

# Views of children on Child Rights situation on **COVID-19** lockdown in — Rwanda —



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## Acronyms

- AMWCY:** the African Movement of Working Children and Youth
- UK:** the United Kingdom .
- CVT:** Children's Voice Today
- NGO:** Non-Government Organization
- CBOs:** Community-Based Organizations
- FBOs:** Faith Based Organizations
- CSOs:** Civil Society Organizations
- UN:** United Nations
- TV:** Television
- EICV 5:** Fifth Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey
- COVID-19:** Coronavirus disease 2019
- REB:** Rwanda Education Board

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## 1. Introduction

### About Children's Voice Today

Children's Voice Today (CVT) is an organization that was established in 2001 to promote the rights of the child through meaningful child participation where children/youth initiate and lead all activities of the organization. CVT is envisioning a child-friendly society whereby children are empowered to meaningfully participate in addressing issues affecting them and that their voices are heard. With its mission, CVT is committed to be the voice of Rwandan children, to empower them to advocate for their rights and to fight against poverty. CVT is a member of different child rights networks and is proud to carry and be the voice of children especially those who are vulnerable. CVT was initially called the Association of Working Children and Youth in Rwanda and is a member of the African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY) based in Dakar - Senegal, it is a member of the child rights coalition in Rwanda known as Coalition Umwana Ku Isonga based in Kigali and is also a member of a consortium of street children network based in the United Kingdom (UK).

Today, CVT has interventions and presence in fifteen Districts of Rwanda from the 4 provinces and the city of Kigali. CVT strives for the rights of every child, advocates and fights against all types of child abuse, child labor, violence and exploitation. The foundation of CVT is based on children's own interventions through their established grassroots groups. The organization has grown and made outstanding achievements with regards to increasing the number of children's groups and working with children's committees at all levels. It has also managed to position itself as the largest child-led organization in Rwanda. CVT creates children's grassroots groups at the community level and empowers children to lead, learn, decide and implement their own activities that promote children's rights.

## COVID-19 in Rwanda

Rwanda confirmed the first case of coronavirus on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2020 from an Indian citizen who arrived in the East African Region from Mumbai on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2020 as the Minister of Health in Rwanda announced. He had no symptoms on arrival but he himself had gone to the hospital for treatment on the 13<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 and they discovered that he was affected. After that, the Ministry of Health took the different measures that must be followed within the period of two weeks in order to strengthen the country's ability to mitigate the risk of the propagation of COVID19 into community: churches and mosques were closed from Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Schools and higher education institutions (both public and private) had closed on Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, employees were advised to continue the work at home without regular frequency to the offices, avoiding events that assemble a lot of people such as weddings and competitions, the number of people participating in burial ceremonies was minimized; businesses and restaurants were advised to continue to operate by taking adequate distance between people at least one meter between them; Unnecessary movements were avoided, and public transport would not be overcrowded.

In the same declaration, the Minister had informed about individual behavior that should recognize as the prevention mechanisms like washing hands and social avoiding traditional greetings by shaking hand or embracing. He reminded the citizens to practice the culture of regular washing hands using soap or hand sanitizer and avoiding physical contact with others. The use of face masks is only recommended the affected or those who are in direct contact with patients. Any person with COVID-19 symptoms (dry cough, high fever) should stay at home and call the toll-free number 114 for further guidance, or communicates to the Community Health Worker.

*(Source: in the minister of health statement, March 14, 2020)*



## 2. Objective of the mapping exercise

The objective of the mapping exercise was to collect children's views on how COVID-19 is affecting their rights in their respective families and communities during the lockdown period to inform the organizations' priorities and actions.

**Geographical coverage:** Children participated in this exercise, are from 5 districts of Rwanda mainly Rutsiro, Kirehe, Nyarugenge, Ruhango and Burera.

## 3. Methodology

*The methodologies used for collecting data in this mapping exercise are :*

- ✓ Phone calls with children ;
- ✓ Conference calls ;
- ✓ Discussion through whatsapp groups.

## 4. Child safeguarding

The mapping exercise on child rights situation considered child safeguarding in all steps of producing this report. At the initial CVT, took time to provide explanations to children the objective of producing the report and how it will be used. The participation in this report was voluntary and parents /guardians of the children gives verbal informed consent and then allows his/her child the rights to use his/her phone. Involves issues which sometimes may be personally sensitive. Interviewees' confidentiality was guaranteed.

## 5. Guiding questions

*For getting the views of children on children's rights during this period, four guiding questions were established:*

- A. What kind of activities are you doing in this lockdown period caused by COVID-19?
- B. What do you appreciate during this period?
- C. What are problems and challenges faced by children during the COVID -19 lockdown?
- D. What would you suggest to address the challenges encountered by children in this period?

## 6. Participation in the Mapping exercise

The total number of participants in the mapping was 99 children including 46 males and 53 females aged between 8 – 17 years old from the 5 Districts where Children's Voice Today is implementing its projects. Children who participated in the exercise came from children's grassroots groups of CVT both members and leaders and members of children's forum committees at District, Sector and Cell levels. The selection was done randomly taking into consideration non-discrimination principle.

## Table showing the numbers of children consulted

|              | Description                             | District                               | Number of children consulted | Males     | Females   |
|--------------|---|--|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1            | 4 Conference calls                      | Burera                                 | 12                           | 5         | 7         |
| 2            | 4 Conference calls                      | Ruhango                                | 12                           | 6         | 6         |
| 3            | 4 Conference calls                      | Kirehe                                 | 12                           | 6         | 6         |
| 4            | 4 Conference calls                      | Nyarugenge                             | 12                           | 4         | 8         |
| 5            | Interview                               | Burera                                 | 7                            | 3         | 4         |
| 6            | Interview                               | Ruhango                                | 8                            | 4         | 4         |
| 7            | Interview                               | Kirehe                                 | 8                            | 4         | 4         |
| 8            | Interview                               | Nyarugenge                             | 6                            | 2         | 4         |
| 9            | interview                               |  | 10                           | 4         | 6         |
| 10           | Interview of children with disabilities | Burera ,Ruhango, kirehe and Nyarugenge | 5                            | 3         | 2         |
| 11           | Interviewed street connected children   | Burera ,Ruhango, kirehe and Nyarugenge | 7                            | 5         | 2         |
| <b>Total</b> |   |  | <b>99</b>                    | <b>46</b> | <b>53</b> |

## 7. Findings

The Data/Information collected via conference calls, phone calls and whatsapp from 21st March 2020 to 17th April, 2020, has highlighted some major activities that children are doing, what they are appreciating, challenges/ problems and suggesting solution to them. Most of the children are not aware of the Coronavirus pandemic. They do not protect themselves when playing or when meeting in different activities such fetching water, looking for fire woods or grasses for livestock. There is a risk of being affected because children are not protected.

However, some of families suffer from hunger because they do not go to casual work especially for those who are used to work in construction, commercial not related food... Studies were stopped. Children are staying home without studying. It is difficult for some of them to revise the courses because of hungry (the hungry stomach has not the ears = le ventre affamé n'a pas d'oreilles), lack of time because their parents ask them to help in their activities, lack of pedagogic materials such as books, pens, papers...

During this period, children are encouraged to follow courses on radio, television or YouTube but there is a big problem to have access on these facilities because there is a lack of materials like television, computer, internet connection, smart phones, and time for following the courses...

There is a serious problem of isolation. Children cannot be allowed to play. They stay home without interacting with their colleagues. They are not even allowed to contact their colleagues for exchanging ideas about the courses.

## 7.1. Some activities done by children during this period.

Children consulted listed the activities that they are doing by helping their parents in the COVID 19 Situation as following: Fetching water to be used at home; helping parents in domestic activities such as cleaning the house and its surrounding, washing dishes, clothes and cooking; looking for the grasses of livestock and revising the lessons, reading the books and notebooks, etc. It was highlighted that children around their communities observed a number of children begging by door to door by asking food related and money, some children are still playing with their neighbors football at water fetching station and the village roads (uduhanda two muri Cartier ) and Collecting fire wood for selling , digging.

*A child girl of 14 years old from Ruhango District said that: yesterday, I saw a group of 7 children playing after coming from collecting fire woos in the forest before reaching their home take time to play football in one of the playing ground in our villages. This can spread the COVID-19 so, am calling the parents to take care and protect their children, especial respecting Governments measures for preventing spreading Corona virus.*

## 7.2 Things appreciated by children during this period.

**Clean  
hands  
protect  
against  
Covid-19**



*Even though this lockdown period seems to have paralyzed everything, there are different things children appreciated and which enjoyed. Those are:*

- ✓ Enjoy being with their parents and having enough time with them at home. Some parents used to work far from home, others waking up early morning when children were still sleeping and come back late or some stay at work the whole week.
- ✓ Some children are supported by their parents to revise the lessons
- ✓ Entertaining with parents
- ✓ Having time to ask questions and getting answers from their parents
- ✓ Having time to sleep and rest during the day
- ✓ Washing hands many times a day

*A girl child is 13 years old. She is living in Rutsiro District. In her own words she says: "I really love to stay home with my parents. It is unusual to see mom and dad and my siblings sitting together at home. I was really surprised to see my father entertaining with us, telling stories and riddles It is a good time that I am enjoying which I was not experienced before."*

*"I really enjoy this stay home program. It is the occasion of protecting children to be affected by COVID -19 in Mahama Sector. Children are aware that they have to wash their hands with soap as much as possible, staying at home and revising their lessons, and having much time of asking to their parents." A girl child of 16 years old, Mahama Sector, Kirehe District.*

### 7.3. The challenges faced by children in COVID -19 lockdown.



**Where Children are fetching water, They need additional protection during this troubling time.**

Most of the children are not aware of the Coronavirus pandemic; the big numbers of households don't have access to facilities such as radio, TV, Mobile phone, computer. As most way of getting information on COVID-19. According to fifth Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV 5) the statistics showing the ownership of the communication assets as follows: 73, 8% Radio; 3, 3 % computer; 66.9 mobile phone; and 10.4 TV set. This shows that there is a big number of children who are unable to have access to relevant information.

(source: EICV5, Thematic report ,utilities and amenities , December 2018)

*"As usual in our villages when fetching water, children play football or other games such as Mabigibigi in the ground surrounding the source point. Nothing has changed. Children are at risk of being contaminated by Coronavirus". Young boys of 12 years old in Mwendo sector, Ruhango District*

Insufficiency of hygiene and protection from which preventing the spreading of COVID -19 requires adequate measures regarding hygiene and sanitation, especially washing hands properly with water and soaps, using hands sanitizer, masks,... during COVID -19 lockdown period a lot of people who contributed to the well-being of many families had lost their jobs which means that the capacity of accommodating families was reduced. Hence, it is difficulty for them to provide everything needed including paying water bills, soaps, hands sanitizer and masks. Regarding children from rural area, they could not comply with stay at home measures because most of time they are tasked to do some activities such as fetching water in long distance where they can have risks of meeting different people who may contaminate them.

A young girl from one of the children's groups in Rutsiro District. In her testimony she uttered the following: *"We have a big problem of water at home. It takes us one hour walking to swamp for fetching water. You understand that the fetched water is used for cooking and washing dishes. Now using it in washing hands as they say as one of the measures taken for preventing the infection of COVID 19, you will realize that it is the sole activity of fetching water you will do, while there is other activities I am assigned by my parent to do. Now regarding mask, don't know what mask is. I only listening to others talking about that I have never seen it"*

Some children are suffering from hunger because of the COVID -19 lockdown. This is due to the daily activities that had stopped, from which parents earned the wage for buying food. Some of those activities are some businesses, construction, motorcycle taxis, hotel industry, etc.



A boys child of 12 years old from Burera District Said that: *" In this period of COVID -19 lockdown, the activities are not being done as usually which caused the lack of job to my father, we are not able to get food. With that situation, I decided to pass my day to the street for looking something to eat by carrying goods. Leaders wished me to stay home for fighting against Coronavirus."*

A girl child of 9 years old from Ruhango District said that: *"After the death of my mother, I continue living with my 2 brothers. My father is older, in the normal life he works to our neighbors and came back with food and in this troubling time to prevent COVID-19 my father is not working. At home, we started passing a day without eating, so I and my brothers go out for begging at the commercial center. "*

During the COVID-19 lockdown period schools were closed. Rwanda Education Board has established the learning through e-learning platform, TV and radio programs. However, some children have raised the issues of lacking these facilities in their families. Children highlighted the big numbers of households who don't have radio, TV, electricity, Computer including network. Others testified that are not able to manipulate them.

According to fifth Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV 5) the statistics showing the ownership of the communication assets as follows: 73, 8% Radio; 3, 3 % computer; 66.9 mobile phone; and 10.4 TV set. It is realized that there is a big number of children belong to the household who don't have any of these material which serves them to have information. Thus, children are unable to have access to courses provided by REB through e-learning, radio or television.

(source: EICV5, Thematic report ,utilities and amenities ,December 2018)



*We are revising our studies at home*

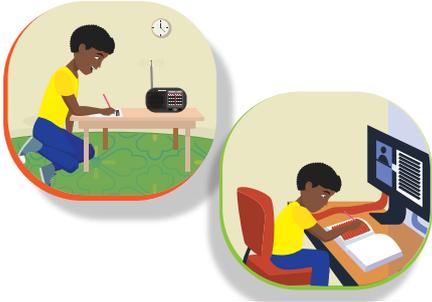
A boy child of 13 years old from Kirehe District said *“My big challenge in this period is that we don't have radio at home, there is no way of getting information, I can't follow the lesson on the radio like other children, if the government can give radios to the children will help to know the information about COVID -19 and also following the courses through radio”.*

During the lockdown period children appreciate the staying at home measures, since it increased the time for interaction between children and parents. Nevertheless, some children highlighted the increment of physical and humiliating punishments and a lot work without rest to children. Children said that in this COVID -19 lockdown period some families chased away the domestic workers and children took over the responsibilities occupied by the domestic workers. When children failed to fulfil the task given appropriately, the physical and humiliation punishment comes in.



A girl child of 16 years old from Kirehe District said that: *“ in this hard time for staying home, I'm working like a domestic worker, I haven't time to revise my studies, I clean house, I cook the food, I fetch the water etc., if I make mistake my aunt beats me and tells me aggressive words, it makes me feel like I am worthless.”*

## 8. The suggestions highlighted by children



**A.** Children are suggesting that the governments and the different stakeholders to support vulnerable families with children including the caused by COVID -19 lockdown to have communication assets/tools that can facilitate children to access the information and following the lessons as Rwanda education Board initiate online learning and learning through Radios and TVs, if possible especially those tools using solar because they are a number of household don't able to access the electricity.



**B.** Children are requesting the governments and different actors to continue providing food to the vulnerable families with children including the vulnerable families caused by COVID -19 lockdown.



**C.** Children suggest that the governments should put in effort in providing water near by the household who have the issues of water so that that the risk of children took long distance for fetching water and meeting different who spread COVID-19 can be reduced .



**D.** Children are suggesting that the government, CSOs, UN agencies and others stakeholders should put more effort in providing real information to the communities especial on these vulnerable families with children who don't the means of accessing the information by using the megaphones for giving the messages and distributing the flies, booklets with COVID -19, hygiene and child protection messages at community level.



**E.**Children suggest that government, CSOs, UN agencies and others stakeholders to provide hygiene materials like: pads for girls, masks, soaps, etc. To the vulnerable families with children so that can help in hygiene and protection.



**F.** Children are requesting parents to stop giving overloaded tasks to their children so that children are able to contribute according to their capacity / ages and have also time to rest.

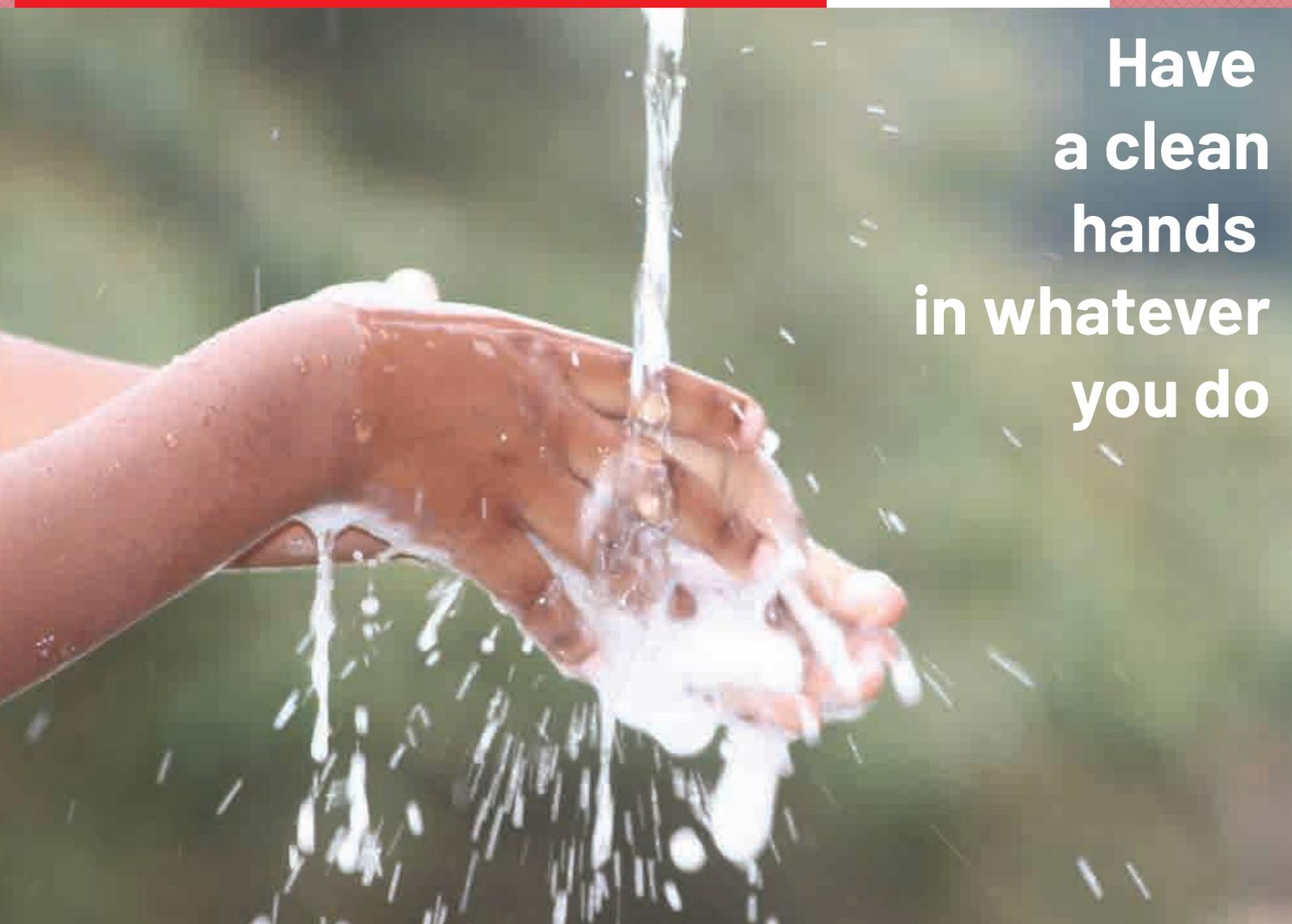


**G.** Children are committed to respect the measures taken by the government for preventing the spread COVID-19 and respecting their responsibilities.

## 9. Conclusion

CVT appreciates the great work and strategies taken by the Governments of Rwanda in fighting COVID-19 and preventing the spread of the virus in the community. However, children find this situation difficult for them to fully enjoy their rights and are calling for support. CVT calls and urges the Government of Rwanda, donors, NGOs, CBOs, FBOs and all actors in different sectors such as health, child rights and protection, social protection, education etc. To contribute in supporting vulnerable families and children this period of lockdown and preventing the spread of Coronavirus.

Finally, CVT would like to thank all children who took part of this exercise and parents/ caregivers who supported in different ways including supporting children with their phones to talk to us.



**Have  
a clean  
hands  
in whatever  
you do**

