



United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGS)

ECA/ACGS/MDGs-PAM/ ED/RP/2008/2

Development Account project on strengthening social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the Millennium Development Goals in Africa

E-Discussion Series

Summary report of the E-Discussion on Promotion of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa

September 2008

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Acknowledgements

This e-discussion on ‘*Promotion of Social Inclusion of Orphans and vulnerable Children (OVCs) in the MDGs in Africa*’ was held as part of the interregional Development Account project entitled “Interregional cooperation to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the MDGs.” The project involved all of the five United Nations Regional Commissions namely Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) (which was the lead agency), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The main objective of the project was to increase the capacity of governments to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and address gender equality concerns and health promotion in national development plans through development of contextualized targets and indicators in the MDG process.

ECA gratefully acknowledges ESCAP for leading the project and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) for the support that it provided. The project was implemented under the general supervision of the Executive Secretary of the ECA, Abdoulie Janneh. Thokozile Ruzvidzo, Officer in Charge of the African Centre for Gender and Social Development provided general guidance. The Chief of MDGs, Poverty Analysis and Monitoring Section, Kasirim Nwuke directed the team that moderated and facilitated the e-discussion. The e-discussion was moderated by Adrian Gauci and facilitated by Tsega Belai.

ECA gratefully acknowledges the fifty-five members of the community of practice (CoP) and particularly express gratitude to the following members of the CoP for their most valuable contributions that made it possible to prepare this report: Gérard Muringa (Burundi), Théodore Mbainaissem (Tchad), Mamadou Fakoly Doumbouya (Senegal), Fatma Mint Elkory (Mauritania), Etaki Wa Dzon (Congo), Dr. Douglas Lackey (Kenya), Francesca Pobee-Hayford (Ghana).

The technical support provided by the staff of ECA’s Information Technology Services Section is gratefully acknowledged.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACGS	African Centre for Gender and Social Development of ECA
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CoP	Community of Practice
DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
HIV	Human Immune Efficiency Virus
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PLWHA	People Living With HIV/AIDS
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategies
NGO	Non Governmental Organizations
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Promotion of Social Inclusion of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa

1.0 Background to the Community of Practice

Under the project “*Strengthening Social Inclusion, Gender Equality and Health Promotion in the Millennium Development Goals in Africa*”, the African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGS) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) organized a series of e-discussions aimed at providing a platform for experts on poverty reduction, gender, social protection and inclusion and the MDGs to share experiences, learn from each other, discuss and to the extent possible recommend supplementary targets and indicators for the MDGs in the areas of social inclusion, gender equality, disability, ageing, youth, sexual and reproductive health and health equity. The first e-discussion of the series ‘*Promotion of Social Inclusion of Women and Gender Equality in the MDGs in Africa*’, that was held from 21 April to 20 May 2008. Subsequently, a four-week-long moderated e-discussion entitled ‘*Promotion of Social Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) in the MDGs in Africa*’ was held from 23 June to 20 July 2008.

The discussion was hosted by the MDGs Poverty Analysis and Monitoring Section of ACGS whose main task is to conduct research and prepare policy papers on the MDGs and poverty; and provide advisory services on the MDGs to member States, Regional Economic Communities, private sector and other stakeholders on poverty reduction strategies and pro-poor policies; and to prepare annual reports on progress towards achieving the targets of the MDGs in Africa in collaboration with the African Union and the African Development Bank.

This community of practice was made up of fifty-five experts from twenty-three African countries that are actively involved in the promotion of socially vulnerable groups. The experts were drawn from governments, non-governmental organizations, universities and development partners. The diversity in experience and area of work of this community of practice (CoP) allowed for an interesting and enriching exchange of ideas and country experiences.

The e-discussion had three objectives, namely: Disseminate and generate knowledge on policies, programmes regarding OVCs in member states; Provide a platform that experts can use to exchange knowledge and experiences on the OVCs and the MDGs; Identify additional targets and indicators in the MDGs that would enable more effective monitoring and evaluation of the inclusion of the OVCs into mainstream development.

This report provides a synthesis of the e-discussion under three key thematic areas: (i) Prevalence and magnitude of OVCs within African countries as a socially excluded group; (ii) Actions taken by countries to address social exclusion OVCs, challenges experienced and policy implications; (iii) Ways in which the MDGs can be reinforced to address the social inclusion of OVCs and the suggested additional MDG indicators. The last section of the report highlights the main conclusions of the e-discussion.

2.0 Prevalence and magnitude of OVCs within African countries as a socially excluded group

Following the review of UNDP's most recent reports¹ on the status of children and OVCs in Africa, coupled with the local situation in their own countries, discussants expressed the surprise, sadness and alarm at the situation at hand. Some noted that in their countries, there is a remarkable increase in the number of orphaned children and children living in the streets, while at the same time, there is a decrease in the number of available caretakers. For example, a contributor from Mauritania expressed outrage at the fact that in her country, fifty years after independence, with its vast the amount of natural resources, small population and large aid assistance it receives, more than 5% of children live in vulnerable conditions. These conditions include living in the streets, having to resort to begging, to prostitution or to thieving, developing addictions to drugs, living with the effects of AIDS and facing or committing acts of violence. In Congo, according to its household survey of 2005, it is estimated that out of a population of 3,550,500 inhabitants, 48,47% are less than 18 years. Of these, there are 137,385 fatherless orphans, 69,025 motherless orphans and 23,091 completely orphaned children. In addition, according to the National Action Plan for 2007 an estimated 4% of all children are OVCs.

Participants have identified several factors that swell the numbers of OVCs across Africa. These are: the AIDS pandemic –particularly in urban areas-, civil conflict, and early parental death. For many OVCs victims of such situations, living conditions become extremely difficult. For example, in Chad, upon the death of a parent, if the remaining parent decides to remarry, the children from the first marriage are likely to suffer from abusive treatment at the hand of their new stepparent or their half-siblings. These children are often treated as household staff and forced to carry out arduous tasks. Children who are completely orphaned are mostly taken in and cared for by their extended families members such as aunts, uncles and cousins of the deceased and suffer a similar plight as children who only loose one parent. Such abusive living conditions force the children to run away, live in the streets where they become victims of drugs, alcohol prostitution and are sometimes even recruited to become child-soldiers.

Orphans and vulnerable children as a group do not belong to a homogenous category; instead, the group can be divided into many subgroups according to their experiences, their family situations and their living conditions amongst other. For example, in Congo, the government has identified 33 different categories of OVCs. Amongst these are OVCs that are being cared for by extended relatives in general, and in the wake of the AIDS pandemic, by grandparents in particular. Grandparents, who struggle with maintaining their health and often live on a very minimal income, are burdened with providing and caring for OVCs, thereby impoverishing further (See Box 1).

Many felt that the major reason behind the continued social exclusion of OVCs was the lack of accountability in governance and failure in leadership that grips the continent. For

Lack of good governance and accountability and corruption identified as the root causes behind the continued social exclusion of OVCs

¹ [“The State of Africa's Children 2008 - Child Survival”](#) and [“Africa's Orphaned and Vulnerable Generations - Children Affected by AIDS”](#).

example, a fellow participant from Chad described how increasing conflicts in his country, has diminished the focus and allocated funds from programmes targeting children. Circumstantial factors, such parent/child relationship, exposure to violence, familial instability and death of a parents, as well as structural factors such as household poverty, failure or lack of state sponsored social policies and the disintegration of traditional family relations have also been cited as reasons causing more children to live in precarious conditions.

Participants have identified several measures that can be taken to improve the dire situation of OVCs. Firstly, Africans need to keep fighting against dictatorship and corruption, as these drain the state coffers of funds that should be used on social protection programmes. Secondly, it should be recognized that any such measures and actions plans couldn't effectively take hold without sensitizing the population of the plight of OVCs. When the funds are available, the establishment of specialized rehabilitation centers for the rehabilitation OVCs into mainstream society is essential.

Box 1. Focus on Older Caregivers.

A fellow discussant working for HelpAge International –a global network of not for profit organisations working to improve the lives of disadvantaged older people- pointed out that even though the data is limited, an estimated 40% to 50% of OVCs are in the care of older caregivers, many of which are older women. The impact of this situation can only be understood when one realizes that, for example, in Eastern and Southern Africa, there are approximately 12 million OVCs affected by HIV/AIDS. If older persons are caring for 40% of these children, then an estimated 4,800,000 OVCs under the care of older people in these regions alone.

HelpAge data indicates that on average, each older caregiver provides for 3 OVCs. Thus, in Eastern and Southern Africa, there are approximately 1,600,000 older caregivers of OVCs. Of these, 80% are older women while 20% are older men.

More often than not, older caregivers of OVCs live in hardship and struggle with the following:

- Lack source of regular income support;
- Difficulties in ensuring that the children receive formal education;
- Providing the necessary parenting skills;
- Accessing adequate information of their rights and entitlements and of the support they could receive in their critical care giving role;
- Difficulties in maintaining their health and that of those under their care.

3.0 Actions taken by countries to address social exclusion OVCs, challenges experienced and policy implications

Participants shared experiences on the actions that their countries had taken to address the social exclusion of OVCs.

3.1 The actions taken by countries

While some African countries have undertaken several initiatives to address the predicament of socially excluded OVCs, other have been accused of not taking the necessary measures to fully and adequately address this situation. In fact a lot of the institutions that provide care for orphans are private institutions, run by missionaries and Northern NGOs. Nevertheless, this section highlights some of the actions that have been taken by governments to improve the social inclusion of OVCs that were identified in the e-discussion (See Box 2).

Inclusion of OVCs in National Development Plans and Strategies – Participants noted that their countries had included provisions that seek to address the situation of OVCs in the National Development Plans and Strategies.

Establishment of foster parenthood schemes – Participants noted that the concept is a community-based solution where priority is given to surviving relatives to adopt the orphans. On the other hand if these relatives are not financially able or willing, the responsibility of raising these orphans will be on joint members of the community. According to research, this concept is more effective than the establishment of orphanage systems, which indirectly creates stigmatization.

Establishment of community supervisory groups – Community supervisory groups in communities where OVCs are visible at the regional and district levels are responsible for the supervision and monitoring of the development of orphans in the custody of caregivers.

Ensuring access to essential services – Including building community level capacity for effective decentralization and targeting of services and multisectoral coordination among service providers. These services include access to free compulsory basic education, the school feeding program.

Box 2. Lessons from Congo and Ghana

In its efforts to socially include all vulnerable groups, the government of Congo firstly defined the conditions that determine vulnerability as “a fragile state of being, which can according to the circumstances affect various individuals and social groups”. This definition naturally includes all children (0 to 18 years old), because their status in life and their dependency on their parents. Under this definition, Children can be categorized as OVCs when particular situations that increase their vulnerability and compromise their future or their lives.

To counter such situations, the government of Congo has prepared a National Plan for Social Development outlining the national vision on childhood. This Plan is accompanied by a National Strategic Framework, which addresses the issue of vulnerability in childhood (2005) and OVCs.

In addition, the 2008 PRS document has clearly explained the reasons why it is essential

to take the situation of OVCs into account and has proposed corrective strategies. Moreover, the national policy towards the fight against the HIV/AIDS, the policy on professional integration and the policy on rehabilitation after war-related trauma contain provisions for OVCs.

In Ghana, the country's constitution and policies provide for the protection and development of children at many levels:

- Article 28 of the National Constitution in Ghana declares that parliament shall enact laws necessary to ensure every child has the right to the same measure of special care, assistance and maintenance necessary for the development of the child from the natural parents except for those parents that have effectively surrendered their right and responsibilities in respect to the child in accordance with the law; the protection of the family as the unit of society is also safeguarded in the promotion of the interest of children.
- Act 560: The children's act, defines the child who needs care and protection in Ghanaian society with specific reference to the orphan as a child who needs protection and care. The Act also defines who qualifies to be fostered and who a foster parent is and explains placement and procedures for adoption.
- The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy seeks, among others, to reduce poverty in the country in order to enhance the welfare of children.
- The National HIV/AIDS and STI Policy focuses on the reduction of infection in all vulnerable persons and groups. The draft policy mentions preventive programmes against HIV/AIDS/STIs, care and support of orphans and young people whose parents are HIV positive.

3.2 Challenges experienced by countries in promoting the social inclusion of OVCs

Identification of OVCs – Most orphaned children are dispersed over families, communities where hardships of these unfortunate victims cannot be seen.

Slow government interventions – Procedures and bureaucracy hamper government response time. Government response time takes time as procedures and bureaucracies are

Lack of bodies that address OVC issues only – OVCs tend to be grouped with other special needs groups such as PLWHA, and therefore may not receive the attention needed.

Inadequate legal provisions – Provisions in the domestic legal framework as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to address the special needs of OVC are inadequate.

Inadequate PRS framework – In spite of the direct link between OVC care and poverty, efforts at addressing OVC care and poverty within the framework of national PRS are limited.

Lack of provisions for caregivers – There does not exist any government provisions for OVCs that are under the care of family members.

3.3 Policy implications

To address the challenges experienced by countries in promoting the social inclusion of OVCs, participants proposed the following policy actions:

- **Cooperation between various institutions**

Participants emphasized that for policies that a focus on OVCs was important for many different types of institutions (such as State institutions, community institutions and development partners) to support the implementation process.

- **Comprehensive approach that supports caregivers of OVCs**

Participants noted that OVCs, unless living in the streets do not grow up in a vacuum. Often, it is up to extended family members, particularly ageing grandparents to take charge of OVCs. For this reason, financial, emotional and physical assistance should be provided for caregivers. This can be accomplished by targeting caregivers through a sustainable livelihood strategy such as micro finance/ credits or schemes.

- **Including OVCs in the decision making process**

Participants suggested that taking into account the greater interest of the child, his active participation in decision-making processes must be an integral part of all programmes, projects and services aimed at OVCs that are being developed at the individual, community or national levels. Programmes and projects, which want to bring about sustainable improvements for the children, must consider the family as the central to the reintegration and the blossoming of the child.

- **Institute affirmative action policies that favor OVCs**

In order to integrate OVCs into mainstream society, OVCs should be given priority in accessing training programmes, funding, working opportunities and financing.

4.0 Ways in which the MDGs can be reinforced to address the social inclusion of OVCs and the suggested additional MDG indicators

Participants have suggested several ways in which the MDGs can be reinforced to address the social inclusion of OVCs, and how progress should be monitored and evaluated. For starters, before we can identify indicators, a clear assessment of the scale

of the problem of OVCs needs to be conducted. This means that the situation needs to be measured and quantified allowing for a concrete diagnosis of the situation at hand and leading to the establishment of policies, targets and indicators.

Suggested supplementary MDG indicators

MDG 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- Percentage of older people/PWD-headed households living in extreme poverty
- Percentage of older people/PWD/PLWHA/OVC suffering from hunger
- Proportion of older people/PWHHA/OVC who have access to poverty reduction programmes
- Percentage of orphaned and vulnerable children aged 0-17 whose households received free basic external support in caring for the child

MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education

- Percentage of older persons who access adult literacy services/programmes

MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

No additional indicators were suggested that fall under MDG 3.

MDG4: Reduce child mortality

No additional indicators were suggested that fall under MDG 4.

MDG5: Improve maternal health

No additional indicators were suggested that fall under MDG 5.

MDG 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

- Percentage of older carers of OVCs/PLWHA receiving support in their role as caregivers

MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

No additional indicators were suggested that fall under MDG 6.

MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development

No additional indicators were suggested that fall under MDG 8.

5.0 Conclusions

The discussion on the social inclusion of OVCs revealed several similarities in the situation of vulnerable children in African countries. The AIDS pandemic, civil conflicts and the disintegration of traditional family networks are seen as the main reason behind the increased number of OVCs across the continent. The corruption, failure of leadership and lack of accountability that grips most governments on the continent further aggravate this situation.

In most African countries, caring for OVCs and ensuring for their livelihood, education, training and integration into mainstream society more often than not falls on the shoulder of the family and the community. These families rarely ever receive any kind of support. In other cases, OVCs either end up directly on the streets or flee to the street following misunderstandings or abuse at their caregivers. Throughout the continent, while private institutions or the few available state orphanages may take in some of these children, most receive very little help or support from the government.

The overwhelming conclusion of most discussants was that governments in particular and development partners in general need to play a greater role in addressing the situation of OVCs by assisting caregivers as well as by setting up social protection networks. Participants noted that without increased interest on the issue, political will leading to the adoption and implementation of policies geared towards OVCs, without the adequate amount of funding for caregivers both within and outside the family and without the establishment of specialized programmes that seek to integrate OVCs into mainstream society, the situation of OVCs will never be adequately addressed.

Annex A. Selected Resources

English:

1. [Millennium Development Goals - Basics](http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.html) - <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.html>
2. [Millennium Development Goals - List of Targets and Indicators](http://www.undp.org/mdg/goallist.shtml) - <http://www.undp.org/mdg/goallist.shtml>
3. [Assessing Progress in Africa towards the Millennium Development Goals 2008 Report](http://www.uneca.org/cfm/2008/docs/AssessingProgressinAfricaMDGs.pdf) - <http://www.uneca.org/cfm/2008/docs/AssessingProgressinAfricaMDGs.pdf>
4. [Millennium Development Goals 2007 Report](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/docs/UNSD_MDG_Report_2007e.pdf) - http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/docs/UNSD_MDG_Report_2007e.pdf
5. [Millennium Development Goals 2007 Update on Africa](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/docs/MDGafrica07.pdf) - <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/docs/MDGafrica07.pdf>
6. [The State of Africa's Children 2008 - Child Survival](http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/soac08/) - <http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/soac08/>
7. [Africa's Orphaned and Vulnerable Generations - Children Affected by AIDS](http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_35645.html) - http://www.unicef.org/publications/index_35645.html
8. UNDP report 2007 Ghana Social Exclusion
9. The Status of Children in the World UNICEF 2008
10. African Union Charter on the rights of the Child
11. Global monitoring report World Bank 2008
12. Education for all UNECSO 2008

French:

1. [Rapport 2008 sur l'évaluation des progrès accomplis par Afrique vers la réalisation des Objectifs du Millénaire pour le développement](http://www.uneca.org/fr/conferenceofministers/cma2008/docs/Rapport2008EvaluationdesOMD.pdf) - <http://www.uneca.org/fr/conferenceofministers/cma2008/docs/Rapport2008EvaluationdesOMD.pdf>
2. [Évaluation des progrès accomplis par l'Afrique vers la réalisation des OMD, 2007](http://www.uneca.org/africanprsp/docupld/MDGs_Report_French_-_formatted_-_Rev.doc) - http://www.uneca.org/africanprsp/docupld/MDGs_Report_French_-_formatted_-_Rev.doc
3. [La Situation des Enfants en Afrique 2008 - La survie de l'Enfant](http://www.unicef.ca/portal/Secure/Community/502/WCM/PRESS/soac08/SOAC_fr.pdf) - http://www.unicef.ca/portal/Secure/Community/502/WCM/PRESS/soac08/SOAC_fr.pdf
4. [Les Générations Orphelines d'Afrique](http://www.unicef.org/french/mdg/files/5270_A__Orph__FR.pdf) - http://www.unicef.org/french/mdg/files/5270_A__Orph__FR.pdf