

EMERGENCY SUPPORT TO STREET-CONNECTED GIRL AND THEIR FAMILIES IN KENYA DURING COVID-19

Rescue Dada Center Approach

Rescue Dada Centre's is an experienced, registered Charitable Children's Institution (CCI), located in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. It was established in 1992 as an organization doing street work to get to understand the circumstances of the girls living on the streets while operating a walk-in Centre where street connected children could come to share about their life experiences with the social workers. Today it has grown into an Organization that envisions an inclusive Society where vulnerable children have equal rights and opportunities to achieve their full potential, focusing on the reduction of the number of street connected children, especially girls.

This we do through holistic, preventive and curative measures, through a process of rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration and resocialization of former street connected girls back into a conducive family environment (curative), working with vulnerable community members whose children are at risk of becoming street connected due to economic and social challenges within the family (preventive), and increasing commitment of care providers and communities to uphold children's rights.

As we strongly believe that the family environment is the best place for children to grow up, core to our approach is the strengthening of the self-reliance of future caregivers of former street connected girls and vulnerable community members through economic, educational, (vocational) skills enhancement and social support activities in order for them to provide a conducive family environment to their children.

Since 2016 we were able to support a total 369 rescued girls to successfully embark on a life away from the street. While 51 of them are currently in RDCs residential care for rehabilitation 318 have been reintegrated with their families or if not otherwise possible with children homes. Beforehand the caregivers of these girls were empowered to provide a safe family environment where their girl's basic rights could be provided for. Rescue Dada in this way has been able to contribute to the eradication of child poverty and has been successful in creating opportunities for former street connected girls to have a chance for a better and dignified tomorrow.

Street connected children & poverty in Kenya

According to [UNICEF \(2015\)](#), there are about 100 million street connected children around the world living and working on the streets. These children live in extremely dangerous situations exposed to divers' risks. In 2007, a study commissioned by the [Consortium of Street Children \(CSC\)](#) indicates there are about 250,000-300,000 street connected children in the whole of Kenya and among that, 60,000 street children in Nairobi alone. Girls were said to account for around 25% of this figure. Although all street connected children are at risk of major harm, there are certain abuses that are far more likely to affect girls.

Thirty six percent ([36.1%](#)) of Kenya's population [that stand at almost 48 million people](#), lives below the poverty line. Many of them are found in Nairobi's slums where 60% of the residents of Nairobi live. They live in deplorable housing and sanitary conditions and their livelihoods opportunities are diminishing by day due to their sheer numbers, low education and lack of skills and assets. Unemployment amongst parents of street connected children is high, most employed mothers are said to be engaged in petty trading. Some parents engage in household and domestic work, illicit brewing, and begging or commercial sex work for a living.

This situation creates not only socio-economic pressure on the family but often leads to parental separation where the women bear the heaviest burden, left to take care of the children. Poverty has threatened the ability of the poor to adequately provide for their children's basic needs. Consequently, children are likely to become more and more street connected and at some point end up living on the street.

This situation is likely to worsen in the coming years due to the devastating effects of COVID19 especially on the poor communities around the world, including Kenya.

COVID-19 in Kenya – An emergency like no other

COVID-19 is a crisis like no other. Besides two other major challenges Kenya is currently facing, i.e. ongoing [locust invasion and floods](#), the Corona pandemic puts additional burden on government, civil society and its people.

The first COVID-19 case was registered in March 2020. The Government responded swiftly. It has previously locked down a handful of counties including the capital Nairobi and within Nairobi parts of informal settlements and Estates. Apart from this it imposed a night-time curfew, schools, training institutions and universities have been closed and children sent home, Kenyans were asked to work in home office and limit their movements as part of containment efforts. 4 month down the lane the fate of school children has been written, schools will not be opening until January 2021, while Training institutions and universities are able to reopen if they fulfil strict government conditions. The lockdown between counties has lapsed beginning of July yet is under review after 21 days.

Despite all measures taken Kenya continues to battle the pandemic with [cases steadily rising each day](#). As of July 12th 2020 the government recorded a total of 10,105 cases with 185 death; while a total of 206,584 cumulative tests have so far been conducted; while it is able to conduct between 1500-4500 tests per day which is far from adequate considering [Kenya has a population that stand at almost 48 million people](#). While the [Kenyan government](#) puts effort in increasing its capacity of testing it is further challenged to contain the spread due to limited resources, reported poor quality of personal protective equipment (PPE) being distributed to healthcare workers; delays in laboratory test results to clients, and the mindset of some people that this is still a myth contributing to laxity in observing prevention and control measures.

The impact of the pandemic is still hard to predict. At the beginning of May the WHO predicted that up to 190,000 people in Africa could die of Covid-19 and a total of 29 to 44 million people were expected to get infected in Africa in the first year. Exactly how dire the situation will become in Kenya is difficult to estimate and at RDC we can essentially just do our part by working from home as much as possible and maintain good hygiene to do our part to not spread the virus.

Expected Impact of the emergency

COVID-19 has become a development issue already affecting the entire socioeconomic spectrum of the country. The Kenyan government is challenged to protect lives and livelihoods – a though balancing act.

Though it is early to predict, first estimates suggest that up to [150 million jobs](#) (formal and informal) in Africa could be lost due to the economic impact of the covid-19 pandemic; while there is a further risk of reduction in wages and working hours as a result of reduced demand and enforced lockdowns. Besides this, the cumulative effects of flooding with associated population displacements, infestation of desert locusts and outbreaks of livestock diseases led to acute food insecurity and threaten the economy through failed harvest as [Agriculture accounted for 26% of Kenya's GDP in 2019](#).

However, while it is still early to predict further developments and long-term effects of COVID-19 there are already indications that the pandemic could be devastating for the target groups of RDC who recently, and with RDC support, have managed to strengthen their livelihood security and were enabled to provide a conducive family environment for their children.

Out of the currently 164 families supported by RDC we have recently interviewed 123 families, including the main caregiver and former street connected girl of the family, to assess their current situation and how they have been affected by COVID-19. The majority of the families are in shock and results were alarming.

About 60% (54) of caregivers that previously have been enabled by RDC to provide for their families through business set up and job placements, lost their business/ job; while the once who maintained their business or job have to cope with reduced salaries/income and working hours. 77% (95) caregivers interviewed are currently not able to provide for their families. This includes food mentioned by 94 caregivers (79%), rent reported by 54 caregivers (49%) and 40 caregivers (27%) mentioned they are not able to purchase protective gear to prevent COVID infection. While we encourage and connect caregivers to other organizations and government support structures out of 123 caregivers, only 8% (10) caregivers succeeded in getting the help.

In line with reports of the [national Gender Based Violence](#) and [Childline](#) helplines, a spike in gender based violence (sexual offences, domestic violence) and child rights violations (especially child neglect, physical and sexual abuse) has been reported since the strict measure to control the spread of COVID-19 have been implemented. This has also been evident in our interviews where we found a number of families facing challenges of Gender Based Violence and Child Rights violations caused due to the distress the families are experiencing by the lockdown and other measures taken by the government to suppress the pandemic as well as the effects describe above like loss of jobs/business, closure of schools, failure to provide for the family, and threats of eviction due to rent arrears.

Shocks to the economy, health emergencies, floods, lack of health services and displacement have a sad and unfortunate record of impacting the most vulnerable and making bad situations worse. RDC foresees a situation where the former street connected girls and other children in the families we support, according to government directives now out of school until January 2021, are increasingly vulnerable to sexual and economic exploitation due to rising household financial distress, lower levels of oversight, and barriers to or lack of availability of reporting and/or treatment options. Also physical and emotional maltreatment, like neglect, abuse, and other physical risks resulting from school closures, more stressful home environments, less attentive or non-existent adult supervision, and new barriers to or increased response times associated with reporting incidents.

Caregivers continue the constant search for income to provide for their families which not only puts them at risk of contracting COVID since majority cannot afford sanitizers and protective gears but increases the distress where some might surrender due to increased destitution.

The girls who recently have been reintegrated are back to the situation that often made them leave their families, either to go and work in the streets to earn a living for their families or to remain on the streets so as to not be an additional burden to be taken care of within the families.

Challenges for RDC's work

RDC has never had to deal with such a crisis before and is learning by the day on how to handle the situation best. The crisis disrupted the normal work routines and timelines as we could not finalize the reintegration or rescue of street connected girls to our Centre which is usually done in the first quarter of the year. Instead all the efforts were directed towards assuring the safety of the 53 former street connected girls already in residential care, and reorganizing activity implementation considering maximum protection of our target group and staff during now mostly remote interactions, and wherever possible request staff to work in home office.

The former street connected girls that have been reintegrated in the last years with caregiver families were focus in the second quarter 2020, while at the same time we started the identification of potential future caregivers of girls in residential care. This way we were able to get to know the needs and challenges they face due to COVID, offered additional psychosocial support and emergency food relief wherever our resources allowed.

In order to address the devastating situation found on the ground we started engaging with our peers, partners, government with whom we have longstanding and trusted relationships in order to achieve our common goal to tackle the effects of COVID. However, support is limited as the pandemic is affecting many lives, including that of our supporters while government support is overstretched.

We will continue our efforts to the best of our ability and acknowledge that this would not be possible if it weren't for our staff, who are rising to this challenge together with faith, hope and complete determination.

What can you do?

The achievements of RDC in improving livelihoods and providing conducive family environments to former street connected girls over many years has been made possible through the generous and consistent donations it receives through individuals and institutional donors. However, this pandemic has posed unforeseen challenges on the capacities of RDC as well as the families of former street connected girls we work with, threatening the previous achievements. We will not be able to address this situation unless we get additional support.

With this crowdfunding campaign we want to encourage you to support our efforts. Your donation will help RDC to address the immediate challenges of the pandemic for the 50 neediest families we identified through our assessment. This will have invaluable effects on the families, reducing distress in the most devastating times by helping them to take care of their own families' basic needs and as such avoiding the children within the family, including the former street connected girls, to STAY OUT OF THE STREET.

Meanwhile RDC will continue to source for funds for long term support to address the family's needs beyond COVID, rebuilding livelihoods through business skills training and set up, job placement support, secondary and vocational training sponsorship and psychosocial support to caregivers and former street connected girls.

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