



# Kinship Care Album



Save the Children

## BREAKTHROUGH

“All children thrive in a safe family environment and no child is placed in harmful institutions”



**Save the Children**

**WE ARE** the world's leading independent organisation for children.

**OUR VISION** is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation.

**OUR MISSION** is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.

# Researching Kinship Care in West and Central Africa

This Album on Kinship Care is a compilation of albums from DRC, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone made by children and young people who were part of a Kinship Care research initiative undertaken by Save the Children in West and Central Africa, 2012 – 2013.

Children actively and directly participated as researchers, documenters and advocates and were involved in analysis, documentation and action planning on the lives of children living in kinship care – the positive and negative aspects of living with kin caregivers and the factors and practices that strengthen or undermine children's care, protection and participation within families and communities.

These albums showcase one example of the way in which child led documentation was a central tenet of this participatory research process, enabling children to communicate their perspectives and their messages to their communities and at national level. Bringing together contributions from the national albums into one regional Kinship Care album provides a platform for these same voices to be heard at regional and global levels.

All necessary child safeguarding measures were taken and respected in the process of compiling this album. All names have been changed to ensure anonymity and to safeguard the children involved.

# Foreword

We know that children are best protected and cared for in a safe family environment, ideally with their own families but, when not possible, in family or community-based alternatives such as kinship care which is the primary focus of this research. If children cannot be with their families, then the alternative care available to them needs to be supported and monitored to make sure it is safe for children and in their best interest.

This research into Kinship Care in West and Central Africa was undertaken to improve our knowledge and understanding of this endogenous practice which is the most prevalent form of informal alternative care in the region. The findings are being used to inform programming and advocacy relating to data collection, improved legislation, policy and guidelines on all forms of alternative care, the use and targeting of child sensitive social protection, access to essential

services, investment in social welfare budgets, the strengthening of child protection systems to ensure oversight of alternative care provision whether formal or informal, supporting the agency of caregivers and children in decision making around care as well as supporting the positive parenting of caregivers. Better understanding of traditional informal care practices will help address the stigma and discrimination often faced by children living with kin caregivers that has been powerfully captured and expressed in this album and will help inform decision making in the best interest of the child.

The research will therefore be used to strengthen delivery of Save the Children's global child protection Breakthrough: **'All Children thrive in a safe family environment and no child is placed in harmful institutions'**.

During the research, boys and girls in the 4 participating countries were invited to explore and document their

experiences and to reflect on better ways to support children and families. This regional Kinship Care album is a collection of writings, drawings and photos from these children and young people.

Special thanks go to the children and young people for their exceptional contributions to the research and this Kinship Care Album. Thanks also to the adults and the country teams for supporting and encouraging the children's efforts and participation as well as to the regional and global team for, in turn, supporting country research teams.

I urge you to consider the experiences and messages being shared on the following pages and to be part of the growing movement to ensure that children are able to live in peaceful and happy homes.

*Lena Karlsson*  
Director, Child Protection Initiative

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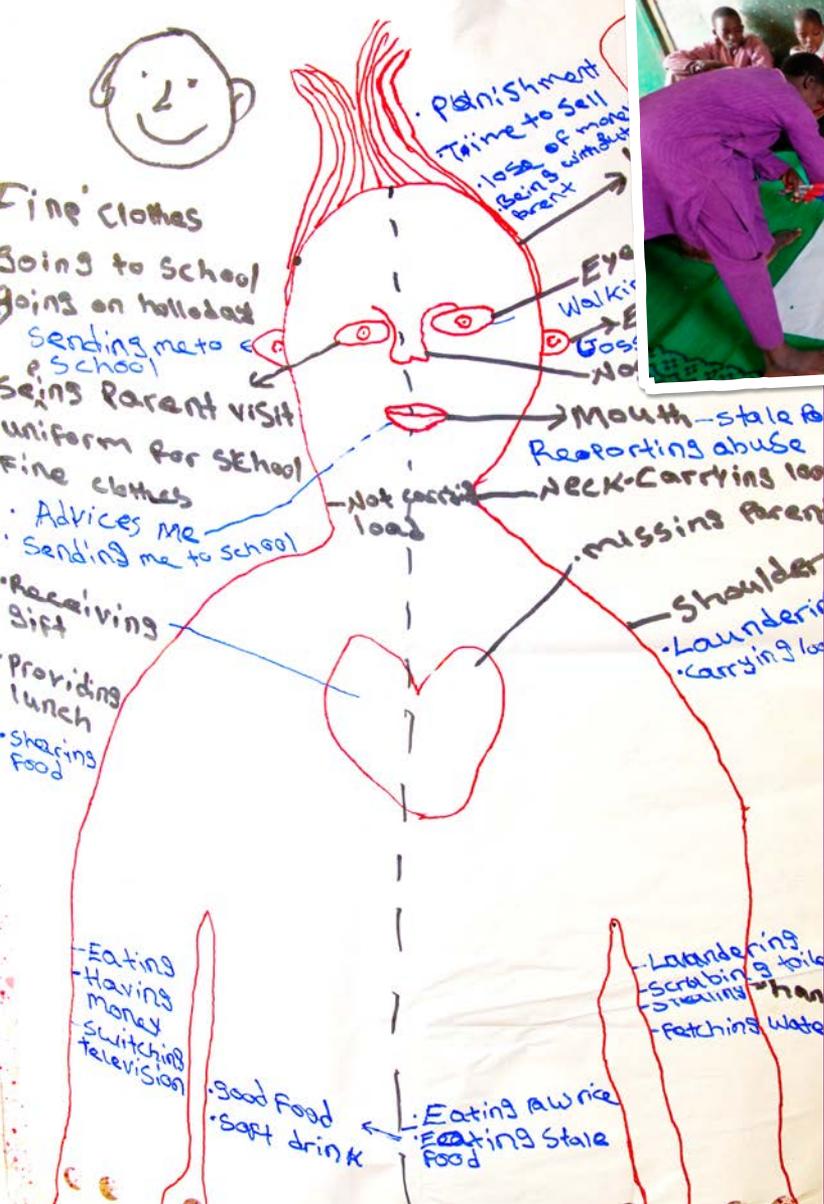
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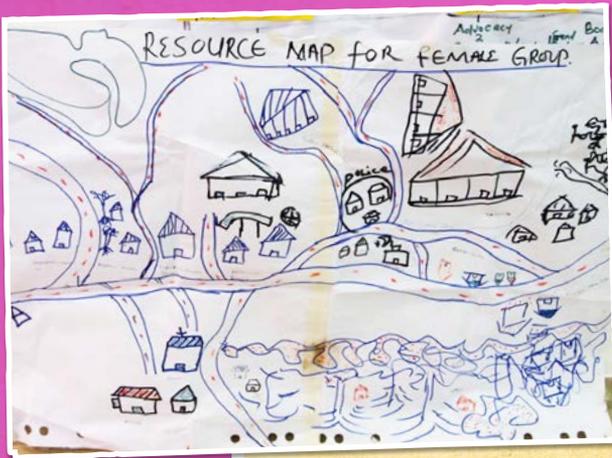
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Child researchers draw a body map to reflect on their experiences and share the positive and negative experiences of kinship care.

Understanding what children see, feel, think and do in kinship care.



This resource map, drawn by a group of child researchers, captures the lives of female groups living in a community in Nigeria.

Focus group with young girls (5 - 10 years old) in Niger.





Children's discussions to explore daily activities for girls and boys in their community. 10 – 15 years old boys and girls, Nigeria, 2013.



Body mapping



During Regional Reflection workshop in Dakar, Senegal

Nigeria, 2013

## Children as researchers



Initial consultation and focus group including children to understand kinship care in local communities in Sierra Leone



Children take part of research activities that help to understand trends, practices and the lives of children living in kinship care. DRC, 2013.

## Focus groups

Focus group  
of boys in  
Niger (5 – 10  
years old).



'A day in the  
life of..' – a boy  
in Nigeria takes  
part in the  
research drawing  
main activities of  
his day.





Focus group of girls in Niger (11-18 years old).

### *Kinship care*

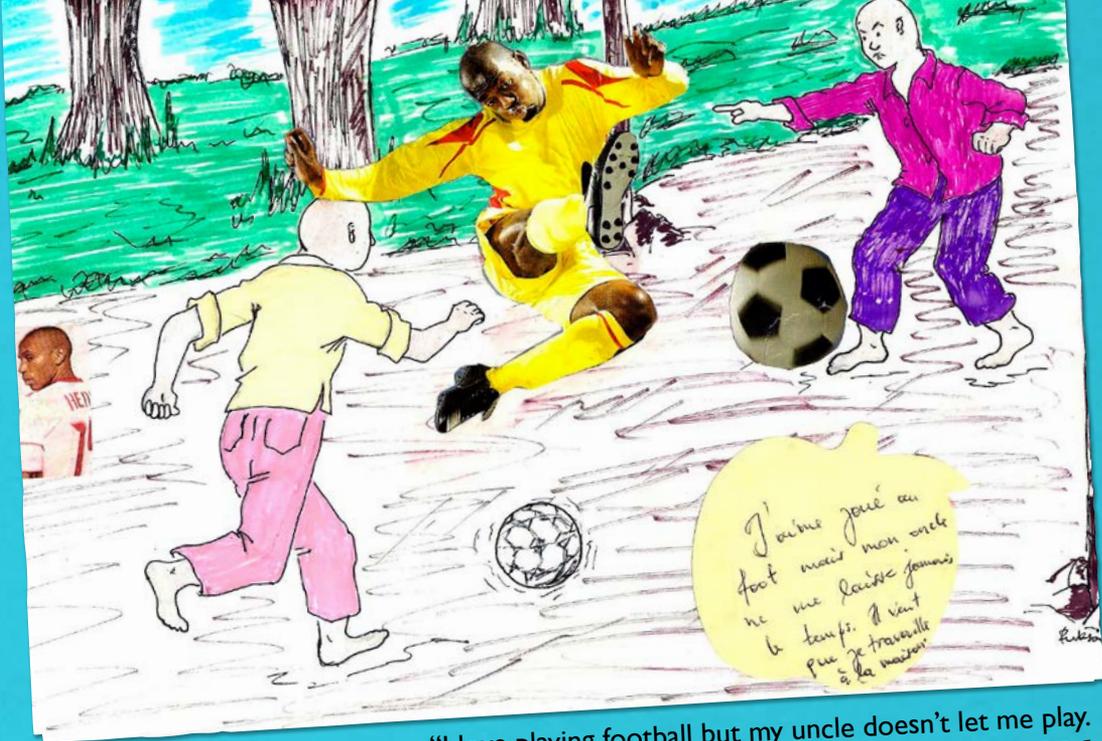
Family-based care within the child's extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child, whether formal or informal in nature.

PART 2

# Living in Kinship Care



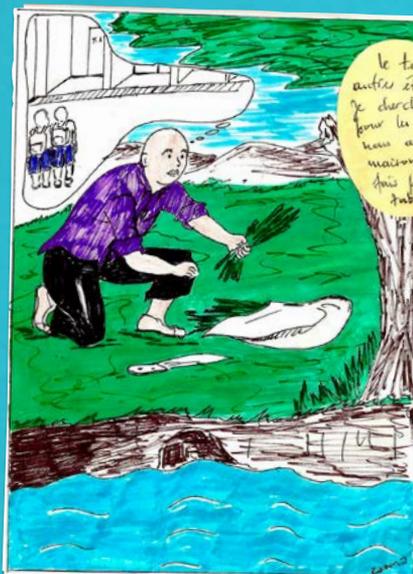
This photo was taken as part of observations by child researchers (8-18 years old) of the daily lifestyle of children and caregivers in the community. The boy in the photo lives in kinship care and is doing household chores.



"I love playing football but my uncle doesn't let me play. He wants me to work at home." A boy, DRC

"It is difficult...very difficult to live with others. I live with my sister because my mom and dad divorced and my dad took a second wife who abused us. It is because of the abuse that my sister on her own. She told me to live with her. My brother-in-law does everything for me, but when I think of my mom and dad I'm sad"

Girl, 12 years old

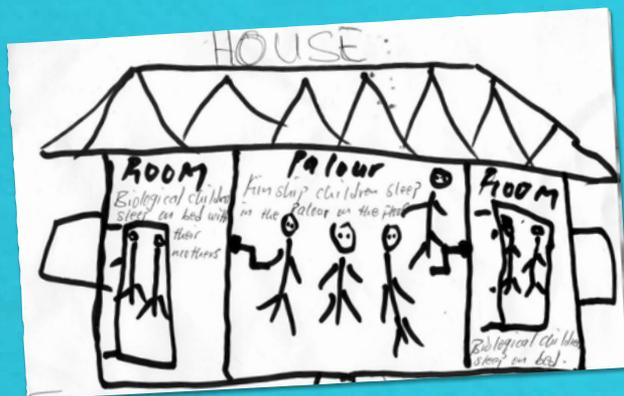


le temps que les autres étudent, moi, je cherche à manger pour les enfants que nous avons à la maison, et moi je ne le fais pas, parce que ma famille est pauvre.



While other children study I have to collect food for the animals we have at home. If I don't do it my uncle will beat me up" A boy, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"Biological children sleep safe in the room with cover clothes, while children living in kinship care sleep in the parlor on the ordinary floor, with no mattress, no clothes on and only the floor to sleep on." A girl, 12 years old, Sierra Leone.



## **I'm worried about my future. Something must be done**

I am 15 years old and live with my father's brother mother in law in Kailahun town. My father and mother separated few years back when I was six years old. At 15 I have been very eager to visit my mother in Moyamba and each time I talk to my father about this he will frown at me. One day my father told me that he would take me to a friend in Kailahun for me to continue my schooling. I felt happy. However, when I came to Kailahun my happiness changed into sorrow and grief. I was enrolled into class six in the Methodist Primary school and after two weeks of attending, my caregiver told me that I will be taken to class four because my teacher had told her that I was not fit to be in class six.

I refuse to be demoted considering my age and most of my play mates are in the junior secondary schools. My caregiver gave me a condition that if I don't repeat course she will not pay my national entrance examination fee and that made me sad and I decided not to attend school for three weeks. One day my father's brother met me at home doing some laundering during school hours and asked why I was not in school. When I tried to

explain, my caregiver shouted at me and told my father's brother that I am very stupid and I want to be in a class where I do not fit. My father brother asked me to go to the school to investigate the matter. Disappointedly my class teacher told us that I will not be taking the national entrance exams because the forms had been sent and my name was not included. I was however advised by teacher to continue school and encouraged me to attend classes.

I did very well in the class exams and my teacher told my caregiver that with that result and recommendation from the school authorities, I will be admitted into junior secondary level 1.

My caregiver told my teacher that she will not pay my school and even demanded that I do hair dressing instead of going to school. Since that time I have not been going to school and my father has also not paid any visit to enquire about my status. Every morning I wake up to launder the dirty clothes while the other children go to school. I am worried about my future. Something must be done.

*A girl, 15 years old, Sierra Leone.*

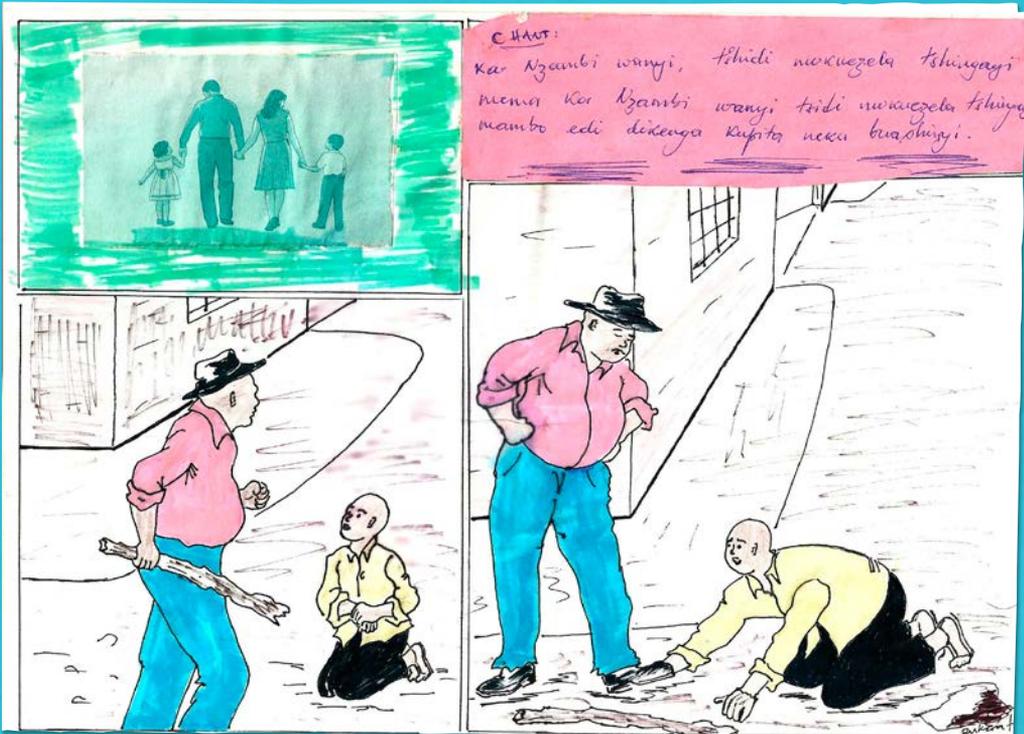


The picture shows some children going to school in the morning while others are seen fetching water from the borehole. This means that children living in kinship care may miss their classes as a result of the work they do. *Nigeria, 2013.*

The picture shows how he sometimes sit under the tree to console himself when he remembers his beloved parent or when he is beaten by his step mother. He also said sometimes he slept unknowingly under the tree  
*Drawing of a boy, 17 years old, Nigeria.*



"I am very glad to have them here  
with me, because I was the only child  
in this house and now we are three"  
Biological child living with children in kinship care



"My aunt has taken care of me since I was 2 years old when my parents passed away. Today, I am 14 years old. I study at the institute of Les élites. She supports me and does everything for me. I love her with all my heart. The whole world knows I am her son and I hope that this stays the same for always."

A boy, 14 years old, DRC



'My life', drawing of a girl, DRC

## LETTER FROM A GIRL TO HER BIOLOGICAL MOTHER

Dear Mom,

I am writing you this letter with a mix feeling. I am happy because you will be hearing from me since I left the village some six months back. I am sad also that your initial plan of sending me to Kailahun to stay with your friend has not been realized.

Since I came to Kailahun I have not been able to attend school, all I do is "work, work, work" while the other children go to school.

Mummy please come urgently. I need to go to school like my other friends. I don't want to go back to the village and become a drop-out.

I hope you will act immediately you receive this letter.

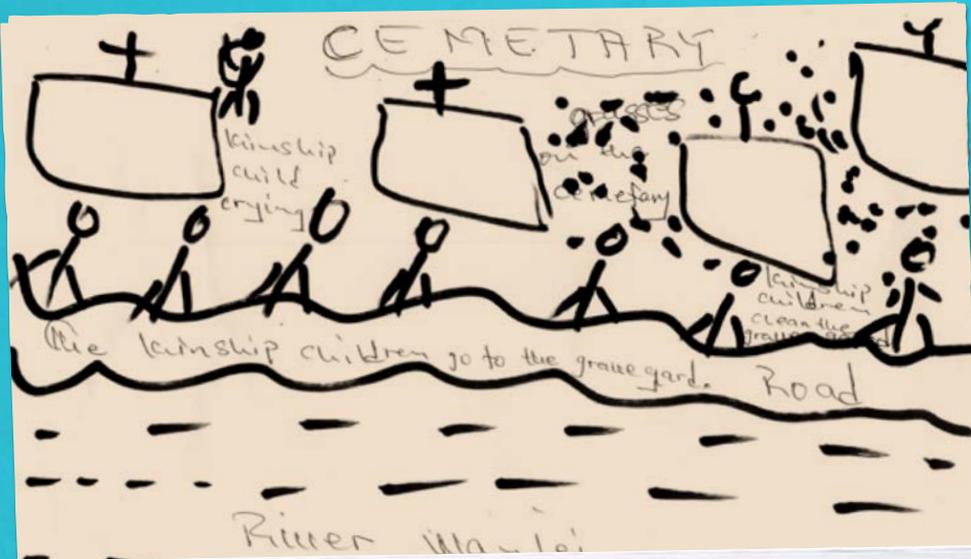
Please tell my younger sisters hello. Ask them to pray for me and I hope to see them again so that we can share the family union.

I miss you and the entire family.  
Your lovely daughter

*A girl, 15 years old, Sierra Leone*



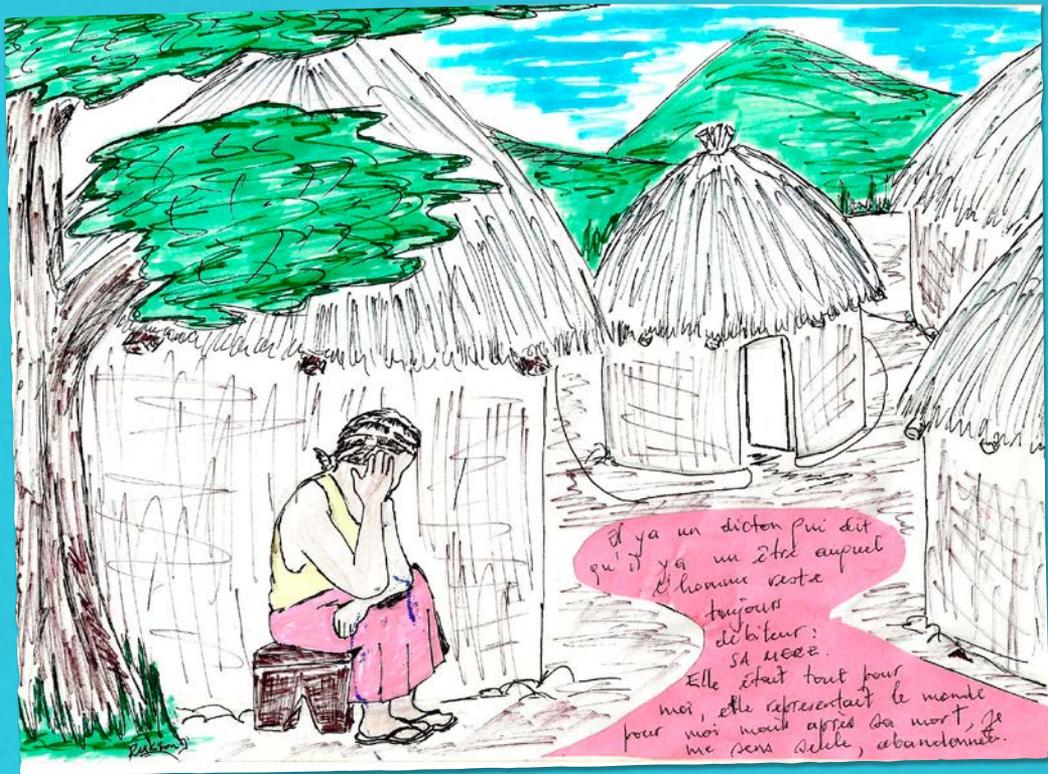
Drawing of a boy living in kinship care in Nigeria.



The picture depicts the road leading to the river Wanjei in Pujehun along which there is a grave yard or cemetery. Most kinship children are sent to clean the grave yard, do the laundry and fetch drinking water from the river.

*"My father was buried in this cemetery. Each time I go to fetch water I burst into tears as I am reminded of the death of my father".*

*A girl, 17 years old, Sierra Leone*



“My mum was everything for me. She was my world... and after she died I feel lonely and abandoned”

A girl, 12 years old, DRC

This is a story from a boy who lives with his uncle in Nigeria. In the picture he shows the biological child playing with his toy car while he is fetching fire wood and the mother is pounding some food items.



## Story of most significant change

I am 14 years old. I attend the National Secondary Schools in the senior secondary 2 level.

I am happy living with my cousin and two of her sisters in the same house. I wake up every morning to assist my cousin in preparing cassava and stew which she sells in the school where I attend. Some of the prepared food is given to me and her sister before classes begin. On weekends, I

assist the younger children to sell food to workers in the oil plantation. During the holidays my cousin prepares other food stuffs like cakes which she will distribute among the three of us for sale and each time she will inform us that the profit from the sale of the market will be used to pay our school fees and buy other school materials.

I am always obedient to my aunty and



“Biological children go to school (left) and children living in kinship care are at home doing hazardous work for their caregivers (right)”.  
A girl, 11 years old, Sierra Leone.

she is very pleased with me and treat me like her own daughter. Unfortunately I feel pity for her because God has not blessed her with a child. In the evening when all the house work is finished, she will call the three of us to her room and advise us to be serious with our education and avoid bad company.

My mother visits us twice in the year and she will always come with some local food stuffs from the village like cassava,

jam, palm oil and husk rice and my aunty will give some to her neighbors.

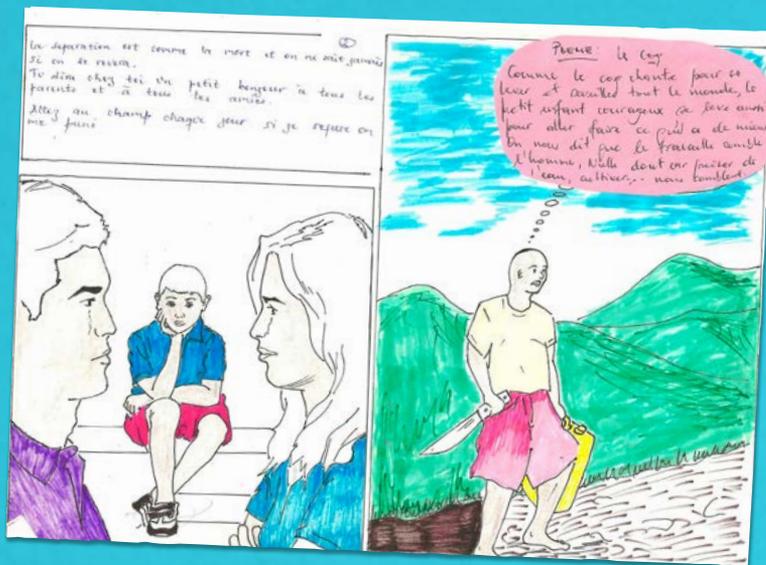
I am happy staying with my aunty because she teaches me how to cook food, do business and every time a I ask for help towards my education, she will assist me without grumbling.

I pray that god will one day bless my aunty to be a proud mother.

*Girl, 15 years old, Sierra Leone*

"I live with my aunt, and I study hard. Every day after school I take care of the goats. I feed them and the other animals. If I don't then I'm beaten and sometimes deprived of food to eat. It's really hard."

Boy, 12 years old.



Children express the need of support in areas related to education and clothing, specifically, financing school fees, school supplies and school uniforms, as well as having access to better shoes and clothes.

Children and young people in DRC.

## A Poem

Kinship Care a way to success

Hey

Which way that paved doomings light  
I had a lot of birds singing in an open  
day

Laughing and crying in the midst of  
darkness

Have I not heard them before?

It is indeed a culture in Africa  
A culture that sensitize people

Oh

My mouth was full with happiness  
I wonder lonely as a cloud  
In the midst beloved son and  
daughter

Have I thought of it?

I became compassionate with pain  
My ear was tapping with advice

Oh

Is this the way?

Joy and happiness comes at the end  
Have it be admirable?

Sons and daughters bobbling in their  
old age as servant

The world change from east to west  
Is life determined by the beginning?

I thought it was

Inlay to success has done much  
Shape, change, mold

Transform and hard work has been  
the virtue

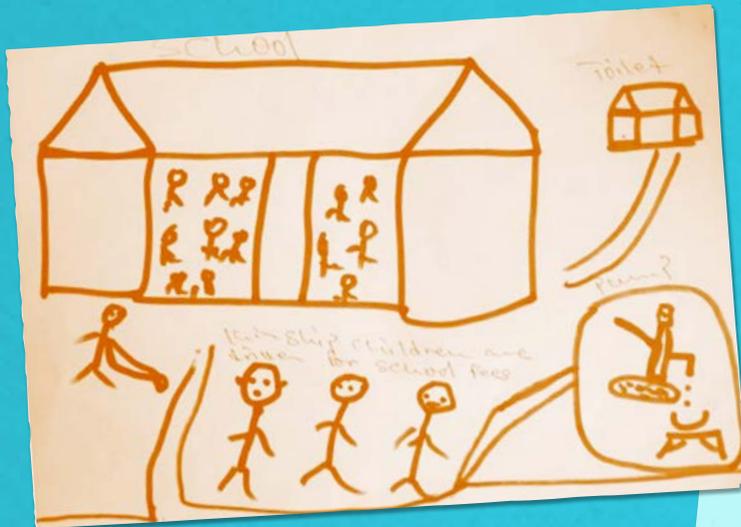
Can it last?

It is a mere passage

Oh

Kinship care is a passage that  
transforms individuals

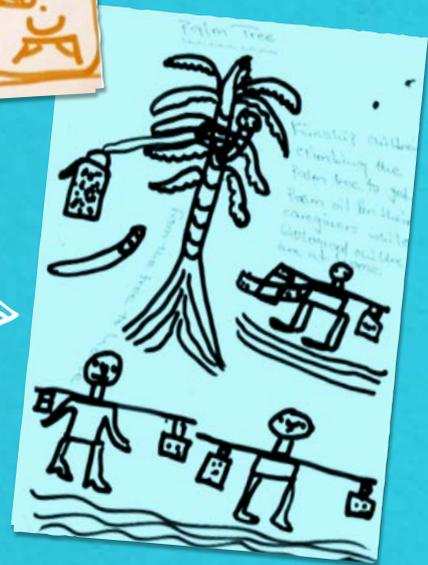
A boy 16 years old, Sierra Leone



“Kinship children can’t pay their school fees.”  
A girl, 17 years old, Sierra Leone.

“Kinship children climbing the palm tree to get palm wine for their caregivers, while biological children are at home. Other children are transporting palm wine for sale”.

A boy, 12 years old, Karlu, Pujehun



poem

TITLE: IS SO PAINFUL TO BE IN KING

Oh what a world.  
Living with your parent  
enjoying your selves  
going to a good school  
living happily  
eating a good meal  
here comes maste death  
death took my Dear parent  
away from me  
am now left alone  
death, death, death what  
what a beautiful family  
happily living and caring  
now am living with my  
aunty doing all the housework  
no opportunity to go to a good school  
no good health  
friends are avoiding me  
no time to study  
life is unbearable  
death, death, death  
death is inevitable:

Writing by

Nigerian



“I live with my grandparents. I work hard and I do everything that they ask me to do. I don't see any injustice in this even though they sometimes ask me to do all of the housework. I never ask for help. I love my grandparents because without them I would not be as I am...I lost my father when I was 8 and my mother when I was 11. I study like any other child.”

A girl, 13 years old, DRC

Oh what a world – a girl, 17 years old, Nigeria.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN 17YRS OLD GIRL LIVING WITH HER ELDER SISTER IN THE VILLAGE



## A day in the life of a 17 years old girl living with her elder sister in the village

I used to stay with my uncle in Kailahun few years back when I lost my mother. I was asked to stay with my uncle because my father was a drunkard and could not take proper care of six of us in the family.

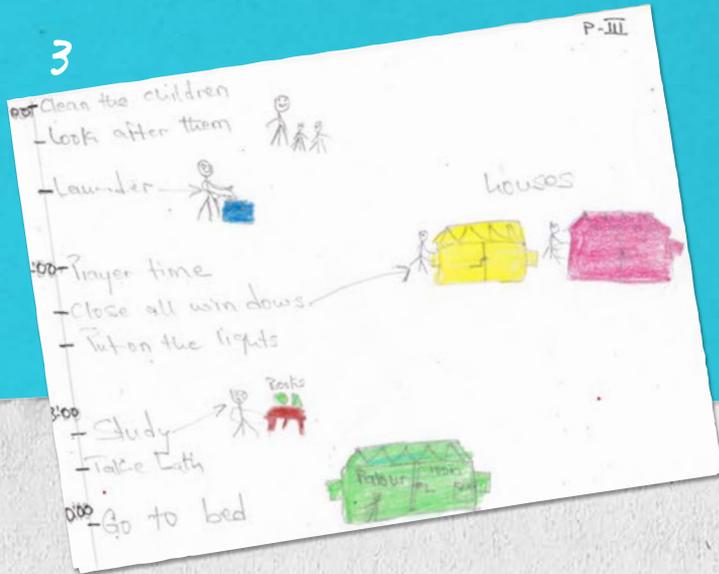
Staying with my uncle and his wife was very horrible. I was forced to do all the house work, go to the farm after school and sometimes go to bed without food.

On Saturdays I go to the farm and break

firewood to sell in order to get few items I may need for my upkeep and schooling.

I was always been mocked by my cousins, they accuse me of being homeless and that my father is a drunkard. My uncle's eldest son who stays in Freetown force me again to have sex with him each time he comes to Kailahun and when I refuse and complain, my uncle's wife will beat me and shout at me accusing me of being a lair.

3



I moved out of the house and went to stay with my friends (Amie 16 years, Hawa 15 years) in the neighborhood. I was happy staying with them, but had no body to pay my school fees.

I joined the Children's Forum Network two years ago (2011) through the help of a friend who was the president at that time. I was encouraged by the group members to attend their meeting and through those meetings I was able to come in contact with

officials of MSWGCA and SCI whom I shared my ordeals with.

My uncle and his wife were invited to the MSWGCA and were strongly advice to take me back home and treat me with care. I was afraid to go back feeling that they may punish me the more for reporting them the ministry official.

I went back home after some counseling and now conditions have improved a little

*A girl, 17 years old, Sierra Leone*

PART 3

# Safe Family Environment



*'A day in my life'*

We are six in the family and I'm the elder in the house. In the morning, I woke up, I pray and go to school. After school, I will wash plates. I don't like fight. I eat three times a day. My grandmother provides new clothes for weddings, Sallah and Maulud period.

*A girl researcher, Nigeria*

## My family



POÈME:

LA FAMILLE :

J'ai un père, une mère et mes  
frères. Je suis la fille unique de ma famille.  
mes parents ont aussi leurs frères et leurs sœurs,  
leurs parents sont mes grands-parents.  
c'est ma famille.

"My aunt has taken care of me since I was 2 years old when my parents passed away. Today, I am 14 years old. I study at the institute. She supports me and does everything for me. I love her with all my heart. The whole world knows I am her son and I hope that this stays the same for always."

Boy, 14 years old, DRC

*In my vision some children are living in kinship care. They are playing with their friends. The children feel safe at all times. They have access to psychosocial support and protection services. They can access good health care in the community. They have a good education and each child will become a great person in their community.*

*21 year old male researcher, Nigeria*

"I am 15 years old. I have not lived with my parents since I was 12 years old but instead with my aunt and uncle. I am now a part of this family. I enjoy all of the same benefits as the true son of the house. I study with my cousins, eat together and have the same chores. There is never any suspicion that I don't belong to this family. My aunt and uncle are like parents to me. I love them like parents. I don't even know where my biological parents are. My real parents are the ones that feed me and take care of me."

*A boy from DRC.*



2 years old girl living her grandmother in Sierra Leone.

My grandmother shows me true and special love and affection. She cooks food for me and she cares about my education

15 year old boy, Nigeria

## The role of grandparents

A grandparent caregiver looking after his two grandchildren in Nigeria



## Children's visions



A girl collecting children and young people's visions after research exercise in DRC.



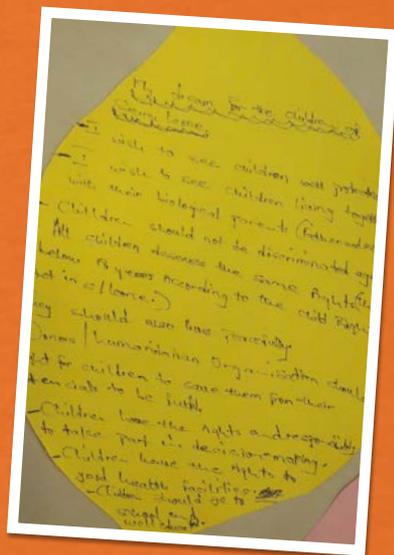
My vision

"I feel part of this family, they love me!"

Drawing from visioning exercise during the Regional Reflection Workshop on Kinship Care in Dakar

My dream for the children in Sierra Leone

"I wish to see children well protected. All children deserves the same rights. (...) Children should go to school and be well educated."







A drawing by a 12 year old girl from Nigeria about the life she would like to have. Key points highlighted are advice and good counsel by the grandmother, enough food and money to go to school up to university level.

“In my vision some children are living in kinship care. They are playing with their friends. The children feel safe at all times. They have access to psychosocial support and protection services. They can access good health care in the community. They have a good education and each child will become a great person in their community”

21 year old male researcher, Nigeria



In my vision I saw that children are living with the biological parents and going to school. There is peace and unity. There is quality education, health services, and better care. Children are taking part in decision making and the child's voice is respected.

17 year old male researcher, Sierra Leone

**CHILD PROTECTION INITIATIVE** October 2013

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