

RWANDAN YOUTH COMMEMORATING THE 13TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GENOCIDE:

A Collaboration for Rwanda's Future
Umubano wabanyarwanda ejo hazaza

Location: Nsanga *Umudugudu* for Genocide Orphan-Headed Household's and Widows, Kinyinya Sector, Gasabo District, Kigali City

Time: 10:00am Saturday 14th April 2007

Coordinating/implementing Organizations:

1. Never Again Rwanda (NAR)
2. Association of the Orphans of Nsanga (AON)
3. (With help from Gihembe refugee Camp in Byumba & Jesuit Relief Services)

Attendance: 350-400 people of all ages, mostly youth about 13 to 25 years of age.

For more information & how to help or contribute, please contact:

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Drama performance by Nsanga orphans

Summary:

The event that happened on 14th April 2007 at Nsanga was a very important collaboration of youth from different backgrounds—from Rwanda and other Great Lakes countries—and from very different socio-economic classes: there were refugee Congolese youth from Gihembe Refugee Camp in Byumba, orphans of the Rwanda genocide from Association of the Orphans of Nsanga (AON), and Never Again Rwanda (NAR) youth from different levels of social mobility.

The event was meant to bring together all these groups of youth for discussion and cultural performance meant to show the importance that youth play in making a better Rwanda and world. Each group of youth shared their views on Rwanda in the past, Rwanda today, and Rwanda in the future. This was done through drama, song and poems presented by the youth.

The leaders of each NAR and AON spoke about the importance of the youth to work together for a ‘brighter’ future. There was also a very important subtext to the day: it was meant to bring attention to the orphans of Nsanga (AON). As victims and survivors, their stories are often only heard during the mourning period. But attention is needed all 365 days of the year. This point was made during the event, as AON presented its ideas for sustainable projects that would end their dependency on foreign, or outside, sources (**see AON description below**)—many of whom only come during the mourning period.

A theme of the day was that a lot of collaboration is necessary *amongst Rwandans* in order to create a sustainable future—where the orphans of the genocide (and orphans for other reasons like HIV/AIDS) can have their basic needs of education, health, nutrition, shelter etc met.

The tour of Nsanga *umudugudu*, at the end of the program, really brought the lack of basic needs into perspective from those even from as near as Kigali. For those visiting Nsanga for the first time—be they Rwandans or foreigners—a common comment that was heard was, ‘I couldn’t find this place’ or ‘I kept getting lost’ and ‘the roads are real bad.’ In some ways these frames of thought was essential to the day’s events. It showed just how difficult the situation at Nsanga and how far removed it is from resources and access to other social services that are taken for granted by many in Kigali or other urban areas of the world. The visiting guests and youth were invited into some of the homes. There they saw unfinished floors and roofs, cramped quarters and unsanitary health/hygiene situations. Some were brought to the home that also serves as the English Language classroom. Here, the guests were given a brief presentation on what happens in the English class and some of the educational difficulties of the orphaned youth of Nsanga—many had to drop out of school to support their orphan families and don’t have the opportunity to complete their studies, those that have do not know how to access the government benefits meant to pay for their schooling.

The commemoration was a ‘success.’ The youth from the different groups and organizations came together and began making connections for future collaboration. Many of the youth from the Never Again Rwanda youth clubs decided that they would come out to Nsanga and do community service work with the orphans there. There was

discussion about future collaborations like debates and athletic competitions. Most of it all it was realized that youth are not only the future but the present too and that they must advocate as a coherent voice for the improvement of their condition and that of their peers in order to make a more livable Rwanda.



View of Nsanga/Tour of Nsanga

Important Outcomes & Future Plans:

- Raised visibility of AON;
- Raised awareness/understanding about the plight of the orphans of Nsanga;
- Collaboration amongst youth;
- Promises were made amongst the youth groups for future collaboration and/or work at Nsanga;
- One NAR youth club (from Kigali Institute of Management) has promised to help raise funds for educational purposes for their peers at Nsanga, while another (Kicukiro) has promised to collaborate on future debates and cultural performances, like more drama;
- Another Rwandan youth organization, GPUTV (Rwandans volunteering for 'peace' organization), has promised to start doing community service at Nsanga—for example, doing agricultural and beautification work, or helping with English classes; and
- NAR plans to do more for the orphans/victims of the genocide.

Background on Association of the Orphans of Nsanga (AON):

We are the Association of the orphans of Kinyinya, AON. We are orphans of genocide—youths of the Child Headed Households in Kinyinya, a district of Kigali. We have been living in small government-provided houses without an income to purchase neither food nor the equipment for clean water for well over a year. Often we have to wait for donations of foodstuff, leaving many to suffer, and sometimes die, of hunger. Many of

the orphans are also HIV+ and AIDS has hit our community especially hard. We want to change all of this.

AON is made up of the 47 household heads (and our orphan “families”) that are not attending school, and have been acting as the parental role for our younger siblings since our parents’ deaths in the 1994 Genocide. Over the years, some of us have achieved certain trade skills and a small few have attended some secondary school or university. Luckily, some of the younger children of the community do get the opportunity to attend primary and secondary school.

We have seen many tragedies and horror in our lives; we have overcome loss and survived in times of little hope. We are trying to become equipped with the will, motivation and hope to change our future and succeed in gaining social, economic and nutritional independence.

In the past we have received a few donations from charitable organizations or individuals who have heard our story and current situation. These donations are thoughtful and helpful, but they are not sustainable longer than a few days.

Recently, we have taken matters into our own hands. We have started sustainability projects. We call our project and our community of Orphan-Headed Households of Genocide orphans the ‘Nsanga’ project.

Our community has self-divided into different groups according to our interests and skills. We have initiated a Gardening project, planting vegetable gardens on small plots given to us by the government. The gardening project has begun: the tools have been purchased, along with the seeds, and an agriculture/gardening specialist has come to work with us on how best to use the land. For this project to continue we are in need of fertilizer and plant feed.

Another project is a Bakery group. In working within our means and resources, we have decided to build a brick fire oven. One of our community members worked as a pastry chef briefly and we have sought the information and education to build the oven and make the bread. The first oven we wish to build is 2 x 3 x 2.5 metres. An alternative to renting a costly location, we have decided that it would be best to build on site using a metal roofed tent with supports, and deliver the bread locally, and expand from there once the project produces profits. For this to work, we are in need of brick, sand, cement etc.

Also we have been receiving English lessons from volunteer educator, Natasha Sniatowsky. This will help us further employment and educational opportunities in the future.

For all of our projects whatever profit is made will go directly back into the community. We have a plan to also use the profits to subsidize community members purchasing of necessary basic needs items. In this way, our projects will be sustainable and we will be

able to achieve greater independence and a brighter path for our future. We must build our community from within using our knowledge, and we believe these are positive steps.

There is still a long way to go to improve the lives and livelihoods of the orphans of Nsanga. Your assistance, by any means possible, will be greatly appreciated.



Song by Never Again Rwanda Kicukiro youth club