



# **PREVENTING THE ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILD CATTLE HERDERS**

A VoiceMore Report from The Democratic Republic of Congo

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## OVERVIEW

This report outlines a project led by a group of young people living in North Kivu in The Democratic Republic of Congo, supported by War Child UK. It details their concerns regarding the abuse and exploitation of child herders in their community, what they feel are the causes and consequences, the research they designed and conducted, and their recommendations for ways to address the issue.

## WHAT IS VOICEMORE?

VoiceMore is War Child's youth advocates development programme which empowers young people affected by armed conflict to share their experiences and act to combat issues impacting them.

VoiceMore Groups in our programme countries discuss and debate how conflict affects children and youth in their area and what they feel could be done to help improve their lives. They are then supported to design and run their own advocacy projects in their local community, with War Child helping them elevate these concerns onto national and international platforms.

### Objectives of the Programme

- Support young people to identify the challenges they and other children and youth face in the regions and country where they live, and to undertake advocacy action which brings about positive change within their communities and beyond.
- Enable young people to improve their well-being by gaining confidence, knowledge, and skills to honestly express their views, needs and rights, including understanding how to conduct research and advocacy.
- Promote the participation of youth in decision-making and raise the voices of young people affected by conflict to those in power.

# VOICEMORE IN DRC

## Context of Rutshuru

The DRC is recovering from the nine-year war between 1994 and 2003 which cost over five million lives; however North Kivu region and the Eastern part of the country, still see high levels of violence due to the presence of rebel armed groups. Although the country is very rich in natural resources, in particular coltan which is used in mobile phones, due to political instability, conflict and inequality, the population in the Eastern region especially have very low access to basic services such as education and health care on top of the constant threat of violence.

The VoiceMore programme is part of the European Union-funded Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) project<sup>1</sup> and is situated in Rutshuru Territory in North Kivu in the East of DRC<sup>2</sup>. Rutshuru territory borders Uganda and Rwanda, which means

there are large numbers of internally displaced and recently returned people. Although a slightly more stable zone now, in the past it experienced a lot of instability from active fighting, including displacement and refugee influxes. Armed conflict continues and is characterized by sporadic acts of insecurity and violations of human rights and children's rights. In a context where employment opportunities are limited and most families rely on subsistence farming, repeated displacement from homes and farming lands, has worsened poverty and food instability as well as limited the development of essential infrastructure and services such as schools, hospitals and child protection services.

War Child UK has been working in DRC since 2004 and continues to deliver programming, including Early Childhood Development Care Centres and Children's Rights Clubs in schools.



<sup>1</sup> The DEVCO project is implemented in consortium with Norwegian Refugee Council, War Child UK (WCUK) and MIDEFEHOPS. WCUK is the International Co-Lead Organization of the consortium that focuses on community child protection activities in schools and within communities. Programme activities include pre-school education for children age 3 to 6, psychosocial activities for children and initiatives for young people to learn about their rights and raise awareness in the community.

<sup>2</sup> The map is taken from Teso, M. and Katcho, K (2019) Assessing Forest Cover Change and Deforestation Hot-Spots in the North Kivu Province. *American Journal of Geographic Information System*, 8(2), pp 39-54.

*"There are several internally displaced people living here because of insecurity. The population has moved from a town which borders Virunga National Park, where armed men are hiding and taking refuge in the town. Similarly, many of the population left another town near the military camp because it was being targeted by armed men."* VoiceMore Participant



Photo: VoiceMore Participants discuss issues facing child cattle herders.

*"There are too few schools and health facilities in the communities. In one village we have 2 primary schools, 1 secondary school and 1 health centre for more than 3000 households... it is especially limited in the final village which has 4 primary schools, 1 secondary school and no health centre for a population of about 4,500 households."* VoiceMore Participant

## Setting Up the Programme

In 2019 War Child UK started supporting a group of 40 young people to identify the protection challenges facing children and youth in the region where they live. Due to the remoteness of the communities and ongoing security challenges, two locations were identified to help mitigate risks associated with travel in the area and to make it easier for members with caring or work responsibilities to stay involved.

Young people interested in the programme and local elders in each location were first invited to attend community meetings to understand more about the programme and its objectives. It was then agreed with the community how selection should be made. Young people discussed and then voted on who they felt should represent them in each group. This included ensuring a 50/50 gender split and for 10 spaces per group to include individuals who might otherwise be excluded, including young parents, youth with disabilities and youth formally associated with armed forces.

## VoiceMore Training Sessions

Before starting their project, both groups first completed their VoiceMore training to help build confidence, knowledge and skills in acting as a spokesperson and understanding advocacy. Young people covered topics such as the role of a spokesperson, children's rights, body language and non-verbal communication, active listening, public speaking, understanding people's perspectives, interviewing skills and keeping safe. Then they looked at the purpose and principles of advocacy action, before working together to identify the major issues affecting children and youth in their community.

The main issues they felt were negatively impacting children and youth in Rutshuru were:

- Children involved in cattle herding.
- Widespread insecurity in the region.
- Unemployment.
- Early marriages.
- Scarcity of water and sanitation infrastructure.
- Non-schooling and out of school children.
- Prostitution between youth and the military.
- High rates of sexually transmitted infections.
- Widespread food insecurity and malnourishment.

To help them decide on one of the above themes for their project, the young people analysed the following:

- The potential impact they felt they could have on the issue.
- Potential safety implications of speaking on this issue.
- The level of vulnerability to harm or abuse of those affected.
- How much power those affected have to bring about change by themselves.

For example, young people felt the issues of insecurity, unemployment and food insecurity were too complex and widespread for the group to be able to make a difference. Other topics, such as challenging the actions of armed groups or military personnel, they felt would place the groups in danger. Finally, they also wanted to select an issue which offered good possibility for community engagement.

Despite there being a high number of serious issues affecting their local community, both groups (independently of each other in their separate VoiceMore trainings) identified the same problem they wished to dedicate their time to trying to alleviate: the exploitation and abuse of children working in cattle herding.

The following chapters outlines the young people’s reasons for selecting this theme, what they felt were causes and impacts, who key stakeholders were and what was already being done to address the issue, before moving on to their research and advocacy phases.

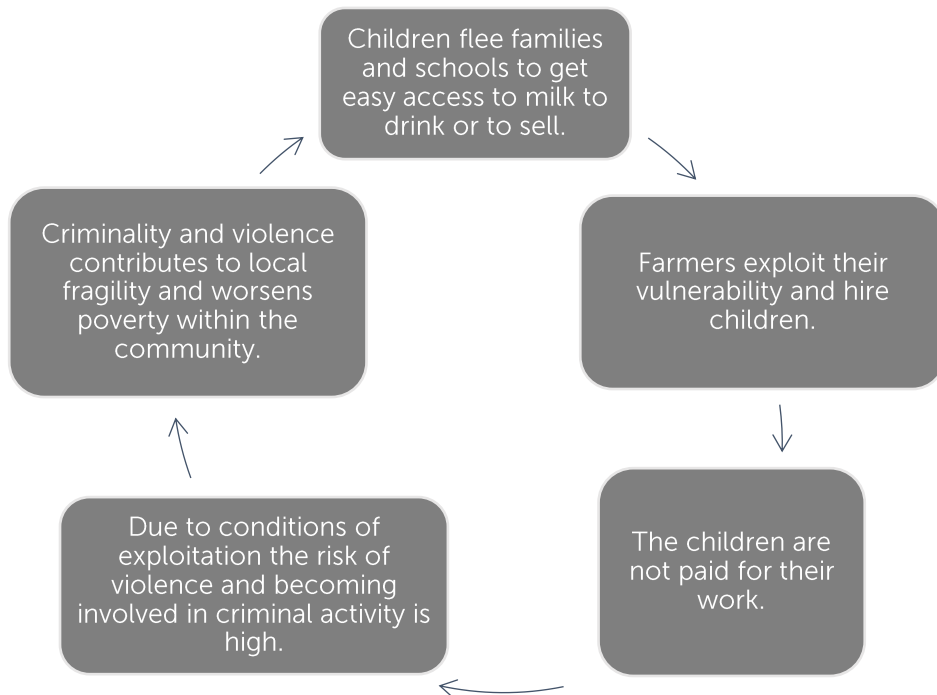
## SITUATION OF CHILD HERDERS

Both groups felt children working in cattle herding were experiencing high levels of neglect, exploitation, and abuse and little was being done to address this. Below are some examples of reasons they felt these children in particular need more support:

*“The lives of shepherd children are in danger. They live in inhumane conditions, without protection from the weather, the rain and cold that causes diseases. They are homeless. It is difficult to find food and this pushes them to steal. They work 24 hours a day outdoors looking after the cattle. The work of cattle herders hinders their physical, mental and social development and prevents their schooling.”* VoiceMore participant.

*“Children who return to the community after spending time as a cattle header are the basis of many problems, like stealing, rape and then they risk losing their life or part of their bodies in this work.”* VoiceMore participant

They identified the following cycle perpetuating the abuse:



They explained how most children and young people who became herders were leaving their families and schools to get access to milk, either to provide sustenance for them and their family,

or to sell. By working with the cattle they have easy access to this. Farmers are attracted to hiring these children because they do not require the same wages as adults. They employ them on a casual basis to work long hours and in all conditions, with little regard for their well-being or other negative impacts brought about by the work on the children, their families or communities.

*"The population is mainly made up of subsistence farmers who live on the produce of their fields. The main crops are beans, corn, cassava, sorghum, and banana. In addition to agriculture, they also raise large livestock, mainly cows and goats. But there is no land reserved for grazing cows, so to feed them, the herders walk them here and there and often use the children as shepherds for this work. This causes conflict between farmers who cultivate crops and those who move with cows. Cow rearing is part of the culture and they play a role in our customs and ceremonies such as marriages."* VoiceMore Participant

VoiceMore youth believe the use of children as herders was at the root of many tensions in the community such as:

- Tension between farmers, due to crop devastation caused by poor cattle herding which is blamed on the more inexperienced child herders. This also causes issues with local leaders who are accused of favouring some farmers over others when crops are destroyed.
- The parents of the children exploited as herders are angry at the owners of the cattle. They accuse them of being the reason behind their children's 'flight' from the families and for them refusing to go to school.
- Farmers often accuse the children and young herders of stealing crops.
- The wider community distrust the child herders. They accuse them of lacking the appropriate 'way of life' in society, of rudeness and other abuses that occur (e.g., theft, rape, murder, kidnapping, collaboration with bandits or armed groups etc.).

The young people also felt poverty, inadequate school structures, difficult conditions for access to education and lack of training structures for young people contribute to the proliferation of the issue.

*"There are disagreements between farmers and herders because of the children who are not experienced as shepherds of cows."* VoiceMore participant.



Below are factors the group felt push children into cattle herding work, why they might find it the best option in their circumstances, and what some of the consequences are:

Children and young people exploited as Herders are orphans, abandoned or separated from their families or they are children of poor families.

These are children and young people from families who have difficulty finding food and meeting their children's primary needs (food, schooling, health, clothing).

The poverty of parents who fail to pay school fees pushes children into being a herder. They are the children and young people who are out of school.

Children and young people who are employed there are attracted to milk to find food.

Lack of access to land makes families more vulnerable to food insecurity, as they cannot produce their own food, which means they may need the work as a herder.

Ignorance of the importance of education by parents and children/young people.

These children and young people are forced to live in very difficult conditions, outdoors with cows 24 hours a day at the mercy of bad weather, without rest or access to games, and without adequate feeding.

Children and young people are introduced to all forms of violence: fighting each other with sticks, learning to steal farmers' crops, physical and sexual violence against passers-by.

There is a risk of recruitment into criminal gangs or armed groups that are present in the area.

Farmers complain about the theft of their produce from the fields by these cow keepers or even the destruction of crops by cows poorly guarded by these children and young people.

Parents are sad this work is seen as a place of refuge for children and young people who are estranged from their families or who have dropped out of school.

They do not earn a salary or are given pittance in return for their work, while adults who do the same work are paid either in cash or in kind (e.g., one cow per year).

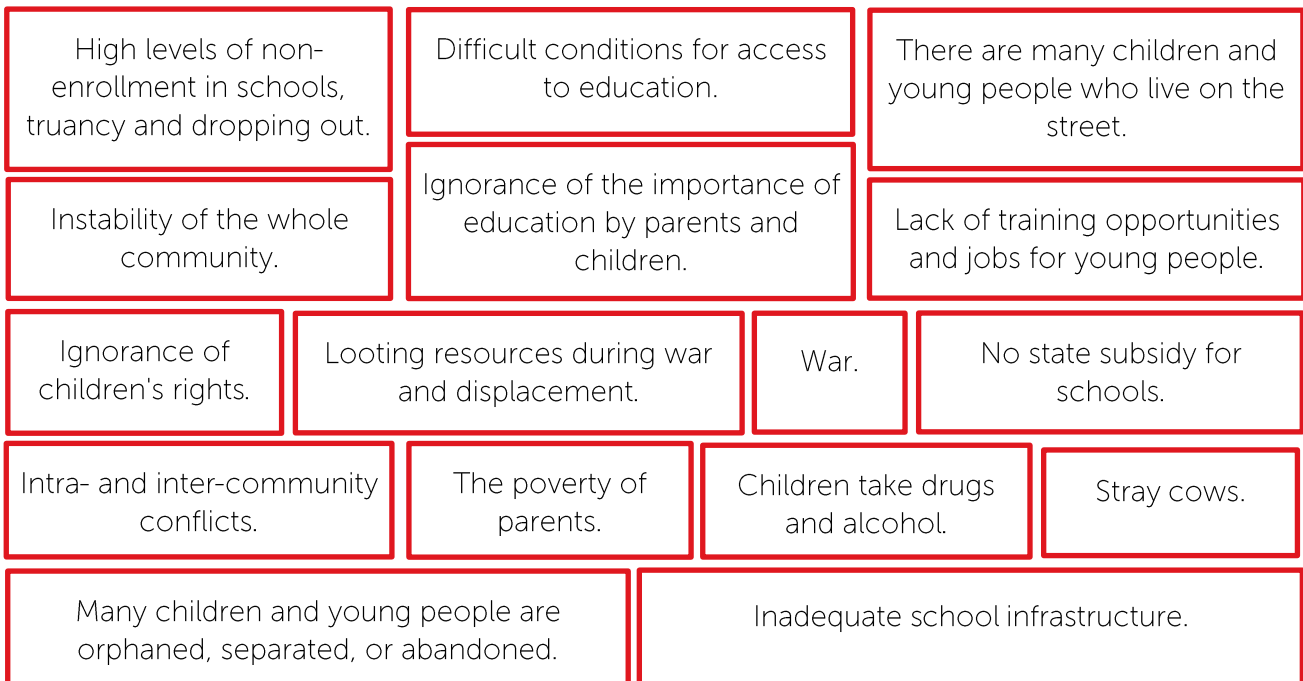
## Causes and Impacts

The VoiceMore spokespersons felt the following were the causes and factors contributing to the problem, as well as the short- and long-term impacts and consequences:

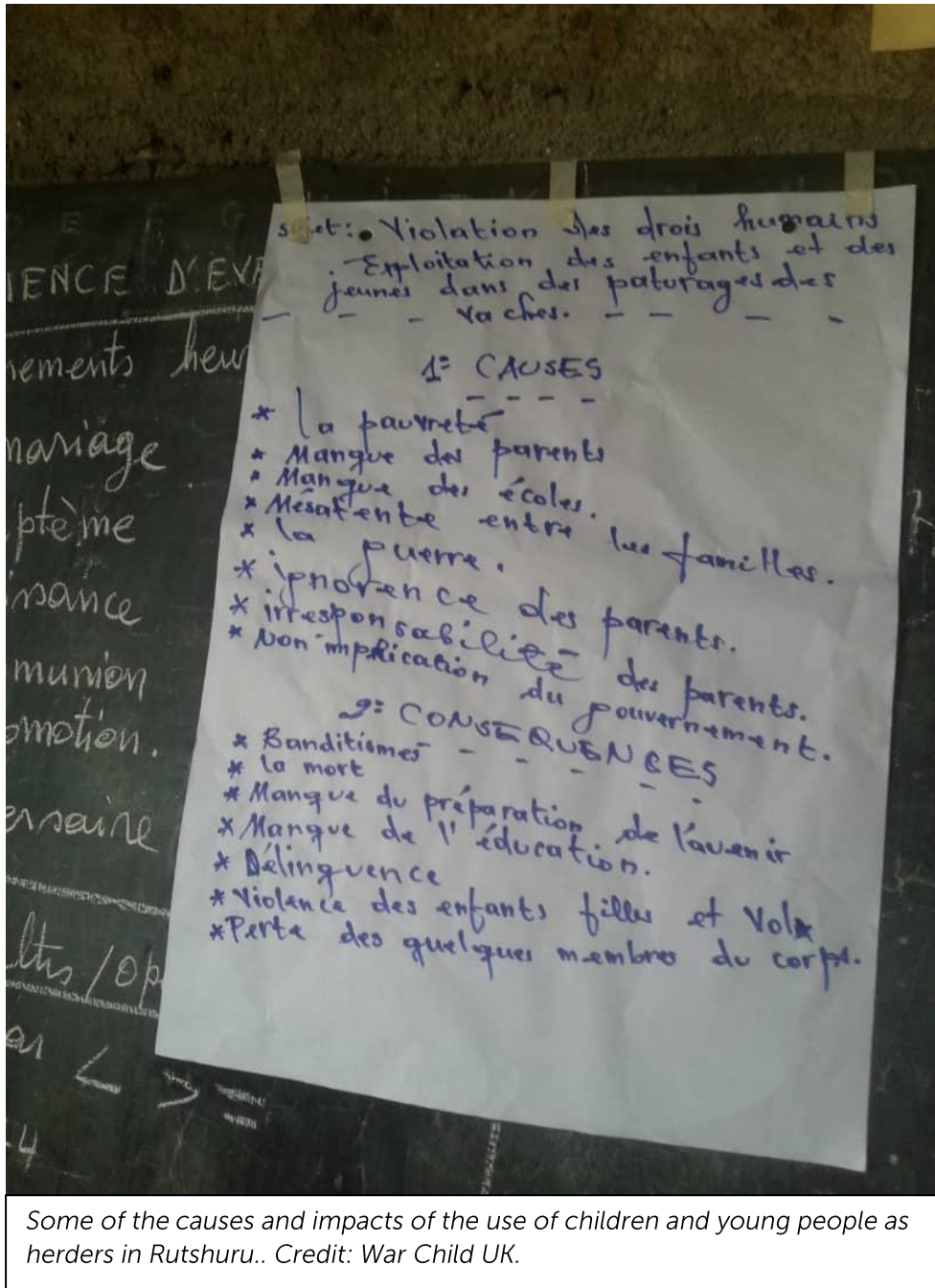
### ↓ ↓ **The Impacts of the Issue**



### **Use of Children and Young People as Cattle Herders**



### ↑ ↑ **What Causes the Problem**



Some of the causes and impacts of the use of children and young people as herders in Rutshuru.. Credit: War Child UK.

After analysing impacts, the young people conducted a session where they compared the different definitions of child employment, child labour and the worst forms of child labour to agree where on the spectrum they believed child herding sat given what they now know about the work.

The groups unanimously agreed that the use of children as cattle herders should be described as child labour because it can be physically, mentally, socially, or morally dangerous and hinder their schooling. In some instances, where the children are forced to work, the young people recognised that it can also be one of the worst forms of child labour.

## RESEARCHING THE PROBLEM

After deciding on the advocacy issue for their project, both groups participated in training to understand the basic principles of research practice, such as the difference between quantitative and qualitative data gathering, research ethics and consent. The group then discussed what kind of research might be helpful for their advocacy campaign to gain a better understanding of the problem, to understand perspectives of their local community on their chosen topic, and to collect evidence to support the need for change.

Before conducting their research, the group also took time to explore risk factors related to their data collection. This included participatory risk assessments, putting in place safety protocols and agreeing the best ways to approach different planned stakeholders.

### Research Methodology

The young people explored a variety of different research methods, before deciding they wanted to use questionnaires and interviews. They selected questionnaires because they felt they could reach a lot of people in a short time and a larger sample would help them build a clearer picture of community awareness on child shepherding.

*"We chose the 'Questionnaires' to get the YES or NO answers to our questions and to meet a lot of people."*

*"We wanted to know if members of the community or the entire population know or do not know the problem of exploitation of shepherd children. So we thought we were going to use the questionnaires."*

They also chose interviews to help gain a deeper understanding from different community members, such as the young herders themselves.

*"We chose to use interviews to have clear answers and accompanied explanations, to understand what people think about the difficulties that children and young shepherds face."*

*"We had wanted to have a lot of information about the problem of exploitation of shepherd children, so we decided to use interviews with stakeholders such as children and young shepherds, parents of shepherd children, local chiefs and farmers."*

The group then designed their own questionnaire to help ascertain awareness of the issue in the community and any efforts that were already being made to address it. Respondents were randomly selected from different groups within the community.

After they had gathered data via the questionnaires, the young people then organised semi-structured interviews with groups of young herders, their parents, security officers, local authorities, farmers, and other members of the community.

For both forms of data collection, questionnaires and interviews, the young people conducted these in places where each stakeholder worked. This meant reaching out to children working in herding in areas where they kept the cattle, parents at home, farmers in their fields, the local chiefs at their offices etc. The reason the young people chose to do this was they wanted to find them easily without disrupting their work schedule, making participation easier and more assured.

## Challenges Faced Conducting the Research

The young people encountered three main challenges while conducting their research.

The first challenge was the size of the area the herders work in and the time they had for data gathering. It was short to cover such a large region, meaning they were limited to the most accessible villages in their communities. To help overcome this they mapped the villages in the community and decided to go in pairs - one male and one female group member - to each village. One would ask the questions while the other took notes.

The second challenge the young people faced was requests for payment for access to information, for example people refusing to answer the questionnaire unless they would be paid. To help mitigate this, the group worked together to draft and rehearse a script which included an explanation to stakeholders the work was being done on a voluntary basis to help solve the problems children in the community face. This helped ensure people they approached understood their project was an effort being led by young people themselves.

The final challenge was the younger children working in herding were afraid and fearful of the interviewers when they arrived and tried to make contact with them. To resolve this, they addressed the children sensitively to persuade them that they were not the security guards to take them out of their work by force. Once it was clear they were not going to harm them, they were then able to tell them about the VoiceMore project and seek their consent to be interviewed.

## Research Findings

For the individual questionnaires, feedback was gathered from 184 respondents, however each respondent was not always able to answer every question.

All were adults over the age of 25, with 80% female and 20% male. The higher number of female respondents was due to the locations and times the group decided to complete the questionnaires, for example, where more women gather for work.

Key findings from the questionnaire were:

- 91% acknowledged cattle were straying wild, due to a lack of farms in the region, and that this was the root of many problems related to the violation of children's rights in the area.
- 80.4% replied that children and young people constitute the most affected demographic of the population for this issue.
- When reflecting who was most likely to be recruited as child herders, children from indigenous families were said to be most affected at 59.8%, children from displaced families were also significantly affected at 28.5%, with returnees' children and children from refugee families least affected (6.1% and 5.5% respectively).
- When asked if there were any efforts being made to address the issue, more respondents felt no effort was being made (47.6%) than was being made (33%). For those who responded effort was being made, this often referred to local police who use threats or corporal punishment to drive children away.
- In relation to decision making on the issue, and how community members are involved, the most common response was that the power sits with the Local Authority. However, there was a split in opinion to the extent in which the community are involved, with 45% saying they are and 38% saying they are not.

Below are results for each question the groups posed to community members.

1) Are there herds of cattle in the community?	Total 142	2) How are these cattle fed/grazed?	Total 137
Yes	88,7%	On farms	5%
No	7,7%	Wandering/roaming	83,3%
Don't know	3,5%	Don't know	1,4%

3) Who in the population is most vulnerable to cattle herding?	Total 174	4) When did child cattle herding start?	Total 153
Children and young people	80,4%	It has always existed	57,4%
Adults	14,3%	It started with the war	34,5%
Don't know	5%	Don't know	7,8%

5) What is the status of those most affected?	Total 147	6) Are there any efforts being made to solve this problem?	Total 151
Moved People	28,4%	Yes	35%
Returned People	6%	Not	47,4%
Local People	59,8%	Don't know	17,1%
Other	5,4%		

7) Which authorities or organisations are involved?	Total 184	8) Who makes the decisions?	Total 150
Local authorities	48.3%%	Local authorities	44.6%
Civil society	20%	Community leaders	12.6%
Community leaders	13.4%%	Don't know	42.6%
Other	17.8%%		

9) Does the population contribute to efforts to find the solution to a problem in the community?	Total 142	10) Are there structures through which people can speak to local leaders or authorities?	Total 127
Yes	45%	Yes	49.5%
Not	37.9%	Not	29.8%
Don't know	16.8%	Don't know	20.4%

11) Are there structures through which decisions are passed on to the population?	Total 139	12) Is there an organization of exchange events between decision-making structures and community members?	Total 164
Yes	31.6%	Yes	32.8%
Not	56.7%	Not	48.7%
Don't know	11.4%	Don't know	18.2%

*"I'd like to do another job, when I see others go to school, I'm jealous since when they go to finish [school] they can become teachers or another person while I'll always be keeping other people's cows."* Young Herder Interviewed by VoiceMore Youth.

*"We had this job [herding] when our parents made us drop out of school because they had no money, because of poverty."* Young Herder Interviewed by VoiceMore Youth.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

The group conducted a total of 55 semi structured interviews with the below groups:

- 11 children and youth working as shepherds, aged between 7 - 22 years old 100% male.
- 11 parents of shepherd children aged 30 - 60 years old and 60% female and 40% male.
- Eight representatives of local development associations, churches and youth associations and 11 local leaders, aged between 25 to 55 years old, 70% male and 30% female.
- Eight farmers aged between 35 to 60 years old, 60% female and 40% male.
- Seven security guards aged between 30 to 55 years old, 90% male and 10% female.
- Local authority representatives (such as village chiefs, heads of localities etc.) aged between 30 to 75 years old, 100% male.

The interviews focused on what interviewees felt were the causes of the issue, the impact it has, and the change they would like to see. Once all the interviews were complete, the group analysed the responses together and grouped common responses, organising these into levels, from local to international:

#### Local

- Poverty - lack of means by parents to meet the primary needs of their children (schooling, medical care, food, clothing, decent housing).
- War - movements of populations (movement, return, refugee, rape, theft, death of men...)
- Lack of parents (death, separation) - lack of responsibility to care for the child.
- Ignorance and irresponsibility - lack of respect for children's rights.
- Feeling of wanting to meet primary needs (food, hunger, milk).
- Inadequate involvement of local authorities in community awareness of children's rights.
- Instability (insecure, kidnapping, looting, theft, rape, activism of armed groups, banditry).
- Demotivation of some state workers because the salary is low or is not paid on time (e.g., teachers, nurses etc.).

## National

- Lack of children's rights awareness plan and inadequate state involvement in efforts to raise awareness about children's rights.
- Inadequate support for laws on the protection and respect of children's rights.
- Weakness of state authority and impunity for child rights abusers.
- Lack of a plan to mentor children from poor families.
- Lack of construction of literacy and trades-learning schools and centres for unemployed and out-of-school youth.
- Lack of development plan of local entities.
- Lack of political will (for ending war and insecurity).
- Paying low wages to state officials.

## International

- Inadequate efforts to support child rights awareness projects.
- Support for wars and weapon sales.
- Inadequate funding for development projects.
- Inadequate love for the suffering populations.

While the above were the most popular reasons given, some respondents answers presented alternative views:

- Some children in interview said they were fine as herders of cows and did not want to go to school to 'starve and waste time'. Young people in the VoiceMore group, like others they interviewed, thought the children herding cattle were 'suffering' and that they should be freed from this suffering. However, it demonstrated to them experiences were not the same for all children and youth, and some might feel herding was a good option (based on the limited options they have).
- A few parents said they did not want their children to leave cattle herding. These parents were collaborating with the owners of the cows to receive the wages their children made, meaning some parents were actively encouraging and supporting this form of child labour for their children.

These attitudes and opinions challenged the assumptions the young people had. Other comments from the interviews illustrated the complex and inter-related nature of issues, for example:

- Some young herders expressed concern over how they could survive if they left the job and what the alternative to the work they could do. A frequent question they asked was if there was a way to somehow keep their job and still take part in any other available training.
- Many people interviewed stressed the relationship with cattle herding and out of school children, who can be found wandering the street, meaning owners of the cows can pick them up and recruit at a lower price. As most of the children are from extremely poor families, their parents cannot cope with the cost of education, which - although in theory should be free at primary level - is not so, with schools charging fees or the need to provide their own uniforms and books.



## INTERNATIONAL LAW AND EXISTING RESEARCH

Children are employed all around the world, and particularly so when the livelihoods of caregivers are disrupted, for example during conflict. Many forms of employment can offer independence, sense of empowerment, greater security, the chance to build skills for future employment in adulthood, whilst allowing them to make valuable and necessary contributions to household income.<sup>3</sup> Work – if in a safe environment with clear parameters and limited hours – can therefore offer a variety of benefits to children. In contrast child labour, particularly the worst forms and hazardous labour, can have significant and life-long detrimental impacts on a child’s development and future prospects.

### Child Labour: The Scale of the Issue

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimate that there are 160 million children in child labour globally<sup>4</sup>, 73 million of whom are estimated to be engaged in hazardous work. This is almost one in every twenty of the world’s child population<sup>5</sup>. However, in emergency contexts, the possible loss of livelihoods, access to education, and where children can become separated, orphaned and/or displaced, children become particularly vulnerable to child labour, and especially to the worst forms of child labour<sup>6</sup>.

In DRC, data from the Demographic and Health Survey 2013/2014<sup>7</sup>, estimated that 38% of children aged 5-17, 40% of girls and 36% of boys, were working in 2014. This is down from 71% in 2007. It is not known what percentage of these children are engaged in the worst forms of child labour, however in 2019 the Bureau of International Labour Affairs summarised the sectors that most children in DRC work in as: agriculture, industry and construction, services including domestic work and those activities that are categorised as the worst forms of child labour including forced mining, domestic and sexual exploitation, illicit activities and recruitment, including forced recruitment, into armed groups<sup>8</sup>.

### Child Herders

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)<sup>9</sup>, agriculture is by far the largest sector where child labour is found, and one of the most dangerous. Livestock forms a substantial and growing segments of agriculture as it represents at least a partial source of income and/or food

#### Terminology Explained

**Child Employment:** When children’s participation in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their schooling.

**Child Labour:** Work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling.

**The Worst Forms of / Hazardous Child Labour:** Any activity or occupation that, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm their health, safety, or morals.

<sup>3</sup> Aufseeser et al (2017) Children’s work and children’s well-being: Implications for policy. Development Policy Review 2018:36:241-261. Overseas Development Institute.

<sup>4</sup> ILO (2021) [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_800090/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_800090/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>5</sup> ILO (2018) Towards the urgent elimination of hazardous child labour.

[https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/informationresources/WCMS\\_IPEC\\_PUB\\_30315/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ipecc/informationresources/WCMS_IPEC_PUB_30315/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>6</sup> The Child Protection Working Group (2012) Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.

[https://www.unicef.org/iran/Minimum\\_standards\\_for\\_child\\_protection\\_in\\_humanitarian\\_action.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/iran/Minimum_standards_for_child_protection_in_humanitarian_action.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF (2014) Second Demographic and Health Survey: <https://www.unicef.org/drcongo/en/reports/second-demographic-and-health-survey>

<sup>8</sup> Bureau of International Labour Affairs (2019) Child Labour and Forced Labour Reports: Democratic Republic of Congo: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/congo-democratic-republic-drc>

<sup>9</sup> FAO (2013) Children’s work in the livestock sector: Herding and beyond. <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-food-value-chains/library/details/en/c/265827/>

security for 70% of the world's rural poor, estimated to be 880million people. They state that the involvement of children in livestock activities is very common and 'much of the work children do in the livestock sector can be categorized as child labour: it is likely to be hazardous, to interfere with a child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development'<sup>10</sup>. The FAO explain how although boys and girls are involved in livestock activities, boys are generally more involved in herding activities than girls, and detail how the child herders who work outside of their household are especially vulnerable to harm, exploitation and abuse:

*In many situations, the nature of the work of children in the livestock sector makes it difficult for children to attend formal school, or the hazards and conditions involved make it a worst form of child labour ... Working closely with livestock carries inherent risks of animal-related diseases, especially in situations without clear boundaries between working and living conditions; of health problems caused by working long hours in extreme weather conditions, poor sanitation and hygiene, using chemical products (e.g. disinfectants to treat animals) and inhaling (livestock) dust; as well as psychological stress resulting from fear of punishment from employers, fear of cattle raiders or a feeling of responsibility for the family capital. In addition, there are direct risks of injury when handling animals and sharp tools used in livestock work activities. Risks include being bitten (also by wild animals and insects), gored, kicked, stamped on; being abused by employers; and musculoskeletal disorders. Some children working in the livestock sector are also in situations of bonded or forced labour or have been trafficked.<sup>11</sup>*

The FAO do however stress, that there are ways in which children can support their families and work in agriculture which are age-appropriate, do not interfere with schooling, allow for leisure time, carry minimal safety risks and allow children to build knowledge and skills for the future.

### **Push and Pull Factors**

The push and pull factors in the existing literature<sup>12</sup> for why children become herders include:

- Children being cheaper to hire than adults.
- Children being thought to be more trustworthy and innocent and therefore less likely to steal from the employer.
- Poverty, food insecurity and vulnerability to shocks, meaning families rely on the labour of children for survival.
- Absence of caregivers and orphanhood.
- Lack of access to education or to education that can be done alongside work, poor quality schooling and lack of better employment opportunities with a school education.
- Families often consider children's involvement in livestock activities critical for their socialisation and for teaching them life skills, where school education is not seen to be a clear path to better employment, these practical skills are often prioritised.
- Ineffective or un-enforced child labour legislation.
- Climate change affecting weather patterns, affecting the success rate of crop harvests and forcing herders to cover greater areas of land to feed cattle.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid page 5

<sup>11</sup> Ibid page 7.

<sup>12</sup> Summarised in FAO (2013) Children's work in the livestock sector: Herding and beyond. <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-food-value-chains/library/details/en/c/265827/>

## Solutions Proposed

Many of the solutions proposed in the existing research on children involved in livestock husbandry, shepherding and herding have focused either on how to increase children's enrolment in education or to reduce family poverty.

Initiatives to support parents' income through giving them additional livestock have however had mixed results, in some instances this income security has meant children were encouraged to enrol in school whereas in other instances, this increased the opportunity cost of sending a child to school when they could be working with the animals, and therefore school participation reduced. Based on programming and policy recommendations by UN agencies and research centres such as FAO<sup>13</sup>, UNICEF<sup>14</sup>, Oxford Policy Management (OPM)<sup>15</sup> and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI)<sup>16</sup> it is therefore recommended that a wider range of integrated programmes are implemented to reduce vulnerability to shocks, stresses, and seasonality.

Some of the possible solutions include promoting alternative livelihoods opportunities, support to informal family and community-level social protection mechanisms such as labour exchange, communal work or rotating money pooling and savings and credit associations. These can be also complemented by provision of cash and voucher assistance by humanitarian agencies and expansion of social assistance, services and micro-insurance schemes to remote rural areas.

In relation to education interventions, traditionally these aimed to take children out of herding roles and enrol them in formal school settings, however increasingly children involved in pastoral and nomadic agriculture are being reached through distance<sup>17</sup> and mobile education programmes. The literature suggesting that for these education interventions to be successful they need to be flexible to allow children to take part in child employment alongside their learning, provide bridging or catch-up support, have a relevant curriculum and be linked to employment opportunities after graduation.

To date, these solutions do not appear to have been tested for children involved in herding activities in conflict affected settings, however. Although work has been done to help ensure livelihoods involving livestock are maintained during displacement and in conflict settings, these efforts have primarily focused on adults<sup>18</sup>. They are focused on supporting farming families as opposed to working with children who are employed by others.

## Comparison to Existing Data on Rutshuru Region

No existing data on children's involvement in herding has been found at the local authority's office or with local civil society. It is therefore believed that VoiceMore have conducted the first research related to this topic in Rutshuru. In addition, whilst academic and NGO literature exists on other forms of child labour in DRC, namely in mining and armed groups, no participatory studies have been identified specifically focused on child herders, therefore it is believed this is the first ever youth-led research on child herders in DRC.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/i7606e/i7606e.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/media/63846/file>

<sup>15</sup> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5aa7d9ede5274a3e391e3d23/WP3-Community-perspectives-Sahel-EN.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/4309.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Siele, D., Swift, J. and Kratli, S. (2011) Reaching Pastoralists with Formal Education: A Distance-Learning Strategy for Kenya. <https://www.future-agricultures.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf-archive/David%20Siele.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> LEGS (2014) Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Rugby: Practical Action Publishing.

## CURRENT CHILD LABOUR LEGISLATION IN DRC

The government of DRC have made international and national legally binding commitments to combat child labour, as outlined below.

### International Frameworks

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) includes Article 32 which specifically addresses child labour by protecting children ‘... from economic exploitation and from performing any work that interferes with his or her education or is harmful to his or her mental, spiritual or social development’. Nearly 40% of the 54 articles in the CRC relate to rights that either are or could be infringed in cases of child labour.<sup>19</sup> The DRC ratified this convention in 1990<sup>20</sup> and are therefore obliged to protect this right of all the children within its territory.

In December 2020, the DRC ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child<sup>21</sup>. This Africa specific convention echoes many of the same rights as the UNCRC, including protection from economic exploitation and hazardous work. It does however, in Article 31, recognise the responsibility of children to their family and society, nation and Africa. This includes ‘a) to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need and b) to serve his national community by placing his physical and intellectual abilities at its service’<sup>22</sup>. Child employment, where work is not harmful, could therefore be argued to form part of these responsibilities.

Aside from Child Rights instruments, the 1973 International Labour Organization Minimum Age Convention<sup>23</sup> established the general minimum age for children to engage in non-hazardous work and prohibited all hazardous work for under 18s. DRC ratified this convention in 2001<sup>24</sup> and adopted 14 as the legal minimum age for employment.

### International Efforts to Legislate Against Child Labour

#### **ILO Minimum Age Convention 1973**

The international community established the general minimum age for (non-hazardous) work and prohibited hazardous work for all children under the age of 18.

#### **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989**

Children have a right to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that interferes with his or her education or is harmful to his or her mental, spiritual or social development.

#### **African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1990.**

Every child shall be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

#### **ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999**

International commitment to prevent the engagement of children in the worst forms of child labour, including providing the necessary assistance to stop and prevent recruitment.

#### **Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 2015**

Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF (1989) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Human Rights (2019) Ratification Status for Democratic Republic of Congo [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=88&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=88&Lang=EN)

<sup>21</sup> African Union (1979) African Charter On The Rights And Welfare Of The Child [https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/afr\\_charter\\_rights\\_welfare\\_child\\_africa\\_1990.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/afr_charter_rights_welfare_child_africa_1990.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> ibid

<sup>23</sup> ILO (1973) Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C138](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C138)

<sup>24</sup> ILO (2021) Ratifications for DRC [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11200:0::NO:11200:P11200\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:102981](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11200:0::NO:11200:P11200_COUNTRY_ID:102981)

In the same year they also ratified the 1999 ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention<sup>25</sup>, which commits the government to prevent the engagement of children in the worst forms of child labour.

Finally, most recently DRC committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) <sup>26</sup>. As part of this commitment, they are required to act on article 8.7 which aims to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms<sup>27</sup>. Following the adoption of the SDGs, the Congolese Observatory for Sustainable Development was created, which monitors, assesses, and reports on the implementation of the goals.

### National Laws

DRC has also passed its own national laws on child work and labour<sup>28</sup>. For example, following their signing of the ILO conventions in 2001, which included:

- The minimum age to work is 15, with the consent of the child's parents or guardians.
- Children younger than 16 are not allowed to work for more than four hours a day.
- All children are barred from hazardous work.
- Only specific light work roles are permitted for 14–16-year-olds.

The International Trade Union Confederation<sup>29</sup> found however that the DRC authorities lack the financial and human resources to monitor and implement these laws or prosecute offenders, for example in 2009 only one company was reported by the police as using illegal child labour. In more recent years, with increased attention on global supply chains of technology companies such as Apple, Dell, Microsoft and Google who use cobalt, which is mined in DRC, there have been international NGO supported lawsuits<sup>30</sup> to seek compensation for families of children who died mining. These have however been lawsuits against the companies for irresponsible and dangerous supply chains rather than against the government of DRC for failing to protect children in their country from child labour.

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<sup>25</sup> ILO (1999) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182)

[https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312327:NO](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312327:NO)

<sup>26</sup> UN (2019) Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform – DRC <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/drc>

<sup>27</sup> Alliance 8.7 (2019) Target 8.7 <https://www.alliance87.org/target-8-7/>

<sup>28</sup> Department of Labour: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/congo-democratic-republic-drc>

<sup>29</sup> International Trade Union Confederation (2010) Internationally recognised core labour standards in the democratic republic of Congo <https://globalmarch.org/child-labour-in-the-democratic-republic-of-congo/>

<sup>30</sup> Aljazeera (2019) US tech giants sued over DRC cobalt mine child labour deaths <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/12/17/us-tech-giants-sued-over-drc-cobalt-mine-child-labour-deaths/>

## RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The group's research and the desk-based literature review conducted by War Child UK have demonstrated there is a need for more attention to the protection of children working in cattle herding in this region of DRC.

Children and young people are experiencing significant forms of neglect, including vulnerability to recruitment into armed groups. They are experiencing sexual, physical and emotional abuse, and when older, can also be perpetrating this themselves against others in the community. Children working as cattle herders consequently face considerable stigmatisation and social marginalization.

There is a lack of support for families, children and young people engaged in this form of labour, with little alternative options available in terms of income generation or learning opportunities. Currently the issue is receiving very limited attention from the NGO community, local civil society, local authorities, and community protection structures. This is also something echoed at international level, with the protection challenges for children in cattle herding under researched and addressed in programming.

While this research project was focused in one region only, there are strong indicators findings will also be relevant at national level and beyond within similar conflict affected contexts.

## VOICEMORE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on their research findings, the young people developed the following recommendations for change at local, national and international level. Their advocacy action will be based around promoting these recommendations and engaging stakeholders who can influence their realisation.

### At Local Level

- **Need for Greater Awareness of Child Rights and Existing Child Protection Legislation:** There is a need for a major awareness-raising campaign on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and other national legal instruments on the protection of children. This requires the involvement of community child protection structures, government representatives of child protection institutions (for example, the Provincial Division of Social Affairs (DIVAS) territorial branch), civil society organisations and local leaders.
- **Economic Alternatives:** The awareness raising campaign should be accompanied by economic activities for the families of child cattle herders and other families at risk. This will help remove the financial pressures that cause many families to push children into cattle herding and will increase the possibility for them to engage in other activities for their future, such as education and learning. This activity should be supported by the government and the international community.
- **Return to Learning:** Schools should support return to education for child cattle herders who are still of school age. They should play an active role in encouraging them back into education. For older children and youth, there should be the creation of trade

learning centers adapted to local realities. This can include some literacy classes and other activities, such as thinking about personal safety. This will help them feel confident they can survive if they leave cattle herding. Both the government and the international community should support these new learning opportunities.

- **Better Implementation of Child Protection Laws:** Support the local community, including law enforcement agencies, in understanding and supporting the implementation of existing child protection laws.

### At National Level

- **Realisation of Free Education:** Government and local parliaments should vote for laws that put into practice the existing 2014 national law on free primary education for all. National and local government bodies should ensure the strict application of this law. This should include monitoring missions to check if it is being applied in practice, through technical services such as Divas (Division of Social Affairs) and DIVIJEUNESSE (Division of Youth).
- **Encourage More Support:** UNICEF, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and National Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) that are interested in the issue of child rights and protection should be encouraged to help identify solutions for the issue of child cattle herding in DRC.

### At International Level

- **Greater Attention to Needs of Child Cattle Herders:** UNICEF, ILO and FAO, alongside the Congolese State, need to pay more attention to the protection needs of children in cattle herding specifically.
- **More Solutions from International Institutions:** The ILO and FAO should help lead the search for solutions to the exploitation of child cattle herders. It is a form of child labour and hazardous work that requires more attention.

For more information about this report, the group's research or their advocacy activity, please contact Sophie Bray-Watkins, War Child UK Youth Advocacy and Engagement Adviser [sophieb@warchild.uk.org](mailto:sophieb@warchild.uk.org)