

The African Report on Child Wellbeing 2008

How child-friendly are African governments?



The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) is a pan-African policy and advocacy centre on child rights. The ACPF was established with the conviction that putting children first on the public and political agenda and investing in their wellbeing are fundamental for bringing about lasting social and economic progress in Africa and its integration into the world economy. The work of the Forum is rights-based, inspired by universal values and informed by global experiences and knowledge. The Forum aims to provide a platform for dialogue; contribute to improved knowledge about the problems facing children in Africa; identify policy options; and strengthen the capacity of NGOs and governments to develop and implement effective pro-child policies and programmes.



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List of Acronyms

ACPF	The African Child Policy Forum
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ANC	Antenatal Care
ARD	Agriculture and Rural Development [World Bank]
ART	Antiretroviral Treatment
ARTI	Acute Respiratory Tract Infection
AU	African Union
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DEC	Development Economics Group [World Bank]
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EPI	Expanded Programme on Immunization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGM/FGC	Female Genital Mutilation/Female Genital Cutting
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NEPAD	The New Partnership for Africa's Development
NPA	National Plan of Action
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OVC	Orphaned and Vulnerable Children
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission
PREM	Poverty Reduction and Economic Management [World Bank]
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
TB	Tuberculosis
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNICEF, SOWC	UNICEF, The State of the World's Children Report
WDI	World Development Indicators [World Bank]
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

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Preface

This maiden report of The African Child Policy Forum is a response to the growing need to monitor and report the extent to which governments in Africa live up to their obligations to protect, respect and fulfil children's rights and ensure their wellbeing. It is a sober and forward-looking African initiative that highlights the continent's promising prospects, the formidable challenges it faces, and the way forward. Its aim is to encourage African governments to learn from each other, and to promote concerted action to capitalise on what has been achieved so far.

The report analyses responses to child wellbeing across Africa and highlights positive practices that can inform future action. Africa's political and economic environment is in the midst of rapid transformation. Peace is returning to many war-torn nations, and governance across Africa is improving. The pace of economic progress is unprecedented. These changes are having a positive impact on child wellbeing while providing the opportunity for a brighter future for all, across the continent.

On the legal side, African governments have ratified most of the relevant international and regional human rights instruments, and a number of countries have made significant progress in domesticating them. Many governments have increased their budget allocations to such sectors as health and education – which are crucial to the lives of children – and these efforts are paying off in the form of enhanced child wellbeing. Immunisation coverage has increased considerably, and near universal primary school enrolment is being achieved in many countries. Despite these achievements, the state of child wellbeing in Africa remains a major issue of concern. Thousands of children succumb to preventable deaths every day; a million babies are stillborn every year; millions of children are orphaned by HIV/AIDS and conflict; many more are victims of everyday violence and harmful traditional practices.

I recognise that there are no easy answers. The problems facing our continent are complex, but they are not insurmountable. This report shows what and how much can be achieved, even by countries with limited resources, if there is political will and commitment. So I urge and call to action our governments to put children first in their political and economic decisions. In particular, I call on them to combat child death by expanding access to public health; to invest in education and ensure quality schooling; to address the problem of orphanhood by exerting the maximum effort to make ART widely available; to adopt a policy of zero tolerance for violence against children; to adopt legal provisions that criminalise harmful traditional practices; to protect and provide for vulnerable children, including those with disabilities; and to provide and enforce the legal protection of all children.

I invite you all to pay attention to the findings of this report, and to join hands in improving the wellbeing of all our children in Africa.

Dr. Salim A. Salim

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Foreword

The African Report on Child Wellbeing is our contribution to putting Africa's children on the public and political agenda, and to holding African governments accountable to their international and constitutional obligations – and, ultimately, to their children. There are few reports that focus exclusively on children in Africa, and fewer still that assess the extent to which governments are child-friendly. Hence this report, the first of a series that The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) intends to publish biennially, to provide critical policy-oriented information and analysis, and to engage governments, the principal duty bearers for child rights and wellbeing.

This report provides an insight into the wellbeing of children and assesses the extent to which African governments meet their obligations, through a ground-breaking Child-friendliness Index developed by ACPF. This index will, we hope, be a useful tool of advocacy for national civil society groups, regional bodies and global organisations. The report also highlights good practices and pays tribute to outstanding achievements across the continent. We hope it will promote effective government – civil society dialogue and facilitate collective action for children.

The report shows that, despite the improvements made, there are still numerous problems facing Africa's children. Millions are dying of preventable diseases every year; millions more are denied education; and still many more are victims of daily violence at home, at school and in their communities. In addition, the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS creates many orphans and child-headed households. An incredible number of children suffer from one kind of disability or another, but many are kept invisible and hidden – all to our shame. This report is an honest attempt to call attention to these, and to the million others who have no voice. But it goes further, and provides evidence-based analysis and advice to African governments on priorities for action, and on the specific measures that can be taken to improve the wellbeing of Africa's children.

One last word. This report is quite unique. It is, to our knowledge, the first African report on Africa's children. This is surprising as much as it is unfortunate – it ought not to have been so. Yes, we are one world, and we should engage with it effectively. Yes, we should welcome and thank all those men and women of goodwill from around the world who, over the years, spoke for us and campaigned for and with us in the search for freedom and social justice in Africa and all around the world. Yes, we are part of that humanity, and, surely, our work is guided and inspired by universalism and internationalism. But we too have to play our part. We are fervent Pan-Africanists. We have to speak for ourselves. We have to have our own voice. This is not out of pride or a reaction. It is the rightful assumption of our own destiny and our own responsibility.

We honour our fathers and mothers past – indeed, all of the millions of African fathers and mothers who brought their children up so well in spite of the enormous difficulties they faced over the centuries. We say thank you to you all. And we owe it to you to cherish the good and the positive in African values, while combating those that are harmful and antithetical to the dignity of men and women throughout Africa. We will build on the past - a past for which, we acknowledge, we are primarily responsible for. Through knowledge, analysis, and reflection on who we are and why we are where we are, we hope to serve as the moral voice of Africa's children, and to build an Africa that can claim its future and assure the rights and dignity of all its people.

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