2018 Africa Report on Child Wellbeing: key messages

Overarching messages

Africa is sitting on a demographic time bomb. By 2050 the continent could be home to a billion angry, under-fed, under-educated and under-employed children and young people, unless African governments commit to massive long-term investment in nutrition, health and quality education.

The rapidly increasing children and youth population is both a challenge and an opportunity. Africa can choose to reap the demographic dividend, nurture its human capital and accelerate sustainable and equitable development. Children have the potential to transform Africa - but if neglected, they will exacerbate the burden of poverty and inequality, whilst posing a serious threat to peace, security and prosperity.

Undernutrition is the biggest problem facing Africa's children. Stunting among under-fives stands at an unacceptably high 30.4 percent, and the actual numbers of stunted children have risen from 50.4 million to 58.5 million over the last 15 years. Up to half of all deaths in under-fives are associated with undernutrition. And while African children may attend school in large numbers, they are not learning. Two in every five children leave primary school without learning how to read, write or do simple arithmetic.

The overwhelming majority of African boys and girls of primary school age do not have the required skills, knowledge, understanding and competencies expected for their age. Such poor quality of education threatens sustainable economic and social development, stability and security.

African girls are yet to be given equal treatment either in law or before the law. More than half of all girls have no access to secondary school education.

Regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, wealth or background, every child should be given a fair and equal chance in life. The ACPF's Child-Friendliness Index shows that African governments are increasingly becoming more child-friendly and that some African governments take children's rights and wellbeing seriously - but many do not, and therefore must try harder to improve the conditions and wellbeing of their children, especially those countries stuck towards the bottom of the ranking.

The child-friendliness index measures wellbeing according to three distinct pillars: i) adoption and implementation of laws and policies ii) resource allocation and investment in children and iii) access to services to promote child well-being.

The Child-Friendliness Index, developed by ACPF, is a robust rights-based statistical methodology that uses a wide range of data (composite index) to measure the progress of 52 African governments towards realizing the rights and wellbeing of children. The most child-friendly governments are Mauritius, Algeria, Tunisia, South Africa, Cabo Verde, Egypt, Namibia, Seychelles, Swaziland, Morocco and Lesotho. The least child-friendly are South Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad, Cameroon, Zambia, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea and Eritrea.

African governments must act quickly to avoid significantly damaging the region's long-term economic and social development. Public policy must go beyond the conventional box-ticking approach to child rights. Governments must commit to radical, transformative actions to ensure an Africa of one billion well-fed, well-educated and globally competitive boys and girls.

Key messages by theme

Demographic time bomb

-   Africa's children and young people are predicted to reach 750 million by 2030, and one billion by the middle of the century - representing approximately 40 percent of the world's child population.
-   This growth is an enormous opportunity for the continent, but failure to invest in African children and youth would mean missing out on the demographic dividend.
-   The growing child and youth population could become a huge burden, exacerbating poverty, inequality, unemployment and instability and creating a serious human development crisis. This crisis will only be avoided if governments invest heavily in children and young people.
-   Lack of decent jobs in the face of economic growth will only exacerbate the anger and frustration of young people, leading to deeper discontent and social unrest. It is vital to create decent employment opportunities for the growing numbers of young people.

The role of the state

-   Children depend on governments for their wellbeing, freedom, dignity, protection, access to services and the fulfilment of their potential.
-   The state is the single most important force for ensuring children's rights and wellbeing. Child rights activists and civil society advocates must put state accountability front and centre of their campaigns for a 'children-first' African politics.

The Child-Friendliness Index

-   Africa has varying levels of child-friendliness, but overall there has been progress for children, and African governments are increasingly becoming more child-friendly. However, many countries which are stuck towards the bottom of the rankings and must try harder to improve the conditions and wellbeing of their children.
-   The Child-Friendliness Index shows some African governments take children's rights and wellbeing seriously - but many do not.
-   The Child-Friendliness Index, developed by the African Child Policy Forum, is a sophisticated rights-based statistical methodology that uses a wide range of data to measure the progress of 52 African governments towards realizing the rights and wellbeing of children.
-   The most child-friendly governments are Mauritius, Algeria, Tunisia, South Africa, Cabo Verde, Egypt, Namibia, Seychelles, Swaziland, Morocco and Lesotho.
-   The least child-friendly are South Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad, Cameroon, Zambia, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea and Eritrea.
-   Wealth is not necessarily related to a government's child-friendliness. Several of the very poorest African countries performed relatively well in the Child-Friendliness Index.

Encouraging progress

-   Africa's children are healthier, live longer, are better schooled, and can aspire to a better life than those before.
-   African governments are gradually becoming more child-friendly with better protection from abuse and exploitation, more child-friendly laws and policies, and more money being spent on children than ever before.

Undernutrition

-   The single biggest challenge for Africa's children is undernutrition. Although stunting among under-fives has gone down slightly in recent years, the current average remains unacceptably high

at 30.4 percent, and the numbers of stunted children has risen from 50.4 million to 58.5 million over the last 15 years.

- Up to half of all deaths in under-fives are associated with undernutrition. Those who survive suffer impaired physical and cognitive capacity, leading to poor learning, low productivity, reduced income and fewer opportunities to escape poverty.
- Child undernutrition costs countries a significant proportion of their annual gross domestic product, and tackling the root causes of child undernutrition is crucial for the social and economic transformation of Africa.

Education

- Africa's serious lack of educational and learning opportunities threatens to undermine social and economic development. Without urgent investment in education, most countries in Africa will miss the Sustainable Development Goal target on education.
- Recent findings suggest that while African children may attend school in large numbers, they are not learning. Two in every five African children leave primary school without learning how to read, write or do simple arithmetic
- Children have a right to good quality education, but relatively few African teachers reach the minimum standards and many lack competences in the subjects they are expected to teach.
- Poor quality education is not just a violation of children's rights, it threatens Africa's sustainable economic and social development, stability, security, and effective participation in an increasingly competitive and technologically-driven global economy.
- Early learning is crucial for cognitive development, but even before they get to school, many African children - especially those from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds - are denied access to pre-primary education.
- More than half of all girls have no access to secondary school education, and the situation is even worse for children with disabilities.

Bigger and better-managed budgets for children and young people

- Investment in human capital remains unacceptably low in far too many African countries. Average spending on child-targeted social protection is less than five percent of GDP.
- Tax revenues are crucial for investment in children and young people. Governments urgently need to improve tax collection and reform domestic revenue mobilisation to make more money available for sectors benefiting children.
- Domestic revenue mobilisation for children and young people will only improve if African countries tackle poor governance, weak tax and customs administrations, corruption and illicit financial flows.
- Africa loses about US$65 billion a year to corruption and illicit financial flows, depriving families and children of much-needed health care, education and social protection.
- Child-friendly budgeting means allocating as much money as possible and using it efficiently and effectively to bring about positive change, particularly for children who are marginalised and left behind.
- African governments must work harder to fulfil their obligations to children by spending more, spending it efficiently and by being more accountable.

National laws and policies

- The good news is that Africa's child protection architecture - its laws, policies and institutions - are generally well developed and established. The bad news is the serious failure to implement and enforce these laws and policies.

- There has been considerable progress in law reform but much remains to be done to adopt international standards and harmonise legislation at domestic level. There are many discrepancies between national law and international and African Union standards.
- Progress remains patchy in some key areas of legislation including birth registration; minimum age for marriage, sexual consent, employment and criminal consent; female genital mutilation; child trafficking; corporal punishment and free compulsory education.
- Girls are still treated unequally in many African countries with laws which discriminate on minimum age for marriage and sexual consent, female genital mutilation and child trafficking.
- Child marriage is slowly declining in Africa but rates remain high – of the 700 million women and girls worldwide who married before their 18th birthday, 125 million of them – about 17 percent – are from Africa.
- African child brides mostly live in rural areas and come from among the poorest segments of society, with girls from the poorest households twice as likely to marry before 18 as girls from the wealthiest. overall, three out of every ten Africa children are married before their 18th birthday, although in some countries the rate is much higher: 41 to 48 percent in Eritrea, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria and Mozambique; 51 to 52 percent in Guinea, Mali, South Sudan and Burkina Faso; and 67 to 76 percent in Chad, Central African Republic and Niger

Conflicts and crises

- Increasingly intense domestic conflicts, climate-induced disasters and natural catastrophes have a devastating impact on African children. Millions of children are displaced both inside and outside their country by war, violence and disasters.
- Conflicts and crises increase the risk of girls being trafficked or suffering sexual and gender-based violence, significantly push up infant deaths and child undernutrition, and mean children are far less likely to go to school.

Key messages: six priority actions

- Africa is on the verge of a serious human development crisis which carries grave consequences for the social and economic wellbeing of its people and for the future of the continent. African governments must commit to radical, transformative actions which go beyond the conventional box-ticking approach to child rights.
  Specifically, African governments must invest in:

i. **Improved access to Nutritious food**: Adopt integrated strategies to combat child undernutrition by enhancing children's access to nutritious food, especially in their early years.
ii. **Enhance the quality of education at all levels:** with particular emphasis on early childhood education and learning
iii. **Embed respect for the human dignity of the child in protection principles** and policies, establish supportive and empowering child protection systems where they do not exist, and strengthen them where they do.
iv. **Focus on human development for youth in particular**: Underpin economic growth with a deliberate focus on human development. Special emphasis should be given to tackle rising youth unemployment and inequality through policies, which create jobs and redistribute resources fairly for young population.
v. **No child should be left behind**: Ensure that every child matters and that no child is left behind through government programmes that target the most deprived, vulnerable and marginalized children.
vi. **Prioritize public investment in children** where children should be at the heart of the budget by applying the underlying principle that funding decisions must always take account of their impact on child wellbeing. There must be strong and transparent public finance management and oversight in order to maintain genuinely open, engaging and responsive budgets for the needs and interests of children.

Country rankings for East and Southern Africa

Countries	Ranking
Lesotho, South Africa, Namibia, Swaziland	Most child friendly countries in Africa
Botswana, Kenya, Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Malawi	Child- friendly
Zimbabwe, United Republic of Tanzania, Sudan	Fairly Child-Friendly
Mozambique, Uganda and Ethiopia	Less Child Friendly
Eritrea, Zambia and South Sudan	Least Child Friendly

Somalia was not included in the African Report on Child Wellbeing