Introduction

For well-known historical, political and developmental reasons, the State is central for the realization of child rights and child wellbeing, more so in Africa than anywhere else in the world. Our governments have an impressive record in their formal accession to the relevant international treaties on children. But the extent of their commitment varies widely, and the gap between promises and reality remains wide in many countries. Why? How well are African governments doing in meeting their repeated commitments to protect, promote and respect the rights and wellbeing of children? Which governments are doing well and which ones are not? How do African governments rank in relation to each other? What is it that relatively 'poorly-performing' countries can emulate from 'well-performing' ones?

These are some of the questions addressed in a pioneering report released by The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), a leading pan-African child rights advocacy organisation. **The African Report on Child Well-being 2008** is available in both English and French and it is the first of what ACPF promises to publish on a biennial basis. The report assesses, scores and ranks the performance of all 52 African governments (those not covered being Somalia and Saharawi Arab Republic) using a common set of indicators and a path-

Indexing Child-Friendliness

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The African Report on Child Well-being 2008:

How Child-Friendly are African Governments?

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breaking Child-Friendliness Index developed by ACPF. Finally, it spells out the specific policies and interventions that account for differences in child-wellbeing outcomes among countries and the good practices that child-friendly governments may adopt.

Why this Report?

This report is special for several reasons, not least because it is the first of its kind in the region. It is comprehensive and an appropriate response to African realities and needs. A couple of explanations illustrate this point.

Africa is a very young continent, the youngest in the world. Children under 18 constitute some 51.5 per cent of the population, with the ratio being as high as 54.8 in Nigeria, 55.2 per cent in Ethiopia, and 60.8 per cent in Uganda. That it is so can be a blessing but, if unattended, a potential curse. The extent to which African governments respect children, protect them from harm and abuse, and provide them with opportunities for a healthy and productive life has an impact both on the future of the children concerned and the future of the region. A healthy, well-fed and educated child population is a necessary foundation for a modern productive and knowledge-based economy that can effectively participate in today's globalised world.

Similarly, the way we raise and treat our children at home and school is critical for what they will be as adults and citizens. A child growing up in an environment where he sees his mother beaten by the father, where differing views and opinions are not tolerated, and where choices are not negotiated is unlikely to be the builder of a peaceful and democratic order. The wellbeing of children is key for the kind of Africa we want to build. Yet, in far too many countries, children are not given the place they deserve at home or in the larger community. We have to combat and correct this reticence and complacency through various advocacy means, including speaking out against child rights violations and government complacency.

Secondly, there is the unfortunate fact that we do not have a sufficiently supportive public environment or public opinion in much of Africa. Where are the African voices that speak out against child rights violations, say in Darfur, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Uganda? Regrettably, the voices we have heard in the past and which we continue to hear to-day are those of individuals and organisa-tions outside our region. This has several explanations, of course, but is nonetheless unacceptable. We need to speak out for ourselves and claim our place on the human and child rights agenda.

Another factor why this kind of report is valuable and timely is in its contribution to remedy current weaknesses in the

development literature and its refreshing approach of contextualising the discourse on African development issues. Look at any of the leading global reports on development and rights issues. Their highly celebrated intellectual pedigree and influence notwithstanding, they are of limited relevance to help us understand our situation, much less to help us design effective and appropriate policy responses. Almost all of them have one thing in common – they lump all kinds of countries together, score and rank them without giving context to their geopolitical or economic reality. So, you have Norway and Malawi, or Switzerland and Rwanda, scored and ranked together. But what, you could rightly ask, do these countries have in common except that Norway and Mozambique have long coast lines, and that Switzerland and Malawi are land-locked countries? We need to look at African countries within their historical, political and economic context to better understand their performance.

Finally, most reports on Africa suffer from one kind of bias or another depending on the institutional affiliation of the author organisation. Government reports wash or wish away the problems. Intergovernmental ones obfuscate them. And we, in civil society, can be negative and regrettably do tend to embellish the facts to suit our own causes or prejudices: *the louder we are the better*, we seem to think. So we have a problem at the source. We need independent voices that can name and shame governments if need be, but more importantly, voices that can go beyond and engage in constructive dialogue.

This Report goes a long way in addressing or meeting these concerns. It is independent, evidence-based, policy-oriented, and anchored to African realities and needs. It is packed with facts, and in-depth analysis which together would make it a useful resource for researchers. The methodology and analytical framework it uses provide a coherent foundation for country-based and comparative policy analysis, and the messages emerging from it could help inform the advocacy work of child rights organisations at the country level.

What the Report Does and How?

First, this Report provides a wealth of information on the condition and status of children in Africa, the progress made and the challenges that remain. Indeed, one of the greatest strengths of this report is the vast amount of statistics and the rich analysis it contains.

Secondly, it introduces a new conceptual and methodological framework that could influence the language and public discourse on children in Africa. Two examples illustrate this. First, although grounded on child rights principles, the report uses 'child wellbeing' as the organising concept and the central objective of public policy. The concept of child wellbeing is likely to be less contentious and more attractive for public discourse in Africa – perhaps less emotive and controversial than, say, 'child rights' or 'child welfare'. It is likely to resonate better with the African psyche and attitude.

Child wellbeing means various things. It is about children being well-fed, healthy, safe and happy. It is about opportunities to grow and learn. It is about positive social relationships, and about being and feeling secure. It is also about being respected, about being given a voice and being heard. It is being free from fear of violence – corporal, sexual or any other form of violence. This breadth and depth of the

concept makes it all the more attractive, and gives it dynamism in setting objectives at a point in time and over time.

The other new and important feature of this report is the concept of child-friendliness and a child-friendliness index. This is a coherent framework for policy review, policy diagnosis and policy development, not to mention its obvious use for comparative analysis and its potential power as an advocacy tool.

Thirdly, the report goes on to score and rank all the 52 African governments and proposes a policy compass which governments could use in initiating and implementing legal and budgetary reforms aimed at creating an Africa which can be a fun place to grow up in.

The State of Africa's Children

Slowly but surely, Africa is changing. And, though still far from claiming its destiny and its future, it is in many ways making a beginning. Africa is witnessing the emergence of a consensus that espouses responsibility and accountability to extricate its people from old unbridled authoritarian ideologies and from the intertwined problems of conflict, poverty, hunger and illiteracy. Though unfortunately threatened by the world-wide economic and financial crisis, Africa's prospects for a better future continue to brighten as many countries in the region reap the benefits of economic policy changes, improved governance and increased investments in key social sectors.

This change in the political and economic environment, albeit cosmetic in some and substantial in others, has resulted in robust growth and improvements in the wellbeing of children.

Most African governments have increased the proportion of expenditure they have directed to health in recent years. Pronounced increases in allocation were made by the governments of Malawi and Rwanda. Countries such as Egypt, Liberia, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco, Tunisia, and Seychelles have achieved immunisation coverage of 94 per cent and above, and rapid progress is being made in many others.

Though uneven, there has also been some progress in the extension of public health services, and safe drinking water. For example, there have been impressive figures in the percentage of deliveries attended by health workers which stood at 86 to 89 per cent in Gabon, Sudan and Cape Verde and 90 to 98 per cent in Algeria, Botswana, Libya, Mauritius, South Africa and Tunisia. Similarly, significant improvements in the provision of safe drinking water were observed in Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, Eritrea, Mali and Mauritania.

Some African governments have taken highly commendable measures to increase the availability of drugs to their citizens. Perhaps the most significant development, given the scale of the problem and the high cost of treatment involved, is the step taken by Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal and Zambia to provide HIV/AIDS first-line treatment free of charge. From the end of 2003 to the middle of 2006, there was a ten-fold increase in the number of persons receiving antiretroviral treatment. The figures for some countries are quite impressive: Mali and Namibia have achieved 32 per cent and 35 per cent coverage of ART treatment, respectively; the figures for Uganda and Botswana are even higher at 56 and 85 per cent, respectively. Mother-to-child transmission has been reduced by 25 per cent in several

countries in the eastern and southern Africa region.

As a result of these combinations of factors, countries like Cape Verde, Mauritius and Seychelles have achieved very low child mortality rates comparable to those in industrialized countries. This is not limited to these countries: there has been considerable progress across the region; infant mortality came down to 50 per 1000 live births in Eritrea, 46 in Namibia, 28 in Egypt and 12 and 13 in Seychelles and Mauritius, respectively.

In education also, there have been impressive achievements. Seychelles, Uganda, Algeria and Tunisia have achieved a near universal net enrolment. Malawi, a relatively poor country, achieved a net enrolment ratio of 98 per cent for girls and 93 per cent for boys in 2004.

These achievements notwithstanding, the economies of most African countries remain fragile and weak, characterised as they are by highly skewed income distribution and abject poverty. Armed conflicts and conflagrations are less frequent but they are no less intensive than in the past. They continue to afflict several countries, for example, Sudan, Uganda and the DRC.

Child malnutrition, an important indicator of food insecurity, continues to hurt the poor and the vulnerable. Overall, over a third of children under five years old were suffering from moderate to severe stunting in 2006.

Exclusion from and unequal access to basic services continue to be a serious and pervasive problem. A staggering number of children and mothers have no access to essential health and education services. For instance, the proportion of people excluded from sanitation services stands at a high 64 per cent for Africa.

As a result, therefore, of all these factors, each year approximately some one million babies are stillborn; about half a million die on their first day; and at least one million babies die in their first month of life.

Yet another major challenge is the huge and growing number of orphans estimated at 48.3 million, which is about 12 per cent of all children in sub-Saharan Africa. Orphans exceeded 20 per cent of the under-15 population in Congo (Brazzaville), Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Look at the absolute number of orphans in some countries: 4.2 million in DRC, 4.8 million in Ethiopia and a staggering 8.6 million in Nigeria! The orphan crisis in sub-Saharan Africa has reached shocking proportions and, sadly, is expected to get worse; it is projected that in two years' time, the orphan population is going to equal the size of the combined populations of South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho.

A major concern seldom mentioned in policy debates is the problem of children living with disability – estimated to be as many as 8 per cent of 2-9 year-olds in Egypt, 16 per cent in Ghana, 23 per cent in Cameroon and Sierra Leon, 31 per cent in Central African Republic and 35 per cent in Djibouti. This means almost one in every three 2-9 year old children in these countries lives with one form of disability or another. Yet, children with disabilities remain invisible and seldom talked about.

There is then the problem of violence against children. This is a widespread problem throughout Africa and is found at home, at schools, at work and in the community. According to an ACPF survey of violence against girls in Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya, over 90 per cent of the

girls surveyed reported being victims of one form of violence or another. FGM (female genital mutilation) is deeply ingrained and early marriage a common practice.

The Child-friendliness of African Governments

Given their huge proportion and demographic importance, and their potentially critical role in ensuring sustained development for their countries, how important are children on the policy agenda? Or, how committed are African governments to the wellbeing of their children? How well are they doing? Which ones are doing better, and which ones not so well, and why? In other words, which African governments are child-friendly and which ones are not?

In order to answer these questions, ACPF developed a Child-friendliness Index to assess the extent to which African governments are committed to child wellbeing. In child rights parlance, child-friendliness is a manifestation of the political will of governments to make the maximum effort to meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights and ensure their wellbeing.

Three dimensions of child-friendliness were identified, namely the extent to which a government is committed to the principles of : (i) full **Protection** of children through appropriate legal and policy frameworks; (ii) adequate **Provision** for the basic needs of children, assessed in terms of budgetary allocation and achievement of outcomes; and (iii) children's **Participation** in decisions that affect their wellbeing. Though child participation is important, it was not possible to obtain sufficient data, and therefore this dimension was not included in the development of the Child-friendliness Index. The index thus covers only the Protection and Provision components of child wellbeing.

The index uses a common framework for the organisation and analysis of information and data for all the 52 countries. It is based on some 40 policy and wellbeing indicators and assesses the individual and relative performance of all 52 governments at a point in time (2004-2005) and over time (i.e. between the periods 1999-2001 and 2004-2005).

In order to evaluate performance, the Report uses a three-step approach. First, it analyses and ranks governments in terms of protection; in other words, their relative standing in laying down the appropriate legal and policy frameworks for protection. It then evaluates and ranks them in terms of their budgetary commitment to child wellbeing. Finally, it looks at the aggregate picture and ranks their overall performance in terms of both protection and provision. This approach helps us to look at various policy strands and to identify the policy areas where a particular government is doing well or where it should make greater effort. Thus, a country may find itself doing well in the provision of legal protection but not so well in the budgetary area, or vice versa. The exercise gives very interesting insights on the problem areas and opportunities, and the interested reader and policy maker will benefit from a full reading of the report. Here, though we reflect only on the overall result.

According to the composite Child-friendliness Index, Mauritius and Namibia emerged as the first and second most child-friendly governments, respectively, in the whole of Africa. In addition to these two, the 'most child-friendly governments' group consists of both countries with high economic status – Tunisia, Libya, Morocco,

South Africa and Algeria – and those with a low economic status – Kenya, Malawi and Cape Verde. Rwanda and Burkina Faso have also done very well, coming eleventh and twelfth, respectively, in the Child-friendliness Index ranking, despite their low economic status.

These and the other countries that emerged in the top ten or twenty did so mainly for three reasons. First, they put in place appropriate legal provisions to protect children against abuse and exploitation. Secondly, they allocated a relatively higher share of their budgets to provide for the basic needs of children. Finally, they used resources effectively and were able to achieve favourable wellbeing outcomes as reflected on children themselves.

At the other extreme are the ten least child-friendly governments in Africa, these being Guinea-Bissau, preceded by Eritrea,

Central African Republic, Gambia, São Tomé and Principe, Liberia, Chad, Swaziland, Guinea and Comoros. Of course, the political and economic situation and the underlying causes vary from one country to another. But, by and large, the poor performance or low score of these governments is the result of the actions they took or failed to take, specifically their failure to institute protective legal and policy instruments, the absence of child-sensitive juvenile justice systems, and the very low budgets allocated to children. Government expenditure on health as a percentage of total government expenditure was only 3.5 per cent in Guinea-Bissau, compared with a median average of 9 per cent for the region. Central African Republic also spent only 1.4 per cent of its GDP for education in 2006, compared to the regional average of 4.3 per cent around that time.

Let us consider another example: Eritrea, the country that scored the second lowest in the Child-friendliness Index. Eritrea scored the lowest in terms of budgetary allocation. Military spending was extremely high, at 19.3 per cent of GDP in 2004-2005, proportionally the highest on the continent. At the same time, overall provision for the basic needs of children was correspondingly low. These two factors accounted for Eritrea's poor performance in the overall ranking.

A recurring explanation or excuse given by governments for inadequate action is their limited financial capacity, the low performance of their economies and lack of resources. To what extent is this true? Comparison of the Child-friendliness Index ranking with that for economic status revealed that national commitment to the cause of children is not necessarily related to national income. The Child-friendliness Index shows that, despite their relatively low GDPs, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda and Burkina Faso are among the best performers in Africa; they are among the twelve countries that have made the greatest effort to put in place an adequate legal foundation for the protection of their children and for meeting their basic needs. On the other hand, relatively wealthy countries, with relatively high GDPs – Equatorial Guinea and Angola, for example – are not investing sufficient budgetary resources in ensuring child wellbeing, and so have not scored well in the Child-friendliness Index ranking, coming out 38th and 35th, respectively.

The Child-friendliness Index data strongly confirms the fact that governments with a relatively low GDP can still do well in realising child rights and wellbeing. The missing factor is political will, reflected in misplaced priorities and the clouded vision of governments as to what constitutes the long-term interest of their countries.

Challenges in Indexing Child-friendliness

The construction of indices to measure states of development or progress is fraught with many conceptual, methodological and statistical problems. This is true of almost all indices that deal with social, political and development issues, e.g. governance, economic performance and wellbeing. So also, with the child-friendliness index developed by ACPF.

The concept of friendliness itself is a highly value-loaded term. Friendliness is more than the provision of laws or budgets. There are important elements that constitute friendliness and contribute to the

friendliness of a society, state or community. But how do you measure or quantify the socio-cultural and psychological parameters as well as the ecological and politically-induced environmental factors that can have a bearing on individual and community wellbeing in a sensible and convincing way?

Moreover, there are equity issues. For example, a government's budgetary allocation may give us an idea of how much a government is concerned with children's issues at the macro level. But it does not necessarily indicate whether or not the allocated money is expended on children, or whether that allocation takes into account distributional concerns, for example, between rural and urban communities or between the poor who need government support and the not-so-poor who could probably manage without it.

There is also the concept of voice or what, in child rights circles, is called child participation. This is an important, though complex, issue. But how do we ensure that we have appropriate indicators to capture the voices of children? Finally, there is the usual problem of getting the right statistics and statistics that are comparable and current. These are some of the weaknesses of the current report, and these difficulties need to be addressed if we are to have a more complete view of the African landscape, and measure and compare the progress of African governments.

Conclusion

The Report confirms what many of us have long suspected. Yes, there are considerable challenges facing governments in Africa, but change and progress are possible and feasible even at very low levels of development. You do not have to have oil and diamonds to provide a better country for your children. The experience of the child-friendly governments shows the importance of a two-pronged approach: (a) adoption and implementation of effective laws and policies; and (b) a policy of child budgeting that prioritises the needs of children.

When all is said and done, three things matter: an African vision based on and around children as the foundation of a sustainable social, economic and political progress, and therefore one that puts them at the centre of public policy; laws that protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and exclusion; and, finally, budgets that provide for the basic needs and full development of children.

So, what our children need is **Politics** that puts them first, **Laws** that protect them, and **Budgets** that provide for them.

Child - Friendliness Index Values and Ranking of African Governments

Source: Developed by The African Child Policy Forum, 2008

Country	Rank	Category
Mauritius	1	Most Child-friendly
Namibia	2	
Tunisia	3	
Libya	4	
Morocco	5	
Kenya	6	
South Africa	7	
Malawi	8	
Algeria	9	
Cape Verde	10	
Rwanda	11	Child-friendly
Burkina Faso	12	
Madagascar	13	
Botswana	14	
Senegal	15	
Seychelles	16	
Egypt	17	
Mali	18	
Lesotho	19	
Burundi	20	
Uganda	21	Fairly child-friendly
Nigeria	22	
Tanzania	23	
Gabon	24	
Mozambique	25	
Togo	26	
Zambia	27	
Mauritania	28	
Ghana	29	
Djibouti	30	
Dem.Rep.Congo	31	
Niger	32	
Cameroon	33	Less child-friendly
Congo (Brazzaville)	34	
Angola	35	
Côte d'Ivoire	36	
Zimbabwe	37	
Equatorial Guinea	38	
Sudan	39	
Sierra Leone	40	
Benin	41	
Ethiopia	42	
Comoros	43	Least child-friendly
Guinea	44	
Swaziland	45	
Chad	46	
Liberia	47	
São Tomé and Principe	48	
Gambia	49	
Central African Republic	50	
Eritrea	51	
Guinea-Bissau	52	

Child-friendliness index ranking of African governments