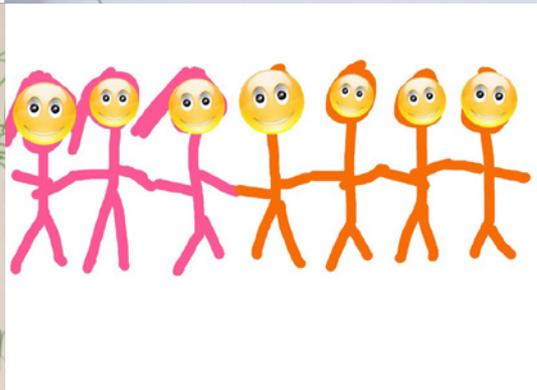
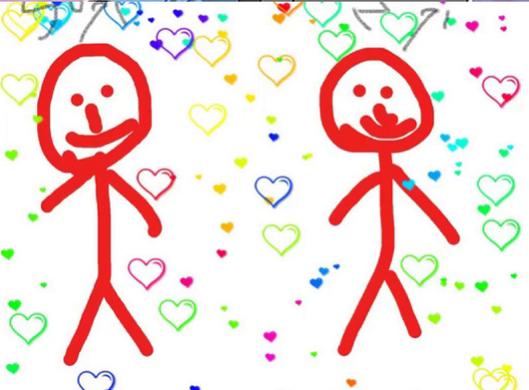
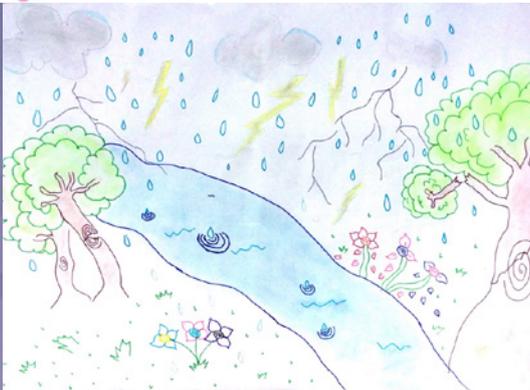


“Losing the care of your parents is equal to losing your life”

Findings from digital stories in Colombia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe



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- Andrea Mendez, Janeth Revolorio and Miguel Angel López of CONACMI in Guatemala
- Blessing Mutama of FOST in Zimbabwe
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- Youssouf Nsabimana and Chaste Uwihoreye of Uyisenga Ni Imanzi in Rwanda

A selection of the films with consent for wide sharing can be found on the Family for Every Child website, including a film from Esther Muhabwamundu, who passed away in a road accident shortly after the project was completed.

Introduction

Digital storytelling for transformation (DST) is a creative, participatory audiovisual process that helps people to tell a personal story through a collective process. It uses digital technology to communicate and amplify this story. A digital story is a short two-three minute film sequence made up of static images that is consciously prepared and told as a first person narrative, from the heart. The tools and methods applied to the DST process have evolved over the past ten years, as a way of working closely with different groups of people in order to gain deeper understanding of the multiple and complex ways that people's lives are affected by the social issues that are most relevant to them. The process is carried out with the intention of building new knowledge, skills and self-confidence for the storytellers, and building connections between the storytellers taking part in the same process together.

Family for Every Child initiated a DST project in 2014 to enable our member organisations to develop films with children, parents and caregivers that would provide valuable insights into family care or care outside of families. *Why Family Matters to Me* was published in 2016 to share the findings of the films produced. The report focused on: family types, and families as a source of love, affection, support and identity, as well as of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect.

The second phase of the project started in 2016. Five members, from Colombia (Taller de Vida), Guatemala (CONACMI), Indonesia (Muhammadiyah), Rwanda (Uyisenga Ni Imanzi) and Zimbabwe (FOST), were involved in the project, which started with a five-day residential training of trainers workshop. During this training, participants learnt how to make a digital story themselves to gain hands-on, personal experience with the transformative and therapeutic power of the tool, reflected on the family in their context, and learnt about and developed the ethical protocol for the research. The ethical protocol included processes for consent for participation and use of films, a risk assessment, and the protocol for taking any urgent action needed to safeguard participants, with potential scenarios discussed.

Fifty-five films were made, of which 33 were made by children (19 girls and 14 boys). Seventy per cent of children who participated in the project were living with their parents while the remaining 30 per cent lived with their relatives. The remaining films were made by adults who were either parents or caregivers, young people who had participated in the work of the participating members as children, or staff of the member organisations. For this report, the films of the young people have been analysed alongside those of the children; the films of the staff members have not been included in the analysis.

Findings

Family separation, multiple care moves and grief impact negatively on children

Family separation and multiple care moves have negative impacts on children

The DST films highlight several causes of family separation including migration or detention of parents or caregivers, poverty, parental abuse of alcohol and domestic violence. The causes are described as often interlinked. Their overall impact is a breakdown in the stability of family care, such as through absence of parents, parental separation and divorce, or multiple care moves.

Storytellers from Colombia, Indonesia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe shared stories of their parents' migration for work, which led to them being placed with relatives. Some children were looked after well, despite often feeling sadness, while some caregivers struggled to meet the child's needs.

“My mother went to look for work. Our extended family shared caring for us amongst them. I was very happy about my new family. They paid my school fees, school uniform and notebooks.”

Boy, aged 14, Rwanda

“She decided to become a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia. I was very sad. [...] I lived with my grandparents. And I think it was such a long two years. I couldn't wait to see Mom come home.”

Girl, aged 13, Indonesia



“During my stay with my aunt, there were days that I would go to school hungry yet there was food in the house. On some days I was told to do house chores first before going to school.”

Girl, aged 15, Zimbabwe

“Because we were poor, my mother and my father went to the city of Kigali to earn a living [...] Though my grandmother let me stay with her, she assigned me heavy work.”

Young man, aged 19, Rwanda

Some storytellers from Rwanda and Colombia shared stories of parents' detention, and how this impacted their lives and the lives of their families both due to their absence and upon their return.

“As I was settling in back at home, I thought that I was overcoming all my problems but it was not the case. My mum got arrested and detained.”

Girl, aged 15, Rwanda



“My father got arrested and he was detained. I dropped out of school and I started fending for myself, because my mum was not around. She was a street vendor and she did this to get money to feed both my father in detention and her children at home.”

Boy, aged 18, Rwanda

In several films by storytellers in Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Guatemala, children spoke of domestic violence between their parents – with the vast majority of examples being of violence from a male caregiver towards a female caregiver – and how this impacted on them. In some stories this was linked to fathers misusing alcohol. It was also linked to problems caused by polygamy and poverty.

“She was beaten to the point that she developed large blood clots. For the first time, I saw my mother crying, and it distressed me so much [...] After beating her, dad went his way to the pub, where he usually drank with others.”

Girl, aged 17, Zimbabwe



“And then my father hit her in the face and I was very scared.”

Girl, aged 15, Colombia, describing domestic violence between her parents

“My grandmother fell sick and as she was on the verge of death, she told me that my father and my mother separated because my father would drink too much beer, and when he got home he would beat my mother up.”

Young man, aged 19, Rwanda

“I grew up with my parents [...] who filled our home with joy, happiness that vanished when my father arrived drunk screaming at my mother and insulting her.”

Boy, aged 16, Guatemala

Some children from Rwanda and Guatemala described being influenced to use alcohol or drugs after witnessing or facing violence at home, or as a result of the impact of separation from a parent.



“He hit my back with his belt with lots of rage. At the age of 12, I had a terrible grudge in my heart and many times I wanted to follow the example of my father and consume alcohol, but I decided to try the marijuana that for me became an outlet.”

Boy, aged 16, Guatemala

“I endured that bad life and went on staying with my stepmother because I had no other alternative. I lost concentration, became addicted to drug abuse and vagrant, simply because my mum was not there to care for me. The separation of my dad and my mum spoiled my life. [...] I continued struggling in that difficult life, but I managed to survive. Losing the affection of your parents is equal to losing your life.”

Boy, aged 17, Rwanda

“Frankly speaking, during that time I drank alcoholic beer, smoked cigarettes, marijuana and other drugs. I sat for those exams in 2014 but I failed.”

Young man, aged 22, Rwanda

Grief over death of parents can be compounded if children are not adequately supported by their remaining relatives

Several child storytellers spoke of the loss of their parents or a parental figure and shared how they were affected. Some described not being able to cope with the loss, seemingly due to a lack of support at this critical time, or wider challenges.

“I got distressed, and kept thinking of my parents, but that was all I could do as my dad had passed away, and my mom had forgotten that she has another child.”

Girl, aged 17, Zimbabwe

“My mother got sick and died when I was eight years old. Dad realised that he alone could not raise us well, so he married another wife. [...] My stepmother really mistreated me, and I deeply missed my mother.”

Boy, aged 17, Zimbabwe

“After her death [his grandmother] my biological mother married another husband. All abandoned me. [...] When I was 11 years old I was living alone.”

Young man, aged 19, Rwanda

“The only way I could rid myself of such sadness was by crying because the person I told my things to, with whom I felt secure, was gone. [...] After everything that happened, my life had a drastic change. I separated myself from many things, it was no longer the same communication. [...] Several years have passed since this happened and it still affects me.”

Young man, aged 18, Guatemala

“A year after his death, I still felt sad because there was no one else who would take me out and defend me. But I will always remember what he said. I will do my best to be my mother’s keeper as my father would have wanted me to.”

Boy, aged 12, Indonesia

Families that are able to meet children’s material and non-material needs support children’s overall well-being and development

Children feel loved through their caregivers meeting their basic needs

Some storytellers from Zimbabwe and Rwanda highlighted the importance of their parents and caregivers fulfilling their basic needs of food, clothing, health care and shelter. They cherished memories of parents meeting these needs despite challenges and limitations.

“When I hurt my leg, it was very painful, and I cried. On that day I went to hospital. My dad took me to hospital, and he carried me on his back as my leg was very painful.”

Girl, aged 16, Zimbabwe

“I stayed with my father in the hospital and I felt loved. He helped me when eating and bathing.”

Young man, aged 18, Zimbabwe

“My father left when my mum was pregnant, but my father was not aware of the pregnancy. My mum struggled in that difficult life and managed to find food for me and catered to all of my needs.”

Girl, aged 15, Rwanda

Children value support from parents or caregivers in meeting their goals

For most children, after the fulfilment of their basic needs, their biggest priority was to have their parents’ or caregivers’ support for their education or to achieve their goals for the future.

“[My Mum] spared no effort to ensure a decent life for me. I loved looking after the grazing herd and my mum taught me how to care for the cows.”

Young man, aged 25, Rwanda

“From then on my mother made sure that my brother, my sister and I got an education. So the years went by and I graduated from primary school in 2011.”

Young man, aged 18, Colombia

“My parents held dear my endeavours and I am fully confident that I will become a great businessman in Rwanda.”

Boy, aged 18, Rwanda

“My mum would come to my school to commit to when she would pay the fees. After her begging, the teacher would allow me to resume classes.”

Girl, aged 15, Rwanda

“My mother is a woman who never gives up. She really wants me to make my dreams come true.”

Girl, aged 16, Colombia

Families are often a vital source of love and support, and enable feelings of belonging and inclusion

Several storytellers described love and affection between children and caregivers, often through recounting good times spent together, as well as support provided by caregivers to children.



“My family would get together at weekends to play five-a-side football. We could feel togetherness, love and happiness. Those days were fantastic. I felt so lucky and grateful for having such a family.”

Girl, aged 15, Colombia

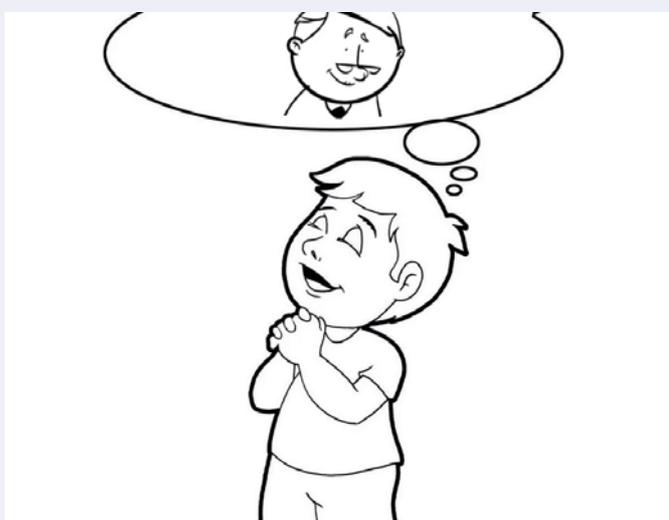
“Once father stood for me when I forgot to do my homework. Mum was furious but Dad defended me. In my opinion my father was the best.”

Boy, aged 12, Indonesia

“I had good moments while in the company of my parents, like attending festive occasions such as New Year celebrations. My parents had strong ties with other families and this made me emulate them, by confiding in my peers, [...] and so on.”

Boy, aged 17, Rwanda

Storytellers also shared their experiences of being loved and cared for by their relatives, including grandparents, aunts and uncles.



“He gave me advice and he spoke to me with such devotion that even though I was still small, I understood him perfectly. He used to take my hand, and we walked together to buy our snacks. He kneeled down in front of me; he took out a comb that he always had in one of his trouser pockets, he combed my hair and he told me: ‘My son, you have to look good’, and then he hugged me.”

Young man, aged 18, Guatemala, describing his grandfather

“Our grandma welcomed us at the door upon our arrival. She was brought to tears and hugged each one of us. [...] The next day, Grandma took us to the zoo. We saw many animals. We also ate out together as Grandma brought food from home.”

Boy, aged 11, Indonesia

“I went to live at my grandfather’s and grandmother’s home. They felt compassion for me and gave me affection. They treated me as their own child.”

Boy, aged 17, Rwanda

“I am proud of my guardians for their love and support.”

Girl, aged 17, Zimbabwe

Siblings are also described by storytellers as a key source of love and support to each other, particularly when parents are struggling to meet children’s material or non-material needs.

“I was on terrific terms with my brother. I loved him very much. He was always encouraging me; he told me that I would definitely become a great player. [...] Every day that I got home late after training sessions, they would beat me.”

Young woman, aged 20, Zimbabwe

“I got used to fasting and hunger. I took over care for my young brother and sometimes I was disheartened by seeing him crying, whereas I had nothing to feed him with. I tried to soothe him. I lifted him and carried him on my back.”

Young man, aged 18, Zimbabwe

Children value receiving advice and guidance from their parents or caregivers, and good communication within families

Children from Rwanda and Colombia described a key role of parents and caregivers in providing advice and guidance to children, either in terms of when this had been provided or when they would like it to be provided.

“My father and my mother were getting on well. They liked chatting and sometimes they would summon us and make us sit together to listen to their advice.”

Boy, aged 17, Rwanda

“I thanked my mum for her advice and apologised to her for all my misbehaviour. Now I do well at school and I have vowed not to be silly any more.”

Young man, aged 19, Rwanda

Children also described being listened to, or caregivers showing concern for their well-being by explaining situations to them.

“I was not that happy as there were no other girls to play with. When my brother noticed this, he then sent me to Harare where my aunt was. That was when I started living the best of my life up to now.”

Girl, aged 17, Zimbabwe



“I have a family that is getting on, we love and support each other and talk about things.”

Girl, aged 15, Colombia



“During Idul Fitri [...] we ask forgiveness from each other. Mum approached me and apologised for having given more care to my brother than to me.”

Girl, aged 13, Indonesia

Families need to be supported to provide safe, permanent care for children through coordinated prevention measures

Adequate services are needed to respond to children and caregivers affected by violence within the home, to reduce negative effects and provide stability

Child storytellers in Colombia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, and several in Rwanda, spoke of being physically or emotionally abused by their parents or caregivers.

“I remember him calling me and telling me that I was disobedient and rebellious, taking his belt [to] hit my back with a lot of fury.”

Boy, aged 16, Guatemala

“I talked back. ‘Not your concern!’ Mum was getting more furious and said, ‘So you are challenging me?!’ Then she beat me. I was so upset with Mum.”

Boy, aged 12, Indonesia

“I was accused of eating the food that had been saved, and my parents started slapping me. This traumatised me and caused me to wet the bed while sleeping, which was an abomination because I was quite old. My mother punished me by ordering me to carry, on my head, the mattress I wetted, which I found disgusting, and this made me tearful.”

Young man, aged 19, Rwanda

“My father would also beat me in front of other children I was playing with, saying that I would achieve nothing in my life. Noting that my father was also ruthless, I kept sinking in despair. My father would not listen to a single query I had for him, because he still saw me as a rude child.”

Boy, aged 14, Rwanda

“The love of my father and my mother has been sorely lacking. [...] Maybe my dad will change, and can be a little flexible, and my mum could be more affectionate with me, and not cold like the wind, and then I will have a true family.”

Girl, aged 17, Guatemala

One child's story depicted sexual harassment.

“I had to distance myself from my biological father, because the problems of jealousy had started in my mum's partner. [...] I... was very scared and terrified about what this man could do to me. He started to get jealous of me and I realised this wasn't normal.”

Girl, aged 17, Guatemala

Some stories from children in Zimbabwe, Colombia and Guatemala depict parents or caregivers wanting to or actually exploiting children, as well as situations of neglect. Children describe the shock, distress and harm this caused to them.



“I then stayed with my uncle. He mistreated me lots, with heavy work, like water drawing, wood cutting and cooking, whilst his wife and children were seated. Some of the work was beyond my age, but I was told to work as his home was not mine.”

Boy, aged 16, Zimbabwe



“What really got to me was that she [stepmother] had her kids, older than me, yet I am the one who did the bulk of the house chores. The chores were beyond my age. [...] This really pained me and at the same time, my food was little. [...] These acts [of abuse] really pained me. And I would lose sleep, just the tears running.”

Boy, aged 17, Zimbabwe



“Imagine my surprise when my father wanted me to marry a boy. I refused because I hadn’t planned on getting married at 13.”

Girl, aged 14, Colombia

“I sometimes spent the night outside because my stepmother did not love me. She would assign me housework that was too hard for my young age. She would physically abuse me.”

Boy, aged 17, Rwanda

“When I was left behind, my life really took a turn. My aunt would simply tell me to go to school without eating, and I had nothing to put on my feet. [...] I developed a boil on my leg. For a whole month, I did not go to school, and my aunt kept refusing to take me to hospital, saying that I had not developed a boil, but it was spirit related. She said that if I ever go to hospital I would die.”

Girl, aged 17, Zimbabwe

In the extended depictions of these situations in the films, the caregivers are often in clear need of help themselves, such as to be able to control their anger, or meet basic needs.

Family breakdown and divorce can trigger challenges for children

Several child storytellers across all countries described the impact of family breakdown and divorce on them, including their emotions about their absent parent, disputes between parents and relatives over their custody, or challenges adjusting to life with new caregivers or step-siblings.

“From that day, my mum left for her parents’ place. I never saw her because my dad relocated me in an area that was very far from my mother’s place, and I could not reach that place even to talk to her. My living conditions worsened. I started living like an orphan, even though I had both parents, but who had broken up with each other.”

Boy, aged 17, Rwanda

“It made me really sad to stay with my father. Because even though my mother has made a lot of mistakes, I’d like to be able to talk to her, or see her again. [...] If I’m ok with my mother, I’ll lose my father.”

Girl, aged 14, Colombia

“On hearing that I was no longer going to school, my aunt came to fetch me. But my stepmother did not agree. My aunt was told that I was not going anywhere. She went back crying.”

Boy, aged 17, Zimbabwe

“Now in my mom’s house lives my stepfather. I have been in a good term with him until he asked his children from his previous marriage to stay with us. I felt I couldn’t get along with them. Maybe because they are not my biological siblings. One of them often picked on me. [...] All I could do was to stay quiet and patient. Later on, he showed a change of attitude towards me. Thank God at the moment I am in a good term with my stepfather.”

Girl, aged 13, Indonesia

Other films depict the struggles of both single mothers and single fathers and even the abandonment of the child by both parents.

“My father was a mechanic that he tried by all means to find food for me and my sister. Life became so hard that my father failed to support me even to keep me at school and I was so disappointed. However, there was nothing to do.”

Girl, aged 17, Zimbabwe

“My mum suffered, she worked a lot to give us what we needed. She worked from 7 in the morning until 5.30 in the evening and if she had to work overtime, she didn’t turn this down [...] because she knew this was already an extra income for our home.”

Girl, aged 16, Guatemala

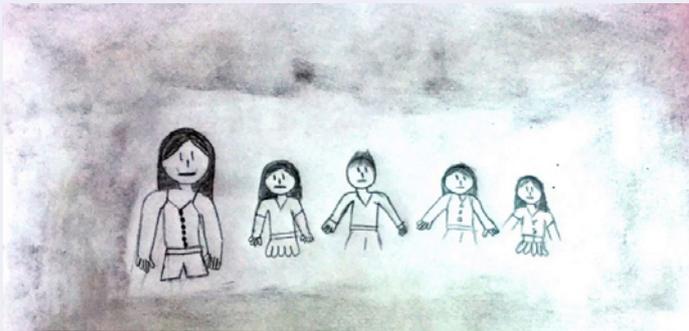
“All abandoned me. I strolled around. I was spending the day and night in different places. I was like a nomad. When I was 11 years old I was living alone.”

Boy, aged 19, Rwanda



“We spent the whole month without Mom. This life was hard, for I ended up doing chores I was not used to. Sometimes I would get back from school and find nothing cooked to eat. I would get home and first do the dishes, fetch water and then cook. This would really get to me and I would think about my mother.”

Girl, aged 16, Zimbabwe



“They left me alone to take care of my other four brothers and sisters. I didn’t know what to do because we were very little and I didn’t know how to feed them.”

Girl, aged 14, Colombia

Children often found much-needed support from the informal or community-based child protection and care system

One boy from Zimbabwe described his grandfather being able to free him from the care of an abusive uncle, due to the fact that customarily he was viewed as having authority over the uncle.

“My grandfather finally came and had a word with him about taking me, but he refused that. Eventually grandfather won, because customarily he is viewed as father to my uncle. That was when I realised that everything comes to an end.”

Boy, aged 16, Zimbabwe

In Rwanda, several adult filmmakers described the informal foster care they are providing to children, which was often arranged by themselves, spontaneously.



“I suddenly became emotional and started weeping. I could hardly imagine how those children would cope. [...] I appealed to my husband and whispered to him with tearful eyes, begging him to foster the children.”

“I came across a baby who had been abandoned by the mother in the forest. I picked her up and cared for her. Now, when I see that all children are attending classes and performing outstandingly, I feel very proud and feel that I have a positive role that I play in Rwandan society.”

Women from Rwanda, providing informal foster care

“These children regard me as if I were their biological mother, because I cater for each of their needs. [...] People who do not know their history regard them as mine, because they are happy, and even my biological children think that they are their relatives.”

Woman from Rwanda, providing informal foster care

Some of these informal foster caregivers described the challenges they experienced when providing this care, and the efforts they have made to formalise the care and explain the situation to the children.

“We went home with the children, but from the time we arrived home we faced serious disapproval from our neighbours, who were mocking us for fostering them. They founded their criticism on the fact that we lived a casual life, and did not have many assets.”

Woman from Rwanda, providing informal foster care

“I appealed to my mother-in-law and begged her to allow me to register the children as mine in the civil status register. She had no choice but to endorse the idea. As of now, the children are mine from the law perspective. Yet, I was wondering how I would explain to them the circumstances under which I met them, because I was feeling that not disclosing the truth to them would be unfair. Little by little, I started sharing what had happened to them. [...] The children now cannot believe that I am not their biological parent, because as they grew up they were given my affection and they were treated the same as my children.”

Woman from Rwanda, providing informal foster care

Sometimes the formal child protection and care system fails to protect children

A few child storytellers describe accessing services from NGOs and UN agencies as part of the formal child protection system.

“[The Scout movement] helped me to overcome loneliness. While in that movement, I was lucky because I disclosed to the leader [...] difficult moments I had gone through. He connected me with a charitable organisation that protects children and pays school fees for them.”

Boy, aged 15, Rwanda

There were also some examples of the child protection system failing children and families, either through lack of sensitive intervention or intervention that hinders rather than helps.

“Sometimes I would get to school late. Teachers would then beat me up for this and it added to my distress. I would then shed tears. I did not perform well at school that year since I was mentally distressed. This got to the point that I even failed to read.”

Girl, aged 15, Zimbabwe

“When my father was in prison as a punishment for his violence with my mother and us, his children, he got even angrier with my mother, and when he came back he started hitting out again with his machete.”

Girl, aged 15, Rwanda

The numerous references to child abuse and neglect described in the DST films indicate a lack of prevention to response measures within the respective child protection systems. This is demonstrated by the fact that the children’s situations had become quite desperate before they received any services.

Parents and caregivers have decision-making power over children's lives, but when they do not involve children in these decisions it can have lasting effects

Many storytellers shared stories of their parents and caregivers supporting them in their lives to achieve their goals and be successful. However, some also spoke of the challenges they faced when parents or caregivers made decisions about their lives without listening to them or involving them, or when they were not informed of things. Such acts made them feel excluded from their families, isolated from their caregivers, and deeply sad and unsettled.

“In fact, it was my grandmother that I was calling my mother and I was calling my grandfather my father. [...] We spoke and she revealed to me that my mother and my father had separated. She pledged to give me further details when I was mature enough. From that day on I lived in loneliness; [...] I was absent-minded.”

Young man, aged 19, Rwanda



“Sometimes deep inside I am upset. I am thinking that Mom is selfish because she comes to see me only once in a month. I once heard and saw my mom fight with Uncle and Auntie. I don't know what caused their fight. I am confused. I want them to understand each other. I also want Mom to understand me more than Auntie and Uncle do me. By doing so we can live peacefully and happily.”

Girl, aged 13, Indonesia, living with her aunt and uncle after her mother migrated for work

“I would overhear my extended family talk about my parents. But when they [saw me] they became quiet. In fact, I was living with my extended family. [...] None of them told me about my parents.”

Girl, aged 13, Indonesia

“In 2008, my father came to visit us. I did not recognise him, although my sister did. [...] After my father left they asked me who he was and I said that I did not know him. They explained to me that he was my father. I ran after him, but I could not reach him. I spent the whole night crying. I was very grieved.”

Boy, aged 17, Rwanda

Some storytellers shared that their parents or caregivers put pressure on them to meet certain expectations. There were also stories of restrictions being placed on storytellers to make them conform to the established socio-cultural norms. These pressures and restrictions impacted on children's well-being.

“He (father) wanted to bring me up his own way, but I knew what was right and what was wrong. There were arguments, misunderstandings: I needed his support.”

Young man, aged 19, Rwanda

“In my room, I was so angry because my father only blamed me. Why? Because I am the oldest and had to take the blame [...] I was sad and felt like no one understood and they didn't even care about me and defended me. That moment was not the only reminder, and even there were moments when I felt like I was not their biological daughter.”

Girl, aged 16, Indonesia



“Said my mother, ‘Jobs are hard to come by for a senior high graduate. Finding a job is easier for vocational school graduates.’ ‘But I want to study in a high school. My final scores are high, what is the problem?!’, I replied. A little bit angry she said, ‘Then if you want your way, use your own money!’ On that day my dream of being an engineer [...] vanished.”

Boy, aged 17, Indonesia

“As she was cooking I approached her and reminded her that I had not got her position about it. She asked me, ‘Do you ever bear in mind that you are a girl?’ I replied, ‘Yes, I do.’ She told me that normally girls like you do not play football, unless you want to be a vagrant. She urged me to quit football. I felt a whimper; I went some steps away from her and started crying. I deemed her decision to be encroaching on my rights.”

Young woman, aged 20, Rwanda, who passed away in 2017

Children's resilience and tenacity in fulfilling their dreams and aspirations should be supported

Many child storytellers shared about the support they received from relatives or friends in fulfilling their individual dreams and aspirations, and the strength this engendered in them, despite often having previously experienced significant challenges.

“He (grandfather) taught me to fight for my dreams, that was always my greatest motivation to be able to reach them.”

Young man, aged 18, Guatemala

“Grandfather began by sending me to school. He would buy me all the things I needed. Eventually good life was here. This got to my uncle, and he started viewing me as his child, for now I had changed and become a respected person. Whenever I see him, I respect him despite that he mistreated me.”

Boy, aged 16, Zimbabwe



“My mum is one of those people that looked on with a big heart, that strived, so that we could progress.”

Young man, aged 19, Colombia

“Luckily, I came across a boy who became my friend. We would regularly go to school together and he would comfort me, saying that my studies had suffered, but I would overcome those hurdles and succeed. When I did not go to school, he would come to see me and ask why. He was giving me advice. Otherwise expressed, he was like my parent.”

Young man, aged 19, Rwanda

“I took refuge in music and my grandmother was my strength.”

Girl, aged 17, Guatemala

As well as support from people, several storytellers described internal factors such as the will to recover from ill health, external factors such as love, or events that supported their resilience, or led to successful outcomes or enduring hope.

“Some days later, I became seriously unwell. I had mumps and malaria. Teachers urged me to stop sitting the exams, but I ignored their suggestion and continued doing the exams. I did all the exams and, against all expectations, I performed well and I ranked the second among the girls. My joy culminated in the release of my mother [from prison].”

Girl, aged 15, Rwanda

“Despite the fact that I couldn’t be with my mother, as she was far away, I could feel her love.”

Boy, aged 16, Colombia

“I had a short rehabilitation, although I had been told it would last five years. After four months I was already taking my first steps as a baby learning to walk. During all this process, I did not listen to everything the doctors told me. If someone said no, I said yes

and kept fighting without turning back.”

Boy, aged 16, Guatemala

“Afterwards I came to enjoy her love. I started to become a godfather to children and my Christianity was boosted.”

Boy, aged 17, Rwanda

“I was grieved by quitting playing football because, according to my mum, there are activities that are to be carried out by boys solely. I decided to be [a] cyclist and I also contemplate becoming a great cyclist who wins prizes in female cycling teams’ competitions.”

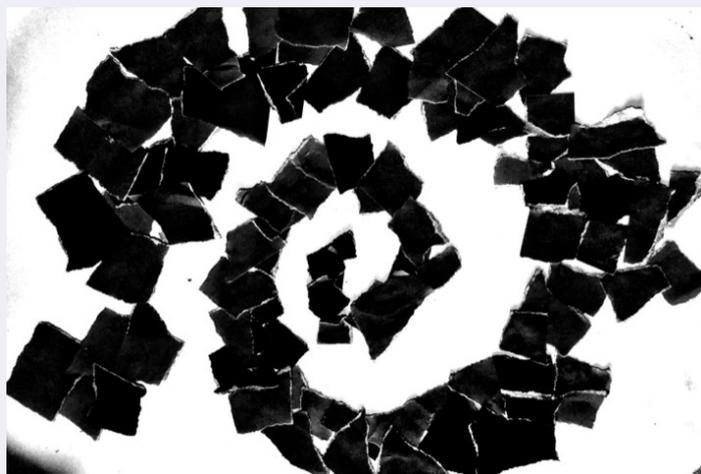
Young woman, aged 20, Rwanda, passed away in 2017

“I continued doing my business tirelessly [...] and eventually I bought a bicycle which facilitated my business and helped me to arrive at school in time. I later managed to buy pigs, chickens, goats, and raising these pet animals went hand in hand with studying.”

Young man, aged 18, Rwanda

“My goal is to be a teacher and I hope one day we will all be together like a close family and that things will go well for us. I want to be an example for other native children from the community and show them that we can be professionals.”

Girl, aged 14, Colombia



“Music has been my refuge, my joy since I discovered it. I realised that I can play instruments with strength and passion and I can also sing. So I’m going to devote my life to music and art. They’ve given me the guts to keep going and they support me.”

Boy, aged 16, Colombia

“I never gave in to my problems, I learnt to solve things by myself. It was difficult but I did it. Discovering music helped me a lot.”

Boy, aged 16, Colombia

Conclusions and policy implications

These digital stories highlight a number of factors that drive family separation, including parental migration for work, poverty, drug or alcohol misuse and domestic violence, or parental detention. They elaborate the negative impacts of such instability and fractured bonds on children, including cycles of violence with children themselves using drugs and alcohol to cope. They also describe how grief or a sense of loss following the death of a parent, or separation following divorce or family breakdown, can be compounded if children are not supported adequately.

It is clear from the digital stories that overall family harmony, and families being able to meet children's material and non-material needs effectively, have positive effects on children's well-being and development. They show that, in the contexts in focus, siblings and extended family members participate in providing this support, as caring for children is a shared responsibility, but also due to necessity.

Many of the stories depict the informal or community-based child protection systems playing an essential role in supporting children's care and protection, particularly in rural communities. Yet these systems would benefit from being supported. Coordinated measures with a strong prevention focus are needed, so that interventions are made early on, before children experience lasting negative effects from their adverse experiences.

While many of the stories show parents and caregivers supporting children to achieve their goals and be successful, others describe parents or caregivers who make decisions about children's lives without listening to or involving them. Others put pressure on children to meet their own expectations, or place restrictions on children to ensure compliance to social norms. All of these negatively impact on children's well-being.

Children profit from external support systems and internal resilience factors in overcoming challenges and fulfilling their dreams and aspirations. This is shown in the depictions in the films of the positive impacts of the support services provided by the NGOs producing the digital stories with the children. Where these can be supported, more children will benefit. The findings of the films emphasise the need for such services to acknowledge the role different family members play in children's lives, and how the extended family can both put at risk children's well-being and be a potential benefit and support to it.

Policy implications

Provide social protection and family strengthening interventions to prevent family separation and the negative impacts this has on children's well-being, except for situations where separation is in children's best interests.

- Recognise and support kinship families and other trusted adults to meet the material and non-material needs of the children they are caring for.
- Enable and encourage contact between children and absent parents where appropriate and in

the child's best interests.

- Provide psychosocial support to children who experience grief or inadequate care and support, and protect and accompany children who have experienced violence and children on the move in their efforts to find safety, stability and well-being.
- Promote family harmony and the capacity of caregivers to meet children's material and non-material needs, as universal aims of services that support children's well-being and their ability to learn and develop.
- Support families to fulfil their role in supporting children's learning and development, including through listening to children, which is greatly valued by children.
- Enable parents to understand and support the participation of children, who are capable of forming their own opinions, in decisions that affect their lives, and to give children's views due weight in accordance with their evolving age and maturity.
- Ensure that prevention interventions are holistic and able to respond to a range of risk factors that can impact negatively on children's well-being, such as the impact of drug and alcohol misuse, violence in the home, economic migration, family breakdown and divorce, or the imprisonment or death of a parent.
- Work with national governments to recognise the important role that local NGOs play in providing frontline services and reaching the most vulnerable, to ensure the sustainability of prevention and response interventions at family, community and government levels.

Find out more about the work we do at:

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