



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Ololade Benson (Part 8 of 9)



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| Role: | Translator |
| Country of Origin: | Nigeria |
| Interview Date: | 23 October 2008 |
| Location: | Arusha, Tanzania |
| Interviewers: | Donald J Horowitz Robert Utter |
| Videographer: | Nell Carden Grey |
| Interpreter: | None |

Interview Summary

Ololade Benson speaks about her role as a translator and the challenges of communicating sensitive material such as witness statements concerning rapes and killings. She discusses her personal engagement with an international non-profit organization that she founded in 1998 to help single mothers, widows and children in Rwanda. She emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability for charitable organizations operating in post-conflict settings. Benson draws attention to the targeting and suffering of women in Rwanda during and after the genocide.

The transcript of Part 8 begins on the following page.

Part 8

- 00:00** **Robert Utter: What do you consider to be the most difficult situation you face in helping people?**
- 00:09 I wish I had more money.
- 00:11** **RU: More money.**
- 00:12 Yeah, because when I went out on Friday and Saturday and I was interviewing the people, I realized that the food – first of all I noticed that when they get the food, they cook like almost everything. They are just so happy and they decided – they decide that, “For the next one week, we’re just going to have a feast.” That’s what I deduced from the interviews I had with them.
- 00:33 So if I could just do a little bit more. That’s number one, but the main thing that bothers me is the fact that, the dependency syndrome if I can call it that. I try to set up businesses for them, but I realized that they don’t want to do anything. They just want to come at the end of every month with their bags and take what I have to give. And I cannot continue doing that.
- 00:52 If you are strong enough, you have strong arms I think you should be able to look for something to do which is why I set up a business and I try to follow up last week to see how they were doing. And I was a bit disappointed by some of them.
- 01:04 The first place I went to, the guy was not even there. He told me – I had bought him two bags of coal, and he told me he had made from the, from the proceeds of whatever he sold he had bought an extra bag.
- 01:14 When I got there he was – I realized that he was lying and I was very, very disappointed. But on Saturday I went to visit another lady who had now – who said the coal business wasn’t very, very good for her and has now diverted to selling chicken. And I saw the chickens there and I saw firewood as well and I was, I was really happy.
- 01:33 Then another problem I had – the third lady I visited has six children already and she just had a seventh baby. That’s another problem for me. And sometimes I ask myself, “Is it because I’m giving them food? How far should I go? When do you stop? When do you say no to these people?”
- 01:53** **RU: Are you able to refer these people to other agencies for care?**
- 01:57 I want to start doing that now because when I – the course I did on the AIDS Program Management I met a few people who I, who might be able to help me, so I’m going to, I’m going to follow up on that as well and see.

02:11 But I – first of all, there, there needs to be a change of mindset. I think that is, that’s very, very important. Because all they see is, “There’s a foreigner in town and she wants to give us food.” So.

02:24 RU: How are you going to get other people to help you? You can’t do all of this by yourself.

02:29 No I can’t, I can’t. I think I’ll do the same thing I did in Rwanda. I, I went to look for organizations who are doing something similar to what I’m doing and then I’ll take it from there, because at the end of the day I have to live as well. And that’s what, what I keep telling them.

02:43 And that’s why I started – I think (___) with about ten people so far I have tried to set up businesses for. That’s going to be in the January newsletter. That’s why I went out last week, you know.

02:54 RU: What do you find the most effective means of communicating with other people is? Through your newsletters . . .

03:00 Yeah.

03:01 RU: . . . personal contacts?

03:03 50-50, 50-50. Some people don’t have time to read the newsletter, but a lot of people read that’s why I’ve gone from six pages to just one page.

03:12 RU: Good, good.

03:13 Yeah. One page, I, I try to fit everything into one page and I get a lot of responses. And the figures also, like in the one I did, “A million people live on less than a dollar a day,” people came back to me and they said, “I didn’t realize there were that many people in the world who don’t have money.” And that’s why I try to put the figures in there so that people can see, you know, very catchy. (____) . . .

03:35 RU: Have you tried to – please go ahead.

03:37 Also the newsletter has been very, very effective even for fundraising as well. Raising awareness, accountability and it also helps with fundraising.

03:46 RU: Have you tried to get professional help in designing the newsletter?

03:49 I want to do that because one of my lecturers at the last course I did told me that. He said I should go do, try to do it properly, desktop publishing, because I attach the photographs. And so I want to speak to the lady who does the ICTR newsletter. She also, she’s also on my

mailing list so I'm going to speak to her and...those are the things I, I'm going to start doing from next year.

04:11 RU: The important thing I think is to realize you can't do it all by yourself.

04:14 No, I can't. I can't.

04:16 RU: But you can find other people who have a heart like yours who have skills that you can use and if a cause is good which it apparently is...

04:27 Thank you very much.

04:27 RU: . . . don't be afraid to ask.

04:28 Yeah. I've realized that it's easy to connect with people who share the same vision . . .

04:33 RU: Exactly.

04:33 . . . who, yeah. (___), like my friend who's doing the website. She does the same thing. She has an orphanage in India and she travels a lot as well so she's ready to do anything for me. But she just called me up and she said you know, this thing – I'll ask what she does for a living but it would have cost me about three hundred pounds to have that website done.

04:49 She said, "I'll just do it for you for free. That will be my contribution." And she's paying school fees for two of my volunteers as well.

04:58 RU: That's a good start.

04:59 Yeah.