



THE INAUGURAL AFRICA CHILDREN SUMMIT REPORT 2023

A HYBRID EVENT HELD AT
THE BOMA HOTEL
10TH - 12TH APRIL 2023



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

To catalyze and create momentum for child participation in Africa, children from across different African countries, supported by Mtoto News, came up with the idea of holding an annual summit which brings together children from across Africa to discuss child rights concerns and propose solutions. The Inaugural Summit was held between the 10th - 12th of April in Nairobi Kenya under the theme **“SEEN, HEARD AND ENGAGED”**. The aim of the event was to share and address challenges that children are facing in an era of newly emerging risks, such as pandemics and climate change.

We would like to appreciate partners and sponsors of the event led by the Office of the UN SRSG VAC, CRC, ACERWC, the partnership programme of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the African Union, Strengthening Good Governance and Human Rights in Africa – AGA, implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, KQ, World Vision, Save the Children, Arigatou, IJJ, NCAJ, Tdh Federation, DialogueWorks, APHRC, RELI, Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, CVT Rwanda, Childfund, Plan International, HAART Kenya among others mentioned later in this report. The Summit was also attended and/or supported by representatives from the Government of Kenya, the Government of South Africa and the Government of Malawi.

The Summit was graced by Hon. Aboubekrine El Jera and Hon. Aissatou Sidikou from the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Prof. Philip Jaffe - the Vice Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and Dr Najat M'jid Maalla - the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children.

The discussion during the summit was about the positives, what might be worrying, and anything that needs to change to enable the child to be safer. Participants, including children, public figures, experts, and government officials, discussed and showcased new risks and new opportunities in the rapidly changing world. A particular focus was given to the ways in which children can be agents of change in the face of key challenges. 800 children from across the globe signed up to attend the Summit but only 400 managed to travel and attend physically with a majority joining virtually.

The children developed A Communique/Outcome statement with policy recommendations and advocacy to be shared with Regional bodies, the UN, Governments and CSOs. The Outcome Statement has been disseminated to children, UNCRC, ACERWC, OSRSG VAC, government agencies and CSOs. The children have formed country chapters through which they will be disseminating and monitoring the implementation of the resolutions. They will be meeting on a monthly basis. Additionally, UNICEF organized a meeting with the ACERWC secretariat member States ambassadors where Dr Najat shared what the children said during the Summit.

Yours,

Jennifer Kaberi
CEO and Founder Mtoto News

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ACRONYMS

ACERWC.....	African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACS.....	Africa Children Summit
AU.....	African Union
CVT.....	Children Voices Today
CSOs.....	Civil Society Organizations
FGM.....	Female Genital Mutilation
HAART.....	Awareness Against Human Trafficking
OCSEA.....	Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation
ODPP.....	Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
SDGs.....	Sustainable Development Goals
UNCRC.....	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VAC.....	Violence Against Children
UNSRSG VAC.....	United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children
UN.....	United Nations

BACKGROUND

Africa is undergoing a population bulge with the average age of the African population being 19 years. Yet, according to a report published by the University of Pretoria, African children are rarely involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of development agendas including Agenda 2040. Marginalization of children, particularly the lack of involvement in designing interventions and decision making has resulted in their disenfranchisement as well as failure in addressing the challenges facing them.

Consulting with children and listening to their views adds new perspectives in developing policies and programmes that have an impact on children. Adults' active engagement with children by listening to their views and opinion and respecting them leads to new insights in developing legislations, policies, budget allocation and services that work. Further, the process of child participation instils the values of democracy and citizenship. It prepares children to take up leadership in an effective way. Children can come gradually to construct authentic participatory democracies. Involving children in the process of decision-making builds up the capacity of children to exercise their personal autonomy and be part of the decisions that affect them not only now but in the future also.

Effective engagement of children will lead to the realization of the development agenda and other rights in the African Children's Charter, and the UNCRC. When children's views are respected it leads to better decisions being taken for individual children. When the views and opinions expressed by children are listened to and taken seriously by adults, children are protected from situations of abuse, violence, threat or injustice.



Progress...

Despite the numerous global challenges, especially when it comes to being engaged, children are standing up and demanding change. From standing up for their right to education, speaking up against violence, or fighting for climate and social justice, children around the world are powerful advocates and changemakers in their communities. They demand space at decision-making tables in their communities, countries and beyond. They are mobilizing to lead change on some of the most critical global issues such as climate change and have courageously stood at the



forefront of progress and development. Despite their incredible potential as agents of change, children across Africa still face violence, marginalization, discrimination and unequal access to resources.

Provided with skills, opportunities and space to engage, the world's children today can become the largest generation of leaders, entrepreneurs and change-makers the world has ever seen. Now is a critical time to continue investing in their development and make sure that they

are equipped to seize opportunities provided by facilitating intergenerational learning.

To ensure that children enjoy their right to participate, the African Children's Committee developed Child Participation Guidelines. The Guidelines aim at ensuring that the youngest Africans are involved from the community level. To support these efforts by the African Children's Committee, Mtoto News and partners, with a huge push by children, organized the Inaugural Africa Children Summit.

The Inaugural Africa Children Summit

This is a continental forum that seeks to give children a platform for participation



in shaping policies and program interventions around issues affecting them. The Summit's goal is to empower African children and create a space where they feel seen, heard and engaged by their peers and community as provided by the AU child participation guidelines. The Summit brings together children from across Africa and beyond to share their experiences on matters of children's rights and protection; the unique challenges they face; interventions by their governments

and share recommendations or solutions.

Co-creating with children

The aim of the Summit was to have children at the forefront, hence we were intentional in working with children in co-creating the program, sessions and identification of speakers. The Summit was child-led and was hosted by children in Nairobi, Kenya from the 10th to the 12th of April 2023. The inaugural Summit was graced by the Vice Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, and the Secretariat members of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Objectives

The purpose of the Summit was to bring children from across the continent together to discuss among themselves on children matters in Africa and;



- To dialogue on what needs to be done to make the Africa Children want.
- Generate and share evidence-based child rights concerns and challenges in Africa.
- Propose key policy recommendations on how Africa can address child protection challenges.
- Documentation and packaging of key issues, advocacy asks and recommendations into an outcome statement.
- To recognize State parties, organizations and individuals contributing to the well-being of children in Africa; and
- To come up with a children's action plan on making the Africa they want.

Outcome

- A Communique/Outcome statement with policy recommendations and advocacy asks to be shared with Regional bodies, the UN, Governments and CSOs.
- Increased involvement of children in the architecture and design of programme and policy interventions on Children issues.
- A report on the child rights concerns and challenges in Africa.

PRE-SUMMIT ACTIVITIES

Two committees planned for the Summit. The two were, the children's Committee composed of children drawn from across the continent and the adult's Committee made up of representatives from civil society organisations and governments.

Children committee

The Children's committee designed and made decisions on all aspects of the Summit, decisions that would then be reviewed by the adult's Committee. The Children's Planning Committee, comprised of over 100 children from different African countries, played a pivotal role in organizing the Africa Children Summit (ACS). Under the guidance of Brian King as the Chair, the committee members collaborated through virtual meetings using platforms like Zoom and Google Meet on a weekly basis, enabling active participation despite geographical distances.

The committee's commitment, dedication, and passion were evident as they worked tirelessly to shape the ACS into a platform that truly reflected the voices and aspirations of African children. The virtual meetings conducted via Zoom and Google Meet facilitated open dialogues, brainstorming sessions, and the formulation of action plans, ensuring that all voices were heard and fostering a collaborative and inclusive atmosphere, coordinated by the chair.

In addition to virtual meetings, the committee established a regional WhatsApp group, providing a dynamic space for idea sharing, seeking feedback, and providing updates on progress. This group served as a vibrant community where ideas flourished, and connections among children from different African countries were formed.

Throughout the planning process, the committee addressed a wide range of topics relevant to African children, such as education, child rights, gender equality, healthcare, violence against children (both online and offline), the child justice system in Africa, challenges in different education systems, accessibility of quality education, the gender gap in the digital sector, child participation in Africa and international forums like the African Union and United Nations, bullying in schools, and environmental sustainability. Each topic was carefully examined, and the committee members shared their experiences, challenges, and proposed solutions.

The Children's Planning Committee's diligent efforts led to significant outcomes, including the development of a comprehensive agenda and agreement on thematic areas for the ACS. Subcommittees were formed under the guidance of different national representatives to oversee various aspects of the summit, ensuring organized and well-executed events that catered to the diverse needs of every child.

The involvement of the committee members and the active participation of children through virtual platforms made the ACS a resounding success. The summit provided a safe and inclusive space for African children to express their opinions, share experiences, and propose solutions, empowering them to become advocates for change within their respective communities. The recommendations and insights generated during the ACS will serve as valuable resources for policymakers, organizations, and stakeholders dedicated to



improving the lives of children across Africa.

The Children's Planning Committee's efforts exemplified the power of children's voices and their capacity to shape meaningful change. The virtual platforms used for planning allowed for interaction among children from various African countries, breaking down geographical barriers, and ensuring a truly inclusive and representative summit. The committee members' dedication and collaboration showcased the immense potential of children in contributing to decision-making processes and driving positive change in their communities and beyond.

The Art and Essay Competition

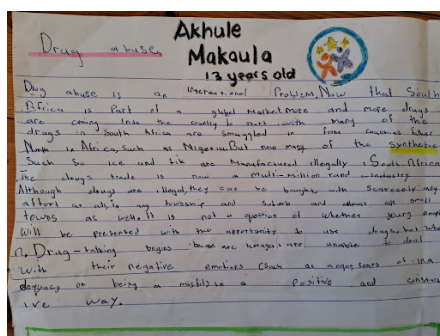
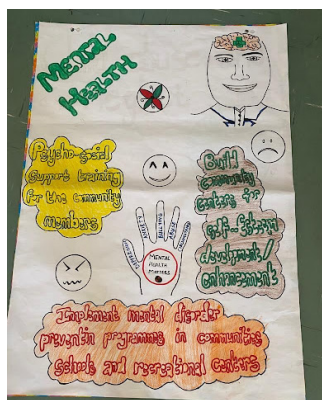
Acknowledging that not all children could be present for the summit. An essay and art competition was run. This was to further allow children who would not have a chance to come to Nairobi to share child rights concerns in their community. Children submitted their presentations in different formats that include essays, drawings, poems both written and recorded, songs both written and recorded videos. All these pieces were documented and were captured in the outcome statement.

59 children submitted the essay and art. 33 of the being boys and 26 were girls. The themes of the pieces were;

a) Child Health

As one of the sub-themes, children were clear to indicate not only in presentations what they go through on matters revolving around health but also through art. The art came out clearly that it did not need any form of further deciphering.

This particular sub-theme had 17 submissions from the children which were thoroughly done by the children. The children tackled different issues from mental health, physical health and other forms of health like physiological health.



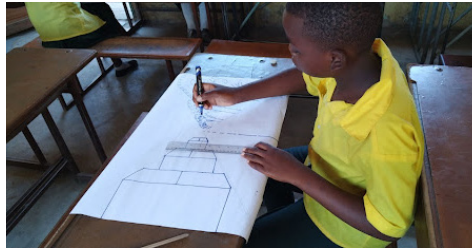
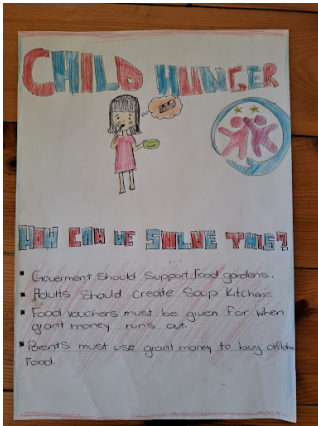
b) Child Participation

The children proved more than enough times that child participation is key in ensuring that society moves forward and that the voice of the child is heard. They expressed this through art too. This entry had five art submissions from the children.



c) Education

Children realized that their right to education is affected by a number of challenges. They came out to express this through art which was submitted to the ACS committee expressing the challenges that they face with regard to accessing quality education. This particular sub-theme had four submissions from the children.



d) Child Rights Governance

Child Rights Governance is crucial in ensuring that the rights of the child are respected, protected and fulfilled. Through child rights governance, society is able to ensure that processes work for children and they too understand this.

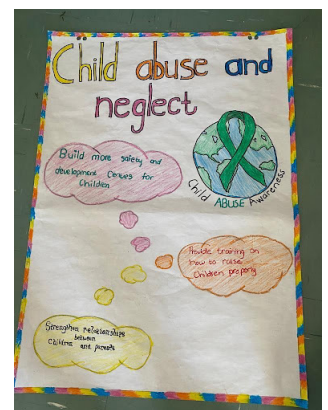
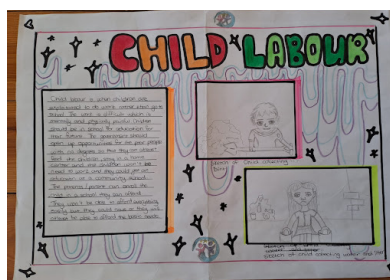
This entry had seven submissions from the children expressing an understanding of the sub-theme.



e) Violence Against Children

Violence against children occurs in different forms. This has affected children in many ways ranging from physical, mental, and developmental effects and in severe cases leads to death. Children for a long time have expressed how this affects them and they also took the opportunity to illustrate this through art.

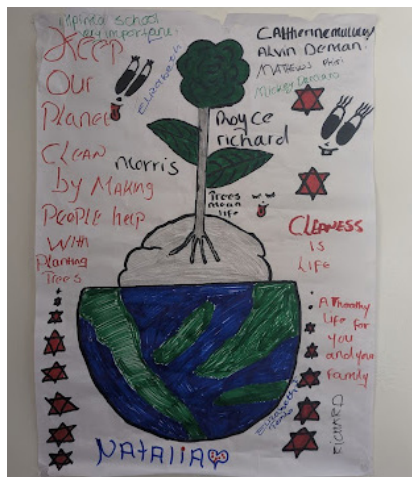
This sub-theme had a total of 16 entries explaining and illustrating the various ways in which violence against children affects them.



f) Climate Change

Climate change, a conversation that has been ongoing in the last few years was one of the entries that children made during this art and essay competition. They demonstrated their understanding of the issues and also went ahead to provide solutions on how to deal with the issues.

Deeply delving into this issue, children submitted 19 entries into this sub-theme.



Among the issues highlighted by children in the essays and art pieces as well as the pre-summit session include;

1. Children, contrary to adult views and opinions, are well aware of the issues affecting society and are able to see and pinpoint all this.
2. Children are directly affected by these issues and it is right to say that they are the most affected.
3. Children are really eager to have child participation embraced by all. We cannot continue to ignore their plight to be involved at the table of decision-making.
4. ACS has been long overdue and children are excited that this is happening for them. They know for sure that such a platform will be an effective change and we as adults and other stakeholders need not fail them.
5. Children's Rights are Human Rights.

The pieces of art submitted by children were also showcased in a gallery room at the Summit. Furthermore, a digital gallery has been set up on the Mtoto News website where the art pieces are displayed.

THE SUMMIT - DAY 1

MONDAY 10TH APRIL 2023

PLENARY SESSION

The plenary session took place in the afternoon. Children were given an opportunity to present the various topics they had discussed in the respective breakaway rooms. Each group had representatives who presented their points to the guests. On day one, children were divided into the following solution areas:

- Solution Area 1: Child participation.
- Solution Area 2: Education.
- Solution Area 3: Health.
- Solution Area 4: The Internet and Children's Protection

Child Participation

Group A

The discussion on child participation had two sets of presentations from the children as they were divided into two groups. One of their emphasis when discussing this was the fact that **child participation is a right and not a privilege**. The children were very clear by backing up this statement. They mentioned that this right is enshrined in different documents like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a core principle, specifically in Article 12 which gives children the Right to be Heard. This right



is also provided for in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child under Article 7 which is clear on children expressing their views in their immediate community and beyond. This was impressive as it really showed the effort that the children put in learning and expressing themselves through this well-researched presentation.

To demonstrate their broader knowledge of the topic, the children then highlighted their understanding of the same issue and

how they would love others to look at it.

The Child presenting had various understandings of what child participation is as below;

Definition 1: The child presenter mentioned that *“Child participation involves children in planning processes. There are processes that go through the community and country that should involve the child's say in it.”*

Definition 2: *“Child participation also means involving the child in decision-making. There are decisions and policies that the government is implementing and as children, we have the right to make decisions indeed.”*

Definition 3: *Child participation is the freedom to choose and to explore our various talents.*

The children did not shy away from expressing how they benefit from child participation. One of these benefits as mentioned by them was that child participation helps children in identifying talents. This was testified by one of those who mentioned that before the summit they never knew they could speak publicly. The presenter was applauded by the

other children as most of them echoed how important being given an opportunity can be to accelerate their participation in such spaces.

“Through child participation, I just discovered I can stand in front of people” - Anonymous child participant

Importance of child participation

Children stated that some of the importance of child participation include:

More information was given by the children on what they and society stand to gain when more child participation is a reality that we live in. Child participation, according to the children, should not be overlooked as it has immeasurable benefits, not only to the children but to society as a whole. Those who have enabled it have already seen its benefits. An example is the Africa Children SUMmit which has brought together all these children from different parts of the continent. These children might never have met for such a course and they will not only be inspired to be change-makers in their society but could also be able to create lifelong friendships from this engagement.

Also on the importance of child participation, the children clearly echoed what is enshrined in the Agenda 2040 Aspiration 10 which emphasizes that African children's views matter. Just as the document says, children emphasized the need to effectively participate both in the family, community, national and regional levels like the AU.

Children stated that some of the importance of child participation include:



- Child Participation helps children to be aware of their surroundings.

- It also helps children in finding different mechanisms for expressing the issues affecting them including diplomatic ways other than always resorting to violence and demonstrations.

- Children are actively involved to identify and participate in matters affecting them.

The child presenter was very clear in stating that “No one knows what you're going through better than you. Through child participation, you can clearly express yourself in what you're going through.”

- Children are able to address the challenges they face as they grow.
- It enables inclusivity for all children in both rural and urban areas. This later translates to the effectiveness of addressing the issues that face the children.

Group B

After delving into the definitions and explanations of child participation, the children went further into discussing issues affecting child participation. The children realized that more can be done to ensure that they are seen, heard and engaged especially on issues that affect their wellbeing. Whilst children are aware of what impact their participation in society can bring, they are also aware that this is hindered by a number of factors:

- Gender inequality. The children, highlighted that children need to be looked as that, children, and there should not be any form of favouritism with regard to the gender of the child, this in many cases causes division and misunderstanding and

misrepresentation especially when addressing their issues. **“We need to say, GENDER EQUALITY. Not girl power!”** emphasizing that both boys and girls are important for the development of society.

- For effective participation, he mentioned, the language used to pass information and engage the children needs to be child-friendly. “When a lot of people stand here to talk, somehow the English is hard. I would advise simple English that children will understand.” This will enable proper engagement of children.
- Corporal punishment is also rampant in schools in the african region, captured the presenter. “It is not necessary to drive us by force and violence, we need to be talked to,” he insisted. The children highlighted a case in kenya where a child was canned 107 times by their teacher because they lost a school uniform. This affected the child both physically and mentally.
- Children are also afraid that many of the issues they raise during scuh platforms are not always implemented. Children are now able to hold duty-bearers accountable of the issues that they make to ensure effective participation.



Education

This team discussed education in Africa. They were divided into two mini-sessions.

i. First Mini-session

Definition: A child defined education as, “The process through which children acquire knowledge and skills.”

The children talked about the 4As that make up the educational system during this session. They were;

- **Availability:** A child mentioned that schools should be made sufficient so that no child is exempted from learning because of limited school access.
- **Accessibility:** A child suggested that educational facilities be placed inside the child’s existing building.
- **Adaptability:** A child gave the example of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the closure of schools, to illustrate how the educational system should be able to adapt to the changing environment. Many kids miss out on learning and education. The child explained that schools should be prepared in case of unforeseen events like the pandemic.
- **Acceptability:** According to a child, education in each country should be relevant to the children of that nation.

The group also touched on what an ideal quality education looks like, listing that for education to be considered ideal:

- It needs to be free.
- It should have adequate infrastructure for children.
- It should incorporate the right to participate.
- It should offer quality learning.

The children proposed that more resources be put towards ensuring the safety and security of children in schools. They based their argument on safety in Kenya, recommending that police stations be located near schools. Police stations should also be made easily accessible to schools so cases can be reported. The many cases of kidnapping and molestation in schools in South Africa have been the cause of insecurity in many schools. The child described it as an irony, explaining that while schools should offer safety, there's too much insecurity.

Children also recommended that resources should be put into the safety and security of children who go to school. They gave a case study of Kenya where the government should recruit several teachers and police stations should be put in place to ensure that there is adequate security, and where children with cases of insecurity can report to for guidance.

Also, the children discussed the reasons why they go to school. Children in group two



gave the following reasons for which they attend their respective schools:

- To interact with their fellow children and teachers.
- To build a good foundation for future careers.
- To acquire knowledge and skills to better themselves and know what is good and bad for the betterment of their future.
- To earn respect from society.
- To identify their talents.

What is the relation between food security and education?

The children talked about the various ways that food security affects their education. They discussed the impact that hunger has on their ability to focus on their studies. They also said that malnutrition causes unhealthy living among children thus disrupting children from attending to their education needs.

Recommendations

Children recommended the following for African governments regarding the improvement of education:

- Adapt to technology so that teachers are well equipped with knowledge of the changing technology, that way they will be able to deliver enough knowledge to the students.
- Adapt to the fast-changing environment.
- The government should ensure there are adequate resources in schools, as education is a key priority for African children.
- Schools should make sure that children have access to enough food and that money is raised to guarantee that they eat well every single day.

The children who are abled differently also said that the government should do the following:

- Ensure there is the same curriculum for everybody so that they do not feel left out of learning what their fellows learn.
- Provide adequate resources for the disabled to ensure they get quality education.

Health

Children's health is multi-faceted, highly intertwined, and difficult to isolate as it touches on mental, health, and social well-being thus child health, growth, and development are inseparable.

This sentiment was well captured at the Summit by a child who said' *Health is the physical, social and mental wellbeing and not merely absence of diseases and infirmities.*'

Some other important parts of your child's health include cognitive (learning and thinking) development, social and emotional growth, and mental health.



Thus a child's health should be vitally concerned with all aspects of children's growth and development and with the unique opportunity that each child has to achieve their full potential as a healthy adult.

It is right to say child's health is the foundation of all growth and development. Poor child health has adverse effects on a child's life that even lingers in their adulthood.

For instance, research has shown that poor health impacts brain development and negative health outcomes that lead to poor performance in school and life in general.

Studies have shown exposure to violence, family stress, inadequate housing, lack of preventive health care, poor nutrition, poverty and substance abuse direct factors in undermining a child's health.

The Summit echoed Africa Agenda on Children 2040 Aspiration 4 which emphasizes that by 2040 every child should be in an environment where they can survive and has a healthy childhood.

This can be achieved by making sure children have proper nutrition and medical services to ensure they grow up into healthy human beings.

Children's health is influenced by different ecological factors which the children at the summit outlined as follows detailing how they affect a child's life.

Economic factors

One of the most life-altering impacts of growing up in poverty are the increased likelihood of teen pregnancy, which has lasting economic consequences.

Children in poverty, mostly girls, get into relationships with the aim of getting financial aid to help buy essentials such as pads. And school fees according to experiences shared by girls in the Summit. 'Girls in room three said they had to get boyfriends to be able to be financially stable and pay their school fees,' a group representative said.

As a consequence, these girls ended up getting pregnant.

In utter shock, a child asked, '*How can a child get a child?*'

UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children. Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid patiently answered the child by saying, '*A child gets a child if they engage in unprotected sexual intercourse when they have reached reproductive age.*'

She continued to say that a child is anyone who has attained the age of 18.

On his part Vice Chair, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Prof. Phillip D. Jaffè said that these girls should be given an opportunity to go back to school and should be re-integrated with their peers.

'We need organizations that can take care of children of teen mothers so that they can also spend time being children and go back to school so that they can interact with girls who aren't parents yet, play and interact with others,' he said.

To mitigate this problem, the children said that teenagers should be educated about teen pregnancy and other factors that can put them at risk of getting pregnant.

Additionally, they asked relevant stakeholders and the governments to provide free sanitary towel for school-going children and for parents to pay for their children's school fees.

Due to poverty, some parents find it hard to take their children to the hospital putting their lives in danger a child at the Summit observed.

Thus, they asked the government to provide free health services to children to alleviate the suffering associated with bad health.

Discrimination in Health Facilities



Children noted that pregnant teens face discrimination while seeking services in health facilities thus discouraging them from seeking antenatal services. As a result, these girls face preventable the risk of maternal and fetal deaths.

'When a young girl goes to the hospital pregnant, the doctors might start to insult her questioning her why a child is giving birth to a child, this affects their mental health,' reckons an anonymous child

Education factors

As a consequence of early pregnancy, many teenage girls miss or drop out of school the team representing health thematic area noted.

Cultural and Community factors

Female genital mutilation is a cultural practice in many African communities. It causes a lot of girls a lot of physical and psychological harm and often times victims of this vice drop out of school to get married.

Then it is expected that they give birth pretty fast and this denies them the opportunity to be economically empowered thus perpetuating the poverty cycle, the children noted.

Aspects of Parenthood

They noted with great concern that some parents don't know the sicknesses their children are suffering from while others are scared to tell their parents.

This poses a great danger to the child's health as they don't get the treatment they need and can sometimes lead to fatality.

To address this problem, the children suggested child-friendly health facilities be set up within villages where children can take themselves to seek health services without informing their parents.

Also, rejection by parents and relatives was mentioned as a contributing factor to mental health issues, the children noted.

The solution to this, they said, community health workers should be trained to map out such families and help in the rehabilitation of such families into more inclusive families.

Environmental factors

Dirt occasioned by environmental pollution puts children at risk of contracting non-communicable diseases which affects the overall well-being of children. These diseases can be fatal at times they reckoned.

Environmental conservation and enactment of tough anti-pollution laws were recommended as a possible solution to avert this problem at the Summit.

THE INTERNET

Whilst the internet has proven to be a basic need in the 21st Century through its immense benefits, children reported that it is also a platform that has been used to accelerate their abuse and exploitation. The world has over the last few years moved into being a digital world and therefore a lot is happening in the digital space as is happening offline. This in education for example, was evident during the COVID 19 period where a lot of schools were closed to stop the spread of the virus.

A child defined **the internet** as “a digital platform where you can access different types of media, people etc.”

Further to this, the children mentioned that the internet and child protection go hand in hand because it is a space that children also have an access to. According to the child presenter, “a child is anyone under the age of 18” and this is well represented in the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and also reflected in different laws of different countries and regions.

Mentioning the above, the children highlighted a number of challenges that they go through. These challenges are both inflicted to by themselves and other people mostly adults. One emerging challenge that has come with the existence of the internet is the issue of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA). OCSEA comes in different forms including;

- Online Grooming which they mentioned comes in different stages.
- Cyber bullying is also rampant and hinders the availability of a conducive environment for children to thrive in the online space.
- The children also mentioned the sharing of Child Sexual Exploitation Materials (CSEM) in the form of images and videos which perpetrators use to blackmail children and inflict other forms of mental abuse on them.
- Sexting is also a form of abuse that children go through where they are lured into sending and receiving sexually explicit messages.



Recommendations

- Realizing that they are not only meant to highlight problems, the children proposed a number of solutions that can help prevent the above forms of abuse and challenges experienced by children on the internet. The solutions and recommendations given by the children should be a responsibility of each and every person including the government, UN agencies, regional agencies, Civil Society Organizations, Non-governmental organizations and the children themselves.
- One of the solutions to the above is the regulation of different online websites as policy makers and the creators of the platforms like the social media platform should have children safety in consideration.
- The children also urged their fellow children to privatize their accounts and only accept requests and access from individuals that they know. They should be extra carefully into whom they give and get attention from.
- There was a call to educators and other stakeholders like the CSOs, the government and other peer educators on creating awareness on an issues like digital footprint which could ruin the future of the child. The child should be careful and informed of what they post online. This was a call especially to abusers who in one way or another will be held accountable for their actions in future.
- Most importantly, the children urged us all to report any case of child abuse and unruly behaviour that is happening in the online space. This will not only crack down on the perpetrators but will also decrease the cases of child abuse in the online space.

In conclusion, it can be established from the session that both adults and children have an obligation to ensure that children are safe online. Different stakeholders, both state and non-state actors all have a responsibility to enforce child protection and online safety through the programs that they run.

PLENARY COMMENTS FROM GUESTS

- **Hon. El Jera** said that the committee on the rights and welfare of the child is there to listen to the children's issues.
- **Hon. Sidikou** echoed Bob Marley's Song Stand up for your rights. She expressed her joy with the children of Africa and said that rights are not given, you have to grab it. Additionally, he said she hopes children have grabbed their rights on the rights and welfare of the child.
- **Hon Jaffe** said that he will engage with the government and criticize them on the rights of children. He also said he will engage the government to discuss more budget for children's healthcare. He then went ahead to congratulate the girls in his group for how they spoke up about their difficult issues.
- **Dr Najat** said that children have a wonderful capacity for resilience and therefore they have to be listened to. She echoed Dr Jaffe's comment when she said "Children are not a problem to solve, they are a strong capital to invest in."



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A child asked: “How Can a child go back to being a child after bearing a child “

Answers: “A child is a person under 18 years, so it is important that their rights are heard and taken care of”

“It depends on how a child is taken care of. It is a collective responsibility of the community/ society. An organization that takes care of that should be established”

Question: “How can a child who is illegally employed get involved in child participation”

Dr Najat: “It is important that issues like these are reported through the hotlines available for children. Children are not reporting about the issues they face and that is evident on the powerful hotline for children where no responses or concerns are being received. It is like the hotline is almost functionless”

“A child should not be employed because they are minors” - Anonymous Child

“Employment of a child falls under child labour. Enforcement of laws by the government on issues of child labour is of importance.” - - Anonymous Child

Questions

1. How can we eliminate discrimination in schools with children with disabilities? A child with a disability was hit by a car but has never found justice.”
2. “How do we help children who have children to go to school”

Responses

1. “On child labour, if you have such cases you should report them to the teachers or someone you trust. Also speak up on behalf of your siblings, neighbours and friends”
2. “On school-going girls who have children, Pregnant girls or girls with children have equal rights as other children. Facilitation of breastfeeding for these girls is necessary.”
3. “On OCSEA, children should report to the justice system and follow up on it.”
4. “On children who frustrate other children who go back to school after delivery, adults should create awareness for their children to stop harassing their mates.”



THE SUMMIT - DAY 2

TUESDAY 11TH APRIL 2023

Opening Remarks

The opening remarks for day two were done by Foday Bangura, a child from Sierra Leone. He welcomed children and everyone present at the Summit.

Special Remarks

- **Mr Philip Thigo**, the Board Chairman of Mtoto News, thanked the children for being part of the ACS. He said that seeing children involved in solving the global crisis is fascinating. He also said that technology has put children at more risk of sexual exploitation than anybody else. Moreover, Mr Philip said that children need to be involved in decisions that matter to them, as that is what child participation is all about.
- **Mr Unaludo Isaac**, a Child Rights Advocate from Botswana, said that it is fascinating that children can come together to come up with solutions to their problems.
- **Mr Fred Nyabera**, Director of Arigatou International, said that they are happy as Arigatou to be part of the summit which is for children, by children. He also said that Africa faces many challenges from poverty, to climate change and many more. Additionally, Mr Fred said that he believes that whenever children come together they find solutions, and through their SDG Academy for children, they support children towards finding solutions. The Arigatou International, Nairobi also echoed the multiple challenges faced by children mentioned by Mr Philip and said that the way in which we are dealing with these challenges makes other challenges more difficult to deal with.
- **Dr Philip Jaffe** said that he loved the summit because it was the noisiest summit he has ever been part of, and that is what the children are there for. He also said that they need children to report to them directly what they are going through and not only through civil societies. Moreover, Dr Jaffe said that their collective behaviour, like climate change, is a threat to all children. He also said that change will come from children's participation and they are not too young to speak out.
- **Dr Najat** stated that she was exhausted to hear about the same speech on matters of FGM, climate and justice delay as it has been in Africa over the years. She said that action was needed on those issues. She also said that we need to fight for digital learning for all children in Africa. Her commitment as the UN representative was to make sure that children's voices are taken into account.
- **Lady Justice Teresia Matheka**, judge of the High Court of Kenya, said that during last year's child justice summit, the issue of child participation came up and she was glad Mtoto News took it up. She also said that if you are a child and cannot present your issue in court or to the justice system then you may not get the justice you deserve. Moreover, Hon. Matheka said that the ODPP has now created a better place for children where they deal with children. She also stated that the Kenyan justice system will strive to be a shining example to the rest of Africa by adopting the issues presented by children during the ACS.
- **Mr Mwangi**, the Child Board Member at Mtoto News, passed his regards to adults who had come to listen to



children. He gave a brief history of Mtoto News.

- **Hon. Martha Koome**, Chief Justice of Kenya. Her speech was read by Hon. Theresia Matheka who thanked Mtoto News and organizers of the event. She said that it is important that we create spaces that protect children. She also said that the role of adults in the room was to ensure that children's rights are protected, and urged her colleagues in the justice system to take children's views seriously. She quoted that "children, you are not in the future, you are in the present". She then urged children to speak up for themselves, their friends, siblings, environment, and country and hold each adult accountable.

PLENARY SESSION

Violence Against Children

Violence Against Children is still happening across African countries despite strong legal frameworks being put in place, with children being harmed in the name of cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation, corporal punishment in many schools in Africa, early child marriages and children dropping out of school which results in the violation of their rights. Violence against children comes in many forms such as physical violence, social violence, emotional violence and psychological violence. A child defined violence as:

"Violence is the form of action being done to children that do not result in positive outcomes to the child"

Anonymous child participant

However, the World Health Organization defines Violence Against Children as

"All forms of violence against people under 18 years old, whether perpetrated by parents or other caregivers, peers, romantic partners, or strangers"

Anonymous child participant

Violence Against Children has lifelong effects on children. It is estimated that about 1 billion children aged between 2- 17 years globally have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence in the past year. There are many children in Africa who are being affected by mental health because of such practices.



Children's views on the relationship between environmental rights and violence against children

Children said they face physical violence caused by lack of food and conflict caused by lack of resources. For instance, when in a country there is war, everyone affected is usually relocated elsewhere where they become refugees. There they are given aid by different institutions. When this aid is not distributed fairly to the affected families it might cause conflict as people fight for

equality in the distribution of these resources. These conflicts might drive children to leave refugee camps and become street kids.

Children indicated that sexual violence due to lack of security in the countries they reside in is also a big contributor to violence against children.

"We face different security issues when we are selling items on the streets."

Sexual violence due to lack of security usually happens to everyone including the girl child. For instance, when girls go to sell they are exposed to different hazardous conditions like sexual harassment from others and other kinds of bullying on the streets.”

Anonymous child participant

Children noted that whereas adoption is of help to children without parents, the type of family they get adopted in is important. They gave a case of domestic violence whereby a child is being beaten and adopted by people who are not their biological parents, and in most cases, these adopters do not know children's rights. They recommended that these caregivers need to be educated on children's rights before they adopt a child. Children also need to be given a chance to express their views to them, i.e. when a child wants to go to school the caregivers should not stand in their way.

“Some families who adopt children do not care about children's rights. When adopted in such families, children find themselves being domestic workers in such homes, instead of them going to school. These children are even being blackmailed that for them to be provided with basic needs such as food, they have to forgo school to work at home.”

Anonymous child participant

Children noted that lack of knowledge of children's rights among the elderly has also been a major contributor to these violations in their communities.

“There is a need to educate the elders about children's rights being violated in our communities so that as they are sending their child to school, they know children's rights and when these rights are violated, they should be supporting children rather than violating these rights.”

Anonymous child participant



Children said that children exposed to violence are substantially more likely to smoke, misuse alcohol and drugs, and engage in high-risk sexual behaviour. Children pointed out drug and substance abuse caused by children when they get idle in society. Lack of environmental rights causes drug and substance abuse.

“When parents leave a child idle instead of taking them to school, they may indulge in drug abuse and engage in illegal activities like stealing. That is a human rights violation since the children are not given their rights to education and instead sort to such harmful practices that not only harm their health but can also lead children into getting jailed and ruining their future.”

Anonymous child participant

Recommendations

Since prevention is better than cure, finding ways to end violence against children will be of greater benefit to the African child. Children, therefore, made the following recommendations:

- Counsellors should be made available in schools to support children with protection concerns.
- Enhancement of security for children, especially during political elections and wars in countries, to ensure that the children are safe. The police should be trained on how to

handle children properly.

- Governments should ensure strict enforcement of laws and policies on violence against children including harmful cultural practices.
- Children should be provided with reasonable punishment in schools and corporal punishment should be completely outlawed as it amounts to violence against children.
- The community should be educated on the importance of children's rights.
- Government should take action against people who propagate violence against children.



- The government should provide children with basic needs because it is their right.
- The government should come up with a proper framework for all children to get their basic needs equally.
- The government should include children in decision-making, not only in policies but also in meetings in society and in any other meeting that involves them.

- The government should put restrictions on discipline methods that are given to children especially when they are in schools with proper monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure adherence.
- Children should be made aware of their rights so that they can know when they are being violated.
- Child helplines should be made available by the government so that children can report cases of violence.
- Children should be supported by parents, society and their schools so that they can have a better future.
- Children should stop being discriminated against based on their gender.
- Children should not be discriminated against based on their class.

Climate change

The future of a healthy environment is highly dependent on climate change management. Climate change has greatly contributed to environmental degradation; and it is with no doubt that the government and other responsible bodies can come together to curb this climate change crisis.

Speaking of environmental degradation, children who attended the Africa Children Summit identified the following environmental problems that children have in their community:

Pollution: Air pollution, a type of pollution caused by harmful gases like carbon (iv) oxide, and carbon monoxide, as well as factory wastes dumped in water bodies, when released to the environment, leads to global warming. This in turn affects the health of children and their families as well as human activities like farming and cattle rearing which is one of the ways through which parents earn money to take care of children's needs. In Africa, a large percentage of families are not able to fend for their daily needs because of such effects of pollution that lead to climate change.

Corruption: When government officials are given funds to fund projects that protect the environment, that money is thrown into individual pockets and ends up not meeting the intended purpose. This deprives the environmental projects of adequate funds thus leading to stalling of these projects.

“In Western countries, bribe is given under the table, In Asian countries bribe is given on the table while in Africa the table itself is given as a bribe ” Anonymous child participant

Poor waste management: Sewages are not cleared properly, and if cleared, most sewage wastes are dumped in water bodies. This not only causes harm to animals living in these water bodies but also to children who consume the water. Health hazards that children develop by consuming contaminated water and being in contact with sewage wastes may lead to death.



Poverty: Proper housing is a big challenge for people living below the poverty level. For example, houses made of iron sheets. The iron sheets wear out fast thus polluting the environment, but because of the state of families living in them, they can hardly afford a better living condition hence they are forced to use the readily available spaces. Also, during the construction of such houses, the remaining unwanted sheets are thrown all over and this causes havoc to the environment and children.

Factory waste: Wastes emitted in the air and those released to the rivers cause global warming, a situation that in turn affects weather patterns hence leading to food shortage.

Deforestation: Trees are a major supply of environmental oxygen that helps human beings to survive. When trees are done away with, the chances of the air children breathe being contaminated with other harmful gases is high thus causing diseases that may lead to death.

“The more trees we cut, the poorer the health of children get” - Anonymous child participant

The children expressed the relationship between environmental rights and violence against children as follows:

- Sexual violence due to lack of security in our society happens to all children, both girls and boys.
- Physical violence caused by lack of food and scarcity of resources.
- Getting adopted in families that do not respect children's rights would lead to child labour.
- Cultural activities that cause violence.
- Insecurity which may cause sexual harassment.
- Lack of environmental rights may cause poor development either socially, economically, mentally or spiritually.
- Lack of environmental rights causes drug and substance abuse.

Recommendations

Owing to the several climate change issues pointed out by children, children came up with the following recommendations to the governments and industries:

To the governments, they said it can solve climate change by:

- **Reducing the use of plastic bags:** As much as the government can import some plastic items, it should try as much as possible to avoid the importation unless it is necessary. Plastics contribute to environmental pollution thus leading to reduced production of food. Whenever children are not able to get an adequate food supply, they get malnourished and face other nutrient-related health problems.
- **Conducting campaigns on the risks of environmental pollution:** Creating awareness of the risks of environmental pollution will aim at reducing the amount of waste emitted to the environment by reducing human practices that lead to environmental degradation.
- **Penalizing environmental polluters:** By creating strict laws that govern the environment, and measures that will be taken against people and industries that pollute the environment. Through this, polluters will be more cautious of their environment and how they dump waste.
- **Encouraging crop diversity:** Crop diversification will promote the interaction of beneficial soil bacteria, and reduce the quantity of weeds that grow in farms. It will also boost the crop output by improving the physical and chemical qualities of soil, therefore the amount of food production will increase.
- **Reducing the use of fossil fuels such as coal, gas and petroleum which acts as a huge contributor to climate change:** By opting to use public transportation or carpooling, there will be a reduced number of cars on the road and therefore the number of cars releasing emissions. thus reducing Fossil fuels released into the atmosphere.
- **Restricting cutting down of trees to discourage deforestation:** Proper forest management strategies should be put in place to ensure the environment is not disturbed. Moreover, more trees should be planted which will contribute to the improvement of climatic conditions. Further, penalties should be given to those who cut down trees and introducing licences for cutting down trees.

Industries can help in solving climate change by:

- **Stopping plastic production:** The fact that plastics are now a serious headache for not only Africa but the planet at large, more and more factories should put measures to reduce their impact on the environment.
- **Reducing the production of wooden materials** that promote deforestation, and instead producing mechanical pencils made using metals.
- **Making electric cars.** Electric cars improve air quality in towns and cities since they do not emit carbon dioxide or other harmful emissions when driving. This reduces air pollution.
- **Producing sulphur oils instead of ordinary oils used by cars.** Sulphur oils are highly biodegradable which makes them excellent choices for applications in sensitive environments.
- **Using micro-filters.**



Media and Technology

Definition: Media- These are platforms made to enable interaction. They are made to bring children together.

Definition: Technology is something created to make work easier, for example, computers that children can use to do research.

Due to its porous nature media and technology have grown in leaps and bounds penetrating every country around the globe making it a necessity for human survival. Echoing this a child at the Summit said, ***“You can survive the internet but you can’t escape it.”***

As a result, children’s experiences are mediated by screen technologies, thus much of their social life takes place while they sit in front of a computer television, phone, and iPhone. In essence, most children acquire some norms, rules, and values from media and technology which affect how they form connections and function in families, peer groups, and the broader society.

Media and technology such as television programs, movies, and even the Internet introduce children to the popular culture where they can form norms and standards of conduct they view as acceptable behaviour by society. Children born in the digital era have been presented with tremendous advantages compared to previous generations as they can easily access the world at their fingertips. Technology has become so pivotal in today’s life that it has facilitated essential human rights in terms of the educational, social, and health needs of children and young people.

During the African Children Summit, in unison, children attested that they are huge consumers of media and technology. Indeed they said almost all their aspects of life are intertwined with the two in areas such as education, entertainment, and social interactions. One child at the Summit describing its very importance said, ***“Technology is our new reality and we cannot stay away from it.”***

Research shows that the average 8- to 10-year-old spends almost 8 hours a day with a variety of media, and older children and teenagers spend around 11 hours per day with media. The Covid19 pandemic stamped and amplified the pivotal role of media and technology in everyday life as it made it possible for children to continue with education and also interact in a period where physical contact was impossible.

In addition, the whole world relied on old and new media like television, radio and newspaper, and the internet for information on what was going on.

Acknowledging the importance of technology in education, children’s views captured in Africa’s Agenda for Children 2040 on their aspiration for quality education, alluded



that schools should provide universal access to affordable information, communication and technology devices, content, and connectivity, and integrate these into teaching and curricula.

However, access to the internet is not uniform as around **67%** of children and young people around the world don’t have internet access. In Eastern and Southern Africa, only **13%** of children and young people have Internet access at home, and in West and Central Africa access is even lower

at **5%**. This puts many children at a disadvantage as they can’t compete with their peers in all aspects of life such as education and exposure to the global arena.

Even with all these great benefits, media and technology present a myriad of harm to children such as online bullying, grooming, child pornography, violence, child online sexual exploitation, and child trafficking. It was evident in the summit that children were cognizant of these challenges prompting them to engage policymakers in attendance to help make media and technology safe and more child-friendly. This responsibility was placed on parents, governments, media, policymakers, and society at large.

“Parents ought to teach their children how to be cyber smart.” Anonymous child participant

During the Summit, Media and Technology were discussed at length and participants gave their own experiences, challenges, and possible solutions.



Media

Television, radio, and newspapers are important media that deliver information, educate and entertain children in homes and learning institutions. However, the children at the summit noted, the content is not always safe for children's consumption, noting some contents are riddled with violence and sexual connotations.

Toward this end, the following recommendations were given:

- They said it is important to keep children safe by ensuring children and adult content is segmented at different times.

“Adults and children are different spiritually and psychologically with adults being mature and thus having the ability to know which content is bad or good.” Anonymous child participant

- It was recommended that awareness should be created on the dangers that lurk in the media and highlight that some contents are not safe or child-friendly.

“Children can watch things that can traumatise them like a news broadcast of people being shot.” Anonymous child participant

- It was recommended that media should create platforms for children to contribute content to their media products.
- The media was urged to give more air time to children's educational programs.
- Parents were called to be at the forefront in regulating the amount spent on media whilst protecting children from being exposed to dirty content and violence.
- Further parents should encourage their children to interact with media that is helpful to them.
- Parents should monitor what their children watch to avoid early exposure to sexual behaviour which can have detrimental consequences in the future.

“Parents should protect their children from pornographic materials which cause them to have early sexual maturity which can lead to early pregnancies in teenagers.” Anonymous child participant

- They noted that many children living with disabilities were excluded from media consumption as investments to accommodate children living with disabilities have not been made.

“Inclusivity is ensuring everyone is involved including the blind and the deaf, so there should be a disability-friendly way of facilitating this.”

Anonymous child participant

- More educational content via the media was advocated for by the children.

Technology

Technology, especially the internet, was lauded for the great benefit it has brought to children and the world in general. It was described as a double-edged sword: ***“The Internet is used to help or to destroy.”*** ***Anonymous child participant***

His voice echoes the reality of many children around the world who have been harmed by the internet in many ways leaving them traumatised. Due to its unique nature of storing data forever, children who have experienced online child abuse are at risk of being re-traumatized and bullied all over again.

“The internet never forgets therefore whatever you use to bully others will be used against you one day.”

Anonymous child participant

Advantages of the Internet

- The centrality of the internet in children’s lives was well articulated with one child saying ‘We as Gen Z need the internet for coding, making games, basically for advancement’.
- The internet has made access to information easy with children acknowledging they have used apps such as Chrome and other search engines to get useful information.
- In education, it was discovered that technology has become a great tool for home-school children as they learn as their peers in school.
- In the economic aspect, children have utilized the internet to advance their skills in coding and gaming which earn them money.



“We can use technology to create games which can make us money.”

Anonymous child participant

- Social interactions via the internet were mentioned as one of the greatest benefits for children as they interact with others from other parts of the world.

“We can make friends through social media.” ***Anonymous child participant***

- The internet has become a great space for entertainment through music, videos, movies, and games for children.

Disadvantages of the Internet

A child narrated how dangerous the internet can be for children if left unsupervised where he said, ***“I wish my parents monitored my online activities three years ago because the things I saw broke me.”*** His experience is shared by millions of children

around the globe who have been harmed by the internet in many ways. The internet is particularly unique from other forms of media because it stores data forever thus putting children who have experienced online child abuse at risk of being re-traumatized.

Children ascertained they are at risk of:

- Internet addiction- Internet addiction in a child can manifest as a compulsive need to spend a great deal of time on the Internet, to the point where other areas of life like play and social interaction are ignored.

A child at the Summit putting it into perspective said, *“If you give a child an opportunity to use technology, they may use it for a longer time unable to manage their time and become addicted.”*

- **Moral Decay** - Through the internet, children may get to learn or view content that is not age appropriate through inappropriate adverts that pop- up and also websites that are not child friendly.
- **Private data violations** - Since there are no particular laws that protect children's data on the web, the fear of children's data being used without their consent by app developers is a reality.

“A creator of a platform might get to know a lot of our personal information.”
Anonymous child participant

“We should not be defined by our social media followers since it may bring down our mental health.”

- Cyber Security- The issue of cyber security is a reality that children deal with each waking day as they have become easy targets for online sexual abuse, bullying, and identity theft. To this end, children advocated for online safety in which they placed the responsibility on themselves, their parents, and the government.



These were some of their views on how children can be safe online.

Children's role

- Don't click on random links on the internet.
- Don't download random files on the internet.
- Inform your parents about what you are doing online.
- Don't browse the internet for too long.
- Seek guidance from an adult on how to navigate the internet.
- Privatised your accounts and report unruly behaviour seen online.
- Be careful in looking at the regulations and guidelines online.

Parent's role

- Parents should activate parental control on their children's devices.
- Monitor what the children are doing online.

- Limit the amount of time children spend online.

Government's role

- Governments should be more intentional with creating safe internet spaces.
- Governments should create websites and consult web experts on how to create and make the internet' child-friendly.
- Governments should regulate sites visited by children.

Recommendations

These recommendations underscore Aspiration seven of Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 which aspires to protect children from any form of abuse or harm. In this regard, they seek to strengthen this aspiration angled at online children's exploitation and abuse. After thorough discussions among children, recommendations on possible solutions for the problems identified were given as follows:

- More child-friendly online platforms should be created to minimize children accessing adults' content.

"The only platform that children have is YouTube Kids, but we can have Chrome for kids."

- Children should be monitored by their parents to ensure they interact with child-friendly content and are safe to use.
- App creators should put up restrictive measures on their apps to ensure that children don't access some content until they are of legal age.

"Before app installation, questions on age and content should be asked to ensure children don't access adult content."

- App creators should be deterred from uploading content that is not child-friendly and make it accessible to children.
- Authorities should not hold back the punishment they give to offenders. Whenever children report cases of bullying, actions should be taken.

"Individuals who subject children to abuse online should receive a bigger punishment than what they are getting."

- Adults should caution children about the apps they can access when using the Phones belonging to the adults.

"Instead of restricting children from using the internet, proper advice should be given on safe internet usage."

- Counselling should be made affordable for children who get abused online to seek counselling services without straining financially.



Access to Justice

Access to justice is one of the main issues that was raised by the children. One of the children defined access to justice as;

“Access to justice is a right for everyone including children whether in conflict or in contact with the law.”

Children are supposed to have access to a child-friendly justice system with special safeguards because of their vulnerable nature. However, we note with concern that children continue to be detained and in some cases in the same facility as adults.

Death sentences are pronounced against children and prohibited terms like ‘conviction’ and ‘sentenced’ are used by courts while determining children matters. The whole system is unfriendly to the children making it unfair and unjust.

The judicial staff lack basic child-handling skills. The children are intimidated and may end up pleading guilty to crimes they did not commit. The system is faced with challenges that have led to its failure. A lot needs to be done to reverse the situation and make the system child-friendly, effective, efficient, just and fair.



During the Summit, the children expressed their concerns through a platform that was rigorous, ethical and sensitive to their unique needs and experiences of children. The approach was child-centred, we had the relevant stakeholders such as other children, parents, chaperons, legal professionals as well as the policymakers. Also, cultural and contextual measures were also taken into consideration as the attendees came from various

backgrounds.

Children said that justice is taken for children in these forms:

- There is the availability of a children’s justice system because the African Welfare on the Rights of the Child has offered that deals with child justice.
- The courts of law have partners that work with them in giving children justice.
- In courts of law, there is no easy devastation.
- In courts of law when the child has a case about the parents it is likely the decision of the child whether to stay with the mother or the father.
- The court of law is capable of providing a child with a lawyer if they do not have one.
- In cases that involve foreigners, there is a possibility of justice through the justice committee i.e. Africa Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

As a result of age and vulnerability, children end up facing unique barriers in accessing justice systems and obtaining fair and just outcomes.

Some of these barriers are inadequate legal representation, lack of access to information and legal resources, discrimination, fear and trauma and other systematic and cultural factors.

‘I was involved in a hit and run and I have never gotten justice..what should I do?’

This is an example of an unfortunate occurrence that one of the children went through and brought it to our attention. Such cases usually arise as a result of lack of access to appropriate legal representation and this is because of poverty

which happens to be the biggest challenge. It came to our attention that ensuring children get access to justice is a complex and multifaceted issue which requires ongoing attention and effort from the relevant stakeholders.

Efforts have already been made to ensure that children get access to justice by 2040 in the Agenda 2040 as seen through Aspiration 1 which is on The African Children's Charter, as supervised by the African Children's Committee, provides an effective continental framework for advancing children's rights. Aspiration 2 is based on coming up with an effective child-friendly national legislative, policy and institutional framework in place in all State parties. Aspiration 7 is based on ensuring that every child is protected against violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse. Lastly, Aspiration 8 is based on ensuring that children benefit from a child-sensitive criminal justice system.

Recommendations

Access to justice is a critical issue that needs to be taken into consideration because the needs of the children have to be addressed to ensure that their rights are protected and upheld. Just like any other individual, regardless of their age, ethnicity or gender, children have a right to access justice and these were the recommendations;

1. Develop child-friendly legal systems

The legal systems should be made more child friendly by simplifying legal language, they should be provided with support services and they should be informed about their rights and the legal process too.

2. Provision of legal aid and representation

Children who are involved in legal proceedings should have access to legal proceedings and representations to ensure that their rights are adequately protected and that their voices are heard.

3. Encourage child participation

Children should be encouraged to participate in legal proceedings and be given the opportunity to express their views and opinions on matters that affect them.



4. Raise awareness

Raising awareness among children, parents and the community at large in regard to children's rights and access to justice in order to ensure that the children are protected.

5. Ensure accountability

The government and relevant institutions should be held accountable for ensuring that children's rights are upheld.

When these recommendations are applied, a legal system that is more responsive to the needs of the children will be created and children will be treated fairly and justly.

THE SUMMIT - DAY 3

WEDNESDAY 12TH APRIL 2023

Dialogue Works - Child Labour

Terre Des Hommes Germany working children presented the “dialogue works project”. The Dialogue Works project is a project involving children all over the world. Within the dialogue works was the Kigali Declaration which highlighted 5 major concerns namely. The Global Gathering of Working Children presented this Dialogue Works project which is a project containing the Kigali Declaration. It highlighted 5 major concerns including:

1. Address poverty, provide decent jobs for our parents and ensure our basic needs are met

- Poverty and exploitation are causes of each other, and therefore must be eradicated from society so that our families have sufficient resources to meet children’s basic needs for food, clothes, health care, clean drinking water, sanitation, and education in urban and rural areas.
- The climate crisis, migration and displacement, health pandemics, conflict, environmental damage and corruption push us into new struggles that need to be dealt with.



- During pandemics and other emergencies, rights must be guaranteed for fair distribution of aid, including social protection for adults and children, and all families should have access to quality health services, vaccines and a healthy environment.

- Parents and caregivers should have opportunities for work that is adequate and stable and vocational skill training in all settings, including rural, remote, camp and urban settings.

- Governments must guarantee rights, and provide decent housing and land rights for families. Plus, we need more spaces for play, leisure and recreation for children’s development.

2. Take our education seriously and provide quality education and skill training

- We want our right to education to be respected, including during pandemics and other emergencies. This includes quality education as a right that is free, friendly, flexible to our needs, accessible, non-violent and non-discriminatory and skill training, including digital education. Education needs to be inclusive of all, including working children with disabilities, children speaking traditional languages and those without access to the internet.
- We want to increase formal, social and community education on climate justice and respect for mother earth to all generations.
- We want informal education in our families and communities on children’s rights and exploitation.
- We want more efforts from governments and states to re-enrol out-of-school

children and to stop factors that hinder children from attending school, like discrimination and violence, as well as tuition fees. We don't want to miss school or drop out because of our work or other reasons. In order to continue studying with our earnings we can cover part of the school costs and thus continue our education, and we also learn skills through our work.

3. Protect us from labour exploitation, harsh conditions and risks, and allow children to do suitable dignified work

- We all want our rights to be protected from exploitation to be respected. We do not want to do work that is too heavy, underpaid, harmful, in harsh or risky conditions or linked to trafficking and bonded labour, which is a crime. Boys face increased risks of heavy work, and girls face increased risks of doing unpaid household work for long hours, taking them away from proper and dignified work.
- However, we do not want to stop all forms of child work. We want to do work that is suitable to our age and capacity to support our families, learn skills, earn money, meet our basic needs and to respect our traditional cultures. This work needs to be safe, fairly paid, and allow for sufficient time to study, rest, and play.
- Many of us feel proud to contribute to our families and want our work to be valued. Our work gives us the opportunity to lead our lives with dignity, provide for our families, and to continue our education as it is also our cultural practice, not just the effect of poverty and exploitation.
- Existing laws on protection from child labour and exploitation must be adequately enforced and monitored everywhere. Plus, policies should support safe work, earn and learn education opportunities, and inclusive skill-based training. Work conditions should be improved, including for working children with disabilities.



4. Listen to us, understand us and implement laws that respect our rights

- We have the right to be heard and need to be seen, heard and engaged in all matters that affect our lives. We want to participate in decisions at all levels and be taken seriously by parents, caregivers, teachers, employers, police, practitioners, religious, traditional and community leaders and policymakers – including government authorities, and other national and international agencies, such as UNICEF, ILO or regional bodies.
- Listening is not enough; we want adults to act on what we say.
- Working children's committees, associations, networks and movements should be supported. We want to be informed about policies and laws affecting us. In addition, we want to play a role in shaping and monitoring laws, policies and programmes to increase proper implementation so they become sensitive to our realities, situations, needs and aspirations.
- Adults should see us as citizens and as important social actors in the care and protection of our planet and its inhabitants.

5. Prevent and protect working children from violence and discrimination

- We want our right to protection from all forms of violence and discrimination, to be respected and to be treated fairly on all occasions.
- We experience different forms of violence (physical, emotional and sexual) and bullying in our homes, schools, on the street, and in the workplace. All working children are at risk of sexual and physical harassment; and in many regions, children with different abilities and girls face greater risks due to lack of protection and public care.
- We also experience violence and discrimination from police and other adults who are supposed to protect us. Police should respect and protect our rights. We need child-friendly juvenile justice systems for all, including children with disabilities.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents experienced higher levels of stress that increased the risks of domestic violence in the home. Thus, governments should provide psychosocial support services for children and caregivers.

Children then had a short session of general questions and answers in which children from Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Tanzania were involved. Each child got a minute to answer the questions.

Presentations of Calls to Action and Recommendations

Later children were split into respective breakaway groups where they discussed and did a recap on topics on:



- Child Participation and Violence against children.
- Education and Climate Change.
- Health, and Media and technology.
- Internet and Children's Protection and Access to Justice.

Group 1: 6 to 13-year-olds

Action Points:

Education and Health

- More books should be provided in schools so that children can read more.
- Establishment of bigger classrooms to create more space for learning.
- Provision of a safer environment for children to live in.
- Adults need to be talked to stop abusing children.
- Provision of clean water and food at school.
- Children should be allowed to play so that they can stay healthy.
- The government should provide free education for all.
- By 6 pm parents should try to be at home to spend time with their children.
- Child trafficking should stop.
- Children should be corrected in a more friendly way rather than being harassed and

arrested.

- Children with special needs should be given a special assistance.
- Freedom of speech- children need to express themselves.
- Children should be enlightened on the dangers of early pregnancies so that they can study first and attain a mature age.
- Children should be provided with free health services.

Ending Violence Against Children and Child Participation

Child participation

- Children do not want to be seen as passive recipients in decision-making and every aspect of life that affects them.
- Children should be included in advocacy for children e.g. in NGOs.

Violence Against Children

Definition: Violence is the form of action being done to children that do not result in positive outcomes to the child.

Forms of violence: Physical violence, social violence, emotional violence, psychological violence.

Recommendations

- The government needs to enforce new laws that protect children from violence.
- The government and other organizations should put in place adequate reservations for children with disabilities.
- Hotlines should be put in schools and the police should visit schools regularly.
- Psychologists should also be in schools to help children undergoing violence.



Call to action

- The government should include children in both policy making and other activities.
- Children should be supported by the society.
- Children should stop being discriminated according to gender.

Climate Change

- Definition: A long term change in weather patterns.
- Deforestation is a major contributor to climate change.

Solution

- Industries should be punished for such offences.
- Industries should use renewable energy.

Education

Recommendations

Children recommended that:

- More books should be provided in schools so that children can read more.
- Establishment of bigger classrooms to create more space for learning.
- Provision of a safer environment for children to live in.
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Media and Technology

Recommendations

- Media should be more upright.
- Media and technology consumed by children should be regulated.
- Protect children from pornography.
- Media should bring more educative content.

Health

Recommendations

- Free medical attention should be provided to children.
- Children counsellors that can relate to their issues should be put in place.
- Create awareness on some diseases.
- Create awareness on some cultural practices that harm children.
- Construct dispensaries in rural areas for easier access to health.
- Set policies to medical personnel who practice discrimination in health centers.

Access to Justice

- The police should be trained on child-handling skills.
- Children should be given time to meet policymakers to present their concerns.
- Proper record keeping to ensure data is available to inform policy and decision making.
- Action should be strongly taken against the police who ask for bribes to help children.

Action Points

- Children will be approaching leaders and having dialogues with stakeholders.
- Child-friendly applications should be made where children can engage and interact in.
- The government should counsel the police on how to handle children.
- If counselling doesn't work then punishment should follow.
- Speed and efficiency in the justice system should be enacted when dealing with children.



Foday Bangura a child from Sierra Leone leads children attending the Africa Children Summit to present a position paper about the Status of Children in Africa to the United Nations representatives Dr. Najat Maalla M'Jid and Dr. Philip D Jaffé.



POST-SUMMIT REPORT

Outcome Statement

During the 3 days, the children were able to discuss and come up with solutions on 7 thematic areas and aspirations in Agenda 2040 namely Child Participation, Health, Education, Media and Technology, Access to Justice, Violence Against Children and Children's Environmental Rights (Climate Action).

The children developed A Communique/Outcome statement with policy recommendations and advocacy asks to be shared with Regional bodies, the UN, Governments and CSOs. The Outcome Statement has been disseminated to children, UNCRC, ACERWC, OSRSG VAC, government agencies and CSOs. The children have formed country chapters through which they will be disseminating and monitoring the implementation of the resolutions. They will be meeting on a monthly basis.

Presentation of the Outcome Statement to ACERWC

To further ensure the conversation is sustained and that the recommendations by children reach the relevant bodies, Mtoto News with support from GIZ facilitated four children from Kenya, Botswana and Sierra Leone to attend the 41st Ordinary Session of the ACERWC in Maseru Lesotho.



The four children presented the Outcome Statement to the Committee during the opening of the session, with an emphasis on the need for increased engagement of children by the committee and the African Union at large.

In addition to the presentation, the children were able to have round table discussions with the different members of the committee, with the main issue being child participation. The committee members wanted to know how best they can involve children in the different sessions.

One of the key issues raised is the establishment of a shadow ACERWC composed of children. The members picked it up as an issue to be discussed in the closed session.

The inter-country interaction between the children led to Foday, the child from Sierra Leone, being invited to speak to the Lesotho Children's Parliament on how to have an effective child-led structure in their country.

Based on our engagement with the ACERWC, Mtoto News has been invited to support the Directorate of Social Development, Culture and Sports through the AU End Harmful Practices Programme in establishing a child participation platform. Further, we have been approached by Kenya's Office of the First Lady to work on a child participation project on climate change which will feed to the Africa Climate Summit in September.

Recommendations

1. The African Union has child participation Guidelines that are yet to be disseminated or translated into child-friendly format. As we move to institutionalize child participation in the Committee, there is a need to have a road map to ensure that member states know and domesticate the Guidelines as well as have a child-friendly version of the Guidelines.
2. To ensure more inclusive participation of children we recommend the capacitation of the ACERWC to support child participation, this includes having a staff whose role is child participation.
3. In the last few weeks, Mtoto News has been invited by different units of the African Union to support child participation, as much as we upload this, there may be a risk of tokenism or overworking children. Where children attend different meetings to speak on the same things or children just attend the meetings without being given an opportunity to contribute. We, therefore, recommend the need to have a workshop with different bodies of the AU on streamlining child participation.
4. There is a need for a dedicated budget for child participation at the AU and ACERWC that enables children to attend and engage with the AU systems including the heads of States Summit.



Next Steps

Establishment of the Shadow Africa Children's Committee Comprising Children

After consultations with children and ACERWC members, Mtoto News will be seeking to facilitate the establishment of a Shadow African Children's Committee composed of children. The Shadow Children's Committee will work closely with the ACERWC to ensure the voices and views of African children are considered in the work of the Committee. The Children's Committee will be made up of;

A total of 12 members being:

- 5 boys and 5 girls - 1 boy and 1 girl from each of the five regions and;
- 2 representatives of children with special needs, 1 boy and 1 girl.

During the Summit, children said that they do not want to be seen as passive recipients in decision-making but rather want to be active participants in creating solutions. They recommended that children should be given time and opportunity to meet various leaders who influence policies that concern them so that they can share

their views and influence policies and decision-making.

The main objective of the Shadow Committee is to promote inclusive child participation by strengthening its implementation at the regional level and to reach out to as many children as possible.

Articles 4 and 7 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and Art. 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child introduced into international human rights law for the first time, recognition of children's entitlement and capacity to influence actions and decisions that affect them. They introduce an obligation to transform the status of children in relation to adults both at the individual and the collective levels. It challenges the idea that children are simply objects of adult protection. Children are citizens of the present and the future, with rights and capacities to influence decisions about their lives and concerns.

Africa Children Summit 2024

The Summit is designed to be an annual event that will be rotational across African countries. Three countries have so far expressed interest in hosting next year's Summit. We are in communication with the committee to ensure that they are part of the planning and take lead in the next summit.



About the Host/Facilitating Organisation

Mtoto News International is a child and adolescent-centred media company that is leveraging technology to build movements and connect children and young people to policy and decision-makers across the globe. Guided by the four pillars of child rights provided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, we aim at making significant changes in the lives of children by making them visible in political, corporate, economic, social and development discourse.

The core (DNA) of our work is Child Participation, where we aim to place children at the heart of development work in Africa. We are always innovating ways to ensure children are a part of all spheres. To achieve this, we work with children to elevate their voices, co-create solutions and convene partners to bring those ideas and solutions to life.

Over the years Mtoto News has grown to be an authority in child participation and especially in child-led advocacy. Through our work, we have facilitated over 100,000 children to directly engage with their leaders while reaching over 2 million through the various campaigns that we have been holding throughout the years.

This has been through working with different agencies in the children's sector including governments, civil society organizations, international agencies such as the African Union and its organs specifically the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; Regional Organizations such as REPSSI and the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF); National and Regional networks such as the ACERWC CSO Forum, Forum for African Women Educationist, Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH), Plan International, and Girls Not Brides at both regional and global levels; Academic institutions such as the Center for Human Rights and International organizations including UNICEF, Save the Children, Plan International and Terre des Hommes.

The outcome of our work has been increased child participation at the national and regional levels through continuous advocacy for the inclusion of children in decision-making processes, the establishment of different child-led movements including the CSO Forum, Children's Forum and the Pan African Child-led Organization (PACLO).



