

New Scorecard reveals wide gap between rhetoric and reality in Africa

Governments fail to meet their budgetary commitments to invest in children

25 MAY 2011, DAKAR, SENEGAL: A new Scorecard that ranks 52 African governments' performance in budgeting for their children being launched on Africa Day reveals not only a continent of sharp contrasts in terms of the region's investment in children, but also the wide gap that exists between what governments' have promised in international and regional commitments, and what they are prioritising and delivering in their budgets.

The Report – *Budgeting for Children in Africa: Rhetoric, Reality and the Scorecard* - launched today in Dakar by The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), ranks governments' performance into five categories (from most to least committed) based on their spending in the key sectors that affect child wellbeing – health, education, social protection and early childhood development. Despite improvements in spending on health, Africa still has a relatively low level of investment with most countries allocating only between 4-6% of their national budget to health in 2008, well below the Abuja target of 15%. In education, whilst Africa has made impressive strides both at primary and secondary levels, the region spends less than 3% of the world's education resources, leaving a significant number of its children out of school. Although Early Childhood Development programmes have been shown to be cost effective, Africa's investment in this sector has been almost entirely neglected. There is also a huge unmet need for social protection in Africa (around 80%) despite the important role it can play in helping to protect vulnerable children, and it is the most neglected sector in the continent.

"The purpose of the Scorecard and our Report is to measure African country's budget performance against the numerous political commitments they have made to children's education, health and rights, using budgets as a useful barometer of a government's policy priorities and true commitments," said ACPF Executive Director David Mugawe. "Not only do our findings show those countries who are most committed, and those who are desperately failing their children; it also reveals a serious dissonance between policy promises and budgetary allocations for children in many African countries."

The Scorecard reveals that the governments of Tanzania, Mozambique and Niger are the most committed in terms of using the maximum amount of available resources for the wellbeing of children. Other governments in the top ten most committed are Gabon, Senegal, Tunisia, Seychelles, Algeria, Cape Verde and South Africa. Tanzania came out on top for a number of reasons, including its spending a significant proportion of its resources on health, as well as further reducing its already low military expenditure.

At the other end of the scale are the ten governments that are ranked the least committed with Sudan ranked at the very bottom of the Scorecard along with Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros, Sierra Leone, Angola, Burundi and the Central African Republic. These countries scored low due to lower levels of investment in sectors benefiting children, the decline of these allocations over the years and their relatively high military expenditure.

Dr Salim A. Salim, former Prime Minister of Tanzania and Secretary-General of the Organization of African Union, said; "Children's rights and wellbeing are intrinsically linked with public budgets and this Scorecard reveals stark differences across Africa in terms of commitment and readiness to translate political rhetoric into concrete budgetary allocations for the benefit of children."

The Report by ACPF, a leading, independent, pan African centre for policy research and dialogue on the African child, also considers to what extent a country's ranking on the Scorecard is related to the volume of resources at the government's disposal and their economic status. Governments with relatively lower per capita resources at their disposal – such as Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda and Tanzania – scored highest, whilst conversely, a number of governments with relatively high incomes – such as Angola, Equatorial Guinea and the Sudan - scored low in the ranking.

“The Report clearly shows that the sheer wealth of a country does not determine the level of commitment to budgeting for children. Rather, it is all about political will”, said Dr Agnes Aidoo, Deputy Chair, UN Committee on Rights of the Child.

One of the factors behind poor budget performance of African countries is the weak link between policy-making and budgeting. “That explains the fact that none of the political commitments made by African governments to children have been met or are likely to be met any time soon, except by a handful”, said Mme Agnes Kaboré, Chair of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Commenting on the Report, Professor Jaap Doek, former Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, observed that this comparative analysis is the first of its kind looking at how far various governments are budgeting for children, and therefore living up to their commitments. “The Report pins governments down in terms of the precise numbers and dollars they are really investing in children. And I very much hope that this kind of exercise will be repeated in other regions as well”.

Professor Yanghee Lee, Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, observed that the Report is an excellent example of analysis of Africa's problems within an African context, by Africans and African institutions. “In contrast to global reports which often group the whole world together and carry out statistically-driven exercises of sometimes questionable validity, the ACPF Report brings a fresh eye to the issues and relevance as it is contextualised in historical, political and developmental terms. This is a trend we should encourage.”

Speaking at the launch in Dakar, Mr Mugawe said; “We are both dismayed and disturbed by the gap between what we say and what we do in Africa for our children. If Africa wants to achieve improved living standards and compete in the international arena we must invest in our children, and this must be reflected in our budget priorities. All of us in the child rights community, and those committed to Africa's future, should insist that our governments move from an era of rhetoric to an era of accountability.”

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The African Report on Child Wellbeing 2011: Budgeting for Children, the Scorecard and media materials are available at www.africanchildforum.org/dakarlaunch

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Note to Editors: ACPF reviewed the budget performance of 52 African governments between 2006-2008 and developed the Performance Index for Budgeting for Children that provided the basis of the Scorecard using five key indicators which were expenditure on health as a percentage of total government expenditure; total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP; percentage of the budget for routine EPI vaccines financed by government; military expenditure as a percentage of GDP; and percentage change in governments' expenditure on health, 2004-2008.