

CABINET BRIEF: STRATEGY FOR NATIONAL CHILD CARE REFORM

Strategic long term goals:

- 1) Transform Rwanda's current child care and protection system into a family-based, family strengthening system whose resources (both human and financial) are primarily targeted at supporting vulnerable families to remain together.
- 2) Promote positive Rwandan social values that encourage all Rwandans and their communities to take responsibility for vulnerable children.

1. Introduction

FAMILY BASED CARE FOR CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONS

This strategy is in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (article 27); the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 20 and 21) as ratified by the Government of Rwanda; the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child (article 25); and the Integrated Child Rights Policy and the recommendations of the 7th National Children Summit in which children expressed their concern that all children living in institutions should be reintegrated in their families and/or other alternative family based care.

The Rwanda National Strategy for Child Care Reform takes a long-term perspective. The strategy recognizes that transformation of orphanages is an entry point to building sustainable child care and protection systems. This document represents the national reform strategy and focuses on Alternative Family Based Care for Children Living in Institutions (orphanages). The document details how children living in institutions will regain their right to live in a loving, safe and supportive family environment. The document focuses on the strategic priorities of the first stage of the reform, which will put the country on the pathway to sustainably achieve the long term goals. The first phase is estimated to take 24 months.¹ The focus of the first phase will be the **3153** children and young adults living in the **34 known orphanages**, and their families. Existing resources will be oriented to implement phase one. However, short-term additional 'kick-off' resources will be critical to ensure sustainability.

The preparation and planning of the second phase of the reform will be undertaken towards the end of the first phase, and will focus on: a) further strengthening child focused social protection programs; b) expansion of community based centers that support vulnerable children to stay within their families; c) strengthen social work at sector levels; d) strengthen foster care; e) and the further development of an effective referral system for children at risk of (or who have experienced) abuse, exploitation and neglect.

During the next 24 Months there are Five Overarching Aims:

- 1) Safely reunify as many children from existing orphanages into their families or extended families wherever possible, appropriate and in the child's best interest. It will be critical to ensure linkages to the social protection system and other existing national and district support.
- 2) Use a mix of newly recruited professional social workers and psychologists (to be recruited in the 19 districts where orphanages exist).
- 3) Promote and build sustainable family-based alternative care systems for children who cannot be reunified with their families or extended families (Foster care).

¹During the first phase, after 12 months, a mid-term review will be conducted.

- 4) Address the root causes of institutionalization and family separation, which includes loss of one or both parents, poverty, lack of adequate parenting or coping skills and abandonment with a focus on linkages with existing social protection mechanisms.
- 5) Ensure opportunities for the effective transformation of existing orphanages into child centered community based services.

Benefits and advantages of the strategy:

Contrary to the institutions, alternative family based care:

- Provides proper development opportunities to the child.
- Offers children the opportunity to live in loving family love and helps to guarantee children’s intellectual and psychosocial development.
- Prepares young people to live independent life.
- Promotes and sustains self-esteem and a sense of identity which decreases risks of abuse, exploitation, and trafficking.
- Develops positive social behavior.
- It is cost effective both for government budgets, and for long term social cohesion and development.

2. Current Situation in Rwanda

Orphanages²

- The total number of residents is 3153: Boys (55%); Girls (45%);
- The current population in institutions is from 0 to 36 years old;
- Young adults above 18 are 850 and represent 28% of the total population. Some of these young people have spent their entire life in orphanage care.
- 800 children in orphanages i.e (25%) have lost both parents while 2195 are children who have at least one parent and relatives i.e more than 70%.
- Children who have lost their mother (16%), have been abandoned (13%), or are coming from extremely poor families (11%).
- At least 1116 children are in contact with their parents and are regularly visited by relatives
- A smaller and very important group is those children whose primary caretaker is in prison (3%) or whose primary caretaker has mental health problems (6%).
- Abuse and neglect as a reason for admission into the orphanages are only 1% of the cases.

The study also revealed additional important information:

- 19 Districts are known to have orphanages.
- The top 10 districts with more children in orphanages are: Rubavu 494, Gasabo 328, Rusizi 297, Gicumbi 282, Gatsibo 256, Kicukiro 236, Nyamagabe 213, Nyarugenge 197, Karongi 187 and Muhanga 152
- The majority of children are from the areas where the orphanages are located, which suggests that the orphanages are having a ‘pulling effect’ on children. Some children, however, are from other districts.

²In 2011, a national survey on the status and situation of children living in orphanages in Rwanda was conducted by MIGEPROF in partnership with Hope and Homes for Children.

- Most institutions are managed by faith-based organizations.
- Most of the institutions are funded by private donors from abroad and the amount of their funding is mostly unknown.
- The current number of staff in institutions is about 600.
- In addition to the orphanages there are 2642 children with disability attending special boarding schools; and 1159 children who are in contact with street children shelters.

Alternative Family Based Care

Foster care has proven to be an effective family-based alternative solution in Rwanda. With proper support, monitoring and follow-up, foster care can be a successful alternative for those children who cannot be reunified with their families.

A study in 2001 commissioned by the Government of Rwanda looked at extended family care and formal agency fostering.

- Approximately 1200 children had been fostered by agencies (referred to as “formal” or “agency” fostering).
- There were a much larger number of children who were spontaneously taken in by unrelated families (referred to as “spontaneous” or “informal” fostering).
- Fostering Guidelines were developed and divided into five sections: sensitization, evaluation, preparation of children and families, endorsement of the fostering agreement and follow-up. They were applicable only to agency fostering and not to spontaneous fostering.
- Despite the widespread perception in Rwanda that children in foster homes are abused and exploited, this was not borne out by the study.
- There was no evidence of widespread discrimination in favor of biological children.
- Ensuring adequate preparation of children and families, using a commitment contract/signing ceremony helps to ensure success of the foster care placement.

3. Next Steps and Proposed Timeline for Phase one of the Child Care Reform Strategy

(a) Planning and coordination mechanisms established [4 months]

- National survey on situation of children in all 34 orphanages [oct-2011-Dec 2011]
- Establish high-level steering committee with clear mandate, roles and responsibilities. Among other tasks, this group will need to decide on how government resources will be allocated to support reunification, the expansion of family support services, and the establishment of foster care[26 January 2012]
- Establish relationships with orphanage managers [9/03].
- Prepare transformation plans with the orphanage managers in close collaboration with districts, local communities and children.
- Conduct in-depth discussions with development partners to identify transition costs, and fill gaps in funding for first phase.
- Develop clear monitoring and evaluation plan to evaluate outcomes for children.

(b) Capacity Building / Human Resource Development of Professionals[4 months]

- Capacity building assessment carried out by an expert group to determine the approach to strengthen de-centralized social welfare and social work professionals.
- Development / refinement of training materials and a training plan by an expert group.
- Recruit one senior social worker in each district responsible for overall coordination.
- Recruit one social worker and one psychologist for each of the orphanages who will be responsible for carrying out the assessments of children and their families. These staff will be employed by the government and will report to the senior social worker at the district level. These staff will be employed only during phase one of the reform. These professionals will be part of the entire reunification and placement process.
- Partner with tertiary institutions with social work programs for practice placements of B.A. and M.A. students.
- Capacity building workshops for newly recruited staff, social welfare officers, orphanage management and relevant district and sector personnel.

(c) Moving children living in institutions into families[24months]

This is a critical part of the process and will require intensive work to ensure children are not placed in families where there is a high risk of abuse, exploitation or neglect.

- Awareness-raising at local level to ensure that the communities are fully aware of the process and are engaged and provided opportunities to assist.[March-April 2012]
- Using refined assessment instruments, and in partnership with orphanage managers, local authorities and additional social work and psychologist's support, carry out comprehensive assessments of every child. The 8 steps include:
 - Initial assessment for each individual child.
 - Family tracing to explore all options, including if necessary foster care.
 - Family assessment to assess needs and risks prior to placement.
 - Placement decision to determine the right family that matches the best interest of the child.
 - Intensive child and family preparation to address needs and risks identified during the assessment phase.
 - Care plan developed where appropriate and in partnership with the caregiver and community partners to ensure that future monitoring and support needs can be measured and adjusted as needed – this includes the older adolescents and adults who will need specialized support such as legal support, psycho-social support, shelter, vocational training and employment.
 - Placements of the child into family alternative starting by birth family, extended family, foster family and/or adoption.
 - Post placement support/follow-up for monitoring and supporting the placement to ensure child protection is guaranteed and sustained.
 - Use of innovation and technology including rapid SMS linked with the Umudugudu to support regular monitoring and reporting of children placed in families.

(d) Reforming the existing orphanages into relevant child centered community based services [24months]

- Create partnerships with orphanage managers, their donors, and community and district representatives to plan transformation.
- Government reallocates its own funds gradually from institutions to family based care services, including awareness raising, support to emergency foster care, and support to community-based prevention services.
- Government to provide clear legislation prohibiting the establishment of new orphanages.
- Plan efficient reallocation of donors' funds from orphanages to family based care and community based family support centers (Possibilities include: Early Childhood Development; Day Care; After-school Programs for Youth).
- Train and integrate new and the existing human resources to implement this strategy and be involved in the new family and community based services.

4. IMPLEMENTATION³

- The overall responsibility and accountability for the implementation of this strategy and the implementation plan rests with MIGEPROF/ the National Commission for Children.
- A primary governmental partnership between MIGEPROF/the National Commission for Children, MINALOC and District administrative offices will be critical for success.

The NCC will lead a steering committee of main partners including, but not limited to:

- a) Community Based Social workers, psychologists and psycho and legal counselors, members of GBV/ Child Protection Committees / children's Mentors will be mobilized to play an essential role in follow up of placements and in strengthening prevention of family separation.
- b) Institution managers, families, children, young people and communities will be encouraged and assisted to 'own' the strategy.
- c) National Police, Rwanda Defense Forces, Rwanda Correctional Service will play a key role in this strategy.
- d) Development partners and private sector will participate in the planning of programs and activities, in evaluation and contributing both technically and financially.
- e) Civil Society including Faith Based Organizations will help initiate and promote this strategy, and will be involved in monitoring the progress, especially for the identification of gaps and overlaps.

³This document represents a strategic vision and sets out the general approach to transforming the Rwandan child care system however, a more detailed action plan will be prepared around each of the steps laid out in the previous section.

5. BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Summary of budget implications

- For 2012-2013, the budget allocated to the National Commission for Children to support alternative family care is 900,000,000 RWF. The Rwandan national budget (2012-2013) associated with child care, social protection, poverty reduction and empowerment of women and families from MINALOC (1, 315, 207, 623 RWF not including VUP and FARG) and MIGEPROF (204, 949, 490 RWF) will contribute to the achievement of this strategy. The balance of 600, 000, and 000 RWF for additional ‘kick-off’ resources is to be mobilized from key stakeholders working in the child rights’ protection.
- During the next 12 months, as the family and children assessments take place and children are being reunified with families, the budget that once supported orphanages will be shifted to fulfill the specific needs of the children who have been moved into new placements.
- Some of these funds will continue to flow through the transformed orphanages that provide community based family support services. Some of the funds will be invested to improved social work capacity.
- The attached budget is an estimate to implement the strategy.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) requests the Cabinet to approve the proposed strategy and support its implementation.