The Rwandan Experience
of Fostering Separated Children

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Save the Children

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– A world which listens to children and learns.
– A world where all children have hope and opportunity.

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by the founders of Save the Children and expressed today
in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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Executive Summary

This study was commissioned by UNICEF, the International Save the Children Alliance and the Government of Rwanda. Following the genocide and civil war in 1994, fostering has been promoted by the Government and by agencies as the preferred option for younger separated children unable to return to the care of their own families. Although responsibility for the care of children is traditionally shared within the extended family and with close friends, care by strangers has not been common. Approximately 1 200 children have been fostered by agencies (referred to as "formal" or "agency" fostering), but in addition there is believed to be a much larger number of children who have been spontaneously taken in by unrelated families (referred to as "spontaneous" or "informal" fostering). However, little has been done to inquire into the circumstances of either group and little is known about how they are faring.

Terms of reference for the study were drawn up and a research team was established. An Advisory Committee was set up to oversee the work of the team and to review the findings and drafts of the study, and an advisory group of young people was also established to help plan the research. The study involved an examination of formal fostering policy and practice from the point of view of the Government and fostering agencies, and an exploration of the perceptions of fostering of children, foster parents, local authorities and other members of local communities. The community-based research encompassed both formal and spontaneous fostering, and was conducted in 8 Communes in 5 different Prefectures, and methods included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and group sessions with children using various activities.

The study sets fostering within the legislative context of other types of care arrangement for children, including adoption and guardianship. Although Government-approved Guidelines on fostering practice are in operation, fostering is not contained within the framework of legislation: hence the status of the foster child and the rights and obligations of foster parents remain unclear.

The procedures and practices of the various agencies involved in formal fostering have become somewhat unified as a result of the Guidelines, but the study revealed considerable differences, especially in relation to the selection and approval of prospective foster parents, the "matching" of children with families and, perhaps most significantly, in the area of post-placement follow-up and support. Many foster parents felt a lack of support from agencies and from the wider community. The children themselves were conscious that they had been "chosen" by the foster parents, but this raises questions about the participation of children in the fostering process.

Foster parents (agency and spontaneous) have been motivated by a variety of factors: perhaps the most commonly expressed was a sense of social or religious motivation, but others decided to foster because they had lost a child, or were childless or lonely. The need for assistance in the house was also expressed by some as a motive. Many who fostered informally did so as a result of personal contacts or chance meetings with homeless children. Some took in a foster child while in exile or during repatriation, and some foster placements were arranged by the army.

A key question for the study was whether or not foster children are treated in a similar manner to other child members of the family: foster parents who took part in group discussions were clear that they should enjoy the same rights as those of natural children and should not experience any discrimination. Evidence from the children generally indicated that they were well treated but there were some notable exceptions, and where this was the case it was unclear what steps could and should be taken to respond to the problems. Many foster parents experienced behavioural difficulties with the child in the early stages but usually these did not persist. Despite the widespread perception in Rwanda that children in foster homes are abused and exploited, this was not borne out by the study. Although some fostered children did carry a disproportionate burden of work within the family, this was not the norm, and for many children involvement in domestic tasks was perceived positively. Many foster parents expressed concern at the difficulties in continuing their children's education and in providing for their health needs, but the study did not reveal evidence of widespread discrimination in favour of natural children.

The study looked closely at how children themselves perceive fostering. As a sub-category of "orphan" (which generally carries negative connotations in Rwandan society), fostered children generally viewed fostering positively. Most children, especially those formally fostered, seemed to be well integrated into the family, though it needs to be remembered that most of the children involved in the study were young. However, many seemed to be particularly aware of the need for good behaviour and obedience.

Not all fostered children had been told that they had been fostered, though some had already found out. Some foster parents saw the child's continuing ignorance to be an indication of success, and because of the negative connotations of "orphans" it is understandable that some parents did not want people to know that their child had been fostered. However, this raises important questions about the child's right to an identity, and poses a serious dilemma in the event of the child's natural parents being traced. Of those children who knew that they were fostered, many expressed the hope of rejoining their own families. Nevertheless, it seems that most children saw themselves as permanent members of their foster family: most were clear that they should be included in the family's identity card and that they should benefit from the family's inheritance. The importance of education was a recurring theme for the children, and interestingly some suggested that education is the most important form of inheritance, being more portable, or transferable, than property.

In principle, fostering is seen as a non-permanent form of care, but foster parents tend to see it as permanent unless the child's family is traced. Most seem to have a strong sense of their permanent obligations towards the child. The lack of clarity about the legal status of the child and about the obligations and duties of foster parents emerges as a key issue. The confusion over the procedures to be adopted if the foster placement is not working well, and regarding the monitoring and support of the placement, reflect the lack of a legal framework around fostering. Most foster parents seemed to be coping with little external support.

It is difficult to draw clear conclusions regarding the differences between formal and spontaneous fostering on the basis of the data from this study. However, it does seem clear that the public nature of formal fostering, and in particular the fact of having a written agreement and ceremony, provides some safeguards. The preparation received helped them to understand the likely long-term obligations. Moreover, the preparation and follow-up provided by the agency seems to be a factor in facilitating positive outcomes. The evidence suggests that parents who fostered spontaneously generally had a less clear perception of their long-term obligations.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Rwandan Government and UNICEF for identifying the necessity to obtain information on fostering, and to the International Save the Children Alliance for supporting the implementation of this study as part of the global research project on the Care and Protection of Separated Children in Emergencies (CPSC).

The members of the Advisory Committee provided technical and administrative assistance. Special thanks are due to Mr. Straton Nsanzabaganwa, Ministry of Local Administration and Social Affairs (MINALOC), and Lila Pieters, UNICEF, for their commitment and continuous technical support, to Félicité Mukantanbara, UNICEF and David Sezikeye, Save the Children UK, for their help with the many day to day tasks, and to Veronique Uwimana, Ministry of Local Administration and Social Affairs, for her assistance with the search of Government documents.

We want to thank the staff of International Social Service, in particular Marie Noelle Senyana-Mottier and Amon Nkurunziza for the information provided, for facilitating contacts in the field and for feedback on the research strategy.

We also would like to thank the staff of Centre Presbytérien d'Amour pour les Jeunes (CPAJ) for supporting the initiative of including children as advisors during the research process, and to children who gave us regular feedback during the various stages of the research.

We are grateful to our institutions for supporting our involvement in this project and to our colleagues for having kindly accepted to take on some of our duties.

Finally, special thanks go to the children, parents and key informants in centres, schools and local structures who agreed to share their experiences, challenges and rewards. We hope that this report will contribute to the improvement of the life, care and protection of children, to the support of families and to the strengthening of civil society.

List of abbreviation

CPAJ   Presbyterian Centre for the Love of Young People
CPSC   Care and Protection of Separated Children in Emergencies
CRC   Convention on the Rights of the Child
ICRC   International Committee for the Red Cross
MIGEFASO   Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs
MINALOC   Ministry of Local Administration and Social Affairs
NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation
RPA   Rwandan Patriotic Front
SCF   International Save the Children Alliance
SSI   International Social Services
UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the 1990s, Rwandan history was characterised by a "crisis of such proportions that every Rwandan is said to have lost touch with at least one member of his or her immediate family" (ICRC, 2000, p. 3).

It is an African tradition to take care of children, and the recent events have tested this custom. The Government estimated that between 400 000 and 500 000 children were lost or became separated from their families (Ministry of Social Work and Social Affairs, UNICEF, Barakabaho, Save the Children US, 1996) during the genocide, war and mass movements of the last decade. Both inside Rwanda and across the border, efforts have been made to reunify or foster children in families rather than to place them in residential care.

The history of the development of policies and programmes on fostering in Rwanda is a remarkable example of a commitment to care and protect separated children. It is within this framework that the Ministry of Local Administration and Social Affairs (MINALOC), UNICEF, and SCF have commissioned this study.

1. Terms of Reference

The overall goal of the study is to document and to analyse the Rwandan experience of fostering. The terms of reference for the study are:

- To chart the history of fostering within the particular social and cultural context of Rwanda and events following the genocide in 1994.
- To examine the evolution of Government policy on fostering.
- To examine and analyse the practice of fostering including the approaches and methods used.
- To analyse the extent to which various aspects of fostering comply with the CRC.
- To examine the definition of spontaneous and formal fostering.
- To examine and analyse the community based support and monitoring of foster homes (material and psycho-social needs of foster parents and foster children and how these are being met).
- To examine the evidence of the outcomes of placements.
- To examine and analyse the psycho-social impact of fostering on both children and foster families.
- To examine and analyse the relationship between foster care, family tracing and reunification, residential care and other forms of care for separated children.
- To gather together the available information on the phenomenon of spontaneous fostering within Rwanda and refugee camps in neighbouring countries.

- To examine how fostering is understood by children (including fostered children), foster parents and other members of the community.

2. Child care

Traditional Care Arrangements for Children in Rwanda

In Rwandan culture, family is defined by blood relations but close friends may also become members of the family. "Kunywana", which means "to cut and drink blood", was a practice used to establish lifelong friendship between families. If the agreement were broken, punishment from nature would follow. In addition to that, and even in recent times, the exchange of a cow has become the symbol of long lasting union between families. The care of children is traditionally carried out by family members in the wider sense of the word. Temporary care of children by the "extended family" is common. Children go to live with relatives or family friends to have access to education; girls go and live with relatives to help them with house-chores.

Responsibility for children without one or both parents is traditionally secured by the father's side of the family, in line with the patriarchal nature of Rwandan society. But other types of care arrangements are possible, depending on the age of the child, and on whether it is the mother, father or both parents who are deceased. For instance, if the father dies, young children continue to stay with the mother, and the paternal uncle will be involved at a later stage to arrange dowry for girls or inheritance for boys. If the mother remarries, older children may move in with the family of the paternal uncle.

Therefore, prior to the war and genocide, orphans and unaccompanied children generally remained within the extended family environment. Owing to death, displacement and conflict, traditional care arrangements became fragmented and at times unable to absorb the rapid increase in numbers of separated and unaccompanied children. The following section describes the transformation of care arrangements for separated and unaccompanied children after the war.

History of Care Arrangements for Separated Children in Rwanda

In pre-genocide Rwanda, there were 37 orphanages catering for about 4 800 children (Cantwell, 1997). They were babies born of unmarried mothers or orphans of both parents. These latter might have had relatives in the area but were either too poor or unwilling to take care of them.

The phenomenon of separated children became visible during and soon after the 1994 genocide. Since then, the ICRC database has gathered 120 266 files of registered Rwandan unaccompanied children in the region (ICRC, 2000), and the Rwandan Government estimated that the total number of unaccompanied and separated children might have been as high as 4 – 500 000 (Minitraso et al 1996).

According to ICRC (2000), in March 2000, 1 533 separated children were registered outside Rwanda, but the figure is thought to be much higher. These children are

found mostly in neighbouring countries (Democratic Republic of Congo: 692; Tanzania: 256: Kenya: 48; Uganda: 26; Zambia: 33; Central African Republic: 19; Republic of Congo: 286; Angola: 45). There are 30 000 Rwandans living in Kivu provinces in Congo waiting to be repatriated, and 3 000 children may be separated from their parents: new Rwandan separated children continue to emerge from the forest, having lived with Congolese foster families in North and South Kivu.

Unaccompanied children were cared for in different types of environments, depending on conditions and available resources. Inside Rwanda, the number of centres for unaccompanied children increased dramatically in the year following the genocide. While 37 orphanages catered for about 4 800 children before the genocide, 55 centres hosted 10 381 children soon after the end of the genocide, and their number reached its peak with 77 centres receiving 12 704 children in April 1995. An emphasis on placing children in families resulted in a decrease in the number of centres. In October 1996, 57 centres hosted 6 620 children; in November 1998, 38 centres received 5 343 children; and in April 2000, 37 centres accommodate less than 5 000 children.

However, if numbers have gone back to pre-genocide figures, the profile of children in centres is quite different. The children still in centres are those for whom family tracing has been unsuccessful, those who are too old to be fostered, and those with physical or mental disabilities. Both Government and partner organisations joined efforts to attempt to place separated and unaccompanied children in family-like environments. Identification, documentation and tracing resulted in 67 119 children being reunified with a family member, and 3 658 spontaneously fostered have been registered with ICRC for reunification (ICRC, 2000).

Foster care

In the Kinyarwandan language, "Kwakirwa mu muryango" means "to be received or welcomed in a family" without any specific reference to the tie of the child with family. Reference to fostering by outsiders is expressed by adding utari uwa bene wabo or utari uwabo, meaning a family with whom there are no blood ties. Programmes for unaccompanied and separated Rwanda children used the working definition of family reunification, to imply reunification of the child with parents or extended family members. Fostering, especially organised fostering, came to be understood as a care arrangement for unaccompanied children with unrelated families. However, it is unclear from some documents, especially those written during the emergency phase, whether the term fostering refers only to placements with non-related individuals or whether it includes members of the extended family.

Fostering can be informal/spontaneous or formal/organised. Informal fostering occurs when a child is taken into the care of a family and no outside party is involved in making this arrangement. During emergencies, informal and spontaneous fostering is frequent. Formal or organised fostering takes place when a child is placed with a family following an arrangement made by a third party, either an agency or an individual. As the rest of the section will show, organised fostering in Rwanda is a documented and

quantifiable phenomenon. By contrast, spontaneous fostering is an unknown pheno-menon. The number of children and families is not available, their situation is not monitored and their psycho-social needs are unknown.

It is commonly accepted that since the beginning of the war in 1990, Rwandan fami-lies had been sending their children to live with relatives and friends to ensure their survival. Between April and July 1994, unaccompanied children were placed with rela-tives, neighbours, friends and strangers amidst killings, perils and displacements. Soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) took in children found in the forest. In RPA controlled areas, the army set up temporary centres for children, organised evacu-ations and facilitated placements of child survivors of the genocide with Rwandans li-ving outside the country. A number of children were brought to other countries in Africa and Europe, where they were placed in foster care in centres or with families.

While it is difficult to record the evolution of fostering in the Great Lakes Region, Brown (1995) reports that out of 93 480 unaccompanied Rwandan children in the Great Lakes Region, 28 300 were in foster families inside Rwanda. For separated refu-gee children, 10 000 were fostered by refugee families in Goma and 4 000 by Congolese families. In Bukavu, 5 879 were fostered by refugee families and 300 by Congolese families. In Uvira, 1 520 were fostered by either refugee or Congolese families.

During an Interagency meeting (SCF 1997), it was reported that since 1994, up to one third of the 30 000 Rwandan refugee children separated from their families were taken in by local families in eastern Congo, the majority in north Kivu. In November 1996, when massed repatriation of Rwandan refugees, and the westward flight of ot-hers occurred, Congolese families gave up fostered children who returned, while other families took in newly separated ones (Brown, 1995).

In Ngara and Karagwe (Tanzania), NGOs aimed at placing children with extended families or with unrelated foster families coming from the same region of origin of the child. This approach, combined with the policy of the Tanzania Government discou-raging fostering by Tanzanian families, resulted in 10 900 children placed with refugee extended families. Those agencies organising fostering in these refugee camps seem not to have provided any continuity of monitoring and support following repatriation and these children now appear to be lost within the larger category of otherwise spontane-ous fostered children.

Inside Rwanda, placing children in families was a priority of the Government of transition. In October 94, there were already discussions about the possibility of pla-cing children in related and unrelated families[1], and reports by NGOs (e.g. CECI, 1997) indicate that associations of "foster families" were active in Ruhengeri and Gisenyi in 1996. The national campaign *One child, one family* launched during the Day of the African Child in June 1996, saw the placement of children through organi-sed fostering by SSI at national level and by Concern in Gitarama.

It is estimated that to date, 1 200 children have been fostered in an organised mann-ner[2]. However the number of children cared by foster families in both organised or spontaneous manner is thought to be much higher. UN (2000) estimates that there

are 120 000 children living with foster families: this number is, however, likely to include both reunified and fostered children.

Very little is known about the conditions in which foster children and families live, as well as how the rights and responsibilities of foster children and families are perceived within local communities. MINALOC, UNICEF and SCF agreed that it was important at this time in Rwandan history to develop a clearer understanding of spontaneous and organised fostering.

3. Statutory Child Care Services and Local Government Structures

Rwanda has an elaborate and multi-layered system of local Government. The country has 12 Prefectures, headed by a Prefet and these are subdivided into a total of 154 Communes, each with a Bourgmestre (or mayor). In turn these are subdivided into smaller units, first Sectors, led by a Conseiller, then Cellules, headed by a Responsable, and finally at very local level is the unit of "Ten Houses" led by a Nyumbakumi. At Commune level (and at Sector level in towns) there is a social worker who is charged with responsibility for social problems and works jointly with the Sub-Bourgemestre in charge of social affairs. At the various levels within this structure there is a committee on which there is a representative of social affairs. In 1999, as part of a larger policy of Governmental decentralisation, social affairs sub-committees were established at Cellule and Sector levels. These various committees and sub-committees provide focal points for issues to do with separated children, with the social worker at Commune level having a co-ordinating function and responsibility for dealing with the more difficult or complex cases: the extent to which this works out in practice is, however, very variable.

Chapter 2

Methodology

1. Introduction

The aim of this research is to provide a picture of fostering in its many manifestations in the Rwandan context. For this purpose opinions, experiences, and concerns of those directly involved in fostering such as children, siblings, friends of foster children, foster parents, and neighbours were obtained. Rather than focusing on individuals in isolation, the social network of family relations was explored.

This study does not aim to be a representative census of the situation of fostered families in the country: rather it describes the variety of experiences, motivations, challenges and concerns of foster families, agency workers, community leaders and authorities. Therefore, a qualitative approach was adopted. The aim of qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative, is to collect information on a particular subject in depth. For this purpose, open-ended questions were asked of different people, and various individuals or groups were asked to discuss or present their experience on the topic from different angles. The purpose is to search for new and different themes that emerge from individuals rather than to find out how many individuals agree with a certain statement.

A qualitative approach was also chosen because one component of fostering, that is spontaneous fostering, is practically an unknown quantity, and it is therefore difficult to select a representative sample of foster families. Although generalisations about the population cannot be drawn from this study, the information given is nevertheless valid and reliable. It is presented in a way that provides an answer to the research topics presented in the terms of reference.

2. Participatory Research

The research strategy and instruments were developed by the team of researchers, with feedback from members of the Advisory Committee. In addition to this level of participation, we have also included children as "advisors" in the research process. In Rwanda, child participation has acquired value in the past few years. The Child Participation team within UNICEF has facilitated children's participation in the Model Parliament, and attendance at conferences, such as the one on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. NGOs are implementing projects in which youth define their priorities and activities. We have included children in the research process, as this section describes.

Participatory Research with Children
N'izibika zari amagi – Even the rooster once was an egg
This Rwandan proverb was frequently mentioned by children to signify that adults become who they are from who they were or what they did in childhood. Remembering the role that childhood plays in adulthood, we decided to rely on children not only as participants but as an advisory group in the development and implementation of the research process. A group of 13 children were elected as representatives by children participating in activities at the Centre Presbytérian d'Amour pour les Enfants (CPAJ). They were selected to represent respectively children from poor families, fostered children, street and working children, and orphans. The research team and the children met on eight occasions, during which they gave feedback on topics for inclusion in the research, selection of participants, how to approach children, specific questions, interpretation of findings and recommendations. In summary, the following are their suggestions:

1. In order to obtain reliable information, not only parents and children but also other individuals need to be interviewed – peers of foster children, foster parents, friends of foster children, neighbours, foster children themselves, workers in centres, teachers, and authorities.
2. Before interviewing foster parents, it is important to gather information from neighbours.
3. It is imperative to ask the permission of parents before interviewing the foster child to help avoid the possibility of the child being mistreated after the conversation.
4. To increase the trust and reliability of information, an informant should be visited two or three times.
5. The study should explore how foster children are treated (do they go to school, do they receive the same amount of food as the other children, are they at ease, do foster parents treat them as their own?).
6. A section on the future of children should be present in the report.

All their suggestions, with the exception of number 4 (for lack of time and resources) were incorporated in the research. During the last session, we found that we all had learned from one another

3. Selection of Sites and Informants

The purpose of the research is to provide a picture of fostering. Therefore, one of the main criteria was to choose fieldwork sites in which fostering occurred. It was also deemed important to select sites that reflected the greatest variety of circumstances and conditions. Discussions amongst MINALOC, UNICEF, and SCF led to the selection of 8 Communes in 5 Prefectures.

Criteria for the Selection of Prefectures and Communes

The Prefectures in different parts of the country were chosen to provide a variety in terms of:

- Fostering experiences.
- Centres for unaccompanied children and organised fostering activities.
- Historical and social key events such as repatriations and displacements which varied with geographical location.

The Prefectures chosen were: Kigali Ville (city), Kigali Rural (rural area), Gitarama, Kibungo, and Gisenyi:

- Kigali Ville was chosen to complement information collected in other surveys and studies, most of whom contain information from Kigali Ville.
- Kigali Rural was chosen because, according to informal discussion, it had many cases of both spontaneous and organised fostering.
- Gitarama was chosen because a number of NGOs conducted fostering there.
- Kibungo was chosen because of the presence in the past of (Save the Children Denmark and the number of earlier and more recent returnees.
- Gisenyi was chosen because, owing to its proximity to the border through which exodus and repatriation occurred, it was thought to have cases of fostering during displacement and repatriation.

The selection of Communes for fieldwork was done according to the following more specific criteria:

- Implementation of organised fostering by different organisations and/or local agents.
- Period of fostering.
- Number of children fostered in an organised manner.
- Centres collaborating with agencies conducting organised fostering.
- City and countryside.
- Presence of spontaneous fostering.

The Selection of Participants

The study aimed at providing an overall picture of what happens to children who are fostered, their families and others indirectly or directly related to fostering. In order to provide a variety of perspectives, a range of individuals were asked to collaborate. They included: children, parents (at least one parent), siblings, friends of the foster child, neighbours, local authorities, leaders in the area, NGO workers, and other children.

Selection of foster families[3]

It was decided that relations amongst members of a foster family would provide a more accurate picture of fostering. Hence, parents, siblings, the fostered child, and other people living with the family were interviewed. Following recommendations

from the children in CPAJ, friends of the child and neighbours were also included in the interviews. Families were identified either by a local authority, a social worker from an NGO, or a member of the community.

Selection of foster parents for focus-group discussions
In each Commune, one group of foster parents was contacted, and discussions organised with the assistance of local authority or NGO staff. Appointments were made in advance and individuals invited to participate.

Selection of key informants and local authorities for interviews
Key informants were selected on the basis of their expertise on a specific topic or because of a relevant experience. At least one local authority representative in each Commune was interviewed.

Selection of children for focus-group discussions and activities
Group discussions and activities were conducted with children still in the centre, in schools, in the family, and in the neighbourhood. They were chosen from a variety of settings to provide different perspectives on fostering. Details about the methods used will be explained below.

Number of participants
The following table summarises the participants in each main activity of the study. As can be seen, 55% of participants were children and 45% adults.

Participants	Numbers	Percentage
Participants in families interviews	130	31%
Parents in focus-group discussions	70	17%
Children in group activities	173	42%
Local leaders and key informants	42	10%
Total number of participants	*Total 415* Children 228 Adults 187	*Total 100%* Children 55% Adults 45%

4. Research Activities

Semi-structured Individual Interviews

Interviews were conducted with fostered children in each Commune. Interviews were structured in three parts: description of daily activities, the use of the image of the river to trace the main events in life, specific questions about family dynamics and relationship with siblings and parents. Care was taken not to identify children as fostered or to ask direct questions about fostering. This procedure was adopted because not all children who were fostered were aware of this fact. When children mentioned their experience of fostering, further open-ended questions were asked.

To obtain an overall picture of the situation of the children in the family, parents were also interviewed and where possible one or more siblings were interviewed through open-ended interviews. A few open-ended questions were developed for the friends of the child and neighbours. Individual interviews were also conducted with a range of key informants or persons selected because of their expertise or experience in an area relevant for the study. Local authorities were contacted to provide an overall picture of fostering in their region.

Focus-group Discussion

In each Commune, focus-group discussions were held with foster parents to explore, in detail, fostering experiences, family dynamics, and challenges. Focus-group discussions were also held with adolescents. One focus-group discussion with adolescents in centres in which other children had been fostered was organised to explore their perception of the process involved in organised fostering, and what happens to children after they have been fostered. Another focus-group discussion with adolescents was held in a secondary school to hear their opinions about controversial issues that had previously emerged during focus-group discussions with parents (identity, inheritance, abuse, coping strategies and support). One focus-group discussion was held with local leaders.

Activities with Children

These included children in a variety of care arrangement but care was taken to ensure that representatives of children in foster care participated in the activities. Teachers and social workers were asked to invite children in different care arrangements to be included in the activities. A series of activities were organised with children to understand children's perceptions of fostering, rights and obligations, abuse, support, and family dynamics. These included:

- Pictures: UNICEF posters on the rights of children were used to elicit information on the rights and obligations of children and parents in general and in fostering cases.
- Sentence completion: children were given sentences to complete (e.g. "If I were beaten"; "If there was not enough food at home").
- Thematic discussions: information such as cases, sentences, examples collected

during the research was used as stimulus for discussion on a variety of themes.

- Proverbs: children were asked to remember and create proverbs on children.

5. Advisory Committee Meetings

Three meetings were held with members of the Advisory Committee to discuss the design of the study, selection of sites and participants, instruments, and information on Government policy and NGOs' practice, while written feedback on the preliminary versions of the final report was provided.

6. Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews with key informants took place between August and November; activities in the field lasted for two months (Sept-November 2000). Fieldwork took place during a time of the year characterised by a particularly dry season.

A team of five individuals was involved in data collection and analysis. Local authorities were first contacted in each Commune; generally a social worker from MINALOC or the agency involved in fostering in the Commune facilitated initial contacts. The letter of presentation by MINALOC proved to be a helpful introduction which ensured assistance, especially from local authorities.

Two teams, each composed of two individuals (one male, one female) conducted focus-group discussions, interviews and group activities with children. Each team undertook all of the research work in a particular Commune to facilitate contacts and continuity of relationships. In this way, at the end of each interview and focus-group discussion, information was shared and opinions exchanged. A diary of events and a section on comments at the end of each interview form were completed, while efforts were made for information to be properly recorded the day following fieldwork.

Quotations from key informants – especially foster parents and children – are given, anonymously, in italics. Brief case examples are also given from the 50 individual case studies which were compiled from interviews and group discussions.

Feedback on Preliminary Findings

A one day consultative meeting was organised on the 15th of November 2000. Forty-four representatives of NGOs, central Government, local authorities, and UN agencies participated and gave their feedback. The research team presented the preliminary findings of the study. Comments and ideas expressed in this meeting were incorporated into the case study.

7. Research considerations

Direct or Indirect Questions about Fostering?

It was felt that asking direct questions about fostering might have negative effects on

children, especially those who did not know that they had been fostered, or whose foster siblings did not know. In an effort to reduce potential discrimination, all children in a family where interviewed, and questions were carefully phrased to avoid direct reference to fostering. The researchers interviewed neighbours indirectly while asking for directions about the foster family or simultaneously (one interviewer was with the family and the other outside). The interviewer informed the family about the presence of the other in the neighbourhood. They explained that the other was gathering information on fostering and on the experience of the neighbour.

Identification of Cases of Abuse

In some instances, abuse of children was observed. It was decided that information about these cases would be reported to relevant authorities and to NGOs.

Reciprocation

What to give in return? In some instances the researchers gave basic advice to parents, in other instances they shared information (anonymously) that had emerged from other foster families. A number of activities required parents or children to spend a considerable amount of time with the researchers, usually after walking to a meeting place. After internal discussions, it was decided that incentives in the form of drinks or some cash were given to participants as a "thank you" for their collaboration. This decision proved to be much appreciated by the families in the light of the poverty resulting from the particularly dry season.

Limitations and Constraints

Research is always a compromise between constraints and resources. For this research, the time frame was three months with a research team composed of five individuals. The following were some of the constraints encountered:

- Researchers were hired at different times, which proved a positive strategy in that it allowed for more time for the research process but it also meant that continuity suffered.
- At times it was difficult to identify spontaneous fostering because local authorities were not aware of cases, as they had not been registered. On one occasion the local authorities had prepared families to receive researchers, making the interviews less spontaneous.
- Collecting data in Kigali proved to be more difficult than in other prefectures because most foster parents worked in offices during the day.
- Children are fostered when they are quite young, and this made the collection of their stories difficult. It is also possible that the chosen method, the interview, was not the most suitable for young children, despite the fact that researchers tried to start with a simple question (what activities do you do during the day?) and used a figurative example (the river) as a tool to describe their life story.
- The research began when the academic year started, and this made it difficult to

contact the children. A number of them were contacted at school, during lunch breaks or on Saturdays.

- At times, to conduct activities with children, additional authorisations were required, such as from the school inspector at the prefectoral level. In some instances, access was refused because the managers of centres complained of "research fatigue", saying that many researchers had been there and no benefit had been obtained.

Chapter 3

Government Guidelines and Programmes

1. Introduction

This chapter aims at picturing the development of Government work in relation to fostering. First, the national and international legal framework is described, and the recent history of fostering within the Government is presented. Then follows a section that summarises the two main achievements at policy level on fostering: guidelines on fostering procedures and a draft law on fostering.

2. Legal Framework for the Care and Protection of Children

The care of separated children is best achieved within the family, whose importance is emphasised in a number of Declarations. Alternative care for children who cannot live with the family is left to customary practices.

The Constitution of the Rwanda Republic of June 10th 1991 states that:

"The family, natural base of Rwandan society, is protected by the State. Parents have the right and obligation to raise their children". (art. 24)

This article is similar to that found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

"The family is the natural and fundamental element of society and it has the right to society and State's protection (art. 16.3) and Maternity and childhood have right to special aid and assistance. All children, born within or outside a marriage, enjoy the same social protection". (art. 25.2)

The African Charter of the Human Rights and those of Populations states in Article 18 and 29 that:

"The family is the natural environment and the base of society. It must be protected by the State, which must oversee its physical and moral wellbeing".

"The State is obliged to assist the family in its mission as guardian of morality and traditional values recognised by the Community".

"The State has the obligation to avoid all forms of discrimination against the woman and to ensure the protection of the rights of the woman and child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions".

"The individual has the obligation to preserve the harmonious development of the family and to support cohesion and respect for the family; to respect at all times ones parents, to nourish them and assist them in case of necessity".

Rwanda, as a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adheres to the Convention articles, including article 20 on alternative care:

> "A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State. State Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placements, Kafala of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background."

In Rwandan law, there are three forms of filiation: legitimate, natural and adoption. The legitimate child is the one who is conceived during marriage, and filiation is established in the birth certificate. Natural children are those born of parents not married. They need to be recognised by both parents in order to have the same rights and obligations as legitimate children.

The Civil Code contains specific articles on adoption and guardianship. Adoption is distinguishable from foster placement in that it aims to provide a child with all the rights relating to his or her parents as if the child had been born to them. Adoption places on parents equal parental responsibility to that of biological parents, and therefore it should only be used in cases of irreversible abandonment or if the natural parents consent.

Adoption is elucidated in the Rwandan Civil Code. Adoption can be applied for by somebody at least 35 years old or 30 if the spouses have been married for more than five years. Unless the child is the child of one of the partners, the age difference between child and parents must be of at least 15 years. If the person who wants to adopt is married, the consent of the spouse is necessary and if the parents of the child are alive, then they have to consent to adoption. Even after adoption, the adopted child maintains his or her own and family name, links with the natural family and his or her rights and obligations. Adopted children have the same rights and obligations as legitimate children, except in case of inheritance.

Guardianship applies in the case of a child whose father and mother are both deceased, absent, disappeared or deprived of parental authority. It also applies with regard to a natural child if neither father nor mother has recognised the child as their own. The individual's right to choose a parent or somebody outside the family as a guardian belongs only to the survivor of father and mother. Guardianship is a personal responsibility that does not pass on to the descendants of the guardian. The guardian represents the child in his/her actions in civil life. Guardianship ends when the child reaches the age of majority or dies; when absent or disappeared parents reappear; when the child is recognised as his/her own by one of the parents after the beginning of the guardianship.

The Rwandan Civil Code does not contain a specific article on fostering. However, as a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Rwanda subscribes to

the Convention articles, including article 20 on alternative care. This article provides that children who are fostered should be entitled to special protection and assistance from the State but in contrast to the safeguards concerning adoption, found in Article 21, the Convention does not provide any detail of the nature of safeguards required.

In 1986, the Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption, Nationally and Internationally was adopted unanimously by the General Assembly. The Declaration provides both a theoretical and practical framework for both foster placement and adoption procedures. Interviews with key informants, community members and foster families suggest lack of awareness and of application of the 1986 Declaration. Indeed, the most general interpretation of current foster practices within the Rwandan context is that they are without legal value. The need to clarify the currently ambiguous legal status of fostering came from many informants – for example.

"It will be quite difficult for a (foster) parent to defend the cause of a child in case of accident because he will be considered neither guardian nor adoptive parent. The Government should speed up the process (of legal reform) so that in case somebody decides to take in a child, the status would be specified and guardianship or adoption papers would be filled in" (Appeal Court agent).

One of the aims of this study is to explore the views of key informants, foster families and children on the type of legal tools appropriate for the protection of children in foster families. In this respect, the Rwandan Government and its partners have drafted Guidelines on fostering, and prepared to draw up a Ministerial decree. The following section reviews the Government mandate, policies and programmes in relation to separated children and fostering.

3. History of Government Activities on Fostering

Before the war and genocide, fostering occurred only sporadically, informally and in small numbers. It was after the dramatic increase in the number of separated children from 1994 that fostering has become a widespread phenomenon and a priority for the Government. The development of fostering has been complicated by successive changes in the Government ministries involved.

In 1994, the then Ministry of Social Reintegration of Vulnerable Groups began to think about fostering because of the high numbers of separated children in residential centres. The Ministry of Work and Social Affairs began to consider, in conjunction with relevant NGOs, the need for the regulation of fostering. The Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO) was established in 1997 and produced a draft policy and guidelines to regulate the functioning of centres for separated children, and in 1998 draft guidelines were produced on family reunification and fostering procedures (the latter are described below). The Ministry of Social Affairs came into being in 1999 and work was undertaken on drafting a law on fostering, though this was not enacted: these proposals will be considered below. In turn this

ministry was abolished in 2000, with many of its services transferred to the Ministry of Local Administration and Social Affairs: this ministry has continued the policy of closure of centres and the promotion of fostering, and the national Assembly approved a new Code on the Family.

The Government is currently undergoing a process of decentralisation that should enable it to work in close contact with the population. It is a recent initiative and therefore roles and responsibilities are not yet clearly defined and understood by its representatives. The plan is that in each Cellule there is a committee and subcommittee (social affairs committee) that makes decisions.

A situation analysis of women and children in Rwanda (UNICEF, 1997) describes the evolution of Government thinking in relation to fostering. While soon after the genocide the Government did not want to formalise child care, in order that spontaneous solidarity could take place, with the passage of time it has become legally necessary to clarify the child's status, to ensure that living conditions are adequate, and that the child's best interests are being protected. There is now a general recognition that regulations need to be developed to ensure that the child is not being exploited, treated poorly, or abused, and to enable the authorities to intervene when necessary.

In late 1997, under the auspices of MIGEFASO, a committee was established with the task of drafting guidelines on fostering procedures. The committee was composed of representatives from UNICEF, Concern, Save the Children UK, SSI, World Vision, and two local NGOs, Haguruka, and Tumurere. Guidelines on procedures for family reunification and fostering were drafted by the Committee, and the revised version of the guidelines on fostering and family reunification was made available by the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs: they are summarised in the following section.

Guidelines on Fostering Procedures

The fostering Guidelines are divided into five sections: sensitisation, evaluation, preparation of children and families, endorsement of the fostering agreement and follow-up. They are applicable only to agency fostering and not to spontaneous fostering.

A. Sensitisation

Sensitisation aims at informing families of the conditions of children in centres and of the Government policy of placing each child in a family, in accordance with the UN CRC and Rwandan culture. Social agents in charge of fostering, in collaboration with Prefectoral agents of MIGEFASO set up a calendar of sensitisation activities in Communes. The Prefect is responsible for writing a letter to Bourgmestres asking them to inform the community.

Community animation is initiated, in which events of 1994 and the presence of unaccompanied children in centres are explained with the goal of finding potential families. It is explained that there are criteria, and an evaluation process. Interested families register with the head of Cellule. A copy of the list is sent to the centre, the

concerned NGO and MIGEFASO. It is said that the child, under the responsibility of the director of the centre, must be prepared to leave the centre. To this end, prospective families visit the child in the centre. An agreement of engagement is then signed by the foster family, the Bourgmestre, and the manager of the centre. Families are informed that fostered children will be followed-up by local authorities whom agents of the NGO and MIGEFASO will support in implementing this task.

B. Evaluation

The first step by interested families is the registration with the Responsable of the Cellule, who should know the family and who is responsible to inform the Bourgmestre or his/her representative, if the family is not suitable. In each Commune, social committees are in charge of the evaluation.

Criteria for the selection of foster families are: individuals who want to receive a child must do it voluntarily and freely; all family members must agree with the decision to foster a child; the foster family must be self-sufficient, and capable of supporting the child; the foster family must exhibit good morality; the family must accept that the child agrees to being fostered; siblings should be fostered in the same family, as far as possible; children should, if possible, live in the Commune of origin; the foster family must agree to let the child join his/her family (including the extended family) when it is found; families composed of older parents (between 50 and 60 years of age) should, by preference, try to foster children older than 10 years of age; single individuals are not accepted as foster families; foster families must accept the religious beliefs of the child; and foster families must hold Rwandan nationality.

The social committee at Cellule level, accompanied by representatives of the NGO, visits prospective families, to conduct a social inquiry (individual interviews with each member of the family and neighbours). A report is prepared and it is given to the social committee at Commune level with recommendations on families to be approved. At this point a meeting with chosen foster families is organised to explain the fostering agreement.

C. Preparation of the child and the family

It is explained to older children that life with a family is better than life in a centre and that foster parents are looking forward to receiving them. From the start, parents show a preference for children according to health status, age, sex, and sometimes regional or ethnic origin. It is almost impossible to foster children with disabilities, and it is therefore recommended that they be placed in specialised centres. Sometimes, families ask for an HIV test, and this should be undertaken if each member of the family is also going to have it done. Sensitisation and education should be offered in regard to separated children with HIV, and it should not appear as a criterion for choice.

Once a foster family and some children have been identified, contacts can begin. Considering certain preferences of the family, some criteria should also be followed.

The first children admitted to the centre should be the first to leave. Fostering of children younger than 10 years of age will be a priority. The first contact is very important. Only the father and the mother should be present. Once a family is attracted to a child, it should not point the finger in front of the other children but it should express its choice discreetly. A transitional phase between the time a family has chosen a child and the time the fostering has become definitive. To this end, the family should try to have some contacts with the child, according to the age of the child and the locality of the family.

The centre should respect the formal procedure. Educators should support care staff who see their children leaving. Care staff should be sensitive to the needs of those children who are not chosen. They should also be involved in the preparation of the children who are fostered. The family should be informed of the health status of the child, food, sleeping habits and behaviour. If the child is old enough to understand, she/he should be informed on the place where he/she will go, and the number of foster brothers or sisters. The child should be assured that there will be a follow-up.

D. Endorsement of the fostering agreement
A ceremony of fostering can be held in the centre when the procedures are completed. Authorities will be invited and the family will sign the fostering agreement together with the Bourgmestre.

E. Follow-up
The objective of follow-up is to ensure that families are able to provide a good standard of care and to avoid the necessity of returning children to the centre. Representatives of MIGEFASO, communal social committee, supported by other individuals are responsible for this service. Each representative has the task to inform the Commune social committee of all inadequate situations and of the general situation of the child. During follow-up, the representative should ensure that the material conditions are sufficient, the child eats, is clean, healthy, and participates in the domestic activities. School performance is monitored, and it is ascertained that the foster child lives in the same conditions as the other children in the family. During the first three months, it is recommended that monthly visits be conducted. During the second three months, two visits are recommended and during the third three months, one visit is recommended. After that, visits will vary depending on the conditions of the child and the family. Other Government ministries are also responsible for follow-up – e.g. health and education. Information collected after visits will be included in the child's file which will be under the responsibility of the social agent from MIGEFASO. Training for foster families is another way to support foster families. Topics are: nutrition, hygiene, health, child development, income-generation activities, and other subjects identified by foster families.

The extent to which these Guidelines are actually followed in practice is variable: Chapter 4 will examine agency practice issues and will consider some of these variations.

Draft Law to Regularise Fostering

MINAFASO co-ordinated efforts to draft a project of law (not yet finalised) to regularise fostering and ensure its good functioning. This project stems from Article 20 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, from the Law of the Rwandan Republic dated 10th June 1991 (articles 16, 30, 40, 72, and 73) and from Rwandan culture according to which a child should live with a family. The proposed law is divided in two parts, the first on the general conditions according to which a child can be fostered and the second on necessary conditions for fostering a child. The first part contains two articles, the first on having valid reasons for fostering a child and the second on the characteristics of a fosterable child (young and without a family or somebody to look after him/her).

The second part contains 6 articles. Fostering must be voluntary and interested individuals must request in writing their wish to foster a child. The family will be accepted if the parent has reached majority age, is Rwandan, married or widow. Only after serious consideration will single or divorced individuals, and those who are older than 60 years of age be accepted. In the last case, only one child will be placed and he/she will be at least 12 years old. The family must be economically able to support the child, and morally respected. Both spouses and children who have attained the majority age will be consulted. Siblings should be fostered in the same family or in families living in the same area. Before accepting foster parents, the child, according to his/her level of understanding should give his/her opinion.

The third part describes fostering procedures and it contains 4 articles. Those interested in fostering a child, the child and the witnesses will go to the secretary of recencement (census), to register the child, and the written agreement of the spouse and of the children who attained majority age is requested and included in the child's file. The ceremony can be undertaken in the centre, in a public location, or in an office. At the request of the foster parent, following a major error or misbehaviour of the child, or somebody else or the Public Ministry, the Tribunal may annul the contract.

Part four describes the consequences of fostering and is summarised as follows:

A. fostering begins on the day the contract is signed.

B. the foster child has the same rights and duties as those of natural children.

C. the child remains with his/her name but the foster family may add a name and for those children who do not have a name, it may be given at the time of the ceremony.

D. the foster child has the right to maintain his/her religion; foster parents will register a child's property, if any, and they will manage it as a parent would.

E. foster parents represent the child in relation to others; a child can only be fostered by one family and the first contract must be annulled for a second family to foster a child.

F. the foster parents and siblings will have a relationship to the foster child similar to that of a natural family.

G. in case of death of the foster parent who has authority, parental authority goes to the spouse and then to the child who has attained the majority age.

Part five describes the termination of fostering, and states that fostering ends when the child becomes an adult (majority age or acknowledgement that he/she is adult), or when the child dies, when his/her parents are found, or when the child is adopted. Part 6 describes in three articles that this law is retroactive and also applies to fostering cases that have been done before its signature. The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for the monitoring of the application of the law, and it will become active once published.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, the two main achievements of the Government in relation to fostering, that is the Guidelines on procedures and a draft for a project of law to regularise fostering, have been summarised. In the following chapters, perceptions and experiences of foster parents and children will be presented to illustrate the impact of such Guidelines and proposal of law on the life of foster families.

Chapter 4

Agency Practice

1. Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of agencies' historical involvement in fostering, and it continues with a more detailed picture of fostering procedures, providing a picture of how the Government Guidelines were actually operationalised.

2. Historical Development of Agency Practice

Cantwell (1997) traces the first attempt to formalise fostering to Concern, which made parents sign a form and therefore accept their responsibilities in writing. Some of the agencies that were involved in fostering in 1995 and 1996 (e.g. Ceci, Concern, World Vision and Save the Children Denmark), are no longer working in this field, some having left the country.

Different agencies became involved in fostering at different times, under different working environments, and with varied degrees and types of previous fostering experience. In the absence of common practices, agencies at first created their own models and procedures, often derived from experience in other countries. As already explained, in 1997 common procedures were developed and published, though these have not been uniformly applied. SSI, which is still involved in fostering, is currently reviewing its strategy to include foster care for AIDS orphans.

3. Fostering Procedures

The Guidelines apply only to organised fostering. Generally, agencies adopt a broadly similar methodology, in accordance with Government Guidelines, but some differences can be observed. This section considers these procedures and some of the differences which emerge from an analysis of agency practice.

Sensitisation of Local Communities

Sensitisation takes place in the selected Commune and Cellule. Its objective is to raise awareness of the problems of children in centres and to invite families to foster: training of local authorities is sometimes offered. Sensitisation meetings cover topics such as child rights, the future of children, and clarification that those families who want to foster a child should not expect any material assistance. Time is given to the family to decide on whether they want to be considered for fostering.

Although sensitisation meetings are the main recruitment strategy, at one time,

the Government did use radio broadcasts in an attempt to recruit foster parents. Currently, one NGO which is trying to help older youngsters to move on from residential centres is helping them to create visual maps of their own social networks as a means of identifying possible people with whom they might be able to live: careful thought is then given to finding sources of skills training. There is probably some scope for developing this kind of approach with younger children as well. We came across no examples of existing networks such as schools and churches being used for the purpose of identifying prospective foster parents.

Evaluation and Selection of Families

There is an evaluation of the family undertaken in accordance with the 12 criteria in the Government Guidelines. In some cases, this appears to be little more than ensuring the family's eligibility, while in others there is a more searching family assessment. In some cases, this is treated primarily as the professional task of the NGO, while in others there is a more significant role for the local authorities. One NGO included a four-session training programme for prospective foster parents. All NGOs seem to provide an element of education in issues such as the child's right to health care and education, the nature of fostering, the possibility of the child returning to his or her own family, and the nature of the fostering agreement. This is undertaken either individually or in groups. Some NGOs, however, tend to rely on follow-up visits by their own staff to provide assistance and advice on issues such as the child's behaviour.

Matching and preparation of children and families

Separated children are eligible for fostering when tracing has been unsuccessful or when children are sans adresse, that is they do not know who they are or where they come from. All agencies provide preparation of the child prior to placement in foster care. This can involve either NGO staff or centre staff, or both, while some agencies have developed the quite sophisticated use of play techniques, especially with younger children.

There are very significant differences in the way in which children are matched with prospective foster parents. It seems that most agencies have operated a system in which approved foster parents choose their child in a group meeting between prospective foster parents and children in the centre. Usually the children sing and dance in front of the group, and children then mingle with the families, eventually resulting in children beginning to develop an attachment to a particular family. However, at least one agency has evolved a system by which NGO and centre staff take responsibility for matching the particular needs and characteristics of the child and the particular strengths, weaknesses and characteristics of the foster parents. This is seen as preferable to a procedure which relies on the emotional reaction of the foster parents, which may discriminate against less attractive children and which may leave unselected children feeling rejected.

Once the selection of the child is done, the child goes to spend some time with the prospective foster family – usually one or more days or weekends – until it is felt that the child is ready to live with the family.

Endorsement of the fostering agreement
Endorsement of the fostering agreement is formalised through a ceremony during which the family, the centre, the agency, and the local authority sign a fostering agreement.

The fostering process from initial community sensitisation to placement of the child with the family generally takes approximately four months.

Follow-up
Although the Government Guidelines stress the importance of follow-up after the child is placed with the foster parents, they do not specify who is responsible for this. This is probably the area in which the differences between agencies are most marked. Follow-up can encompass psycho-social support by social workers, some form of material assistance, meetings amongst foster families and sharing of responsibility by the community.

An area of considerable divergence is that of who undertakes the follow-up. In at least one case, the agency undertook the initial follow-up, and later transferred responsibility to local authorities and then changed focus again to emphasise the responsibility of follow-up by community structures.

It is important, however, not to idealise the idea of "community". A number of researchers (see particularly Veale, 1999) have pointed out that in Rwanda, communities have experienced unprecedented disruption, fragmentation and reconstitution which, coupled with widespread poverty, have combined to limit effective collective responsibility and action. Veale's study revealed what people described as "a lack of love" between people and an absence of "fellowship": people also talked about tensions within the communities stemming from experiences during the genocide. Veale's study was commissioned by one of the fostering agencies who were concerned to develop appropriate strategies for mobilising the community to exercise responsibility for fostered and reunified children and for other categories of vulnerable families.

One fostering agency did its own quite thorough follow-up and then stopped, leaving a significant gap. Another agency did its own follow-up and it is now aiming at transferring responsibility to the community (inyangamugayo = wise individuals at Cellule level) under the supervision of social agents. In some instances, Government social workers are seen as key actors in follow-up: in others, their role appears to be minimal.

There are also different approaches with regard to material assistance to foster families. Some agencies decided not to give any material support to ensure that the child is not fostered for material gain, while others thought that foster families who

accept an extra burden should be assisted. Agencies then differ in the nature of material support provided. The research came across examples of direct material assistance (e.g. uniforms for all the children in the family), and of material assistance (in the form of funds for starting small businesses) through associations of foster parents (sometimes involving other needy families in the community). Save the Children Denmark also provided intensive training in income-generating activities together with book-keeping and marketing.

Fostering and family reunification

When the child is fostered, a copy of the file goes to ICRC and one to the relevant Ministry: the original is given to the foster parents. Tracing continues and there are instances when the child's family of origin is found. In the past ICRC would go to the foster family and take the child away, but sometimes this has been done in an uncoordinated way, as is illustrated by the following case:

> Case 47: U an 8 year old girl, was formally fostered in 1999 by a childless couple. In July 2000, the girl was attending primary school when she was reunified with her family. The mother, recently returned from exile, had registered with an agency to find the child. Once traced, the natural mother and the social worker came to the foster family. When they arrived, the foster mother was not there, and so the child directly was told about the situation. The child refused to accept it and so the visitors left to come back a week later. During the week, the foster mother sent the daughter to say goodbye to her "grandmother" and other "relatives". The following week, the Commune social worker tried to explain the situation to the child but it was difficult for her. The problem of compensation arose, as the foster mother could not understand how neither the agency nor the natural mother can withdraw a child without providing any compensation. The natural mother said that she had nothing as she had only recently returned from exile, and she said that if she could find something she will come back to thank the family. The neighbours were also surprised – "It is not possible". The child left crying because she did not accept the other woman as her natural mother. The child left three months ago, and the foster family does not have any news. The foster mother would like to see the child again and she said that if the natural mother is still poor, she is willing to take care of the child, even though the foster family is also poor.

However, currently efforts are being made to harmonise activities. Ideally the agency social worker goes to the foster family to prepare the child and the family, and local authorities are sometimes involved in the process. In practice, it is not always clear what the link between fostering and family reunification is. Do existing family reunification procedures include steps for removal of fostered children from families? Do fostering agencies have standardised procedures for the removal of children if and when the family is found? Are these procedures the same or similar to those used in family reunification? What is the responsibility of local authorities? These policies and procedures are not clear.

The Rwandan Experience of Fostering Separated Children

4. Conclusions

This chapter has illustrated the variety of different agency practices despite the generally unifying effect of the Government Guidelines on fostering. The differences are most pronounced in respect of evaluation and selection of foster parents, the matching of children with foster families and follow-up. There are also some inconsistencies in the way in which continuing family tracing is integrated with fostering.

With increased efforts at closing down centres for children who lost their families in the genocide, agencies are faced with the possible challenge of promoting foster care for other groups of separated children, most notably children requiring substitute care because they have been orphaned by AIDS.

Chapter 5

Foster Families

1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a picture of families' experience of fostering. It is divided into seven sections: the first explores some of the similarities and differences between organised and spontaneous fostering, and the second looks at how spontaneously fostered children came to be placed. The other five sections relate to both spontaneous and organised fostering: they examine the motivations of foster parents, foster family relationships, challenges for foster parents, parental perceptions of the challenges for foster children, and finally the outcomes of fostering.

2. Similarities and Differences Between Organised and Spontaneous Fostering

During focus-group discussions with parents who had received children both through spontaneous and organised fostering, opinions about the two types of fostering were expressed. They were considered similar mainly in terms of foster parent motivations (often expressed as "pity" or humanitarian concern) and responsibilities (for the child's health, education, and inheritance), as the following quotes narrate:

> I received children both spontaneously and organised and I think that neither is more worthwhile than the other.

> It all depends on the family, heart and patience, on the child's attitude and behaviour.

> A child is a child, and it does not matter if you have brought him to this world, picked him up, received him spontaneously or formally; simply life conditions in the centres make it difficult for many children to adapt easily in a foster or own family:

> Amongst the two forms of fostering, it depends on God and on the heart of the foster child.

> We have taken in children because of love. There are no gains in taking in children either spontaneously or in an organised fashion.

Opinions in favour of organised fostering were put forward, and they highlight the important role of preparation, follow-up visits, of being able to monitor the conditions of children and of receiving advice:

> Organised is better because in spontaneous fostering the child may remain disobedient because nobody does the follow-up. There was a child who left without saying anything.

> Spontaneous fostering is somewhat more difficult because children are unknown, they are not visited, parents treat the child as they want because there is no follow-up.

> Formal fostering has more chance of succeeding because there is preparation, since spontaneous fostering is often done without reflection.

> Organised fostering is better because one can go to see the authority, who has participated in the ceremony, or (name of agency) for advice or assistance.

> Generally, spontaneous cases of fostering are treated as servants.

> Organised is better because with spontaneous they end up finding their families.

> We who have had the chance to foster children formally are visited by (name of NGO) and those parents who have received children spontaneously are jealous because they think that at a later stage we will receive some support. Furthermore, those who have fostered children spontaneously think that the State loves us while they are ignored.

Generally, there is a feeling amongst parents that while motivations and obligations are similar, organised fostering offers higher visibility for the child and the family and it has more chance of success. However, one person who fostered a child spontaneously said that as long as the child is registered in the Commune and is on the identity card, authorities can also help.

3. How did Children Come to be Placed with the Family?

Individual circumstances brought children and families together, either through the mediation of an agency or because of specific life events. In the following section, we will look at each of the two forms of fostering, organised and spontaneous, in detail.

Group discussions with foster parents confirm that most organised fostering took place in 1999. However, an example of organised fostering that took place in 1992 was also found:

> In 1992, there were children from Byumba who fled the war. They lived like vagrants, and the State launched a message to take them in.

During organised fostering, children from centres were placed in families that they did not know or with families in which one parent had worked in the centre. It took place mainly from centres that had to close. For instance in Gisenyi, fostering took place in July 1999 and the centre closed in January 2000. In another instance, in Rubungu-Ndera, Kigali rural, those who worked in the centre were asked to foster children when the centre suddenly closed. This has resulted in difficulties for those who worked in centres and who became foster parents. They complained that activities were interrupted quickly, and that they did not think about the future of the children and the potential difficulties when they accepted to foster them:

> The State has conducted fostering quickly and this situation should have been studied in advance.

Within the framework of the project "Maison d'Hóts" [3] of the Belgian Red Cross, I received seven children, and when the project abruptly terminated, I asked to keep the young girl, who seemed very unhappy.

Organised fostering usually began with sensitisation, which is mentioned by parents in focus-group discussions as having been a catalyst factor in the decision-making process:

> Sensitisation touched us. We were a young couple and we wished for a girl but we did not have the chance to find one. We took a boy since they are the ones who remain because children are the same.

> For a long time, my husband and I wanted to foster an orphan from a neighbour. I attended a sensitisation meeting by (name of NGO) and I quickly realised that I had to take in a child because the role of the Christian is to assist orphans and the poor.

Words spoken during sensitisation, especially the presentation of the poor conditions in centres, touched some individuals emotionally – some were moved to tears:

> I have six children but thanks to the sensitisation of (name of NGO), I understood that I had to take in another child.

> I did it to withdraw the child from the centre so that he may grow in a family as we were told during sensitisation.

Sensitisation also played a role in the selection process:

> We have been sensitised in great numbers but afterwards many withdrew because they thought they would have (children who would be) workers or (they would receive) some type of assistance.

Most cases of *spontaneous fostering* took place soon after the genocide; however, interviews with families indicated that spontaneous fostering is still taking place. Children in need of fostering are those who leave existing families owing to family disharmony, poverty, or children who continue to move from one type of care arrangement to another, including from one fostering family to another.

An analysis of the varied circumstances in which spontaneous fostering occurred revealed five main categories: through personal contacts, chance meetings with homeless children, through the intervention of the army, fostering while in exile, and finally during repatriation. Some cases for each of these categories are presented.

Fostering through Personal Contacts

> Case 16: One day a woman went to visit a family in the neighbourhood when a woman asked to use the toilet, and left her baby in the house. When she left unnoticed, she did not take her baby with her. The neighbour asked her to take the baby saying that she knew the mother. At first she refused but then decided to take the baby, convinced that otherwise he would have been eaten by dogs. She registered the 12 months old baby with the local authority (Nyumbakumi).

> Case 18: F, 16 years old, left her paternal aunt to go and live with a neighbour. The girl explained that the aunt's husband does not like her and that he kicked her out. Her aunt said that nobody has forced her to leave and that she would like the child to come back. The

woman with whom the girl stays said that she saw the girl coming and she could not tell her to go away.

Case 19: A young couple fostered a 10 year old girl from the neighbourhood and whose family was very poor. Neighbours said that the natural mother of the girl went mad and that the father asked the foster family to take in the child with the promise of recompensing them at a later stage.

Case 25: The foster mother fostered M, a 12 year old girl, J, a 10 year old boy, and S, a 7 year old girl. They are the children of a friend who died during the war, and that the family tried to do its utmost to help the children while they lived in their house but it proved very difficult. Therefore, they have moved into the house of the foster family. The neighbours believe that they are the younger siblings of the foster mother.

In a significant number of cases, staff working in centres for separated children decided to become foster parents, sometimes on the closure of the centre.

Case 36: J. is six years old. She has been formally fostered by a man who used to look after her in the centre, where he and his wife had a room. When a local NGO built houses, the family left the centre. There was a formal fostering ceremony for the families that fostered those children whom they used to look after in the centre.

Case 38: M is a 7 year old girl fostered in April 1999. The child was in the centre where the foster mother used to work. She is a young woman, 23 years old, who worked and lived in the centre. She returned to her parents' family once a month. Since her mother was alone with her father, the elder mother asked her daughter to bring her home a child. The girl began by sending older children (12 years) to spend the week with her mother, who would observe their behaviour, kindness, and how they worked. She said that they had bad habits, and she sent them back to the centre. She asked her daughter to bring her a younger child to educate. And this is why M. ended up with the family, even though she is registered with the daughter.

Through Chance Meetings with Homeless Children

Case 1: P is a ten year old boy, who attends the second year of primary school. The child was with his parents in a refugee camp in Tanzania. During repatriation, the mother died and subsequently the father remarried. The child felt that he was treated badly by his stepmother and he left the paternal house. He stayed with three other families and then on the street. It is at this point that the foster mother, a widow, and her children invited him to share a meal with them and after some time the child decided to stay with the family. The family is composed of six offspring. The siblings and the foster child get along well. The foster mother has said that she will try to do all she can and treat him as her other children, if he decides to stay with them.

Case 4: M, ten years old, was spontaneously fostered in March 2000. M. is nicknamed Zairois because he repatriated from Congo. At first he was in a centre for unaccompanied children but he escaped from there. He was then picked up by a young man, who brought him home. Unfortunately his father did not want to take him in. Consequently the young man brought M. to the office of an NGO involved in tracing to find him a family. Since M. did not want to return to the centre, the social worker volunteered to take him home until a family could be found. She has placed the child with her mother, an elderly woman, so that he can help her.

Case 22: D was spontaneously fostered in May 2000. The girl is 12 years old, and she has been taken in by a 60 year old woman. When the researchers approached the woman, she

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said that she did not have anything to say as she did not know any case of foster children. However on the way back the researcher met the girl by chance. The girl lived with her parents in Kibungo, but her mother died and her father remarried. She did not get along with her stepmother. It is for this reason that she has began to spend the nights here and there, and afterwards she left the area and she ended up with the current family.

Through the Intervention of the Army

Case 7: H is an 8 years old boy. Left by his mother, he was picked up by the army and placed with a family. However, the child escaped because he was badly treated, and he went to look for another family. The previous foster family went to visit the child after his departure but the child refused to return and therefore they agreed that the child should stay with the second one.

Case 20: The foster mother, a 50 year old widow, has taken in three children, two boys and a girl. The girl, 12 years old, was brought by the military in 1994.

Fostering while in Exile

Case 24: A is now six years old. She was picked up in Congo during the 1994 cholera epidemics by Rwandan exiles, when she was only few months old, still close to her dead mother. On seeing her, the foster mother had pity and took her with her. She has registered the child as her own but A. knows that she has been fostered, even though the foster mother does not know how she discovered it.

Case 44: A and C are two boys, respectively 10 and 7 years old, both attending primary school. They were taken in by a 25 years old woman in Congo. She is unmarried but has two other children, a 9 years old girl, and a 15 months old baby. The foster mother had lived with the family of the children in a refugee camp but she did not know the family well. When the camp was destroyed, they separated in the flight, and this is how she encountered the children in the forest. She wanted to give them to an agency but the children did not want to and cried. She had pity on the children and she came back from exile with them.

Fostering During Repatriation

Case 17: E, 8 years old, was received by a 73 year old woman on the way back from exile. The child, four years old at the time, was crying alone. She picked him up and she gave him to her daughter to carry home with them. The foster family has tried unsuccessfully to find his family.

Finally, it is worth noting that the researchers came across one example in which members of an association made a collective request to become foster parents, following an orientation by a centre for separated children in 1995. Out of 28 requests to foster, 12 children were placed.

4. Motivation of Foster Parents

The term "pity" was often used when explaining the reasons behind the decision to foster. However, the term was used to summarise religious sentiment, concern for the well-being of the child, and social responsibility towards the country. Other motivations reflect reciprocation, the desire to have children, loneliness, and the need for help. In the following section, quotes from parents illustrate each type of motivation.

Religious motives were frequently mentioned as the only or main reason for deciding to foster:

> The role of the Church is to help orphans and the poor.

> I had pity for these children because those who died had not sinned and we are here thanks to God's grace.

> As a Christian and a good citizen, I have pitied children in the centres after the sensitisation by authorities.

> Our family used to host orphan children. It is for this reason that when I listened to sensitisation, I thought of receiving a child, to serve God through this good action.

> A Sector meeting took place where we were told about the problems of the children in the centres and that it is better that each child has a family. I had the idea of fostering one and I asked to be included – to better serve God.

Social responsibility towards the country was also reported:

> During sensitisation, it was said that children are unhappy in the centre. And since there is a problem with overcrowded centres, I had the good will to help the child but also the country.

> Children were unhappy in the centre and I had pity to educate one according to Rwandan culture.

> I have participated in a meeting in the Sector office, authorities began to sensitise, and I quickly realised that I had to take a child to help the country to educate these children.

> If the child leaves the family it is difficult for the country and the world.

While many parents had the interest and well-being of the child in mind when deciding to foster, some parents illustrated this motive more directly than others:

> It is for pity that I have judged it good to look after this child, I could see that she was going to regress if she returned to the centre.

> When I found him shoeless and after multiple efforts to find his mother had failed, I told myself that it was a gift from sky and I have loved him with all my heart.

> The centre has asked me to be Godparent at the baptism, and the child took me as his mother, and I decided to take him with me. I fostered because children were unhappy in the centre and because I had a Godchild in the centre.

Some citizens foster because they implement the request made by local authorities and therefore see themselves as inyangamugayo, model citizens. It is voluntary but possibly subject to social pressure, with the catalyzing factor having been the sensitisation.

War-related losses and events influenced the decision and motivation of parents. Widows who lost their children are happy to find others:

> Children belong to us because all Rwandans have lost their own.

> During the 1994 events, I lost my children and I thought of receiving others.

> I had three children, amongst them one boy, who died.

> I lost my child and somebody told me that he has been looked after by somebody in

Congo, I have felt the desire to take in a child in a similar way to those who have received ones they did not know.

I had lost my children, and up to now I have not been able to recover them. I have had pity to receive these children lost in the same way as perhaps my children will be educated by others.

I had heard that all my oldest sister's family had died. When I visited the centre, I found her children, and I was surprised at how well they were. I asked myself how these people had the good heart to educate these children. Hence, I have taken the initiative to educate a child as they had educated ours. I have received two children (one boy and one girl, siblings), because I liked the girl but I was told that there was also the boy and I took them both.

The desire to have children, either by childless couples, or couples having children of only one gender, also motivated people to foster:

I did not have children, and I wanted to have at least one to be a parent.

I had been married for ten years and I had not had a child. When I heard the sensitisation, I was very happy at the thought that I would have had a child. I received the child and after I got pregnant and I had a baby.

With my wife, we had had some miscarriages. My wife went to sensitisation in the Sector. We quickly decided to be included in the list, because we did not have any children, and to serve God. But God has given us our own child. Thank God.

I could see that I could feed a child, and after having discussed with my husband, we decided to foster a girl because we only have sons.

I had received children who were fleeing, and every time they found their family. I had the idea of receiving a child who will stay with me for ever, and my husband agreed.

Case 31: A genocide survivor who lost her husband and her children during the genocide spontaneously took in a boy, I, who is now 16 years old. Since the genocide he has moved back to his family of origin. Following sensitisation by an NGO, she decided to foster a girl in 1999, O, who is now 8 years old. The choice of a girl was due to the fact that she already had a boy.

Loneliness was also mentioned:

I have discussed and agreed with my wife that, since our children were all married and the others dead, I had the idea of receiving a child not to be alone at home.

I had some children but after the war I found myself all alone, the other children were dead; I wanted a child to talk to and there were so many orphans that I felt pity for them, and it is for these two reasons that I decide to take them in.

The need for assistance is mentioned as one or the main reason for wanting to foster:

As a widow and only with boys, I needed a young girl that helped me in small domestic chores; you know, at a certain age, boys wonder around and I was alone at home.

At my age, I had so much desire for a girl to educate and to help me in cleaning the house, bring water… Then fortunately we were sensitised and I went myself to the (name of centre) to ask for a girl.

I had ten children and they all died during the war. I needed a child to help me. I wanted two children but I got one, and I thank God for it.

In organised fostering, there is generally a strong preference for girls: this may partly reflect family's needs for help in the family: it may also reflect other factors such as marriage and inheritance issues.

In conclusion, generally cultural and humanistic reasons that prompted families to foster children are mixed with personal motives and they are dictated by specific life events.

5. Family Dynamics

How should the Fostered Child be Treated?

In group discussions, parents agreed that fostered children should be treated as natural children, and the foster child should enjoy the same rights as those of natural children. There should be no discrimination among the children; children should live in the same way, and that although they are poor, they share the poverty together. One parent said that they accepted that they will be their children and that parents will not expect assistance. One parent said that he had already determined to grant inheritance to his children, including the foster child because "at least if I die he has his property".

Relations amongst Siblings

Most parents say that relations amongst siblings are good:

They love one another, they share the work and they play together.

Our children and the fostered ones used to live together at the centre, they know one another.

Relations are good because children see that we treat them in the same way, if they go to school, they all go; if we buy clothes we try to buy them for everybody. Therefore our children get along without discrimination.

There are not problems amongst children because they are young.

For me, she has her brother because they do not leave each other, they have more or less the same age, they are like twins.

Mine is too young in relation to the others but they get along well.

Children get along well. I have my own natural child and a foster one and they play, eat, and sleep together.

I stay at home and I am a farmer. I have many of my own children and in general there are not problems, the child is well-integrated.

When the children, either fostered or mine, make a mistake, they are all punished in the same way, and when the children talk, I have never heard them say anything negative about the fostered one.

He is a child who has adapted well because I have seven children and he is like the others.

Our children participated in the fostering process and for this reason they know that she is their younger sister, and therefore relations are good.

Our children had been prepared.

Siblings are also affected by the presence of the foster child:

I had a child older than the one I received. My son was jealous at the beginning thinking that the new one was angry and that he had to eat alone. I fought against this bad habit and now things are well. The children share their meals, work, games etc.

Adjustment Difficulties

If there were difficulties, they were most prevalent at the beginning of the fostering process:

In my case, the foster child one day cried and he said that he would never stop but as time goes by, this has ended. He lives like the others.

At the beginning, the child did not behave and I was worried. Later we tried to understand that he was a child that had experienced difficult times and for now, it works.

My daughter often had nightmares, isolated herself, and manifested an abnormal calm. I took her to a doctor in town, who visited her and told me that things will improve. Unfortunately, the doctor did not do anything special for her, and it is only thanks to the advice of friends, that I continued to manifest affection, patience and comprehension, so that the child is showing trust in me, and things are improving.

Case 27: D is nine years old, fostered by a family in an organised way in 1999. At first the child did not want to wash or go to school; at present he is well integrated, he works and goes to school.

In a number of cases, the child regressed and manifested behaviours younger than those attributable to age:

I have received a three year old child, whom I carry on my back because this is what he likes. I showed him that other children his age go on foot and he slowly learnt. Now he has returned calm.

Fostered children are jealous and they want to be considered like the other children, even the babies. When one buys something for the baby of the family, they want to have the same, they want to be carried on the back like babies. Children of three or five years of age make themselves very young towards foster mothers.

Parents were also asked to discuss the improvements that they saw in the conditions of the child, and they mentioned physical, psychological and moral ones:

Children lived in chaos in the centre; now they share family joy and I have put the child in school.

The child was sick in the centre; now he walks.

In the centre, the child did not work, I am now teaching him how to work.

The child was behind, his actions did not correspond to his age but he has now calm thanks

* The fact that a woman's name is sometimes informally changed after the birth of a son (and not a daughter) also demonstrates the higher value accorded to male children in many societies.

to the love I have showed him.

The child did not eat certain foods, now he eats the product of the land.

They also emphasise the educational role of the parents and moral qualities of the children (e.g. respect and work) .

When the child has adopted a bad habit, I try to address the problem soon and to talk to the child, to explain the problem and the inconvenience.

I try to educate the child and to punish him/her when the child does not understand.

I have my own child who does not like to work and I see that the foster child works alone. Then I try to fight against this culture.

I have a foster child whom I love a lot and who respects me a lot. Up to now, everything is fine.

Community Support

Whom do parents refer to when asked about the role of the community? And what type of support do they mention? Their comments highlight a sense of loneliness or limited support:

Up to now, there has not been any community support.

With the exception of having introduced the child to the extended family, which can give something or correct the child, otherwise nobody else.

It is possible that the Counseiller goes to visit a family without even knowing that the family has fostered a child, therefore the community (local authority) cannot support without knowing.

Somebody in charge of health in the sector comes and gives advice to parents.

When the child is sick, which often happens, I worry and I tell myself that it may be the end; otherwise, the greatest challenge is the fact that neighbours with bad intentions who tell the truth to the child when I would like her to believe that she is mine 100%

When I have received the child, I have visited the extended family to present the child and vice versa.

Self-sufficiency and assistance

Often, community support refers to some type of assistance, and in Rwandan history, especially during the emergency phase, assistance played an important role in people's lives. The language used sometimes refers to a sense of dependency and expectation:

We do not have any means, but if a benefactor like you comes, he gives us the chance to initiate some activities, such as commerce.

Aid has been promised but we are still waiting.

There is aid for other categories of people, so there should be aid for us.

However, other parents talk about specific and targeted interventions:

On this special occasion, one should think about us and foresee emergency aid following this sun that eats our crops (i.e. drought).

Generally, unhealthy children cause many problems to parents because health care is expensive and the families are poor.

There has not been any assistance but we try as best as we can. However there are some difficult circumstances such as when the child is frequently ill.

What also appears is a sense of self-reliance and of efforts to achieve self-sufficiency:

We do not have anything apart from the land, and if it rains, harvest will be good and we can take care of ourselves and our children.

Those who worked in the centre said that they also wonder about how to improve conditions because they are without employment. Only God makes us survive.

Everybody has one's secrets to feed one's family.

Sometimes neighbours offer food but it is rare because they are also poor. Each has one's own problems, who is the richest anyway?

These children that we have taken in are treated like the others and even better because they want to be treated better than others. So, since we work and we think about the future of our children, so we do for the fostered ones.

6. Challenges for Foster Parents

Various challenges facing foster parents were revealed from interviews and focus-group discussions: these included education, health, poverty, the children's future, their behaviour, worries about their own death, their responsibility for the behaviour of the children, neighbours and the possibility of sexual abuse.

Education

Although the majority of agency-approved foster parents appeared fully committed to their children's education, some comments by parents clearly explain the type and level of worry in relation to education:

One cannot pay school fees and so we try to ignore them because only God can help us. Sometimes children arrive at school and they are sent away and told to pay the school fees.

I will have a problem to pay the school fees and other needs for secondary school. Otherwise, I have a piece of land left to me by my parents that I will leave for my children.

In general children are not going to primary school.

We can take care of expenses for primary school but it is for secondary school that we need assistance.

It is also necessary to have certificates of poverty, as when a child does not pay it is one less charge.

For the moment, we do what we can but education, especially secondary education, is beyond us. The Government will have to intervene, otherwise we will not be able to do it.

The boy is in grade 1. He is intelligent in school but at times he gives the material I buy for him to others.

Health

Health problems are highlighted as a major challenge by one of the individual foster families we encountered, when the foster parent asked to "exchange" the child due to the strain her sickness imposed on the family.

Case 49: M is a five years girl. She was fostered in a formal way in 1999. The family has 12 natural children. She is often sick, and the foster parents said that she came with the illness. The parents are afraid that it might be AIDS but they have not done a test yet. The foster parents are very tired because the girl is always sick. The mother complained that the child was always in the hospital and that the child is unhappy because of the illness. The family would like to foster another child instead of M.

In general foster parents worry about health and education. Health costs are expensive and the State should intervene to assist.

If there is a health problem, I will try all that is possible to find the money to treat him without go to (name of NGO) as if he were mine and I had to sort the problem out by myself.

Generally, when my own child is sick, I buy some pills and I wait to see if he recovers, I can give him traditional herbs, but it will be a problem if the foster child becomes sick and I do not take him to hospital because he can die and it can cause me too many problems. I will have to ask for money to have the child treated and it will be difficult to pay back.

I have a child in the hospital and the fostered child has stayed at home, I must find time to take care of him.

Poverty

The problem is poverty because it is poverty that will show children that they are not loved as their material requests (education, clothes, food) will not be met.

We have problems because we received children when the weather was better: it rained, crops were good. Now the weather is too dry. The child may steal because she/he is hungry and he/she will be badly regarded in the neighbourhood.

The Future of the Child

In general, parents who fostered through agencies accept a long-term obligation towards the child. This may partly reflect the strong bias towards girls: issues of marriage and inheritance may serve to create a greater obstacle in fostering boys, though other factors may lie behind this gender imbalance. Those who fostered spontaneously generally had a less clear perception of their longer-term obligations:

I will probably have a problem when the child grows. I will suffer to have a dowry for my child, build a house and all that goes with a marriage because I am old (widow over 60 years old).

I am still young and what I expect for my foster child is education.

I have six children and the foster one, so with regard to land it will be difficult to share land, and to pay for education.

There are problems but we hope that they will go away. We hope that the children will go to school.

I speak in general, as my child has gone. One must say to the family that the child must have one's share even if I will not be around then.

When I told my child that I went to search for a child… he was happy. When he asked me about sharing the land, I said that it was soon but the child knows that they will equally share their properties.

Behaviour of Children

There were many references to difficult behaviour among foster children, though in most cases this was mainly a feature of the initial fostering experience. In some cases, however, it persisted to the point that the foster parents regretted having the child: some examples are given later as examples of unsuccessful fostering (pages 54/55). In other cases, foster parents were persisting in dealing with the problem:

He is intelligent in class and he works but he does not like to wash himself. Up to now I am still unsuccessfully trying to teach him.

Worries about the Death of Foster Parents

The lack of a clear legal status of fostering places foster children in an ambiguous position in the event of the death of their foster parents: the current level of HIV/AIDS infection in Rwanda means that this is potentially a large problem. Foster parent concerns included the following:

It will be problematic if children left the family when the parents die.

I do not know what will happen after my death.

Responsibilities for Crimes

If the foster child becomes bad and commits crimes and the foster parents must sell their land to pay the debts, the child will not have the inheritance. The Conseiller said that if the child commits some errors, it is up to parents to pay for his mistakes

Neighbours

Another difficulty is that neighbours believe that we receive money for having received the child; some are jealous and they say bad things to the child:

The problem is that neighbours say bad things to children.

Another worried about the fact that the child may make a mistake and leave the family, in which case the neighbours might say bad things to the foster family.

The Possibility of Sexual Abuse

Young girls have problems in foster families especially when the members of the family, especially boys, want to take advantage of them and rape them.

One mother shared her worry that it could happen to the foster child in her house.

7. Challenges for Children

This section reviews some of the challenges for fostered children, as perceived by the foster parents. Children's own views of fostering are presented in the next chapter.

Identity

During focus-group discussions and individual interviews, concerns about the identity of the child were raised, both in legal terms (should the child be registered in the identity card or not?) and in psycho-social terms (should the child know that he comes from another family?). Some of the arguments are presented in the following section.

Some parents registered the child on their identity card while others did not. This is an issue that needs to be defined by some type of national guideline. Another sub-topic is the timing for inclusion of the child in the identity card. Different individuals in different Communes expressed different understandings of the issue. One Counseiller, present at one of the group discussions asked if the five-year period for registering the child in the ID card could be reduced because it may happen that parents die in the meanwhile.

Another issue is whether children who may still be able to find their family should be registered, and what happens if the person who registers them is old, like the following case exemplifies:

> Case 11: A widow, who lives with her 85 years old mother, fostered I in 1999 in an organised fashion. The mother thinks that she will register her on the identity card.

Another important topic for discussion is whether children should be told that they are fostered or not. During focus-group discussions with parents, it seemed that one indicator of success was given as the fact that the child does not know that she/he comes from another family. Foster parents said that fostering is unsuccessful "when he continues to know that he does not belong to you 100%":

> I had already received a child before the war from a centre and he has completely forgotten where he comes from.

> There are good-hearted people but other neighbours have bad intentions and they tell the child that he/she is an orphan taken from a centre and that he/she does not belong to us. At that moment, I have done all I could to tell him that those people do not know the reality, that he had been lost during the war and that he is really my own child.

A number of cases confirm the fact that individual parents told their fostered children that they are theirs and that they lost them during the war. They do not want the child to discover that he/she has been fostered:

> Case 13: F is a nine year old girl and she was fostered at the age of five in 1996. When the researchers approached the house, she ran away saying that she did not want to be taken back to the centre. The foster mother, an elderly woman, told F that she is her natural child, who was left in the unaccompanied children centre during the war and who was found again.

Other parents say that the child knows that he/she has been fostered but he/she calls them "mama" or "father". The researchers found cases in which the parents thought that the child did not know that he/she was fostered while in reality the child was well aware of his/her situation.

> Case 24: A is now six years old. She was picked up in Congo during the 1994 cholera epidemics by Rwandan exiles, when she was only few months old, still close to her dead mother. On seeing her, the foster mother had pity and took her with her. She has registered the child as her own but A. knows that she has been fostered, even though the foster mother does not know how she discovered it. For the foster mother, no one else can claim the child as theirs, and for this reason she will not give her up to anyone.

It is clear that children end up knowing the truth.

Difficulties related to the fact that the child does not know that he/she has been fostered have been expressed:

> Case 5: M. does not know that she has been fostered. Her parents do not want her to know and they worry that the neighbours will tell her.

> Case 21: T is a 7 years old boy fostered in July 1999 in an organised way by a woman who had lost her husband and children. The foster mother had told him that he was hers that she had lost during the war and found again. Since the fostering, she has remarried and has given birth to two children, one 15 months old and the other 3 months old. The child lived well with the mother until February 2000, when some parents came to look for him thinking that he was their child, and in his presence they were saying: "It is him, look at his ears… no it is not true, look at his feet". Since then, the child has found out that he is not the natural child. Then a conflict began between the child and the mother, and when it was in the process of being solved, another family arrived in July 2000. Similar discussions were held in front of the child. Since then, the child has began to spend the night here and there, searching for his family and saying: "I want to be with my family". The foster mother has asked advice of the agency social worker, who told her to tell the child the truth. She did so but the situation got worse instead of improving. Currently, the foster mother has suggested that it might be better to find another family for the child, away from the foster family, and tell him that it is his own family.

One foster parent interviewed took in two children when she was single. When she married the neighbours congratulated her for having her "own" children. The two fostered ones got angry at her for not having being the one who told them that they were, in fact, fostered. Her recommendation was to inform the child.

When these findings were presented to the children in CPAJ who acted as an "advisory committee" all of them said that they would want to know that they had been fostered. They referred to parents that do not tell them as "liars"; they said that it is likely that the child will find out by others; and in any case it will be evident at the time of inheritance.

Differential Treatment owing to Ethnicity

In Rwanda, discussions about ethnicity generally prove to be difficult because of the extreme sensitivities involved. However, these issues did emerge, sometimes indirectly. Some cases of differential treatment owing to differences in appearance or speech

(which were understood as indicating ethnic differences) were found:

Case 9: An elderly widow who lives alone fostered in an organised way in 1999 a boy named P. When the boy arrived from the centre, he used words from another region, such as adding ga at the end of the word. The widow's other children, who are married, told her that she had been wrong in taking into the family a child from the north, because those from the north and those from the south do not always get along and it is possible that the child will create problems in the future. The mother has since punished the child when he used the words of the north, and the child has now stopped.

Case 20: The foster mother, a 50 year old widow, has taken in three children, two boys and a girl. One of the boys, 10 years old, was fostered through an NGO from a centre for unaccompanied children in 1995. The other boy, 13 years old, was received from a transit camp in 1996, during repatriation from Congo. The girl, 12 years old, was brought by the military in 1994. The mother likes the two boys but she does not love the girl. The girl realises that she is not treated like the other two but she attributes it to the fact that she does not work. The mother and the two boys say that the girl is difficult and that it is for this reason she is beaten. Neighbours told the researchers that it is because of the ethnicity that differentiates her from the other two children. The girl has asked to return to her family.

Work

When asked about their motivations to foster, some parents said that they wished to foster a child to have some help. It is customary for children to help in the family as a way to gain skills that will help them to grow. The fact that parents want to foster a child for help does not necessarily mean that the child is abused or exploited. In the following cases, children work at home but they also go to school:

Case 10: S is an eight years old girl fostered in an organised manner in 1999 by a couple in which the man is 62 years old and the woman is 58 years old. The natural children are married and the mother wanted a child to be with her, to help her to bring water and wood. It is a family that can support the child, who is in the second year of primary school, and they treat the child as their own. Since the girl is alone in the house, there is a risk that she isolates herself and it is for this reason that the foster mother has asked her younger sister to entrust her with child of the same age so that they can live together.

Generally, however, children indicated clearly that they find household chores a rewarding activity which they enjoy. However, there have been some cases in which the child feels more like an unpaid servant than foster child:

Case 22: D was spontaneously fostered in May 2000. The girl is 12 years old, and she has been taken in by a 60 year old woman. When the researchers approached the woman, she said that she did not have anything to say as she did not know any case of foster children. However on the way back the researcher met the girl by chance. The girl said that she works very hard at home as a servant. The child would prefer to be with another family. She does not mind working hard but she wants to be paid for it.

Case 23: A is a 12 year old girl spontaneously fostered by a 20 year old woman, who is also an orphan who lives with her uncle. Her mother died during the genocide, her father remarried, the child had problems with the stepmother and left the house to go and live with neighbours. In this house the woman saw her and since she saw that the neighbours could not take care of her, the young woman asked them to take the girl with her, and this is how

she arrived in Kigali Rural. The neighbours said that the other four children in the house go to school but that A. does not go to school but rather works as a servant.

Case 29: M is a 16 year old girl, formally fostered in 1999. She stays at home. Neighbours say that she is not well treated, she works hard, she is beaten and that the foster mother does not love her. She sleeps on the floor. The neighbours recommend that she is withdrawn from the family. The social committee in charge of fostering had a meeting but nothing has changed. The researchers themselves observed that the child is not well physically, and she did not want to leave the vehicle of the research team asking to be taken back to the centre.

Such cases were, however, a very small minority among the fostered children whom we met during the study.

8. Outcomes of Fostering: Successful and Unsuccessful

During focus-group discussions, parents were invited to discuss criteria for defining successful and unsuccessful fostering. The following is summary of their answers:

Fostering is *successful* when
- A family receives a child without expecting aid.
- The child listens to the words of the parents.
- The child is at ease in expressing him/herself.
- The child is well treated.
- There are no misunderstandings between the child and the family.
- The child is clean and has clothes.
- The child grows up well (as the child grows, one can say that the child eats well).
- The child is polite and well-brought up.
- Foster parents' own children take care of the foster child.
- Parents are patient about children's caprices otherwise it will be a failure.
- The child is physically well.
- The foster family does not use negative words.
- The child is not a vagabond.
- The child does not lose its culture.
- The child is well-integrated.
- The child approaches parents and other children without difficulties.
- The child eats easily and does not isolate him/herself.
- Good-hearted neighbours can witness it objectively.

It is *unsuccessful* when
- The child performs difficult tasks; the child looks after cows; works harder than the others.
- The child is exploited.
- There is no safety at home and the child is beaten.
- The child becomes a street child.
- There is discrimination.

- The foster child eats alone.
- The child behaves badly and the parents end up hating him/her.
- The parents want a girl but they find a boy.
- There are misunderstandings between parents and the child suffers.
- The child is fostered when he/she is old and there are fights amongst siblings.
- The child does not eat the same food that the child ate in the centre.
- The child sometimes leaves the house.
- The child becomes a vagabond; who spends the night here and there and who does not accept to be corrected.
- The parents think about their interests and not the child's interests.
- There is no food at home.
- The parents who have taken children from the centre thought that they would receive money from (name of agency) and when they did not have any money they brought the children back to the centre.
- The child isolates himself from other members of the family.
- He/she leaves the family.
- He continues to know that he does not belong to you 100%.

Other individuals expressed different opinions, such as that it is difficult to say if a fostering is successful or not: "It depends on the capacity of parents to satisfy the needs of the child". They said that there are children who do not like to be punished and that they do not like to work, and it is they who may leave the family to escape work:

> Nobody can say negative words about oneself. It is up to neighbours to tell if we have succceeded or not.

> One should ask the children.

> It is difficult to know if fostering is working or not because children have not been fostered long ago, and one goes slowly in re-educating these children.

Successful Fostering

In the following section, we summarise a few cases of what we consider, according to interviews with members of the family and neighbours, and observation, to be successful or unsuccessful fostering. The following are some examples of successful fostering:

> Case 6: N was fostered in 1999 in an organised manner. When the researchers approached, the child hid away because she thought that it was her parents who had come to take her away. The child said that she did not want her parents any more because they abandoned her. The child gets along with the foster family, especially the younger brothers. She also plays with the children in the neighbourhood. The parents worry about what will happen if the original family is found because the child does not want to be separated from them.

> Case 11: A widow, who lives with her 85 year old mother, fostered I in 1999 in an organised fashion. The widow lost a 10 years old daughter, and she wanted to replace her with I, who is a nine years old girl. The child is well in the family, she looks healthy, she spends time with her cousins, and she behaves well with the neighbours. The mother thinks that she will re-

gister her on the identity card. The child remembers everything about her family of origin. Her wish is to pay a visit to the other children who were with her in the centre.

Case 13: F is a nine year old girl and she was fostered at the age of five in 1996. When the researchers approached the house, she ran away saying that she did not want to be taken back to the centre. The foster mother, an elderly woman, told F. that she is her natural child, who was left in the unaccompanied children centre during the war and who was found again. The foster mother has her own children who are parents themselves. Since her offspring did not want to give her one of their children to help her at home, she went to the unaccompanied children centre and brought home F. The house in which they live is not in good condition, F has the certificate of poverty to be exempt from paying school fees. Despite the circumstances in which she lives, she looks happy in the foster family.

One MINALOC agent commented positively on her visits to families:

The process is proceeding well and the 30 families or so whom I have visited have shown me that children are better in a foster family than in a centre. At times it is not easy to foster those children older than 8 and they have to stay in the centre and even worse they are transferred from one centre to another (MINALOC prefectoral agent).

Unsuccessful Fostering

The following are some examples of unsuccessful fostering, mainly because the family clearly states that they do not want the child any more:

Case 2: C is a 7 year old girl, fostered in 1995 at the age of two by a rich family. The foster mother took the initiative to foster the girl from a centre but she does not want the child any more. The foster mother said: "I do not want to continue to live with this child because of her behaviour. If she is placed somewhere else, I can help her but I do not want her with me for ever". The father on the other hand prefers to be patient and he said: "What will people say? That we who are well-off and Christians are unable to look after a child?" The mother only talked about the negative aspects of the child. The child has started the first year of primary school but she is not a good student. On the day of the visit to the family, the child had been raped by unknown individuals; a medical report released later confirmed that she suffers from venereal diseases. The social worker from the Commune has proposed that the child terminates the medical treatment and that she transfers to a centre. Since then she has returned to the centre.

Case 45: F is a seven years old boy in first grade of primary school. He is the youngest of the children, the other three being in secondary school and university. He has been formally fostered by the local authority. The foster mother regrets having fostered the child because he is difficult: "He is an outspoken child, not good at school, who often tells lies, who sometimes steals, who does to like to wash himself". She explained how she fostered him: "As I was working with (name of NGO), parents used to come to the centre and choose the children. I clearly noticed that nobody was interested in F, so I had pity on him and I took him. But now I am disillusioned and I cannot recommend to anybody to take in a child". By contrast, the child said that he was happy for having found a good family who loves him, and he thanks God for having chosen such a good family.

Other cases emerged from the testimony of foster parents who indicated that fostering had not been successful:

I received a child but he has now gone; he was difficult, he did not obey and in May 2000 he left. I have continued to ask ICRC, who told me that he is in the unaccompanied centre

> Musha. I have not gone to take him back. But if he returns, I will receive him with open hands.

> My child (12 years old) is difficult. He is stubborn; he is a vagabond. I am trying to educate him. I have also a young girl who is difficult. I have concluded that all children are the same. It is not because he is not mine that he is difficult because my young one is also difficult.

Clearly the case (no. 20) mentioned on page 44, in which the child's work was exploited can also be seen as another less than successful case.

One indicator of a successful fostering is that the foster child is treated in a similar manner to other children in the family: the following case might indicate an unsuccessful example of spontaneous fostering, though there are clearly positive features to the case:

> Case 44. A. and C. are two boys, respectively 10 and 7 years old, both attending primary school. They were taken in by a 25 year old woman in Congo. She is unmarried but with two other children, a 9 year old girl, and a 15 month old baby. The foster mother had lived with the family of the children in a refugee camp but she did not know the family well. When the camp was destroyed, they separated in the flight, and this is how she encountered the children in the forest. She wanted to give them to an agency but the children did not want to go and cried. She had pity on the children and she came back from exile with them. They returned in May 2000 but the foster children suffer from malnutrition, while her own children are healthy. She has only been helped by neighbours, who gave her food upon return but only for a month. The family suffers from hunger in a visible way. The mother prefers to remain with the fostered children even though conditions are difficult.

As part of the study, an attempt was made to identify any existing evidence on the outcome of fostering, but little was found. The only exception was an unpublished follow-up study of 20 fostered and 20 reunified children in Gitarama, undertaken by Concern: although obviously using a small sample, this study was interesting in that it revealed a significantly more positive outcome for fostered children as compared with reunified children. Almost three quarters of the fostered children were in a stable and satisfactory situation, and, in contrast to many of the "reunified" cases, poverty did not emerge as a major issue. There were, however, four cases in which the child had remained in an unsatisfactory situation, and one case had moved on to another (satisfactory) placement. Among the reunified children, a higher percentage had moved on to another situation, in some cases the new situation was either unsatisfactory, or unknown. It is understood that Concern undertook a similar study in Butare, with broadly similar findings, but it has not been possible to gain access to the data.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter, opinions of foster families have been presented. They have shown that many different circumstances have brought children and families together, sometimes in a thoughtful and planned manner and at times in specific circumstances. Despite these differences, foster parents and children experience similar challenges –

these include issues of work (and particularly where work is appropriate and where it becomes exploitative), initial adjustment difficulties, lack of external support, concerns about education and health, issues of identity and the longer-term future of the children. They also expressed similar ideas of what constitutes a successful or unsuccessful fostering arrangement. In the next chapter, children's opinions about fostering procedures and life in a foster family are presented.

Chapter 6

Children's Perceptions of Fostering

1. Introduction

This chapter will look at some of the issues discussed in the previous chapter but from the child's perspective. There will be a section on perceptions of orphans and foster families, followed by children's opinions on the process of organised fostering and life and problems in the family. The chapter will conclude with the presentation of their perceptions of their own (birth) families and of their sense of their future.

2. Foster Children as Orphans

Umwana w'undi abishya inkonda – A child of somebody else is difficult/a child of somebody else is not like one's own.

This Rwandan proverb indicates that in Rwandan culture there is a perception that natural and fostered children are different. Children in foster care are often described as orphans, a label that does not go away after their placement with the foster family. Although the term strictly means children without father and mother, it is commonly used to describe other categories such as child heads of households, fostered children, street children and more generally poor and vulnerable children.

"Ndi Imfubyi" is the Kinyarwanda phrase used to mean a child without both parents, a phrase used by some of the children interviewed. The term used to have positive associations and before the genocide it had connotations of "children without parents to whom one must offer affection and care". However, after the genocide and war, the term has come to be associated to the reasons why children became orphans and hence less positive associations – "children who have lost the pleasure of a good life and who do not have the same luck as other children". On some occasions in the study, it has been used to justify differential treatment such as in the case of two fostered girls who explained that they do not study "because they are orphans".

The needs of foster children, as seen by other children, are mainly school-related ones. These requirements are similar to those expressed by fostered children themselves in interviews. Foster children feel at times discriminated against because they do not have the materials to go to school or the means to pay for school fees and their difficulties are picked up by other children:

They need exercise books, pens.

They need a foster family.

Uniforms.

Assistance during holidays to earn uniforms for the following year.

3. Children's Perceptions of Organised Fostering

Young children in a centre said the following when asked if they wanted to be fostered or not:

I would like to be fostered because the family treat the child well and there one can move around easily.

I could go with a family that it is not mine but not with joy because I would like to go back to my family.

I would be better in a foster family if I am not given too much work to do.

It was clear that children have their opinions about what motivates them to go to live with a foster family and what a good foster family is. Adolescents in a centre describe the following main criteria as being able to continue one's education, love and material wealth. They expressed concern about going into a family and having to interrupt the studies and become a "slave":

I would have checked if he/she really loved me and if there was love I would leave.

I would go if he paid for my studies, if he gave me things that I need and if he were rich.

The parent can give you what you want but without love you are not in peace.

Adolescents in a centre know children who have been fostered and described the fostering process. One emerging theme during their discussion was the fact that parents choose and children are chosen. They repeated the same idea in different contexts:

Parents came to look for them, and they took the 6 – 7 years old children, some were three years old.

Those in charge of the centre prepared the children and they dressed them and parents came to look for them.

There were photos of the children; (name of agency) committee prepared the list with pictures and gave it to parents and the parents chose; it was not the child who chose.

A group of younger children in another centre cited the names of children who have been fostered. Three children said that they prepared a party and songs. Then the day of the ceremony arrived.

We danced and sang. There were many people and the authorities from the centre and the State proceeded to give the children to their parents. Foster mothers had gifts (bread baskets) for their respective children.

It was like that the children left that day with their new mothers and fathers.

After the children were chosen, staff in the centre prepared (cleaned and dressed) the children. With an ironic tone, the adolescents who participated in the group discuss-

sion added that they also had been sensitised but not chosen:

> The committee also came to tell us about sensitisation but they have not prepared us.

> I am 15 years old and I wait.

> They asked us questions and assured us that they will find a family.

One adolescent thought it is normal that only young children would be fostered, and he felt that the process did not apply to him.

During the preparation phase, which involved visits by the child to the family, the adolescents in the group talked to the children who had been chosen, and they said that the majority of them were satisfied with the families they had visited. But they also added that even when children were not convinced they felt pressured to go and live with the foster family. It was added that it is difficult for young children to know what will happen to them in the family and it is also difficult for them to make a choice. For the older ones it is easier to see whether a family is suitable or not.

> Young children only think about the present and not the future.

Some children were not happy after the visit but the social workers encouraged them to try to live with the family and that the situation might change.

Young children in a centre were very keen to have the opportunity to keep in touch with fostered children, and they expressed it in their recommendations to foster children, parents and directors in the centre, respectively:

> That they come and visit us.

> That they bring the children to visit us.

> To give us permission to visit fostered children.

Similarly, on a few occasions, children who had been fostered said that they would like to go and visit their friends in the centre.

4. Life in a Foster Family

Good Behaviour

Umwana utumvira se na nyina yumvira ijeri – A child who does not obey his/her parents is lost.

Uvoma yanga avoma ibiroha – One who looks for water with negligence obtains bad product quality (which is used to mean that bad actions lead to bad results).

Umwana utumva bwira aneye rimwe – A child who does not listen to advice uses his/her time badly.

These proverbs highlight the importance of obedience and good behaviour by children, and this applies especially to a child who lives in a family that is not his/hers.

Children in a variety of care arrangements, including fostering, listed what they like to do. There are no differences amongst children who are fostered and those who live in other arrangements, and the activities that children like the most are to study and to do household chores. These activities are commonly seen as good behaviours:

I like to study.

I also like to study but I do not have exercise books.

I like to go to school until university.

I like to sweep and to get water.

I like household chores.

I like to play, to study and to work at home.

I like morning breakfast.

I like tea with bread.

I like to visit people.

I like tea and biscuits and to work in the house.

It is worth noting that the two fostered children in the group mention looking after their younger "sibling" and play.

I'd prepare food (girls in general).

I'd look for water (boys in general).

I'd look after younger children so that they do not cry (fostered girl).

I would be at school (almost all the children).

I would go and play with other children (fostered child).

Another group, which included two fostered children, their fostered siblings and other children from the neighbourhood, said:

I would prepare the house, I would fetch water, I would work for God (fostered boy).

I would laugh, I would do things, I would pray.

I would study because I want to go to university and become a teacher.

I will be a nurse and I will work for God.

I would prepare rice and I would pray.

I would help the poor and I would pray (foster "sister").

I would sing and I would pray (fostered girl).

The two fostered children, both 7 years old, are at ease in the foster family. S went to get food without asking for permission while V went to look for the keys to enter

the house and then invited the visitors to enter. They were also asked to imagine what they would do on two scenarios:

1. Suppose that a child mistreats you, what would you do?

   I can let it go (V).

   I can tell his parents.

   I would pray for him.

   I would show him that he has sinned (S).

2. Suppose that a drunk husband mistreats his wife, what would you do?

   I would try to change through love (V).

   I would let it go.

   I would pray for him.

Help, Exploitation and Abuse

Some parents mention the help that they receive from the child as a good feature of the child and as having a positive impact on their relations with the child:

> Case 34: N, 10 years old, has been fostered in 1999, after the sensitisation by a family who has one natural child, 3 years old. The mother likes the boy because he helps at home and looks after the younger brother.

> Case 48: M is seven years old, and she was fostered in an organised manner in 1999. The foster father said that they felt lonely at home and this is why they fostered the girl. The child is well, she is attending primary school, and she helps at home.

The issue of help or exploitation of children in foster families emerges on a number of occasions, and it was mentioned by children in centres and by key informants. Generally it was found that the children find household chores a pleasant and rewarding activity. Problems arise when children indicate that they work hard and when they say that they feel treated as unpaid servants:

> Case 28: A and N were looked after by a widow in a centre for unaccompanied children immediately after the 1994 genocide. At the time A, a girl, was 8 months old, and N, a boy, was two years old. She had four other children. The woman is now complaining about poverty, the lack of resources to pay for school fees and for the other needs of the children. The researchers could not talk with N because he was at school, while A said that she works very hard.

Problems also arise when instances of clear exploitation and abuse are found:

> Case 29: M is a 16 years old girl, formally fostered in 1999. She stays at home. Neighbours say that she is not well treated, she works hard, she is beaten and that the foster mother does not love her. She sleeps on the floor. The neighbours recommend that she is withdrawn from the family. The NGO committee in charge of fostering had a meeting but nothing has changed. The researchers themselves observed that the child is not well physically, and she did not want to leave the vehicle of the research team, asking to be taken back to

the centre.

How are instances of abuse recognised and what coping mechanisms and resources do children visualise? A group of adolescents in high school discussed abuse in general and more specifically abuse in a foster family. They said that one form of abuse was to remind the child that he/she is not the natural child, and to discriminate the foster child from the others. The two main signs of discrimination mentioned by them are exploitation and differential treatment:

If parents distinguish the child from the others.

If you give the child many chores.

If you send him/her away from the others.

If he/she works very hard.

From individual interviews with fostered children, exploitation is mentioned by some of the fostered children by using the term "hard work" and linked to the inability to go to school. During the focus-group discussion with adolescents in a centre, one child asked what to do if a child in a foster family is abused. Another adolescent said that some of these children go on the street, but another added that it is mainly the children reunified with extended family who go on the street. One adolescent suggested that an option for an abused child would be to return to the centre, but another participant said that it is not possible to return to the centre once you have been fostered.

Children in foster families encompassed by this research were mainly young and therefore they did not comment on what they would do if there were problems within the foster family. Older children seem to report the need to accept their conditions, as they do not see other alternatives.

Two fostered girls in different families who spent time together talk about life in the family. They are aware that they work hard because they are not in their family but also that they must accept it because they do not have any parents and that they stay with the family because it has given them shelter. They accept it because they envisage no alternative.

But not all of them do accept it, and some cases of children moving from one foster family to another were found:

Case 42: V's parents were killed during the 1994 genocide in Kigali Rural. She was 12 at the time, and she is now 18. With her two young brothers, she was taken to a centre. In 1997, the siblings were reunified with their grandmother, who died shortly afterwards. They went back to the centre, but when the centre was closed, she and one of her brothers were fostered by a family friend. The other brother had joined the army. V was afraid of being sexually abused by the foster father, as another adolescent girl living with the family had become pregnant. V then decided to leave.

The following excerpt from an interview with the girl portrays her experience:

When I arrived here, I hoped that my situation would be good as I was living with a friend,

a so-called Christian. They however began to mistreat me and to remind me always that I am an orphan and that I had to leave the house. It was very difficult to cope and I prayed God to help me. Fortunately, another friend of mine, M (17 years old), came to pay me a visit. When I explained my situation, she said that she would ask her family if I could go and live with them. After few days, they told me that it was all right and I said good-bye to the family. Now I am OK and I hope that things will continue the way they are.

5. Fostered Children and their Family of Origin

The fact that children are fostered does not mean that they do not have a family or that they do not still miss and hope to find their family of origin. Fostered children fall into two categories: first there are those who still hope to find their family:

> I would like to rejoin my family because I feel great sadness when I remember my mother.

> Sometimes it is bad because it may happen that my parents may come and look for me and that they cannot find me because I am in a foster family.

> Case 39: Z is a ten year girl, spontaneously fostered by a Counseiller. The child, separated from her parents ended up in Cyangugu. In the centre, there were two brothers from Mugesera, who had lost their younger sister with the same name as Z. The brothers liked the girl and they told her that she was their younger sister. The girl took the complete name and she became their sister. Following successful tracing of the family, the agency brought the three children to the family. After the departure of agency staff, the father found that she was not his daughter and he began to treat her poorly. The problem was amplified by the fact that the real sister was later traced and reunified. The child went to complain with the Counseiller and asked him to help her to find the agency to find her family of origin. The Counseiller has not been able to do it and that is why she is with him. For now, she is in 3rd grade of primary school. The child is still hoping to find her true family. The Counseilleur already has many responsibilities and if she finds a place somewhere else, he would be relieved of one chore.

Other children express strong views about their family of origin:

> My mother became close to me when I was in the centre, and I thought that it was my real mother. Once arrived at home, she began to tell neighbours stories of how she took me from the centre. Had I known that she was not my real mother, I would have remained in the centre.

> I would like to find my real family because I know that it was in Gitarama, and I know the names of my mother and father. It would help me if you helped me to find my family.

> The second category consists of fostered children who do not want to return to their family of origin. This is particularly well-illustrated by the case of N, a 9 year old girl who escaped when she saw the car because she did not want to be reunified with her family as they have thrown me away… they have left me alone.

6. Children's Perceptions of their Longer-Term Future

A recurring theme was the value which foster children accorded to their education. They were clear that they should be included in the family's identity card, and that

they should have a share in the family's inheritance: children linked this with the fact that it was the foster parents who chose them, not the other way round. Interestingly, some considered that educational support is a form of inheritance which they valued more highly than the inheritance of land, because it is a transferable resource. They also expressed the view that girls as well as boys should receive inheritance. It seems that most fostered children see their future with the foster parents, though those who know they have families tend to cling to the hope of finding them.

7. Conclusions

Fostered children, as a sub-category of "orphaned children", seem generally to be negatively perceived within Rwandan society. Other studies have revealed a very negative perception of foster care on the part of both adults and children – this will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

   However, in the present study, although negative perceptions of fostering were encountered, especially concerns about exploitation and discrimination, the general impression is that most fostered children did not experience such problems, and that the majority felt well integrated into their families. This was particularly the case with organised fostering, probably because of the element of selection and preparation of foster parents. Some of the fostered children called their foster parents "mama" and "papa", indicating that they feel comfortable enough with the parents. Many also referred to their foster siblings as "brothers" and "sisters".

   In general, children expressed a preference for fostering rather than living in the centres for unaccompanied children. There was, however, a strong awareness of children in centres that it was foster parents who chose the children and not the children who chose their families. This raises an important issue of child participation. From interviews with children in centres and in the community, education is high on their list of priorities. Most, but not all, fostered children interviewed go to school, most of them being in primary school.

   However, some children interviewed did feel that they had to make an extra effort: themes about the need for obedience, respect and good behaviour all emerge from the study. Moreover, some cases of less favourable treatment in comparison with other children in the family did emerge, there were some cases where fostered children were clearly unhappy, and a few cases of actual, or feared, abuse were revealed. Although a few children felt that they were being treated as unpaid servants, the majority clearly were not and many appreciated the value of contributing to work within the family. How children should respond to situations of abuse or exploitation is a significant area of uncertainly: some simply felt that they had to endure the situation, though older children were able to take action themselves. Issues such as the procedures to be followed when the fostering is clearly unsuccessful, and when the families of fostered children are traced, are also unclear to foster parents and

children.

Because most of the fostered children encountered in the study were relatively young, and because some of them did not know that they were fostered (this fact, per se, might be interpreted as an indicator of them being well integrated into the family), it was difficult to raise, in a meaningful way, issues concerning personal and family identity, and future issues such as marriage and inheritance.

Some of these important issues will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

Chapter 7

Fostering and Alternative Care Arrangements

1. Introduction

In this chapter, fostering is examined in relation to other care arrangements such as guardianship, adoption and family reunification, as well as in comparison to life in the centre, and the situation of children living on their own.

2. Fostering, Guardianship, Adoption and Family Reunification

The Government has been involved in the process of regularising fostering in the context of a changed Rwandan society and in comparison to other types of care for separated children. Some of the differences between these types of care arrangements are expressed by key informants:

> The difference is clear. Fostering in its present form does not fit in any legal procedure. Guardianship and adoption refer to the legal representation of a child; the first ends at the age of majority while the second does not end except within well specified conditions. (Ministry of Justice consultant)

> Fostering is a provisional care arrangement while waiting for legalisation; there is probably a legal project to transform it into guardianship. Guardianship and adoption are legal formulas. (MINALOC agent)

> All these procedures share the fact that the child finds himself/herself in a "new family", guardianship and adoption have known legal bases while fostering is not yet legalised, and this causes difficulties in relation to rights and duties of each part (child, parent). (Save the Children staff member)

The table overleaf attempts to identify fostering and some of its distinctive features in relation to guardianship, adoption and family reunification. The characteristics reported in the table are the outcome of group discussions with foster parents, individual interviews with foster parents and foster children, interviews with key informants and activities with children.

The Rwandan Civil Code contains articles on adoption and guardianship but none on fostering. Reunification with parents is recognised in the Rwandan Constitution and Civil Code, and when it occurs with members of the extended family it should be regularised as guardianship. Guardianship and family reunification existed before the war and genocide but they increased owing to these events. Adoption, legally in existence for a long time, is mainly practised by foreigners. Fostering is a new phenomenon that emerged during the war and increased dramati-

cally after the events of 1994. Currently, in organised fostering, parents sign an agreement and they feel responsible for the child's well-being but many aspects of fostering are unclear because of the lack of legal status.

Issue	Fostering	Guardianship	Adoption	Extended family reunification
Legal	No	Yes	Yes	It depends
Temporary or permanent?	For ever or until family is found	Majority	For ever	Customary and legally at majority
Legal representation/Responsibility	Foster parentss feel responsible	Guardian	Parent	Chief of family
Social identity	It depends	Family of origin	It depends	Family of origin
Inclusion in identity card	It depends	Yes	Yes	It depends
Responsibility for the child's property	In most instances not applicable	Yes	Yes	Yes
Inheritance	Not obliged Mixed opinions	Not obliged	Obliged	Not obliged
Procedures for removal due to abuse or desire by one of the parties (parent or child)	No	Yes	Yes	It depends
Regularisation	New phenomenon: spontaneous and organised with no formal way opf establishing long-term responsibilities	Way to formalise extended family reunification	Formalised long-term obligations	Automatic with knowledge of long-term obligations
Occurence	Emerged mainly during war and after genocide	Already existent and increasing after war and genocide	Already existent but rare	Already existent but increased after war and genocide

Is Fostering Temporary or Permanent?

Guardianship ends at majority age of the child, while adoption and family reunification define a life-long relationship between the child and the family. In principle, fostering is supposed to be a temporary placement. However, for most parents it is regarded as a permanent care arrangement, though if the family of origin is found, foster parents are willing to return the child to the family:

> One will look after them until they find their parents, otherwise he/she is my child.

> I have picked up the child when he was very young. I have launched communications and nobody has come forward. He is a gift from the sky, I will look after him until I die.

The wish to keep a child for ever occurs in particular when the family chooses a young child:

> Case 43: J is a two and half year old girl fostered in an organised manner. She is with a family who has a 13 year old daughter and who has been without siblings for the last six years. The child arrived when she was just over a year old, and the family took care of her needs and hired a servant to look after her. The family is very happy with the child, and the neighbours confirm it. The family is well-off, and they are business people. They are planning to look after the child for ever. One of the reasons for choosing a baby was that an older child had more chances of finding its family, and they wish to have a child with them for ever. The family would like to foster another child.

In this situation, as in a number of others, fostering is really seen as a form of de facto adoption. Foster parents who used to work in a centre and who accepted to foster children said:

> We took in the children but we did not think about the future.

However, most foster families have not encountered major difficulties. It is when problems do arise that the commitment of the parents is tested, and so is their idea that the child is theirs for ever:

> Case 49: M is a five year girl. She was fostered in a formal way in 1999. The family has 12 natural children. She is often sick, and the foster parents said that she came with the illness. The parents are afraid that it might be AIDS but they have not done a test yet. The foster parents are very tired because the girl is always sick. The mother complained that the child was always in the hospital and that the child is unhappy because of the illness. The family would like to foster another child instead of M.

During one focus-group discussion, parents said that if the family of origin were to be found, the foster family would like to be given another child.

Responsibility for the Foster Child

Under the guardianship arrangement, the guardian is responsible for the child, in adoption it is the parent and in extended family reunification it is the head of the household. Although not clearly detailed, during group discussions with foster parents, it emerged that foster parents feel responsible for the fostered child:

> We will look after the child until he/she finds the family, otherwise we have signed a contract that states that we are going to consider these children as ours, hence to look after them for ever.

This quote indicates the particular sense of responsibility which the contract, required in organised fostering, tends to confer. Sometimes, however, the responsibility results in worries about the child's behaviour or the family's social responsibilities:

> We have problems because we received children when the weather was better: it rained, crops were good. Now the weather is too dry. The child may steal because she/he is hungry and he/she will be badly regarded in the neighbourhood.

> I will probably have a problem when the child grows. I will suffer to have a dowry for my child, build a house and all that goes with a marriage because I am old.

If the foster child becomes bad and commits crimes and the foster parents must sell their land to pay the debts, the child will not have the inheritance. The Counseiller said that if the child commits some errors, it is up to parents to pay for his mistakes.

Social Identity

In instances of guardianship and extended family reunification, the child is clear about his/her social identity, which is that of his/her family of origin. The situation becomes more complex in cases of adoption and fostering. Legally, in cases of adoption, the child adopts the family name of the adoptive family but this does not necessarily mean that he/she feels that it is his/her social identity.

With fostering, two different scenarios are present. There are instances in which the child did not know that he/she had been fostered. The fostered parents have told the child that he/she had been lost during the war and happily found. Difficulties arose when the child found out that he/she was not with the natural family. This seems to happen through neighbours, who call the child "orphan" or tell the child that he/she is not with the natural family. There are other cases in which the children know that the family they are with is not the natural one, and generally the children ask that efforts be made to find their family, with whom they still identify.

Inclusion in the Identity Card

Guardianship and adoption clearly stipulate that the child should be included in the identity card of the guardian (specifying that it is a guardianship arrangement) or the adoptive parent. In cases of extended family reunification, the child should be registered under a guardianship arrangement.

Legally, fostered children are not necessarily included in the identity card of the foster parent. In instances of organised fostering, a formal ceremony assisted by local authorities sanctions the formal passage of the child from the centre to the family. Since prospective foster families had registered with the local authority to become foster families, some of them go to the local authority to include the child in their identity card. However, differences of opinions and practice arose, with children being put on the identity card after six months, two years or five years. One Counseiller asked if the five year time-scale for registration could not be reduced because some parents might die before the time has passed.

Responsibility for the Child's Property and Possessions

In instances of guardianship, adoption and extended family reunification, it is the person in charge of the child who looks after any property of the child. The issue did not emerge in the study, mainly because children fostered in an organised mannner are those for whom tracing has stopped or those sans adresse, unable to remember any relevant information to enable agencies to initiate tracing. The foster family takes in the child with the understanding that it is possible that the child will never find his/her family or that if the family of origin is found the child will return with them. Management of the child's property and possessions was mentioned as one of

the reasons why children were taken in by extended family members, and that some-times fights occurred amongst family members for the child's guardianship when it was actually over the child's property.

Inheritance

Legally, it is only adoptive parents who are obliged to give their inheritance to their children. In instances of fostering, guardianship and family reunification, the property owned by the parents does not necessarily pass to the child.

Inheritance is one of the challenges for foster children and parents. Some foster parents said that they had already allocated land for the child or that they were planning to do it.

> When I told my child that I went to search for a child in Rwamagana, he was happy. When he asked me about sharing the land, I said that it was soon but the child knows that they will equally share their properties:

> Case 8: M is a girl, 8 years old. She used to live in a centre and she was fostered through an NGO in 1999. She has been placed with a widow who decided to return to her family of origin after her husband's death. The child calls the widow's brother her father, and he has accepted it, as he accepted that the foster child will inherit one portion of the inheritance due to his sister. The child is the youngest of the siblings, who have all finished primary school but did not have the means to continue their studies.

However, scarcity of land and the poverty of foster families were mentioned as challenges. One parent in a focus-group discussion said the important thing is to put the child in school since there is not enough land, and educational support was considered a form of inheritance in the past. Children in group activities also said that they prefer education to land as a form of inheritance because they can carry education but not land with them.

Discussions with children at CPAJ indicated that both boys and girls should be able to inherit from foster parents once they are registered on their identity card. One child said that it is parents who go to the centre to look for children and register them and therefore after registration they should consider the child as their own, and give him/her a share of the inheritance.

Procedures for Removal owing to Abuse or Desire by One of the Parties

Removal of children from any care arrangement, be it guardianship, adoption, or extended family is complex. In the case of guardianship, removal can be done after the case has been dealt with by a tribunal. In adoption, it is a rare event that needs to be justified and dealt with by relevant bodies. In reunification with extended family members, a child who does not get along with the family moves within the extended family.

During field work, instances of child abuse or explicit requests by foster parents to terminate fostering appeared. In cases of spontaneous fostering, it is difficult to identify and monitor cases of abuse, while in cases of organised fostering this should be achieved through follow-up. Some children took the initiative to leave a family in which they felt abused and went to live with another.

Agencies adopt informal procedures for removal of children from foster families. In such cases, the agency tries to find another foster family, otherwise the child returns to the centre. However, formally there is no standard procedure. One agency had a letter written from a high official in the central Government to the Bourgmestre, who then visited the family and removed the child. The process took approximately ten days. Psychological preparation and explanation to the child and family was undertaken.

Regularisation of Fostering

While adoption is about formalised long-term obligations, family reunification has customary common understanding of long-term obligations. Guardianship is a way to formalise extended family reunification, though this is rarely used in practice. Since fostering is a new phenomenon, there is not yet a formal way of establishing long-term responsibilities either in spontaneous or organised fostering.

3. Fostering in Relation to other Care Arrangements

Generally fostering, guardianship, adoption and family reunification are not clearly distinguished in the minds of most informants. As already indicated, the term "orphan" is often used in a way which covers children in a variety of situations. Foster parents were able to compare fostering with many other living arrangements.

Foster Children and Children on their Own

Foster parents compare foster children with children who live on their own (either in child headed households or living on the streets), and they assess the lives of children on their own as more difficult than that of foster children not only because of physical hardship but also in terms of relationship:

> The best way of life for children is life in a family because children who live alone do not respect the one that is considered the head.

> In general, children who live alone do so because they leave extended family after misunderstandings. Children decide to recover their houses and land.

> The worse situation is that of children on their own who cannot study and because of the current hunger cannot survive. Children alone are adults before their age. That is their problem, otherwise they do well.

> For me, children who live alone and on the street are the least happy.

> But in good times, children on their own are better than those in centres.

During the field work, a case was found where the fostering arrangement started with the foster family at first helping the children of a family friend while they remained in their own house, but it proved complicated and therefore the arrangement changed:

Case 25: The foster mother fostered M, a 12 year old girl, J, a 10 year old boy, and S, a 7 year old girl. They are the children of a friend who died during the war, and the family tried to do its utmost to help the children while they lived in their house but it proved very difficult. Therefore, they have moved into the house of the foster family. The neighbours believe that they are the younger siblings of the foster mother.

In a group discussion, street children are seen as worse than fostered ones because of differences in behaviour:

Fostered children are better than street children because they have a shelter and a family to look after them. Even though fostered children may live with a poor family, they have the culture and kindness that street children do not have.

Fostered Children and Children in Centres

Parents do not have a positive impression of life in the centres, and their comments focus on behavioural difficulties experienced by a child in a centre. Indirectly, they are saying that the problem of children in centres is that they are not brought up to life in society. It is worth remembering that some foster parents mentioned that during sensitisation they were moved to foster a child after having learnt that children in the centres were not leading good lives. Their opinions might reflect what they heard during sensitisation:

Foster children are better because they can express their problems, which are dealt with by foster parents while others cannot even ask for advice.

Children in centres find it difficult to adapt to the food. Children in centres do not want to work and they treat social workers as servants, saying that they are paid to serve them.

You will see, you receive a child who has been educated in a European way, you will be surprised.

Reinsertion in the family is preferable to life in a centre, which is preferable to life on the street.

Rather than living in a centre, young adolescents can live together under the supervision of an adult, but living with a foster family is better.

Children alone lead a bad life but they know how to take care of themselves while those in the centre are looked after, they do not work, and they want to be served rather than serving.

The research found evidence of tension between some residential centres for children and those agencies promoting fostering. While some centres have been co-operative in allowing agencies to identify children suitable for fostering, there are still centres that are reticent to participate. As centres block fostering, lost time translates in increased age and reduced chances for a child to be fostered. In November 2000, the representative from MINALOC announced the government plan to hold a meeting with representatives from centres to discuss the government policy to close down centres and to encourage the integration of children in the community.

Fostered Children and Children in Poor and/or Extended Families

Among other care arrangements mentioned, there was also a comparison between fostered children and those living in extended families. An example was presented of somebody who refused to take in the child of his uncle and he did not even want to see the child. The conclusion was that not all children can be reunified and that nobody should force foster families and children to live together:

> I think that children in extended families are worse off than fostered children because the fostered ones are received by mothers who have been prepared.

> They go to the extended family and they are difficult because they think that they are in their own property, while fostered ones are prudent with families that are not their own.

> Having done both family reunification and fostering, I think that in many instances fostering works better than reunification with the extended family (former Save the Children Denmark staff member).

It has already been noted that Concern's small-scale follow-up study revealed more problems with children reunified in extended families than with fostered children.

Fostered Children and those in Group Homes and Centres

A group of adolescents living in centres said that the best alternative for a child is to live with his/her parents in the family, independently of whether the family is rich or poor. They themselves prefer to live in group homes or in centres rather than in a foster family because in a centre everybody is treated equally and they are too old to be with a foster family. One boy said:

> Children younger than 6 years of age do not have problems in a foster family but older children have problems.

4. Conclusions

This chapter has described fostering and situated it in relation to alternative care arrangements. Some distinctive features of fostering emerge such as its lack of legal status and uncertainty between what it should be in principle and what it is in practice. Nevertheless, most foster parents see advantages to fostering as compared with other types of care arrangement. An additional theme emerged in chapter 5, namely that foster families feel alone and need to rely on their own resources to care for fostered children. Fostering is often seen as a long-term form of care: foster parents tend to see it as permanent unless the child's natural family is found. They generally have a strong sense of responsibility, and in many cases this extends to providing for the child's inheritance.

Chapter 8

Discussion and Conclusions

1. Introduction

This chapter will highlight some of the main issues to emerge from the study, starting with a definition of fostering, and then a comparison of organised and spontaneous fostering. Next we consider the issue of whether fostering is seen as a temporary or permanent form of care and, more broadly, how fostering is seen by children and parents. The chapter continues with a presentation on life in the family, some observations on fostering procedures and practices, the issue of follow-up, procedures for the removal of children, and finally some concluding thoughts on the evolution of fostering.

2. Definition of Fostering

Fostering is commonly defined as an arrangement whereby a child lives with an unrelated family on a temporary basis, without the expectation of permanent membership in the "new" family, and without any expectation that natural parents will lose their parental rights and responsibilities (Tolfree, 1995, p. 185). Within the Rwandan context, a definition of fostering is not found in the Rwandan civil code, nor in Government Guidelines on family reunification and fostering, nor in any of the documents analysed. The Kinyarwanda expression Kwakirwa mu muryango means "to be received (welcomed) in a family", without specifying if it is the extended or non-blood related family. It is the addition of utari awa bene wabo or utari uwabo, meaning a family with whom there are no blood ties, that defines fostering in the western sense of the word.

   The lack of a commonly defined understanding has implications for policies and practice. For instance, the campaign "One child, one family" refers to family reunification and placement with non-relatives, leading to an assumption that there is a similarity in the type of care and obligations. Similarly, NGOs and Government have used family reunification as a model to sensitise families to foster. The absence of a definition alters estimated figures of fostered children. Cantwell (1997) reports that the number of children looked after by families other than their own varies between 200 000 and 400 000, depending on whether or not foster care includes care by distant relatives. Similarly, the UN Common Assessment (2000) figure of 120 000 children in foster families must include both reunified and placed children: in May 2000, 3 658 spontaneously fostered children were registered with ICRC for reunification and only 1 200 have been formally fostered by non-relatives.

Fostering, family reunification, guardianship, and adoption are used interchangeably, reflecting the recency of the phenomenon in Rwanda, in which care for separated and unaccompanied children took place within the extended family.

3. Organised and Spontaneous Fostering

Fostering, intended as care by non-related individuals, is distinguished in formal or organised fostering and informal or spontaneous placement. Formal fostering is an arrangement made by an intermediary whereby a child who is unable to live with his/her own family is placed with an individual or family with whom he or she has no blood ties, and with whom he or she has not previously lived. Spontaneous, or informal fostering, is a situation in which a child lives with an individual or family with whom he or she has no blood tie, but where no external agency or authority has been involved in making the arrangement.

Organised fostering varies in level and type of implementation. In 1992, a message on the radio was used to recruit volunteer foster families, while the Government transported children from internally displaced camps to families, and made them sign an agreement with the Government. After 1994, fostering procedures varied, with some NGOs simply bringing children to families, while others set up procedures for selection, evaluation, matching and follow-up of foster families and children.

Spontaneous and organised fostering also differ according to the nature and duration of the decision-making process. In spontaneous fostering, decisions are generally made on the spot at the sight of a separated child in need of assistance. In organised fostering, a thoughtful decision-making process is expected. Another differentiating criterion is the level of common understanding of the rules governing fostering, with organised fostering having pre-defined rules of behaviour and responsibilities. Ribeiro (1997) suggests that traditional fostering can be seen as "formal" when rules governing it are commonly understood. In pre-genocide Rwanda, rules for neither organised nor spontaneous fostering existed, making it necessary for all partners to develop and agree on them.

One key informant summarised the difference between spontaneous and organised fostering in that the former is done using the heart by an individual or a family on their own, while organised fostering is thought through with the head, sanctioned by outsiders as a public engagement. Foster parents differentiate the two types of fostering not by reference to a third party but rather in relation to the higher degree of preparation and monitoring in organised fostering.

During the research, when researchers asked NGOs or local authorities to find a foster family, organised cases were identified. It was only by asking neighbours of interviewed families that cases of spontaneous fostering were discovered. Sometimes neither neighbours nor local authorities knew where spontaneously foster children lived. They only get to know about the existence of a foster family if there are major difficulties. This confirms that organised fostering, thanks to the presence of outsiders at ceremonies, results in the cases been identifiable while spontaneous cases are

dispersed and unknown. Foster parents themselves emphasised this factor as offering greater safeguards for formally fostered children. Sometimes individuals talked of fostering when referring to family reunification, and sometimes domestics were included in the foster family.

4. Permanent or Temporary Fostering

Fostering is generally understood as a temporary arrangement with no expectation of permanent membership of the foster family, or of loss of parental rights and responsibilities. However, in many instances fostering is more akin to a form of de facto adoption, a permanent care arrangement. Inside Rwanda, participants in the study agreed that foster parents would look after the child until the family is found or for ever. In refugee camps across the Rwandan border, where fostered children were added to ration cards, separated children were accepted by fostered families but brought back to the centre, reunified or abandoned after repatriation, though some of them remained with foster families. In the camps, fostering was often referred to as a form of "interim care", emphasising the perception of its non-permanent character which, of course, did not always prove to be the case.

While fostering is considered a temporary arrangement with the option of becoming permanent (possibly through adoption), for foster parents in the study, fostering is a permanent arrangement that might be interrupted by the unlikely recovery of members of the family of origin. Foster parents are in a state of confusion as they do not know if natural parents are alive or dead and although they know that fostering is temporary, they might actually have wanted a permanent member of the family when they accepted to foster. This is especially the case when childless couples seek to have a family through fostering. Particular problems are likely to arise in situations in which children are unaware that the foster parents are not their own (birth) parents, when their own families are successfully traced.

Foster parents variously said that fostering should become permanent after the child has been under the care of foster parents for six months, two years or five years. Even if the longest interval were applied (five years), separated children fostered in 1994 should by now be considered permanently settled with the foster family. It is quite important to specify some type of deadline that states a period by which, if the family of origin is not found, foster parents could assume that the child will stay with them. Without such a threshold, foster parents and children face an unhelpful uncertainty.

Another factor relevant to this debate is the commitment of NGOs: many have not made a long-term commitment to Rwanda, as evidenced by the fact that many have either ceased their fostering programme, or have left the country altogether. Others, seeing that they were setting up unsustainable programmes requiring their long-term support, have shifted the emphasis away from long-term agency support to long-term community support, despite the problems involved in the latter.

5. Fostering: Perceptions and Reality

Perceptions about Fostering

Because of the novelty of fostering, it is unclear whether fostered children are considered members of the family or not. Some Rwandan proverbs and sayings describe the special case of orphans deprived of their family environment. The term orphan is generally used to refer to a child without both parents. For instance, when the teacher in class asks orphans to stand up, it is only those without both parents who do so, and it is the children who have lost or are separated from both parents who are considered suitable for fostering. The differential status of an orphan is reported when people say "I have two children and one orphan", to refer to children without both parents living with extended family relatives or non-related individuals.

It would seem that in Rwandan tradition, care of children outside the family is negatively perceived, as the following proverbs indicate:

An orphan has to mature before his age.

The child of somebody else is dirty.

A fostered child is a cross to carry.

A child who disobeys poops once a day (interpretation: if you are in a family that is not yours, a child must obey to find food; a child must go slowly; a child is not automatically at ease; a child must make an extra effort).

One foster parent said that those who have not received children laugh at them saying "Support the cross that you yourselves have taken on, I have withdrawn from the challenge". This explains why some foster parents do not like the foster child to know the truth as it might affect the his/her behaviour, and they dislike it when neighbours remind the child that he/she is an orphan.

This traditional view explains why negative perceptions on foster care are expressed by both adults and children. Community workshops conducted as part of Orphan's Assessment (Veale and Quigley, 2000), highlighted the widespread belief that children in extended or alternative care are subjected to exploitative labour compared to other children. According to some respondents, many families fostered children because they expected to receive some type of material support, and when this failed to materialise, the families felt tricked and turned their anger on to the child. According to the findings of the same study, children believe that extended and foster families have not received adequate preparation to ensure genuine reintegration of separated children. Many children are wary of the benefits of being placed with a foster family. There is widespread belief that they will be exploited as domestic labourers and that they will not receive adequate care and attention.

In the present study, negative perceptions about fostering were also expressed by participants, worried about exploitation and discrimination. Although some cases of abuse were found in this study, such a widespread belief does not seem to be empirically confirmed, probably owing to the fact that fostered children are young and go

to school, and that foster families have been selected and prepared. When exploitation occurs it is generally with adolescents. Having said this, it is also true that foster children live in difficult conditions, and that their future is sometimes uncertain.

What sense do Children Make of their Fostering Experience?

How does a foster child feel in the foster family? Does the child identify with the foster family or the family of origin? From the findings of the study, four scenarios emerge.

In the first instance, children do not know that they are fostered and therefore they think of themselves as members of the foster family. Parents tell them they are their own that they had lost during the war. There is a second scenario in which parents think that the child does not know while the child actually does know. On one occasion, while a foster mother said that it is not good to talk to her foster child separately because she does not know that she has been fostered, her child raised the issue, clearly having found out from other sources. The general observation is that most children know or at least suspect that they are not with their own family. Either at school or in the neighbourhood, they hear about the family and their past. In a country like Rwanda where families know one another, especially in the countryside, it is likely that children will sooner or later discover that they are not with their family of origin. Even though parents consider the lack of knowledge as an indicator of success, it is important that they understand the risks of such an approach, the value of the child knowing his/her identity, and the fact that this does not mean that relationships will deteriorate.

There is then a third scenario in which parents know or suspect that the child knows that he/she has been fostered. In focus-group discussions, while at first parents said that the child should not know that he/she has been fostered, later they said that the children know but that they still call them "mama" and "papa". In theses instances, a discussion with the child about his/her understanding and perceptions would strengthen relationships. The fourth scenario occurs when child and parents know that the child is fostered. In all these cases, how do children cope with the fact that they are fostered but also that tracing continues?

When children talk about their history there are times when they are happy and other moments when they are not. Young children between the ages of 6 and 9 are in primary school and they are generally happy and integrated, with some exceptions. The main challenge is with regard to their future, especially education. They say that do not know their origin and they would like to be in good terms with the foster family in order to be able to study.

Rwandan sayings imply that additional obligations are expected by children who are not with their family. The fostered children interviewed confirm that sometimes they feel that they need to make an extra effort. A pre-adolescent girl mentioned that she and her friend, who is also a foster child, discuss about their life and they agree that they need to be obedient to those families who have fostered them. The

need to obey and respect foster parents is the main recommendation to foster children from adult and child informants. Additional obligations are also expected from children in extended families.

Spontaneously fostered children said that if they were badly treated they would leave the family. Similarly children in natural families say that they would be patient with their own parent that mistreats them but they would leave a foster family that mistreats them. Ties with the family of origin are different from those with a foster family.

Motivation and Decision-making Strategies

Motivations of parents to foster vary from religious reasons, desire to be good citizens, wanting help at home, wanting a child, and sometimes result from being brought together with a child by circumstances. There is an added value in taking in a child, such as company for elderly people, help with household chores, or higher moral and social standing in the community. Motivations of parents are personal but not exploitative, and by themselves they are a necessary but not sufficient element to ensure the success of fostering. Other criteria, such as the behaviour of the child, the economic status of the family over time, the level of preparation, and the degree of support play a more significant role.

Gender Considerations in decision-making: Most decisions to foster, particularly for organised fostering, involved the family. When the idea first came from the woman, she consulted the husband as in the case of a woman whose husband was in prison and who was asked for his permission. When the decision came from the man it was difficult for the woman to refuse, but her involvement is necessary. Visiting the child in the centre and taking care of the child, especially when the child is young, is a task expected of the mother. Since the education of a child is the mother's concern, if the mother is not willing to do it, fostering is unlikely to work. There was a case in which the father wanted the foster girl to stay but the mother did not want it, and the girl was returned to the centre. The role of the woman in ensuring the success of fostering should not be underestimated.

Children's Participation: Children have a limited role in the decision-making process, especially those in centres. There is clear perception by children that fosterable children are "given" to parents. The procedure of preparing children by telling them the benefits of life in a family is information rather than participation. The preparation of children for visits by foster parents is seen as a selection procedure in which some children are "chosen" and others are not.

The child's opinion is asked after the child spends time with the family, when the child evaluates the family and decides whether or not to go and live with them. However, there is a perception among children that parents can choose children but children cannot choose parents. Although there may be some pressure for children to go, at least children are informed, a useful mechanism especially for younger ones, who may find it difficult to select. Also, the process is voluntary and sometimes children do not attend the group fostering ceremony in the centre prior to placement

because they have changed their mind about living with the family.

Differing Perceptions of Criteria: Government and NGOs have specified criteria for selecting foster families, parents have criteria for assessing the success or failure of fostering and so do children. Are these criteria the same? While Government Guidelines focus on socio-demographic characteristics of prospective families such as age, civil status, and economic conditions, foster parents focus on personal characteristics such as behaviour and relation of the child with siblings and parents, and children talk of love, education, and material well-being. It is worth noting that some foster parents encountered in the study would not be eligible to foster within the proposed criteria for eligibility proposed in the draft law. Moreover, some "unconventional" arrangements seemed to be working well, for example the successful case of a poor elderly widow fostering a young girl.

Challenges and Obligations: In general, foster parents feel responsible for the children who live with them. The degree of obligation is stronger for those parents who have fostered the child in an organised manner, since a contract has been signed and publicly sanctioned. Parents feel that the community is observing them. An example was given of three children, among them a foster child, that broke a window at school. When the school director asked parents to pay, the foster mother also paid for the damage. The relation with the child may suffer but the parent assumes responsibility to avoid being perceived as a bad parent.

The attributed validity of the fostering contract is evidenced when foster parents go to the Commune to require that the child be registered on their identity card on account of the fact that they have signed a contract. Social ceremonies that publicly acknowledge the child-foster parent arrangement promote the concept that the child belongs to the family as witnessed by the community. A greater and more specific involvement of some members of the community, either extended family or neighbours or friends, would increase a sense of common responsibility for the well-being of the child and would provide a source of monitoring and support for the family. The family and child might choose neighbours or friends as special witnesses or, as sometimes happens "godparents", who accept the task of looking after the well-being of the child.

It is easier for parents to say that they feel responsible for the child when children are young and doing well. On a couple of occasions, foster parents asked for the removal of the child owing to difficult behaviour or to health problems. It is to prevent these occurrences and to deal with them properly that regulations and legal tools are indispensable. But the development of such instruments raises the question of whether or not parents would still be willing to foster if their legal and moral obligations were put on paper. From the evidence of the case study, it might be foreseen that fostering would continue, mainly because foster parents already feel morally responsible. Furthermore, parents who currently decide to foster might continue to do so because they hope that the child will be theirs permanently, that is they consider fostering as de facto adoption.

The presence of a legal tool would ensure that prospective foster parents are aware of the nature of their engagement and their short- and long-term obligations. At the same time foster children, who also have responsibilities towards the foster family such as obedience and respect, assistance with household chores and care for younger siblings or elderly parents, need to be clear about their duties and rights. If and when their responsibilities are heavier than those of other members of the family, a legal tool would clarify actions to take, and it would guarantee that procedural steps (including guidelines not present in current documents) are revised, regularised, implemented and monitored. Training and informing sharing on legal articles should be for new parents and for parents currently fostering.

Foster parents and children are confronted with many challenges such as access to education, health care, relations within the family, identity, and future of the foster child. Some of the ways in which these challenges are dealt with highlight the ambiguous position of the foster child within the family. For instance, parents say that fostered children should be regarded as their own children but then they complain when the orphan's certificate in not taken into account by the school. Similarly, parents say that they have fostered a child to help the country and therefore responsibilities such as education and health costs should be shared.

Are foster families' challenges similar or different from those of other Rwandan families? With 66% of the Rwandan population affected by poverty and 18% living in especially difficult circumstance (UN, 2000), it is to be expected that worries about education, health and poverty pose challenges for many Rwandan families. Other worries are more specific to foster families and they are discussed in the following sections.

Adolescence: Foster parents prefer to foster young children so that they can better educate them. Adolescents in a centre were suspicious about the motives of parents who want to take in older children. One of the reasons why fostering is working out is because children were placed in foster care when they were young. However, the study encountered a number of children who were fostered during the adolescent period: secondary/vocational education, pregnancy and fears of sexual abuse were common themes.

In the west, adolescence is a sensitive time for fostering to break down, and some cases of exploitation and abandonment of the foster family encountered in this study confirm this concern. Therefore preventive measures to avoid breakdown of foster parent-child relationships in adolescence need to be implemented together with special care in monitoring adolescents.

The Future of Fostered Children: Many parents, especially those who have fostered children spontaneously, have not had the chance to think about the long-term implications of fostering. The future of foster children should be considered in comparison with children in similar circumstances. Fostered children may be disadvantaged in comparison with children in centres with regard to access to secondary school or vocational training when they grow older. However, they are at an advantage becau-

se they are learning life skills and are establishing networks not available to children in centres.

Fostered children may be disadvantaged in relation to children living alone, who receive material assistance, and to children living in extended families, who are expected to receive support and inheritance. There is no legal obligation for foster parents with regard to inheritance and foster parents' opinions on the topic vary. Some parents say that they consider the child as their own and therefore plan to give her/him a share of inheritance but this arrangement may be opposed by extended family. A new law No 22/99 covering, among other things, inheritance rights, became part of the civil code in 1999 and an awareness-raising campaign is under way. However, its practicalities are still to be defined, such as what happens to the inheritance rights of foster children in cases of remarriage. Children's opinions on inheritance rights for fostered children are quite clear. They said that since it is parents that go to a centre and choose a child and put the child on their identity card therefore they should give the fostered child a share of the inheritance. They are quite progressive in their thinking when saying that both boys and girls should receive inheritance, and that education should be considered a form of inheritance preferable to land because it is a transferable resource.

The legal and social identity of the foster child is unclear. Even though the name of the child in Rwandan culture is not the same as the name of the family, the identity status of the child needs to be clarified. When the child reaches the foster family, the child generally keeps the name of the family of origin when this is known, or the name that he/she had been given either in the centre or by somebody else. At times, the foster family changes or adds another name. There is no well-specified guideline on whether the child should or should not be included in the identity card of the foster parents, nor on whether or not his/her status as fostered should be indicated. Usually, those around the child in the neighbourhood and at school know that the child is fostered, and in terms of social identity it is important that the child himself/herself should know. It would seem that there is a need for agencies to adopt clear policies on the issue of the child's right to knowledge of his/her identity: the preparation of foster parents can be used to ensure that they feel comfortable and confident in talking openly to the child about the family of origin. Follow-up visits can then be used to ensure that information is given to children in an appropriate way. Work within the local community may also be important to ensure the child's acceptance and to avoid the foster parents feeling a need to conceal the child's true identity from their neighbours.

Exploitation and Abuse: There is a widespread perception that children in foster care are abused and exploited. In this study most children helped with household chores and lived in poverty but few of them were exploited or lived in particularly bad conditions. Exploitation and abuse of a foster child can be identified when his/her activities and treatment are different from those of the siblings, and often chores requested were considered similar to those of the siblings, such as going to-

gether to look for water and firewood. This again is probably linked to the fact that fostered children are young and go to primary school. The place and obligations of the child in a family reflect cultural practices and normative behaviours. In pre-genocide Rwanda, it was not unusual for a child to go and live with another family to help in exchange for education, or for a child to be placed with the grandmother to help her.

Discrimination amongst siblings occurs in relation to access to education, with fostered children being sent to a different school further away where the orphan's certificate is accepted while the siblings go to a nearby school. Exploitation needs to be situated within the developmental stage of the child, and given the life experience of some of these children, it may occur when a child is requested to do something that he/she does think capable of doing. Within the many centers, children were not expected to do household chores and hence became removed from the norms of their society.

An indirect form of neglect comes from the community when cases of exploitation or abuse are not monitored or reported. In this respect, organised fostering offers some safeguards for abuse and exploitation because of the public nature of the event that increases the visibility of the child.

Do children react to abuse and exploitation? While in the past, children were described as vulnerable and passive, recently their resilience and coping have been emphasised. When discussing actions that children may take in the event of abuse, the role of other children as a support network is frequently mentioned together with patience. Children mention that they would talk to friends, pray, keep silent (especially adolescents) and wait. Few said that they felt comfortable talking to parents or adults.

6. Fostering Procedures and Practices

Ribeiro (1997) highlights some crucial issues in fostering. What guidelines exist regarding fostering, what mechanisms are there to regulate them and who has the authority to make fostering decisions? How does fostering situate itself in relation to existing mechanisms for care for separated children? What are the effects of interventions by external agencies on existing mechanisms? What are the problems when short-term placements become long-term ones?

In the following section, there will be a discussion of fostering procedures. Although a systematic evaluation of the impact of procedures on outcomes is not possible owing to the limited number of cases, some trends and observations are worth discussing. Despite some instances of abuse and exploitation, the majority of fostered children are integrated in the family, especially those in which preparation has occurred. This is not to say that foster children and foster families do not encounter many challenges. Some, such as poverty, access to social services, and interpersonal difficulties are shared by other Rwandan families, while others such as iden-

tity and rights to inheritance are specific to foster families.

It is also worth mentioning that successful integration of children does not necessarily relate to motivations or socio-demographic criteria as it is exemplified by the successful case of a poor elderly widow fostering a young girl, or the unsuccessful case of a young girl fostered at a young age by a rich family. There are interpersonal and circumstantial events after placement that mediate its outcome, with unexpected and unconventional care arrangements working well.

During a consultative meeting held in November 2000, general recommendations were made in relation to fostering procedures:

1. The relevant Ministry should be involved in cases when centres do not want children to leave.
2. Fostering agencies should also do direct sensisation in the centres with children in addition to that done by the centres' own social workers.
3. So far, children are asked about their opinions. It would be useful to involve them in the decision making process.
4. Popular education should be undertaken on the problems sometimes caused by others such as neighbours, as the community should feel involved.

The introduction of Government Guidelines on fostering practice has helped to unify practices and procedures: nevertheless some significant differences in practices did emerge, most particularly in relation to the selection of foster parents and the matching of children with foster parents: if fostering is to be further developed in the future, these differences need to be addressed. The question of follow-up probably illustrates the area of greatest uncertainty, which is now discussed separately.

7. Follow-up

Follow-up is an essential element of the fostering process but its implementation, frequency, and duration are the subject of much debate. The Machel Report (Machel 1996) recommends that "The situation of a child in a foster family should always be closely monitored through a community-based system" (page 15). During an interagency meeting (SCF 1997) on children in emergencies, participants agreed on the minimum requirements for follow-up:

a. The community should be involved in the selection of foster families.
b. Local capacity to manage foster care should be developed using appropriate local structures.
c. Follow-up should be linked to the development of community welfare structures.
d. Research is needed on what happens to children placed in foster families.

The role of the community and community-based follow-up are commonly used terms but who is the community in the Rwandan context? Is it everybody or nobody or whom? In this study, when asked about support received from the communi-

ty, foster families mention extended family, neighbours and occasionally authorities. Fostered children pay visits to the "extended family" and the extended family has a say in whether the foster child gets inheritance or not. Neighbours are also mentioned as people children go to for support, and sometimes as a source of anguish, when they remind the child that he/she is an orphan. When major problems occur, authorities are contacted. The general feeling from interviews is that families struggle and survive on their own. Significantly, Associations, schools and churches were almost never mentioned as sources of support. Government social workers have a role to play in follow-up but their role is left to personal interpretation and is made difficult by lack of resources and time.

If clear guidelines about rights and obligations were put into place and publicised, then roles and responsibilities would be less confusing. It would be helpful if local authorities could be involved in special circumstances, if specialised workers from agencies could provide training, and if extended family members, neighbours, or other specified individuals could volunteer to be involved in monitoring. It has been recommended that the practice of public naming of "godparents" for the child that promote the concept that the child belongs not only to the individual family but to the community should be encouraged (Veale and Quigley, 2000). A grass-roots level follow-up would have additional benefits such as the elimination or reduction in expectations of assistance, and the higher probability that both spontaneous and organised cases would be monitored. The question is whether the community is cohesive enough to deal with the task.

In 1999, committees were elected with several tasks, amongst whom a subcommittee at different levels (Cellule and Sector) for social affairs. One objective of the Government is to decentralise and to give more power to lower level structures. The challenge may be that individuals involved in these committees have many tasks to achieve, and few human and material resources. They would therefore be better placed as channels for the transmission of information about foster children than in the implementation of follow-up. Whatever their role might potentially be in fostering, it would need to be precise and realistic.

Neither school nor church are perceived as having a strong role in monitoring and providing support to foster children and parents, and yet both are well placed to monitor conditions of fostered children, to promote children's rights, to give advice or support to families, and to provide role models and resource persons. While NGOs' programmes sooner or later phase out, both church and schools are permanent organisations placed in local areas and with grass-roots representatives.

The role of NGOs, families and the community was highlighted during a consultative meeting held in November 2000, during which it was reported by participants that psycho-social follow-up could be conducted by NGOs' agents, but that meetings amongst foster families and actions to emphasise the responsibilities of the community should be strengthened. To improve follow-up, there is a need for community education, training, and meetings among foster families and fostered

children. It was also suggested that a committee formed by already existing bodies (social affairs, legal affairs, education) be set up, that Government Guidelines be applied, and that local authorities be aware of the problems of children.

Whether or not follow-up includes economic assistance is an issue for debate. On the one hand, there is suspicion about families who take in a child when material benefit is involved; on the other hand many foster families live in very poor economic conditions. One recommendation from the orphan's assessment is the necessity to strengthen economic capacity in communities so that they can support orphans, including foster families (Veale and Quigley, 2000). Economic assistance should be given to all children in the family and it should be targeted at the community rather than to a particular category of children. One NGO involved in fostering had a particularly well-developed programme to provide support for small enterprise to foster parents and other vulnerable families.

8. The Removal of Children from Foster Families

During an interagency meeting on children in emergencies (SCF 1997), it was reported that children may need to be removed for protection, problems linked to ethnicity, neglect and abuse; voluntary repatriation or refoulement; lack of civil and political rights; security problems; and the wish of the child. In the documents consulted in Rwanda, no specific guidelines on the removal of children from foster families were described.

Different NGOs have different procedures for removal and common ones need to be developed. It is also unclear if preparation for removal when the family of origin is found is to be undertaken by the agency that did the fostering or the one in charge of reunification. Furthermore, what happens if the child does not know that he/she has been fostered and thinks that he/she is with the natural family? And what happens if the child does not want to leave the foster family?

What happens to children who are spontaneously fostered? How are their conditions monitored and is tracing done for them? What happens when fostering fails? What are the back-up mechanisms? Currently, removal is done on an ad hoc basis and it should be discussed and formalised to address these dilemmas.

9. Integration with Family Tracing Activities

The issue of inter-agency collaboration also emerges in situations in which family tracing activities continue after placement in a foster home. Children are usually fostered when it is assumed that tracing has been exhausted. However, eagerness to foster has resulted in children been fostered before all tracing efforts have been made. According to one key informant[4], in one centre, 62% of children originally destined for fostering were reunified after personalised, accelerated and intensified tracing efforts. In another centre, of the closed cases that were re- opened for family

tracing, 43% were reunified. Thirty children were able to find a family, and of these 33% were able to find one parent, and an additional 60% were reunified with close family members such as older siblings and grandparents. Out of 24 children on the fostering list, 13 were able to return to their families and 11 children were fostered (ten are still in fostering). This information highlights the lack of a "decision tree" to determine if a child is really ready for fostering. Decisions to foster are based on the age of the child, the time the child has spent in the centre, and the lack of information for more standardised fostering. More personalised tracing is required and the majority of children who have incomplete information still have a chance to be reunified by using radio communication (De Lay, 2000, personal communication).

10. The Evolution of Fostering: Past, Present and Future

The first empirical case of fostering recorded in this study took place in 1992, when children were moved from camps for internally displaced in Byumba, Kigali Rural, and Ruhengeri. A major change has occurred as a result of the war, genocide and mass population displacements, which led to fostering becoming familiar and prominent. According to UNICEF (1997), soon after the genocide the Rwandan Government did not want to formalise fostering to enable spontaneous solidarity to take place. However, as time went on the need emerged to clarify the child's status, to ensure that living conditions are adequate, and that the child's best interests are being protected. There was a need to strike a balance between the protection of children and the rapid and informal application of procedures.

It is thanks to the generosity of foster parents, and, perhaps paradoxically, their lack of careful thought about long-term obligations that made fostering possible. As one key informant said: "We are lucky that our peasants do not understand what they are doing so that they foster. I invite other people to foster but I myself cannot because I already have five children and I am aware of the responsibilities of fostering and so I do not volunteer to foster".

In other countries, rules governing spontaneous or organised fostering form conventional knowledge. Ribeiro (1997) suggests that in such instances, traditional fostering can be seen as "formal" in the sense that the rules governing it are commonly understood, and spontaneous fostering may be endorsed and directly or indirectly supported by the local community. In the Rwandan case, because spontaneous fostering was not regularized by custom, common understandings and rules need to be agreed upon, otherwise a short-term rather than long-term solution is reached.

The view of the Machel study (Machel, 1996) on fostering is that these arrangements need careful supervision. Many foster families take excellent care of the child, but where economic and social situations have been undermined by war, children may be at risk of exploitation. The situation of a child in a foster family should therefore always be closely monitored through community-based systems (para 71).

During a consultative meeting held in November 2000, suggestions were made re-

garding the elements to include in a legal instrument aimed at regularising fostering. These included the following:

Definition of fostering.

Procedures for the legalisation of spontaneous fostering.

Essential elements in the process of fostering.

Criteria for the identification of families.

Juridical status.

Rules about the property of the foster child and his/her right to inheritance.

Child's identity (name, religion, right to information, registration in the identity card).

Define the engagement.

Procedures for the termination of fostering (return to centre, family of origin, etc.).

Procedures (competent bodies, sanctions etc.) to be adopted in instances of abuse.

Obligation, rights and duties of parents, children, local authorities, Government, NGOs etc.

Creation of an ad hoc committee for evaluation of families.

It was also recommended that a presidential edict be drafted. It has the advantage of being developed and approved more quickly than a project of law and it can also be changed more easily, and it could be executed on the basis of the existing New Code on the Family, recently voted by the Assembly.

11. Conclusion

This study has explored the phenomenon of fostering in Rwanda, with a particular emphasis on the use of qualitative methods to understand how it is perceived by children, foster families, other members of local communities and other key informants. Despite the lack of a tradition of children living with strangers in Rwandan culture, and despite the generally negative perception of "orphans" and suspicions about the likely treatment of fostered children, the introduction of organised fostering programmes has proved to be an appropriate means of providing family care for separated children unable to return to their own families. Despite the fact that this study did encounter examples of abuse and exploitation, such instances were very much the exception to the general impression of fostered children being happy and well-integrated into their families. However, most of the fostered children who were encountered in the study were young: some of the problems associated with adolescence may not have been encountered yet. Some children did indicate, however, that they felt the need to "make an extra effort" in terms of obedience and respect for their foster parents.

Most foster families seem to envisage fostering as a form of permanent care, with

an acceptance of their long-term obligations which, in many cases, included the pro-vision of inheritance. Children themselves had clear expectations that they should re-ceive both education and inheritance: the former was sometimes preferred as a more transferable resource than inherited property. Foster families did indicate a real pro-blem in continuing to fund the children's education, though the issue of providing dowries did not emerge very clearly – perhaps because most of the children are still young.

The ambiguity in the legal status of foster children and the lack of legislation co-vering it do leave some uncertainties, which the proposed legislative changes would help to address. One surprising finding is that many fostered children have not been told that they are not living with their own families – though many had found this out from other sources. On the one hand this raises an important question about the child's right to an identity and to information about his/her past. On the other hand, foster parents sometimes saw the child's ignorance of the fact of fostering as an indication of his or her successful integration into the family: there seemed to be a worry that the truth could destabilise the child. This emerges as an important issue for agencies to discuss with prospective foster families. It also links with a broader issue of children's participation in the planning of their future – in particular their involvement in the choice of foster family. It also raises important questions about the child's rights to a name and identity.

The study attempted to reach children who had been taken in spontaneously by unrelated families: this is an area in which there has been very little research, with the phenomenon of spontaneous fostering in Rwanda being unquantified and poor-ly understood. Many of the themes we encountered were equally relevant to both ty-pes of fostering, but one factor which did stand out is that the selection and prepara-tion of parents for fostering by an agency helped them in their task, and that this fact, coupled with the signing of an agreement and the public nature of their comm-mitment, both strengthened their obligation to the child and opened up the potenti-al for a greater element of monitoring and support from within the community: the extent of community support was, however, limited and very variable.

This emerges as a key issue: some agencies which initially promoted fostering brought with them western models which envisaged a long-term follow-up by agen-cy staff. This proved unsustainable, and with the limited capacity of Government so-cial workers to take on this task, community responsibility has been envisaged as the most appropriate solution: this, however, in the context of the fragmentation of communities, coupled with widespread poverty, has proved immensely difficult. The current Government emphasis on de-centralisation of services may provide the struc-tures, though not necessarily the resources, to bring about a greater community re-sponsibility for foster families and other categories of vulnerable children.

The numbers of children separated on account of the genocide and civil war who are eligible for fostering are now diminishing rapidly, though there remain many "hard to place" children, some of whom may be encompassed by IRC's attempts to

involve new categories of children in fostering. There is clearly some scope for building on the experience of fostering as a means of responding to the needs of other categories of separated children: these might include children placed in centres by their fathers following the death of their partner, and in particular the growing number of children orphaned by AIDS

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