

CHILD ADVISORS' REPORT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN GHANA

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Child Online Africa (COA) formerly called J Initiative (JI) is a child focused research and advocacy based non-for-profit organization that campaigns for/with children and young people and their families to influence policies and change practices that affect child welfare in Ghana and Africa. We build partnerships with organizations, agencies and individuals to promote child online safety by employing rights and evidence-based advocacy approaches to achieve sustainable outcomes. These activities we believe will endorse child online safety locally, foster Africa Fit for Children and promote the global child safety agenda. Resource mobilization, Open Strategic Partnerships, Capacity building and policy advocacy have played key roles in our work. We are pacesetters in most of our operational communities on issues of Child Online Protection, Child wellbeing, Digital Literacy and safety, menstrual hygiene management and the general well-being of children and young people, with special focus on young girls. Our work with Government, local and international organizations and individual technical experts seek to end all forms of individual, institutional, and systemic violence against children and young people. We strategically adopt mass education and provision of safety resources, violence prevention and response initiatives, advocacy and research to achieve our goals. Our policy advocacy consultations with the Ministry of Communication in Ghana are promoting Child Online Protection under a bigger Cyber Security framework resulting in mass awareness programs throughout Ghana. These actions have influenced Ghana's status on the International Telecommunications Union's COP benchmarking.

To mark the AU Day of the African Child 2018, Child Online Africa in collaboration with World Vision initiated a fifteen-day hashtag to draw attention to the fact that key African Union framework aimed at the protection of children consider protection in cyberspace. The outcome of the #Onlinesafety4Agenda2040 campaign has influenced an Executive Council Decision (Ex.CL/Dec 1017 (xxxiii)) during the 33rd Ordinary Session of the 28-29 June 2018, Nouakchott, Mauritania. It requests the ACERWC to scale up its work in safeguarding and promoting the rights and welfare of children in cyberspace, namely the protection of children's information, rights to safety, informed choices and digital literacy.

We believe both local and international advocacy will effectively manage child Internet access threats. The complexity of these challenges demands a participatory policy development to ensure universal action and produce the needed change in practices and actions.

Countries with potential partners and partners: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya (Nairobi & Mombasa), Burundi, Zambia, Cameroun, Tanzania, Lesotho, Egypt, Ethiopia, South Sudan.

Child Online Africa was supported by Zsuzsanna Rutai JD LLM, independent consultant on children's rights.

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1. INTRODUCTION

We are a group of four child advisors from Ghana, and we worked on this report with the help of Child Online Africa and personally with Awo Aidam Amenyah, Zsuzsanna Rutai and Daniel Odonkor. We were selected through an open call and had several online meetings in June – July 2022. After we decided about our focus (the right to protection from violence, right to education, child participation and social rights), we had a survey with children in our school and community. We managed to talk to 106 children between the age of 11-16. We got good feedback from the children who were involved in our survey, they were happy to talk about these topics.

About us:

My name is Jaden, I am 14 years old. I live in Burma Camp. It is a security zone, it has a lot of schools and sports facilities, and the camp is peaceful and quite when you walk on the street you will see cars passing left and right the buildings, and there are very colourful birds and different trees. My school is a private school, it is well guarded and studying there is fun.

My name is Marie, I am 12 years old. My community is community-24 in the Tema - West District, about a stone throw from the Head-Office of the Ghana water company. It is not a mountainous but a low land area. It is populated with more than 2000 people. The occupation of the people there are mixed, some are Government workers, traders, drivers, teachers, masons just to mention a few.

My name is Peniel, I am 13 years old. My community is Lashibi (Community 17, Tema). Lashibi is located in Tema West of the Greater Accra region, Ghana. My community is between Nungua and Klagon. Lashibi is the twenty-first largest settlement in Ghana with a population of 78, 539. Most people in Lashibi are traders and teachers. Some social amenities in my community are schools, hospitals, public toilets, electricity and potable water. Lashibi is not mountainous. The streets of Lashibi are third-class and second-class roads.

My name is Samuel, I am 13 years old. The community in which I reside is Banana-Inn. It is a very nice community. It has hospitals, children healthcare centres and schools. The

population of my community is approximately a quarter of greater Accra population. The people in my community are mostly traders and government workers I mostly see children selling on the streets, and also people and children going to work.

2. THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION FROM ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION AND VICTIMS' RIGHTS



results: Most of the children feel safe in their home, but all children feel safe in their school and many children do not feel safe in their community or city. Many children know others who are not safe or who were hurt, for example children who sell on the street.

Key issues:

Child protection is the safeguarding of children from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect. Child violence can be physical, emotional, sexual and exploitation. A child is anyone below the age of eighteen (18), whether male or female. Article 19 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child provides for the protection of children in and out of their homes but boys and girls in Ghana still experience frequent and multiple abuse. In Ghana, more girls are abused sexually than boys. However, more boys are trafficked and sold to other countries to be exploited than girls. Statistics show that most victims of violence are sexually abused, a few are emotionally abused, and few are physically abused. The government should ensure justice for survivors of violence and abuse. Survivors of violence want and deserve justice for those who committed the crimes against them but only a fraction of them have access to the protection of the law. Victims of sexual abuse should be encouraged to reach out to community resources and support groups. They should not be stigmatized but connect them to crisis hotlines and mental health services.

Violence and protection are a major problem in my community, which includes verbal attacks, insults, threats, harassment and other abuses. Violence occurs in homes, schools and on the streets. In my community some children are physically assaulted by their parents for making a mistake or another. In some schools even though, corporal punishment has been abolished they continue to cane us. This makes sitting uncomfortable especially when it is on your buttocks. There are laws prohibiting all these things, but enforcement is a challenge and since no one has been penalized so far, teachers and parents continue to do it. We must also see that children are well protected by their families at home. In schools, children must be protected from abuse and any form of harm. The protection of children should be paramount to keep us safe as children and as future leaders.

Assessment of the recommendations from the 3rd cycle of the UPR:

Recommendations No. 146.144-146.192 have not been implemented.

Our recommendations:

1. Ghana should protect children from all forms of violence and exploitation, for example, by providing community support to prevent and tackle violence and addressing the economic causes of exploitation.
2. Ghana should ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, furthermore, it should sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.
3. Ghana should implement programmes to educate children about children's rights, protection from violence and harmful practices, which are detrimental to their well-being. Ghana should sensitize parents, teachers and communities about children's rights and the right to protection from violence.
4. Ghana should ban corporal punishment in all settings and enforce it in practice. Ghana should educate society about the full ban and about positive, alternative ways of disciplines.

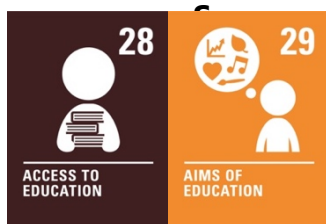
5. Ghana should ensure justice for survivors of violence which is tailor-made to the needs of children (child-friendly information and reporting mechanisms) and provide special care and support in the form of community services, crisis hotlines, mental health services and shelters.

6. Ghana should do everything to stop child labour and ensure no child lives in street situations.

7. Ghana should abolish all forms of harmful practices like child marriage, female genital mutilation, breast ironing and tribal marks.

8. Ghana should protect children from addictive substances (e.g. drugs, cigarette, alcohol) and ensure that children, particularly teenagers, and parents are educated about the negative effects of addictions.

3. THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



results: Many children said that in their community not the boys and the girls go to school, for example due to poverty.

children said they study about children's rights at school, others they study about human rights and citizenships in

general. All the children who don't study about children's rights, they said they would like to.

Key issues:

The right to education is the right of every human being from childhood until the end of life without discrimination under any ground. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child, The Africa Charter on the rights and Welfare of the child and the Children's Act, Act 560 (1998) all recognize the educational rights of children. Article 25 of Ghana's 1992 constitution provides for educational rights of children and mentions amongst others that basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all children of school going age. Contrary to the above legal provision, some children in my community and Ghana as a whole, are not enjoying this educational provision, because they lack money for school fees,

uniforms, reading books and food. The situations of Kayayei (people including children carrying other people's loads for money) in the major cities attest to this fact.

Furthermore, though some children are enjoying this right, the environment does not promote quality nature of the education. For example, according to Ghana News Agency (Tuesday, 1st June, 2021) school pupils of Ofoso- Bator M/A Basic school, a fishing community in the Nkwanta South Municipality of the Oti Region, are forced to study under trees due to lack of infrastructure. The report further noted that, the school has no classroom, staff common room, learning materials, including texts books, ICT laboratory and desks, denying these pupils good environment and peace of mind needed for their studies.

Another factor affecting children's right to education is the frequent changes of educational policies anytime there is a change of government. One of the great setbacks of this is that current students have been studying without approved textbooks.

Assessment of the recommendations from the 3rd cycle of the UPR:

Recommendations No. 146.120-146.129 have been partially implemented.

Our recommendations:

1. Ghana should ensure all children are at school including girls who should be provided with equal educational opportunities.
2. Ghana should ensure free and quality education for all children and support families to send their children to school (including help with the school fees).
3. Ghana should provide the basic educational needs of children, for example infrastructure, classrooms, equipment, uniforms, food, exercise books everywhere in the country including small villages. This includes providing support for the parents as well.
4. Ghana should set a long-term national education policy.
5. Ghana should ensure that all children study about children's rights at school.

4. CHILD PARTICIPATION



Survey results: More than half of the children said they can give their opinion at the family, but less than half of them said they can give their opinion at the school and even less children said they can give their opinion at the community.



Less than half of the children said they can share freely with others what they learn, think and feel at the family, while most of them said this works at school, too. Most of the children said they cannot share freely with others what they learn, think and feel at the community.



Some children said they have access to information when they search to learn more about things (for example on the internet), but some children said they feel like they do not have access to information.

All the children said they do not have students' or children's council in their school or city.

Key issues:

Child participation in Ghana depends on the place in which the child is in (school, home, community). First of all, I would like to state that child participation starts with respect for child views, the opportunity to share thoughts freely and the access to information. The respect for child views in our country Ghana is very rare because adults assume that children do not know what the things are about. One example is a school with an abandoned playground where the pupils of the school thought it would be great if the playground was made as a basketball court, but the school authority did not think about it and just ignored the idea. This is how the respect for child views is infringed upon. Children can freely share their thoughts in any place depending on what the topic is about. If it is about school, it is fine and shared with schoolmates and parents. At community and family level children are rarely allowed to participate which is very bad. The access to information is not infringed upon because in most homes the parents make sure the content is good (e.g. from radio, television, internet).

Our recommendations:

1. Ghana should sensitize parents, schools and communities to encourage children to talk freely at gatherings, to participate in discussions and to be involved in decision-making, for example through programmes and awareness-raising activities. Adults should make sure to take the views of the children into consideration at all levels. Children, especially the girl child must be heard in situations of child marriage to prevent early marriage.
2. Ghana should encourage schools and communities to set up students' and children's councils (for various age groups) in order to provide more opportunities for children to influence decisions made at school and community level.
3. Ghana should encourage all media to provide child-friendly programmes and information and make sure children have access to age-appropriate content (for example by issuing warning about inappropriate content and supporting parental guidance). These measures should balance children's right to protection and their right to information.

5. SOCIAL RIGHTS OF CHILDREN



results: Almost all the children asked said there are families in their area and there are children who are who don't have clothes or who live on the street.

Key issues:

Social rights in this country are a very serious problem. When you travel all over the country you will see a lot of homeless people and these people are mostly children and as a child, I feel so hurt to see them on the street - but the government of Ghana is not doing much to support them. This means that while they are entitled to social and economic help, it is only once in a blue moon that organizations go on charity walks and give some food and money and sometimes shelter. But it is not enough. Like I said earlier, these people do not have clothing, shelter and food and it is the job of the government to provide these things for them since they are citizens. But this is not like that in Ghana and this is a very big infringement on the rights of the child.

Our recommendations:

1. Ghana should ensure the implementation of the social rights of children by supporting families and children in need, for example by providing social benefits, food, clothing, and shelter.
2. Ghana should provide special care and support for children with disabilities, children in street situations and children in care.
3. Governments can train the parents and provide jobs for them so they can make better lives for their families and children.