



# SHIRIKI NEWS HIGHLIGHTS FROM ESARO



East and Southern Africa  
Regional Office Newsletter

## Country Focus: Rwanda

This issue of ShirikiNews looks into Save the Children's work in Rwanda, our programme approach and the COVID-19 response highlights. Enjoy the read!

### Context:

Although Rwanda has been heralded regionally and globally as having one of the best track records in their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has come at a high cost for children. The country has experienced some of the strictest lockdowns, adversely impacting children and families for almost a full year now. School closures, affected livelihoods, increased child protection incidents and pressures on health services have meant a tough time for children across the country. A key word for the Rwanda CO during the last few months has been ADAPTATION.

Save the Children has been working in Burundi since 2016 in the aftermath of political violence following elections. Our work to-date has primarily focused on strengthening national child protection systems through partner implementation. 2020 marked a peaceful transfer of power and many Burundians have begun to repatriate after having fled in 2015. Save the Children recently conducted an assessment to better understand the needs of returnees to shape future cross-border programming. At the end of 2020, Save the Children was selected by The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the child protection and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) partner for Congolese refugees living in five camps and urban places, which greatly expands our operational footprint and direct service offerings.

Despite the heavy restrictions, we keep showing up for children at a time when so many of our peers have shut down shop and gone home.

Below we see how the teams have kept working around the ever-changing environment to ensure that children in Rwanda continue to survive, learn, and be protected.



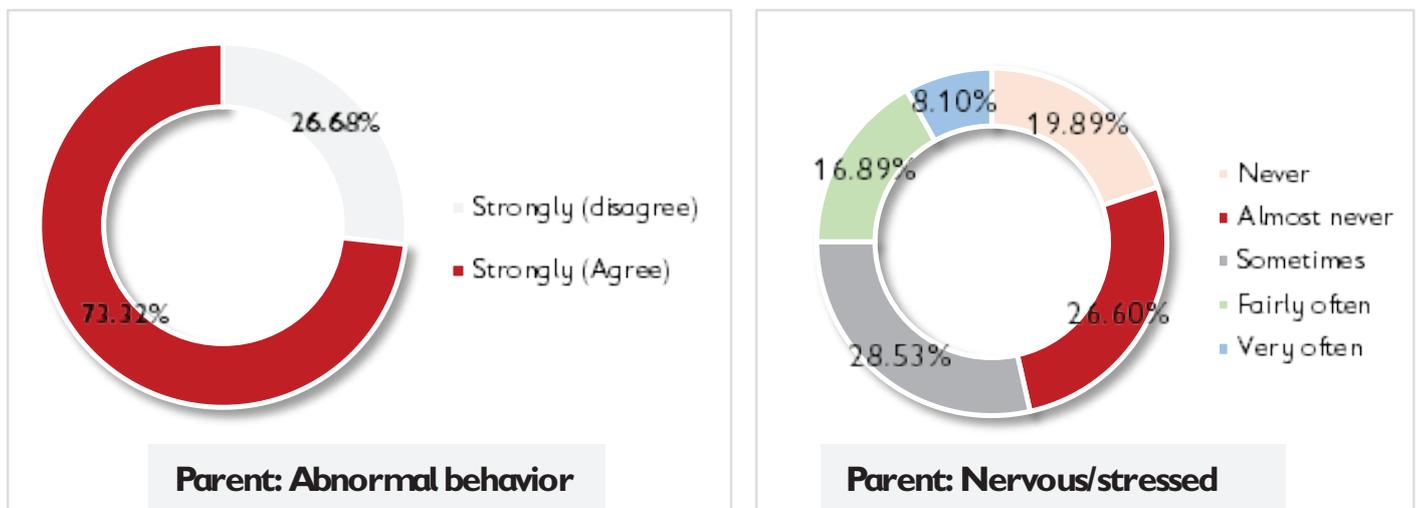
# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## Baseline survey on parenting during COVID-19

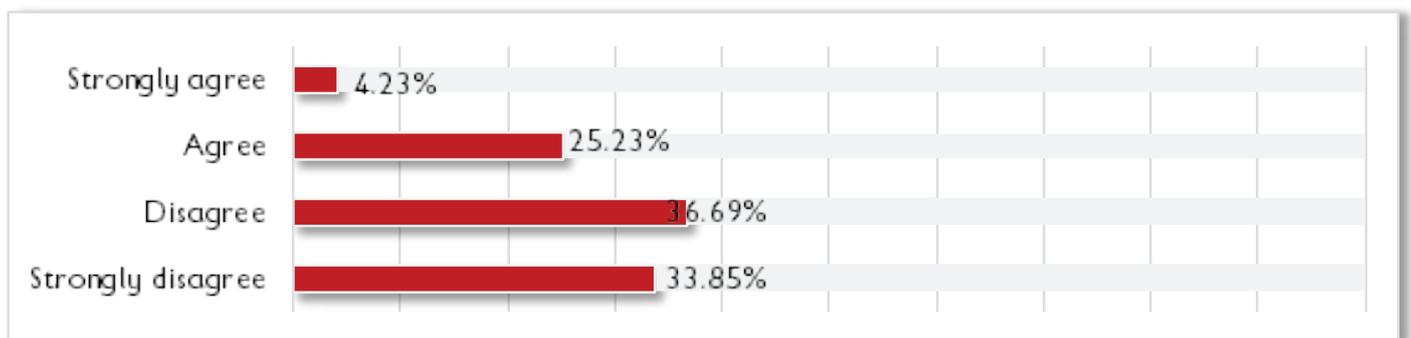
Parents' interactions with infants and children in the first years can have a long-term impact on physical, health, on social and emotional well-being, and on cognitive capacities (CDC, 2007). With training, parents can become more effective providers of the care and stimulation that babies and young children need to develop properly (Evans, 2006). Since the Pilot Phase of First Steps (Intera za Mbere) in 2015, Save the Children continues to implement the program with an aim to improve parenting practices, child development outcomes, and promotion of emergent literacy in the home. As part of our COVID-19 response in 2020, in partnership with UMUHUZA, we conducted a baseline survey on parenting during COVID-19 intended to collect data to benchmark the "Evaluation of First Steps (Intera za Mbere) Towards Quality Early Childhood Care and Development through Holistic Parenting Education in Response to COVID-19." Full Report Can be found [here](#).

Below are some key findings

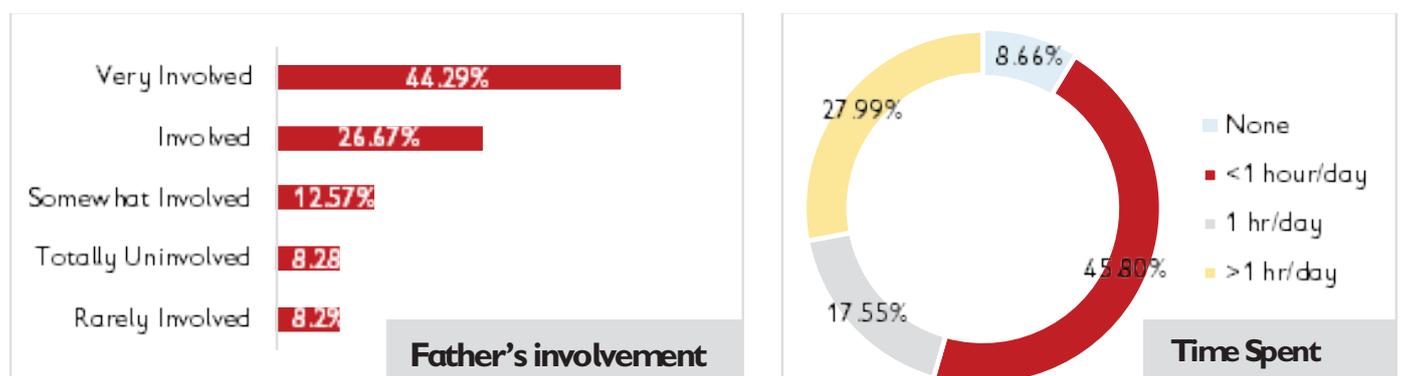
**Figure 1: Parent: Emotional feeling during COVID-19**



**Figure 1: Child: Emotional feeling during COVID-19**

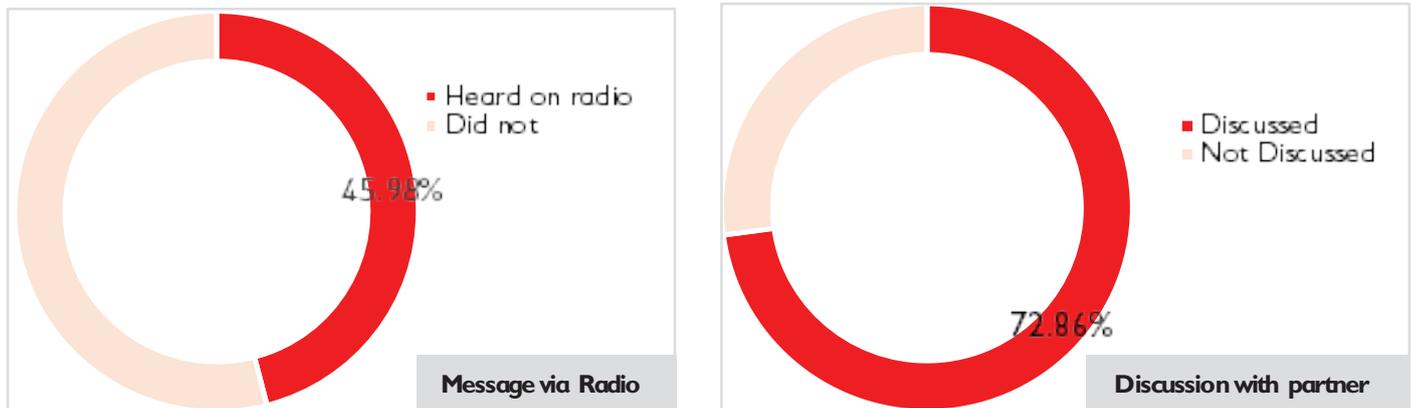


**Figure 1: Father's involvement and time spent with children**



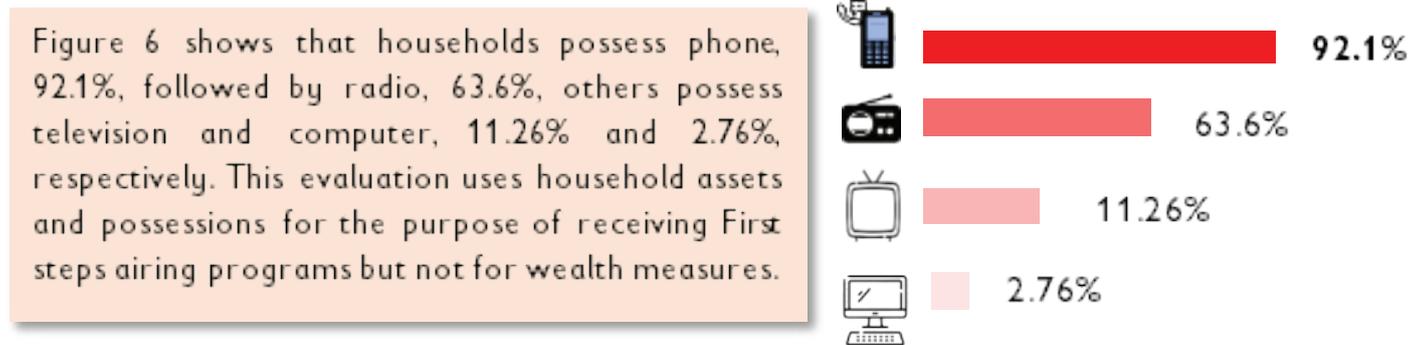
The following results focus on exposure and child development in projects activities: 45.98% caregivers revealed that they have followed or heard message on radio discussing child development, and showed a significant difference to the caregivers who did not hear messages about child development (Annex 6). Moreover, among the caregivers who heard message, 72.86% discussed the message with their partner (Figure 20)

**Figure 1: Heard on radio discussing about child development**

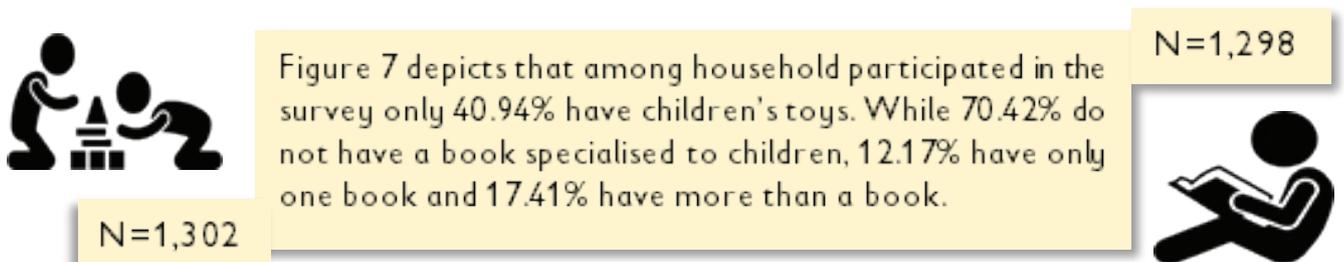


Parents had varied educational backgrounds. More than 60% of both parents completed primary education and secondary 25.4% and 19.2%, for mother and fathers, respectively. Fewer parents completed ordinary level (O level): 4.1%, mothers and 3.6%, fathers, and higher education, 2.2% mothers, and 3.7% fathers. Figure 5 shows that 5.9% and 8.4% of parents did not attend formal education, for mothers and fathers, respectively.

**Figure 1: Household Assets and belongings**



**Figure 2: Toys, and books for children under three within households**





## LEARNING FROM DOING - A LOOP AFTER A LOOP

To prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Mahama Camp, Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) and Youth Friendly Spaces have been closed as of March 2020.

Within this context, Save the Children launched an initiative to introduce home based recreational activities to help children be creative, learn new skills and stay safe during the pandemic.

Denise, 13, was in primary six when COVID-19 interrupted the school year. Save the Children responded by making sure that children, like Denise, had the basic necessities to protect them from harm while staying at home. Save the Children also supported boys and girls, with and without disabilities, to explore and nurture their interests at home.

Denise, who wants to be a teacher in the future, was inspired by Save the Children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Denis's story in her own words

There was a Save the Children volunteer who used to teach us how to crochet when the CFS was still open, but I did not give it much attention back then. When COVID-19 struck, I began crocheting because it is a wonderful thing to do during free time. It was not easy when I started crocheting. It took me two weeks just to finish one handbag. Whenever I see that handbag, I laugh at how it looks," remarked Denise. Fortunately, the volunteer who used to teach us before, came here with yarn and hooks. She took time and retaught me the basics of crocheting again. As you can see now, I can easily crochet," she added.

When asked about school in times of COVID-19 pandemic Denise had this to say "Things have changed at our school. You cannot approach your classmate while sitting in the classroom, you have to keep one meter of distance apart. I have also seen that some of my peers did not come back to school. The newest thing that I first noticed is the washing facility, where we wash our hands before entering the school," she shared.

"I love mathematics so much. When I grow up, I think I want to be a teacher so that I can teach children the way my teachers teach me," revealed Denise.

### Additional interviews:

"When I heard that schools closed, I was worried because I know when children are not in school, they can do bad things. It was not good news for every responsible parent here in Mahama Camp, especially those of us who have young adolescent girls. If they do not find things to keep them busy at home, they can be tricked by boys. I was personally happy when I found that Save the Children is giving my daughter a chance to sit at home and crochet, and I liked the way they even followed up on them to make sure they are really crocheting," admitted Mathias, 66, Denise's father.

Save the Children's home based recreational activities initiative has reached 435 children, including 265 girls and 170 boys, to date.

# FINALLY, A HAPPY ENDING FOR CHANCE\*

In 2005, Daphrose departed Burundi in pursuit of economic opportunity across the border. After arriving in Rwanda, Daphrose met and fell in love with a man named Vincent. Although he was legally married, Daphrose and Vincent began to live as husband and wife in 2006 and welcomed a daughter, Chance, in 2011.

During this time, a severe drought was impacting the livelihoods of agricultural communities, especially near Akagera. In 2015, as Burundian refugees were flocking to Rwanda and other countries in the region, Daphrose was struck by financial insecurity that she took Chance, moved into Mahama Camp, and registered them both as refugees.

Chance's father, who still lived in the host community, was struggling to make ends meet. In his desperation, Vincent unlawfully entered Kimisi Game Reserve in Tanzania on the banks of Akagera River and died in a hunting accident.

In 2016, Daphrose fell ill and succumbed to her sickness after being hospitalized. Now an orphan, Chance required Save the Children's intervention more than ever. Chance, then 5, did not have relatives in Mahama Camp.

Save the Children placed Chance in a safe, loving home. Captorine, a mother of three, took care of Chance as her foster mother. They lived happily as a family for several years until Captorine decided she wanted to repatriate.

Chance, born in Eastern Province, is registered in Rwanda's civil status. Without known biological family in Burundi, Chance's situation was complicated. A case conference brought together UNHCR, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Save the Children. In resolution, the panel agreed to trace Chance's stepmother and step siblings in Rwanda and reunite them.

Save the Children traced Chance's family and located them in Kirehe District. After being approached by a Child Protection Case Worker, Feburonie, 45, agreed to take in Chance and be her stepmother.

With the support of local leaders and Inshuti z'Umuryango ("Friends of Family"), Save the Children reunited the family on January 26, 2021.

"She is my husband's blood, so she is mine too. I will raise her together with her brothers and sister, and whatever we find, we will share," affirmed Feburonie, 45, Chance's stepmother.

"I knew Chance when she was born in Nyarubuye Sector. It is a sector near us, and I knew she is my husband's daughter. I did not



know her mother until she was married to my late husband. I did not have any issues with my sister wife, apart from when they married. It has been a while since my husband left us, and when they married, he left to live with them." clarified Feburonie.

### Additional interviews:

"This family loves children. Recently they adopted two children and that is why they did not hesitate to welcome Chance who is their husband's blood. I can assure you that this child is in good hands, they have a welcoming heart for children," vouched the Village Leader.

"We always make sure that children with protection concerns are thoroughly followed up on. We will do whatever possible to advocate for this child at cell level and other levels for her wellbeing," confirmed the Inshuti z'Umuryango Cell Coordinator.

Since 2015, Save the Children has strived to protect and keep safe more than 31,000 children in Mahama Camp. In collaboration with UNHCR and MINEMA, Save the Children traces families and reunites them with their children in Rwanda and Burundi.

## Rwanda Innovation Hub

Save the Children's 2030 vision needs groundbreaking, private sector-led innovation to keep up with ever-changing landscapes, climate change, and inclusive technologies. Private sector enabled impact will be a crucial differentiator setting Save the Children apart in how the organization serves its stakeholders and achieves its local and global goals. For this reason, Save the Children is piloting an African-based Impact Innovation Hub ("The Hub") out of its Rwanda office. The Hub will position Save the Children's country offices to better engage with the private sector and amplify impact for children and families in their education, health, and protection.

The Hub will consist of four key verticals that will be developed and piloted for further scale-up, serving Save the Children globally. These

verticals are intended to support each other leading to holistic, private sector partnered breakthroughs. The four verticals of the Hub represent the critical areas of strategic focus for engaging the private sector:

- 1) Inclusive Financing for Small to Medium-Sized Social Enterprises (the fund)
- 2) The Social enterprise lab (the lab)
- 3) Market Development (the marketplace) and
- 4) Training Consultancy (the consultancy).

To learn more about the innovation hub in Rwanda, click [here](#).

**VIDEO:** An innovative approach to Earning and Learning for Urban Refugees in Rwanda. The MicroWork pilot project provides a digital work opportunities for urban refugees in Rwanda. This project aims to establish proof-of-concept that urban refugees can earn decent livelihoods in the international job market with minimal inputs through access to the MicroWork platform. Watch the video [here](#).



## Advocacy and Campaign Updates

- As the situation in Burundi remains stable, the Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA) and UNHCR began the process of refugees' voluntary repatriation. Save the Children supported this process through providing medical screening in cooperation with Alight and COVID-19 testing in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH) as well as delivering child protection services to ensure that children and families have the necessary documentation and know the right process for supported repatriation to keep households unified during the move and continuity of services for refugees, including SGBV survivors, during and after their transition. To date at least 11,488 refugees have returned to Burundi since August 27th, 2020, when the first cohort repatriated.
- Save the Children in partnership with the Ministry of Education organized a National Literacy Month campaign in September 2020 which included the September 8th 2020 International Literacy Day. Part of our campaign goals and call for action was to request the approval of the National Literacy Policy by the Government of Rwanda which is still pending.
- With COVID-19 measures limiting face to face activities, in collaboration with Soma Rwanda members, we launched the 'read aloud challenge' which was officially launched in a virtual event promoting a culture of reading and sensitizing all Rwandans and people in Rwanda to spend at least 15 minutes a day reading for a child by the Minister of Education. This initiative which went viral on social media attracted the participation of community members and other high-level government officials and development partners including the US Ambassador in Rwanda. After the month of celebration, parents and caregivers continued to share testimonies on how their reading habits with children improved.
- Save the Children continued to advocate for full prohibition of physical and humiliating punishments. In collaboration with the former National Commission for Children (NCC), Save the Children was tasked to take a leading role in the development of a positive parenting policy. However, the merger of the NCC with the former National Early Childhood Development Program (NECDP) to form the National Child Development Agency (with brand-new leadership) stalled the policy discussions but lobbying efforts are underway to take this agenda forward. It is important noting that Save the Children continued to influence the new revised Family Policy to consider positive parenting components and it was well considered in the draft to be approved.
- In September 2020, Save the Children played a key role in the launch of the Localization Report in Rwanda. Localization was an important commitment in the 2016 Grand Bargain and means prioritizing local actors in all development and humanitarian activities. Save the Children makes localization a global priority and we know that in order to meet our 2030 ambition to ensure that all children survive, learn and are protected, local and national actors are essential in supporting children's rights and needs.

## STAFF IN ACTION

Meet our book development champion, Diane Umulisa. She is an author and has written a number of books mainly for children, since 2008. Also meet Jean Luc Ishimwe, Front Office and Admin Assistant. Click [here](#) to read full interview.





**Save the Children**

# SHIRIKI NEWS

# RWANDA

**Contributors:**

Odette Ntambara

Elizabeth Muiruri

John Mwangi

**For more information, contact us at:**



**Save the Children**

Save the Children Rwanda  
P.O. Box 2953, Kigali, Plot 204 KG 9 AV,  
#23 Nyarutarama-Remera-Gasabo,  
Kigali, Rwanda

 [@SCIRwanda](#)

 Save the Children Rwanda

 [rwanda.savethechildren.net](http://rwanda.savethechildren.net)