

Stories
from

the
field

IZU Cyriaque supports a grandparent-headed household during the COVID-19 pandemic

After almost one year of schools being closed, the “Friends of the Family” or IZU – Rwanda’s volunteer, community-based cadre of child protection workforce – have been playing a crucial role in ensuring that children were reenrolled to attend school.

In Nyanza district, Nyagisozi sector, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IZU had been visiting vulnerable households under the coordination of the local sector IZU coordinator, Etienne. They were tasked with monitoring these households to ensure that they had sufficient food and hygiene materials, and were aware of COVID-19 prevention protocols. The IZU reported that poverty was spiking due to increased unemployment and lockdowns. They suspected that many families would not be able to reenroll their children into school once schools reopened, due to lack of funds for uniforms and other school supplies.

“

We decided to move ahead and try to find solutions for needy children. Together, in a coordination meeting with several IZU and IZU Coordinators, we decided to focus on child headed families and others who might not be able to reenroll into school

Etienne, IZU Coordinator

Cyriaque is one of Nyagisozi sector’s IZUs, and works alongside his IZU partner, Josephine. They had been visiting households throughout the pandemic, including that of Clara, a 78-year-old woman. Clara cares for her two grandchildren, Sifa and Moise, thanks to the monthly social protection cash transfer for the poor elderly (Vision Umurenge Programme). Recognising Clara’s vulnerability as an older caregiver, Cyriaque and Josephine made sure to check that she was able to protect herself and her grandchildren, asking if they had sufficient food, enquiring about their health, asking if they had any COVID-19 symptoms or other medical concerns, and if they are registered for Mutuelle de Sante or medical insurance. When schools finally reopened in November 2020, Cyriaque’s visits to Clara’s house brought new questions.

“

Cyriaque’s visits to our home had been regular [since the beginning of COVID-19]. However, on this specific visit, he asked a lot of questions about me, he was checking to find out why I hadn’t returned to school.

Sifa

Cyriaque noticed that both Sifa and Moise had not yet returned to school. This was not a surprise: many families he had been following were facing financial difficulties and could not afford to send children back to school. Recognising this, Cyriaque took Sifa and Moise to the sector offices where they were given school uniforms, shoes, books, and stationary.



Now we have school uniforms, shoes, pens, and books. This reduced the burden on my grandmother and she and I are so happy that I am able to attend school regularly.

Sifa

Cyriaque and Etienne also advocated to the sector administration for additional support for Clara's household:



With the help of the sector administration, we managed to offer them some livestock and food to take them through the months of food shortage during the dry season.

Etienne, IZU Coordinator

Cyriaque also made sure that Clara understood the process of re-enrolling her grandchildren in school and followed up with home visits to ensure their registration was successful.

Both grandchildren are now back in school. Cyriaque continues to visit the household to check that it has food, monitor the children's school attendance, check if they have sufficient books and stationery, and monitor Clara's health and ability to keep taking good care of her grandchildren.



Cyriquer visited us three times in the past two weeks, he gets to chat with me to understand if all is well. I like that IZU Cyriaque visits to follow up on my studies and my grandmother's welfare.

Sifa

According to the District Child Protection and Welfare Officer, the IZUs' response to the challenges faced by families in Nyagisozi sector during the COVID-19 pandemic made a huge difference to their lives. IZU's efforts to support children's return to school were recently formally recognized by the District Vice Mayor, Directors, and Officers.

TAKE-AWAYS

- In this case study, the IZU's role involved conducting home visits, identifying vulnerable households, sharing information and guidance, ensuring regular follow up, and advocating for the household's and children's needs
- A key part of this role was to identify factors of vulnerability and risk, so as to take early action including to make sure children do return to school
- The IZU provided critical linkages with other stakeholders and service providers to help meet the household multi-faceted needs

The establishment and ongoing strengthening of the Inshuti z'Umuryango' (IZU) or 'Friends of the Family' programme was made possible thanks to the support of USAID's Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF), the **IKEA Foundation**, the **United Kingdom** and the **Swedish Committee for UNICEF**