

Communiqué of a Two-Day National Conference on the Status of Child Rights in Nigeria; Children's Rights at a Cross-road organised by Wellbeing Foundation in collaboration with UNICEF and FIDA International at Kwara Hotel on Monday, 24th May, 2010 and Tuesday, 25th May, 2010 at the Meeting Room of the Office of the 1st Lady, Kwara State, Government House, Ilorin, Kwara State.

Introduction

Children are born with fundamental freedoms and inherent rights of all human beings. Governments have gone further to enact legislations, create mechanisms and put in place a range of creative measures to ensure the protection and realization of the rights of those under the age of 18. Despite the passage of the Child Rights Act in 2003 and the adoption of the law in about twenty-four states of the federation the challenges of implementation is being experienced in states with existing child Rights law.

These issues among others were the focus of discussion at a national conference on the status of child's rights in Nigeria; children's rights at a cross-roads, organised by the Wellbeing Foundation (WBF) in collaboration with Office of the First Lady, Kwara State Ministry of Women Affairs, UNICEF and FIDA international. It was convened as a platform for reflection and dialogue between government, non-governmental organizations and international agencies on the status of child rights law implementation across the country. The dialogue also presented a forum for participants to share their experiences, ideas, analysis and discuss development of policies and practices designed to safeguard children's rights.

Specifically the dialogue focused on the promotion, protection and enforcement of children's rights through; Implementing legislative frameworks and exploring new possibilities; elaborating comprehensive policies that integrate all children needs; address root causes of children in distress; reviewing and building institutional framework for the promotion and protection of child rights; launching awareness campaigns; producing educational materials; providing trainings for stakeholders; and promoting networks /exchange of good practices.

Proceedings

The conference, with over seventy participants from across the country, opened with a dinner hosted by the Governor of Kwara State, Dr. Bukola Saraki, in honour of the visiting United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organisation (WHO) and other participants. It was chaired by Justice Amina Augie JCA. The Deputy Governor, Chief Joel Ogundeji and his wife were in attendance. The Deputy Speaker of the Kwara State House of Assembly led other members of the Assembly to the dinner with overwhelming presence of the State Executive Council members. Also was the International President of FIDA. The representatives of WHO and UNICEF gave goodwill messages while Federal Institutions were represented by the Legal Aid Council, Nigeria and National Human Rights Commission. The appreciable presence of local and national NGOS underscored the importance of the conference and by extension, children's rights issues. Prof. Bolaji Owasanoye, Professor of law at the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, gave the keynote address which highlighted the status of legislation and implementation of child rights related laws in the country. He identified the four key principles of the Child Rights Act as Survival, Protection, Participation and Development. The Professor while stressing the critical roles of CSOs in the implementation of the Child Rights Law, further posited that the realization of Millennium Development Goals is only meaningful with effective realization of the Child Rights Law provisions.

Independent resource persons, World Health Organisation, UNICEF and FIDA International made additional presentations on local and international best practices of child rights legislation and implementation. States in attendance presented status of Child Rights Act passage and implementation in their individual states.

Participants extensively discussed and commented on presentations of the seasoned resource persons and experts.

Key Observations

The conference subsequently observed as follows:

- In view of the cut crossing nature children issues in all areas of governance, complementary Institutional mechanism is presently lacking in many states. Most Institutions of government compete rather than cooperate and complement in Child Rights Law implementation.
- Inadequate capacity is prevalent across the country in the interpretation, implementation, monitoring and review mechanisms thereby hindering service delivery.

- Low public education on potentials of the Child Rights Law is responsible for the negative responses towards the law in states yet to pass the law. Insufficient knowledge of its provision continues to deny children the benefits inherent in the law where it is passed.
- Resource allocation is crucial to full implementation of the child rights and requires appropriation commensurate to the obligation.
- Culture is responsible for several resistances to Child Rights Act. Sentiments are attached to child labour, cultural and economic needs, child marriages, religious beliefs and toleration of having children in excess of economic capacity.
- Internal Reporting Mechanism is no doubt a barometer for effective monitoring and evaluation of achievements
- Participation rights still suffer major set-back in many states with the Child Rights Law. Children are excluded in the development of implementation strategies with insufficient sensitization on provisions of the Law.
- Countries across Africa are making remarkable progress at implementing the provisions of the UNCRC where Nigeria ranks very low.
- Across the country, 70% of children under age 5 are not registered at birth.
- Lack of political will, poverty, ignorance, wasteful application of economic resources and absence of committed elites are identifiable challenges to development.

Recommendations:

The conference, recognising progresses made by state governments individually and collectively across the country, therefore recommended as follows:

- Establishment of key Implementation Committees comprising all stakeholders in states and FCT to monitor implementation and compliance with CRL provisions.
- Rehabilitation and re-organisation of relevant institutions such as remand homes for the support, care and protection of children in conflict with the law by states with the Child Rights Law.
- Capacity building for stakeholders on the domestication and implementation processes of the Child Rights Law
- Establishment of family courts or designate family courts from existing courts by State Governments.
- Allocation and appropriation of realistic resource for children related programmes of State governments.
- Development of clear monitoring and evaluation plan to create proper database for planning and response to child rights issues.
- Adaptation of child Rights Act to suit state peculiarities should be done such as to guarantee the principle of best interest of the child.
- Updating knowledge and skills in human rights generally and child rights in particular through continuous staff training and cooperation in government.
- Preparation and circulation of simplified, illustrative and abridged version of the key principles of CRL by state governments and partners.
- Design and organise seminars, workshops and conferences for government officials, opinion leaders, faith organisations and religious leaders to break cultural resistance.
- Establishment of Child Rights Clubs and designation of child friendly schools in communities and local governments.
- Intensify media campaigns and enlightenment programmes, including documentaries and movies, IEC materials and billboards on children rights.
- Prompt Gazetting of the Child Rights Law in the states that have passed it.
- Establishment of strong partnership with NGOs, CBOs, CDAs and development partners by Governments to promote and propagate child rights issues.
- Increase activities focusing on children participation and well being such as holiday camps, quiz/debate competitions, rallies celebration of special days and creation of special days to inspire children.
- Design of short/medium/long term strategy for implementation of CRL in a systematic and holistic way.
- Development and institutionalisation of internal reporting mechanism on implementation of CRL with information



generated from the communities through NGOs, CDAs and CBOs.

- Replication of children participation initiative developed by states at Local Governments to promote mechanisms for getting feedback from children.
- Creation of a peer-review mechanism within the Governors' Forum on Child Rights Law domestication and implementation.
- Convocation of annual conference on status of child rights promotion and protection by Governors' Forum with participation of all stakeholders.
- Creation of child friendly police stations in states across the country.
- Inclusion of child rights education in secondary and primary school curricula.
- Design, implementation and monitoring of compulsory, free and qualitative education programme for children
- Creation of children commission for budgetary allocation, appropriation and monitoring.
- Provision of facilities for the implementation of 'Diversion scheme' for children in conflict with the law.

Her Excellency, Mrs. Toyin Saraki expressed her commended partners for their contributions and participants for their time, commitment and contributions. She declared forum as an opportunity for her rededication to the promotion and protection of children's rights through her office as 1st lady of kwara state and her position as Chair, FIDA International Child Rights Standing Committee. Participants thanked the Kwara State Government, the Wellbeing Foundation, UNICEF and WHO for providing the platform for exchanges and expressed satisfaction at the outcomes and standard of the conference.

Signed

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