

Building an inclusive early childhood development system for young children with disabilities and their families in Africa

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Presenting on behalf of the project team



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(SANECD) and The African Early Childhood Network (AfECN)



Background

- The report provides an overview of regional and country commitments and provisions to address the needs of children with disabilities and their families, with a particular focus on children younger than six years of age.
- To inform how best to promote fully inclusive early childhood development programmes, policies, systems, and societies in the Africa region.

Thematic areas

Themes

Statistics on children with disabilities in the region disaggregated by age, gender, type of disability and country.

Mapping of cultural, institutional and policy barriers to caring for children with disabilities

- *Including financing provisions for children with disabilities across the region*

Mapping of services including health, nutrition, early learning, safety and security and responsive caregiving practices. The following were also included:

- *Screening and assessment centres for young children.*
- *Including capacity building and mentorship programmes for frontline workers and parents for children with disabilities*
- *Mapping of actors (NGOs, Academia, Development partners, community-led initiatives) providing services for children with disabilities*
- *Available public and private programmes targeting children with disabilities*

Limitations

- We tried to include non-English sources as far as possible
- Most of the information in this report is drawn from secondary data and publicly available information, mainly from online sources, which can, in some cases, be incomplete or outdated.
- Concerted efforts were made to source the relevant or the most recent documents through the AfECN country network partners, other relevant contacts and networks and hand searches, but this was not always successful.
- Thus, some of the information, especially at country (or sub-regional) level may not be up-to-date or may be missing.

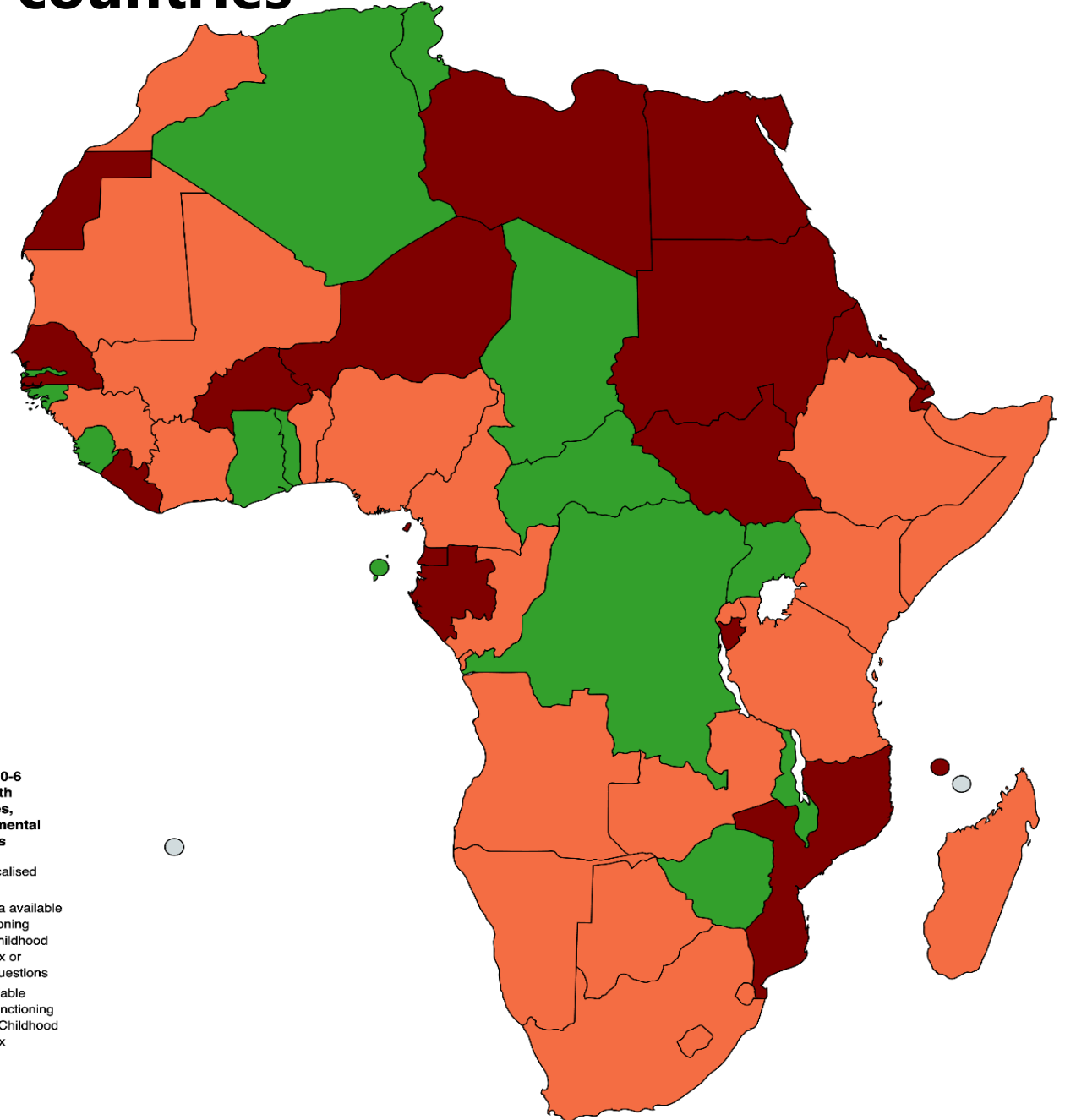
Data availability for AU countries

Children with disabilities in the Africa region:

Who are they, where are they and how are they counted?

Data availability for 0-6 year old children with functional difficulties, suspected developmental delays or disabilities

- No data or only localised data available
- Some national data available using Child Functioning Module or Early Childhood Development Index or disability-related questions
- National data available using two Child Functioning Module and Early Childhood Development Index



Prevalence of childhood disability: CFM

- Regional prevalence estimates of disability among children younger than 4 years was highest in **West Africa (6.8%)**, followed by **East and Southern Africa at 5.2%**.
- Central African Republic (15%), Ghana (11%), Chad (10%) and Madagascar (10%) were among the top five (out of 103) countries reporting the highest percentages of children aged 2 to 4 years with one or more functional difficulties.

Suspected developmental delay: ECDI

- West and Central Africa (17 countries) had the highest reported prevalence of suspected delay in the ECDI (41.4%), with country estimates ranging from 24.9% in Ghana to 67.3% in Chad.

Data and Prevalence

Achievements

- Global and regional commitments have resulted in significant improvements in the availability and quality of data on children with disabilities in the Africa region.
- An increasing number of countries have included the ECDI and/or CFM into national survey instruments, thus enabling intra- and inter-country comparable child development and disability data in the region and globally.
- Those that have not systematically included these modules are either making progress towards this or have included some relevant disability or development-related questions into population surveys.
- These advancements have also facilitated the availability of sex and age disaggregated data.

Gaps and challenges

- Countries do not yet uniformly use standardised definitions or measurement instruments for disability and thus the ability to compare data within the region and globally is limited.
- <50% of AU countries have included the CFM into one of their national survey instruments, thus there is a dearth of regionally comparable data pertaining to 0–6-year-old children with disabilities.
- Most reported data are on persons with disabilities older than five years old and are not always disaggregated by age, so ascertaining data on younger children within the broader datasets is not always possible.
- There is also extremely limited population-level data on children younger than two years old.

Constitutional, legal, policy and financial provisions and barriers

- All countries have committed to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- 40 AU countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- All AU member states have ratified the ACRWC, except five countries
- The African Disability Protocol is the regional legal framework on which AU member states should formulate disability policy and legislation to promote rights of persons with disabilities. It builds on the CRPD and is more representative of the African context.
 - Since its adoption in 2018, only three countries (Mali, Rwanda, and Kenya) have ratified and, except for Mali and Rwanda, only nine countries – South Africa, Mozambique, Malawi, Togo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, and Angola - have signed the protocol.
 - The protocol will only come into effect after it is signed and ratified by 15 AU member states.

Constitutional, legal, policy, financial

Achievements

- Most countries have adopted the CRC and CRPD and have or are making firm commitments to improve early childhood development.
- All the countries had at least one or more policy or legislative commitments or strategic documents (that were included in this review) in place or in development.
- 19 countries had either a broad-based disability policy, strategy, or action plan in place, however, there was limited focus on children in these documents.
- 24 countries had disability legislation, but this was not always relevant to children, particularly younger children.
- Inclusive education policies were present or in development in 17 of the 55 countries.

Gaps and challenges

- Variable progress in translating the CRC and CRPD into meaningful reforms for children with disabilities on the continent.
- Few countries have either national laws that are fully compliant with the CRPD or effective mechanisms to enforce legal provisions, where they do exist.
- 40 countries did not have a child protection specific policy or legislation.
- Less than half of the 29 countries with an ECD or ECCE Policy have developed implementation plans (or strategic plans)
- Current provisions often do not provide sufficient protection or adequately address the rights and inclusion of children with disabilities.
- Attitudinal barriers, stigma and discrimination are common across the region presenting a barrier to accessing appropriate care and rehabilitation for children who most need it.
- There is gross under-resourcing and underfunding for provisions for children with disabilities and their families, particularly during the early childhood period.

Health

Achievements

- Rwanda: Collaboration between Ministry of health and NGOs integrated services to CWDs and at risk in rural areas
- Uganda: Early identification and support of CWDs through Primary Health care providers and community-based rehab workers in communities
- South Africa: most advanced expression of healthcare services for children with disabilities in the Southern Africa region is from South Africa.
 - However, even though the right to health care for children with disabilities is articulated in various policy instruments, access to these services is not without its difficulties
- In Zambia, the Persons with Disabilities Act requires the Ministry of Health to provide free general and specialized medical care

Gaps and challenges

- Health and rehabilitation services limited to urban areas
- Limited access to services within own communities or specialized rehabilitation services
- Access affected by stigma, poverty, low education, inadequate health care systems, civil unrest and shortage of healthcare workers and professionals
- Negative attitudes from caregivers as well as healthcare staff affect access to healthcare services and facilities

Nutrition

Achievements

- Kenya, Zambia and Mauritius
- NGO's- SPOON Foundation
 - Provides training and tools on how to feed children safely in low resource settings
 - Package of intervention tools addressing what and how children are fed
 - Nutritional and feeding needs of children with disabilities - evidence showing reduction in wasting, stunting and anaemia

Gaps and challenges

- Poor evidence of mainstream approaches including children with disabilities
- Integrating nutrition into health care systems
 - problematic for children with disabilities
- School feeding programmes: children with disabilities are often not reached

Early learning

Achievements

- NGO's play an important role in ECCE service delivery role for children with disabilities
- In Mozambique, Plan International Finland and Plan Mozambique partnered with Light for the World and the Uhambo Foundation to support families and strengthen community preschools in which children with disabilities can play and learn alongside their peers
- Rwanda: Strong start- inclusive ECD approach
- Some examples of mainstream school attendance but still segregated into special classes

Gaps and challenges

- Lack of robust and reliable disability data on ECCE in Africa
 - Only recently become part of continental development agenda: SDG4, which calls for '*inclusive and quality education for all*'
- Marginalisation in education in terms of gender, age and disability
 - UNESCO's 2020 Global Education Monitoring Project: more than 75% of young girls do not have access to pre-primary education.
- Implications for access for CWDs when age, gender and disability status intersect???
- Stigma plays a significant role in exclusion from ECCE
- Safety concerns noted for mainstreaming disability
 - Special educational needs environments chose instead –perceived as safer
 - Fear that children will not be adequately supported in mainstream

Responsive care

Achievements

- Some examples in Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda
 - Getting to Know CP /Ubuntu Programme
 - community-based training programme catering for caregivers of children aged 2-12 years
 - peer psychosocial support to help improve caregiver's skills in caring for their child with a disability as well as facilitate their empowerment
 - SA ELRU and Department of Social Development - Circles of support to Caregivers

Gaps and challenges

- Few examples of services targeting responsive caregiving for children with disabilities specifically
- Need more robust regional evidence base

Safety and Security

Achievements

- Web based WASH resources for persons with disabilities developed by International Disability Alliance (IDA) in partnership with UNICEF, the World Bank, WaterAid, HelpAge International, the Special Olympics, and the International Centre for Evidence in Disability (ICED) at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
- Lesotho: Inclusive WASH programmes
- 2020 SA: children with disabilities given access to justice
 - legal precedent set: child with severe communication disabilities allowed to give testimony used Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). Abuser convicted.

Gaps and challenges

- Children with disabilities are less likely to live in households with access to clean water and more likely to be excluded from WASH programmes
 - Humanitarian crises increase risk
- Need stronger protections from violence and abuse
 - CWDs at high risk for violence, abuse and unintentional injuries
 - 2020 African Report on Child Well-being - Girls with disabilities 4 times more likely to experience violence than non-disabled peers
- Social Security and Birth Registrations
 - Stigma: children with disabilities are often 'hidden' and births not registered
 - Social security is often unavailable and where it is, may not be sufficient or difficult to access

Thank you

Project team

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