

PD-ABS-012



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## **1. Introduction**

In April 1997, a repatriation of Rwandan refugees began from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Over 80,000 Rwandan refugees were airlifted from Kisingani and Mbandaka back to Rwanda. 9,000 of these refugees were unaccompanied children, with approximately 10% of them 'sans adresse' (with no known address). These children had become separated from their parents in their westward flight through the dense jungle of DRC.

When the program commenced in June 1998, the relevant Ministry was MIGEFASO. In February 1999, a cabinet reshuffle was announced by the Government of Rwanda. The responsibilities of MIGEFASO were divided across two Ministries. The Ministry for Social Affairs (MINAFASO) is now responsible for the implementation of the program.

The policy of the Ministry on centers for unaccompanied children is to close them as soon as possible. The Concern program works in line with this policy. Its aim is to re-integrate unaccompanied children back into community life in Rwanda, thus advocating their right to live with their parents or in a family situation. These children have suffered a huge trauma in being separated from their families and there is an urgency to reunite them or place them in a family environment as soon as possible. Concern recognizes the risks of institutionalism for children remaining in long-term care in centers.

## **2 Project Goal**

To facilitate the transfer of operational responsibility from Concern to MIGEFASO and local NGOs for the transit care and community re-integration of unaccompanied children.

## **3. Project Description**

### **Objective 1**

*To develop the capacity of MIGEFASO representatives to enable them to assume greater responsibility in the areas of tracing, fostering and follow-up and to assist MIGEFASO in its aim of establishing child and family support centers at commune level.*

Progress was relatively slow, in the achievement of this objective. A social worker was seconded by Concern to MIGEFASO in both Butare and Ruhengeri. However, due to lack of staff and resources, MIGEFASO were unable to second a staff member to Concern. The Government of Rwanda took a decision in early 1998 to reduce the numbers of staff employed by each Ministry, in some cases by up to 60%. In Butare and Ruhengeri, the number of MIGEFASO social workers was reduced from four to two. Following the recent cabinet re-shuffle in Rwanda, the number of staff in Ruhengeri has been further reduced to one.

The staff exchange in Butare commenced on the 1st of June 1998 and in Ruhengeri on the 1st of July 1998. They both lasted for 6 months. Their work was mainly concentrated on training Ministry staff on the maintenance and documentation of files on children previously reunified or fostered. They were also involved in the establishment of the social development committees. MINAFASO in both Prefectures were supportive of the initiative and felt that many benefits accrued to their staff.

MINAFASO in Ruhengeri also requested that Concern assist with the provision of a computer and computer training. The computer was provided in April '99 and the training was ongoing throughout the program period. It is hoped that the computer will enhance the capacity of the MINAFASO Representative to fulfil his duties in an efficient manner. In the future, it is planned that a data-base be established of all children that have been reunified or fostered in the Prefecture.

Initially, CONCERN had hoped to assist in the establishment of a child and family center in both Butare and Ruhengeri, whose role would be to offer a focal point for support services for families and children in vulnerable circumstances. The idea of the child and family centers was dependent on the existence of strong Social Development Committees (SDC) and the ability of MINAFASO to provide staff and support. Doubts still remain regarding the success and effectiveness of these committees. Reports from other prefectures indicate that the training received hasn't been adequate, to address all problems that are being encountered and that these committees are not making a significant contribution to the welfare of the community. In addition, the fact that these are voluntary committees also indicates that motivation may be a factor.

Following discussions with Ministry staff in both Butare and Ruhengeri, it has been decided not to proceed with the idea of the child and family centers, due to the lack of adequately trained SDC's. However, it was decided to pilot a scheme, whereby assistance was given to local associations, who would offer a similar service to that of the child and family center but for their own commune only. Associations were

identified in both Prefectures and material and training assistance provided in order to increase their capacity to fulfil this function. In Butare, an association was assisted, which existed before the war, which provided vocational and skills training for young people from the communes of Maraba, Mbazı and Huye. In Ruhengerı, assistance was provided to an agricultural association in Mukıngo commune.

## **Objective 2**

*To develop the capacity of local NGOs to enable them to assume responsibility for the transit care of unaccompanied children*

Given the need for a transit center in both Ruhengerı and Butare and Concern's desire to close its centers, two new transit centers were identified. The Concern center in Butare closed its doors to new arrivals on the 13th of April, 1998. The role of caring for children in transit was originally filled by the St. Elizabeth center in Butare and later by the Don Bosco center in Ntyazo commune. Relations with the center were very good, and Concern worked closely with center staff to ensure tracing opportunities for all children.

In Ruhengerı, the Bene Bikira center assumed the responsibility for the care of children in transit. The Concern center took no new arrivals after the 31st of March 1998. A contract was signed between Concern, Bene Bikira center, and MIGEFASO outlining the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved.

The Concern center in Ruhengerı officially closed on the 13th of August, and all the remaining children were transferred to other centers. A total of 68 children were transferred to the Bene Bikira center, and the remaining children were transferred to centers in Kigalı. Supplies such as mattresses, cooking pots, blankets, medicines and food, from the Concern center were transferred with the children to the other centers.

Support was provided to the Bene Bikira center for an Income Generating project. Assistance was given for the establishment of a Beverages Wholesaler which was operational since early August '98. The results were positive, and weekly stock and financial reports were given to Concern. A number of smaller proposals were also funded by Concern. A new kitchen was constructed, and was fitted with special energy-saving cooking pots. The latrines at the center were rehabilitated and school materials and furniture was also provided.

Concern also provided training for all the staff at Bene-Bikira in October 1998 , which covered the following topics

- (i) Rights of the child and the MIGEFASO policy
- (ii) Roles and Responsibilities of center staff
- (iii) Advantages and disadvantages of center care for children
- (iv) Difference between life in a center and life in a normal family for children
- (v) Child Psychology
- (vi) Concern "Sans Adresse" methodology of tracing
- (vii) Fostering - Reasons, Procedures and Responsibilities of Foster Parents
- (viii) Hygiene, Sanitation and Nutrition

The center in Butare closed in mid September 1998. At the time of closing, there were only 38 children remaining, and 34 of these were transferred to the Don Bosco center. Three sisters from one family were transferred to the St Elizabeth center in Butare, while one traumatised child was transferred to the Musha center in Kigali for special care. Again, supplies such as blankets, mattresses, cooking pots, medicines and food were transferred with the children.

Concern provided financial assistance for the establishment of a small animals production program. A sewing room was equipped and training was provided to 25 children in the center. In addition, supplies such as new beds, furniture for a refectory, seeds, tools and school materials were supplied to the center.

### **Objective 3**

*To reduce the number of unaccompanied children in centers through tracing and fostering activities*

Between June 1998 and the closure of the center in Butare, a total of 251 children were cared for by the Concern centers in Butare and Ruhengeri. In this period, 40 children were re-united with their families, while 49 were placed with foster families. A detailed schedule of the statistics, for both centers, from the start of 1998 to their dates of closure is attached (see appendix 1).

Concern commenced tracing activities in the Bene-Bikira center in Ruhengeri in August and until the end of the program 86 children have been re-united with their families. This is now the only center for unaccompanied children in Ruhengeri Prefecture. As at the end of August 1999, all documentation for the 224 children in the center was completed. A breakdown of the circumstances of each child is as follows

“Socio – Economic” cases	125
Candidates for Tracing	18
Candidates for Fostering	14
Transfer to other Prefectures	47
Repatriation to Congo	20

“Socio – Economic” refers to children who know their addresses, but due to the poverty of their families or disputes between the two parties, are unable to return home. This category also includes children who are resident in the center in order to complete their education and hence should not be classified as unaccompanied. It is the responsibility of MINAFASO to resolve these cases. UNHCR are responsible for organising the transfers of children to other Prefectures and the repatriation of the Congolese.

Since the closure of the Concern center in Butare, efforts are concentrated on tracing activities for children from the Don Bosco, St Antonien and Mugusa centers. Since starting work in these centers, a total of 24 children, who were previously considered untraceable, have been reunited with their families. The remaining children in these centres are classified as “Socio – Economic”.

A detailed review of the Concern Fostering Program was carried out from February 9th to 20th, 1998 which involved the Concern teams and MIGEFASO representatives from both prefectures. The program re-commenced in March. In the period from June '98 to September '99, a total of 95 children have been placed in foster families (61 in Butare and 34 in Ruhengeri).

Throughout the program, the majority of children who were available for fostering were boys. However, most families who were accepted as foster families, had a preference for girls. Some families who were accepted as being suitable, were requested to be put on a waiting list until a girl becomes available. The other issue with the fostering program was that although many families put their names forward, the majority were found to be unsuitable, following the series of interviews that had taken place. For example, in Butare in June 1999, 42 families were interviewed but only 6 were accepted as suitable foster families. The other families were interested in fostering a child, but their economic situation indicated that they were already experiencing difficulties in supporting themselves. It was felt that a foster child would become an extra burden, rendering the child vulnerable to deprivation and maltreatment. However, Concern felt that this level of detailed scrutiny and interviews were necessary, to ensure that suitable

Two houses were constructed for children from the Don Bosco Home, who have been resident in the center for a number of years. One house was constructed for a family of six, while the other was for a family of four. Materials such as clothing, mattresses, cooking equipment and animals were provided to these families, on moving into their new homes. Possibilities for further houses were investigated, but no other families who could occupy houses, were found. The remaining children in the centers were un-related and it was felt that placing these children into houses as a group, could cause problems in the future.

#### **Objective 4**

*To provide follow-up and one time material support for 750 vulnerable reunited or foster families and to facilitate the setting up of MIGEFASO social committees at commune level to take over responsibility for this task*

In Ruhengeri, initial training for the social development committees took place in April and July 1998. Training was provided for the committees in 10 communes on topics such as

- The role and function of a social worker
- The rights of a child
- Difference between reunification and fostering of a child
- Government policy on fostering

However, due to the security situation in much of the Prefecture, it was difficult to carry out follow-up work on these committees. In Butare, no training had taken place for social development committees. The first obstacle was a dispute between two ministries over who had responsibility for the committees. This was resolved in September '98, and MIGEFASO were the ministry with sole responsibility for the formation, training and monitoring of these committees. Originally, Concern was asked to provide the training for these committees, but by the end of the program MINAFASO were organizing the training, and Concern were not involved.

It is difficult to determine how successful these committees will be. Firstly, the exact role and responsibilities of these committees is not defined. Another issue is the Cabinet re-shuffle, whereby MIGEFASO has been split into two separate Ministries. This has also led to delays in finalizing the policy for these committees. Finally, the elections which took place in March are likely to lead to a change in the composition of these committees as many of the previous members were not re-elected.

The fact that these are voluntary committees suggests that motivation is likely to be a problem. Indications from other Prefectures where committees are in existence, are that they lack the skills, capacity and motivation to function properly, even though training has been provided. In addition, their exact role and responsibilities are still not defined.

Originally, it was hoped to provide assistance to vulnerable families both directly by Concern, and through the social development committees. Follow-up visits were carried out to families who had accepted foster children, or who had been reunited with their children. Among these families approximately 20% were having difficulties in providing enough food for their children. Another common finding amongst the teams was children, who were previously reunited with their families were now living alone. This situation arose when older family members got married and moved out of the house, or when parents re-marry and have no legal obligation to care for children from the first marriage.

In Ruhengeri, the social workers were providing the assistance on a commune by commune basis. Over 300 families from five communes received assistance, which was in the form of farm animals, plastic sheeting and seeds/tools for planting. In September 1999, assistance was provided to 90 families from the commune of Butaro. The recent local elections led to delays in the provision of support, as all assistance given must be approved and verified by these local officials. In two communes, some of the families that received assistance formed themselves into associations. Concern was supporting these associations through the provision of training.

In Butare, it was not possible to provide any assistance to families in vulnerable circumstances. Although lists of families in need of assistance were prepared, the local authorities stated that assistance must have been provided to all families and not just those that have received re-unified or fostered children. Hence, no assistance will be provided in Butare.

Given the problems as identified above with the social development committees, no assistance was channelled through this medium. However, the Ministry of Local Government are drafting plans, to set up a fund in each commune for the benefit of vulnerables, and it will be responsibility of the local authorities to monitor and distribute this fund. Given that elections took place recently for representatives at cellule and sector level (lowest administrative units), it is hoped that this fund will provide the necessary assistance in the future.

## **5. Financial**

Forms SF269 and 270 are attached and are based on the revised budget approved in June 1999

There are 2 areas which were under spent throughout the program period  
Within objective 1 the budget was under spent for the establishment of Child and Family Centres. As previously mentioned, the lack of staff and resources on behalf of MINAFASO and the non-existence of strong social development committees hindered the establishment of the Child and Family Centres. It was then decided to assist local associations, who would provide a similar service. This was carried out and the associations assisted their own communes. However the budget allocated was not utilized fully.

Within objective 3 – Construction it was planned to construct 4 houses. 2 of these houses were constructed but because no other families were identified to occupy the other 2 planned houses it was decided not to construct them.

## **6. Conclusion**

Progress was slow in the achievement of certain objectives, while others were successfully achieved. This arose due to lack of resources available to MINAFASO, and delays in the training of the social development committees. However, both transit centers previously operated by Concern were closed, with responsibility being passed to other locally run centers. A total of 144 children (40 from the Concern centers and 104 from other centers) were reunited back to their original families. In addition, 88 children were placed in foster families. Finally material assistance was provided to over 300 households and to associations from two communes.

Butare	No of New Arrivals	No Reunified by Concern	No Reunified by SCF	No Reunified by ICRC	No Reunified by UNHCR	No of Foster placements by Concern	No Transfers of	No Transfers on closure	No Deaths of
January	42	12	0	2	0	0	27	0	0
February	48	21	3	2	0	0	20	0	0
March	31	22	3	4	0	0	17	0	0
April	17	22	3	0	0	7	5	0	0
May	0	5	0	0	3	4	10	0	0
June	0	8	1	0	0	5	0	0	0
July	0	7	0	0	0	7	0	0	0
August	0	10	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
September	0	6	0	0	0	29	0	38	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0</b>

Ruhengeri	No of New Arrivals	No Reunified by Concern	No Reunified by SCF	No Reunified by ICRC	No Reunified by UNHCR	No Foster placements by Concern	No Transfers of	No Transfers on closure	No Deaths of
January	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
February	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
March	8	7	0	5	0	0	12	0	0
April	0	9	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
May	0	9	0	0	0	11	1	0	0
June	0	3	0	4	0	4	0	0	0
July	0	1	0	0	0	4	4	0	0
August	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	117	0
September	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>2</b>

No of children in centres on 01/01/98 361  
No Cared for by Concern in this period (in Butare & Ruhengeri) 512  
No Transferred to prefectures of origin 100  
No Transferred on closure of centres 155  
No remaining in centres after transfers were completed 257

No Reunified by Concern 154 (83% of total reunifications)  
No Reunified by SCF UK 10 ( 6% of total reunifications)  
No Reunified by ICRC 17 (9% of total reunifications)  
No Reunified by UNHCR 3 (2% of total reunifications)  
No placed in Foster Families by Concern 71  
No of Deaths 2

No of children in centres on 30/09/98 0

There were no foster placements for the first three months as a review of the fostering programme was undertaken

Note The Concern centre in Ruhengeri closed in August and the centre in Butare closed in September

Butare	No of New Arrivals	No Reunified by Concern	No Reunified by SCF	No Reunified by ICRC	No Reunified by UNHCR	No of Foster placements by Concern	No of Transfers	No of Transfers on closure	No of Deaths
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May	0	5	0	0	3	4	10	0	0
June	0	8	1	0	0	5	0	0	0
July	0	7	0	0	0	7	0	0	0
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<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0</b>

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January	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
February	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
March	8	7	0	5	0	0	12	0	0
April	0	9	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
May	0	9	0	0	0	11	1	0	0
June	0	3	0	4	0	4	0	0	0
July	0	1	0	0	0	4	4	0	0
August	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	117	0
September	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>2</b>

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