

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Foreign Assistance Series

BONAVENTURE NIYIBIZI

*Interviewed by: Carol Peasley
Initial interview date: January 19, 2017
Copyright 2018 ADST*

This oral history transcription was made possible through support provided by U.S. Agency for International Development, under terms of Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-F-16-00101. The opinions expressed herein are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Family and Educational Background

Initial Employment as Contractor on USAID Project with Rwandan Ministry of Agriculture

1988 – Joins USAID as FSN – observations on lack of ethnic prism in hiring

- Starts in USAID Agriculture Office
- Chair of FSN Advisory Committee
- Training Opportunities, including Development Studies Program
- Moves to Project Development Office and Management of Private Sector/Small Business Development Program

October 1990 – Rwandan Patriotic Front Enters Rwanda and Onset of War

- Arrested – USAID and Embassy Support and Actions
- The real beginning of the Rwandan Genocide

1991 – Changing Responsibilities and Mounting Tension and Violence

- Release from prison and movement to USAID Program Office and management of economic policy reform program
- Interactions with Government of Rwanda and exposure of corruption
- Becoming a target
- USAID's Private Sector Program – strict application of criteria and lack of any consideration of ethnicity
- Attempts on his life

- USAID management of increased tension and maintenance of program strategy
- Human Rights Watch Visit in 1993
- American Dependents Evacuated – impact on FSNs – and informal help from American families to FSNs

April 1994 – Genocide Explodes

- April 6 Meeting with Ministry of Plan and suspension of parts of Policy Reform Program
- April 7 – violence explodes; closure of Embassy and Americans evacuated
- Escape and in hiding for months
- Reaches USAID mission in Uganda in July 1994

Late July 1994 – Return to Rwanda

- Work with Ambassador Rawson to Re-open Embassy
- U.S. Government first to recognize new Rwandan Government
- Opening of Embassy on July 27

Re-opening USAID

- Searching nationwide and in neighboring countries for former FSNs
- Support from posts in region
- Starting a new program focused on emergency response and rehabilitation of Ministry of Justice
- Fragility of New Rwandan Government

Importance of U.S. Government Leadership and Voice – not just resources

- High Level Dialogue was Key
- U.S. best in moving dialogue away from ethnic divisions
- Could international community done more immediately after October 1993 entry of RPF in promoting dialogue between RPF and Government of Rwanda – and thus prevented the genocide?

Expanded Role of FSNs in Re-starting the USAID Mission

Looking Back: could USAID or U.S. Government have done things differently pre-genocide?

- Greater attention to ethnic designations and legal constraints to women's economic participation – should have been policy dialogue
- Expulsion of Rwandan refugees from Uganda – no international reaction

Post-USAID Career

- Minister of Commerce and Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, 1997-2000
- Rwandan Investment Promotion Agency, 2000-2003

Concluding Thoughts on Roles of Foreign Service Nationals

- Why not always trusted and treated as equal professionals?
- FSNs as supervisors
- Expansion of responsibilities and incentives

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is January 19th, 2017 and this is Carol Peasley. This is the first interview with Bonaventure Niyibizi. Again, we very much appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today. Maybe we could start by talking a little bit about your background – where you were born, your family background, education, and then moving into the work that you perhaps did before joining USAID (United States Agency for International Development), and telling us about when you did join USAID.

NIYIBIZI: I was born in Rwanda in the mid-‘50s.

Q: Were you born in Kigali or outside?

NIYIBIZI: I was born outside of Kigali. A place called Gitarama at the time, in the Southern region today. I moved to Kigali when I started working. I attended elementary school in my village and moved to the priest seminary for higher school. In the early ‘70s I had to leave Rwanda because of the ethnic violence. I went to Congo which was Zaire at that time. I did my residency there. I graduated in agricultural economics.

Q: Where did you graduate from in agricultural economics?

NIYIBIZI: In Congo. Then I came back to Rwanda.

Q: Did you come from an agricultural background as a child? Or was your family, did they farm or do other things?

NIYIBIZI: My father was working for a mining company as a nurse. He passed away when I was young. My family was farming, and had cows. But that did not have an influence on my academic choice. Initially I did want to be a medical doctor or a lawyer.

Q: Did you return to Rwanda with your degree from the Congo?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. But with the situation prevailing in Rwanda at the time, it was difficult for me to get a job with the government, who was the main employer.

Q: What year was this?

NIYIBIZI: It was 1982-83.

Q: The difficulties of finding the job, was that because of the ethnic differences in the country?

NIYIBIZI: Correct, yes. I spent a few years trying to find a job, but the same ethnic criteria were applicable in all the sectors, and I had to report to the police/intelligence on a regular basis. Then in '85, USAID had a program supporting the statistics data collection and analysis. The government of Rwanda had conducted a survey on household budget and food consumption. USAID was putting in place a team to help in data entry, processing, and analysis which was consistent with my academic background. Fortunately, I was put in contact with USAID by a friend, then I started with them. I was seconded to the ministry of Planning.

Q: You were on a contract for USAID, working for the ministry?

NIYIBIZI: That is correct.

Q: This was on a food consumption survey?

NIYIBIZI: Yes, it was on " household budget and food consumption".

Q: That was your introduction to USAID. Had you known about USAID before?

NIYIBIZI: Yes, somehow – when I was at the university, the Rockefeller Foundation was supporting the section of agricultural economics. We had access to documentation from USAID related to economics and development projects. Most of them were coming from the Rockefeller Foundation. Peace Corps volunteers were also on the campus teaching English. I started taking English lessons, trying to improve. I took extra lessons, which proved to be useful a few years later when I started working with the USAID team and for interview when the mission opened new posts. So it gave me an introduction to international development and to have contact with Americans involved in development activities.

Q: So with Peace Corps before you went to university?

NIYIBIZI: No, no – this was in Congo. They were posted at the University but teaching English in the secondary schools. I met some of my teachers in Washington 20 years later. It was very interesting to see and to discuss changes which had occurred during this long period.

The Peace Corps volunteers were posted in this remote area, they were teaching English and leaving on the campus facilities.

Q: That's wonderful.

NIYIBIZI: This is the background. I started to be interested very early in USAID activities and missions and then an opportunity opened, I took it. It was the only

opportunity I had. After a few years, the Mission in Kigali started to be interested in hiring Rwandan professionals. Before that, they had only support staff.

Q: It was all just administrative staff?

NIYIBIZI: Yes, there were no professionals at the time. Somebody was hired just before me, and then they opened more positions. Then I got it and moved to USAID as an FSN (Foreign Service national).

Q: Was that in the agriculture office?

NIYIBIZI: I started in the agriculture office.

Q: Let me go back for one minute to the time you were on the USAID contract working with the ministry of Plan. Was that a successful activity? Were you able to perform in a way that you were satisfied with your contributions?

NIYIBIZI: We had a very nice team and it was a learning experience for me. We were the only team who had computers offered by USAID and we were thought to write computer programs to analyse data and prepare our reports. We had two teams, what was called a "French team" coming from the Institute of Statistics in France and an "American team" coming from USAID, I was with the American team. I had two wonderful people on my team: Nicholas Minot (an agricultural economist from MSU) and Jim Otto on computer programming side. We had also the Ministry's officers, technically we were reporting to them. I have kept friends on all sides.

Also for a young and curious graduate, I had the opportunity to look at other economic reports and see how the Government was operating. We were given other opportunity to see many economic issues in Rwanda, but also looking at those statistics that the department of Statistics was producing.

At the same time, we had to report back to USAID. They were very much interested. I think it was because of that it was possible to hire me at the mission.

The program officer, Rose Mary Depp and the Agricultural Development Officer, were wonderful people.

Overall, I was very satisfied with my contribution. And above that, I learned how to work with this multicultural team. I learned a lot about Rwandan economy and politics.

Q: Who was the contractor you were working for?

NIYIBIZI: Michigan State University was supporting the department of Statistics in the government. So we had a number of people from Michigan State University. I don't remember exactly what kind of contract they had with USAID, but they had been working in the creation of the department of Statistics in the early '80s, probably.

Q: So they had a very strong partnership with the government planning.

NIYIBIZI: Yes, very strong partnership in the agricultural sector and in statistics. They were doing all kinds of surveys and training people. They sent people to Michigan State University for further training. It was a very good program setting the ground for the Government to have reliable data for policy formulation, and at the same time, developing the capacity of young Rwandans.

Q: Okay. You did that for two or three years?

NIYIBIZI: Yeah, almost three years. In the meantime, I was interested in pursuing my academic training, but the government of Rwanda would never approve me for the program or giving me the travel document.

Q: So you were then recruited directly by USAID to join the agriculture office there?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. They opened the position; many people applied. I was selected for the position.

Q: This would have been 1988?

NIYIBIZI: Correct.

Q: Was the USAID program in Rwanda expanding at that time? Is that why they were hiring?

NIYIBIZI: It was expanding, and Michael Fuchs and Rose Mary Depp (the program officer) were eager to strengthen the program. They were also supportive of the Rwandan staffs. The mission director at the time was late Gene Chiaverolli, I did not get to see him often, but it was clear that he was a development oriented person. So the mission in Rwanda was expanding, especially in the agricultural sector. It is also during this period that a \$12 million program (the largest in the mission) was developed under the Economic Support Fund. The program was supporting various programs, being also used for policy dialogue with the government and supporting the private sector development. It was a time of structural adjustment programs, although supported by IMF, but the mission was contributing to it at the sectoral level.

Q: Were there other professional Rwandan staff hired at the same time for other sectors?

NIYIBIZI: There was one hired just before me who was previously teaching at the university who joined the mission. He left after a few years. In the meantime, there were other professionals who were hired. The mission was having a strong health program. They started having other professionals in various field. So, we started seeing more and more FSNs coming to the mission and taking higher and higher positions.

Q: Do you recall the recruitment process for FSNs? Were there any special efforts made on recruitment? Or was it just posting positions and seeing who would apply?

NIYIBIZI: They were posting the positions. I don't remember if it was in the newspaper; I don't remember exactly how it was done. What I remember is that the position was opened, I was not the only one who went to be interviewed; there were many who were interviewed.

Q: So they were seen to be very desirable jobs?

NIYIBIZI: They were desirable jobs professionally on one side, on the other side they were not asking the ethnic group you belong to. Personally, I started as a project manager. So, I was involved in many projects which opened my eyes. Also, it was the opportunity to enter the USAID system, but also dealing with government counterparts. It was very interesting.

More importantly for me, USAID was judging me just by my performance – that's all they were looking at. As long as they were satisfied, I had a promotion every year and they had no problem whatsoever with my ethnic group.

Q: As the mission was recruiting new Rwandan staff, was it completely mixed ethnically? Or were there more of one? Or was that just not a factor that you considered?

NIYIBIZI: It was not a factor; it was never a factor at USAID.

Q: So there was always a mix of staff at USAID?

NIYIBIZI: Definitely.

Q: We'll probably come back around to that subject again, I suspect. So you started in project management. Did you get much training? Were you able to go to any training programs to learn the AID (USAID) or was it learning by doing?

NIYIBIZI: The training programs came later. Sometime there were budget constraints and priority was given to American staff I guess. As FSNs were taking higher and key positions, the training was also offered to us. After a few years, I took several short-term training, including the economic development studies program in Washington.

Q: So you took an economic development class in Washington. Was that the Development Studies Program?

NIYIBIZI: Correct.

Q: When did you do that?

NIYIBIZI: From January to March '93.

Q: Ninety-three. That must have been towards the end; I think they stopped doing the Development Studies Program.

NIYIBIZI: I don't know for that one, but I took it, although it was during a difficult time back in Rwanda.

Q: Very good. It sounds like the mission did a good job in investing in training for the staff.

NIYIBIZI: Yes, they did. They became very open as more professionals were coming. We had a system called the FSN Committee which I was the head of, and were able to establish dialogue with the mission, and agreeing that we are professionals so we should have training and the opportunity to grow and become better. They were more open; there was a training program in the budget.

Q: So was the FSN Committee created fairly soon after they hired professional staff?

NIYIBIZI: I think so.

Q: It started not too long after.

NIYIBIZI: That is my impression. I cannot say for sure, but I remember we started having people elected in the committee and looking at issues like salaries, salary surveys, social issues, and keeping contact with the mission management. I remember starting electing people in '89 or something like that.

Q: You talked about issues like salaries and salary surveys. Was the mission seen as responsive to the issues that were raised?

NIYIBIZI: Definitely. It was not that easy because we were using comparators and we were looking at the professions, and the content of job description, taxes and social security contribution. There would be a survey team that would come to the mission to look at UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and the World Bank and some private enterprises in Rwanda and look at the salary. Of course, I was involved. But it was not only that; we'd be looking at security issues, the working environment, etc...

Q: Was there much discussion among the Rwandan staff for the various donors? Would the FSN committee at USAID perhaps be talking to Rwandan staff at the UN office or World Bank office or at other bilateral donors to discuss benefits and things like that?

NIYIBIZI: We had. From my position, I had to participate in meetings about a program or the economic situation in Rwanda, so we had a lot of interaction with the World Bank and UNDP.

Q: So you had professional contact with them. You could also talk about internal management issues you were both facing?

NIYIBIZI: Correct. But their system was different from USAID, they had a mixed of people whereas USAID was understandably Americans and FSNs.

Q: The early programs you worked on in the agriculture process – you end up continuing to support the work with the ministry of Planning and the department of Statistics? Or were you doing other kinds of project work?

NIYIBIZI: I moved from the Ag Office to PDO (Project Development Office), and I took over the activities related to private sector development which were overseen by my supervisor, Henderson Patrick. I cannot remember after how many years. For some reasons, I had to move later to the Program Office in 1991. But I kept working with the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Finance in areas related to economic reforms and private sector development.

Q: When you left the agriculture office, you went to the project development office?

NIYIBIZI: Yes.

Q: And then later to the program office?

NIYIBIZI: Correct.

Q: Each of these changes probably involved a promotion as well?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. I had a promotion every year.

Q: When you went to the project development office, you were working with multiple sectors in designing programs?

NIYIBIZI: Yes, but also at looking at the implementation and evaluation of the projects. Then being involved in a project at the early stage of the project design.

Q: So you were talking about your work in the office of project development.

NIYIBIZI: Yes. But at the same time as the program was growing and operating budget limited, you could be assigned to another project team. I can remember when I worked in the PDO office for example, I was looking at private sector development. I was also involved in the training program. So I was in charge of that and also participating in other activities. Most of the time you will be assigned to more than one team, but answering to specific section or division. It was a time when we were looking at the economic reforms and how the legal environment in Rwanda was impacting the development of the private sector. It was also a time to look at the United Nations activities to ensure better donors' coordination and government investment activities like tea or transport development. I

was involved not only in the very specific activity of the PD (project development) office but also looking at the program more broadly.

Q: So the broader private sector work which sounds like it was quite broad based, from doing policy reform work to investment and business promotion. I vaguely recall hearing discussions – was there a small business promotion program in Rwanda at that time?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. It was included in various programs related to economic development.

Q: You were managing that program?

NIYIBIZI: Yes.

Q: So this would have been 1990, 1991 that you had moved to manage the private sector program?

NIYIBIZI: I did not stay long in the agriculture sector. During that period (90-91), the private sector program was already part of my portfolio.

Q: Okay – understood.

NIYIBIZI: That I think was '89 or early '90. I was arrested in late '90.

Q: You were detained when? In 1989?

NIYIBIZI: In October 90 to March 91.

Q: So you were managing the small business program?

NIYIBIZI: That was one of my responsibilities while I was in PD. I'm trying to remember the time. In '90 I was already in this program.

Q: You were already in the program office.

NIYIBIZI: No I was in the PD office then moved to the program office in 91, after I was released from prison.

Q: Okay. Obviously we need to talk about the detention. Can you tell us when that took place? Was there any relationship in it to your USAID work? Or was it for other reasons?

NIYIBIZI: Not directly. I don't know if you recall in '90 (in October) that is when RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) entered in Rwanda and the war started. Thousands of people, mainly of Tutsi ethnic group were arrested or killed by the government at the very beginning of the war, in retaliation.

At the end of October, I was travelling to Nairobi to take the management skills course with USAID, I was arrested at the airport. During several interrogations I had with the intelligence people, the question which kept coming back was "why are you so close to Americans, why they love you, etc...". Of course, the primary reason was my ethnic group.

Q: This would have been the beginnings of the – I don't want to use the term 'civil war,' but what's the correct term to use for...?

NIYIBIZI: I don't know what the term is. If you can recall, the RPF came to Rwanda on the first of October. Refugees living in neighboring countries since the 60s had been negotiating with the government to come back, but the government had been opposed to that for more than 30 years. Since peaceful negotiations failed, they decided to come by force.

Q: So the war started in 1990.

NIYIBIZI: Yes. Immediately the government arrested thousands of Tutsis and moderated Hutus who they supposed were opposed to the government. Thousands of people were arrested starting October second. As I said, I was traveling to Nairobi to take a management course. Then I was arrested at the airport; the government said I was going to meetings with the Rwandan Patriotic Front. But the truth was that I had been denounced by a colleague at the mission who had ties with the intelligence services in the government. So, I was arrested and was detained for six months.

Q: To go back – you said that you were arrested at the airport when on the way to a management training course?

NIYIBIZI: Yeah, it was called management skills which was taking place in Nairobi. I had been designated by the mission to attend this course.

Q: Right.

NIYIBIZI: I was arrested at the airport. The immigration officer at the airport had a copy of cables from the mission.

Q: A cable from the mission?

NIYIBIZI: Yes.

Q: That cable was saying what? Was it just...

NIYIBIZI: The cable did give details of my travel. A colleague of mine in the mission had sent information to intelligence or political police in Rwanda that I was traveling. He gave them copies of the cables, which I saw.

Q: Oh. I see. This could have been something like getting country clearance from Kenya for you to travel to Kenya for USAID?

NIYIBIZI: No, the cable was – remember the system at the time where we were doing cables for all kinds of communication. This was a cable sent to Nairobi and maybe to Washington saying, “So and so will be traveling to take a course, please do the approval process...” It was also showing my itinerary.

Q: Right, so it was looking for approval for your travel to Kenya, and that’s what officials had at your airport?

NIYIBIZI: Yes, but also my itinerary. They knew exactly on which flight I was. But then when I was being interrogated, they said that I had been attending meetings in Uganda and Burundi. That I was going to attend another meeting in Nairobi with the Rwanda Patriotic Front.

Q: Though it was obvious if they had the cable that you were going for USAID purposes.

NIYIBIZI: Yes. But my colleague gave them another version.

Q: What did USAID do after you were arrested?

NIYIBIZI: USAID and the Embassy contacted the government to ask the accusations they had against me. I learned later that my Rwandan colleague requested/suggested to the Mission to fire me. The mission director at the time, Jim Graham, said “No, we are not going to fire Niyibizi, there are no proofs that he is guilty. I remember the first day or the second day after I was arrested, the mission director and the Exo (executive officer) came to see me. After that, it became very difficult. But Henderson Patrick (my supervisor) kept coming when he received authorization from the Ministry of Justice. I received also a visit from Washington.

So, the Mission kept pressure on the Government.

Q: But initially, Jim and the executive officer came to see you after you’d been arrested?

NIYIBIZI: Yes, it had been difficult to locate where I was. I was detained in the cell where they would torture people, so they would not be able to locate where I was, but the Government did not want that to be seen. During the night, I was relocated to another place. Then the embassy became involved. After a few days, the government informed them where I was. So they came to see me and after a few days, I was transferred to the central prison, the main prison in Kigali. So I was no longer moving between cells and so on. Then to visit me they had to have an authorization from the minister of Justice. It was a hard, long process. But anyway, the mission and the embassy were involved in the six months period I was detained.

Q: Did the embassy and USAID interact with your family while you were detained?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. Absolutely.

Q: Did they keep you on the rolls as an employee throughout that time?

NIYIBIZI: Absolutely. They arranged it. The Mission has been very supportive the whole time.

Q: So you continued to be paid, for your family?

NIYIBIZI: Absolutely, yes.

Q: It sounds like they behaved very responsibly.

NIYIBIZI: Oh they did. They did very, very well.

Q: I supposed we probably shouldn't discuss the period of detention unless you wanted to say any more about it.

NIYIBIZI: I don't know how much interest you have with the interviews you have. But what I can say is, first of all this was very interesting to go to the mission and see how the mission and the embassy was a big support. They had nothing to do whatsoever and no reason to be. When I came back in March '91, the mission was very receptive and I took back my position. My desk was still there.

My family had been able to survive the period. My wife was pregnant, she had been taken by the police for a short time and then released.

Of course, this can take us to the genocide time. I think not only the mission but the international community at the time including the U.S. embassy could have seen that the situation in Rwanda was deteriorating. I think 10,000 people in prison, many died or were killed was a serious indication of a deteriorating situation. So we could have enough information to see that the genocide would happen. In 1993, there was the UN peace keeping mission who kept the diplomatic mission and UN in New York of the preparation of the genocide.

Q: The detention was a real warning what was to come.

NIYIBIZI: It is one. When a government arrest or kills several thousands of his citizen without any charge, only because they are of certain ethnic group, this should be alarming. Everything which happened thereafter was telling how the situation would be very bad, because the killings continued in '91, '92, '93. At one point the mission dependents were moved to Nairobi. Maybe we can come back to that later.

Q: We can come back to that. Were any other U.S. government employees detained during this period?

NIYIBIZI: No, at the time it was only me.

Q: Do you know of any other Rwandan professional staff at any of the other donors, the World Bank or anyone else who might have been detained?

NIYIBIZI: When I was in the cell with the political police, there were some UNDP employees who had been also arrested. The head of that service is now in prison in France and has been condemned to 25 years. He was the head of political intelligence in the government, most of the tortures were conducted or supervised by himself.

Q: Wow. This was as early as 1990. So, when you were released, you went back to USAID and that's when you went to the program office?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. At the time, Dirk Dijkerman, an economist, was joining the mission.

Q: Jim Graham had left and Dirk Dijkerman had come in as mission director?

NIYIBIZI: No, Dirk Dijkerman came as the program officer. The mission director was Gary Nelson who had replaced Mr. Graham. I think, it was just a week or two weeks after I was released in '91, Dirk came from I think Sudan to look at the program in Rwanda before he moved. Jim Graham who was still there and he said, "It would be interesting to have you in the program office, and work with Dirk Dijkerman because we are going to have so many programs in economic reforms and Dirk is an economist." So, he moved me to the program office when Dirk came to Rwanda. There was no other professional in the program office. Actually, there was no real economic program, except the economic support fund (ESF). So, when Dirk came I think the mission strategy had moved to include economic reform program. That was the time when the government of Rwanda was going through the structural adjustment program. Having Dirk as an economist and the mission expanding the strategy, being involved in economic policy projects, Dirk was of course the key person but he needed another person to work with him. I was doing some program activity, but I was in charge of all the projects on economic reform and support to the Government.

Q: So were you involved with Dirk in the policy dialogue process with the government?

NIYIBIZI: Correct.

Q: Since you had just come out of detention, was that awkward at times? What was the government's reaction when you were coming to meetings?

NIYIBIZI: Coming from USAID, they were trying to be cooperative. The minister of Plan used to be a good friend, I had worked with him when he was a contractor on one of our program before he joined the Government. I was dealing with the ministry of Planning, ministry of Finance, and the Central Bank. It was not easy, but some people were always open and cooperative. But at the same time, I think what helped me was the

environment at the mission which was very good. I was working very hard; we had very big programs. But the environment in the mission was conducive to keep working hard.

When the genocide started, the very first thing they did, I mean some of my counterparts in the Government, was to check if I was dead. Then fortunately they got the wrong information, that I was killed. One of the points they made was because I was involved in the program, that was preventing them from personally enjoying access to funds from the U.S. Government. There are a lot of details that I don't mention. It was not easy. It exposed me to high risks. Fortunately, I survived.

Q: In some ways, your work made you more vulnerable?

NIYIBIZI: Oh yeah. No question about it, yes.

Q: Can I ask another question about the portfolio? We'll come back to the genocide, but I recall in Washington when Dirk returned and the AID administrator Brian Atwood asked Dirk to do some thinking about what the AID program had been, and should we have understood better what was happening below the surface within the country. I vaguely recall some discussion about some of the private sector program, that the benefits were – that there were some issues with the ethnic distribution of those who were benefiting from some of the programs in the private sector, and that this was exacerbating tensions. Have you ever heard that? Is that an issue that you think is legitimate?

NIYIBIZI: You mean, the distribution of aid?

Q: Of who was benefiting from our private sector program?

NIYIBIZI: I don't recall having discussion of that kind with Dirk. If I recall correctly, with all the details I have, I don't think really the program was targeting one group compared to another. Decisions were based on a predetermined criteria. Of course, people who were involved within the private sector most of the time would be Hutu because they had more opportunity, but there were also Tutsi entrepreneurs. What I recall discussing with Dirk after the genocide, we were trying to understand how it is possible that so many people were killed in such a short period of time. Dirk's point of view, if I recall correctly, was that the land issue could have been a source of tension.

My point of view till today is that there is no way you can explain a genocide like what we have seen in Rwanda. Because if land was an issue, what is the point to kill somebody who is 80 years old? And killing the way it happened, I have not been able to find any explanation. On the other side, the mission program was reaching a limited number of people compared to the whole population. It is true that land has been always an issue in Rwanda, but not to an extent which will explain a genocide. That is the discussion Dirk and I had. I think we have to keep in mind that during those years, the corruption was very high. That is one point, because I recall one time the government issued a letter to Gary Nelson, asking him to fire me. The only reason they were looking at that was they

had tried to give me money to help them access the local currency funds, which I refused and we suspended some activities when it became clear that the money was misused. I was targeted by this same group the first days of the genocide and they organized a party when they learned that I had been killed.

But when we were implementing the projects, we were not looking in any way to a specific ethnic group, we had very concrete and specific criteria that we were using. I can remember for example the case where we did send people for a study tour in the U.S.; there was a program I cannot remember exactly how it was called, but people from the private sector had opportunities to come to the U.S. to visit the states, private sector, and learn about entrepreneurship and how government institutions were working to support the private sector. I can remember clearly two key people who were in an association to promote industry. We looked at the criteria, and they met the criteria. We did send these people to a tour in the U.S. Both of them in the end became ministers in the central government.

But I remember one of them coming back to my house and saying: “When I learned at the embassy that my study trip will have to be cleared by you, I never expected to be approved.” For the same reason I had been in detention; I was a Tutsi, he was a Hutu. So he was thinking I would never give my recommendation. But I gave the recommendation. So he came for several weeks. And he came back and said, “Bonaventure, I had never expected to be accepted in this program and go to the U.S. as long as you were in the mission.” I said, “There is no point to that, because the point is what you are doing with the association of industry, and promoting the private sector and you are qualified; you have the experience. Ethnic group to me does not count. That is not the way the mission does business.”

I can give many examples. I remember we were organizing training programs. There was a program that was with the University of Pittsburgh, and we were sending a few people each year. Then we discussed in the mission that we’re sending just a few people to Pittsburgh for four or five weeks. With the money we are spending, we can take qualified trainers from the U.S., bring them to Rwanda, do the same training but reach 25 or 30 people and repeat the program regularly. The Mission approved my proposal and we set very specific criteria to identify people who were going to benefit from the program. It was a mix of people. I don’t see looking back at any criteria which was ethnic based, and the selection was conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Q: Those are very interesting examples; you obviously were working hard to try to overcome these tensions.

NIYIBIZI: Yeah, we tried the best we could, but the political and social environment was getting worse and worse. The impact this program could have had on the economy was huge, because we had also several million – probably \$20 million, we put a pot of money in the program where we were supporting for example the ministry of Finance to repay debt to the private sector. The rationale was that as long as the private sector supplies

goods and services to the Government and the government is unable to pay, many enterprises will close their activities, which was going to have a big impact on the economy. I think Dirk has more details and he was instrumental to this program.

Q: This large \$20 million program was one of the Africa Bureau's non-project assistance then project assistance policy-based programs?

NIYIBIZI: Yes, I think so. Before that there was another program on Economic Support Funds which was called "Policy Reform Initiatives in Manufacturing and Employment-PRIME".

Q: If one goes back to the deteriorating situation throughout 1991 – the genocide was in the fall of 1993? When did it take place?

NIYIBIZI: Officially it started in April, but the killings had started in 1990.

Q: April of '94, right?

NIYIBIZI: Yes.

Q: Okay. But during that period from the time you were released in March of 1991 until the spring of '94, there was increasing tension and violence?

NIYIBIZI: Oh yes. There was violence and killing. I remember in January '92, I was attending a meeting in one of the hotels in Kigali, and suddenly a message came to the mission that everybody at my house had been killed. Fortunately, nobody was killed but they had left grenades with my nine months old son at the house and taken everything in daylight. Killing was going on since October '90, and it never stopped. That is why to me the genocide started long before April '94. It had been going on for almost four years.

Q: And you remained a target throughout this?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. I was a target, yes.

Q: As the violence increased and the difficulties, were changes taking place within the USAID program and mission? Were there changes programmatically or with staffing? What was happening within USAID itself?

NIYIBIZI: First of all, the mission tried to keep harmony in the mission. My detention somehow divided the FSN community. Jim Graham was very strong about keeping the mission together and avoid ethnic tensions. Mission management was very strong about this. The program was not suspended or downsized.

With the growing number of displaced people in the North, an emergency program was added to help these people.

Q: Did any staff have to be removed because they couldn't accept it was going to be a workplace in which ethnic differences wouldn't interfere? Did any staff have to leave?

NIYIBIZI: Not that I recall, but I know there were activities with FSNs who were involved in the genocide. That we know. We know that FSNs used US government vehicles for example to take the killers and loot the property. This we know. But within the mission, it was to keep FSNs together and make sure we're doing the job we need to do without interfering with the ethnic division in the country.

Q: That must have been a very difficult environment to work in.

NIYIBIZI: It was, yes. But we had a very good team. For example, I remember in '93-'94, Americans who were in the mission took FSNs into their homes whenever they felt in danger.

Q: Let's come back to – what I would like to do is walk through in some detail as the spring came and what actually happened, what various people did. I'm wondering the degree to which USAID began to make changes and how it worked as this violence was increasing.

NIYIBIZI: What do you mean?

Q: Did we make any changes to the program to try to deal explicitly with the increasing violence?

NIYIBIZI: No, I don't think so. But at the diplomatic front, the US Embassy was very active. The idea was that by having all these programs and not stopping, but rather expanding on economic reforms, that we help the government to keep the dialogue with RPF and within the national community. So the mission did not stop the program until of course April. The mission was using dialogue and showing that the US government was keeping its support to Rwanda. We have also to keep in mind that the Rwandan Government was perceiving the US as being supportive to the Rwanda Patriotic Front, a very delicate situation.

In the meantime, the Mission was also involved in the emergency situation which was created by hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the war zone in the north.

Q: And the hope was the government would try to take steps to defuse the violence?

NIYIBIZI: Exactly. Because this came also in a period of economic crisis; the foreign earnings were short, the price of coffee and minerals was so low; high debt for the government, and so on. I think the mission strategy was maybe saying in general we're looking at keeping the program, not putting the government in a way that they feel abandoned. Looking back, I don't know if it was helpful or not, but maintaining the programs – they did not stop. I don't recall any program being stopped at the time.

Q: You had earlier mentioned something about dependents leaving post. Had there been any kind of drawdown of staff or of the families of USAID employees prior to April?

NIYIBIZI: Yes, yes. They were moved to Nairobi, then came back.

Q: When did they go to Nairobi? Before – well it's hard to define when the genocide started. Did they go to Nairobi before April, or after?

NIYIBIZI: Before. Non-essential people and dependents were sent to Nairobi; mostly dependents. And, of course, all the Americans left in April.

Q: As I recall, the actual what we refer to as the genocide happened shortly after the plane crash that killed the president of the country; is that correct?

NIYIBIZI: That is correct. But if you can recall, in '93 human rights organizations came to Rwanda to look at exactly what was happening. One of them was Human Rights Watch with Alison Des Forges. Actually, Alison Des Forges of Human Rights Watch and Catherine Newbury, who had worked in Rwanda in the 60s, had done an assessment of the situation in late 91. Alison came back in late 92 with a team of the International Federation of Human Rights. They produced their report in early '93 concluding that, in fact, a genocide was being committed in Rwanda; that was the first time a well-researched documented and independent report was produced. I recall in '93 I was in Washington for the development studies and was talking to Alison Des Forges quite often. When I was going back to Rwanda, Alison Des Forges was traveling to Paris and was planning to meet President Mitterrand and let him know that the French Government was supporting a government who was committing a genocide, it was March '93 when Alison Des Forges went to Paris. We keep in mind that French troops had been in Rwanda since late 1990. So, it was clear that the genocide was happening and has been well documented, not only by the mission but by international human rights organizations, especially in '93.

Q: And so the departure of dependents was after that but before April '94?

NIYIBIZI: I think so.

Q: What kind of impact did that have on the USAID mission, with the Rwandan staff, once the embassy allowed this?

NIYIBIZI: We felt that the Mission will not protect us. I think there were cases I remember one in '92, another colleague went home after work and when he got home his brother in law had been killed and his wife was injured with machetes. Many FSNs were losing family members in '93 and '94. So we had many things happening as the killing continued.

We were aware that the Embassy was preparing for evacuation and not prepared to help FSNs.

Q: So even before '94 many FSN staff had had deaths in their families from the violence?

NIYIBIZI: Oh, yes.

Q: I can't even imagine trying to manage a USAID mission with that kind of thing happening.

NIYIBIZI: I don't think it was easy, but we were continuing to work. As I said, at one time the mission said there is no way we can help you officially because the U.S. government position is to help Americans and not local employees.

Q: Hmmm. Okay.

NIYIBIZI: On a personal basis, I can remember many American families, Claudia, Louanne, Dirk and other people taking FSN families into their home. In the mission, many people did see us as a family and tried to provide help on a personal basis. I remember raising this with Administrator Brian Atwood in '94 or '95. Atwood was visiting Rwanda and he came to the Mission. I was expecting to be fired because I was very straightforward. But when I left the mission in '97, I remember receiving a letter from Brian Atwood saying that my contribution was important to the mission because they were able to help FSNs in Burundi because when the situation further deteriorated in that country the mission was able to help FSNs.

Q: Absolutely. When what the outside world thinks of as the genocide that began in April – were people at work and this suddenly this horrific violence started? Was it the middle of the night? Did it gradually increase over a period of time? I'm trying to capture whether you were at work or all at home and then that was when the efforts began with family shielding Rwandans; if you could give a picture of what that period was like when the violence erupted into such a horrific spectacle.

NIYIBIZI: We went to the office on April 6th as a normal workday. I remember that on April 6th I went with Dirk to the ministry of Planning. We had this program under the Economic Support Fund. I had raised some issues and highlighted corruption, and then we decided to suspend one or two activities. Those activities were involving local grants and construction and we were working with local government officials. I told Dirk, "You know, since this is going to require some skills that I don't have, it involved construction and civil engineering, I need someone who will come and look at all these designs." So we had somebody from the Regional Office in Nairobi. Dirk was acting as mission director. We met the Minister of Planning for an introduction before the meeting, I stayed with the person from the Regional Office. Our position was that we will suspend those activities and funding, which would almost cost my life. So, a seemingly normal working day.

The government was pushing us to raise the money but we knew very well that the money had been used for corruption with political activities. So, I took the position that

we are not going to continue the program, but that I was going to report back to the mission, and I was going to report back to the minister. We were supposed to have another meeting the following day at 10:00 am, each of us reporting back on what we had done with our superior. We went back to the mission and briefed Dirk. We were going to have another meeting the following day at 10:00, on April 7th. ... and it never happened.

I remember that evening. I took the person from Nairobi out for dinner and then took him to the hotel and went back home. It was the end. The following day, we could not reach the mission anymore, road blocks were everywhere, and the killing at a large scale had started during the night. The killing expanded quickly throughout the country.

The Embassy was officially closed and all the Americans were evacuated on/about the 10 of April.

It was that night that the president was killed. There were grenades exploding all night. But that was happening almost on a daily basis. The following morning when I woke up to go to the office, I learned that the president had been killed and there were roadblocks everywhere and the killing had started already.

But there is no way you can organize this killing to this extent in a matter of 10 minutes; it is not possible.

Of course, we could no longer go to the mission. The embassy was organizing an evacuation; we stayed in Kigali, struggling to survive. Many FSNs were killed; others survived.

Q: Was USAID or the embassy in touch with the Rwandan staff at all during this period? This was pre-cell-phone days.

NIYIBIZI: Yes, before cell phones.

Q: So they probably weren't able to get in touch with people.

NIYIBIZI: I don't think so. Probably some were able to call. I did not have a phone in my home. But also, I have to say that many people were too busy trying to see what can be done. Some of them saying, "No we shouldn't close the embassy." Finally, the decision was made to close the embassy and evacuate out of Rwanda. Which I think happened on April 9 or 10 as I said earlier.

Q: Not a pleasant memory to have to recall at all.

NIYIBIZI: It is not pleasant, but we can talk about it.

Q: So, the Americans evacuated by road as you said, and they went across the border. When was the next time that you heard anything from the U.S. government or from USAID?

NIYIBIZI: When I went into hiding, I took a small radio with me. During the night I was able to listen to the radio, to the Voice of America and I was trying to follow the situation. Through this I knew that the embassy was closed and that the U.S. government officials were not allowed to talk about genocide. If I understand correctly, the US Government would have been compelled to intervene under the 1948 Geneva Convention. I was following this on the radio. In mid-May I called Washington.

Q: Mid-May? So this is a month later.

NIYIBIZI: Yes. From the church compound where I was hiding, I was able to reach a telephone in an office.

Q: Were you in hiding at that church for all that period? Or were you in multiple places?

NIYIBIZI: The first week I was in hiding in multiple places around my house. Then it became tense; all the people around my neighborhood had already been killed. Then I got a message that I was next on the list. So we decided to take a risk. I had tried to reach Mille Collines Hotel, which was like a safe haven because of the UN soldiers present there, but I was not able to because of too many road blocks. We decided, “We have no option. Let us drive to the church. At least we’ll force them to shoot us instead of killing us by machetes.”

Before, I had tried to reach UN (United Nations) soldier who was in my neighborhood. He said, “No, I cannot help you.” So when we first drove on the road, we were lucky and were able to reach the church. Once we got to church, the killing started there 2-3 days later, on April 15. My name was on the list of people they were looking for; they were calling my name. I had to move inside the compound; I was never able to leave that compound till June 13.

By mid-May I was able to reach the phone and called the State Department. There was a lady who had been in Rwanda on consultations and I had her number, then finally I reached Henderson Patrick – do you remember him?

Q: Yes, I do.

NIYIBIZI: I reached Henderson, who had been my supervisor in the PD; I had kept contact with him, and we attended the same course in '93 in Washington. I told him, “Things are going very bad. The situation has deteriorated; we’re going to be killed.” I remember they told me that if I am able to reach any US embassy in the region, then they will help me. A very remote and unrealistic dream.

But I couldn’t leave the church; there was no way I could even dream to reach any embassy in the neighboring country. But I remember Henderson told me, “Bonaventure, you will not die.”

But we were there while the killings were going on, in the church. We were evacuated in mid-June, after long negotiations between the Government, UN and RPF.

Q: When did USAID come back into the country? I know that Brian Atwood made a trip fairly early on, but it was probably to where refugees were pouring over the border. Is that correct?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. That was a very good thing that the U.S. government did. After I left the camp, I went to Uganda and reached Kampala on the 3rd of July. I went to the mission on the fourth of July. I had no clue about dates: the fourth of July was of course a holiday, I had lost a sense of time and events. I went back the following day, they were open, but I had difficulties to convince the guard that I was a former USAID employee. The guards told me that USAID never employs somebody like me. I had been living in hiding and camps for 3 months, I had lost weight and no clean cloths, I had not shaved during this whole period. Somehow they were right. I told them that I knew the deputy mission director, Laetitia, with whom I had attended the course in Washington the previous year. They only laughed!!

Finally, a former colleague, Bob, who had worked in Rwanda came into the building when I was trying to explain to the guard that I used to be a USAID employee, he recognized my voice, and asked me if I was Bonaventure. I said yes. The mission in Kampala had also my name on the list of FSN killed in Rwanda.

Bob was very kind, we were there talking and hugging, and the guards were asking between themselves if this white man was not crazy.

Finally, they did let me in, we sent messages to Washington, everybody was happy there. Dirk sent me some money in the afternoon and I went to buy some new clothes.

I was thinking about seeking asylum, but my family was still back in Rwanda.

There was a small team already in Uganda, trying to help and to see how it may be possible to bring an emergency team in Rwanda. I stayed a few weeks in Uganda. I did not know exactly what to do; if I was going to ask for asylum in the U.S. I tried to contact this team and say, "I'm a former USAID employee, can you help?" They said, "No." We cannot hire you.

Q: Who said no?

NIYIBIZI: The team that was in Uganda.

Q: You told them you were a USAID employee?

NIYIBIZI: Of course I told them, but I was no longer looking at myself as a USAID employee; I was looking at myself as a former. I had left my family in Rwanda, so I had to come back after the government was sworn in. My family was back in Kigali from the

camp. One day I was walking by the embassy building and met the ambassador's driver. He told me that Ambassador David Rawson was in Kigali at the Hotel Diplomat. I went to see him, and he was happy to see me alive. There had been all kinds of reports that I saw in Uganda that were reporting how many FSNs were killed. So, one day I was on the list of killed, one day I was on the list of survivors. Of course, Ambassador Rawson knew I was alive but was not aware that I had come back to Rwanda.

According to the radio, he had been to Addis Ababa. So I met him, said "Happy to see you." And he asked me "Can you come tomorrow and we'll see what we can do?"

So I went there; we reopened the Embassy building. We went inside the embassy and we started doing things.

Q: So initially you were helping at the embassy?

NIYIBIZI: Immediately I started working to reopen the embassy, relocate employees, talk to the government and so on.

Q: When was this?

NIYIBIZI: July. The U.S. government was the first to recognize the RPF government. I think on the 27th of July, the embassy was officially opened in Kigali. I remember there were only five people when we had the flag up. There was George Moose, the ambassador, myself, a colonel in the Marine, and another person. The ambassador and George Moose said, "The U.S. government has recognized this government. We are reopening the embassy." It was the first foreign government to recognize the RPF, which was very helpful.

Other survivor FSNs came back slowly. They helped a lot to put back the mission on track, they all worked very hard.

At the same time, we had Marines who came to Rwanda and were at the embassy, helping provide water and re-establish the communication system. Although everything had been destroyed or looted, I was able to get my car back and I was driving U.S. officials in my car before they got cars from Burundi and some from Somalia. (Laughter)

Q: Did you have any contact with USAID, while you were helping the embassy get reestablished?

NIYIBIZI: I don't remember exactly how the communication system was, but the first USAID persons who came was Al Smith, on official mission, and Louanne Douris, who was posted in Uganda, and came to visit her Rwandan FSN family. She came on a private trip to visit us. Smith came from Nairobi and we started talking how we could reopen the mission. Initially we were operating from the embassy where the infrastructure was intact. USAID and Peace Corps had been looted and some parts of the building had been damaged.

One of the few things I kept with me was the security key for USAID building. I went there and we opened the door. They had tried to force the doors but were not able to break the security door. So I reopened USAID, and we started protecting what was remaining and cleaning what had been damaged during the battle in Kigali. People from the mission in Uganda helped us to put things in place and rehabilitating the residence for the ambassador which was on the other side of the city. The team came back slowly.

It is in this context that Brian Atwood came and went to meet with government officials. He came to the mission; that is when I said, “We FSNs are completely upset. You have seen what happened. Our colleagues have been killed and USAID cannot help their widows and orphans.”

The other point is that we were struggling for the FSNs who have been killed, if there could be payment for the families who survived. It was taking time. I was telling Brian, “I cannot understand how the bureaucracy cannot give some money for the widows and orphans.” I did put it very strongly. In the end, that was something USAID had to do. Mr. Brian listened to me and to my frustration. I thought I will be fired the same day, but I did want the highest person in USAID to hear the problems we were living in every day. I was not fired and came back to work the following day.

(Laughter)

Q: That was making it very clear.

NIYIBIZI: That is one side.

Q: Did that speed up the process?

NIYIBIZI: I think it did. It was not easy. It took time. There were a lot of things which happened where we were upset but we understood people were not really getting the point of what had happened to the mission. But anyway, the mission came back, resuming the program, trying to get the programs back and rehabilitating the embassy and restarting the dialogue with the Government.

Q: Do you recall of the number of FSNs who had worked in the mission earlier – obviously you came back. Were there others? Or were you one of the only ones? Do you recall the numbers?

NIYIBIZI: I cannot remember the exact number. I think more than 25 FSNs have been killed. We were trying to locate the survivors and their families. Ambassador David Rawson was very open and supportive. I remember I was using official vehicle with the flag to go everywhere in the country. We identified one doctor, an FSN, who was now working in a hospital in the north with his family. I was allowed to go to all these places and try to find people and bring them back to the mission and the Embassy was ready to accept any surviving FSNs to come back. Everyone who came back was welcome.

Some FSNs were able to come back to Kigali by themselves. Others we had to locate them and assist in their return.

I went in the North to find the doctor the first time; this had been a war zone for four years, since '90. There were landmines everywhere. So I drove in the bush, but I was able to find him and his family. The following week I went back to take the family back, and I found out that the road I had taken, another car had been there and drove on a mine; everybody was killed.

I remember another day when we had been rehabilitating the Mission director's house, it was on the same as USAID office, the Mission director's house, and Peace Corps office. I was on this road every day, day and night, on weekends. On a sunny Sunday, a young girl, eleven years old, going to the church lost her leg on this same street where we had been walking every day.

We tried to bring people back and to put all US Government property in order and protect them from looting. Slowly we had a small team and the USAID was rehabilitated, so we left the embassy and went back to USAID and started a small program with the ministry of Justice initially. It came back slowly.

Q: I recall visiting in October of '94 when the NSC (National Security Council) director Tony Lake made his visit to Rwanda. We visited the USAID office; it still had the door that had been shattered but withstood. Quite an amazing sight.

NIYIBIZI: You remember the door?

Q: Yes. I remember the door.

NIYIBIZI: It was strange that I kept the key for the door for that long so I could reopen it. Sometimes I think back to that.

Q: This is Carol Peasley; it is January 26th, continuing the interview with Bonaventure Niyibizi. Bonaventure, thank you very much. I believe when we finished up last week, we were talking about the genocide and the help you were providing to re-start both the embassy and the mission. I'd kind of like to start there and ask if you could talk a little bit about when the USAID mission got re-established, what that process was like, who was there to helping re-stand up the AID mission, how you went about doing it, how you engaged with Washington in those discussions. If you could give a little bit more background about how that happened, I'd appreciate it.

NIYIBIZI: Thank you Carol. I will try to go through it. As we discussed last time, the mission officially reopened in July. The U.S. was the first diplomatic mission to reopen officially in Kigali after the genocide. The ambassador was there, contrary to other countries who did not have their missions open. We were looking at the mission itself; the assets, the embassy, USAID, Peace Corps, and personal property for people who were

living in Kigali, before April. So we had to work through the process, also trying to locate where FSN survivors were.

Q: Had any of the American staff returned during that period, in July?

NIYIBIZI: No. It was only the ambassador, if I recall correctly, we had support from neighboring missions and US Embassies. A few weeks later, Al Smith, who had been at the mission before the genocide came to Kigali to help as a US Direct Hire, he was now posted in Nairobi. There was a military presence at the time and the embassy was getting support from Uganda, Nairobi and Burundi. In the next phase, the mission director in Burundi, Myron Golden, was also covering Kigali. Jack and Christine Hjelt came also from Nairobi and helped to put the mission together. Then a group of contractors came in slowly. Officially I don't think the U.S. government had approved American direct hires to be back; we had many contractors who came and then just people who were around.

Q: So people were coming in on a temporary basis to help, rather than on assignment?

NIYIBIZI: The mission director in Burundi was traveling between Kigali and Bujumbura on a regular basis. Jack and Christine Hjelt were not direct hire, you know the process. Then of course we had many visits from Washington, both USAID and the State Department, and even staff from the Congress. Permanent assignment came in when George Lewis was appointed I think in 1995.

Q: You had started talking about in July one of the first tasks was to assess the status of the FSN staff. Could you talk to us a little bit about that; how many FSNs were able to return to the AID mission? Were some lost during the genocide?

NIYIBIZI: There were a few FSNs, not many – maybe the first two or three weeks I think we had 10 to 15. I recall we had our first meeting at the library in the embassy; the situation was tense and the ambassador was saying “We are back here. We have to consider all of you as U.S. government employees. What has happened in Rwanda, the tension between Hutu and Tutsi, that is not the way we are going to reopen the mission. You have to look at yourselves as U.S. government employees.” That was the first meeting; I think we were 10 or 15 from the whole US mission.

Many were killed during the genocide, others had fled the country.

Q: It was a mix of Hutu and Tutsi?

NIYIBIZI: Correct. Mostly Tutsi survivors, because most of the Hutus had fled and were in Congo. We had mainly Tutsi survivors who had been in hiding in Kigali. Then slowly as the situation was getting stable, we'd find somebody who was hiding in a school or a mosque, somebody was hiding in a camp, somebody in a house somewhere, somebody who had lost his family and his children, things like that. So mostly they were Tutsi survivors. Slowly we had also people who came from the camps in Congo; they came back to the mission. There were a few people who were repatriated from Goma; one of

them who was from Burundi and used to work at the embassy. I remember we had gone to the border, I had no clearance from the ambassador to cross the border for obvious reasons. The colonel, I mentioned earlier and Al Smith crossed the border; we had information that those people were in Goma, and we took them back to Kigali.

Q: Wow, so Al actually went across the border to find staff?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. They came back with two people: Jeanne and the other who was working at the Embassy. Unfortunately, when the latter got to Kigali, we got information that he may have been involved in the genocide; he was on the road blocks with military uniforms. Then he left. We started rebuilding and having other people come in. That is how we started to build. Initially, the mission did not have resources. I think the first program we had was on justice and governance. Also, too many NGOs (non-governmental organizations), there were many NGOs in the country, American NGOs.

Q: Did the old programs start up again? Or did you really just start over completely? Or was it a combination of some old programs restarting and new programs?

NIYIBIZI: I think everything was closed maybe from May, the previous program had to be closed and money allocated elsewhere. Also, the context was different. The old programs were focusing on development whereas the current situation called for an emergency situation, post war and the challenges resulting from a genocide committed by neighbors and citizen under the leadership of the government.

Q: Right, but did it start up when the mission reopened? Did those programs then restart? Did those contractors return and the program started again? Or did they just terminate?

NIYIBIZI: The situation was completely different. At the time we could not see programs which were related to economic development and health for example, which was the major programs we had in Rwanda pre-'94. I think the only resources available were for emergency situation. There were some resources from the OTI (The Office of Transition Initiatives).

Q: So those programs were terminated, and the mission began to identify more appropriate activities for the current situation?

NIYIBIZI: I think so. The new initiatives were more on the emergency and refugee resettlement and later on governance and the justice sector. If I recall correctly, we had for example a program to give equipment to the government ministries, they were operating without any resources, not even a typewriter or papers. Everything had been destroyed or looted by the previous government. For example, we imported a lot of vehicles for the government, because nobody including the ministers had transport. I remember one day, the Mission Director and I were having a meeting with the minister of Justice. When we closed the meeting the minister said, "I don't know how I'm going to get home." The small car he had belonged to somebody else who was living in Rwanda

before April. The owner came back and claimed his vehicle from the Minister. The USAID director said, “Bonaventure, you have to give your car to the minister for him to go home.” A situation difficult to imagine.

Q: Right.

NIYIBIZI: So we restarted on those emergency programs with the main funds going to the NGOs. Then on governance, helping the ministry of Justice to rehabilitate their offices and the prosecutors’ office and providing basic equipment like typewriters, those kinds of things. Very difficult, because nothing was there. The first priority after the genocide was what is going to happen with the people who have committed the genocide? I think out of 700 judges pre-’94, there were less than 100, some had been killed and others fled the country. That was one big challenge. We were all convinced that the reconciliation will be difficult without justice. The other challenge was the system pre-genocide was in French, the judges were speaking French and in Rwanda it was becoming a mix of French and English. It was imperative to reconcile these systems and USAID looked at bilingual countries, mainly Canada, to help start training lawyers at the university. I think we worked with an organization in Canada who was bilingual to help people to have excellent English and translate some of the legal texts from French to English.

Basic things to help the government to operate and then providing assistance to the displaced people. There were a lot of displaced people, lots of people who had been refugees since the ‘60s who were in Uganda, Congo, Tanzania – relocating them, helping them when they were in transit. A lot of displaced camps inside Rwanda. This was the priority, compared to development activities which we had pre-’94.

Coming back to the mission and the staff. Slowly we had a small group of Rwandan staff who joined the mission with the small group of Americans. Jack Hjelt was there, Christine and other contractors, and Myron coming from Bujumbura. This is how we slowly started the program. I think the first mission director who came as a direct hire was George Lewis. Then it started as a normal mission with the whole process. Initially, many things were being done from Nairobi, I remember I had to go there several times. The contracting officer was there, HR (human resources) was there, EXO was there. I was traveling to Nairobi quite often, because people who were qualified to make decisions on the whole process according to USAID procedures were not present in Kigali.

This is how we re-started activities in Rwanda.

Q: In trying to determine what the priorities should be, putting aside the humanitarian relief requirements because those were I’m sure very visible and people knew what needed to be done to try to work with refugees and displaced persons and food programs and those kinds of things. But looking more generally at how USAID was re-engaging with the new government in Rwanda, were you personally involved in those discussions

in identifying priorities and for example in working with the ministry of Justice? Did that come from somewhere else? Was that the suggestion...

NIYIBIZI: I was involved. I was not officially in the decision-making, but I was very much involved. There were many programs we had. For example, the de-mining program. The Mission was also engaging the government on the political front. If you can remember, many western governments and traditional donors had not recognized the new government in Rwanda, and they were not prepared to provide assistance to the government. You may recall for example the conference in Geneva sometime in 95-96, the U.S. government was represented by Dick McCall and his team who were very knowledgeable with the situation and supportive to rebuild the country after the genocide. The US position was "We need to support the government of Rwanda, to be able to cope with the aftermath of the genocide." So we were involved in those discussions with the minister of Finance, the minister of Justice, the minister of Local Government, minister of Foreign Affairs – we were everywhere. Most of the time I was with them. At one time there were no Americans in Kigali so basically I was acting as the senior person in the mission. Gayle Smith was also very active and helpful in this process.

Q: You went to Geneva to that meeting?

NIYIBIZI: I did not go to Geneva. I think nobody from the mission went, but I remember Dick McCall was the head of the U.S. delegation going to Geneva.

Q: OK. You were involved in helping to identify the priorities?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. It was really difficult to an outsider to understand the situation after the genocide. I remember Dick McCall himself had traveled to the camp inside Congo, visited several places in Rwanda and spoke to Rwandan Government officials at all levels, compared to other countries whose position was "No this government will never survive, the country will be invaded and taken over by the genocidaire forces across the borders in Congo."

I can remember one day coming from the border with Congo. When we came back we stopped somewhere and had a meeting with the international organizations and NGOs and different people representing the UN. They didn't know that there was a Rwandan in the room, and they said, "This government won't survive even for a few weeks." NGOs knew exactly what was happening in the camps because the infiltration had started and arms were circulating in the camps. People were coming back, they were organizing in the camps. Even the IDP (internal displaced person) in Rwanda, they knew exactly because they were working with those camps, that the camps were not actually camps; they were like military organizations inside the camps.

Basically, we did not have many people who could understand the situation in Rwanda. But certain people from USAID because so many had come and worked very hard and tried to look at the exact situation; they were very positive and more realistic about it. It

was quite a tense situation dealing with the UN, dealing with different representatives from other governments. It was a delicate situation.

Q: In working with the ministry of Justice, did we continue that work – I'm interested in the decision to work with them on the issues of justice associated with finding those accountable for the genocide. Was that an explicit part of the discussion, that it was important to do that and should be a priority for the U.S. government? The decision to work with the ministry of Justice – was there an explicit desire on the part of USAID to help work with Justice specifically to help deal with the accountability issues associated with the genocide?

NIYIBIZI: I think it was – probably you know this more than I do, but I think it was a decision from the U.S. government. When you have a situation like this, the way we were looking at the situation – the only way to re-establish the situation to some normalcy and pave the road for the future was to have justice and accountability. I think the US government at the highest level, yourself, all of you had come to Rwanda did not see any way to re-establish the situation if Rwanda did not have a functioning justice system. Certainly, on the Rwandan government side also, I think that was a priority. Which was good in a way because a different situation would be, “We have revenge. People have been killed by their neighbors; now we are going to have revenge.” Or to wait till those who had committed the genocide come back and finish their job. The government did not take this decision. Instead, they said, “No, we will hold people accountable. We’ll be open and everybody who has not been involved in these crimes will come back to Rwanda and restart his life.” I think that is a point where the U.S. government and Rwandan government were really in agreement. But having the U.S. government to be the first government present at a very high level and to officially recognize the new government in Rwanda was a very positive and helpful step. I don't remember any other western government in the first six months after the genocide who had such high-level people being interested in coming to Rwanda and seeing by themselves all that had happened and actually talking to the new government.

That was something which was interesting, but also, we have to keep in mind President Clinton was the first president to visit Rwanda after '94, at least from western countries. It was February '98, probably. This has helped and the Rwandan government was appreciative of these efforts.

In pre-94, the program was focusing on the agricultural sector, the private sector, economic reforms, and health. Those are the kinds of things that were no longer appropriate given the social and political situation and the making of the population itself. It was not something that you could start; the people were not stable, there was no security, there were killings still going around, there were widows and orphans by the hundreds of thousands who had no shelter. It was not possible. The situation on the ground was not the situation to start up those old programs. We were looking at stabilizing the country, help people to meet their basic needs and stabilizing the nascent institutions. It is how it went to emergency then to justice and local governance, and then support to the government, direct support to the government.

Q: That's very interesting, the process.

NIYIBIZI: When you look back, it is difficult to imagine how it was possible to cope with that, to restart the mission in Rwanda, and actually the country itself come back to some level of normalcy and how much progress and changes which have been achieved today.

Q: It sounds as if there was very good communication from the outset with the government of Rwanda to talk about priorities and needs.

NIYIBIZI: You mean from USAID? Oh definitely, no question about it.

Q: You mentioned that George Lewis came as the mission director when the mission was re-established as a full bilateral AID mission and no longer being managed out of the office in Burundi. Do you recall when that was? It may have been – was it as long as a year?

NIYIBIZI: I think so. I think I was in Washington probably July '95 and it was the first time I met George Lewis and he was waiting for the confirmation process. He may have come in the second half of '95.

Q: I think so as well. At that point, there were significant operating expense constraints on USAID globally, and the African Bureau was having difficulty managing it and for a while they were hoping to minimize some of the infrastructure and thought perhaps it could be operated out of Burundi. It quickly became evident that was not a good idea. (Laughter)

NIYIBIZI: I think he may have come by September; definitely a year after July '94. I clearly remember staying in a hotel in Virginia and I visited him before he joined his post. Also, I was working from the State Department, I remember having gone to his office a number of times, so definitely was during or immediately after the summer of '95.

Q: At what time did the USAID mission step back and prepare a new strategy? Would that have been in late '95 or early '96?

NIYIBIZI: I think so. I think the first funding was all coming from emergency sources rather than the normal development funding.
A new strategy was probably developed after I left in 1997.

Q: I suspect so.

NIYIBIZI: Up to the time when I left in '97, I think it was mostly on emergency and democracy funding. I don't remember exactly which year – probably '98, '99 – when a new strategy started. I was still in contact with the mission, that's when we started having

people in the program office who were in charge of other development activities. But at that time, I had left the mission, but was in contact with those people who were in the mission. The first two or three years was all emergency, justice, governance funding. No funds allocated for development activities for Rwanda.

Q: You mentioned some democracy funding. Was that for NGOs to do various things?

NIYIBIZI: I think there were mainly NGOs, but also some activities from the mission. I remember for example. I cannot remember exactly which NGOs were there but they were closely involved in these activities, because the mission was not very well staffed at the time.

Q: Was it civil society development? Or was this some of the work with the ministry of Justice?

NIYIBIZI: It was the ministry of Justice, and more broadly in the justice sector. There were also some programs – emergency/post conflict programs which were helping for example women to restart economic activities.

Q: I think that's right. In fact, I think perhaps the office of Transition Initiatives went into Rwanda and was doing some of that work.

NIYIBIZI: You are right, it was the Office of Transitions Initiatives.

Q: About this same time, South Africa was developing its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, right? Was there any communication between Rwanda and South Africa itself? Did the USAID mission do anything?

NIYIBIZI: Not I am aware of. There was definitely communication between the Rwandan and South African government. But I don't remember seeing the Mission in Rwanda being involved directly.

Q: I was just curious because I know AID was involved with some of the reconciliation work in South Africa.

Do you have thoughts on that – it sounds as if USAID did a good job of cobbling together funds from multiple sources to try to respond to emergency needs in Rwanda but at the same time trying to help rebuild. There was a lot of creativity it sounds like and the U.S. was pretty responsive.

NIYIBIZI: That is true, but I think the first success from USAID in my view was the dialogue with the Rwandan government and with the various government institutions. I think more than funding; the dialogue was very helpful. You know, people were new, there was tension everywhere, there was the whole implication of the genocide. Having USAID – not only USAID, but also the embassy and from Washington – having this

dialogue was very useful in rebuilding the situation in Rwanda and getting started to deal with the situation at the international level.

I think the US was also coordinating with other governments like the UK and the Netherlands whose contribution was also important after the genocide.

Q: That dialogue included people like Dick McCall from Washington as well as the ambassador and locally based staff?

NIYIBIZI: I think the dialogue was at all levels. If you recall, Ambassador David Rawson had to leave very quickly because of various reasons. Then there was a new ambassador, I think his name is Robert Gribbin. First of all, from the mission I think there was a good dialogue. I said, Dick McCall, Gayle, the Mission, all these people were coming quite often to Rwanda and were engaging the government, keeping the dialogue. But also if you recall, there was a lot of support from Washington. We were talking the other day about Brian Atwood's visit, Tony Lake, the national security advisor, all those people coming to Rwanda contributed to a better understanding of the situation and an open dialogue. It was only the U.S. government that was having this kind of dialogue with the Rwandan government at the highest level. Secretary of States and the President visited Rwanda in the 3 years following the genocide. Many other countries did not have presence in Rwanda or they were not very supportive, except, Holland and the UK (United Kingdom) who came later on. But the traditional donors like France and Belgium were not yet active. The U.S. government played a key role not only keeping the dialogue with the government of Rwanda but also with other donors.

Q: That sounds like an important lesson-learned, to engage often and at high levels.

NIYIBIZI: It was a useful lesson to learn. Also, I think many times the success you achieve depends on the people you have. People play a key role in how much you can accomplish. In this particular situation, I think it has been very helpful. If I look back at pre-'94 for example – if the U.S. government had had so close dialogue with the government, I have always been convinced that it was possible to avoid the genocide. But at the time, France and Belgium were more active and had more political influence because of the historic reasons.

Q: Right, and there should have been more dialogue up front to try to prevent that.

NIYIBIZI: Yes. I can remember being in the same car as somebody called Herman Cohen in Nairobi.

Q: Yes, he was the assistant secretary for Africa for some period, and then was the head of the Coalition for Africa at the World Bank?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. I remember being in the same bus with him; we were having a meeting in Nairobi. Of course, at the time everybody was talking about Rwanda and the genocide. I remember him describing the situation in Rwanda with clear details and he had been the

under the Secretary for African affairs. He talked about meetings he had with the then president about the crisis. I think there was a group of four or five ambassadors who were trying to convince the government to stop the violence and open negotiations with the Rwanda Patriotic Front. But most of the time according to the discussion I had with some of them, said Cohen, the president was telling them, “No, there are very few problems. These are just a few groups of people who are not happy, but otherwise the situation is good.”

Definitely, there was clear information that there was training for militia and distribution of fire arms to the civilian population. As we now know, the UN peace keeping mission deployed at the end of 1993 had a lot of information and intelligence which were being shared with diplomatic missions in Rwanda and in New York. But engaging strongly the government and taking adequate measures? It did not happen. I think people kept thinking, “It will improve.” When the information and the actual situation on the ground was clear that from ’90 the situation was deteriorating. If there had been strong commitment from the international community, I think we could have avoided the genocide. Personally, I’m sure about that.

But there were interests somewhere else. France was very close to Habyarimana. I guess even the geopolitical situation in the World played its role. In spite of the information available, the geopolitical situation, the interest or lack of interest did not help. Compared to after ’94, when people were very shocked by the situation in Rwanda. I can remember Jack Hjelt going to a place near the main hospital in Kigali, just minutes from the US Embassy and witnessing the mass graves around the hospital; people had been taken from the hospital and from the schools— thousands and thousands of people and killed there. When he came back in the afternoon, he could hardly talk. He could not realize that just next door in the middle of the city, by the Hospital, UN offices, embassies, there were mass graves with thousands of people. He was shocked.

Now, probably when people were realizing what has happened, they realized the reality of the situation and the extent to which the genocide had been committed. But at the same time, other people were saying no, it was just a few thousand people, almost denying the obvious genocide. I remember a meeting in our offices with somebody from the UNDP. He came and said, “You know, the Tutsi government cannot last.” So, he’s representing a very important organization but he’s looking at the situation in Rwanda as a Tutsi government. That is a concrete situation that I have seen.

I can remember after leaving USAID, somebody came at the ministry where I was, he took me for somebody else, and he started describing the situation as a Hutu problem, not an aftermath of the genocide. And he was a very knowledgeable person in Europe.

The question he had was, “How many Tutsi and Hutu do you think are in the government?” He said, “Ninety-five percent are Tutsi.” When the government is talking about reconciliation and peace, you could not take such positions. But if you have that state of mind, it means you won’t be inclined to engage with the government or to help or

to see the concrete situation which was on the ground. This is where the U.S. was completely different from many donors and international organizations.

Q: Probably one of those cases where it helped to not be so immersed in the country as some of the European donors were.

NIYIBIZI: Yeah, probably. Being able to look at all the information on the ground, you could not deny that a genocide had happened. It is distressing to see some people saying “Oh, it’s not genocide, it’s just a few thousand.”

Q: It’s hard to believe people would have said that.

NIYIBIZI: Unfortunately. When you look at the situation at the church, the mass graves everywhere, then trying now to see the complex situation resulting from the massacres – widows who have lost completely their families, orphans, raped young women, you realize the gravity of the situation. You cannot keep looking at the ethnic make of the society, in this case the Tutsi and Hutu, but rather look at the future and how to help people and may be how to avoid this calamity in the future.

Q: Let me go back, you mentioned a couple of times that you left USAID in 1997. George had come out and the mission was becoming regularized in late 1995. By the time you left in 1997, was the AID mission beginning to look at some of the economic and more traditional development issues? Or was it still almost solely focused on ...

NIYIBIZI: Not yet. I remember by the time I left, I was basically acting as a program officer which was a position for an American direct-hire. For the key position like EXO, the controller office, we did not have permanent people coming in these positions and the mission need them to run fully fledged operations.

Q: So FSNs were playing many of those key roles?

NIYIBIZI: Yes, definitely. Like the control office for example – you had to have the control officer who came from Nairobi, the same for the contracting officer. George was there, it was hard to hire people but at the same time it was difficult for him to get good people who were willing to come to Rwanda. They were coming slowly, but not many. We had people who were not professional. An example – I was appointed on a Friday, I had not organized my desk, so Saturday or Sunday I came back to the office and the acting administrative officer instructed the security not to let me enter in the compound.

Q: You were appointed to government?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. So I came back to USAID on Saturday. The acting EXO who was not really a USAID career professional said, “No way.” He gave instructions to the guard that I could not come back to the mission. (Laughter) Then I said, “Why? I have not left the mission yet. I was appointed yesterday and I haven’t taken office yet.” He said, “No, you are going to work for another government; you cannot come back.”

In my mind, I had spent all these years taking many responsibilities and taking care of the mission and somebody who had not even worked a full year for USAID is telling me that I cannot come back. It was also in the interest of the Mission that I organize a clear hand over for some activities to continue without interruption. I would not expect that from a professional foreign service for example. Because when I called George Lewis, he said “Come back whenever you want.”

Then I had time to come back and be organized and have a meeting and farewell to the Mission. Professionally, the way people were looking at the situation was completely different. Somebody who is used to work with international organizations or with different countries, with foreign people, with complex situations, is completely different from somebody hired from Iowa (just an example) who has never worked in this kind of situation. The Mission Director was struggling to have really experienced people with USAID working experience and being sensitive to FSN role and so on. It took time to get there.

Q: That sounds very difficult. It's hard to believe that someone who had done as much as you had done would have had to confront that kind of thing.

NIYIBIZI: I remember one day we had visitors in Rwanda and after Rwanda they had a meeting in Uganda with President Museveni, and they were to be met by the Embassy at the border with Uganda. Then I said I was not really comfortable with the driver, so I proposed myself to accompany them to the border. Somebody who was acting as the head of the mission, I think it was his first time to Africa and first time USAID, and he told me the route we were to take to the border with Uganda. I responded, “There are two borders with Uganda where you can cross, but you cannot take this one.” He told me, “You have to take this route.” He said he had spoken to the embassy in Kampala, which is where people from the embassy in Uganda were waiting for this delegation. “You have to do what I tell you to do.”, he insisted. I said, “Fine, OK. It's up to them.”

So we drove in the morning, and I did what he told me to do. We went to the border and nobody was there. We had no communication – nothing. There was no mobile phone, no way to communicate, no telephone at the customs. So, we were stuck three hours from Kigali and six hours from Kampala. Then we said, “There is no way to miss the meeting with President Museveni. Let's try to find a way to get to Uganda.” But I had no passport. Then the immigration officer on the side of Rwanda wrote me a small piece of paper and we drove to Uganda until we reached the post where we could call the embassy in Uganda. They said, “No people have been waiting for you on the other side of the border, where I expected them to be.”

It was already probably 4:00 pm. We were 300 kilometers from Kampala and we decided to drive to Kampala without the delegation who had come from the Embassy to meet the high-level visitors.

Q: Unfortunately, there are people like that in this world.

NIYIBIZI: Indeed, but that is not a situation that you expect from a professional USAID official. You expect he would ask you, “Why? Why are you saying this? Let me call again, let’s double-check before you leave.” That was the kind of situation even George had to live with when he came.

Q: Again, I think that’s another important lesson for USAID. The reality is there will be situations where an AID mission is dependent on temporary help as they’re trying to re-staff after a conflict situation. But that needs to be carefully managed and make sure you have people who are able to do it as you say professionally.

NIYIBIZI: Yeah. I hope the Rwandan situation will never happen anywhere in the world, but it may happen. It is different from managing a normal situation where you are looking at development activities with all the resources required and a good working environment. I don’t know if I’d say that I’ve been lucky, but I have seen the mission going from mid-‘80s with relatively peaceful situation to development activities and then to unspeakable crisis. This experience gives good perspective for different situations. The country was going through a lot of problems which were indicative that development activities will be difficult to sustain for too long: from a development aid program to a situation in an emergency where you have 40 flights per day landing in Kigali for an emergency with a million displaced people, to a situation where the mission closed completely. There are lessons to be learned.

Q: Before we move on – I would like to talk a bit about what you did after you left USAID – but just thinking back on what you just said about having been with USAID in the ‘80s when it was a relatively traditional program and then seeing the program and the mission in its relationship with government and its understanding of the local situation over eight to 10-year period. Were we sensitive enough as an AID mission in looking at the development situation to the growing tension in the country? As you said, the genocide really began much earlier than April of 1994.

NIYIBIZI: When I look back at the situation in Rwanda, I think about a few examples that I compare to today situation. For example in the mid-‘80s when I joined USAID, we knew the government was manipulating the statistics because the policy was to go by ethnic quotas. And the census data had to be adjusted by the government before they become official, because they had to ensure that the ethnic distribution in the population remains the same as it had been announced in previous years. This had an impact on education and employment. That was official. In 2005 when I went back to the mission, this would have been a subject of great concern, it was not the case in the 80s-90s. At the time, I think Rwanda was the only country in the world with South Africa where your ID (identification card), had to clearly mention your ethnic group. But nobody in the international community raised concerns about this or made its removal as a pre-condition for development assistance.

Look at for example women’s issues. There was a law at the time which was preventing married women to open a bank account, or another legal act, without the authorization of

her husband. I remember when I was working on private sector development with USAID, with this law, where women could not open accounts. You are unmarried today and you have no limitation; you can open an account. Tomorrow you are married, and you can no longer open an account. Basically, there is no economic activity you can undertake, you cannot be an entrepreneur. All this kind of situations were the reality in Rwanda. Segregation was clear and was part of the policy.

Q: Those issues were not raised by USAID during that period?

NIYIBIZI: No. Those issues were not raised by USAID nor the embassy as I recall. Not by other embassies.

Q: They weren't discussed among the donors as being critical issues?

NIYIBIZI: Rwanda and his President were rated very good in the mid-eighties. If I take another example: everybody knew that there were hundreds of thousands of Tutsis who had left Rwanda in the late '50s and '60s. The problems started again in '82 when Uganda expelled all the Rwandan refugees. You have a significant part of the population who has nowhere to go: they are not accepted by the asylum country, and they are rejected by their own country. But this did not raise the attention of the international community as a key obstacle to stability and to justice. When we looked at the U.S. government's spending in Rwanda, over a period of 30 years, I think the official assistance had been between \$150 and \$200 million, over 30 years. In '94, '95 the U.S. government spent billions to assist refugees, demining activities, etc.... Of course, that is not development funding, but they are resources from the American people. If you prevent that situation from happening, it is saving the taxpayers' money and you can avoid the crisis, then you can have impact by spending less, in my view, and can put it towards other important activities.

Q: I think you point you raised is one that Dick McCall and Gayle Smith and Brian Atwood recognized after 1994. I know that they pushed AID to be thinking much more about crisis prevention and looking more critically at reality on the ground, and doing more to try to prevent crisis. I think there was some recognition that more could and should have been done in Rwanda. A lesson was learned. Whether it's been implemented, whether AID or anyone else has been able to do a better job, that's probably less certain. I do think that Brian, Dick, and Gayle pushed folks in USAID to think more critically about crisis prevention. I suspect some of that learning came from you.

NIYIBIZI: We had long discussions, definitely. We had long travels together throughout the country.

Q: Let me move on to when you left and went into government. You became a cabinet minister, is that correct?

NIYIBIZI: Yes.

Q: Which ministry?

NIYIBIZI: I went first to the ministry of Commerce.

Q: You were getting back to your roots in working on economic development issues.

NIYIBIZI: That's correct. It was the ministry of Commerce, cooperative and industries. Then from there I went to the ministry of Energy and Natural Resources.

Q: OK. I'd be curious – were you minister of Commerce when USAID's strategy began to change and to deal more with economic development issues?

NIYIBIZI: Yes.

Q: Did you have discussions with USAID about what AID could or should not be doing on the economic development front? What would be the best investment of AID resources?

NIYIBIZI: For some years after I left USAID, I was always in contact with the mission. So nothing official, but we kept in contact and were discussing a lot of activities. I was not involved directly, but I think different mission directors and other staff I think were looking at me as somebody who had been with the mission for a long time and they said had been dedicated to the mission, so...

Q: So you were an informal advisor.

NIYIBIZI: (Laughter) I was a friend!

Q: So the USAID directors and other staff would reach out to you to discuss your thoughts?

NIYIBIZI: Yeah. Until recently, I was always in contact with the mission.

Q: Did you in your government capacity ever have to negotiate with USAID on any programmatic issues?

NIYIBIZI: No, I don't think so.

Q: I was going to ask you what it was like to negotiate from the other side of the table!

NIYIBIZI: (Laughter)

Q: But you didn't have to do that! OK.

NIYIBIZI: I hope there was not going to be a conflict of interest, but I have always been convinced that anything good I did to improve USAID program was always good for Rwanda also.

Q: No, no. Did that ever come up – were there any requirements on you either from the USAID or government side about conflict of interest?

NIYIBIZI: No. Because in USAID, officially I did not have the capacity to commit resources. But at the same time, I had good experience with USAID and the government and with the situation in Rwanda. There was no problem with that, but I remember many people in the government kept telling me, “You are USAID, you are American.” They kept talking about that for many years. (Laughter) I had been there for many years and I was very visible when I was at USAID because I was sitting in all these meetings with ministers and the Central Bank. Everywhere. Suddenly they were seeing me on their side, but for many years people had seen me as a USAID person.

Q: Did any of your government colleagues ask your advice when they were having to negotiate program issues with USAID on how to deal with these crazy Americans?

NIYIBIZI: We discussed some issues. I remember the day I was sworn in, the president in his speech said, “We have been able to take somebody from USAID.” (Laughter) And the time for example when Clinton came, we were discussing different aspects from the U.S. government perspective, what can be done, this kind of thing. But fortunately, it was very constructive on both sides, because I understood very well USAID and the embassy, I had good contacts. And at the same time, I was with the government. I was very much interested in seeing USAID being successful all the time, and having successful programs in Rwanda and being able to keep a good relationship with the government. I was very interested in that. So, whenever I could help, I didn’t hesitate.

Q: Did you think the USAID program evolved in a way that was the best possible? Or would you like to have seen other things being done?

NIYIBIZI: I think there has been very good experience in my view. For example, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) – when we started in ’95, ’96 the indication that HIV prevalence in Rwanda was very high, probably in some places in town it was 15%, was the estimate. When I see the activities and the contribution brought by USAID programs like PEPFAR, I think there was a very positive impact in Rwanda. When I remember AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) for example, I was very involved in that program. At the time, I was no longer a minister but was the head of the Rwanda Investment Promotion Agency. The program opened doors to a number of opportunities for Rwandan entrepreneurs.

Q: That’s the African Growth and Opportunity Act?

NIYIBIZI: Correct, yes. I remember the official representing the U.S. government at the ministry of Commerce, I was the first contact and I had had a discussion with the officers

at the embassy. I could understand both sides and I think that for example was economically useful but politically also it was useful that the government can be eligible to the program. I remember for example – a small program like the Leyland Initiative. It was meant to promote internet connectivity to some African countries. I remember being in the State Department, talking about telecommunications and internet. There were 20 eligible countries and Rwanda was not among them. I think it was Jim Graham who was at the State Department and he told me, “There is this program, but Rwanda is not there.” So we started discussing it. Finally, I discussed it with Dick McCall and USAID sent somebody to Rwanda. They started helping in telecommunications and later on in internet, which was helping a lot.

I think there have been very successful programs. Even some small initiatives which did not involve a lot of money, but even if you look at the larger scale, when for example USAID went back to the agricultural sector – coffee. The promotion of coffee as I see it today, USAID played a key role in promoting coffee in Rwanda. Now, coffee has become one of the main foreign currency sources because the quality has improved; Rwandan coffee is known as being among the best. Starbucks promoted Rwandan coffee. Different farmers and private individuals have invested in coffee. People who are there today do not realize the contribution of USAID in the coffee sector 15 years ago. But there have been very successful initiatives in my view.

Q: That’s important to hear. Have you in more recent years had much involvement with the USAID program?

NIYIBIZI: No, I haven’t had much contact with USAID recently.

Q: I know that at one point they were working on designing a major agricultural reform program that ended up not being able to go forward for other reasons. I was wondering if you were aware of that at all.

NIYIBIZI: At one time yes, they were designing a program in the ag sector. I think some people in Washington contacted me to see if I was interested in being on their team. I can’t remember exactly what it was, it was five years ago. I think it was not successful, but I was not involved directly with the mission.

Q: I have no idea what the dialogue between the U.S. government and Rwanda is these days other than what I read in the newspapers, but I know that at times issues have arisen. I wonder if you have any thoughts on where some of that dialogue is between our two countries?

NIYIBIZI: I don’t know the situation over the last six or so years, but my feelings are that the relations are good.

Q: I don’t know either! For the record, you were minister of Commerce, then moved on to other ministries?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. I started as Minister of Commerce, cooperatives and industries. Then I moved to the ministry of Energy and Natural Resources.

Q: A year or two later?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. I was moving quite quickly, between 1997 and 2000. And then I was appointed to start the Rwanda Invest Promotion Agency.

Q: That was in 2000?

NIYIBIZI: In 2000. Then I put it in place and it was running, and I was appointed to the Privatization Program. I was there two or three years; I was involved in the main privatization transactions affecting the private sector. Then I decided to leave and went briefly to USAID in 2005.

Q: Oh, I didn't realize you'd returned to USAID.

NIYIBIZI: It was there very briefly, a year or so.

Q: What was your position?

NIYIBIZI: The official position was senior advisor to the mission. Then I went to the private sector. I was managing a private commercial bank until 2010.

Q: Let me go back to this year, 2005.

NIYIBIZI: At USAID?

Q: Right. You were senior advisor to the mission director?

NIYIBIZI: Yes.

Q: Who was the mission director?

NIYIBIZI: There was an interim, then Kevin Mullally joined the post as Mission Director when I was there.

Q: That's fine, you can add it later. It wasn't a totally satisfactory experience?

NIYIBIZI: At USAID? No, it was probably one of the best experiences.

Q: Going back in 2005?

NIYIBIZI: In 2005, not really.

Q: That's what I meant by not being satisfactory. Then you went to a commercial bank? At some point you must have at least semi-retired?

NIYIBIZI: Yes! (Laughter)

Q: I can appreciate that. Looking back – you started to say a moment ago your experience with USAID was a positive one. I wonder if you have any thoughts about working for USAID more generally, and any observations or recommendations you'd like to make on how USAID could more effectively use FSNs?

NIYIBIZI: I think FSNs – I don't know the situation today, but I think USAID can use FSNs more efficiently. It all depends again on the people who are there, on both sides. It depends on the mission management but also on FSNs. That is normal. When you have people who are open and want to involve FSNs, then FSNs play an important role. But the structure itself is the same. There are a lot of limitations on what FSNs can or cannot do, in terms of structure and regulations. There are some aspects which are not really by regulation. As I was saying one day, when I was the FSN representative I asked why we cannot come to the office on weekends without being escorted by an American. That's because I was working all the time. They said, "We don't know." We went to see the ambassador and raised the question "Why can't we have access to the mission?" Finally, we were allowed to come to the office on Saturdays, staying late, without being escorted by an American. I was saying the other day, when I was in hiding I kept the security key until I came back. Those kinds of things – why do FSNs have to be escorted, just small examples. If you are a professional, you can stay late, you can come early, you can come on holidays depending on the workload you have, which will help you to accomplish more as a professional. I think at one point, USAID – I hope it has happened now – looking at FSNs as people who are professionals, can be honest and take responsibilities.

Q: Do you have any thoughts on the supervision issues where I think again regulations said that FSNs cannot supervise American direct-hire staff? Do you have thoughts on that issue?

NIYIBIZI: Yes. I think, I can understand where the U.S. government is coming from, but at the same time when you look at it in a professional way, you can have a very senior person who has more experience and management skills than an American direct hire. They may have been at the same university or have better qualifications and even have better management skills than a direct hire, and I don't see why an FSN cannot take this responsibility and supervise Americans. I don't see why not. Of course, it is also related to the issue of committing resources on behalf of the U.S. government. Again, I can understand having somebody for 10 or 15 years, you can look at his capacity, his attitude, whether he's an honest person, and let him take the responsibility. I think he can in international organizations, World Bank, IMF (International Monetary Fund), etc... where you have very unique culture and mixed people and are dealing with very important resources. I don't see why that cannot happen with USAID. With these limitations, USAID will hire FSNs, train them and then loose them to the benefit of other organizations.

At the same time, the FSNs have the advantage of knowing better the situation on the ground. Sometimes people think you may be influenced because you are local person, or the U.S. government will not have much authority over. But I feel that in terms of efficiency, that can happen. I don't see the authority or the responsibility or the respectability of an American meeting with the minister being affected because he's being supervised by a local person, I don't see that. But the structure being what it is, yet I think FSNs can play an important role and they actually when they are given the opportunity.

What happens often is USAID loses very good, qualified people very quickly because they are putting a ceiling on FSNs. When they go out, they can double or triple their salaries. I think they need to look at being more competitive and efficient in using FSNs in terms of responsibility and in terms of incentives that they may have, what they can bring to the table to develop the mission program.

Q: Very good. You mentioned the IMF and World Bank, which operate differently because they have international staff. I'm wondering, did you see any bilateral donors that might have done a better job of utilizing the talents of FSNs and empowering them more than USAID did? Or not? I'm just curious whether you've seen any better examples?

NIYIBIZI: Not directly, and not from what I saw in those years. There may have been several reasons for that. But also the bilateral tended to have small missions, and are not implementing as big a program as USAID did. It will be quite different. But also if I look at the situation now specifically in Rwanda, I think people have been accumulating more experience and better training. My impression is that it will be difficult for the mission to attract good people for a long period of time. Of course, I'm recognizing that people can sometimes be corrupt, but anybody can be corrupt. It depends on the structure and measures you put in place and how you train and look at the capacity and the personality of the individuals that you hire.

Q: Going back, you mentioned it depends on the people and how some Americans are more open and better at empowering and using the talents of FSNs than others. Did you ever see USAID make any effort through training programs or otherwise trying to improve working relationships among the diverse staff of FSNs and Americans? Were there ever any efforts at post to do that?

NIYIBIZI: I have seen that happening and improving over the years. I have seen FSNs getting more and more training. Very specific training on regulations, like people in the contracting office for example, or the admin office. I have seen that happening over the years. It was good in my view. I remember when I went back in 2005, I could see FSNs ___ coming to be also contracting officer in Rwanda, which meant it was happening. I also saw FSNs in Rwanda going to work in Iraq or some places. Not many, but it happened.

Q: That is happening more, to give more professional opportunities to FSNs.

NIYIBIZI: That was very good.

Q: Are there any final thoughts you have, that you would like to make about your years working with USAID directly and observing it from afar?

NIYIBIZI: As I said, my experience with USAID has been very good. It took me in different positions and gave me the experience to look at different aspects of the mission but also different activities and programs. USAID contributed to my professional development.

Sometimes you make judgment based on information you have and that you are sharing with other people, so I cannot blame USAID or the mission in general for what happened in Rwanda. I think especially when you go to the '80s and '90s, I guess USAID and the U.S. government was making judgments based on the information that was available and also based on political considerations. I can understand.

But again, having been in Rwanda through the difficult period, when I think back, I still wonder how can we avoid all these crises which are happening everywhere in the world and which are taking human lives and huge resources: what could have been done better? It's not blaming, but learning lessons from what we have seen, not only in Rwanda but in other places. Can we use these lessons that we have learned over time to improve what we are doing today or what we will be doing in the future?

I think we should go back – people close to the situation leave and we forget completely, and other people come 15 years later and without considering all those lessons, which in fact can help improve the future of the people and the future of the program.

Q: Very eloquently said.

NIYIBIZI: Thank you. Perhaps I can say a bit more to sum up and reflect on the lessons we have or we may have learned and highlight the USAID/US contributions in the 1990s. I have touched on some of those aspects earlier, but the 1990s decade will remain the most important period of the Rwandan history in my mind, so I would like to add a bit more.

First, how did we get there?

This question takes us back to the mid-1980s and the clear indicators of a deteriorating political situation:

1. Policies related to the treatment of ethnic groups regarding employment, access to school and education, and the citizen participation in political activities were reinforced. This policy of so called “quotas” (and we know that the statistics were manipulated) tended to monopolize all opportunities to

one ethnic group. Secondly, it didn't stimulate talents to emerge because one side will feel that they have access whatever the case is, and on the other side, the "quotas" eliminate those who have the potential. Beside the ethnic group, one region feels endowed to political and economic opportunities, which aggravates the already fragile situation and all Rwandans were required to be members of the political party in power.

2. During the same decade, Rwandan refugees living in Uganda for more than 2 decades were expelled by the Ugandan authorities and denied access to Rwanda on the ground that the country was too small. It is "a full glass" said the Rwandan authorities at the time.
3. Murders: several high profile people and senior military officers were murdered in daylight. There were no trials, no arrests.
4. All official documents included the identification of each citizen by his/her ethnicity.
5. Limited movement of people: passports were tightly controlled and even when delivered, interrogation by the police would follow each trip.

In retrospect, I think this large number of things showing political deterioration should have triggered an alert to every development partner. They should have seen that the situation would not be sustainable in the long run. Also, recalling the ethnic violence in the 1960s and 70s, there was ground to think that a similar situation could repeat itself.

But, in the discussion at the time, development partners were optimistic that the situation would improve, that there was good will, until the call from French President in La Baule in 1988, to which the President of Rwanda responded by initiating some dialogue, and amending the Constitution in 1991, to allow the formation of political parties.

Having said that, I would also like to recall the USAID/US Government contribution during the 1990s crisis that helped us move toward normalcy.

1. Assistance to displaced people in 1990-91

The attack by RPF in October 1990 caused a large movement of the population fleeing the war zone in the North. Thousands of people, children, adults, and elders were gathered in several camps around Kigali without any government preparedness to deal with the crisis. No water, no sanitation system, let alone the shelters for this huge number of people. I think without USAID's rapid response, the situation could have been catastrophic. It is the first time, maybe the only time, I have seen so many flights landing in Kigali daily, bringing in humanitarian

assistance. Almost every other activity in the Mission was put on hold to deal with the handling and delivery of the assistance.

2. Contribution to and participation in the Arusha peace negotiation.

Although the US Government was not a big donor, and Rwanda was not necessary part of the US zone of strategic interest, the US actively participated in the peace negotiation. On the ground, I recall Joyce Leader/DCM and Laura Lane following closely the situation and travelling to Arusha to bring the US global leadership to find a workable solution and to put an end to the hostilities. We now know, from various interviews and publication, that Washington was very active in this process and encouraging dialogue between different parties. I should stress here that the US position during this period was not easy since she was perceived as pro RPF and pro English speaking people. Joyce Leader was at least once mentioned on the infamous Radio Television des Milles Collines, as “tutsi or representative of RPF” something on those lines, but it did not stop her from remaining active and trying her best.

I have always been convinced that the US could have done more at low cost. It remains in my mind when listening on the radio in May 1994, the position of the US government not to officially talk about genocide in Rwanda, because this would have compelled the US government to intervene as per the 1948 Convention to fight genocides wherever they occur. President Clinton came back to that during his visit in Kigali in February 1998. The memory of the situation in Somalia was still fresh. That is the past, but there are lessons to be learned, including the decision to close the Mission in early April 1994.

3. Actions post genocide

My frequent discussions with Ambassador David Rawson convinced me that he was committed to do the most possible to help the country recover. At the same time, we did not always agree on the interpretation of the situation based on what he knew from Burundi where he had lived in the early years.

Several things stand out for me post-genocide.

First was the rapid recognition of the Government and opening of the Embassy. As I mentioned before, the US Embassy officially reopened less than a month after the end of the genocide. (RPF took Kigali on the 4th of July defeating the previous government, a new government was sworn in on the 19th of July and the US Embassy was reopened on or about July 27 therefore recognizing the new government). The presence of a fully fledged US diplomatic mission in July meant a lot when one recalls that no other single country was in this position, let alone several western countries who were less inclined to support the country and sometime hostile to the new government.

This leadership should be recognized as a very positive gesture contributing to Rwanda's emergence from a genocide crisis. The presence of a diplomatic mission facilitated dialogue and interactions between the two countries and culminated in the visit of President Clinton in 1998, which was a few symbolic hours but contributed to reinforce diplomacy. We keep in mind that the visit came after or resulted in those of high level government officials from the Secretary of State, the head of the National Security Council Tony Lake, Assistant Secretary of State Susan Rice, USAID Administrator Brian Atwood and yourself and many others. This diplomatic support had certainly an impact on other countries who slowly made the decision to come back to Rwanda and to work with the new government.

Second was the emergency support. The USG mobilized important and quick resources to assist Rwanda after July 1994. I would just mention a few things which had significant impact; there may be other that I don't remember or was not aware of.

The military: they worked on the restoration of various systems, including water. I cannot remember how many Marines were stationed in Kigali, but they were working day and nights. They also worked with and trained the Rwandan military on de-mining. This saved a lot of lives and later contributed to restarting several economic activities like tea production. It made it also safer to the refugees returning in 1996-97 and their reinstallation in their home villages. Mines were everywhere and it took several years to complete the de-mining process, which would have been difficult without the USG contribution. This was in addition to resources channeled through NGOs who were operating in different areas throughout the country.

Third was the way in which the U.S. transitioned towards a normal mission with a development program, especially in supporting the new Government who was operating with nothing: no resources, infrastructure destroyed and limited human resources. It was the first time that direct support was given to the Government without too many waivers and regulations. When it was approved to give more than 70 vehicles directly to the government without restriction, instead of giving them to NGOs, I had long discussion with Ambassador Rawson trying to convince him that "buying America" would not help Rwanda, we would only have those vehicles without spare parts and they will last only a few months. We finally reached a point of 7 or 8 Jeep Cherokees and the rest were Toyotas. This may seem like a small issue today, but it was very important at the time.

USAID, with the approval of the Government of Rwanda, made the rehabilitation of the justice system a priority. Not making people accountable for what they did during the genocide would make the reconciliation difficult and not lay the foundation for cohesion in the community and for a durable peace. It still holds.

The first equipment to the Ministry of Justice, the prosecutors' offices, the training all came from USAID contribution in the early days after the genocide.

Fourth, was recognizing the role of women in the reconstruction of torn society. One of the first initiatives by USAID was the support to women initiatives. I believe reconstruction and rehabilitation without taking into account the family's lives and the contribution of women (who are by essence mothers and moderators and immediate support to future generations) will be fragile. USAID's early support in that direction probably raised the interest and the contribution of other donors.

Fifth was the U.S. contribution and support in the international arena. The USG reached out in various arenas and maintained dialogue with other donors, I mentioned earlier the Geneva meeting, as an example, and played a leadership role in convincing other partners that Rwanda deserves support to deal with the gravity of the situation.

To conclude, I think there is a lot that could have been done, but we should recognize the contribution of the United States in the aftermath of the genocide and the rebuilding of the country.

I would recognize also many people, from Washington and in the Mission, who were extremely dedicated, often beyond their normal mission and job description, to assist in the recovery process.

On a personal note, I would like to mention two or three things that I am especially thankful for. First are the efforts of many to remember our Rwandan colleagues who were killed during the genocide. The first commemoration service organized by a foreign mission for her employees took place at St Michael Church with the support of Ambassador Rawson who was present himself at the ceremony. Also, when the USAID office was reopened, we requested that a plaque, with the names of those killed, be prepared and put at the entrance/reception. It was approved and the Mission facilitated the whole process. Also, when I was back in the Mission in 2005, I attended a meeting at the then Hotel des Diplomates where the architects were presenting the drawings and the layout of the new Embassy building. I asked if it was possible to reserve a place for a commemoration plaque for the Rwandan employees killed during the genocide. It captured their attention and it is there at the new embassy compound.

Second is the support to orphans whose parents were killed while working for the Mission. The Mission approved and facilitated the initiative, and the Orphan Fund was created and many orphans were able to continue their studies. I am extremely thankful to those who brought personal contributions to support the orphans and allow their insertion in a "normal life". In the end, any initiative is meant to improve the human lives and allow everyone "to pursue his life and happiness" and not to deny "our common God given humanity"

Thank your Carol for your time and the opportunity to share a bit of my memories.

Q: That was all so very nicely said. Thank you, Bonaventure for sharing your very important story — and lessons for the future.

End of interview