



## Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est / The East African Review

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Orphelins, enfants vulnérables et jeunesse violente

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### Introduction

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# Introduction

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- 1 This new issue of *Cahiers de l'Afrique de l'Est* follows the path opened by a previous issue on vulnerable children (46-1); it gathers some research papers presented in the workshops of Pau (2010) and Nairobi (2011) held under the French National Agency of Research program about "Child Victims, Vulnerable Children, 'Violent' Youth in East Africa (Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda): Realities, Perceptions and Care". The final conclusions presented at the Conference in Kampala in November 2012 will be the subject of subsequent publications.
- 2 These seven contributions contribute to a basic but necessary debate on the definition of "vulnerable children" and "youth". Concerning the "vulnerable child", the path is well marked through definitions and international standards (Orphans and Vulnerable Child-OVC) that each country adopts and singles out. Concerning the "youth", definitions are fluctuating, from teenager to young adult, and they reveal changes in practice and perception, with significant differences between countries and societies.
- 3 Respectively in Burundi and in Rwanda, Émilie Matignon and Gaspard Gaparayi analyze the recognition process of children's rights, the implementation of the recommendations made by the international Committee of the Rights of the Child (CRC), the implementation of public policies and the mobilization of political, social, national and international actors engaged in this path. They question the vulnerability-precarioussness of children but also the capacities of the states and civil society to address these problems inherited from immediate and dramatic history. However, as Gaspard Gaparayi underlines it, these issues are heavy socio-demographic challenges and a considerable burden for both countries' future. This problematic, discussed at a general level and through the studies cases of Burundi and Rwanda, is also the topic of Mildred Ndeda's paper which tackles the demographic dimensions of the orphans in Nyanza Province in Kenya, equally disastrous than the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. However, Mildred Ndeda uses a socio-anthropologic and participant observation approach, moving the analysis from a general scale, the societies' and states' capacities, to a local scale: following individuals trajectories, she

reveals a complex reality and feeds a debate about the capacities of communities, households and individuals and their resilience in facing such challenges<sup>1</sup>.

- 4 The last three communications are about youth in Burundi. By contextualizing historical, cultural and socio-anthropological changes, it reveals the acuteness of the problem of youth in Burundi. More structural than situational, this issue might also be generational, combining the universal challenges of the rise of youth and adolescence, and a specific challenge, the extension of the youth because of late marriages and the appearance of a new age group, the “young adults”. How do society and young people manage this revolution? What strategies, what behaviors, what resilience can be observed? These three communications provide nuanced answers, from the political use of young adults to innovative survival strategies, and from conflicts to the use of “traditional” family values. The Burundi case is not so different from its neighbors. All the papers raise questions on public policies that should be implemented—questions that are difficult to answer when it comes to their order of priorities and selection—in relation to children and/or young people.
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## NOTES

1. See E. Nyambedha « Practices of Relatedness and the Re-Invention of duol as a Network of Care for Orphans and Widows in Western Kenya », *Africa*, 77 (4), 2007 ; and E. Cooper, « Sitting and Standing; how Families are Fixing Trust in Uncertain Times », *Africa*, 82 (3), 2012.
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