



**WAPO WAPI
FOUNDATION**

**MODEL MISSING
CHILD FRAMEWORK**

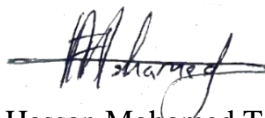
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Foreword

Every day, children go missing all over the world. However, addressing this issue requires a multi-agency response and coordination across various procedures, policy areas, and operational partners, including law enforcement, local authorities, and the health sector.

To address this issue, we, the Wapo Wapi Foundation, have adopted a model missing child framework from reputable organizations such as the International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children, AMBER Alert, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, Missing children and adults 'A cross-government strategy' UK, ASTRA, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our mission is to collaborate with different government authorities, law enforcement agencies, NGOs, and other agencies to reduce the occurrence of disappearances and facilitate the recovery of missing children.

As an organization, we are committed to making the world a safer place for all children, starting with our community in Tanzania. We will continue to work tirelessly to support the welfare of children and their families who may be left behind.



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1.0 Introduction

Children go missing every day around the world. Unfortunately, it is a global issue that lacks a global response. Despite the presence of significantly more mechanisms in place in some countries today, we still struggle globally as there is no consensus on how to define a missing child. While international legal instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provide a universal definition of how “child” is defined, there is no similar global consensus on how to define “missing child,” or on how to investigate cases involving missing or abducted children. The concept is largely dependent on the national context and cultural and social influencers.

This lack of global consensus makes it difficult to know the full extent of the problem and to determine the best ways to protect children from going missing or being abducted. To facilitate the more efficient investigation, management, and resolution of missing children cases, a robust, national missing child framework is necessary. Such a framework includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1.1 National legislation with a definition of “missing child”

To effectively address the issue of missing children, it is important to establish clear definitions at the national level to assist with internal processes related to reporting missing children and investigating such cases.

A proposed definition of a "missing child" is any person under the age of 18 whose whereabouts are unknown.

There are many different types of missing children cases, and each category requires a different, yet immediate, response. Therefore, it is critical that countries implement national policies delineating how the different cases will be investigated.

Sample categories include, but are not limited to:

1.1.1 Parental/Family Abduction:

The taking, retention, or concealment of a child or children by a parent, other family member, custodian, or his or her agent, in derogation of the custody rights, including visitation rights, of another parent or family member. This type of case often involves a custody dispute between parents, where one parent takes the child without the other parent's permission. These cases can be complicated because they often cross jurisdictional boundaries and may involve different legal systems.

1.1.2 Non-parental/ Non-Family Abduction:

This category can involve a range of scenarios, including abductions by strangers, acquaintances, or family members who are not the child's parents. Non-parental abductions can be particularly dangerous, as the abductor may have harmful intentions towards the child.

1.1.3 Runaway/throwaway:

This occurs when a child voluntarily leaves home and chooses not to return. A "throwaway" refers to a child who has been forced to leave home or has been abandoned by their parents or caregivers.

1.1.4 Abandoned or Unaccompanied Minor:

A child, not accompanied by an adult legally responsible for him or her, including those travelling alone without custodial permission, those separated by an emergency, those in a refugee situation, and those who have been abandoned or otherwise left without any adult care.

This list is in no way exhaustive, and should be developed to respond to local needs and context.

1.1.5 Unexplained disappearance:

In some cases, a child may simply disappear without any apparent reason or explanation. These cases can be particularly challenging to investigate, as there may be few clues or leads to follow.

1.1.6 Trafficking and exploitation:

This category includes cases where a child is taken and used for commercial purposes, such as sexual exploitation, forced labor, or organ harvesting. These cases can be especially heinous and require a coordinated response from law enforcement, social services, and other agencies to rescue the child and hold the perpetrators accountable.

1.1.7 Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing:

Children can become lost, injured, or otherwise incapacitated in a variety of settings, such as parks, shopping malls, or wilderness areas. When a child goes missing in these circumstances, time is of the essence in locating and rescuing them.

1.2 Role of Voluntary sector and Volunteers

Those working in the voluntary sector and youth workers in both statutory and voluntary services have experience in building trusted relationships with children. With their assistance,

additional services such as family mediation and specialist support for parents can often be provided. They can also play a role in engaging with children to develop a support package to meet their needs if they are at risk of running away.

2.0 A Reporting Mechanism

Countries should have a mechanism in place that allows the public to easily report a child missing and provide leads on a case. Our reporting mechanism will also provide educational materials/information to the public on the issue. This will be done through a dedicated toll-free hotline and a simple website working in conjunction with law enforcement and other investigative agencies.

The reporting mechanism will be:

- Available nationwide 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- Free of charge;
- Accessible to both children and adults; and
- Staffed by properly trained personnel.

There will be no waiting period to intake a report of a missing child, and a standardized intake form will be used to record all reports of missing children. Consideration will be given to implementing policies that protect the identity of anyone calling in to report a child missing and to maintain the confidentiality of the information that is reported, when appropriate.

Long-term sustainability is paramount to the success of the reporting mechanism and will be considered from inception. Whether a hotline or a website, basing the reporting mechanism on a Public-Private Partnership Model will have the potential to provide access to current technology and other resources to support the reporting mechanism.

Once the reporting mechanism is up and running, it will also serve as the platform for awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of public support to the success of missing children investigations.

3.0 Immediate investigation of missing children's cases

Time is of the essence when a child is reported missing. When a child goes missing, it may be an indication of other underlying issues or problems. Therefore, it is important that responses be well-coordinated and carried out so that each hour is used efficiently. A study conducted in the United States found that in the 735 cases of missing child homicides analyzed, 76.2% of

the children who died were murdered within the first three hours of going missing. In this context, it is crucial that the report of a missing child be taken immediately and that no waiting period exists either in written policy or in practice. The intake of the report will occur immediately, and the search will begin without delay. This is true even when missing children are believed to be runaways, as they too are at high risk for murder, sexual abuse, and exploitation, along with a whole host of other crimes. It is vital that no time is wasted as the risk of harm experienced by the child while missing increases with each passing hour.

4.0 Regulations regarding cross-border travel with children

It is crucial for Tanzania to have clear and comprehensive regulations regarding cross-border travel with children. Entry and exit procedures can prevent and deter potential abductions and trafficking, and can be linked to civil and criminal consequences for those who attempt to circumvent the system. These procedures may include requiring documentary evidence of the relationship between the adult and child, written or notarized permission from the legal guardian authorizing travel, and dual signature and physical presence requirements at the time of application for a minor's passport.

Furthermore, it is important to implement a database containing relevant entry and exit records, ideally integrated with missing children registries or databases. This will serve as a valuable tool for law enforcement in detecting potential cases of child trafficking and quickly identifying missing children.

5.0 A comprehensive database of missing and unidentified children

Experience has demonstrated that registries are incredibly useful in locating missing children, especially when a child crosses regional or national borders. In today's interconnected world with increased mobility, it is crucial that we are able to track these children. Therefore, we strongly recommend that countries establish a national registry that is accessible to and maintained by a central authority. This will enable the sharing of information across agencies, institutions, and jurisdictions, ensuring a coordinated and efficient response to missing children cases.

6.0 A case management system to organize and record case information

Case management systems are a critical aspect of any agency's work on missing children cases. A good case management system will track key information such as how many cases are being investigated and solved, where many cases are reported, who is in charge of each case and what

investigative actions have been taken. Such a system will also highlight repeat incidents (when a child goes missing on multiple occasions or repeated cases on a same area) and will enable the finding of appropriate interventions.

It is paramount that we have an adequate case management system containing as much information about the missing case as possible to ensure coordination across all fields and minimal confusion and/or duplication of efforts. It is also particularly important that essential information related to the investigation be available to every unit, agency and organization involved to ensure that every person working on the case has access to the same information.

Ideally, our case management system will include:

- Necessary missing child information including full name, body appearance, parent information, last seen location and last wearing clothes;
- Information on unidentified children in orphanages, shelters, day care centers, morgues and other relevant agencies;
- Mandatory review periods during which case information and investigations are updated;
- Case categorization based on the definition of "missing child";
- Periodic review of long-term missing children cases;
- Media activity;
- Details of other partners involved in the case; and
- When necessary, Biometric information, including DNA, fingerprints and dental records, of missing children and their families for cross-reference in cases where visual identification of the child may not be possible. DNA testing is very useful in helping to solve long-term missing children cases or "cold cases." These types of cases are often the hardest to solve as new evidence is difficult to find and witness testimony may become less reliable as time passes;

It is vital that all staff are trained on how to enter information into and retrieve information from the system.

7.0 Photo distribution system

To involve the community in the search and increase the chances of locating a missing child, each agency working on such cases should have a means of distributing the child's photo and description to the public. A well-established distribution system can provide law enforcement

with indispensable leads, bring widespread coverage to cases, and keep the missing child's information in the public eye until they are recovered.

A photo distribution system should include disseminating photos and vital information through various channels, such as:-

- Enlisting volunteers to hand out posters;
- Distributing information via email and fax to distribution lists;
- Issuing press releases;
- Sharing information with radio and TV stations and other media outlets;
- Displaying information on TV screens, in taxis, buses, hospitals, stores, train stations, etc.;
- Posting information on websites and social media networks; and
- Distributing information through our Wapo Wapi App.

Before distributing any information, it's crucial to acquire consent from the guardian of the missing child or the investigative agency and to consider the child's privacy. With new technology being developed every day, it's essential to establish procedures to remove any reference to a child once they have been recovered.

As part of our investigative strategy, we will consider whether or not to use media to generate publicity for a case, and determine whether or not publicity would be in the best interests of the investigation. We will also give consideration to which types of media, such as print, digital/online, or social media, to use and to what extent.

8.0 Responses and investigative procedures

Agencies that accept reports of missing children, whether they are law enforcement or NGOs, must have established policies or standard operating procedures in place that outline their response and investigative procedures. These procedures should include, but not be limited to:

- Receiving a report of a missing child and taking immediate actions to follow up on the report
- Interviewing potential suspects, family members, friends, and witnesses
- Developing an investigative strategy
- Identifying necessary resources and determining what resources are available to search for the missing child
- Collecting and managing forensic evidence

- Creating special procedures for children who are missing abroad
- Deciding when and how to activate response protocols
- Managing media involvement

It is essential that personnel responsible for these procedures receive regular training on them. When developing policies and procedures, it is crucial that each response is based on the assumption that the missing child is in danger until proven otherwise. Law enforcement should never dismiss reports of a missing child, and should always launch an investigation immediately, regardless of the child's age, race, gender, or the circumstances of their disappearance.

Therefore, it is vital that all police officers, detectives, and investigators are trained in how to handle a report of a missing child, including what to look for and what questions to ask of suspects, family, neighbours, and friends. Alternatively, specialized investigative units should be readily available to handle these cases.

8.1 Policies or standard operating procedures

Policies or standard operating procedures for missing children are guidelines that law enforcement agencies or NGOs follow when they receive a report of a missing child. These procedures are designed to ensure that all necessary steps are taken to locate the missing child and ensure their safety. They typically cover various aspects of the investigation process, such as:

- Establish clear criteria for determining when a child is considered missing and when they are considered endangered.
- Develop a standardized intake form for all relevant information about the missing child, their family, and the circumstances of their disappearance.
- Create a protocol for activating search and rescue teams and determining which resources are available and how they will be utilized.
- Establish procedures for sharing information with other agencies and neighbouring police departments.
- Determine when and how to involve the media and establish guidelines for managing media coverage.
- Provide support services to the family of the missing child and ensure that all personnel involved in the response receive regular training on relevant procedures and protocols.

Develop a plan for providing support services to the family of the missing child, including counselling and advocacy.

- Ensure that all personnel involved in the response to missing child cases receive regular training on relevant procedures and protocols.

These policies and procedures are crucial for ensuring a timely and coordinated response to missing children cases. They also help to ensure that all children are treated equally, regardless of their race, gender, age, or other circumstances. It is essential that all personnel responsible for handling missing children cases are trained in these procedures and receive regular updates to stay up-to-date with the latest best practices.

8.2 Essential personnel will be trained regularly on these responses and procedures

When establishing policies and procedures for reporting and investigating missing children, it is critical to assume that the child is in danger until evidence to the contrary emerges. We will collaborate with law enforcement and other agencies to initiate an investigation promptly, regardless of the child's age, race, gender, or circumstances of disappearance. To ensure effective response, it is essential that our staff receive training from police officers on how to handle a missing child report, including what to look for and which questions to ask suspects, family members, neighbours, and friends. Alternatively, we may engage specialized investigative units to provide expertise and support.

8.3 Pre –placement and admission to the Foster care and residential service

Foster carers and residential providers will receive a copy of the policy that must be followed in the event that a child goes missing. They will also receive basic training, supervision, and support to ensure they are equipped to implement the policy and develop skills to prevent children from going missing. Additionally:

- Each child in care must have a care plan that is based on a comprehensive assessment of their current and future needs, including any potential risk to themselves or others. The care plan must consider any risks associated with the child going missing and identify any factors that may increase the risk to the child in case they do go missing.
- Staff working in children's residential and fostering services should contribute to this assessment and specify the level of supervision that the child needs. The placement plan and the child's care plan should include all relevant risk information. As part of this assessment, it may be necessary for the local authority to consult with the police to share information.

- For children in care, a recent photograph that accurately represents the child must be kept on record. When a child enters care, the consent of a person with parental responsibility will be sought for a photograph to be used in any subsequent missing person investigation.
- The relevant local authority must ensure that sufficient knowledge and information about the child is recorded to enable carers to complete the missing person form should the child go missing.
- The residential unit manager or foster carer should consider the most appropriate ways to meet the above requirements and decide whether it is necessary and appropriate to discuss the possibility of the child running away.

9.0 Formal agreements between agencies involved in missing children investigations and child protection overall

These agreements will include the articulation of each organization's roles and responsibilities, as well as the jurisdiction and duties of each agency or organization to eliminate duplication of efforts and to ensure a comprehensive response.

These agreements also will include government agencies and other NGOs that are working with children and/or advocating for children's rights.

10.0 Community engagement programs to educate the public on a variety of missing children issues

Parents and guardians should be encouraged to report a missing child as soon as possible and not assume that the child will return home on their own, even if they have done so in the past. To help with the investigation, parents and guardians will be advised to keep up-to-date information about their children, including photographs, places the child frequently visits, and their height and weight, which can be provided to investigative agencies in the first few hours after the child goes missing.

In addition, parents and guardians will be informed about law enforcement responsibilities, as engagement with the community is crucial to the success of community programs and locating a missing child quickly. Law enforcement officers may provide prevention presentations to local school children and distribute Child Identity Kits, which include a recent photo, key data about the child, fingerprints, and possibly a biological sample of the child for DNA profiling if needed later.

By fully engaging the community in the official response, law enforcement can react more effectively, increasing the likelihood of a swift and successful recovery. To develop these policies, we have considered the role of the private sector, the capabilities of the community, and how we can collaborate with law enforcement, such as by receiving leads from the public, distributing photographs of missing children, or educating the public on the issue.

11.0 Rapid Emergency Child Alert System

After establishing the basic components for responding to missing child cases, the next consideration will be the implementation of a Rapid Emergency Child Alert System. In the United States, the AMBER Alert Program is a voluntary partnership between law enforcement, broadcasters, transportation agencies, and others, activating urgent bulletins in the most serious missing children cases (which only represent 1% of all such cases in the United States). The goal is to instantly mobilize the community to assist in the search and safe recovery of the missing child by providing detailed information on the child, the suspected abductor, and the suspect's vehicle.

The Rapid Emergency Child Alert System will be subject to strict criteria, such as:

- law enforcement believes the missing child is under 18,
- Missing child has been abducted or is in imminent danger of serious bodily harm,
- and there is sufficient information available to identify the child or the suspected abductor.

It's important to emphasize that the Rapid Emergency Child Alert System alone is not sufficient. Our organization, law enforcement, and relevant partner agencies must first establish a comprehensive response to reports of missing children, and the Rapid Emergency Child Alert System should complement the overall missing child response.

12.0 Prevention Framework

The Prevention Framework for missing children includes various measures to prevent and respond to cases of missing children. The framework also emphasizes the importance of multi-agency response and coordination to efficiently investigate, manage, and resolve missing children cases. The overall goal is to make the world a safer place for children and support missing children and their families.

12.1 Core component of Preventive Framework

We will develop a comprehensive prevention framework that integrates with relevant practices and areas. To guide the creation of this framework, we will have a clear understanding of the issue of missing children and child abduction, both domestically and regionally. We will also consider the effects that these experiences have on children and their families.

The prevention framework will ideally include several core components, such as:

- A public awareness campaign to increase understanding and inform communities about available resources and services.
- Delivery of educational and awareness campaigns to students and educators across all school levels.
- Training for border officers and other law enforcement on possible indicators of abduction and trafficking, including victim and perpetrator profiles.
- Incorporation of judicial mechanisms and tools, such as custody orders, protection orders, and safekeeping of passports by a neutral party, to help prevent and deter parental child abduction.
- Assessment of each reported missing case independently to understand the overall situation, risks involved, and take appropriate preventive measures.

12.2 Public awareness campaigns

To inform both adults and children of potential risks, public awareness campaigns can develop targeted safety materials, such as posters, educational games, short videos, and reading materials. It's important for private industry, civil society, and law enforcement agencies to collaborate and provide consistent prevention messages to the community. These materials can offer practical tips for parents and children to stay safe and avoid harm, including basic safety practices such as not opening doors for or accepting gifts from strangers, avoiding following unknown people/crowds, and not giving out personal information over the phone or internet, or approaching suspicious vehicles on the street.

Additionally, parents will be encouraged to maintain up-to-date identification and information on their children, including photographs, medical and dental records, and government-issued documents. We will also encourage parents to help their children memorize their full name and home address, their parents' full names and contact information, and relevant emergency resources.

12.3 Respond to a child who has been missing

The way professionals, including police officers and social workers, approach a missing child can significantly affect how the child engages with future investigations and protection planning. Despite appearing "streetwise," children who are missing may be extremely vulnerable to various risks. A supportive approach that involves actively listening and responding to a child's needs can greatly reduce the likelihood of the child going missing again and provide protection against other potential risks.

12.4 Independent return interviews

Independent return interviews present an opportunity to gather information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, address any dangers they may have faced while missing, and identify risk factors in their home. It's recommended that the interview takes place within 72 hours of the child's return to their home or care setting, in a neutral location where the child feels safe. An in-depth interview is usually best conducted by an independent person, someone not involved in caring for the child, who is trained to carry out these interviews and can follow up on any actions that arise. It's important to note that children may need to develop trust with the interviewer before discussing in detail why they ran away.

The interview and subsequent actions should:

- Identify and address any harm the child has experienced, including any that may not have been disclosed during the initial 'safe and well check', either before they ran away or while missing.
- Understand and attempt to resolve the underlying reasons for the child running away.
- Help the child feel secure and aware of their options to prevent future instances of running away.
- Provide them with information on how to stay safe in case they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers.
- The interview provides an opportunity to listen to the child's perspective and assess whether the child may run away again in the future.

13.0 Necessary support to strength mental wellness of family and missing child

Providing necessary support to strengthen the mental wellness of both the family and the missing child is crucial. Families of missing children experience high levels of distress, anxiety, and depression, and it's essential to provide them with support, including counselling and

practical assistance. The missing child may also experience trauma and may require mental health services to address any issues they may face. Mental wellness support can help families and missing children cope with the emotional impact of the situation and increase the likelihood of a positive outcome.

13.1 Family emotion and physical wellness

The impact of a missing loved one cannot be overstated. The emotional and physical toll caused by the uncertainty of their whereabouts and safety is enormous. Unfortunately, many families are left to bear this burden alone, without access to the support services they need.

To alleviate this burden, it is crucial for organizations involved in missing persons cases, whether they are law enforcement or NGOs, to have established standard operating procedures and policies in place. These protocols should not only cover the initial investigation but also the period following the resolution of the missing person case.

Families of missing children can also suffer financially, as search activities can be costly and time-consuming. In some cases, family members may have to leave their jobs or have difficulty finding employment following the disappearance of a loved one. Moreover, the emotional impact of a missing loved one can manifest in physical symptoms such as sleeplessness, stress, and deteriorating health, which can in turn impact the national healthcare system.

In conclusion, the impact of missing persons cases extends far beyond the individual involved. It is essential for organizations and agencies to have established **procedures** in place to address the emotional, financial, and physical impacts that can affect the families of missing persons.

13.2 Missing child emotion and physical wellness

Missing children are at real risk of harm while they are missing, and may suffer from mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. They may also be at risk of criminal activity or homelessness. It is important to note that repeatedly going missing from home can be a sign that a child is a victim of abuse or exploitation, including child sexual exploitation.

Children may run away from home for a variety of reasons, including problems at school or conflicts with family members. However, it is also possible that they have been groomed by predators and are running towards something, rather than away from something.

It is crucial to acknowledge the emotional impact on missing children and their families, who may experience shock, uncertainty, fear, guilt, and grief. These feelings can also lead to physical symptoms such as insomnia, stress, and deteriorating health.

Therefore, it is essential that we have ongoing support schemes in place, whether provided by law enforcement or NGOs, to help reunite missing children with their families and provide ongoing support to help them recover from the trauma of going missing.