



PRESS RELEASE

Experts and academics call on West African leaders to end child poverty

Abuja, 22 June 2016 - A group of experts hosted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), UNICEF, the International Labour Organization (ILO), Equity for Children and other organizations issued a communiqué today urging West African leaders to eradicate child poverty. The experts also highlighted the need to monitor child poverty with separate measurements along geographic, gender and socio-economic lines.

The considerable overall economic growth that the region has experienced in recent years has not resulted in improvements in the life of vast numbers of children, many of whom continue to lack access to proper nutrition, basic healthcare, education, clean water, and housing.

Since the publication of a UNICEF global study on childhood poverty in 2003, there has been an expansion of policies aimed at addressing the multiple factors that feed into the problem in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, in most countries, inequalities and social exclusion have led to the persistence of high levels of child poverty.

“Child poverty is not only about monetary poverty, but about actual deprivations children are experiencing,” noted UNICEF Regional Advisor on Social Policy Gustave Nebie, “Children have a right to education, to healthcare, to information, to nutrition, to housing, to clean water and to adequate sanitation. We must ensure our children are free of crippling deprivations today – and enable them to grow into the leaders we need for the future.”

The call to action issued today was based on the outcome of the International Conference on Child Poverty and Social Protection, held in Abuja May 23 – 25. The conference was organised by ECOWAS, UNICEF, the ILO and academic networks Comparative Research On Poverty (CROP) and Equity for Children. It was attended by 70 noted regional and global experts and academics.

As different Sub-Saharan countries continue to battle a range of health and environmental crises, the negative effects on child welfare deepen and expand to varying degrees across the region. Epidemics such as Ebola, natural disasters including flooding and droughts, and armed conflicts can all counteract improvements that have been made. However, the experts noted at the conference, factors that can be addressed by economic policy, such as poor working conditions, low salaries and high unemployment can actually have an even greater impact on child poverty. Putting policies in place that address these problems is critical to reducing child poverty and creating a better future, the experts said. They also highlighted the need for social protection measures such as providing cash grants and subsidies.

Noting the importance of development partners and the international community, the experts also called on them to consider the rights of children and to address their situation in a coordinated way, even in countries with relatively higher per capita income but with lagging social development.

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