

Children from across Rwanda have raised concerns over drug abuse, family conflicts and violence, saying the challenges are affecting their growth, education and future prospects.

The concerns were highlighted Thursday, Aug. 6, during the 18th National Children's Summit, which brought together more than 500 child representatives from sectors, districts, provinces and the City of Kigali, as well as representatives of children with disabilities and those living in refugee camps.



The children called on leaders, parents and communities to strengthen efforts aimed at protecting children and supporting their development.

Kelia Isimbi, president of the National Children's Forum, said children need continued support to overcome challenges that threaten their well-being.

"Leaders, we ask you to continue standing with us and promoting activities that support children's development, protect us and defend our rights," she said.

She urged continued action against issues affecting children, including drug abuse, violence, school dropout, family conflicts and alcohol abuse in some households.

Annet Mukabugingo, another child representative, said some children under the age of 18 are exposed to harmful environments, including spending time in bars, which can lead to behaviors that affect their future.

She said such challenges contribute to increased vulnerability among children and create obstacles to their education and development.

Assumpta Ingabire, director general of the National Child Development Agency (NCDA), said weak parental involvement remains one of the major challenges affecting children.

She said some parents do not give enough attention to raising their children, a situation that can contribute to school dropout, substance abuse and poor nutrition.

"The focus now is to equip parents with knowledge on how to prepare for parenthood and raise children responsibly," Ingabire said.

Gender and Family Promotion Minister Consolée Uwimana said the summit reflects Rwanda's commitment to ensuring that children's voices are heard in decisions affecting their future.

She encouraged children to remain focused on their dreams, saying they represent Rwanda's future workforce and leadership.

The National Children's Summit was established in 2004 to provide children with a platform to express their views, build leadership skills and participate in addressing challenges affecting their lives.

The annual forum has since become a key platform for promoting children's participation in Rwanda's development agenda.