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POLICY BRIEF

Orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) in Africa: Implications for the MDG indicators

Policy goal

To influence the adoption by ECA member States of social development indicators in particular MDG indicators that would enable more effective measurement of the social inclusion of orphans and vulnerable children in Africa.

1.0 Introduction

The concept of vulnerable children is, obviously derived from the overall general concept of vulnerability. Systemic vulnerability of nations is often used in the African to describe household and societies management of a portfolio of assets that are at risk. Rural livelihoods, rainfall variations, health status are all aspects that first of all give rise to poverty and low unstable resource bases which further exacerbates vulnerability and poverty.

Vulnerable children are defined as those whose safety well being, are development are for various reasons threatened. Vulnerable children may include: orphans, abandoned children, street children, handicapped children, child soldiers and those affected by war (displaced and refugees), children exposed to hazardous work, children who are victims of trafficking and various forms of abuse and neglect, and children living in extremely poor conditions. A clear point that emerges is that there is a wide plethora of children at risk and a need to protect the future assets of nations.

The plight of vulnerable children has been recognized at both international and regional levels. The United Nations Rights of the Child and Universal Declaration of Human Rights do provide a clear legislative framework for the provision of children and vulnerable children. In 2000, the main objective of the Millennium Summit was to set quantifiable and time bound global development goals to end human suffering from hunger, destitution and diseases mainly in developing countries. At the regional level the African Charter for Children and various

programmes have been established to provide institutional context for the improvement of children in general and vulnerable children in particular.

Notwithstanding the magnitude of the problem is not without challenges. For example provision of educational support to vulnerable children is hampered by refugee status. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 1 million school-age refugee children live in developing countries, most of them in urban areas or camps. Data for 11 refugee camps in 7 countries show that full primary school enrolment has been achieved in only out of 10 camps, and that at least 1 in refugee children is not part of the formal education system. In 1 out of 8 of the camps with inadequate primary school opportunities, less than half of all primary school age children are enrolled. Girls are at particular risk of dropping out before completing their primary education, often because they lack a safe, quality-learning environment, or because of poverty and early marriage. In camps where enrolment rates are 70 per cent or higher, the enrolment gap ratio between girls and boys has narrowed slightly: the number of girls enrolled per 100 boys increased from 89 in 2005 to 91 in 2007. In addition, the ratio of orphans to non-orphans in Africa, a target of the MDGs exhibits data only for 14 countries and the ratio varies from 0.67 to 0.97. Furthermore, the school attendance of orphans of the 10-14 age group demonstrates available data only for eleven countries and the range is from 28 percent to 88 percent (UN 2008).

The Aids pandemic has exacerbated the magnitude of vulnerable children in Africa. The orphans created by the AIDS have grown to enormous proportions- 11.4 million in Africa (UNAIDS 2007) notwithstanding coverage remains low, even in countries with high HIV prevalence, with a low median of 9 per cent. However several countries are making progress in providing orphans and vulnerable children with a minimum package of services, including education, health care, social welfare and protection. By the end of 2007, specific national plans of action for children orphaned by AIDS and other vulnerable children had been developed by countries, including 1 in sub-Saharan Africa. Ten more countries – nine in sub-Saharan Africa – had such national plans in process. Many countries are also integrating policies for children affected by AIDS into national development plans, overall plans of action for children and policy plans of ministries such as those for education and health. Among 19 countries with data, the proportion of households with orphans and vulnerable children receiving external support ranged from 1 per cent in Sierra Leone to 19 per cent in Swaziland.

Despite these notable improvements in the policy, legal and institutional frameworks, the vulnerability of large sections of the child population in Africa is still not adequate. For example, vulnerable children continue to have less access to education and health services relative to children from stable households. This gives rise to disadvantages over the life span of vulnerable children to advancement opportunities and employment. Their potential role and contribution to national development are neither recognized nor rewarded and the persistence of vulnerable children and orphans compounds the achievement of the MDGs and overall socio-economic development in Africa.

Translating the commitments of African leaders on reducing vulnerability in children and orphans and socially including these categories requires more information both of a quantitative as well as causal nature on how governments can adequately address the

promotion of orphans and vulnerable children in the MDGs. It is in this context that this policy brief aims to fill this information by addressing the following questions pertinent to social exclusion of this category in Africa; (a) How and why are orphans and vulnerable children excluded from development in Africa? (b) What are the existing gaps in measuring the social inclusion of OVCs in the current MDG framework? (c) What additional MDG indicators should countries adopt to effectively address the social exclusion of women and promote gender equality?

2.0 How and why are vulnerable children excluded in development in Africa?

A possible analytical framework that categorizes some of the causes for the social exclusion of is the three broad inter-related areas of capability: economic, social, political participation (as shown in table 1).

Table 1 Overview of the different dimensions of OVCs

Dimension of capability	Form of vulnerable children and orphans
Economic participation	Vulnerable children and orphans do not have equal access to and control over resources such as land, property, agricultural inputs, extension services, employment, and a wide range of livelihood opportunities.
Social participation	OVCs are discriminated in access to essential public services such as education, health, water, energy and social security and protection, community and family support.
Political participation	OVCs are voiceless and their particular situation within households led by older people or unstable households renders them rather ineffective in policy formulation

The major reasons behind the continued social exclusion of OVCs include traditional and cultural norms on children’s welfare; lack of economic dependence; limited or lack of access to education and health; lack of knowledge of their legal rights.

3.0 What are the existing gaps in measuring the social inclusion of women and promoting gender equality the current MDG framework?

3.1 Economic participation

The existing MDGs 2 and 6 do not adequately capture the plight of orphans and vulnerable groups and this has a dual effect. First of all given the magnitude of the problem in Africa the slow progress towards education and health goals is partially caused by their non-inclusion. For example, youth literacy rates could be higher on the continent if street children or refugees are included in national policies on education thus denoting some gaps in MDG monitoring. In addition, the voiceless nature of OVCs renders policy change or inclusive reforms to be particularly difficult. The second reason is the social policies that do exist in some African countries are generally outside the MDG set, thus integration within the overarching goals for reducing poverty becomes difficult.

However important gaps in tracking OVCs are evident in the following areas: poverty; gender dimension of unemployment; access to credit; exit from the informal sector (where most OVCs are economically engaged). Although poverty in Africa is known to be generally high the proportion of OVCs that contribute to poverty is not known and data remains scarce.

Most older orphans in Africa are therefore dependent on small-scale trading, agricultural production and food processing as major sources of income to meet livelihood needs. A connected aspect is the tendency for OVCs to be “invisible” not in official statistics and therefore excluded from economic life. Similarly, secure access and control over land, access to credit, technologies, extension and technical capacity are important and do require that OVCs are registered within national development plans and MDGs to ensure effective participation.

3.2 Social participation

The inadequate access of vulnerable children and orphans to social services such as education, health, water, sanitation and energy sources are key determinants of their ability to be able to engage in productive opportunities and to secure their overall well-being. However while some of the MDG indicators capture the some of the dimensions of participation in primary, education, and HIV orphans ratio in school participation, gaps remain in other important aspects of social capabilities. Additional areas that need to be addressed include access to antiretroviral treatment (ART).

In Africa, there remains a high risk of contracting HIV. The number of orphans set at 12 million and their lack of inclusion and therefore susceptibility to a lack of knowledge of HIV transmission creates a particularly grim picture. This further exacerbates their exclusion and their participation in voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) services and access to anti retroviral treatment (ART).

3.3 Political participation

Participation of OVCs in decision-making at all levels from household, to community and national is important in achieving their empowerment. Their participation influences the extent to which their specific issues are mainstreamed in the national development agenda, including poverty reduction strategies and resource allocation mechanisms. Therefore, assessing OVCs power to influence policymaking, legislation enactment, institutional setting, planning, and resource allocation is key for monitoring all the MDGs.

4.0 What are the suggested supplementary indicators to monitor inclusion of OVCs in the MDGs?

The proposed supplementary indicators to strengthen and ensure the social inclusion of OVCs as both beneficiaries and effective participants in development shall mainly relate to filling in the gaps in connection with improving their empowerment- economic, social and political- in addition to providing a basis for effective monitoring of their status.

4.1 General recommendation

The general recommendation is the need to further disaggregate data on children's schooling and health status to enable a more efficient monitoring of the status of OVCs thus providing for policy informed decisions.

4.2 Suggested additional indicators

Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

% population of OVCs suffering from hunger

% population in OVCs who have access to poverty reduction strategies and and social protection

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

% of OVCs who complete primary and secondary schools

Net enrolment ratios of OVCs in primary and secondary schools

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases

Proportion of older carers of OVCs receiving support in their role.

Proportion of OVCs who receive free support