

Rapid assessment of the effects of COVID-19 on vulnerability and worst forms of child labour in Rwanda: Qualitative case study.

*Authors: Felix Muramutsa (felixmuramutsa@gmail.com) and Sylvestre Musengimana (musengimanasy@gmail.com)
ANPPCAN Rwanda, June 2022*

As part of its mandate and evidence-based advocacy strategy, and following the global pandemic of COVID - 19, ANPPCAN-Rwanda has conducted a rapid assessment to gauge the effects of COVID-19 on vulnerability and worst forms of child labour in Rwanda in early June 2022. A mixed research method was used, including a quick literature review of reports and policies and primary data collection through in-person and phone interviews with young boys and girls, parents, government officials and development organisations. This brief report discussed the following points:

- General situation in Rwanda,
- Existing initiatives to protect children and decrease their vulnerability,
- Identified worst form of child labour,
- Effects of Covid-19 and mitigation measures
- Quick wins actions and priorities for ANPPCAN

General situation in Rwanda

Rwanda has made excellent progress in ensuring children's rights with a number of laws and policies, the establishment of a National Commission for the Child (that will become NCDA in 2020), and in June 2012, passing a new law *Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child*, which is meant to be, in effect, a "Bill of Rights" for Rwandan children¹. However, there is still a long way to go given the emerging issues and persisting complexity of the worst form of child labour.

The 2008 Rwanda National Child Labour Survey (2008-RNCLS) conducted by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda showed that children aged 5-17 years engaged in economic activities were estimated at 324,659 representing 11.2% of children in that age group. Almost half of them (5.3%) work full time while the remaining (5.9%) combine going to school with work. The 2016 Labour Force Survey conducted by NISR shows that 312,200 children 5 to 17 years old engaged in employment work during the reference period, representing 8.4% of the total number of children in that age category. The major part of the working children were engaged in agricultural activities (72%), combining work with school (82.5 %) and working 20 hours or less per week (58 %². The reports confirm that child labour is not yet totally eliminated due to multiple reasons, including parental poverty and illiteracy, social and economic circumstances, and lack of community awareness. Since 2012, little is known about the existing forms of child labour, its causes and the impact of child labour on their rights.

Existing initiatives to protect children and decrease their vulnerability

The government of Rwanda has collaborated with partners to initiate a number of community-based initiatives and programs to protect children from the worst form of child labour. At the central level, there is a

¹ Institute of Policy Analysis and Research, IPAR (2012). Legal and Policy framework for Children's Rights in Rwanda

² NCHR (2020). Analysis of child labor and its impact on child rights in Rwanda

National Child Development Agency (NCDA), a newly established Government institution. Established by the Presidential Order N° 083/01 of 28/08/2020, NCDA is a merger of the former National Commission for Children (NCC) and the National Early Childhood Development Program (NECDP). The mission of NCDA is to foster a child's development and promote and protect their rights³.

Initiative	Brief narrative
Ijisho ry'umuturanyi (neighbour's eye)	Citizens are encouraged to report to local leaders any case of child abuse /child labour
Parents' Evening (umugoroba w'ababyeyi)-	This is an evening time opportunity for parents, especially women, of the same village to sit together and share their experiences on different topics such as children's education, family management and conflict resolutions.
Child Protection Committees	Child protection committees are established at the village and national levels. At each level, these committees have specific tasks, including sensitising the population on child rights and child protection, sensitising parents on their responsibilities in the education of their children, advocating and reporting to other organs on any case that needs further intervention, visiting homes to avert family conflicts before they happen
Nkundabana	Rwanda's Nkundabana approach ⁴ provides a community-based solution to the overwhelming problem of child-headed households and households where adults cannot provide adequate care for children. Nkundabana enlists community-based volunteers who serve as adult mentors and role models for children in child-headed homes. The Nkundabana Model mobilises adult volunteers from the community—to provide guidance and care for children living alone.
<i>Malayika Murinzi</i>	The Malayika Murinzi strategy ⁵ consists of identifying and rewarding adults who have shown remarkable compassion and selflessness by adopting and caring for vulnerable children and protecting them. The Malayika Murinzi Initiative was officially launched in 2007 by the First Lady's Campaign, "Treat Every Child as Your Own," that had started in 200
Community Policing	Community policing ⁶ is a philosophy that promotes and supports organisational strategies to address the causes and fear of crime and social disorder through problem-solving tactics and police-community partnerships. This policing concept conforms to the ideal of a "multiagency approach" in which the police, public, elected officials at all levels, government, and other agencies work in partnership to address crime and community safety.

Identified worst form of child labour

As reported by interviewed respondents, the worst forms of child labour are observed in various categories as follows:

- Domestic work for children under 18 years old
- Children enrolled in mining and tea plantation
- Sexual exploitation
- Children trafficking

³ <https://www.ncda.gov.rw/about-ndca>

⁴ CARE International. A Model for Community-Based Care for Orphans and Vulnerable Children: Nkundabana. Kigali, Rwanda.

⁵ Kigali Konnect (2012). Best Performing Girls and Malayika Murinzi Awarded. Available at: www.kigalikonnect.com/article/best-performing-girls-and-malika-murinzi-awarded.html

⁶ Taken verbatim from: Rwandan National Police. Community Policing. Kigali, Rwanda. Available at <http://www.police.gov.rw/about-rnp/organisational-structure/commissioner-general-services/directorate-community-policing>

Effects of Covid-19 and mitigation measures

In early March 2020, Rwanda took preventive measures to curb down the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon the confirmation of its first case on 14th March 2020, measures were taken gradually to contain its spread. On 21st March 2020, a nationwide lockdown was imposed and accompanied by other measures, including the closure of the airspace and land borders, the ban of non-essential outdoor movements, the ban of inter-District movements, the imposition of curfew hours and closing or suspension of non-essential business activities, the closing of schools and temporary suspension of court hearings to contain the spread of the pandemic. Those measures were gradually taken based on the daily national health assessment reports (NCHR REPORT, 2020).

The family economy has been highly affected by COVID-19. Consequently, children have been victims of the loss of jobs or other income by parents, caregivers or guardians. Though there is no accurate data on the magnitude of the worst form of child labour as a result of COVID-19, the interviewed respondents confirmed that some children were involved in survival sex, and others were used as beggars to find food. In contrast, others were used in domestic work and mining as a labour force. The issue of child trafficking seems to be a new concept and complex phenomenon in society. A few interviewees acknowledged that young girls are maliciously attracted to relatives or friends in urban areas, where they have ended up as sex workers. Others have heard about cross-border trafficking on radio and in newspapers happening to some girls.

"Sexual exploitation and child trafficking is a problem to the community. It is happening in a very sophisticated way since the perpetrators don't clearly explain why they are taking you abroad. If the victims could know the purpose before, they may not go. Therefore, there is a need for regular sensitisation and community awareness among parents and other stakeholders." A female respondent suggested.

As reported in the International Journal of Research in Sociology and Anthropology (IJRSA), Volume 3, Issue 1, 2017, page 19, between 800,000 and 4,000,000 people, mostly women and children, are trafficked across international borders annually (Ngwee & Elechi, 2012). Europe receives about 400,000 illegal immigrants annually from Africa, the Middle East and Asia, while 850,000 immigrants enter the United States of America. Middle East countries affected by civil war, such as Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Afghanistan, are source countries for refugees flocking to Europe fleeing war for a better life in Europe (Africa centre for strategic studies, 2015). Over 1,000 migrants and refugees are thought to have died while crossing the Mediterranean sea (African centre for strategic studies, 2017). Proceeds from human trafficking are pretty enormous. Rahman (2011) estimated that an annual \$31.6 billion is obtained from sexual exploitation and forced labour. About 12.3 million people worldwide are in slavery, serving bonded labour, child labour and sexual servitude (ILO, 2005)⁷. Globally, women and girls are primarily exploited in most unskilled labour. About 60% of the youth in poor countries are unemployed, and Africa has the highest number of unemployed cases worldwide. Nearly 20 million African men and women are migrant workers (ILO, 2005). It was anticipated that by 2015, one in ten Africans would migrate to work outside their original country (ILO, 2005).

Human trafficking, the modern-day form of slavery, affects many people's lives globally⁸. A 2017 International Labour Organization (ILO) report estimated that 24.9 million men, women, and children were victims of human trafficking around the globe (Human trafficking by the numbers, 2017). Ending human trafficking remains a priority of the Rwandan government, as articulated clearly by H.E. President Paul Kagame in August 2014 during the swearing-in of ministers, members of parliament, and the inspector general of police:

⁷ Human Trafficking Incidence in Rwanda: Its challenges, Prevention and Control by Dr. Isaboke Peter Kennedy Nyataya, Gacinya John. International Journal of Research in Sociology and Anthropology (IJRSA), Volume 3, Issue 1, 2017, page 19

⁸ Never again (2019). Understanding Human trafficking in Rwanda: Causes, effects and impact.

"Can we afford to keep quiet in the face of human trafficking? How is it possible that our children – particularly girls – have become a commodity, even though we are aware of the problem? People are not commercial goods. Ending trafficking of girls goes beyond law enforcement authorities; it is the responsibility of every citizen" (Kagame, 2014).

With regards to the worst forms of child labour, respondents reported key causes including but not limited to:

- Family poverty, including increased impoverishment due to Covid-19 and the current global crisis, leads to increased child labour phenomenon;
- Lack of knowledge and information about internal and cross-border trafficking
- Low community awareness of the adverse effects and impact of child labour on children, families and country;
- Child labour and exploitation are not very interesting topics to donors;
- Family conflicts
- Uncontrolled social media platforms and modern technology
- Insufficient communication and coordination mechanisms of key players
- Low quality of education
- Families question the return on education compared to current expensive investments
- Lack of income-generating activities

As mitigation strategies, respondents have confirmed various interventions coupled with findings from the literature review as follows:

- Radio and T.V. Talk
- Community sensitisation about the rights of children and reporting mechanisms
- Organised meetings with local leaders and stakeholders to evaluate issues faced by children at community levels for joint solutions (school reintegration, school feeding programs)
- Promoting e-learning
- According to the Rwanda NCHR report⁹ (2020), it was observed that students from remote rural areas and those from low-income families faced a challenge in terms of accessibility to e-learning services. It was also noted that the e-learning programs considered the needs of students with disabilities more minor. To reduce congestion in schools and, more importantly, to minimise the spread of COVID-19, the NCHR was informed about the construction of 22,500 classrooms all over the country and the recruitment of teachers.
- The government of Rwanda has adopted law n° 51/2018 of 13/08/2018 relating to the prevention, suppression and punishment of trafficking in persons and exploitation of others

Quick wins and priority actions for ANPPCAN

Referring to the identified worst forms of child labour and drawing on the combined expertise and experience of ANPPCAN members and networks at the national and regional levels, the following actions and areas of intervention are prioritised:

- a. Generation of the evidence-based situation for informed advocacy. This implies quantitative and qualitative research efforts so as to engage with policymakers, human rights-focused organisations and the entire community:
 - Situation analysis on violence against victims of survival sex and child prostitution,
 - Situation analysis of child trafficking (internal & cross border)
 - Assessment of sexual violence against children as the impact of COVID-19;

⁹ NCHR (2020), Assessment of the Impact of Anti covid-19 pandemic measures on human rights in Rwanda: From March to October 2020.

- b. Systematic planning and facilitation of preventive activities through sensitisations and awareness campaigns in close collaboration with government institutions, media houses, schools and other key players:
 - Awareness and training on reporting violence and neglect of child rights within domestic labour using SMS based on the broadband network;
 - Preventing and protecting the worst forms of child labour in Rwanda.
- c. Project interventions mainly in most affected geographical areas:
 - Improving livelihoods of teen mothers;
 - Addressing teenage pregnancies and Sexual Gender-Based Violence in Rwanda;
 - Community Awareness Campaign to fight against domestic child labour and the worst forms of child labour in Kigali City;
- d. Thematic conferences and workshops based on the identified and emerging issues affecting the rights of children at the national, regional and global levels
- e. Partnerships, Knowledge generation, management and experience sharing. It is so critical to building strong and strategic partnerships with other key players for more synergy and information sharing. This approach will lead to a more significant impact on our interventions and promote the well-being of children's dignity across the region.

References

- ANPPCAN Rwanda (2014). *Identification and review of the roles and functions of national child protection institutions and definition of the human resource needs in Rwanda*
- Dr. Isaboke P. K, Gacinya J. (2017). *Human Trafficking Incidence in Rwanda: Its challenges, Prevention and Control. International Journal of Research in Sociology and Anthropology (IJRSA), Volume 3, Issue 1, 2017, page 19*
- GoR(2028). *Law n° 51/2018 of 13/08/2018 relating to the prevention, suppression and punishment of trafficking in persons and exploitation of others*
- Institute of Policy Analysis and Research, IPAR (2012). *Legal and Policy Framework for Children's Rights in Rwanda*
- NCHR (2020). *Analysis of child labour and its impact on child rights in Rwanda*
- NCHR (2020). *Assessment of the Impact of Anti-Covid-19 pandemic measures on human rights in Rwanda: From March to October 2020.*
- Never again (2019). *Understanding human trafficking in Rwanda: Causes, effects and impact.*