

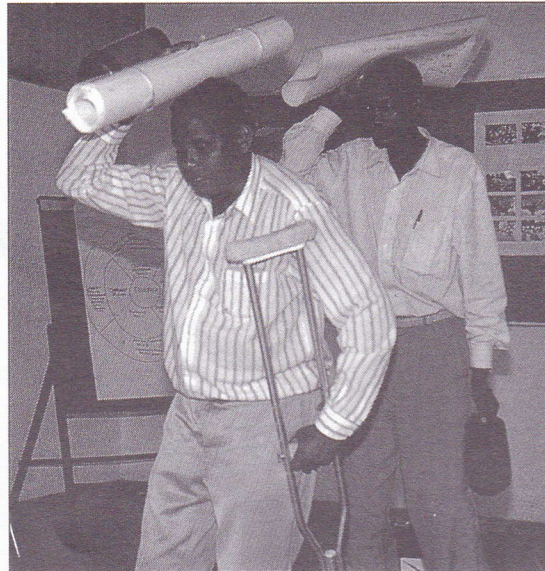
take part. They are doing this because their overriding concern is to get back to a peaceful society in which the genocide and conflict of 1994 never happen again. The older people feel very strongly that they need to work with children and pass on the message of reconciliation, so that the children in their community don't grow up with the sense of ethnic divide which led to the genocide.

Because of this, the most important activities to the older people are still those which come from their traditional *Banyarwanda* culture - singing, dancing and poetry (especially poems about cows, which are very important to all people in Rwanda, regardless of their ethnic group). They do these activities with the children so the children can learn that all the people in Rwanda come from the same tradition. The recalling of Rwandese cultural values and assisting with the upbringing of young people is one of the priorities of ARPA not just in Kanzenze, but as a national organisation. One branch, in Gisenyi, is currently supporting a primary and a secondary school.

These activities are important to ARPA not just because older people can play a role in peace, but because traditional *Banyarwanda* culture emphasises the positive roles that older people have in society. In Rwanda, older people were traditionally considered as sources of knowledge and wisdom. They were respected by other members of society and nearly always consulted in decisions involving communities as a whole. Even before the genocide, older people were becoming marginalised in Rwanda. The influences of colonial rule and of western culture helped to break down the established family structure in Rwanda and the aspect of younger people caring for their elders has been weakened. Older people began to be seen in terms of their material possessions (money, cows, agricultural products and so on). ARPA feels that if older people can re-awaken respect for traditional structures, younger people will once more come to value them as counsellors, advisors and arbitrators.

ARPA and development work

As well as working with children, ARPA is actively participating in development work across Rwanda, where many structures need to be rebuilt following the conflict. In particular,



John Lovrie/HAI

Across Rwanda, ARPA is working with returnees on community development projects. In this training session two people working on the project are doing a role play about refugees returning home and some of the problems they have encountered.

ARPA has run training activities which they are hoping will create opportunities for starting up income generating projects such as mini cooperatives and building societies. Members of ARPA - all older people - are drawing on their knowledge and helping with the training, which is targeting people who are particularly vulnerable, such as widows, orphans and people with disabilities. The idea of the training is to show that there are ways for Rwandese society to move forward, even though circumstances at the moment are very difficult.

The new branch of ARPA in Kanzenze has shown how older people, even in these very difficult circumstances, are able to contribute to each others' lives and to the life of their community. From a simple informal self-help group, they have become part of a national organisation. They have created opportunities for themselves and for others to enjoy all kinds of activities. At the moment the group is organising a football tournament for local children, which will be a social event for the older people. The older people's enthusiasm and physical efforts are an inspiration to each other and to the rest of the community who come to watch and take part in their activities.