda has experienced political instability in the past, and there are concerns that this instability could resurface and threaten the gains that have been made in terms of reconciliation and healing (Traoré, *et al*, 1, 2013) <sup>[33]</sup>. This instability can create an environment of uncertainty and mistrust, which can make it difficult for reconciliation efforts to take root and flourish.

A fifth challenge is the lack of resources and infrastructure to support reconciliation efforts. Reconciliation requires significant resources, including funding, training, and infrastructure (Wen, and Char, 2011) <sup>[34]</sup>. In Rwanda, where many communities continue to struggle with poverty and underdevelopment, it can be difficult to find the resources necessary to support effective reconciliation efforts.

Despite these challenges and obstacles, there have been some successful community initiatives in Rwanda that have helped to overcome cultural differences and promote reconciliation (Destexhe, 1995, p 29) <sup>[20]</sup>. For example, the Gacaca court system and the "Icyizere" program have been successful in bringing together survivors and perpetrators of the genocide in dialogues that promote healing and forgiveness (Kabisa, *et al*, 2021) <sup>[12]</sup>. The Peace-Building and Reconciliation program has also been successful in

providing education and training on conflict resolution and reconciliation to communities affected by the genocide (Sabala, 2019) <sup>[15]</sup>.

To finish off, overcoming cultural differences for community reconciliation is a complex and difficult process that is often challenged by various obstacles (Destexhe, 1995, p 26) <sup>[20]</sup>. In Rwanda, where the Hutu and Tutsi communities were torn apart by a genocide, these challenges have been particularly pronounced (Hudson, 2009) <sup>[13]</sup>. However, there have been successful initiatives that have helped to promote reconciliation and healing. To continue making progress towards lasting peace, it is important to continue to address these challenges and obstacles in a thoughtful and strategic way.

### Lessons Learned and Implications for Other Countries

Lessons learned from Rwanda's experience in overcoming cultural differences for community reconciliation

The small central African nation of Rwanda is known for its tragic history of genocide, where nearly one million Tutsi and moderate Hutu were killed in a span of just 100 days in 1994. In the aftermath of this horrific event, the country faced a daunting task of overcoming deep-seated cultural differences and reconciling a traumatized nation. Today, Rwanda is considered one of the most successful cases of post-conflict reconstruction and community reconciliation, and its experience offers valuable lessons for other countries grappling with similar issues.

One of the most important lessons from Rwanda's experience is the critical role of leadership in bringing about reconciliation (McCullough, 2001) <sup>[17]</sup>. President Paul Kagame, who took office in 2000, emphasized the need to rebuild national unity and heal the wounds of the past. Under his leadership (Krug, 1998) <sup>[16]</sup>, the government established a number of initiatives, such as the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, which aimed to promote dialogue and understanding among different ethnic groups (Clark, 2014) <sup>[23]</sup>. Kagame also implemented policies to encourage economic growth and reduce poverty, which helped to improve social and economic conditions and foster a sense of shared destiny among Rwandans.

Another key lesson from Rwanda's experience is the importance of inclusive and participatory processes in achieving community reconciliation (Krug, 1998) <sup>[16]</sup>. The country established community-based courts called Gacaca, which aimed to involve ordinary citizens in the process of justice and reconciliation. These courts allowed victims to confront their perpetrators and seek restitution, while also giving perpetrators the opportunity to confess their crimes and seek forgiveness (Staub, 2004) <sup>[9]</sup>. The Gacaca courts also helped to restore trust and build social capital within communities, as neighbors came together to resolve disputes and work towards common goals.

Rwanda's experience also highlights the critical role of education in promoting reconciliation and overcoming cultural differences (Bentrovato, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>. The government implemented a comprehensive education reform program, which emphasized the teaching of shared values and national identity. Through initiatives such as the "One Cow per Family" program, which provided families with cows for milk and fertilizer, the government also helped to alleviate poverty and promote economic development, which in turn contributed to social cohesion and unity.

Another important lesson from Rwanda's experience is the need to address the root causes of conflict and build a strong foundation for peace (Krug, 1998) <sup>[16]</sup>, Rwanda's post-conflict reconstruction efforts focused not only on physical infrastructure but also on addressing the underlying issues that led to the genocide. This included efforts to promote social justice, human rights, and good governance, which helped to create a more inclusive and equitable society (Staub, 2004) <sup>[9]</sup>, The government also implemented policies to promote gender equality and empower women, recognizing that women are often disproportionately affected by conflict and have a key role to play in building peace.

Eventually, Rwanda's experience demonstrates the importance of international support in promoting reconciliation and overcoming cultural differences (Eftekhari, 2001) <sup>[21]</sup>, The international community played a key role in supporting Rwanda's post-conflict reconstruction efforts, providing financial and technical assistance, as well as diplomatic support. This support helped to create a conducive environment for reconciliation and provided Rwanda with the resources it needed to rebuild its economy and society.

In the end, Rwanda's experience in overcoming cultural differences and promoting community reconciliation offers valuable lessons for other countries grappling with similar challenges (McCullough, 2001) <sup>[17]</sup>, The country's success was due to a combination of factors, including strong leadership, inclusive and participatory processes, education, addressing the root causes of conflict (Bigagaza, *et al*, 2002) <sup>[22]</sup>, and international support (Eftekhari, 2001) <sup>[21]</sup>, While every context is unique, these lessons can provide a framework for building more peaceful and just societies, where differences are not a source of conflict but rather a source of strength and diversity (Clark, 2014) <sup>[23]</sup>.

### **Implications for other countries facing similar challenges in reconciliation efforts**

The experience of Rwanda offers important implications for other countries facing similar challenges in reconciliation efforts. While every context is unique, there are several key lessons that can be applied to other countries seeking to promote community reconciliation and overcome cultural differences (Krug, 1998) <sup>[16]</sup>,

One important implication is the need for strong leadership committed to promoting national unity and reconciliation (Clark, 2014) <sup>[23]</sup>, Rwanda's success was due in large part to the leadership of President Paul Kagame, who prioritized the need to heal the wounds of the past and build a more inclusive and equitable society. Leaders in other countries facing similar challenges must similarly be committed to promoting reconciliation and willing to take bold steps to address the root causes of conflict and division (Bigagaza, *et al*, 2002) <sup>[22]</sup>,

Another key implication is the need for inclusive and participatory processes in promoting community reconciliation. Rwanda's Gacaca courts provided a model for involving ordinary citizens in the process of justice and reconciliation, allowing victims to confront their perpetrators and seek restitution while also giving perpetrators the opportunity to seek forgiveness (Wielenga, & Harris, 2011) <sup>[10]</sup>, Other countries can learn from this example by promoting inclusive and participatory processes that give voice to all members of society and foster a sense

of ownership and responsibility for promoting reconciliation.

Education also plays a crucial role in promoting community reconciliation and overcoming cultural differences (Bentrovato, 2017) <sup>[18]</sup>, Rwanda's education reform program emphasized the teaching of shared values and national identity, helping to build a sense of common purpose and identity among Rwandans. Other countries can similarly prioritize education as a means of promoting shared values, strengthening social cohesion, and fostering a sense of national identity that transcends cultural and ethnic differences (Bentrovato, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>,

Addressing the root causes of conflict is another important implication of Rwanda's experience (Bigagaza, *et al*, 2002) <sup>[22]</sup>, Rwanda's post-conflict reconstruction efforts focused not only on physical infrastructure but also on promoting social justice, human rights, and good governance. Other countries facing similar challenges must similarly address the underlying issues that led to conflict and division, including poverty, inequality, and discrimination. By promoting inclusive and equitable societies, other countries can lay the foundation for lasting peace and reconciliation.

Finally, international support is a crucial factor in promoting community reconciliation and overcoming cultural differences. Rwanda received significant international support (Eftekhari, 2001) <sup>[21]</sup>, both financial and technical, which helped to create a conducive environment for reconciliation and provided the resources needed to rebuild the country's economy and society. Other countries facing similar challenges must similarly prioritize international support and engage in multilateral efforts to promote reconciliation and build a more peaceful and just world.

### **Conclusion**

Overcoming cultural differences is crucial for successful community reconciliation in Rwanda, given the country's history of ethnic tensions and violence. These deep wounds still affect the population, making it essential to address the cultural differences among Rwanda's various ethnic groups to build a peaceful and inclusive society. However, Rwanda's unique cultural groups require tailored strategies to address their diverse characteristics, which presents challenges to developing and implementing effective reconciliation initiatives.

Various strategies have been implemented, including education and awareness programs, cultural exchange, and integrating cultural practices into community reconciliation efforts. Although some successful initiatives have been developed, challenges and obstacles remain, such as distrust between different ethnic groups and reluctance of some to engage in reconciliation efforts.

Nevertheless, Rwanda's progress in overcoming cultural differences provides valuable lessons for other countries facing similar challenges. Education, cultural exchange, and addressing past injustices through culturally sensitive approaches are critical to building an inclusive and peaceful society. There is still more work to be done, but the progress made so far provides hope for a more peaceful and inclusive society for all Rwandans.

Based on the information provided in the abstract, the following are some recommendations for overcoming cultural differences for community reconciliation in Rwanda:

To overcome cultural differences for community reconciliation in Rwanda, a range of strategies and approaches are required. This includes increasing education and awareness programs to promote understanding and reduce prejudice, and promoting cultural exchange and interaction to break down barriers and create a shared identity. It is also important to integrate cultural traditions and practices into community reconciliation efforts to promote a sense of belonging among different groups.

Efforts to address past injustices and promote healing must be done in a culturally sensitive manner, taking into account the different needs and perspectives of different cultural groups. Celebrating successful community reconciliation initiatives can also inspire others to replicate these efforts in their own communities.

Remaining challenges and obstacles, such as ongoing discrimination, must be acknowledged and addressed to ensure progress towards a more peaceful and inclusive society. Lessons learned from Rwanda's experience should also be shared with other countries facing similar challenges to promote more effective community reconciliation efforts globally.

In conclusion, overcoming cultural differences for community reconciliation in Rwanda is an ongoing process that requires a range of strategies and approaches. By increasing education and awareness, promoting cultural exchange, integrating cultural traditions, using culturally sensitive approaches, celebrating successes, addressing remaining challenges, and sharing lessons learned, Rwanda can continue to make progress towards a more peaceful and unified society.

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