‘Accountability for Investment in Children’


DRAFT

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I. BACKGROUND

Member States of the African Union have long recognised that “children hold a unique and privileged position in society”. In 2001, the African Common Position on Children (the Declaration and Plan of Action Towards an Africa Fit for Children) was adopted at the first Pan African Forum on Children in Cairo. The Plan of Action comprised a wide range of policies and programmes for the protection and welfare of children. This was a prelude to the 2002 United Nation’s Special Session on Children.

In 2007, at the Second Pan African Forum on Children held in Cairo, Member States reviewed progress and challenges and adopted the Call for Accelerated Action Towards Africa Fit for Children (the “Call”) with a Plan of Action (2008-2012). The Plan of Action in particular focused on the following priority areas:

- Legislative and policy framework
- Institutional framework
- Mobilising and leveraging resource
- Enhancing life chance
- Overcoming HIV and AIDS
- Realising the right to education
- Realising the right to protection
- Realising the right to participation of youth and children

The Call also provided a framework for actions to be undertaken at all levels, including international and regional partnerships as well as proposals for follow-up and monitoring.

The African Union Commission was mandated at the Second Pan African Forum to develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that Member States can apply to report back to the Commission on progress made and challenges faced in the process of implementation. Consequently, the Commission developed the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework which was later adopted by Member States to monitor performance against the Plan of Action for Africa Fit for Children.

Despite limited responses to the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, the Commission has documented and analysed responses from 15 Member States and identified a number of areas in which Member States have made significant strides and noted challenges that need to be addressed.

In order to take stock of progress the AU has organised the third Pan-African Forum on Children (19-20 November 2012) under the theme ‘Accountability for Investment in Children’. One of the key objectives of the meeting is to promote and reinforce national actions for children through a Renewed Call for Action Towards an Africa Fit for Children for the coming five years.

II. THE STATE OF CHILDREN IN AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The draft State of Africa’s Children Report – 2012 of the AU and the assessment made on the basis of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework clearly show that considerable progress has been made across the continent especially in realising children’s rights to access to health and education. Increasingly, attention is also being given to the rights and welfare of vulnerable groups of children such as those with disabilities.

The economic outlook of Africa is promising where most Member States showed consistent growth over the last ten years. This provides additional resources that can be used to invest in children to improve their welfare. Furthermore, the fact that 46 Member
States have also ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and that almost all of them are State Parties to the Convention to the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a positive sign showing that children are increasingly gaining recognition in national agenda.

Notwithstanding the positive developments, children in Africa have been confronted with a series of challenges that are detrimental to their welfare. Political instability and the growing income inequality against a backdrop of prevalent harmful practices have rendered many of Africa's children vulnerable to a range of abuses thereby compromising their ability to attain their full potential and development.

Here below is a brief summary of progress and challenges since the mid-term review undertaken in 2007 on the priority areas of the Call.

**ENHANCING LIFE CHANCES**

- One of the main areas where Member States have made significant improvement is child survival. Under-five mortality rate, for example, has on average decreased by about 30 per cent in Africa from about 141 deaths per thousand children under five years of age in 2000 to 101 in 2010 (UNICEF; ACPF 2012). But the distribution of the global prevalence of child death is still heavily skewed towards Africa. Therefore strengthening health systems especially to address maternal, newborn and child health is a priority to enhance life chances.

- Member States have also made a considerable effort to improve access to clean water and sanitation which have been major causes of childhood illnesses that claim the lives of many children in Africa.

- Poverty reduction has been the main national agenda for most Member States and encouraging efforts are being made to reduce poverty and inequality in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Although moderate decrease in the level of poverty has been achieved, poverty and inequality continues to be hurdles for enhancing children's life chances. These are manifestations of inadequate investment in social protection and job creation to address the high level of unemployment and support economically disadvantaged families who in many cases tend to have large family sizes most of which are children.

**ADDRESSING DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION**

- Non-discrimination and equal protection before the law constitutes a basic principle relating to the protection of human rights including children's rights, and one of the four cardinal principles of the ACRWC and the CRC. Member States are making commendable effort to realise children's rights to non-discrimination through several initiatives including harmonising their national laws with the international and regional standards as well as by formulating policies that promote protection and equal opportunities for all children irrespective of their gender or their parent’s or legal guardian's race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, fortune, disability, birth or other status.

- Gender gap, for example, in access to education is increasingly narrowing in most Member States as a result of their efforts to address discrimination in access to basic services including health and education (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2012). Furthermore, attempt is being made by Member States, in collaboration
with civil society organisations and development partners, to improve access to basic services of vulnerable children such as those with disability and without parental care. But still, these vulnerable groups remain disadvantaged and more investment needs to be made to further narrow gaps through tailored programmes that specifically target them.

OVERCOMING HIV AND AIDS

- Prevalence rates of HIV infection and death rates due to AIDS have shown significant reduction in recent years largely due to concerted efforts of Member States, development partners, CSOs, the media and associations of persons living with HIV/AIDS. Recent data suggests that new HIV infections among adults has declined by about 26 per cent (UNAIDS 2011) and there is a similar trend among children as a result of improvements in access to services for prevention of transmission of the virus from the mother to the child during pregnancy, labour, delivery or breastfeeding.

- Significant increase in antiretroviral therapy coverage has also occurred in Africa in recent years. Between 2009 and 2010 alone, about 20 per cent increase was observed in the number of people with HIV who have access to the treatment in the region (UNAIDS 2011).

- However, there remains many challenges. Despite the increase in the coverage of antiretroviral therapy, there is wide disparity in the level by countries and by urban and rural residence. Africa is still confronted with challenges relating to HIV and AIDS and children continue to be the most affected. There is need to step up action to improve access to care and support; while at the same time strengthening national policies and programmes targeting the pandemic. Vulnerability to HIV and AIDS, if coupled with poor access to health care services can produce a significant burden of morbidity and mortality.

REALISING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

- Education is a fundamental right of children with immense implication on their development and life chances. Member States recognise children’s right to education and have committed to its realisation. To this effect, many Member States have put in place policies for free and compulsory universal primary education. On average, at least eight out of ten children do have access to primary school while some are nearing to achieve a universal access.

- But still, one in every five children on the continent does not have access to primary education. Even in countries where primary schooling is free, the ancillary costs can leave children in economically poor households at a disadvantage.

- Access to secondary and tertiary education is generally low in most Member States despite the effort being made to improve access at these levels. The gender gap is even higher at secondary level education and Member States need to enhance their commitment to invest in expanding secondary education, especially to marginalised communities where such services are currently inaccessible.

- Furthermore, quality of education is an important consideration over and above the national efforts to improve access. While available data tends to focus more on access, enrolment and retention, quality indicators such as the pupil-teacher ratio show that in some Member States the ratio goes as high as 75:1 (UNESCO
Such overcrowding and the lack of appropriate facilities like toilets and learning materials are among the factors that undermine the quality of education.

With regards to early childhood development, there are initiatives in some Member States to improve children’s access to early childhood education and healthcare programmes in view of its importance in enhancing children’s cognitive, social and emotional development. However, provision of early childhood care and development services is one of the neglected areas in most Member States and therefore effort needs to be made to improve children’s access to such services in order to enhance their cognitive development and strengthen early detection of impairments for treatment and care.

REALISING THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION

- The protection of children from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and harms is a human rights imperative provided for in the ACRWC, CRC and other relevant international and regional human rights instruments. Member States are exerting effort to realise children’s right to protection through measures encompassing legal and policy reforms. Establishment of child justice systems in some Member States is testimony to such efforts.

- Physical, emotional and sexual abuse and exploitation have become common phenomenon in the life of millions of Africa’s children (ACPF 2010). It occurs at home, at school, on the street and in institutions. The risk to abuse and exploitation is even higher among children with disabilities, girls and children without parental care. Member States need to therefore pay special attention to these highly vulnerable groups of children and develop strategies to reduce their vulnerability and improve access to legal and psychosocial services.

- Protection of children against abuse and exploitation is an uphill task due to several economic, social and cultural factors. It involves a broad range of actions that entail legal reform, setting up of functional child protection systems at community level and addressing attitudinal barriers that contribute to the practice.

- In the African context, child protection is not given the attention it deserves. In many cases, it is not incorporated in national development plans and often misses out in budget allocation. Many child protection initiatives have failed due to lack of both human and financial resources. It is high time that Member States prioritise child protection in their development endeavours and commit themselves to provide the necessary legal, administrative and political support to enhance the realisation of children’s right to protection and create violence-free environment for them at all levels.

REALISING CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

- There is a growing awareness on children’s right to freedom of expression, their right to be heard and the importance of their participation in decisions that affect them. In addition to being an achievement in its own accord, children’s and youth participation is one mechanism of enhancing effectiveness of interventions targeting them.
While child participation programmes have been initiated by a number of Member States, often supported by civil society organisations, more comprehensive child-centred participation mechanisms are lacking. Unfortunately, children's rights to freedom of expression and their views to be taken seriously are the least realised in the African context. Though there are efforts to establish children's parliaments and nurture child-led initiatives, meaningful participation of children in decisions at all levels remains unsatisfactory. More effort needs to be made to increase children's access to information and initiate programmes that aim at equip them with appropriate skills to enhance their participation.

III. THE RENEWED CALL FOR ACTION TOWARDS AFRICA FIT FOR CHILDREN

Having noted the significant progress made and the challenges that remain to expedite the implementation of the Plan of Action Towards Africa Fit for Children:

We, the Ministers of the African Union Member States responsible for the protection and promotion of children’s rights and welfare, reaffirm our commitment to the 2001 Plan of Action as well as the Call for Accelerated Action of 2007.

We, further reaffirm our commitments as expressed in the various international and regional legal instruments, Declarations, Resolutions relating to the rights and welfare of children.

We, therefore renew our commitment to the following key priority areas of action:

RENEWED CALL FOR ACTION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TOWARDS AFRICA FIT FOR CHILDREN
1. PROMOTING THE RIGHTS AND ENSURING THE WELFARE OF ALL CHILDREN INCLUDING THE MOST VULNERABLE

2. ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

3. MOBILISING AND LEVERAGING FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

4. STRENGTHENING THE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

5. ENHANCING LIFE CHANCES

6. COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION

7. REALISING THE RIGHT TO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN

8. REALISING CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO PROTECTION

9. ENHANCING CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS THAT CONCERN THEM

10. OVERCOMING HIV AND AIDS

1. PROMOTING THE RIGHTS AND ENSURING WELFARE OF ALL CHILDREN INCLUDING THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Member States commit to:

- develop and implement pro-child laws and policies that promote the rights of children and ensure their welfare

- pay special attention to the situation of most vulnerable groups of children such as those living with disabilities, those without parental care, children
living in marginalised communities, internally displaced and refugee children and those in economically disadvantaged families

- develop policies and programmes that specifically identify and address the needs of these highly vulnerable groups of children

- combat, through appropriate interventions, negative attitudes towards these children and their families

- ensure that their interests are reflected in budgetary allocations and disbursement

2. ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Member States commit to:

- uphold our obligation to establish and maintain appropriate structures to provide leadership, oversight and accountability for implementation of laws, policies and programmes for children

- set up functional mechanisms to strengthen coordination of the implementation of inter-sectoral programmes for children, that would involve all relevant Ministries and Departments as well as civil society, private sector and where appropriate institutions led by children

- establish and build the capacity of relevant structures such as child rights observatories, Ombudspersons on Children and National Commissions for Children

- establish and maintain a well resourced system for universal birth registration

- put in place systems for data collection, management and dissemination on children.

- set up monitoring and evaluation system to enhance efficiency of operations and effectiveness of service delivery

3 COMMITTING AND LEVERAGING HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Member States commit to:

- allocate and efficiently use budgetary resources channelled to sectors that benefit children such as education, health, social protection programmes and other poverty reduction programmes targeting poor families where children are disproportionately represented.
- mobilise resources for programmes that specifically target marginalised children such as those from poor families, children who are orphaned and children with disabilities
- develop appropriate pro-poor and pro-child fiscal and monetary policies that aim at addressing the growing income inequality
- develop strategies to generate adequate resources from national sources for financing programmes that aim at implementing the Plan of Action for Africa Fit for Children and proactively seek support through other means including through international cooperation.
- invest in the designing and implementation of child-sensitive social protection programmes such as cash transfer and safety net programmes as well as other schemes such as food subsidy and child support grants.

4 STRENGTHENING THE LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Member States commit to:
- strengthen efforts to harmonise national laws with the international and regional standards. In particular, ensure that customary laws and justice systems are in line with the international and regional norms
- ensure that law and policy reform should be seen, not as a single event, but as an ongoing process that reinforces the need to continuously evaluate and subsequently review laws on the basis of emerging issues, or gaps in implementation
- Invest both in human and financial terms to overcome major challenges encountered in implementing laws and polices
- identify and draw on good practices in law, policy development and implementation, especially in countries with comparable situations, in order to utilise lessons and experiences.

5 ENHANCING LIFE CHANCES

Member States commit to:
- strengthen health systems in order to provide accessible, free and quality maternal and child health services for children, especially under five years of age
- scale up essential interventions to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality as well as reduce neonatal mortality
fully participate in the Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal, (Newborn and Child) Mortality in Africa (CARMMA)

- enhancing food security and nutritional programmes

- improve access to potable water and sanitation services

6 COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION text

Member States commit to:

- combat both in law and practice discrimination against children, including children with disabilities, children without parental care and children in transitional situations, through all appropriate measures including legal reform, improved enforcement, investing in education and training, and awareness raising programmes

- implement national policies and strategies to build and strengthen governmental, family and community capacities to provide a supportive environment against discrimination for vulnerable children

- hold accountable those who violate children’s rights

7 REALISING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Member States commit to:

- implement the goals of the Second Decade of Education for Africa, 2006-2015

- ensure free and compulsory post primary education and skills training up to the age of 18;

- invest in addressing the challenges faced in the availability, accessibility, adaptability and acceptability of education

- establish good early childhood development programmes in order to support children’s survival, growth and learning

- develop inclusive education programmes by making schools disability-friendly

- create educational opportunities for disadvantaged children

8 REALISING CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO PROTECTION
Member States commit to:

- reinforce national efforts to provide full protection of children against all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and harmful practices in conformity with the ACRWC, the CRC and other relevant international and regional legal instruments

- implement measures to prevent conflict through integrating peace education and promoting effective participation of children, consistent with international humanitarian law and the provisions of ACRWC.

- undertake a systemic follow-up in the implementation of the recommendations of the UN Global Study on Violence against Children.

- undertake investment in positive parenting and early childhood care and development programmes

- enhance families’ capacity to protect and care for their children through appropriate programmes that aim at skills development and income generation. establish and strengthen child justice and protection systems

- strengthening child protection systems

9 ENHANCING CHILDREN’S PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEM

Member States commit to:

- ensure that children’s capacities are strengthened are given adequate opportunities to express their views in matters that affect them at all levels

- undertake programmes to improve children’s access to relevant information and build their social skills in articulating their views and negotiating their interests at all levels of decision making

- support child-led initiatives at school and community levels and encourage their involvement in decisions relating to children at community, school and local government

10 OVERCOMING HIV AND AIDS

Member States commit to:
- implement the African Union Commission’s initiative “African Plan towards Elimination of New HIV Infections among Children by 2015 and Keeping their Mothers Alive”

- scale up universal access to HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support (linking with other health measures on promoting reproductive health and reducing Tuberculosis, Malaria and other related diseases) with an emphasis on adolescents, girls and other vulnerable segments of the society

- scale up programmes for Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV and AIDS

- support initiatives to foster positive attitudes towards persons living with HIV and AIDS and address stigma and exclusion

- strengthen community care systems for children affected by HIV and AIDS in alleviating the impact.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES OF AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

Implementation and realisation of the priority areas in this Renewed Call requires concerted effort by all stakeholders including Member States and several other actors such as the African Union Commission and its different organs, treaty bodies, Regional Economic Communities, children, development partners and the civil society. These stakeholders are called upon to undertake the respective priority actions to expedite the realisations of the objectives of the Declaration and Plan of Action Towards Africa Fit for Children

The AU Commission to:

- take appropriate initiatives to promote greater collaboration and involvement of all relevant stakeholders

- strengthen its monitoring role and track progress that Member States have made and the measures they have taken to promote child rights and welfare

- facilitate dissemination of information among Member States on laws, policies and good practices

- organise forums to take stock of progress, identify challenges, exchange experiences and share ideas on the way forward to expedite the implementation of the priority areas identified in this Renewed Call

- allocate adequate resources for the effective functioning of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child to:

- continue to monitor and report on violation of children’s rights under the ACRWC and mobilise adequate resources to accomplish its monitoring role

- continue to advocate for the urgent continent-wide ratification of the ACRWC by Member States, and actively and strategically lobby for the periodic reporting of State Parties under the Charter

- systematically integrate the Renewed Call into its work and collaborate with relevant stakeholders in order to promote implementation in their programmes and activities

- use the Day of the African Child, and other relevant platforms to highlight the issues prioritised in this Renewed Call.

Other AU Organs (especially Pan-African Parliament, ECOSOCC, Peace and Security Council) to:

- accord high priority to the areas identified in this Renewed Call on their agenda and play meaningful roles in implementing commitments

- include the promotion of children’s rights and welfare in their specific programmes

- work in collaboration with the Department of Social Affairs and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on child related activities

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to:

- strengthen networking and partnerships to enhance collaboration and coordination of efforts targeting children

- work closely with Member States, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and other stakeholders to implement the priority areas identified in this Renewed Call as well as other programmes benefiting children

- collaborate and exchange information with the AU Commission on all matters related to children

- mobilise and leverage resources to finance programmes aimed at implementing the priority areas identified in this Renewed Call

Development Partners to:
- provide technical and financial support to Member States to expedite implementation of the priority areas identified in this Renewed Call

- enhance collaboration and exchange of information among all stakeholders to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance efficient utilization of resources

Civil Society Organisations to:

- create a network of civil society organizations to support the dissemination, implementation and monitoring of the Renewed Call for Action Towards Africa Fit for Children

- provide relevant information to the AU Commission to assist in compiling progress reports, and also the State of the Africa’s Children report

Children’s Groups to:

- establish child-led initiatives aimed at promoting children’s rights to protection and participation and build their capacity to defend their interests by proactively engaging in information sharing and dissemination as well as other skill development initiatives

- actively participate in the design, follow up and implementation of the priority areas of the Renewed Call at all levels

- utilise all available fora to bring children’s perspective in decisions and programmes that affect children

THE WAY FORWARD

We hereby

- mandate the Chairperson of the African Union/Chairperson of the African Union Commission to submit this Renewed Call as Africa’s contribution to the World Fit Children at the UN General Assembly High Level Plenary meeting to be held in 2013

- urge the AUC to strengthen its monitoring the performance of Member States in implementing this Renewed Call and periodically issue a report on the progress and challenges

- urge the AU Commission to widely disseminate this Renewed Call to Member States and partners

Done in Addis Ababa on 20 November 2012 at the Third Pan African Forum Towards Africa Fit For Children
References


