

History

In Kinyarwanda, the word 'Gacaca' refers to 'a bed of soft green grass' on which in ancient traditions, a community and its representatives, mainly elders, leaders and individuals known for their integrity and wisdom, gathered to discuss and resolve conflicts within or between families and inhabitants in a certain village. Among the solutions for resolution to conflicts, the Gacaca called upon the accused families or person to reconcile with the complainant, and vice-versa. This conflict resolution system's origins could be traced back to the 15th century when the kingdom of Rwanda became more socially and politically organized.

Achievements

Population impact:

The Centre for Conflict Management (CNLG) and the National University of Rwanda carried out a study to determine the extent to which Rwandans believe that Gacaca had attained its five objectives. The following are the results for each of the five objectives:

- Finding out and disclosure of the truth about the genocide: 83.5%
- Speeding up of genocide trials: 87%
- Putting an end to the culture of impunity: 86.4%
- Strengthening unity and reconciliation: 87.3%
- Demonstrating the capacity of Rwandans to resolve their own problems: 95%
- Overall percentage of the study: 87.84%.

Challenges that were faced by Gacaca in its inception:

- Persistence of genocide ideology;
- Killing and intimidation of survivors of genocide, witnesses and Inyangamugayo judges;
- Destruction or damaging of equipment used in data collection (filing cabinets, books, forms...);

- Inyangamugayo judges accused of participation in crimes of genocide (1.226 individuals identified);
- Refusal to testify;
- People moving to Provinces where they were unknown;
- Refugees who fled Gacaca Courts;
- Partial confession of crimes causing re-categorisation or maximum penalties;
- Serious trauma cases (193 cases)

Legacy

Most of the people who participated in the Gacaca courts firmly state that they have paved the way of reconciliation among the Rwandans, even though the memory of the genocide is still present. Former genocide prisoners and survivors now live side by side and do business with each other which was impossible in the early post-genocide days.

Another outcome of the Gacaca courts is the fact that perpetrators cooperated by telling survivors where their deceased relatives' bodies could be found, so that these could be exhumed and re-buried with dignity. Consequently, genocide memorials have been built all over the country and in the most cases, designed to harbor the remains.

Gacaca is credited with laying the foundation for peace, reconciliation and unity in Rwanda.