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### **New report reveals how African countries are performing in budgeting for their children**

**7 DECEMBER 2010, ADDIS ABABA:** A new report launched today by The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) measures African government's investment in children and confirms that a country's commitment to child rights and wellbeing is not dependent on their economic status, but rather on political will and spending priorities.

*The African Report on Child Wellbeing 2011: Budgeting for Children* reviewed the budget performance of 52 African governments between 2006-2008 focusing on spending in sectors that most directly impact on children. It found a continent of contrasts and that the governments of Tanzania, Mozambique and Niger are the three most committed to budgeting for children, along with Gabon, Senegal, Tunisia, Seychelles, Algeria, Cape Verde and South Africa who make up the category of best performers allocating the maximum of their available resources to children.

At the opposite end, the low performers identified in the Performance Index for Budgeting for Children developed by ACPF include Sudan, Angola, Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. These countries scored low due to lower levels of investment in sectors benefiting children, the decline of these allocations over the years and relatively high military expenditure.

The Report by ACPF - a leading, independent, not-for-profit pan African centre for policy research and dialogue on the African child - was launched at the opening of the Fourth International Policy Conference on the African Child (IPC) taking place in Addis Ababa 7-8 December 2010 in partnership with the UN Economic Commission for Africa . The conference will examine the challenges facing children in Africa and the policy choices for governments.

"Children's rights and wellbeing are intrinsically linked with public budgets and this new report reveals stark differences between African countries in terms of their commitment and readiness to translate political rhetoric into concrete budgetary allocations for the benefit of children," said ACPF Executive Director, David Mugawe. "Trends or changes in budgetary allocations for children serve as proxy measures of the extent to which governments are truly committed to realising the rights of the child."

In addition to identifying three categories of child-friendly budgetary performance, the Report analyses the extent to which a country's budget commitment to children relates to the volume of resources at a government's disposal. Despite lower economic status than some of their neighbours, countries such as Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda and Tanzania scored highly in the Index, whilst conversely, a number of African governments with relatively high incomes including Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritania and the Sudan, scored low.

"The research clearly shows that the sheer wealth of a country does not determine the level of commitment to budgeting for children", said Mr Mugawe. "Rather, it is a case of political will being translated into action and prioritising children in national budgets".

Looking in more detail at the four key sectors affecting children in Africa, the Report analyses progress in budget spending, or lack of it, on health, education, early childhood development and social protection. Whilst the last ten years have witnessed encouraging improvements in child health in many African countries with increased immunisation coverage, improved nutritional status and reductions in infant mortality, Africa still has a relatively low level of investment. Most countries invested only between 4-6% of GDP in health in 2008, well below the commitment made at Abuja in 2001 to spend 15% of national budgets on health. Eight years on, only four countries have reached that target – Liberia, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia. And there are sharp contrasts. Whilst Liberia spent nearly 12% of its GDP on health and Rwanda increased health spending by nearly 19%, others, such as DRC, spent less than 2% and health budgets declined in Malawi and Swaziland, whilst others remained almost unchanged.

In education, whilst Africa has made impressive strides both at primary and secondary levels with encouraging results in reducing the gender gap, the region spends less than 3% of the world's

education resources, leaving a significant number of its children out of school. But again, there are vast variations between countries. Lesotho, for example, had the highest expenditure on education (some 13% of its GDP), alongside five other countries who have met the *Dakar Education for All* target of allocating 9% of GDP to education by 2010 (Djibouti, Botswana, Swaziland, Tunisia and Kenya). In contrast, some of the resource-endowed countries performed poorly, with Sudan and Equatorial Guinea spending just 0.3% and 1.4% of GDP respectively on education in 2008.

Although Early Childhood Development programmes have been shown to be cost effective in the long run and that their benefits surpass their costs, Africa's investment in this sector has been almost entirely neglected with only 20 of 52 countries having early childhood programmes in place in 2005, and only 15% of pre-primary school aged children having the opportunity to attend pre-primary schools.

"Investment in early childhood development has been grossly ignored across the region, despite its very great significance", said Honourable Jessica Alupo, Minister of State for children in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Uganda. "In economic terms early childhood development is the first step in the process of human capital development and as a result should be viewed not merely as a vehicle for delivering badly needed social services, but also as an important element of economic development and strategy. Africa cannot continue to ignore this imperative. "

The fourth key sector examined in the Report is social protection, especially those initiatives focused on vulnerable children. There is huge unmet need for social protection in Africa – around 80% - and it is the most neglected sector in the continent. "Despite the critical role social protection can play in the lives of children and the contribution such initiatives can make to poverty reduction, many countries in Africa spend less than 3% of GDP on these programmes, the lowest among all regions of the world", said Dr. Assefa Bequele, Distinguished Fellow of ACPF.

ACPF also highlights the challenges in monitoring governments' budgets as in the majority of African countries the process lacks transparency with limited participation by the wider public, including children. "In Africa public participation in budgeting is far from uniform practice and very much at the embryonic stages", said Dr. Salim A.Salim, in his taped message to this year's IPC participants. "But some countries, including Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, are explicitly providing for people's right to participate more the process and we urge governments to be more transparent and provide disaggregated information to demonstrate the extent to which budget allocations reflect the needs, rights and wellbeing of children."

The report further reflects on the impact of the global economic crisis on Africa's children. With an average fiscal gap of 5% of GDP in the region (some 13 countries face a deficit of more than 5%), budgets for education, health and social protection are being cut and at the household level, families are taking measures which include fewer meals consumed, reduced school enrolment, increased absenteeism and begging in schools, seasonal hunger forcing children into casual labour and increased prostitution among youth people with an associated increase in HIV/AIDS and STIs.

ACPF's report identifies three priority areas for action that will be discussed at the IPC;

- Ensuring priority is given – in both budgetary allocation and implementation – to the realisation of children's rights and wellbeing
- Ensuring efficient use of resources through transparent budgetary frameworks and processes
- Ensuring adequate support for, and investment in, early childhood development.

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Fourth International Policy Conference on the African Child website [www.africanchildforum.org/fourthipc](http://www.africanchildforum.org/fourthipc)

#### **Note to Editors:**

- ACPF reviewed the budget performance of 52 African governments for the period 2006-2008 and developed the Performance Index for Budgeting for Children using five key indicators focused on health, education, early childhood development and social protection. The indicators were expenditure on health as a percentage of total government expenditure; total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP; percentage of the budget for routine EPI vaccines financed by government; military expenditure as a percentage of GDP; and percentage change in governments' expenditure on health, 2004-2008.