

## **Children's call at the gate of the Sahara on citizen participation in the protection of African children**

Children and youth who participate in the African Children's Forum on the theme "**Sustainable child protection and citizen participation**", initiated by the African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY) in collaboration with Enda Youth Action, the support of the Government of the Republic of Niger, with the partnership of Save the Children, OAK Foundation, International Social Service in West Africa, Plan International, Educo, World Vision; Terre des Hommes Lausanne, which took place in Niamey in Niger from Monday 24 to Saturday 29 September 2018;

**Note** that over the past two decades, international and national agencies; NGOs and their state counterparts in various African country renewed their interest in issues affecting children and youth; that mobility, especially among children, have become national and transnational public issues of interest giving extra importance to protection needs;

**Affirm** that they are the future of the continent and that the foundations for the future of African continent are found in their commitment and their strong participation in the current challenges of various levels of development.

**Believe** that it is necessary and even essential to collaborate with other organizations and children's clubs in order to coordinate actions and together raise the voice of all African children, without any discrimination.

**Affirm** that it is essential for them to speak with one voice in order to denounce the problems that undermine the continent and do not allow or slow down the promotion of children's rights. These are especially, wars, political crises created by adults, corruption and poverty.

**Realize** that, despite the numerous awareness campaigns, teenage girls are still getting pregnant in places where sexuality is taboo and where parents feel uncomfortable to discuss about sexual issues with their children.

**Regret** that despite all the actions carried out in different countries, many children continue to be victims of traumatic violence. The most frequent are genital mutilation, especially in rural areas, forced and early marriage.

**Realize** that some families and community groups continue to consider children as sources of income, thus engaging them in many risky paths that lead to exploitation, labor migration and other miscellaneous practices that may jeopardize their bloom and growth;

**Affirm** their conviction that no bloom or growth of children can be achieved without their full participation, despite the progress made on the issue of children's participation in the decision-making process, particularly at the national level, in Pan-African bodies such as the AU, ECOWAS, CEMAC, SADEC, the issue on child participation and young people in the processes and other dynamics regarding them, still remain far from the desired standards;

**Thus realize,** that there is an absence or little consideration of children's opinion by their parents or guardians and other seniors in decisions concerning them. More worrisome, in some communities, children are not always considered in the same way by their social groups, in the planning and monitoring of community projects, children's opinion is not always taken into account in local, national and even international advocacy initiatives on child issues and are almost entirely conducted by adult;

**Also realize** that the marginalization of children in issues concerning them is even more frequent for girls that most communities put at the second position in the materialization of children's rights;

**Also realize** a weak support for initiatives that aim at creating and developing IGAs for children and youth, a lack of appropriate training to ensure the support of their projects and in many cases, a lack of information on the existing mechanisms for obtaining fund for IGA;

**Consider** that children face problems of equity in the enjoyment of their right to education. In fact, some children living in precarious conditions cannot attend school while those who are there are forced to alternate the school hours with long hours of work to provide for themselves and their family;

**Also consider** that children forced into various forms of mobility have a troubled schooling, just like girls in some marginalized communities who abandoned school early to pay social charges related to family needs;

**Also consider** that many factors prevent children and young people from enjoying their rights. These include teenage pregnancy, different forms of violence, lack of access to education and quality education;

**Reaffirm** our commitment to taking into account children's rights and especially their participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of all interventions regarding them;

**Note** an important weakness in the harmonization and coordination of partners who support the Movement in various areas of intervention in different countries. In fact, the various agencies and international NGOs that are partners of the Movement do not always know the type of support that each brings to it;

**Remind** that children's mobility are embedded in relationships and other normal interactions of sociability that place them in complex social dynamics. They can be voluntary and related to life projects; just as they may be under stress and require interventions to protect children who are victims;

**Identify** as main obstacles to understanding the challenges of mobility and migration of children and youth, the low consideration of structural factors and the values withstand these behaviors, the neglect of perceptions of children presented as victims and not as willing actors, the isolation and marginalization of organizations of children and young people by the agencies in working out these questions, the valorization of the formal norms to the disadvantage of the socially accepted ones and the agencies' difficulties in going down to concrete social arenas, as working children can do.

## **Call:**

1. The African Union (AU), in collaboration with all networks of the associations for the defense of children's rights, introduces and makes adopt, by countries, in addition to the day of the African child, a specific framework of participative reflection on the defense and the real follow-up of all the practices and behaviors which compromise the

protection and more generally the development of children in different African countries;

2. African States should establish without delay a climate of peace and a system of sustainable protection for children through prevention mechanisms and responses to situations of violence, exploitation, maltreatment or abuse of any kind and nature, and neglect of children;
3. African States really engage themselves and resolutely to the effective protection of children without any discrimination and to ensure that their fundamental rights are respected wherever they are and at all times with their full participation;
4. African States should establish specialized education or vocational training for incarcerated children to provide them with the basis for adequate socio-economic reintegration and to avoid making them social deviant due to their stay in prison ;
5. The various partners of the Movement joint their efforts in supporting the various associations of the movement, coordinate their activities for more efficiency in the activities and invest in harmonizing the speeches, the work and support processes, the language of communication with children and youth;
6. The AMWCY partners set up a committee to accompany the movement, and develop a support framework for the movement in the mobilization of resources;
7. Families and communities adopt behaviors and ways of life that are conducive to the preservation of the rights of every child. This may result from a continuous work of protection actors through various forms of communication with communities on children's rights. It also requires an awakening of people's awareness so that the protection and participation of children in decision-making concerning them becomes a reality;
8. Parents, taking into account the specificities of their living environment, find ways of breaking taboos and approach their children in order to better communicate with them about their various difficulties and risks, to better advise them, and better face the challenges of life and all kinds of threats that could endanger them;

9. The Movement strengthens its status as a child protection and development actor in Africa. This involves, among other things, training members, building children's capacities, listening and supporting leadership, passing on life skills and through a well-coordinated openness to other structures of children and young people in Africa ;
10. The movement develops strategies and partnerships that strengthen the specialization of young people in promising professions. This should result the design and strengthening of the mechanisms for placing skills coming from the AMWCY to organizations and other institutions likely to employ them or to support their self-employability;
11. The Movement values the experiences gained by its members who are becoming young adults in the social, humanitarian and responses in case of disaster;
12. The Movement negotiates partnerships at all levels (local, national and international) in order to effectively achieve the implementation of the 12 rights of the child and succeed in the fight "zero child on the streets", "no to early and forced marriage", provide vocational training for children school dropout and design projects for children in difficulty;