Challenges Facing Former Street Youth Graduating from Rehabilitation Centres in Rwanda

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Abstract

This paper, based on a study carried out in Rwanda during the period 2021–2022, investigates challenges facing former street youth who have graduated from rehabilitation centres (RCs) in Rwanda. It employed a theoretical framework grounded on empowerment and resilience theories. A descriptive longitudinal research design used quantitative and qualitative research methods involving 433 respondents, 365 survey questionnaires distributed to former street youth, 10 group interviews comprising 66 former street youth, 5 personal interviews with former street youth, 3 group interviews with 33 youth without street life experience and 1 group interview with 20 parents, 15 personal interviews with officials, and 4 key informant interviews. The findings indicate that 66.4 percent of the respondents lack financial support, 58 percent are not linked or connected with service providers, and 39.2 percent face family and community mistrust. Thus, 70 percent struggle to improve their livelihoods through jobs/income-generating activities, which are different from the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) skills acquired from RCs, after long waits for unobtained support, and 72.2 percent earn less than $50 per month. It was concluded that former street youth are incompletely/partially empowered; and are not resilient in terms of the capacity to improve their livelihoods. The findings suggest that RCs should start to involve parents, families and communities when former street youth are undertaking rehabilitation programs to collaboratively handle issues faced by RC graduates. Immediate support after graduation, and special consideration for former street youth in job/ income-generating opportunities were highly suggested to enhance empowerment and resilience for long-lasting improvements to livelihoods and self-reliance among former street youth.

Keywords: *street youth, former street youth, rehabilitation programs, reintegration, rehabilitation centres*

Introduction
Street youth represent a worldwide problem, and the cause of the issue differs from one country to another. Previous studies have shown that the lack of productive work, poverty, unstable families, urban growth and migration, HIV/AIDS, unfavourable schooling conditions, alcoholism, delinquency, war, abuse, family breakdown, etc., are some of the factors that result in the existence of street youth (Ndabaga & Bahizi, 2022; NRS, 2019, 2020; Sanji, 2018; Embleton et al., 2016; Sorber et al., 2014; Abbott & Batoni, 2011; Ochanda, Wamalwa & Gebremichael, 2011; Shah, Graidage & Valencia, 2005). In the case of Rwanda, it is presumed that the 1994 Tutsis genocide has its own implications in relation to the issue: the problem of street youth is persistent and complex, mostly in Kigali, and there have

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been no easy solutions (Abbott, Mutesi & Malunda, 2015; Abbott & Batoni, 2011). Fleeing physical abuse and memories of parents lost, many young men come to town streets where they live miserably without shelter, food or money (Ocobock, 2017: 89–96). Despite many strengths and examples of resilience among street youth when they live on the streets, they are vulnerable to many risks. Also, whether or not they remain connected to their families, they are excluded from mainstream social structures and opportunities (Coren et al., 2016).

Different interventions have been made available for street youth to help them access housing, health and social services, and improve their quality of life. Various authors have affirmed improvements in the quality of life through counselling, reducing substance abuse, establishing a trusting relationship, strengthening self-worth and resilience, focusing on goals, and perceiving a sense of hope and possibility, as well as treatment interventions to address mental health or health risk behaviours on such street youth (Morton et al., 2020; Lynch, 2017; Altena et al., 2010). Moreover, nonformal education and housing access are used to promote inclusion and reintegration among former street youth as a result of improved literacy, numeracy and self-esteem, increased participation in education and skills-based employment, and safer environments (Mayock & Parker, 2020; Coren et al., 2016; Shephard, 2014). Cases in Sub-Saharan Africa (Sanji, 2018) have also highlighted poverty alleviation and the creation of social enterprises as offering opportunities to former street youth and their parents to successfully address the issue.

In 2010, the government of Rwanda started establishing rehabilitation centres (RCs) to offer rehabilitation programs aiming to reform, educate, provide professional skills, and reintegrate delinquents or any person engaging in deviant acts/behaviours through psychosocial rehabilitation support and TVET courses. Most of the youth brought to RCs in Rwanda are taken from the streets. For instance, all 1,851 attendees at the Kigali Rehabilitation Transit Centre were arrested on Kigali's streets; the same is true for all 1,432 in Nyamagabe RC, all 250 in private RCs, 2,701 of 4,320 in Iwawa RC, and 437 out of 556 in Gitagata RC (*New Times*, 2019). Based on the available information on identified delinquency categories, there were vagrants, street children, drug users, street beggars, street vendors and prostitutes. The numbers of former street youth who have pursued and graduated rehabilitation programs at RCs may be 10,591 (80.7% of delinquents); including 7,933 (74.9%) males and 2,658 (25.1%) females (NRS, 2019). In 2017, the government spent an average of RF591,000 (US$556.60) on transforming just one person, and a total of RF662m (US$623,470.61) was spent on that year's graduates (Kt Press, 2017).

Despite the collaborative efforts used to take the youth off the streets, the numbers of admitted youth have been continuously increasing in RCs in Rwanda (NRS, 2019) as some former street youth graduating from RCs return to the streets, and newcomers join them (Abbott, Mutesi & Malunda, 2015). No previous study has specifically focused on the challenges faced by former street youth in Rwanda to capture their voices thoroughly, understand their conditions, and the factors leading

them back to the street after graduating from rehabilitation programs in RCs. Some studies (such as Ndabaga & Bahizi, 2022; NRS, 2020, 2019; Nsanzimana, 2019; Munyeshema, 2015; Abbott, Mutesi & Malunda, 2015; Abbott & Batoni, 2011) have focused only on (former) delinquents. Though these studies are inspiring in their depiction of particular groups of former street youth, they have not provided sufficient information about the problem as former delinquents are not necessarily former street youth, and all former delinquents have not lived on the street. Street youth and delinquents can equally be different in terms of their backgrounds, current experiences and future ambitions (Karabanow & Kidd, 2014).

Thus, this study makes a unique contribution by investigating the challenges faced by former street youth who have graduated from rehabilitation programs in RCs, by involving different stakeholders, including former street youth, youth (without street life experience), parents, and representatives of rehabilitation centres, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the City of Kigali, and the National Rehabilitation Service (NRS). The study seeks to provide evidence-based information concerning the challenges faced by former street youth for appropriate reintegration interventions that would improve the livelihoods of former street youth in communities.

Theoretical Framework
This study used the empowerment and resilience theories. The main objective of the empowerment theory is to connect individual wellbeing with the larger social and political environment, and provide people with the opportunities necessary to become active in community decision-making to improve their lives, organizations, and communities (Zimmerman, 2000). The theory may demonstrate how to improve the livelihoods of youths who migrate to streets; and by what means to redress imbalances in social, economic and political power leading youths to live on the streets (Nelson, 2000). This holds that former street youth need the capability to satisfy their needs once reintegrated with families and communities. According to Gwadz et al. (2018), former runaway youth face grave challenges related to safety and high levels of skills related to survival on the street and away from the guidance of their families. The situation becomes more critical in the face of one transitioning out of acute crisis with less evident competencies for thriving in other settings to build resilience, optimism, and confidence regarding the possibility of future successful engagement within a wider society. The theory provides explanations on how—through empowerment-oriented interventions—people can achieve enhanced control of various aspects of their lives and participate in the community with dignity through better understanding of their own needs, than anyone else, to define and act upon those needs (Lord & Hutchison, 1993). In this study, empowerment-oriented interventions are rehabilitation programs (psychosocial support and TVET courses) undertaken by former street youth to "… enhance well-being, ameliorate problems and provide opportunities to develop knowledge and skills, and engage professionals as collaborators instead of authoritative experts" (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). The fundamental concepts in the empowerment theory are the notions of autonomy and control for people, and within communities.

Abbott and Batoni (2011) contend that former street youth face challenges resulting into a strong possibility of returning to the streets when they are reintegrated without support following graduation. This suggests that, to ensure the maximum effectiveness of rehabilitation, an after-care system is required to support graduates' integration into the community as productive citizens. Brown and Amundson (2010) explain that the lack of support, not fearing homelessness, limited formal education, unemployment, and difficulties of income assistance hinder efforts by former street youth to get off the streets forever. When former street youth graduating from RCs do not change socially undesirable behaviours, and/or are neither employed nor self-employed to generate income, they cannot have autonomy and control over their livelihoods: hence, street recidivism becomes inevitable, which marks the failure of empowerment/rehabilitation programs.

The empowerment theory allow one to understand human problems in the context of a social, political, and economic environment that is stratified and oppressive to those with the fewest advantages in society. It also situates human problems in a person-in-environment perspective, not only recognizing the interdependence and mutual influence of individuals and communities, but also proposing that successful interventions in human problems occur at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community levels simultaneously (East, 2016). In addition, Joseph (2019) suggests that the empowerment theory is a continuously useful model for social workers at all levels of intervention—micro, mezzo, and macro—to help them influence their own lives. Thus, this study employs the theory to study empowerment outcomes and establish challenges that contradict expectations of improved livelihoods and self-reliance among former street youth.

The term empowered outcomes refers to operationalizations of empowerment that allow us to study the consequences of empowering processes (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). While East (2016) believes that empowerment interventions help individuals to develop psychological self-efficacy or coping skills to adjust to their existing social environment, the theory has, however, been criticized by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995: 51–57) for focusing on organizational and community empowerment, which "… are not simply a collection of empowered individuals." In this study, rehabilitation programs act as empowerment tools, preparing individual former street youth to sustainably reintegrate in their families and communities, and eliminate/overcome situations that may result in negative factors working against livelihood improvement and self-reliance. The purpose of this study is to examine the autonomy and control of former street youth when faced with challenges arising during family and community reintegration, to which the empowerment theory is applicable.

Our second intention is to focus on the ways in which people resist the setbacks occurring when struggling for autonomy and control of their lives. It is possible that some people may have the ability to cope with challenges obstructing them in the absence or failure of family, community, and/or government to support or care for them after graduating from rehabilitation centres. Therefore, we use the resilience

theory to explain the strategies employed by former street youth to cope with situations pushing them to return to the street. The resilience theory has been used as a framework in numerous sociological writings; however, for the purposes of this study, it is used as advocated by Antonovsky (1979) and van Breda (2018). Antonovsky (1979) argues that the resilience theory gives the actor the capacity to resist in a situation of breakdown in social functioning or wellbeing. The theory helps us to understand the human experience of adversity, inform policy, and engage people to achieve better-than-expected outcomes in the face/wake of adversity (van Breda, 2018). It increasingly pays attention to understanding resilience within broader social systems, and to engaging with issues of power and social justice (ibid.).

The resilience theory is based on the hypothesis that in the face/wake of adversity, people have the knowledge and ability to resist, persist and survive. For instance, youth resilience concepts and approaches serve to elucidate and promote the capacity for positive adaptation in the context of existing/potential threats (Masten, 2014). Resilience revealed shifts in street youths' senses of self/identity, and related understandings of agency, self-worth, value systems, and connectedness in various efforts to adapt to various street and non-street contexts (Kidd & Davidson, 2007). The resilience theory has a major focus on the mediating processes that enable systems to achieve better-than-expected outcomes in the face of hardship and adversity. According to van Breda (2018), one cannot talk about resilience in the absence of adversity: the heart of the resilience theory is the resilience processes that mediate adversity and outcomes. Van Breda also insist on understanding these resilience processes to better inform policy and practice rather than understanding adversity only (ibid.). Thus, when the resilience theory is applied intelligently and critically, it can help open up new understandings of how people in a resource-constrained environment work for their growth and development, and how to mobilize social structures of inequality and opportunity to cultivate a society that cherishes social flourishing (ibid.).

This study employed the resilience theory, in support of the empowerment theory, to explore the capacity of former street youth to withstand challenges faced after graduating from rehabilitation centres. The resilience theory complements the empowerment theory since it supports the perspective that persisting in the face of difficulties is a spirit that can be promoted by an individual him/herself regardless of any support to improve one's own livelihood. In this context, the theory assisted in identifying coping activities of former street youth after graduating from RCs, allowing an investigation of family and community experiences to generate incomes for livelihood improvement and self-reliance.

Methodology
This descriptive longitudinal research design used quantitative and qualitative research methods involving participants who were former street youth, parents, and youth without street life experience, plus officials of the National Rehabilitation

Service (NRS), rehabilitation centres (RCs), City of Kigali (CoK) authorities, and NGOs. Former street youth included male and female youth who had been on the streets in three districts of the CoK (Gasabo, Kicukiro, and Nyarugenge); and continued to reside in Kigali after graduating rehabilitation programs at RCs. A total of 433 respondents were recruited from a population of 5,364 using convenience sampling to investigate the challenges facing former street youth who had graduated from RCs in Rwanda. These comprised 365 former street youth (275 males and 90 females) determined by Slovin's formula; as well as 20 parents, 33 youth without the experience of street life, and 15 officials/representatives. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data, while qualitative data were gathered through group interviews (GIs), participant observation, personal interviews (PIs), and key informant interviews (KIIs).

In addition to the NRS and its RCs, other participating individuals and institutions included private RCs (Centre Marembo and AERA Ministry) located in Kigali. The NRS is the government institution established in response to law No. 17/2017 of 28/04/2017 with the overall mission of eradicating all forms of deviant behaviours by instilling positive behaviours, and educating and providing professional skills. This study focused on the NRS headquarters located in Karongi District, Western Province, and its Gitagata RC in Bugesera District (Eastern Province), Iwawa RC in Rutsiro District (Western Province), and Nyamagabe RC of Nyamagabe District (Southern Province).

Results and Discussion
The study results revealed 12 challenges facing former street youth who graduated from RCs in Rwanda, including poor availability of jobs and income-generating activities, the lack of financial and material support, the lack of networking opportunities with service providers, family and community mistrust, difficulties of joining ongoing community development programs, the lack of follow-up, centralized and insufficient NRS staff, empty promises, insignificant interventions to fight the reasons behind the phenomenon of street youth, dependency culture, unrecognized certificates, and the lack of internship programmes. These challenges are discussed under the sub-sections of respondents' characteristics. Some of the results were obtained from both quantitative and qualitative data, while others were extracted from qualitative information only.

Respondents' Characteristics
Former male street youth were slightly over-represented in the study at 75.3% (*n*=275); while 24.7% (*n*=90) of the participating former street youth were female. This reflects greater visibility of males over females in street situations, and indicates a greater likelihood of help-seeking among males (Coren et al., 2016). Records from public RCs show that the first intake for males graduated in 2011, while that of females graduated from 2019. One of the participating private RCs revealed that the first graduation for females was in 2019, but another did not divulge this information.

The dominating age group for former street youth respondents was 26–30 years old (35.3%, *n*=129); 31–35 years old (29.6%, *n*=108); and 20–25 years old (26.3%, *n*=96). The results show that the majority of former street youth respondents were still in the youth age/category as indicated by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (2017). Here, the implication is that policy makers, planners, and job providers should consider former street youth with a view to recognizing their potential in terms of long-lasting contributions to development as they still have many working years.

All former street youth respondents had been on the street in Kigali, and had graduated from public RCs: Iwawa (74.2%, *n*=271), Gitagata (12.3%, *n*=45), and Nyamagabe (1.1%, *n*=4)). Those from private RCs were from Centre Marembo (7.1%, *n*=26), and AERA Ministry (5.2%, *n*=19) (see Figure 1).
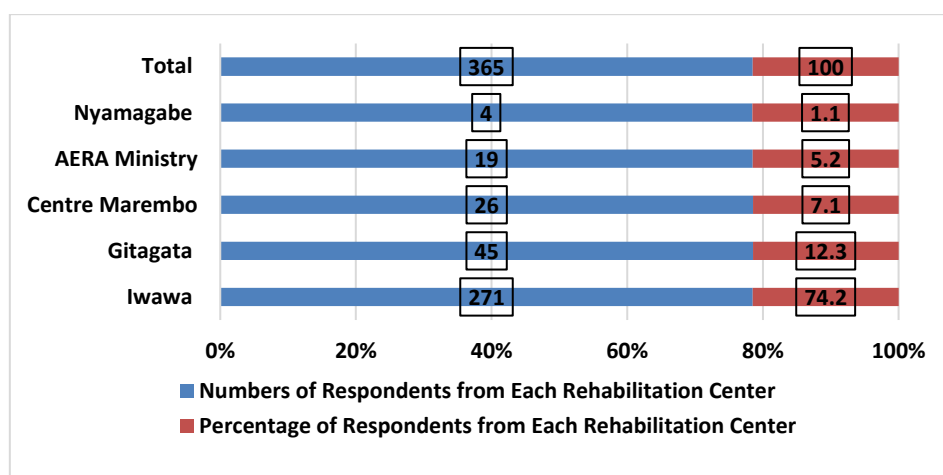

Figure 1: Former Street Youth Respondents and Rehabilitation Centres
Source: Field Survey (2021/2022)

Table 1 indicates 15 official participants for the PIs, including 4 from the NRS and its Gitagata, Iwawa, and Nyamagabe RCs: 6 from CoK, 2 from private RCs (Centre Marembo and AERA Ministry), and 3 from NGOs: Hope Ethiopia Rwanda (1) and Abadacogora-Intwari (2). Overall, 8 interviewees were males and 7 were females; out of whom 6 held Master's degrees, 5 held Bachelor's degrees, 2 held PhDs, 1 held a postgraduate diploma and 1 was educated up to high school certificate.

Table 2 illustrates the spread of the 129 participants for the 14 GIs, 5 PIs, and 4 KIIs from Gasabo (45), Nyarugenge (45), and Kicukiro (39) Districts. Overall, there were 66 participants who were former street youth in 10 GIs; while 5 participated in the PIs. Additionally, 33 youth without street life experience and 20 parents participated in 3 and 1 GIs, respectively; and there were 5 participants in 4 KIIs.

Table 1: Officials' Characteristics

Institution	Institution Type	No.	Sex	Position	Educational Attainment
NRS	Government	1	M	Ag. Director of Social and Health Rehabilitation Unit	Master's
Gitagata RC	Government	3	M	Training Director	PGD
Iwawa RC	RCs			Ag. Coordinator	PhD
Nyamagabe RC				Ag. Coordinator	Master's
CoK	Government	6	F (4)	Sector Executive Secretary	PhD (1)
				3 Sector Social Affairs Officers	Bachelor's (3)
			M (2)	Social Protection Officer at CoK	Master's (1)
				Cell Executive Secretary	
					Bachelor's (1)
Centre Marembo	Private RC	1	F	Executive Director	Master's
AERA Ministry	Private RC	1	F	Legal Representative	Master's
Hope Ethiopia Rwanda	NGO	1	M	Transitional Support Officer	Master's
Abadacogora-Intwari	NGO	2	F	Coordinator	Bachelor's
			M	Social Worker	High school + training
Total		**15**			

Source: Author's construction

Table 2: Participants in GIs, PIs, and KIIs
City of Kigali (CoK)

	Gasabo District		Kicukiro District		Nyarugenge District	
Tools	*Number*	*Participants*	*Number*	*Participants*	*Number*	*Participants*
Former Street Youth						
GIs	5	28	3	24	2	14
PIs	2	2	2	2	1	1
Youth (without street life experience)						
GIs	1	13	1	12	1	8
Parents						
GIs	0	0	0	0	1	20
Key Informants						
KIIs	2	2	1	1	1	2
Total	**10**	**45**	**7**	**39**	**6**	**45**

Source: Author's construction

Different challenges facing former street youth were identified from the respondents when they were asked about the livelihoods of former street youth and the opportunities that such individuals had to improve themselves. Many former street youth confirmed having received no assistance from any source (Munyeshema, 2015). Moreover, Ndabaga and Bahizi (2022) found that incomplete family/community re-unification processes and rejections were among the contributory factors in former street youth relapsing. This research sought to investigate the challenges facing former street youth. These challenges are discussed below.

Challenges Facing Former Street Youth
Unavailability of Jobs and Income-generating Activities
Though 83.1% (*n*=260) of former street youth respondents had pursued TVET courses after making their own choices, 70% (*n*=222) had jobs or were involved in income-generating activities that required different skills to those acquired from the TVETs undertaken at RCs, while (17.3%, *n*=62) did not have a source of income. Very few with jobs/income-generating activities (30.2% (*n*=83) of males and 7.8% (*n*=7) of females) were happy and very satisfied; but a large number were complaining of delayed livelihood improvement because of very low incomes. Overall, 72.2% (*n*=241) earned less than US$50 per month, while 47.7% (*n*=174) affirmed that they have had no opportunity to improve their livelihoods. While they had graduated from rehabilitation programs psychosocially prepared, they were not skilled and capable enough materially as well as financially. This supports the assertion that rehabilitation programs have poor capacity to impart adequate community and societal integration skills to former street youth (Ochanda, Gebremichael & Wamalwa, 2011).

A particular issue was faced by 34.8% (*n*=31) of female former street youth, who confirmed that they lacked employment and income-generating opportunities/ activities because they had graduated without TVET skills; with only psychosocial rehabilitation support. Their challenge was that they only had the benefit of psychosocial rehabilitation support unaccompanied with TVET skills to improve their livelihoods. The study established that the first females' intake in 2019 (from Gitagata RC), had only received psychosocial rehabilitation. In total, 50% (*n*=45%) of former females street youth respondents had graduated from rehabilitation programs at Gitagata RC. This finding relates to the findings of Abbott and Batoni (2011: 4), which revealed limited productive work opportunities for former street youth entering the labour market as a result of being poorly educated and lacking employability/income-generating skills. Hence, RCs should provide rehabilitation programs that at the same time offer work skills that will benefit former street youth after graduation. In addition, the findings suggest the need for special consideration for former street youth in available job/income-generating opportunities.

Lack of Financial and Material Support
Many former street youth respondents (66%, *n*=241) were facing issues related to the lack of financial and/or material support. They were still struggling to use the knowledge and skills they had acquired at RCs because they had no relatives, friends or supporters to provide them with any assistance. The GIs revealed that, due to this unstable livelihood situation, any setback might lead them back onto the street again. The respondents suggested that support should be provided immediately after graduation to avoid delays in opportunities for street youth to work to improve their livelihoods. Abbott and Batoni (2011: 35) found a need for reintegration support or special capital investment in start-up enterprises as it is uncertain if skills learnt at RCs can help former street youth to reintegrate without financial support.

Participant observation indicated that, when receiving former female street youth from Gitagata RC in December 2021, an NRS official urged them to initially go on the ground and study the situation, and then decide what to consequently do. However, the group interviewees were in need of immediate financial/material support to start small businesses and utilise their acquired skills straightaway.

> *After pursuing culinary arts, I intend to implement what I was taught. But I cannot promise to make it because I need material support to be able to improve my livelihoods, my family wellbeing, and later contribute to my country's development. I need things like a cooking stove, fridge, and ingredients to start a self-employment activity as soon as possible before forgetting what I was taught and advised. The more I delay starting, the more I forget the acquired skills and knowledge* (GI on 30 December 2021, Gitega Sector/Nyarugenge).

Over a period of three months, the study observed some of the graduates back on the street. They confirmed that they had been involved in prostitution as a means of survival in the same way they did before rehabilitation:

> *I returned into street prostitution because I haven't been supported to implement the hairdressing skills acquired from Gitagata. …[there are] no other means to survive: I only have a mother who is poor, and I am supposed to support her instead. On the street, at least I can get food. They never gave me something that can prevent me from returning to the street. TVET skills were one thing very important, but support is another thing to sustainably solve my issue. I know I am risking to be retaken to a RC, and if this happens, I will accept* (PI with a female a former street youth on 3 March 2022, Gatenga Sector/Kicukiro).

A male respondent recounted a similar situation:

> *After rehabilitation, I immediately returned on the street for one year because of no support to find a job. On the street, I got informed about this cooperative … I joined it but still continued living on the street. I used to come here leaving the streets during the daytime, and sleep under a bridge during the night because I did not have a home. At Iwawa, I pursued masonry. I joined this carpenters' cooperative without any notion on carpentry. Colleagues trained me on carpentry. While gaining new skills, I was paid and started renting a house. That is how I came off the street. I suggest that the Iwawa RC and NRS to look for possible means of supporting new graduates at least with the basics to prevent them from returning to the street* (GI on 24 February 2022, Kacyiru/Gasabo).

A youth who had never been on the street also emphasized the need for immediate support:

> *Before sending former street youth back home after rehabilitation, rehabilitation centres must first ask them the support they need that can prevent them from returning to the street. However, they do not do this …. they send them without support and follow-up; without considering what will happen after rehabilitation* (GI on 17 May 2022, Gitega Sector/Nyarugenge District).

Lack of Networking with Service Providers
This study found that the lack of networking with service providers limited the capacity of former street youth to generate incomes. Overall, 58.4% (*n*=213) former street youth respondents suggested that it would be helpful to connect them with service providers including jobs, banks, refresher courses, etc. Some needed

connections with hiring companies/institutions to find employment, banks/micro-finance institutions to start small businesses, and further training to sharpen/advance their TVET skills. Some RC officials also agreed with this suggestion:

> *Usually, we help them to find jobs, or they find jobs for themselves. But we are thinking of grouping them according to the TVET courses they have pursued so that they can implement them together. They can look for start-ups … helping them to look for it is better than letting them return to the community and arrange themselves to find what to do* (Centre Marembo Interviewee on February 4, 2022, Ndera Sector/Gasabo District).

The implementation of the above suggestions would result in the same positive impact as Currie (2011) found about the links program which increased understanding and acceptance of former street-involved youth and youth in the community, fostered supportive relationships, and enhanced knowledge and skills. One of the problems was that service providers ask for a lot of requirements that are beyond the capacities of former street youth. Getting a loan from a bank requires collateral which former street youth lack; while training institutions require training fees that these youth do not have. The Business Development Fund (BDF) supports projects for former street youth with a collateral of 75%, requiring the youth to pay 25%. This 25% was still hard to afford by most former street youth respondents. Although the respondents highlighted the importance of financial and/or material support, the NRS described the unwillingness of some of the youth to contribute in the assistance:

> *The BDF gives money [grant/fund] to the former street youth who can contribute with 25% [of the grant], as a condition in training/preparing them to work with financial institutions. The issue is that former street youth don't want to play their role, some want to be supported 100%. They have a misunderstanding that this is their donation from the President of Rwanda and do not have to contribute anything* (NRS interviewee on March 8, 2022, NRS HQs/Karongi District).

Related to the above issue is the observation by Erangey et al. (2020) that young people experiencing street life/homelessness are often worried about engaging with conventional service systems as a result of prior maltreatment by providers and others in their lives, along with the stigma/discrimination linked with accessing services. However, the NRS emphasised the need for contributions from former street youth to improve their livelihoods. The NRS further claimed that while some former street youth had tried their best to improve their welfare and failed, some had made no efforts to do so at all: they were just complaining and waiting for support to start improving their livelihoods. Willingness to improve was found to be an important factor, but when support was discussed, as in the section above, it was still found to be more important. Although the BDF has supported projects for some former street youth (cooperatives and individuals), it was criticised for setting conditions for former street youth participants to get grants/funds; like the condition that they should be graduates from TVET schools or universities. It was found that BDF services were not easily accessible to many former street youths. The BDF needs to give special consideration to this particular vulnerable group of youth to offer financial empowerment and resilience enhancement.

Family and Community Mistrust

The findings revealed that 39.2% (*n*=143) of former street youth respondents had experienced family and/or community mistrust. Some respondents confirmed that they were unable to make livelihood changes, and/or were unable to satisfy their basic needs because of family and community mistrust: some parents often continued to perceive them as they did when they were living on the street. One respondent said:

> *…we need parents and the community to engage in caring and supporting us after graduating from RCs because they don't trust us. They think we can misuse their support. We tell them that we have changed but they do not trust us at all* (GI on 21 December 21 2021, Ndera Sector/Gasabo District).

Another stated:

> *In the community, there is no trust in us. You can go to rent a house, and the landlord denies you because s/he was told that you were a prostitute; and thinks that you will damage his/her house because of misunderstandings that might occur between you and sex partners* (GI on 11 January 2022, Bumbogo Sector/Gasabo District).

One participant advanced that parents did not care much or trust the youth:

> *… who had lived full-time on the street because they had earlier done their best to prevent them from engaging in street life, to no avail … the youth had ended up becoming street youth until they got admitted into RCs* (Abadacogora-Intwari interviewees on 25 February 2022, St Famille/Nyarugenge District).

The lack of community and/or family trust to former street youth is related to an incomplete process of taking them from the streets to transit centres (TCs), TCs to RCs, and then finally to the family/community. Mistrust was found to be rooted in the way RCs (do not) communicate with the community/family about the youth under rehabilitation programs; and how they communicate with the youth about what the family and/or community say/think about them. Families that had not been properly communicated with were said to mistrust former street youth; and former street youth who had not been in communication with their families to prepare them for re-union with their families were reported as not feeling being free in their families/communities. This finding is in line with Shah, Graidage and Valencia (2005: 7) and Noh (2018), who maintained that a successful promotion of psychosocial well-being of former street youth is best achieved through considering community participation in all aspects of programming, youth participation and empowerment, economic incentives, skills development, spiritual development, and counselling for both the youth and their families.

Difficulties of Joining Ongoing Community Development Programs

A few former street youth respondents (11.5%, *n*=42) confirmed that they had joined ongoing community development programs (cooperatives, savings groups, BDFs, etc.). The GIs found that it was difficult for former street youth to join/start

cooperatives or saving groups because they did not fulfil the set requirements. Joining saving groups -- which is easier than joining cooperatives -- was also found to be difficult. Saving groups are usually made up of people who have the same occupation or something in common; here, members contribute an agreed amount of money over an agreed regular period, which is then handed to one or more group members for their use. However, membership to these groups has its conditions. For example, some former street youth in Gahanga Sector needed to join the Bicycle Riders *[Abanyonzi]* Association savings group. However, it was not possible to join the association and its members' savings group without having a bicycle. Also, some savings groups are made up of individuals who have organized themselves based on knowing each other. Such kinds of groups require community trust towards former street youth; and also former street youth need to convince them that they have changed their behaviours to be accepted into such groups. Group members must trust one another, and successful savings groups are those whose members never betray their trust.

Joining a cooperative requires an individual to pay a capital share in line with what has been paid by every member since the cooperative started. Equally, starting a cooperative involves certain procedures and requirements that cost money, which many former street youth cannot afford. The need for support to join cooperatives was insisted by a former street youth who had been assisted to join one:

> *Other districts can also form cooperatives of former street youth … so that new graduates can join immediately instead of giving them RF2000 [2$] only as transport to their families. Where are you sending them? Are you sure they have homes or they are able to rent houses? With RF2000, one can instantly buy beers and return to the street the same evening* (GI on 24 February, 2022, Kacyiru Sector/Gasabo District).

The study identified 112 former street youth working in four (4) youth cooperatives consisting of 161 members in Kigali. Cooperatives have given former street youth job opportunities, like in Kacyiru Sector (Gasabo District), and Nyabugogo National Car Park (Nyarugenge District); and this has helped them to improve their livelihoods.

> *One can't go below RF5000 [5$] per day, although our daily incomes depend on the situation … I can sign a RF100,000 contract to deliver furniture to you in three hours … When I am done in two hours, I can earn additional RF50,000 or RF20,000 per day through signing other contract(s). Incomes depend on the client or deal.* (GI on 24 February 2022, Kacyiru Sector/Gasabo District).

Generally, cooperatives are one of the most significant community development programs that have transformed the lives of the Rwandan population. Harelimana and Mukarukaka (2021) estimate that, in Rwanda, there are 10,025 cooperatives with 4,872,729 members; and a capital share of RF49,797,022,184. These have contributed much to poverty reduction, especially by supporting job-creation and

providing financial security. Nevertheless, former street youth in cooperatives were still few in number, not because of their unwillingness, but mostly because of financial constraints. Of the 5,044 rehabilitated graduates, only 439 had been reintegrated: 72 in cooperatives, and 365 in other jobs (*New Times*, 2019). This study found that some former street youth wished for support to pay the basic shares to allow them to integrate with existing or start new cooperatives or saving groups because without support they did not have the financial capacity. The government has offered very little support in this area, while many respondents were still waiting for support. The government needs significant stakeholder engagement to empower former street youth to integrate themselves in community development activities/programs.

Lack of Follow-Ups
Only 24.9% (*n*=91) of former street youth respondents confirmed having experienced follow-ups as one type of opportunity to improve their livelihoods. Most former street youth need support in terms of follow-ups to sustainably live in the community.

> *Those who got accompaniment or a follow-up by the government, their livelihoods are better. For those who did not, theirs are not good; they have returned into recidivism, and their situations have become worse … they are gangsters, prostitutes, etc*. (Centre Marembo Interviewee on 4 January 2022, Ndera Sector/Gasabo District).

However, NRS explained that this lack of follow-up was due to various factors:

> "…*rural-urban migration, many* [street youth] *return to Kigali, as Rwandans have the right to live wherever* [they want] *in the country, …*[so] *follow-up becomes difficult. You can't blame anyone*" (NRS Interviewee on 8 March 2022, NRS HQs/Karongi District).

Since most former street youth (87.6%, *n*=320) had graduated from rehabilitation programs provided by government RCs (Iwawa, Gitagata and Nyamagabe RCs), it is recommended that the government should play a proactive role in follow-ups to ensure that these graduates remain sustainably in their families/communities.

Centralized and Insufficient NRS Staff
Nonetheless, the study found out that the insufficient number of NRS staff partly contributed to the lack of follow-ups on program graduates. Nationwide, the NRS has one staff member coordinating reintegration activities in the Kigali, Eastern, and Northern Provinces; while another coordinates activities in the Southern and Western Provinces. Rwanda's local administrative entities are based on the levels of village, cell, sector, district, province/CoK, and lastly on the Ministry of Local Government. The NRS needs permanent staff at least at the sector level to ensure easy collaboration/involvement with parents, communities, local NGOs, and local leaders to see to it that former street youth reintegrate successfully. One social affairs staff at a sector level was found incapable of handling (former) street youth issues as s/he is always overloaded with all associated social issues.

Empty Promises

The study noted complaints of empty promises by government leaders when visiting street youth at RCs, which were seen as a lack of support, as revealed in one GI:

> *We asked the local government minister, in his visit at Iwawa, whether there is equipment support relating to TVET courses we were undertaking … He replied that he was going to discuss with the district mayors, and that when we graduate everything will be ready; and advised us not to misuse the support … But, on graduation, it was different. For us from Kicukiro, we were met at the Kicukiro Sector. After dinner, they gave us certificates only … leaders do not tell us the truth* (GI on 8 February 27 2022, Gahanga Sector/Kicukiro District).

Districts are responsible for creating opportunities, providing equipment, grouping former street youth in cooperatives or groups, linking connections with service providers, and making follow-ups to help the former street youth generate incomes. During fieldwork, we found the Lord Mayor of the City of Kigali, along with the District Executive Administrators (DEAs) of Gasabo, Kicukiro and Nyarugenge had visited the Iwawa RC. The intention was to witness and discuss the rehabilitation programs being undertaken; and look into what needed to be improved so that former street youth from Kigali could be well reintegrated in the society to improve their livelihoods and contribute to the development of Kigali after graduation. Former street youth from Kigali were clustered into three groups to discuss with the DEAs the issues and worries they wished to be addressed for successful reintegration. However, nothing meaningful came out of it. It was revealed that various government officials visit each intake at different times for the same purposes, but with the same results; with government budget constraints being pointed out as the key barrier to making promises a reality.

Insignificant Interventions to Fight the Root Causes of Becoming Street Youth

This study perceived that street life results from critical livelihoods and situations of social relations amongst the Rwandan family and/or community, which lead children and youth onto the streets. However, the study findings revealed that socio-economic issues that led youth onto the street were not addressed during rehabilitation programs. The qualitative findings show that such issues included youth unemployment, family poverty, large families, irresponsible parents, peer groups, effects of the 1994 Tutsis genocide, school dropouts, unwanted pregnancies, and drug/alcohol abuse; and that some of these problems that had pushed the youth onto the streets were still prevalent. The study results demonstrated significant interventions and/or efforts dealing with the *effects* of the street youth issue amongst the youth at RCs, with less efforts/focus on fighting the *root causes* of the problem in families and the community at large. According to RC officials, the unresolved issues result in unsuccessful reintegration of former street youth, and then recidivism.

> *It is really challenging to support street youth with nothing done for their families that are the source of the issue … reaching families requires many means we don't have. …supporting a person to the extent that s/he takes measures to do the best for resilience after rehabilitation programs, and then you find her/him there again, is very challenging. You get discouraged and feel you have done a null work* (PI with Nyamagabe RC Coordinator on 2 April 2022, Nyamagabe District).

One GI with a youth with no street experience revealed:

> … *families are not ready to receive former street youth because of poverty … Parents and family empowerment and involvement is still at low levels to expect a successful reintegration* (GI on 17 May 2022, Gitega Sector/Nyarugenge District).

The numbers of youth without a stable family to support them are higher in Rwanda compared to many other countries due to the effects of the 1994 Tutsis genocide (Abbott & Batoni, 2011: 4). Family instability in terms of relationship between husbands and wives, or parents and children, was also found as one of the major causes of street youth. For the sake of solving this persisting problem *[street youth]*, family therapies are likely to be effective in cases of substance use; and cognitive behavioural therapy-based interventions when dealing with cases of depression, as recommended by Noh (2018). In fact, the study found that parents, families and communities are not prepared socially, psychologically, and financially to welcome and receive former street youth when they graduate from RCs. Some parents do not even know what happens at RCs. One of parents stated critically:

> *The government doesn't support them after graduation, and it doesn't support us as well. They really come in at a situation in which we both need support. That is why we are unable to support them. Sometimes parents are said to be irresponsible, but it is wrong. Financial capacity is an issue for many families of these youths* (GI on 16 May 2022, Gitega Sector/Nyarugenge District).

Some former street youth reported financial incapacity of their parents to satisfy family needs to have often led them to the streets at an early age; and that they were still encountering the same situation after graduation from RCs. Likewise, family conflicts were still the common challenges facing former street youth in terms of receiving support from their parents/relatives. Family poverty, large families, and conflicts were mentioned in the GIs conducted in Kigali, and at the Nyamagabe RC. One former street youth in Kigali testified to having returned to the street after disagreement between his father and stepmother on receiving him back and supporting him. Another at Nyamagabe RC *[still under rehabilitation]* was worried about what might happen to him if he returns home to live with his stepmother who had poisoned him. From the foregoing, RCs need to investigate and address individual cases of former street youth undergoing rehabilitation to ensure that graduates are sent back into a welcoming family/community environment. Also, the government should establish ways to provide rehabilitation programs to former street youth at RCs, while at the same time as handling family/community issues that led each individual into the streets. This will in turn ensure an effective street youth prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration. Family empowerment, strengthening existing strategies to alleviate poverty, resolving family conflicts, and mobilization of family planning are some of the recommended considerations for the government and stakeholders to address in the matter.

Dependency Culture
The results revealed a dependency culture among some former street youth who had no desire to contribute to improving their livelihoods: they were always waiting for outside support without making any effort of their own. However, NRS does not see the need to treat former street youth differently from other youth:

There are opportunities for former street youth as for all Rwandans in general. Why do they feel they need to be treated in a special way from other Rwandans? They are brought at rehab centres to learn how to eat a fish they have fished for themselves. They are brought back in the community where there are opportunities available for all Rwandans, and they are not excluded from those opportunities. Are they forbidden to benefit from a wetland, since other youth have activities in wetlands, because they have been rehabilitated? Are they mistreated on jobs differently from other youth? (NRS Interviewee on 8 March 2022, NRS HQs/Karongi District).

In a GIs with parents and youth who had not been on the street, it was confirmed that some parents were unwilling to support their children who were former street youth; thinking that it was the responsibility of the government to do it all. Also, some parents were accused of failing to satisfy the needs of their families due alcohol addiction. Therefore, the NRS encouraged a resilient spirit.

Rwanda is not Europe; we are struggling from scratch because of the 1994 Tutsi Genocide … There aren't sufficient means to help everyone. There is direct support for elders because they can't work. Do you think the scheme can be used for youth who can work? We can't support persons who don't want to contribute to their own well-being. One of the most important ambitions of rehabilitation is the spirit to live by using personal efforts. Last intake, 1585 graduated from Iwawa, and 885 from Nyamagabe. Imagine feeding them all at RCs, and to continue doing everything for them in their families… while at the same time taking care of newcomers at RCs. Do they think that this is possible for a developing country? (NRS Interviewee on 8 March 2022, NRS HQs/Karongi).

This statement is in opposition to Abbott and Batoni's (2011: 5) argument that without support after graduation from rehabs, there is a strong possibility of street youth recidivism. It was found difficult for many former street youth to improve their livelihoods without support, despite serious persistent efforts by some graduates to make it on their own.

Unrecognized Certificates
Certificates awarded to former street youth after graduating rehabilitation programs were not recognized and accepted by some job providers, which discouraged former street youth graduates of the programmes:

I was trained in masonry, but you can't apply for jobs with TVET certificate from IWAWA … Here in Kimironko, even the sector officials know … when building the sector office, we went there seeking for jobs, but got nothing. Even at other construction sites they don't trust us; they think that we don't have skills to deliver what they need, or mistrust us because of our previous street behaviours. This discouraged me; living in the community without income-generating activity is challenging … I tried again to seek for a job in two times, but the same thing happened. This forced me to commit crimes that landed me into jail. Thereafetr, I returned onto the street looking for life (GI on 5 March 2022, Kimironko/Gasabo District).

It was observed that some job providers doubt the capacity of former street youth to successfully perform job duties; misconceiving that the youth continuously need to live by vagrancy, delinquency, prostitution, drug using, street begging, and/or street vending as they had lived before rehabilitation programs: they do not trust the programs to have completely addressed the issues of street youth. Even if RCs

were found keeping on increasing human and material resources to improve psychosocial rehabilitation services and TVET courses, the certificates given to the program's graduates are not yet trusted by job providers to ensure the graduates' productivity at work. This might have resulted from there not being pedagogically and formally designed programs to offer to rehabilitees, critical incapability of the screening team whose majority of members are politicians with no sufficient skills and knowledge regarding street youth rehabilitation, an inappropriate methodological training approach, inaccurate training schedules and insufficient counsellors: all these are the major challenges affecting the effectiveness of street youth rehabilitation programs (Ndabaga & Bahizi, 2022; Nsanzimana, 2019). It is this that makes it difficult to effectively provide former street youth with adequate and appropriate knowledge and vocational education to reintegrate into society in compliance with the programs of the Rwanda TVET Board, the public institution overseeing a such education.

Lack of Internship Programmes
From their experience, some former street youth graduates recommended immediate support and internship opportunities to help them to acquire hands-on experiences that will consolidate their professional skills.

> *An immediate support would be very important if it is given to new graduates with minds that are still fresh, remembering everything acquired. Local leaders can establish places where we can immediately go to receive that support. It may be the sector offices, where they can link a person with former street youth who have graduated before. For instance, we can stay with them for six months, just to help on-the-job integration to practise what they pursued at RCs. Six months would be enough. This may also help us to live with the general community members, because as you know, at Iwawa we lived with persons/colleagues from streets. Otherwise, the same day [of graduation], officials send us back home without accompaniment, savings, or a place to stay. Thus, some of us have no other option but to return to the streets* (GI on 24 February 2022, Kacyiru Sector/Gasabo).

The above quote relates to the findings by Thulien et al. (2021), who stated that the life trajectories of youth, after exiting homelessness, face persistent social and economic struggles to successfully overcome homelessness and housing instability. Accordingly, a successful street/homeless youth rehabilitation "…*requires a consistent consideration of prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration activities*" (Abadacogora-Intwari interviewees on 25 February 2022, Saint Famille/Nyarugenge District), to prevent former street youth from recidivism; and also to prevent other youth from ending up on the streets.

Conclusion and Recommendations
The challenges facing former street youth who have graduated from RCs in Rwanda include unavailability of jobs and income-generating activities, lack of financial and material support, lack of networks with service providers, family and community mistrust, difficulties of joining ongoing community development programs, lack of follow-up, centralized and insufficient NRS staff, empty promises, insignificant interventions fighting the root causes of becoming street youth, dependence culture,

unrecognized certificates, the lack of internship programmes, in addition to the limited capacity of former street youth to start/join cooperatives or saving groups. Also, the Business Development Fund (BDF) was criticized for setting conditions for former street youth to get grants/funds, such as that they should be graduates from TVET schools or universities: conditions that they cannot meet. Thus, former street youth are found incompletely/partially empowered and resilient to improve their livelihoods. Many former street youth struggle to improve their livelihoods by acquiring jobs/ undertaking income-generating activities that are in different areas from the TVET skills acquired from rehabilitation centres, after long waits for unobtained support, while earning less than US$50 per month.

Pertaining to effective former street youth reintegration, the study recommends that RCs start involving parents, families and communities when former street youth are still undertaking rehabilitation programs to collaboratively handle issues that will such youth after graduation. Immediate support after graduation, and special consideration of former street youth in job/income-generating opportunities for them are highly recommended to enhance their empowerment and resilience for long-lasting livelihood improvement and self-reliance.

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