

Partnerships for change:

Working together to influence child protection reform in Rwanda

Hope and Homes for Children (HHC) has catalysed deinstitutionalisation and child protection reform in Rwanda through a partnership approach. Working together with partners and building a common language has strengthened capacity and coordination across state and NGO stakeholders and sparked commitment to common aims and objectives for a renewed child protection system.

Building on extensive development and delivery at grassroots level, HHC has implemented internationally recognised, evidence-based models and accompanied this with advocacy and policy input which has contributed to high-level commitment to, and the development of strategy, policies and plans for, comprehensive child protection reform focused on deinstitutionalisation and alternative care across Rwanda. Partnership with the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) and the National Commission for Children (NCC) have been at the heart of this strategy, alongside UNICEF and local and international NGOs. Engagement has also included the Ministry for Administration and Local Government (MINALOC), Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN), the Office of the Prime Minister and the Office of the President. This approach contributed to the development of the National Strategy for Child Care Reform, the *Tubarerere Mu Muryango* programme for its implementation, and the Programme Coordination Team that is overseeing the programme roll-out. This experience highlights the way in which it is possible to deliver change through working with partners, using a model of change that combines demonstration work with the development of a strong social work force, policy development and securing funding for transition from institutional care into community and family care.

Key actions and approaches to partnership development and advocacy for systemic change

- Signed Memorandum of Understanding with MIGEPROF in 2010, jointly committing to reduce the number of children living in and entering institutional care through the closure of institutions and the development of sustainable, community based alternative care services.
- Combined demonstration project and research to create the evidence base and model for deinstitutionalisation:
 - o Undertook a national survey of institutions and produced a comprehensive situational analysis in partnership with MIGEPROF, delivering an evidence base to inform policy and plans.
 - o Undertook the closure of the Mpore PEFA institution in Kigali, ensuring transition of all children to family-based care and developing a range of supportive community-based family strengthening and alternative care services.
- Contributed to capacity building locally and nationally, including bespoke training, conferences, events, advice and technical assistance for government and non-government staff and policy-making professionals. Included national conference in 2007 attended by the President, and a supportive declaration from him in favour of family-based and alternative care. Sharing international experience of deinstitutionalisation helped decision makers to see that institutional care in Rwanda can be addressed within a reasonable timeframe.
- Information, education and communications messaging to increase national awareness of core issues. Harnessed the media - including radio, TV and print media - to disseminate key messages which influenced public awareness and attitudes towards family-based care.
- Provided technical input to national policies and plans - such as the Integrated Child Rights Policy (ICRP) and Law relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child - through forums, committees and direct input. In particular, contributed significantly to the development of the National Strategy for Child Care Reform approved by the Cabinet in March 2012.
- Partnered in the development of *Tubarerere Mu Muryango* - the national programme for the implementation of the National Strategy for Child Care Reform. Together with key partners we identified the needs and approaches required in the Rwandan context, and are jointly overseeing the roll-out of this programme as members of the Programme Coordination Team.

Opportunities and challenges:

- **Service provision:** Fairly extensive service provision for vulnerable children and families across Rwanda provides an opportunity, but lack of harmonisation and diversity of approaches make

coordination and linkages difficult. Partners are supporting the Government of Rwanda to increase their capacity to standardise and regulate service provision and harmonise delivery to ensure full coverage.

- **Political commitment:** Child protection reform is backed by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, and endorsed by the President. High level political commitment has significant value, and also facilitates buy-in at local levels. However, lack of capacity for coordination and implementation hinders this opportunity and results in differences between government policy and reality on the ground. Investment in capacity building of NCC and government runs throughout our partnerships.
- **Framework for collaboration and coordination:** Clear expectations, common goals, mechanisms for coordination and a clear framework for partnership are vital. The *Tubararere Programme Framework* and the Partnership Compact signed between Programme Coordination Team members is a positive example of a formal agreement on the joint aims, roles and responsibilities of each government and non-government partner. This sets a framework for actions and is a tool for ensuring ongoing commitment and accountability.
- **Demonstration of evidence-based, successful models of intervention:** Advocacy alone is not enough; through taking action, achieving results and showing concrete progress we have been able to dispel myths, build evidence and develop a locally-relevant model. We have taken Government and other stakeholders on a journey of '*seeing is believing*', fostering knowledge and commitment beyond political rhetoric.
- **Relationships and partnerships.** We have cultivated relationships with key Government personnel – from Ministers to implementing Officers – and NGOs and other stakeholders over time. We have supported them to articulate and achieve their aims, contributed expertise in response to gaps and requests, opened informal channels for advocacy and responded flexibly to meet needs that partners identify themselves. It takes time to build relationships into effective partnerships, and this has worked best in parallel with direct programme implementation.
- **Communication:** Simple and clear messages, open forum discussions, the opportunity to raise concerns and ask questions was key to advocacy and influence. This works in both directions, enables a relationship of trust and increases partners willingness to engage. Regular partner meetings, joint responses to challenges and joint celebration of success all foster shared responsibility and increase the likelihood of success. Forums such as the Programme Coordination Team and stakeholder meetings enable this.
- **Securing resources:** Financial and human resources are essential for delivery of child protection system reform. We have worked together with partners to leverage funding for implementation for the strategy. This has included leveraging investment from institutional donors, such as USAID, into government initiatives for child care reform. For example, we supported the Government to secure funding for recruitment of new social workforce staff, and provided training to build their capacity once in post. Attracting and coordinating donor funds for a coordinated, impactful effort enables good practice models to be elevated to national scale and is critical both nationally and regionally.

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