

Alumni Panel Probes Nonprofit Obstacles

Winter 2009-10

President Lee C. Bollinger moderated a panel titled From the Me Generation to the We Generation: The Future of Service on November 6 as part of the Fifth Annual Columbia Alumni Association's Worldwide Alumni Leaders Assembly.

The panel, which took place before an audience of 200 alumni, probed the challenges to successful nonprofit programming, among other issues. Participants included New Jersey Senator Frank R. Lautenberg '49BUS; New York City Chief Service Officer Diahann Billings-Burford '02LAW; and Rockefeller Foundation President Judith S. Rodin '71GSAS, and Deogratias '01GS, the founder and director of Village Health Works, a nonprofit health-care clinic in his native Burundi.

Deogratias, who narrowly escaped the genocide in Burundi in 1994, came to the United States soon thereafter with a fake visa and wound up homeless on the streets of Harlem. He worked odd jobs, learned English, and in 1997 enrolled in the College of General Studies, majoring in philosophy. Deogratias, who is the subject of the Tracy Kidder book *Strength in What Remains*, attended the Harvard School of Public Health and subsequently returned to his rural village of Kigutu, where he launched Village Health Works in 2005.

Despite working in one of the world's poorest nations, Deogratias said that his core challenges are similar to those of nonprofit executives everywhere. "NGOs and other programs have to work *with* the community, not [simply] within the community," said Deogratias, who goes by his first name because of security concerns in his homeland. "You have to figure out: Why are you doing this? Is this service for ourselves or for the community? And if so, are we getting the community involved?"



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