

## RAPRED-Girubuntu and Peace and Reconciliation Work:

### A Perspective from Caritas Science

Déogratias Maruhukiro

#### **Abstract**

*Promoting peace and reconciliation requires careful, multidimensional, and multidisciplinary work. Cooperation between academic institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in research and peacebuilding seems to be an untapped field which, if its potential is used, can lead to good results. The Department of Caritas Science and Christian Social Work (the Department of Caritas Science) at the University of Freiburg has been working with RAPRED-Girubuntu for a number of years, and many projects have already been launched within this framework of cooperation. After outlining the theoretical framework of cooperation between academic institutions and NGOs, a brief presentation on the Department of Caritas Science and the RAPRED-Girubuntu will be given. Afterwards, the various projects of RAPRED-Girubuntu will be presented. In this presentation, it will be made clear that all projects that are carried out follow the same strategy, the same leitmotif, namely: the promotion of peace and reconciliation from the perspective of Caritas Science.*

#### **Introduction**

The commitment to peace and reconciliation is a noble duty that falls to every citizen—it is not only a duty of the state, which in its obligations must concern itself with the well-being of its population, but also, and above all, a mission of civil society. RAPRED-Girubuntu (African Network for Peace, Reconciliation and Sustainable Development) has been committed to the promotion of peace and reconciliation since 2015. In order to achieve this noble mission, RAPRED-Girubuntu has been working, in particular, with the Department of Caritas Science at the University of Freiburg. This collaboration opens up a new perspective on the applicability of research on practices in the field of peace-building and

reconciliation. This article focuses on the following fundamental questions. Is collaboration between academic research institutions and NGOs possible? What are the disadvantages and advantages of such work? How is the collaboration between the Department of Caritas Science and RAPRED-Girubuntu structured? What are their respective tasks and objectives?

In this article, which is the result of a webinar held on February 2, 2021 with the Institute of Global Concern at Sophia University (Tokyo, Japan), we will try to address the above questions and show that the commitment to peace and reconciliation of RAPRED-Girubuntu is based on the perspective of Caritas Science.

***Preliminary note: What does "from the perspective of Caritas Science" mean?***

Klaus Baumann briefly explains this dimension of the Caritas Science perspective in his article "*Gerechtigkeit und Wahrheit - Vergebung und Versöhnung: einige caritaswissenschaftliche Überlegungen und Perspektiven*,"<sup>1</sup> highlighting the concept of "Agape" love, which originates in God's love for mankind and is realised in man's love for God the creator and his neighbour. Jesus Christ is the personification of this divine love for mankind, and the new commandment he gives to his disciples focuses effectively on love for God the father and for one's neighbour: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,.... and you shall love your neighbour as yourself*" (Mt 22:37-39). According to Klaus Baumann:

*Das menschengewordene Maß dieser Liebe – in allen Aspekten – ist die Person Jesu Christi, der seinen Jüngern aufträgt zu lieben, wie er sie geliebt hat – auch als Gemeinschaft. Was dies – also „caritas“ – theologisch, anthropologisch, sozialwissenschaftlich interdisziplinär in verschiedensten Fragestellungen und zumal in der Auseinandersetzung mit allem, was ihr entgegensteht oder sie herausfordert zur Überwindung von Leid, Hass und Not, bedeutet, all das ist Gegenstand der wissenschaftlichen Forschung und Lehre von „Caritaswissenschaft“. Versöhnung und*

---

<sup>1</sup> Baumann, Klaus: *Gerechtigkeit und Wahrheit - Vergebung und Versöhnung: einige caritaswissenschaftliche Überlegungen und Perspektiven* in Baumann, K., Bendel, R., Maruhukiro, D. *Gerechtigkeit, Wahrheitsfindung, Vergebung und Versöhnung. Ansätze zur Friedenspolitik in Nachkriegsgebiete*, Berlin 2021 (im Druck)

*Frieden sind ohne weiteres Aspekte des Gelingens bzw. der Realisierung von „caritas“ anzusehen – oder zumindest als Teil ihrer innersten Anliegen.<sup>2</sup>*

Thus, it can be understood that the commitment to peace and reconciliation, and especially the commitment to the most vulnerable members of society such as refugees, children, and women, as well as the promotion of education, are objectives that materialise love for God and love for neighbour.

### 1. **Collaboration Between Academic Institutions and NGOs**

In the introductory note, we have already mentioned, albeit briefly, the collaboration between an academic institution (the Department of Caritas Science) and a civil society organisation (RAPRED-Girubuntu) in the field of peacebuilding and reconciliation. Let us now try to outline the theoretical framework before describing the specific tasks of these institutions.

For the achievement of the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, no institution can do it alone. Synergy and networking are essential for our time and especially for the achievement of the SDGs.<sup>3</sup> Karola Hoffmann and Marco Rieckmann argue that in the 21st century, no single form of institution is capable of addressing or responding to all the issues of sustainable development that will shape the world of tomorrow. Universities and civil society organisations are also facing this challenge.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The incarnate measure of this love – in all aspects – is the person of Jesus Christ, who instructs his disciples to love as he loved them and to love as a community. The object of the scientific research and teaching of “Caritas Science” is to understand what this – “caritas” – means in theological, anthropological, sociological, and interdisciplinary terms when considering complicated questions and confronting suffering, hatred, and need. Reconciliation and peace are seen as aspects of the success or realisation of “caritas” – or at least as a part of its central concerns.

<sup>3</sup> Maruhukiro, Déogratias / Birantamije Gérard: The Idea of the “RAPRED Network” and Peace Academy Approaches to the Great Lakes Region of Africa, in Klaus Baumann, Rainer Bendel, Déogratias Maruhukiro (Hg. ), *Flucht, Trauma, Integration. Nachkriegseuropa und Ruanda / Burundi im Vergleich*, Berlin 2018

<sup>4</sup> Karola Hoffmann & Marco Rieckmann, editorial in *Zeitschrift für interregionale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik* 38. Jahrgang, Heft 3, 2015

The field of transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary research can indeed be understood as a bridge to connect the two worlds of academia and civil society.<sup>5</sup> In particular, transdisciplinary work allows for effective collaboration between NGOs or other organisations and academic institutions. “Transdisciplinarity” means the joint treatment of practice-related problems and issues by scientists and practitioners (e.g. companies and NGOs).<sup>6</sup> Marco Rieckmann states to this effect:

*Eine transdisziplinäre Zusammenarbeit bezieht sich auf gesellschaftlich relevante Probleme, initiiert gemeinsame Lernprozesse von Wissenschaftler/inne/n und außeruniversitären Akteur/inn/en und zielt auf die Generierung von Wissen, das lösungsorientiert, gesellschaftlich robust und sowohl auf die wissenschaftliche als auch die gesellschaftliche Praxis übertragbar ist.<sup>7</sup>*

This suggests that this is a "win-win" project where academic institutions and civil society organisations benefit from each other. The practical experience gained in the field by NGOs can inspire research, helping to develop new research questions, and enrich university teaching, as the latter must be research-based. Theories can be tested in the field by researchers under the guidance of NGOs, so that theory and practice are harmoniously combined. The work of NGOs will no longer be a repetition of past patterns but will this time be marked by creativity and innovation based on research.

However, cooperation between academic institutions and NGOs is not without its problems. Karola Hoffmann discusses these problems based on her experience as an "*eine Welt-Fachpromotorin Hochschule*" (One World Promoter in post-secondary education) in the state of Baden-Württemberg. She especially mentions the problems caused by university structures that do not favour collaboration with NGOs.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the competition for

---

<sup>5</sup> Marco Rieckmann, transdisziplinäre Forschung und Lehre als Brücke zwischen Zivilgesellschaft und Hochschule, in *Zeitschrift für interregionale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik* 38. Jahrgang, Heft 3, 2015, S. 4-10

<sup>6</sup> Ibid S. 5

<sup>7</sup> Ibid S. 5

A transdisciplinary collaboration addressing societal problems initiates joint learning processes between academics and non-university actors and aims at generating knowledge that is solution-oriented and socially-robust, as well as applicable in scientific and social practices.

<sup>8</sup> Karola Hoffmann, Stärken und Schwächen in der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Hochschulen und Zivilgesellschaftlichen Organisationen im Bereich globale Nachhaltigkeit, in *Zeitschrift für interregionale Bildungsforschung und Entwicklungspädagogik* 38. Jahrgang, Heft 3, 2015, S. 11-15

funding and the race for success in a short period of time strongly affect how academic institutions choose which research projects to support and can only contribute to the lack of good cooperation with other organisations. In conclusion, it should be noted that the cooperation we are talking about here is quite a new experience for both universities and NGOs. It will therefore require time, tact, and patience for this new experience to take root. Let's turn now to the experience of the cooperation between the RAPRED-Girubuntu and the Department of Caritas Science at the University of Freiburg.

## 2. **On the Cooperation Between the Department of Caritas Science and RAPRED-Girubuntu**

Before discussing the cooperation between the Department of Caritas Science at the University of Freiburg and RAPRED-Girubuntu, let us briefly talk about these two institutions and their objectives.

### 2.1. ***Caritas Science and Christian Social Work***

The Department of Caritas Science and Christian Social Work is one of the departments in the Institute for Practical Theology housed in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Freiburg. As a part of the Faculty of Theology, the Department of Caritas Science is committed to the promotion of research in various fields and teaching based on this research. Its subject of study is "Caritas" as the "essence" or the very "heart" of the Church and the social commitment of organisations in society in general and in the Church in particular. This includes:

- (1) The person who suffers,
- (2) The person who helps, and
- (3) The Church (with its guidelines for its charitable social work) in service to "the poor and afflicted of every kind." (Gaudium et spes 1).

The Department of Caritas Science has three objectives: to describe, then to explain and/or understand, and finally to promote through a constructive transformation of society. From a methodological point of view, Caritas research is fundamentally interdisciplinary in cooperation with other theological and non-theological sciences.

The aim of the Department of Caritas Science is basically to link Caritas theory and practice in order to promote a constructive change in society. This transformation can be operationalised through four important areas of Caritas engagement:

- (1) Social services,
- (2) Assistance to the poor and other vulnerable people through solidarity,
- (3) Education, and
- (4) Advocacy for marginalised, oppressed people and others such as refugees, prisoners, etc.

## 2.2. **RAPRED-Girubuntu**

RAPRED-Girubuntu stands for "*African Network for Peace, Reconciliation and Sustainable Development*." *Ubuntu* is a word, or rather a very important value in the African Bantu culture, that can mean generosity, sharing, and solidarity. This value is based on the belief that humans are interdependent—"I am, because you are...." *Gira-ubuntu* is not only a wish but also a recommendation to carry and grow this value.

RAPRED-Girubuntu was founded on the basis of research work at the Department of Caritas Science<sup>9</sup> and is primarily engaged in peace-building and reconciliation with the following objectives:

- (1) Promotion of social cohesion within a nation and/or between peoples,
- (2) Promotion of aid to people persecuted for political, racial, or religious reasons, refugees, displaced persons, and people affected by war,
- (3) Promotion of development cooperation,
- (4) Promotion of education and training,
- (5) Promotion of civic engagement and civil society, and
- (6) Promotion of networking among organisations working in the field of peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development.

Thus, as can be deduced from the above, the cooperation between RAPRED-Girubuntu and the Department of Caritas Science falls within the scope of RAPRED-

---

<sup>9</sup> See Déogratias Maruhukiro, *Für eine Friedens- und Versöhnungskultur. Sozialpolitische Analyse, ethischer Ansatz und kirchlicher Beitrag zur Förderung einer Friedens- und Versöhnungskultur in Burundi*, Lit Berlin 2020

Girubuntu's work, i.e. the promotion of peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development. Let us now look at how this cooperation is being implemented.

### 3. **Implementation of the Cooperation Between the Department of Caritas Science and RAPRED-Girubuntu Through the Sangwe Project**<sup>10</sup>

The Sangwe Project illustrates how an academic institution and a civil society organisation can implement a collaborative venture with a significant impact on local communities. Indeed, the idea for the Sangwe Project was sparked by interviews during my doctoral research at the Department of Caritas Science at the University of Freiburg. In 2012, while I was conducting interviews in Burundi, there was a climate of tension between the Catholic Church and the state and between the state and civil society organisations. This had a ripple effect of causing tensions amongst members of the Burundian population. The interviewees made concrete proposals on how to initiate activities aimed at reconciling society. These ideas helped create the "Sangwe Pilot Project" (Sangwe Project), and RAPRED-Girubuntu took the lead in implementing the Sangwe Project.

#### 3.1. ***Presentation of the Sangwe Project***

*Sangwe* has several meanings, one of which is welcome. It is not only about welcoming someone but also, and especially, about giving them a home in one's heart. Those who are welcomed with *sangwe* know that they belong and are not regarded as strangers. With this project, RAPRED-Girubuntu wanted to emphasise contact and cooperation and thus promote a culture of welcome. Contact between people helps to overcome prejudices and enables reconciliation. Cooperation between different actors can avoid tensions and create lasting peace and reconciliation. The Sangwe Project was carried out in Bugarama Municipality and dealt with young people from four small villages (Magara, Burangwa, Kirundo, and Bugarama). For the purposes of the project, Magara and Burangwa, which are inhabited by a majority of Hutus, were grouped together as one larger village, and Kirundo and Bugarama, which are inhabited by a majority of Tutsis, were grouped together as a second larger village. The project therefore enabled young people from two different ethnic groups to meet and get to know each other. In addition, the parish priest, the mayors, and a head of a NGO were appointed as responsible persons.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Déogratias Maruhukiro, *Op.Cit* Ss. 322-324

The Sangwe Project is known as the "three dimension project," meaning the "religious dimension" represented by the parish priest, the "political dimension" represented by the mayors of the villages, and the "civil society dimension" represented by the head of a local NGO.

### 3.2. *Implementation of the Sangwe Project*

#### 3.2.1. *Promoting Peace Through Sports*

Burundian youths like to play football, so we helped to form two football teams made up of members from the aforementioned two villages (Magara-Burangwa and Kirundo-Bugarama), which provided youths of different ethnic backgrounds the opportunity to work together on the same team. We also formed two volleyball teams from the two villages. During the crisis, the inhabitants of these villages did not visit each other, so sports allowed the young people to meet and thus exchange ideas.

Sports can be not only an avenue for fun but also a channel for peace and reconciliation. Youths from different ethnic groups (i.e. Hutus and Tutsis) and different political parties can meet and play together. Youths can also learn to overcome differences and work together towards the same goal; they can experience winning as a team and thereby achieving victory together. In this sense, ethnic differences can play a lesser role. Young people learn to identify more and more with their team and to pursue common goals. Sports can serve as a bridge to unity and social cohesion.

#### 3.2.2. *Promoting Peace Through Dance (Culture)*

Culture can be a means of promoting peace. Burundian people love to dance, and the drum is a traditional musical instrument that is highly valued in Burundi. Burundian drums are now inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.<sup>11</sup> Burundi is called the "Pays des tambours sacrés: land of sacred drums."<sup>12</sup> Drums have always been a sign of peace in the Burundian kingdom. Drums have always enabled people to come together; where there is drumming, a crowd gathers and peaceful events can be held there. During the drum dance, the

---

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20141127-tambours-burundi-inscrits-patrimoine-mondial-unesco>

<sup>12</sup> Castermans, Philippe & Jean: *Au Burundi, entre Nil et Tanganyika, le pays des tambours sacrés*, Didier Hatier, Paris 1990



essential message that is always conveyed is that of peace and reconciliation (*amahoro-subizahamwe*).

Through the Sangwe Project, traditional dance groups of girls and boys were created, and these groups organized regular peace festivals in which many local people participated.

### 3.2.3. *Promoting Peace Through Theatre Games*

Theatre games have also become a vehicle to convey messages of peace and reconciliation. Burundi has experienced repeated bouts of war that have caused a large part of the population to flee the country. During the period of peace, many refugees decided to return home. The return of the refugees was always accompanied by conflicts and tensions with the population that stayed in the country because they had occupied the properties of their neighbours who had fled.

Under the Sangwe Project, we hosted open-air theatres, where young people played games and discussed possible solutions to this situation. The use of games by young people to dramatise this conflict situation was intended to defuse the tensions not only by adding a certain sense of humour but also by delivering an important message. The local people who came to these theatres engaged in community-building activities, which underscored the importance of the values of peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion.

## 4. *Girubuntu Peace Academy*

The Girubuntu Peace Academy is a new initiative established by the Department of Caritas Science at the University of Freiburg, RAPRED-Girubuntu, and Ackermann Gemeinde. Ackermann Gemeinde focuses on the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation in relation to the problems of forced displacement of people in Central Europe - especially people of German origin - after the Second World War. RAPRED-Girubuntu focuses on the conflict situation in Africa's Great Lakes region, where political and identity conflicts have become endemic.<sup>13</sup> The Girubuntu Peace Academy has developed along three main lines:

- (1) Peace Dialogues: The organisation of the Freiburg Peace Dialogues, which is a kind of "*Forum politicum*" that takes place behind closed doors between different politicians and members of civil society to reflect together on peace and reconciliation issues.

---

<sup>13</sup> Maruhukiro, Déogratias / Birantamije Gérard, id. P. 212

- (2) Training Seminars: The organisation of international seminars and conferences in the city of Freiburg, especially at the University of Freiburg or at the Catholic Academy of Freiburg. The results of these conferences are then recorded in a publication. It should be noted that these seminars are also organised in Africa in collaboration with partner universities. In Rwanda, training seminars on trauma care were organised in collaboration with the Faculty of Clinical Psychology of the University of Kibungo and the Christus Centre of the Jesuit Fathers. In Burundi, these seminars were organised in collaboration with the Faculty of Clinical Psychology of the University of Grand Lac. Following these training seminars, the Girubuntu Peace Academy has been organising workshops and conferences under the central theme of "memory and trauma" since 2020. This series of conferences and workshops began in September 2020 in Germany<sup>14</sup> and will continue until 2021 in Africa's Great Lakes region (Burundi-Rwanda-DRC) under the direction of our partner universities. These conferences were financed by the German Bishops' Conference and the State of Baden-Württemberg through the SEZ Organisation.
- (3) Publication: The Girubuntu Peace Academy now has its own publication department in the publishing house Lit under the theme: "Peace-Reconciliation-Future. Africa and Europe: Studies of the Girubuntu Peace Academy."<sup>15</sup>

##### 5. *Other Projects of RAPRED-Girubuntu*<sup>16</sup>

The RAPRED-Girubuntu has other projects which, in general, fall into three categories:

- (1) Assistance to maintain equal access to higher education

RAPRED-Girubuntu founded the Iga Project (*iga* means "may you study"), which provides assistance to children from low-income families so that they may pursue higher education. In many countries in Africa, especially in Burundi, primary education is free, but secondary schools and universities are very expensive. So, children from impoverished

<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.theol.uni-freiburg.de/disciplinae/ccs/nachrichten/tagungsept20>

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.lit-verlag.de/publikationen/reihen/frieden-versoehnung-zukunft-afrika-und-europa.-paix-reconciliation-avenir-l-afrique-et-l-europe-peace-reconciliation-future-africa-and-europe/>

<sup>16</sup>      For more information on RAPRED-Girubuntu projects, please visit our website: [www.rapred-girubuntu.org](http://www.rapred-girubuntu.org)

families cannot afford higher education fees and thus cannot continue their studies. Poverty then becomes a factor of exclusion and unequal opportunities. The Iga Project was created to fight against this inequality of opportunity and to enable children and young people from poor families to continue their studies. Furthermore, we are convinced that education is the key to sustainable development and therefore an important factor in the promotion of peace.

## (2) Direct aid to vulnerable people

RAPRED-Girubuntu has initiated direct aid projects for vulnerable people, such as refugees. Since 2015, Burundi has experienced a very serious political crisis which has led to violence and a flow of refugees into neighbouring countries such as Rwanda, Congo, Uganda, and Tanzania.<sup>17</sup> RAPRED-Girubuntu's direct aid projects help these refugees in Rwanda and Uganda. These projects work to promote social cohesion, and, in particular, we focus on women's self-empowerment. In Africa, women are not only the pillars of the family but also the key drivers of community development.<sup>18</sup> Projects such as "*Hakuna Matata*" in Kenya, "*Humuriza*" in Rwanda, and "*Iteka ry'umukenyenzi*" in Burundi were conceived with this in mind. We are convinced that the fight against poverty is an indispensable condition on the way to peace and reconciliation.<sup>19</sup>

## (3) Raising awareness through activities promoting peace and reconciliation

Although the promotion of peace and reconciliation is the common thread that connects and underpins all the activities of RAPRED-Girubuntu, there are specific activities and projects that really make this goal concrete. Every year, a peace concert is organised in the city of Freiburg in Germany. These peace concerts are an opportunity to ask for support for our projects in Africa. The concerts are also a place to exercise integration and social cohesion in Germany. Indeed, at least two choirs of different origin - one choir with a majority of German members and another one with a majority of African members - sing

---

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.unhcr.org/fr/news/stories/2016/3/56d9a610c/violences-burundi-250-000-refugies-burundais-fui-avril-2015.html>

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.dianova.org/fr/advocacy-articles/autonomiser-les-femmes-cest-contribuer-au-developpement/>

<sup>19</sup> Déogratias Maruhukiro, *Für eine Friedens- und Versöhnungskultur. Sozial-politische Analyse, ethischer Ansatz und kirchlicher Beitrag zur Förderung einer Friedens- und Versöhnungskultur in Burundi*, Lit Berlin 2020. S. 264

together or separately, and this creates not only harmony on a musical level but also on a community and social level.

In Africa, we organise several peace festivals: Peace Festival "*Sangwe*" in Burundi, Peace Festival "*Umuganuro*" in Rwanda, and Peace Festival "*Rukinzo*" in Uganda. This is a new initiative that was started in 2019 to train peace bridge builders between the different countries. Thus, the Burundian political crisis that has sent thousands of young Burundians into exile can be positively exploited by making these young people build "bridges of peace and reconciliation" not only in the countries where they have been hosted but also between these different countries. An in-depth study on this subject and appropriate assistance to support youth initiatives would be absolutely necessary.

### ***Conclusion***

In this paper, we have tried to show the importance of collaboration between academic institutions and civil society organisations. Although the theoretical framework has not been sufficiently deepened, it has nevertheless allowed us to show that interdisciplinary research cannot yield the expected results without collaboration with civil society organisations. This collaboration therefore allows for innovative work to be carried out by both academic institutions and NGOs. One example is the cooperation between RAPRED-Girubuntu and the Department of Caritas Science at the University of Freiburg. This collaboration focuses on the field of peace-building, reconciliation, and sustainable development from the perspective of Caritas Science.

Déogratias Maruhukiro (University of Freiburg / RAPRED-Girubuntu)