Dimensions, Dynamics and Pathways of Addressing Inequality and Inequity among Children in Africa

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Abstract

Inequality and inequity are devastating to all of us. These two pertinent issues, however, negatively impact on children more than adults. They are a cancer that must be halted from many fronts by both state and non-state actors. Public policy in Africa can no longer afford to pay little attention to inequality among children. All children – regardless of circumstances at birth and other extraneous factors such as place of residence, available income, religion and political context – should have equal chance and access to opportunities to develop and progressively realise their rights.

Inequality and inequity among children have their own dynamics, slightly different from those experienced by other segments of the population. If African governments are to effectively fulfill their role of ensuring the development of all children, they need to be mindful of the dimensions, manifestations and measurements of inequality and inequity among children. The aim of this paper is to proffer policy options, conveniently labelled 'pathways', on how to tackle inequality among children in Africa. The paper advocates for a broad-based and child rights based approach, which goes beyond the narrower focus on income and delivery of social services to children. The discussion is based on extensive review of literature on inequality and children's rights as well as interviews with key informants in selected African countries. The policy options are by no means exhaustive. Their effective application will, however, be significantly influenced by the context.

Key words: inequality, children's rights, fiscal policy, social inequities

Sumário

As desigualdades sócio-económicas são devastadoras para todos nós. Estas questões pertinentes, no entanto, têm um impacto negativo sobre as crianças mais do que os adultos. Elas são um cancro que deve ser travado em muitas frentes por ambos os actores estatais e não estatais. A política pública em África não pode continuar a não prestar atenção para as desigualdades entre as crianças. Todas as crianças, independentemente das circunstâncias de origens naturais e outros factores externos, tais como local de residência, renda disponível, religião e contexto político, devem ter igualdade de oportunidade e acesso a oportunidades para desenvolver e realizar progressivamente os seus direitos.

Desigualdade e iniquidade entre as crianças têm a sua própria dinâmica, ligeiramente diferentes daquelas experimentadas por outros segmentos da população. Se os governos africanos são para cumprir eficazmente o seu papel de garantir o desenvolvimento de todas *as crianças, eles precisam de estar atentos às dimensões, manifestações e medidas de desigualdade e iniquidade entre as crianças. O objectivo deste artigo é propor opções políticas, convenientemente sobre como lidar com a desigualdade entre crianças na África. O defensor de papel para uma abordagem baseia-se amplamente nos direitos da criança, que vai além do foco mais estreito sobre a renda e prestação de serviços sociais para as crianças. A discussão é baseada em extensa revisão da literatura sobre a desigualdade e os direitos da criança, bem como entrevistas com informantes-chave em países africanos selecionados. As opções políticas são de modo algum exaustivas. A sua aplicação eficaz, no entanto, pode ser significativamente influenciada pelo contexto.*

Palavras-chave: desigualdade, direitos das crianças, política fiscal, desigualdades sociais

Introduction

In the last decade or so, many African countries have experienced good economic growth. According to the World Bank, in 2013, seven out of the ten fastest growing economies in the world were in Africa. Unfortunately, the benefits of Africa's economic growth have been concentrated in the hands of a few. This is what a number of classical and contemporary economists, including David Ricardo, feared: that economic growth would benefit the owners of capital the most whilst the working class and the poor majority languish. When it comes to income, most children are dependent on their parents or guardians. It is unacceptable that an estimated 60.8% of the poor people in Africa, mostly children and young people, still live on less than US$2 a day and hold only 36.5% of total income (AfDB 2012). Yet, the ultimate objectives of development, should be expansion of economic, social and political freedoms and human development opportunities of all people, including children (Sen 1999). Ortiz and Cummins (2011:20) have estimated that, if the current economic development and consumption patterns do not significantly change, it will take more than 800 years for the bottom billion in the world to achieve ten percent of global income.

Inequalities are not a new phenomena. They have been observed throughout the evolution of the state and the development of the human race. What is worrying, however, is that although inequality has in recent years become a topical issue, not much has been done to bring the discussion closer to children. Yet, the African population is significantly youthful. The works of Latin American researchers (Barros *et al*, 2009) working with the World Bank, which resulted in the development of the Human Opportunities Index to measure inequality among children, though focused on Latin American, provides inspiration to this study and hopefully to African governments. The Human Opportunity Index is a composite indicator that measures two elements: (i) the level of coverage of basic opportunities necessary for human development, such as primary education, water and sanitation, and electricity; and (ii) the degree to which the distribution of those opportunities is conditional on circumstances exogenous to children, such as gender, income, or household characteristics (Barros et al, 2009).

This seminal work by Barros and other Latin American researchers, working with the World Bank, is undoubtedly valuable. It therefore constitutes a solid base for the discussion that will follow. It will, however, be extended to include variations in enjoyment of fundamental freedoms and rights by all children – including civil and political freedoms; democratisation of the public sphere that children live in to ensure human security; and a scrutiny of the systemic and structural issues that perpetuate the privileging and disadvantaging of specific segments of society and subsequently constrain household income and opportunities for children to develop.

The focus on children is deliberate. Firstly, inequality is twice as high among children than in adults (Save the Children, 2012). Children suffer more from living in unequal societies than adults. The effects of inequality are more pervasive during the early years of life. Second, opportunities for children to develop fully, especially early on in life, are dependent on factors extraneous to them, including but not limited to, circumstances at birth, availability of basic services, demographics of households and places of residence. It is the responsibility of adults to make a case for this focus on children. Third, children lack the voice, power and resources to negotiate issues of life. This makes them vulnerable and dependent on parents, guardians and public officials for their survival and development. Fourth, childhood inequalities and inequities have far-reaching effects on the physical, cognitive and emotional development of children. Some of the negative effects are permanent. At the same time, certain opportunities for development are such that once lost they are difficult to recover in the future. Malnutrition of children under the age of five, for example, may irreparably affect the cognitive and physical development of children. In Ethiopia, children who get stunted early in life, are nearly one whole grade behind non-stunted children at the age of 12 (Woodhead, Dornan & Murray, 2013:28).

This paper aims to achieve two related goals. Firstly, it seeks to highlight that inequality among children is multi-dimensional. Second, it aims to tease out possible policy options at the disposal of African governments, presented as pathways, to address this pervasive challenge. African leaders have the responsibility to ensure the progressive realisation of children's rights. The 'Post-2015' agenda is a lifetime opportunity for African leaders to work in partnership with the international community to improve life chances for all children and to reverse trends in inequities among children.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section sets the context for discussion by providing a conceptual framework of inequality as it relates to children. The second section is a discursive analysis of the various dimensions of inequality among children in Africa. The third section presents the possible pathways on how inequality among children in Africa could be addressed by national governments, and where necessary, with support from the international community.

Inequality and Children's Rights

The four fundamental child rights principles articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) constitute the frame of analysis and policy positioning that will follow. The four principles are: non-discrimination; best interest of the child; right to survival and development, as well as the child's right to form and express his/her own views. Inequality among children should thus, I argue, be discussed in terms of the extent to which individual children have the opportunities and capabilities to enjoy fundamental freedoms and rights outlined in the CRC and national laws.

The following questions will help us to delve into the subject, albeit from a simplistic viewpoint: 1) Are all children within a particular country receiving the same treatment from adults in both private and public spheres?; 2) Are government policies and actions reflecting the best interests of all the different groups of children?; 3) Do all children in a given African country have equal opportunities for survival and development?; and 4) Do all children in a given African country have equal chances of forming and expressing their views about issues of concern? The simple answer seems to be 'no' for all the questions. That points to inequality and inequities among children. The 'no' answers, however, beg the why and how questions. In answering the later questions, it becomes abundantly clear that discussions on inequality among children cannot be insulated from the deep-seated and structural factors shaping the political economies of Africa.

How then is inequality among children defined? Save the Children (2012:07) defines inequality as "variation in living standards across a given population". To Amartya Sen (1999:15), inequality among children refers to differences in the enjoyment of "substantive freedoms". The CRC outlines the freedoms and rights that should be enjoyed by children. These include right to life, health, education, protection from abuse, participation and to parental responsibilities and state assistance. Woodhead, Dornan, and Murray, (2013:06), have argued that inequality is a measurement of "differences in both household circumstances and child outcomes" which reflect "political-economic-cultural forces that structure societies, and children's lives, in terms of distribution of resources and opportunities in ways that align to greater or lesser degree with ethnicity, caste, religion, urban/rural location, gender, generation, etc.". From the above definitions, inequality among children could be defined as disparities in access to and availability of opportunities, voice, power and social status of children for them to survive, develop, participate in issues that affect them, and to be treated the same way in society. Inequity, on the other hand, refers to unfair and unjust treatment of children on the basis of their social, economic and political status as well as other circumstances that result in them not enjoying specific rights and freedoms they should.

These disparities are perpetuated by those in power via the policies and institutions they put in place as well as the socialisation processes (Naidoo & Wills 2008). Unequal societies exhibit disparities in levels of access by children to essential services such as water, shelter, clothing, sanitation, healthcare and education. This could be linked to lack of enjoyment of the rights to survival and development. Inequality is reinforced by and also leads to social exclusion, chronic poverty and powerlessness among children. It is dehumanising and a reflection of social and economic injustices. Inequality is also divisive, socially corrosive, a breeding ground for conflict and a general cause of unhappiness among children and adults alike (Warwick-Booth, 2013). It also affects children's self-esteem, identities, and performance, thereby undermining human development.

Inequalities become apparent in the schools that children go to, the neighborhoods they live in, the type of playgrounds they spend most of their time in, the length of their life, the power they have to influence family and community affairs, and in consumption patterns. Children living in high-income families, for example, tend to experience better education, health and more opportunities for their development compared to those in poor households (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Save the Children, 2012; Ortiz and Cummins, 2011). At the same time, children from poor families are less likely to be registered at birth and nearly three times as likely to be underweight than those from rich families. In Tanzania, only 4% of children from poor families – surviving on less than $1.25 a day – are registered at birth compared to 56% from rich families. Children from poor families are also twice as likely to die before they reach the age of five (Unicef 2014).

Ortiz and Cummins (2011:34); Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) and Piketty (2014) established a positive correlation between inequality levels and the rate of crime and other social problems in society. They concluded that people in relatively equal societies engage in less criminal behaviour, have better social mobility, are more trusting and experience less violence than those in unequal societies. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), for example, argued that levels of social cohesion, child participation in social activities and the size of social networks of children are closely related to levels of inequalities in society. They also noted that citizens living in unequal societies rarely trust their governments. Warwick-Booth (2013) also observed that social challenges such as child prostitution and children living on and off the streets are usually associated with poor and crowded communities, which usually reflect inequalities. It is the same children that suffer the most from the effects of pollution and environmental degradation. When inequality becomes more pronounced, it perpetuates stigma and discrimination of certain groups of children. Unfortunately, stigmatisation among children can be worse than among adults. At least adults know how to sometimes 'cover up' their inner feelings about other groups of people. Children tend to be carefree when they talk or relate.

Inequalities among societies in general usually manifest themselves in social and economic stratification; discriminatory policies and behaviors; social exclusion; lack of voice; and differences in access to human development opportunities. Countries that experience high levels of inequality have less chances of eradicating child poverty with the same level of growth as their equal counterparts. Every percentage increase, in health sector spending for example, will yield more and better results in more equal societies (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

Dimensions of Inequality among Children in Africa

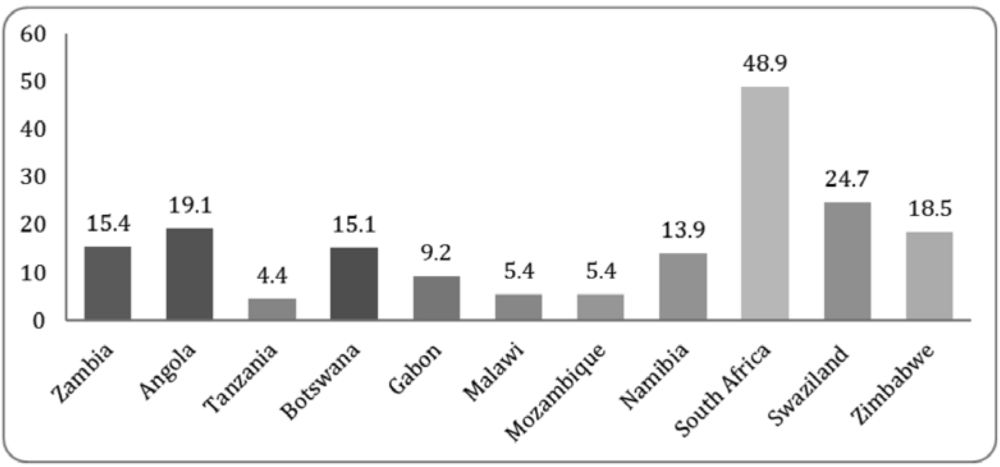
Inequality among children in Africa is a growing challenge, and may soon reach crisis point if not reversed. Let us briefly unpack the different dimensions of inequality among children. For the purposes of easy understanding, I have decided to categorise inequality and inequity among children into four dimensions, namely: 1) geographic, 2) economic, 3) sociological and 4) historical/inter-generational. A child may experience all or some of these dimensions.

Geographic Dimension

A child's place of residence, to a considerable extent, reflects the income, protection and other opportunities for survival, development and to enjoyment of fundamental freedoms and rights outlined in the CRC and national laws. In this paper, place of residence refers to the physical location as well as the type of house that children live in. Residence-based disparities are usually influenced by the level of infrastructure, climatic and environmental conditions, economic circumstances of parents and guardians, historical as well as the political and security situation in a country. Disparities often exist in access to safe water, hospitals, schools and other essential services for children living in rural Africa compared to urban areas. Children in rural parts of Africa tend to walk much longer distances to access essential services like schools and clinics. In the process, these children, especially girls, are exposed to violence and other forms of abuse (Unicef, 2014). According to Save the Children (2012), stunting is six times higher in rural than in urban areas.

A striking element of this geographic element is skewed access to information and communication technology. Several parts of Africa, for example, do not have cellphone, television and Internet coverage. Yet the Internet and television, for example, have become key instruments of learning. By 2013, except South Africa, all sub-Saharan countries had Internet penetration below 25%. This means that 75% of the population, most likely from rural and peri-urban areas, which generally lack electricity, are deprived of what is apparently an essential service.

Table 1: Internet Penetration Levels in Selected African Countries

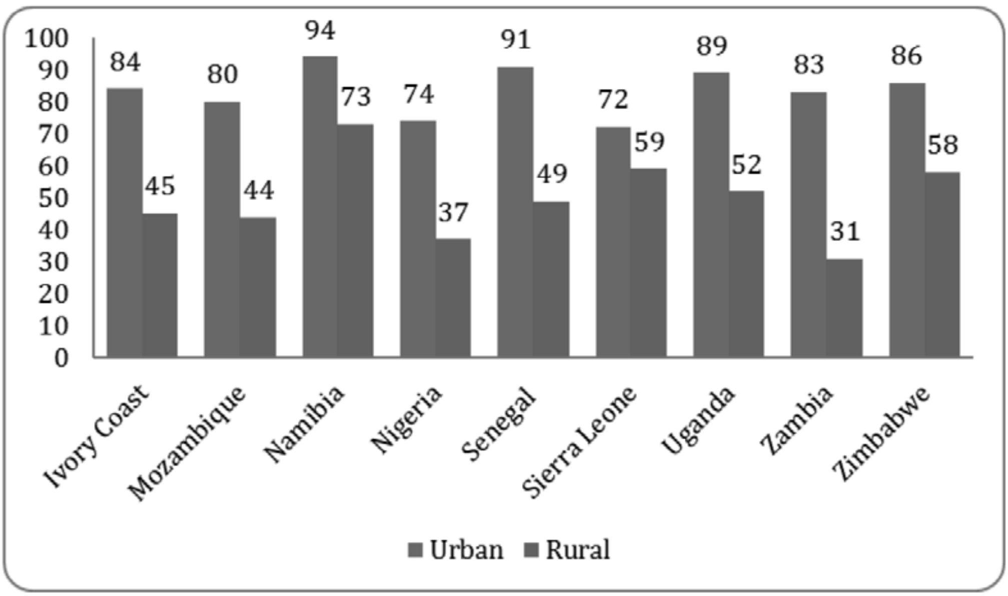


Source: Author's compilation based on World Bank data (2013): http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/

Extreme inequalities are also observable within the same urban or rural area. Most urban areas in Africa reflect three distinct settlements, namely slum and highly crowded areas with poor houses; medium-density and modestly housed settlements; and, rich and low-density suburbs. These settlements mirror the quality of services and opportunities available to children. A child living in a slum area like Alexandra Park in Johannesburg and Kibera in Nairobi is exposed to the risk of poor sanitation, crime, poor housing and an unsafe environment compared to a child in Sandton and Karen respectively. At the same time, a child residing in Nigeria or Somalia, prone to terrorist attacks, does not have the same level of peace as a child living in Botswana.

Recent studies in Kenya by the National Bureau of Statistics and Society for International Development (SID) also confirmed that children in different regions of the same country may have completely different lifestyles and opportunities for their survival and development. For example, children in Nairobi County (capital city of Kenya) have 15.4 times more access to secondary education than those living in Turkana County, which is approximately 700km from Nairobi. The Loima Constituency in Turkana has the lowest proportion of individuals with secondary education in Kenya estimated at 0.8 percent. This is 79 times less than the proportion in Embakasi West Constituency in Nairobi County which is estimated at 63 percent (Njonjo 2013).

Table 2: Geographic Disparities in Child Rights Outcomes



Source: Author's compilation based on UNICEF (2014) data: The State the World's Children in Numbers.

From the above bar graph, a woman living in a rural area in Zambia, for instance, has a 31% chance of having a skilled birth attendant while her urban counterpart has nearly 83% chance. In general, a mother living in rural Africa has 1.7 times less chance of having a skilled attendant at birth than one in an urban area (Unicef 2014). Although rural poverty is still high in Africa, after it only declined from 64.9% to 61.6% between 1998 and 2008, urban poverty is also increasing. It is estimated that the urban population in Africa will be 52% in 2025, up from 37% in 2014 (AfDB, 2014). Policy responses should thus refrain from only using the rural-urban praxis. Dynamics within both rural and urban areas should also be investigated. The place of residence is squarely extraneous to the child, influenced by, for example, economic circumstances of parents of guardians; settlement patterns arising from wars of conquest and dispossession and colonisation; and migration due to a changing climate.

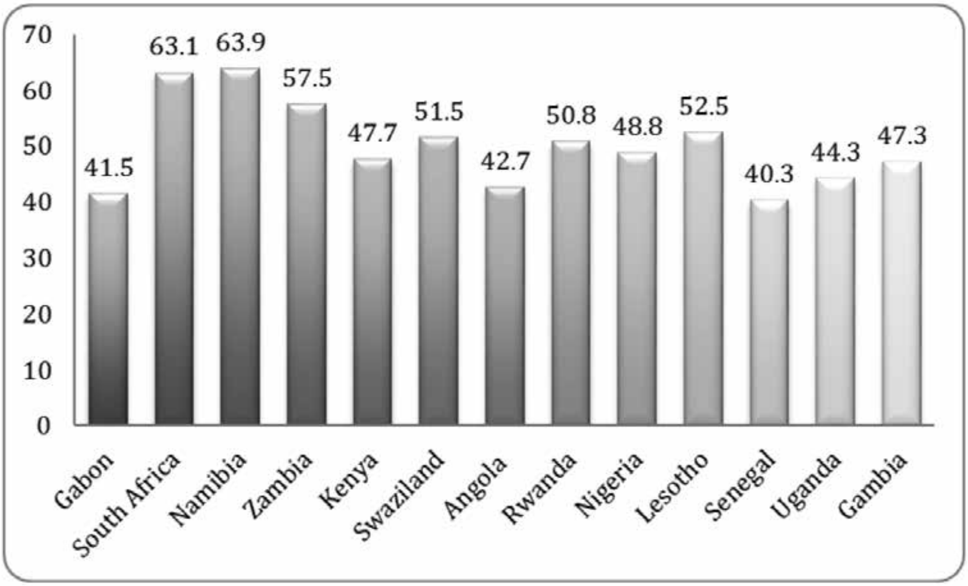
Economic Dimension

The economic dimension of inequality refers to skewed access to available income and wealth by children, which would help them to access basic services required for survival and development. It is crucial, however, to note that the economic dimension influences the others to a greater extent. The essence of this dimension is not to advocate that children should have income of their own but that they should have access to available income, which is basically an enabler to access specific services and for the enjoyment of certain freedoms and rights. It is common knowledge that children, by law, are not required to engage in economic activities to have income of their own. They depend on resources availed to them by their parents, guardians and governments.

The economic dimension of inequality among children is therefore broken down into three elements. The first element is differences in availability of and access to household income to purchase services and products such as food, clothing, uniforms and school books, even if some services are provided by the government for free. The second element is access to financial and non-financial wealth or assets of parents and guardians. These may include cattle, land, businesses and financial investments. The last element is access to public resources provided by government. Public income could be availed to children through cash transfer programmes, for example. A key question then is the need to interrogate the extent to which governments invest in children when their parents or guardians are poor.

The table below shows the Gini income coefficient of selected African countries, most of which have been experiencing high income growth. The Gini coefficient is a commonly used measure that varies between '0' reflecting complete equality and '1' or '100' indicating complete inequality. From the table opposite, most of the countries in the medium income bracket (South Africa, Namibia and Zambia) exhibit high levels of inequality.

Table 3: Income Inequality in Selected African Countries



Source: Author's compilation based on UNDP statistics, 2013.

While some children have access to all the income they need, mostly from their parents and guardians, some rarely have enough to buy basics such as food or books. Save the Children (2012), estimates that a child in the richest 10% of households has up to 35 times the effective available income of a child in the poorest 10% of households. The organisation has further observed that "the gap between the richest and poorest children has grown by 35% since the 1990s" (2012:34). One third of Kenyans, for example, survive on 1 440 Kenya shillings (about US$18) or less per month while only 12 percent spend 7 200 Kenya Shillings and above (Njonjo 2013:18). This translates into less available income to children to improve access to opportunities and enhance their capabilities to progressively realise their rights. In Africa, the top 10% people earn 22 times more than those in the bottom 10%. This disparity is reflected in the lives of children. Poor families spend nearly 80% of available resources on food. This means that children in these families barely have income for other things like sports, leisure and health checkups.

High levels of income inequality also mean that when economic downturn or disaster strikes, those at the bottom of the income scale, the most vulnerable, are disproportionately hurt (Njonjo, 2013). During this period, poorest households also suffer the most because government spending in Africa tends to be cyclical. This means that governments usually cut expenditures, including basic social services, when faced with a fiscal crisis. In view of this, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) have concluded that inequality and inequities demand a greater role of government. The inverse is true for more equal societies.

It is unfortunate that poor families tend to have more children yet they have less income and wealth available to support them. For many poor families, having many children is seen as a livelihood-strategy. This contributes to the transmission of intergenerational child poverty. Furthermore, the pyramid structure of populations in Africa implies huge dependency ratios. Many children look to parents or guardians who may actually not be gainfully employed. Furthermore, poorest children are three times more likely to be married before the age of 18 than their rich counterparts (Save the Children, 2012). Table 4 below shows the relationship between income inequality and outcomes for children in selected African countries. A general trend is that more children from rich families are registered than those from the poorest. In Cote de l'vore, for instance, while 90% of children from the richest 20% have birth cirtificates, only 44% of children from poorest families are registered. Similarly, the percentage of births with a skilled attendant are far higher in the richest 20% families than in the poorest 20%.

Table 4: Disparities in Child Rights Outcomes Based on Economic Status in Selected African Countries

Country	Birth Registration % (2005-2012)			Skilled Attendant at Birth % (2008-2012)			Primary School Net Attendance Ratio (2008-2012)		
	Poorest 20%	Richest 20%	Ratio of Richest to Poorest	Poorest 20%	Richest 20%	Ratio of Richest to Poorest	Poorest 20%	Richest 20%	Ratio of Richest to Poorest
Cote de l'vore	44	90	2.0	35	91	2.6	57y	80y	1.4y
Mozambique	42	60	1.4	32	90	2.8	67y	91y	1.4y
Namibia	-	-	-	60x	98x	1.6x	88x	97x	1.1x
Nigeria	12	76	6.2	11	90	8.2	34	94	2.8
Senegal	50	94	1.9	30	96	3.2	47	78	1.7
Sierra Leone	74	88	1.2	44	85	1.9	59	88	1.5
Swaziland	39	73	1.9	65	94	1.4	95	99	1.0
Uganda	27	44	1.6	43	88	2.0	73	87	1.2
Zambia	5	31	5.8	27x	91x	3.4x	73x	96x	1.3x
Zimbabwe	35	75	2.1	48	91	1.9	84	91	1.1

Source: UNICEF (2014), The State of the World's Children in Numbers.

In one of his letters to Malthus, renowned economist David Ricardo argued that economists should not only concentrate on the causes and drivers of economic growth but also on the "enquiry into the laws which determine the division of produce of industry amongst the classes"

(Ricardo 1820: 01). Ongoing discourses in Africa on shared and inclusive economic growth do not, however, seem to give due consideration to the economic dimension of inequality as it affects children. Many people, including academics and policy makers, assume that the benefits of inclusive economic growth will trickle down to children. History, unfortunately, tells us otherwise. The problem, in part, lies with the overemphasis on ‘productive sectors’ such as transport, communications, agriculture and tourism without paying equal attention to social sectors such as education and health. Yet, empirical evidence exists to show that social spending in health, education and social protection has demonstrable medium- and long-term economic benefits (ACPF, 2013; Save the Children, 2012; World Bank, 2010). In spite of the high-sounding rhetoric on inclusive growth, the overtly liberal and market-based economic development paradigm being pursued by many African countries, which apportions a lesser role to the state in economic development, is likely going to condemn many children to poverty and result in the widening of the gap between the rich and poor children.

Sociological Dimension

Using social systems theory, inequalities are also seen in how children are treated in society and in how they relate to each other and to adults. A key element of this dimension, also relevant to others discussed above, is the level of access by different groups of children to basic social services such as clean water, education, housing, water, sanitation, and primary healthcare. Access is influenced by a number of factors such as distance to be travelled, household demographics, access rules and procedures, culture and public access to relevant information about the services.

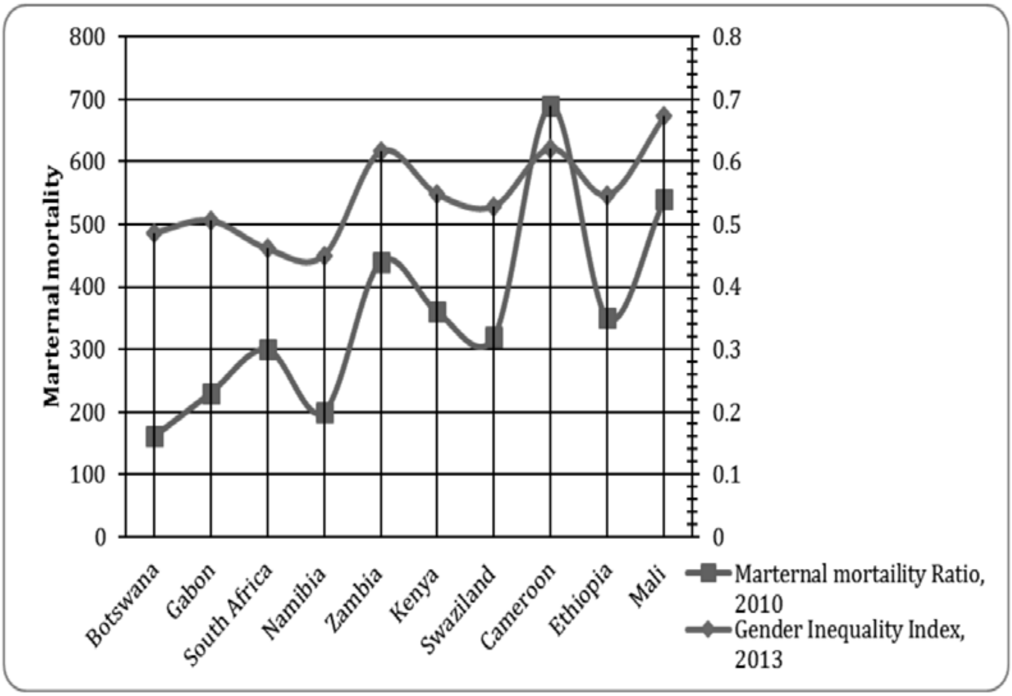
Max Weber is one of the early writers to have described inequality using a sociological lens. According to Weber, inequality is reflected in three dimensions of social stratification, namely class, status and party or political power (Livesey, 2010:03). Class is not just an issue of social stratification but also an expression of a whole set of norms, values, beliefs and interests. Children will reflect the basic class, race, and gender divisions in a given society (Wrigley & Dreby, 2005:01). Other sociological factors such as religion, caste, language and disability status also influence how a child is treated in society.

Social inequities are embedded in social, cultural and religious values and norms that are driven by family institutions, clans, religious organisations, political structures and media. Cultures and societal norms define who children are, how they should behave and what power relations should exist among them and also with adults (Livesey 2010). Social inequities expose children to the risk of discrimination, abuse and even systemic exclusion from mainstream life. They also tend to result in stigma and discrimination of some children. Discrimination levelled against specific groups of children affect the way they perceive themselves, lower their ambitions in life and reduce their confidence to engage in public life. The situation is considered to be worse for children with disabilities and with mental illnesses.

Social inequities are also reflected in the roles and relations between boys and girls. Most African cultures tend to accord more freedom, voice and opportunities to boys than girls. Unicef

(2014) established a close, though not perfectly linear, relationship between levels of gender inequality and maternal mortality. As shown in the diagram below, countries with higher gender inequalities, measured by the Gender Inequality Index (GII), also tend to have high maternal mortality. For the GII, a score of 0 means equality between males and females while a score of 1 implies the highest level of inequality. The average GII for sub-Saharan Africa is 0.570 while the average for Europe and Central Asia is 0.317. The maternal mortality ratio is 31 and 389 respectively (Unicef 2014).

Table 5: Gender-based Social Inequities in Selected African Countries



Source: Compiled from UNDP data, 2013.

There are also disparities in the way various groups of children exercise the right to form and express opinions. Opportunities available to exercise this right are influenced by culture and societal norms, economic circumstances, public access to information and place of residence. At the domestic level, children from rich families tend to have more freedom to claim their rights and to demand their parents' time. Children from poor families rarely have time with their parents or guardians as they spend most of their time searching for livelihoods.

Another element of the sociological dimension is the unequal access to protection and development opportunities as a result of a child's race, ethnicity and religion. Tribalism and religion, for example, are issues that have continued to characterise contemporary life – and in many cases are a cause of instability and conflict in many African countries including, but not limited to, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. Perceptions that specific tribes or religions are economically and politically more powerful than others, usually leave some people feeling dissatisfied. This makes political consensus hard to achieve (Warwick Booth, 2013).

Racially, children from black families in Africa tend to have less income and opportunities than their white counterparts. Inequality in South Africa, for example, "is an enduring legacy of the apartheid system, which denied the non-whites the chance to accumulate capital in any form – land, finance, skills, education, or social networks" (Narayan & Mahajan, 2013:01). However, post-apartheid South Africa has seen the replacement of white with black elites, without dismantling the systemic issues that perpetuate inequality. With a Gini coefficient of nearly 70, South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world. Ethnicity and race-related inequities arise from many factors including global power relations, legacies of colonialism, wars of conquest and dispossession in Africa, geography and socialisation.

The last element of this sociological dimension is political. This occurs when children have different opportunities and capabilities to exercise their rights, including civil and political freedoms due to political and religious affiliation of their parents or guardians. In Zimbabwe, for example, between 2002 and 2008 especially, concerns were raised over skewed access to food aid and other social services in favour of supporters of the ruling ZANU PF party. Further allegations were also raised concerning selective application of the law on the basis of perceived political affiliation.

Historical and Intergenerational Dimension

A cross-cutting dimension of inequality among children is its inter-generational nature. This means inequality can be transmitted from one generation to the other. The education and income circumstances of one generation, for example, are likely to have an impact on children in the next generation (Durlauf, 1992; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). High-income families are able to invest in their children through a variety of means including bank savings, insurance and enabling them to access education in high quality schools. This increases opportunities for their children to live happy and dignified lives in the next generation. The inverse is also true for poor families, who for failing to invest in their children, will pass on child poverty to further generations. The level of education of the head of the household and size of family also determine the extent to which children and future generations will be accorded opportunities for their development (Nayaran & Mahajan, 2013).

Although there are good chances that rich parents will transmit their wealth to their offspring, it is not always the case because of structural and other systemic issues affecting economies in Africa. For example, income and wealth mobility is usually difficult because of high inflationary environments, uncertainties in financial markets, unpredictable state regulation and climate change. Non-financial assets such as cattle, lands, etc. are particularly affected by changing weather patterns and demographics. It is therefore likely that a child who is born to a wealthy family may actually not be able to transmit the same level of wealth to his/her children.

From the above discussion, a few conclusions can be made. First, inequality among children is systemic and multidimensional. It is sometimes driven and perpetuated by those in power through the political structures, media and cultures in place at a given time. Secondly, children tend to reproduce and suffer the most from inequalities. Inequality among children is largely a result of factors extraneous to them. Public policy action should thus seek to ensure that a child's circumstances at birth should not limit opportunities available for survival and development.

Pathways to Addressing Inequality Among Children

Addressing inequality seems to be getting high up the development agenda of the African Union and its member states. The Common Africa Position (CAP) on the Post 2015 agenda adopted on 31 January 2014, recognised rising trends in inequalities. It therefore acknowledged that "investment in children, youth and women always generates substantial development multipliers" that contribute to a reduction in inequality (African Union 2013:02). The CAP rightly concluded that without sufficient investments in children, the war against inequality will be difficult to win. The CAP does not, however, elaborate on dimensions of inequality among children nor does it focus its policy proposals on children. It only provides generic policy prescriptions such as "sustained inclusive economic growth", "decent and productive employment", "sustainable social protection programmes", "eradicating poverty", "health for all" and "making services adequately and geographically available in both rural and urban areas" (African Union, 2013:03-6). The African Development Bank's Human Capital Development Strategy outlines the role of social safety nets and other risk management policy instruments in tackling inequality. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the Africa Progress Panel have also cautioned that if not addressed, inequality will negate efforts to develop the continent.

A brief discussion of possible pathways to reduce inequality among children within countries will follow.

Mitigate risk, shocks and vulnerability through child-sensitive social protection (CSSP)

Child sensitive social protection (CSSP) is a key tool that could be used to address inequality. There are four main instruments of child sensitive social protection, namely: social assistance, social insurance, social services and social equity measures. Social protection schemes can target children directly or indirectly through households. Child-sensitive social protection helps children move out of chronic poverty while at the same time expanding opportunities for child protection and development (Triegaardt 2006; UNICEF 2014; World Bank 2010). Increasing income available to children and opportunities for development significantly reduce the chances of children dropping out of school or not accessing other basic rights, like food, health care, etc.

Classic examples of CSSP programmes in Africa include South Africa's Child Support Grant, Malawi's School Feeding Programme; Ethiopia's Productivity Safety Net Programme (PSNP); Uganda's Expanded Social Protection Programme, including the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) project; Zimbabwe's Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM); Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme, Ghana's National Health Insurance schemes and Rwanda's Umurenge Programme. The Child Support Grant in South Africa has helped reduce inequalities among children and also reduced the gap between rich and poor children by nearly 47%, while the Umurenge Programme in Rwanda helped reduce extreme child poverty from 40.6% to 9.0% (Soucat & Ncube, 2014). Many of the social protection schemes target the poorest and most vulnerable children and households. The aim is to improve access to education, food and primary healthcare by children. In East and southern Africa, a sizeable number of these social protection programmes seek to address the risks and vulnerabilities associated with HIV and AIDS and recurrent droughts.

Although it has been empirically proven that child-sensitive social protection can break the vicious cycle of poverty, and cushion households from various shocks and vulnerabilities, a few challenges continue to arise (Triegaardt, 2006; World Bank, 2010; Soucat & Ncube, 2014). The first challenge raised by some African governments is sustainability of CSSP programmes. This is particularly the case considering that many governments fail to adequately mobilise domestic resources to invest in children due to factors internal and external to them. For example, in 2010, African governments lost nearly US$859 billion dollars to tax evasion and avoidance, corruption and other cross-border illegal financial outflows (GFI, 2013). Many of the CSSP schemes in Africa thus depend on aid and sometimes borrowed money. Inadequate resources seem to have forced a number of countries to move away from universalism to targeted social protection schemes. This is done through means testing, income tests, claw-back taxes and other behavioural tests. However, a few African countries seem to be moving in the right direction in so far as domestic resource mobilisation is concerned. These include Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Rwanda, South Africa and Senegal (Soucat & Ncube, 2014).

The second challenge is that some policymakers are yet to appreciate the connection between CSSP and economic development. A number of governments still need to be convinced about the economic benefits of investments in CSSP. Some even argue that if social protection schemes are to be funded from domestic revenue then economic growth should be a priority. This line of thinking has somehow led to social protection schemes sliding down the ladder of the spending priorities of many governments.

Third, in a number of countries, concerns have been raised regarding corruption, limited coverage of social protection programmes, poor targeting, late disbursement of funds and inefficiencies in social protection expenditures. Problems of ineffective and inefficient spending are in part exacerbated by weak public finance and expenditure tracking systems (Triegaardt, 2006). In Egypt, for example, where 30% of social protection spending goes to food subsidies, concerns have been raised on whether these subsidies are in fact benefitting poorest families the most. Some of the subsidies are badly targeted and somehow benefiting the rich more than the poor (Soucat & Ncube, 2014). Furthermore, social protection programmes are generally easy to politicise. Reports of nepotism, political patronage and selectivity in the identification of social protection schemes are common features in many African countries.

Fourth, the effectiveness of some social protection schemes is affected by lack of awareness of benefits as well as access procedures and requirements. Skewed access to information is often a cause of social exclusion. In addition, issues of political and religious affiliations of parents also emerge.

Lastly, contributory social insurance often overlooks the unemployed and child-headed households. In Ghana for example, although the National Health Insurance has been expanded on a voluntary basis to include the informal sector, it still leaves a lot of child- headed households outside the system. It can be concluded therefore, that to be effective, CSSP should be developed within open, inclusive and accountable governance frameworks.

Enhance Child Survival and Development Opportunities through More and Better Public Spending in Key Child Rights Sectors Based on a Lifecycle Approach

Disparities in children's life chances to survive and develop fully can be reduced through adequate, equitable and effective public spending with the aim of ensuring universal access to essential social services by all children. It is important that public spending on social services is prioritised during the early years of life. At the same time, it should be transacted within open, participatory and accountable governance. Existing evidence suggests that enhancing opportunities for all children early on in life is likely to have a greater impact on child outcomes (Ricardo Paes de Barros, et al, 2009). Effective public spending has a strong redistributive effect that can significantly reduce inequality.

The demographic situation of Africa itself demands a deliberate focused on investment in children and youth. In most countries children and young people below the age of 25 constitute 45-60% of national populations. The youthful and growing African population means that there is a huge demand for education and primary healthcare that target children. Education systems, for example, have to be expanded to ensure that there are enough quality schools, educated teachers and adequate teaching materials. Demand side financing models[1] in the education sector, for example, such as scholarships for girls, provision of books and educational materials, have however, proven to be effective in a number of African countries (Save the Children, 2014). In line with Education for All objectives, most African governments currently provide free primary education. Concerns have, however, been raised regarding adequacy of resources and subsequently the quality of education provided (ACPF 2013). Primary healthcare services for children under the age

1 These are ways of financing that are designed to respond to requests, needs and particular circumstances of identified children.

of five are also paid for by government in many countries. Ensuring universal access to health will also imply reduction or elimination of user fees. In 2010, Sierra Leone for example, introduced a Free Health Care Initiative for children under five as well as for pregnant women. In 2013, Kenya also introduced free maternal health services for all pregnant mothers (ACPF, 2013).

A universalist approach – under which an entire population is eligible for social benefits as a basic right – to public spending on essential social services to children usually leads to social inclusion, decreased disparities in material well-being, a sense of belonging, voice, autonomy and improved power relations in society. However, while universalism in public spending may be desirable, lack of sufficient resources and sometimes pressure from interest groups, tend to force governments into 'targeted' interventions. Unfortunately, too much targeting sometimes creates societies of 'givers' and 'beneficiaries', thereby perpetuating stigma and discrimination of certain groups of children.

In order to make this 'public-spending-on-social-services' pathway effective, African governments have to address the following challenges. First, they have to increase domestic revenue, especially from tax, by eliminating unnecessary tax incentives, improving efficiency in tax collection and combating tax evasion and avoidance. As noted by Save the Children (2014b:04) "while aid can have a dramatic impact in the short term and should be maintained, it cannot replace the long-term political commitment to and resourcing of public services" from domestic resources, especially through taxation. The average tax to GDP ratio for most African governments is 17% compared to 34% for OECD countries. As mentioned earlier, Africa also continues to suffer from illicit financial flows. According to Global Financial Integrity, from 1980 to 2009, Africa lost between US$1.2 and US$1.3 trillion in tax evasion, tax avoidance, mispricing, corruption, money laundering and other illicit flows. Out of this figure, West and Central Africa account for 37 percent, North 31 percent and southern Africa 27 percent (Kar et al, 2013). Lack of international cooperation on tax contributes to this.

Second, governments should ensure effective and equitable budget allocations to sectors that directly contribute to the implementation of children's rights. No children should be left behind in enjoying their rights.

Lastly, deliberate efforts should be made to ensure that allocated resources are effectively and efficiently spent, within open, inclusive and accountable public finance systems. As we discussed in the above section, efficiency and effectiveness in public spending is still an issue in a number of countries, and should be addressed. The World Health Organization has estimated that 20-40% of health sector resources are wasted in one way or the other (WHO, 2010). In Kenya, for example, reports of overlapping beneficiaries have been reported in its various social development initiatives, which include Free Primary Education (FPE), Secondary Schools Bursary Fund (SEBF), Constituency Development Fund (CDF), Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) and the Rural Electrification Fund (REF) (Njonjo, 2013).

Democratisation of the Public Sphere and Combating Discrimination in order to Expand Opportunities for the Enjoyment of Fundamental Freedoms and Rights by all Children through Supportive Laws, Policies and Effective Oversight Mechanisms

A crucial aspect of the battle against social inequities – which is a cause and consequence of discrimination and social exclusion – is to expand opportunities for all children to exercise their civil and political freedoms. Religious, ethnic, gender and even political fundamentalisms and differences, which are commonplace in many African countries, significantly limit the exercise of freedoms and rights by all children. To undo these practices, with the aim of tackling social inequities, governments may require policy and legislative reforms. These reforms will need to be reinforced by the establishment and/or strengthening of human rights and accountability institutions. For example, impartial police forces, ombudspersons, human rights commissions and an independent judiciary are key accountability institutions that help governments to handle cases of social inequities. It is unfortunate that in a number of African countries, there is selective application of the law as well as biased relationships between ruling parties and independent human rights and oversight institutions. This ultimately compromises their effectiveness.

Some countries in Africa have established specialised oversight bodies to monitor and report on inequality and social inequities. An example is the 'Equal Opportunities Commission' in Uganda. The Commission was established by the Act of Parliament in 2007 in line with the National Constitution in order to eliminate discrimination and inequalities against any individual or group of persons on the ground of sex, age, race, color, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, health status, social or economic standing, political opinion or disability. The effectiveness and impact of this Commission is beyond the scope of this paper.

It can therefore be argued, that the role of the state in addressing inequality is unquestionable. Strong and capable oversight institutions are required to address the systemic and structural drivers of inequality among children. Laws and institutions must not only be in place, but be used effectively by the population. A free and independent media is important. International human rights mechanisms such as the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, NEPAD Peer Review, Universal Periodic Review, State party reporting to the CRC Committee and to the Committee of Experts on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, are also key.

Several African countries have also put in place sector-focused institutions such as gender, disability and children's commissions to address any perceived social inequities. It is, however, yet to be seen whether such institutions will effectively hold governments and powerful private actors to account for the levels of inequality the politics of patronage and power dynamics engender. Many of the child rights institutions, including these oversight bodies, are usually under-resourced and patronised by ruling parties for them to effectively perform their duties. Furthermore, for the most part, children are usually not prioritised by some of the oversight institutions in favour of 'politically sensitive' issues such as disability, race and women.

Another way of responding to social iniquities is through expanding opportunities for children's participation in development and public spending processes. This requires that governments establish and adequately resource participation structures at sub-national and national levels. Public participation should also be provided for in national policies and laws. In order to participate effectively, the public should have access to timely, relevant and user- friendly information. It is the responsibility of governments to create a supportive environment for citizens' (including children's) participation in decision-making. This includes enactment of laws and policies that uphold freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. In a number of countries, civil society organisations operate in restrictive environments that limit their opportunities for effective participation in policy and budgetary processes.

Enhance Household Income and Ensuring Public Investments in 'Pro-poor' Development Initiatives

Inequalities among children can also be addressed through livelihood, employment creation and public works programmes targeting households. Labour market-based strategies such as minimum wages, decent employment, insurances and worker benefits are therefore an important component of this pathway. Low formal employment levels, alongside widespread informality of economies, however, make labour market instruments an inadequate, though necessary, pathway of improving the amount of household income available to children in Africa. Other pro-poor policy alternatives are required. These include public works programmes, small-scale agriculture support, low-cost housing, micro-finance support, rural electrification and other livelihood initiatives. Examples of public works and livelihoods programmes include the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in South Africa, Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia, Slum Upgrading Programme in Kenya as well as the Food for Work programme in Zimbabwe. South Africa's EPWP was introduced in 2004 with the purpose of creating jobs for the unemployed, utilising labour-intensive methods rather than capital-based technologies. Investments in small-scale and subsistence agriculture are particularly important in Africa considering that nearly two thirds of the African population depend on agriculture and fishing for survival. Some of the pro-poor interventions are reinforced by affirmative action that seeks to prioritise specific segments of the population such as girls and women, indigenous groups, youth and people with disabilities in issues such as educational scholarships, business finance, internships and youth development funds.

Another way through which income inequality at household level can be reduced is through progressive taxation. This is done by ensuring that those who earn more money are taxed at a higher rate than those earning less. In line with this principle of progressive taxation, many African governments usually revise their tax-free brackets upwards every year for them to be in tandem with inflationary trends and changing salary levels. They also charge very low tax or zero rate specific goods and services consumed by the poor while at the same time charge high tax on luxury goods, usually consumed by the rich. This will leave the lowest paid employees with some disposable income to spend on children. Suffice to say, in conclusion, that direct taxes such as pay-as-you-earn (PAYE) or income tax tend to be more redistributive than indirect taxes such as VAT.

In order to maximise tax revenue and ensure progressivity of taxation, where necessary, African governments should reform their tax policies, particularly property and wealth taxes such as capital gains taxes in order to increase tax revenue in an equitable manner. This also entails evaluating the distributional effects of specific taxes such as Value Added Tax. The ultimate objective should be to avoid a situation whereby the tax burden is not disproportionately placed on the poor though.

Conclusion

The paper discussed the different dimensions of inequality among children. The multi-dimensional nature will help us to appreciate the vital roles of the state in expanding opportunities and capabilities of all children to progressively enjoy their rights. It also discussed several pathways to tackle inequality among children. These include child-sensitive social protection (CSSP); making basic social services available to all children through more and better public spending in key child rights sectors based on a lifecycle approach; expanding enjoyment of fundamental freedoms and combatting discrimination through supportive policies and effective oversight mechanisms; and enhancing household income through labour market instruments as well as strategic investments in pro-poor development initiatives.

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