



Consultations with children on their priorities for the post-MDG framework

AFRICA



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GHANA
KENYA
MALAWI

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Family for Every Child is a diverse, global network of hands-on national organisations with over 300 years' combined experience. We work with the millions of children in extended family care, in institutions, in detention, on the streets, as well as those without adequate care within their own families. We are a catalyst for global and local change. Our network provides a platform for sharing and amplifying the expertise of our members. We work with others who share our vision to enable significantly more children to grow up in secure families and access temporary, quality alternative care when needed.

This report was written by Gillian Mann, Family for Every Child's Research Advisor. It is based on consultations carried out by Family for Every Child members Challenging Heights and EveryChild, and EveryChild's partners Solwodi and Pendekezo Letu. Thanks go to all of the teams who carried out the consultations, and to the EveryChild Programme Management Team in London for their assistance.

Introduction

In late 2012 and early 2013, consultations were held in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi with boys and girls between the ages of 8 and 17 years who were living without parental care. Participating children were living in the following circumstances:

1. those living with extended family (Malawi, Ghana, Kenya)
2. those living and working on the street (Malawi, Kenya)
3. those living in residential care (Kenya, Ghana)
4. those living in detention (Kenya)
5. those with disabilities living in residential care (Kenya)

The children spoken with in Ghana were also children who had been until recently living with employers, mainly in the fishing industry.

The purpose of these consultations was to explore with children their priorities for a framework to replace the current Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) when they come to an end in 2015. These discussions were part of a broader consultative process that has taken place with approximately 600 children in seven countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and South America.

In each of the three countries, a workshop-based approach was used, in which boys and girls participated in a series of activities designed to enable them to share their experiences and perspectives in a fun and engaging manner. These groups varied in size, depending on the needs and abilities of the participants. Each workshop was approximately 1-2 hours in duration, and we generally spoke with boys and girls separately. The average size of each group was 6 children, and in total, 35 workshops were conducted. Roughly equal numbers of boys and girls, both younger (8-12 years) and older (13-17 years), participated in these consultations.

Breakdown of number of consultations held with children:

	Living with extended family	Living on the street	Living in residential care	Living in residential care (with disabilities)	Living in detention	Total
Ghana	3		5			8
Kenya	7	3	7	2	2	21
Malawi	4	2				6

The focus of these workshops was on learning from children about the following:

- things that make them feel happy and safe in their communities and families
- things that make them feel unhappy and unsafe in their families and communities

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- things that they would like to change about their lives and the lives of other children in their communities and beyond.

These discussions were placed in the context of the current MDGs and the development of the post-MDG framework. The workshops involved both individual and collective activities – drawing, writing, discussions and ‘gallery walks’ in which children looked at one another’s productions and discussed them as a group. Participating boys and girls also enjoyed games, informal play time and snacks. After the workshops were completed, the findings were analysed and a provisional child-friendly summary report was produced and shared with participating children in each of the three countries for their elaboration and feedback.

Post-MDGs

The purpose of these consultations was not only to learn more about the realities of children’s everyday lives, but also to support them to examine their personal and community-based experiences within a larger context through discussing their priorities for the framework that will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) when they come to an end in 2015.

Developed in 2000, the MDGs consolidated and refined numerous international agreements aimed at tackling extreme poverty on a global level. Together, they endorse a multi-dimensional view of development and recognise the cross-cutting nature of many development problems. There are eight goals in total, including the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the achievement of universal primary education, the reduction of child and maternal mortality, disease eradication and environmental sustainability.

Discussions are currently underway to explore what a new, post-MDG framework might look like. Throughout these consultations with children in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi, the policy framework and the political process for its implementation were communicated and explained to participating boys and girls in simple and accessible ways, including using stickers, drawings and discussion.



Children in Kenya sharing their views on what governments’ priorities should be

Findings

In each of the 35 workshops held, children worked together to share their opinions and experiences. Despite the different ages, circumstances and experiences of participating boys and girls, very similar issues were raised, discussed and prioritised. All children were able to articulate their concerns in clear and straightforward ways, using their own lives and those of their peers to draw out issues of significance to themselves and to children more generally. While the exact manifestations of the problems they faced differed somewhat, according to their specific individual characteristics and circumstances, boys and girls with physical impairments shared the similar concerns as those of other children. There were also very few issues that appeared unique to particular groups of boys or girls in particular country contexts.

Broadly, the findings from the consultations can be grouped into seven main themes:

Theme 1: Children desire strong, safe and loving relationships with parents, caregivers, teachers, peers, siblings and others. Boys and girls of all ages stressed their desire to be loved, cared for and protected, and to be treated fairly and with understanding and kindness. The emotional closeness they valued was closely associated with physical proximity: living together with parents, siblings and other family members was an important means of feeling safe, happy and protected. Friendship was universally identified as serving a similar purpose. This point was underscored by the frequent mention of its corollary: all groups mentioned fighting, teasing, mockery and the isolation and mistreatment of children by other children as something that made them feel unhappy and unsafe. Children of all ages referred to living apart from their siblings – both younger and older – when they spoke of the things that made them unhappy. In general, supportive relationships with adults and children were understood to strengthen children’s resilience to the numerous challenges that they themselves identified.

“Being isolated from your parents means that your life will not be good. Children should not be isolated from their parents at all if they are alive” (girls in Kenya, 8-12 years, living in extended family care)

“Children want the government to take them back home” (girl in Kenya, 12, in detention (care and protection order)

“I feel safe when I receive much care and love from grandparents and other relations at home” (girl in Malawi, 12, living in extended family care)

Theme 2: Children want to feel protected and live free from violence in their homes, schools, workplaces and communities. In Ghana, Kenya and Malawi, boys and girls of all ages drew attention to the omnipresence of physical violence in their everyday lives, including between children, between adults and children, and between adults themselves. Beating at the hands of parents, teachers, caregivers, custodians, classmates, strangers on the street and others were very common experiences. Both boys and girls also spoke frequently of sexual violence as well as intimidation, ostracism, verbal abuse and bullying. Workshops with girls and boys highlighted the specific risks that girls face of sexual assault and harassment and that children with disabilities

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experience at the hands of their parents, families, caregivers, communities and peers. Children stressed that they wanted the adults in their lives to play a stronger role in protecting them from violence of all kinds.

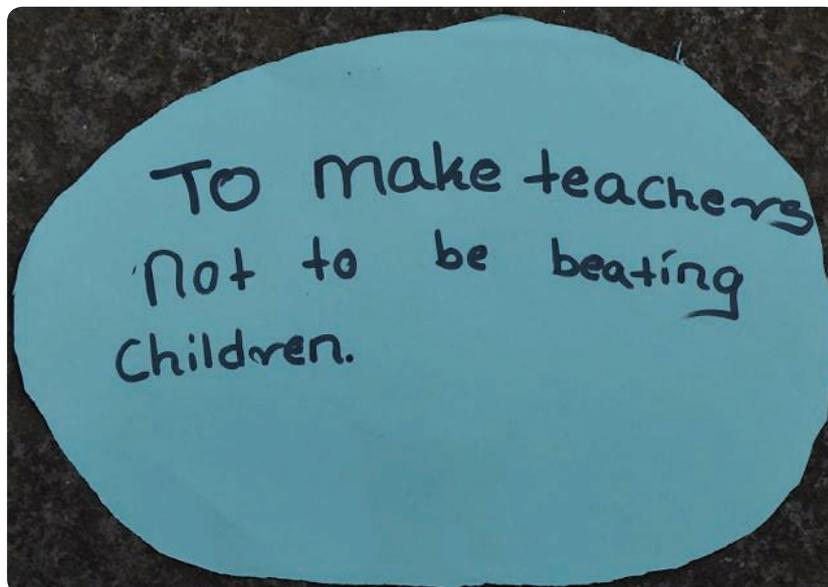
“There should be no child abuse...most children are physically abused. They are beaten up and given too much work for their age” (boy in Malawi, 11, living on the streets)

“Those who abuse children should be punished” (girls in Kenya, 8-12 years old, living on the street)

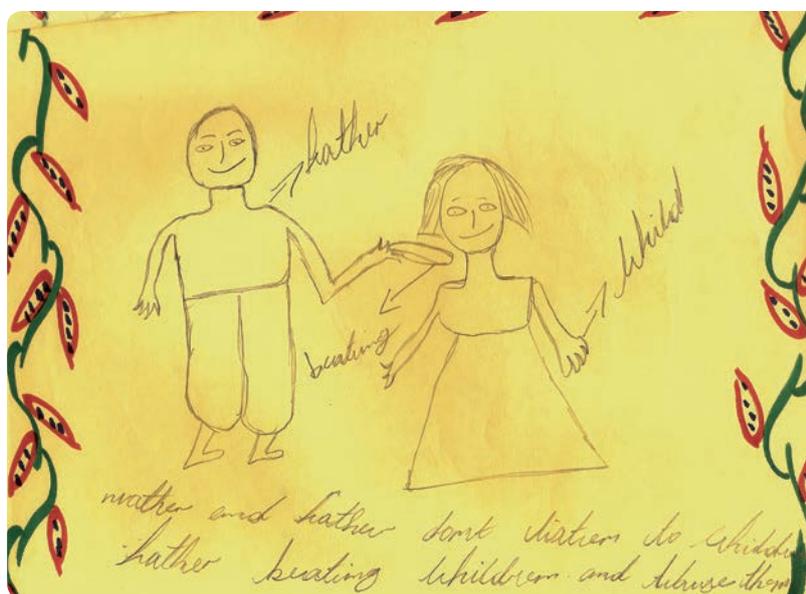
“Government needs to help us because some parents rape their children” (boy in Kenya, 14, in detention)



“This man is holding a girl’s hand, saying ‘I will rape you today’. The girl is shouting for help” (boy, 15, living in extended family care in Malawi)



One priority listed by a girl, 11, living in extended family care in Kenya



Girl, 14, living with extended family in Malawi.

Theme 3: Children want to be treated equally and with dignity, respect and tolerance. Boys and girls of all ages, including those with special physical or learning needs, asserted their desire to be treated kindly by others and to be accepted for who they are. They stressed the importance of treating all children equally and prioritised the need for government and others to work with families and communities to better understand the needs of children so that boys and girls can be cared for

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in supportive and loving homes. Doing so, they argued, would reduce the numbers of children living in residential care, on the street, in detention and in other environments inappropriate for children. Participating children expressed their desire to 'feel free', to feel connected to not only the people who are known or related to them, but also to the larger social and environmental setting in which they live. They stressed their longing to feel loved, accepted, cared for and protected rather than to feel 'hated' and 'abandoned', as they often did. Children in all settings mentioned going to church as a means of connecting with their communities and of feeling happy and safe.

"Talk to community leaders to make them understand the challenges of being deaf and to advocate for their rights" (boys in Kenya with hearing impairments, 13-17 years, living in residential care)

"Parents should not hate their children" (boys and girls in Kenya, 8-12, living on the streets)

"I like staying with supportive and caring guardians who do not look down on me because I am an orphan" (boy in Malawi, 15, living in extended family care)



Some changes 8-12-year-old girls in Kenya would like to see

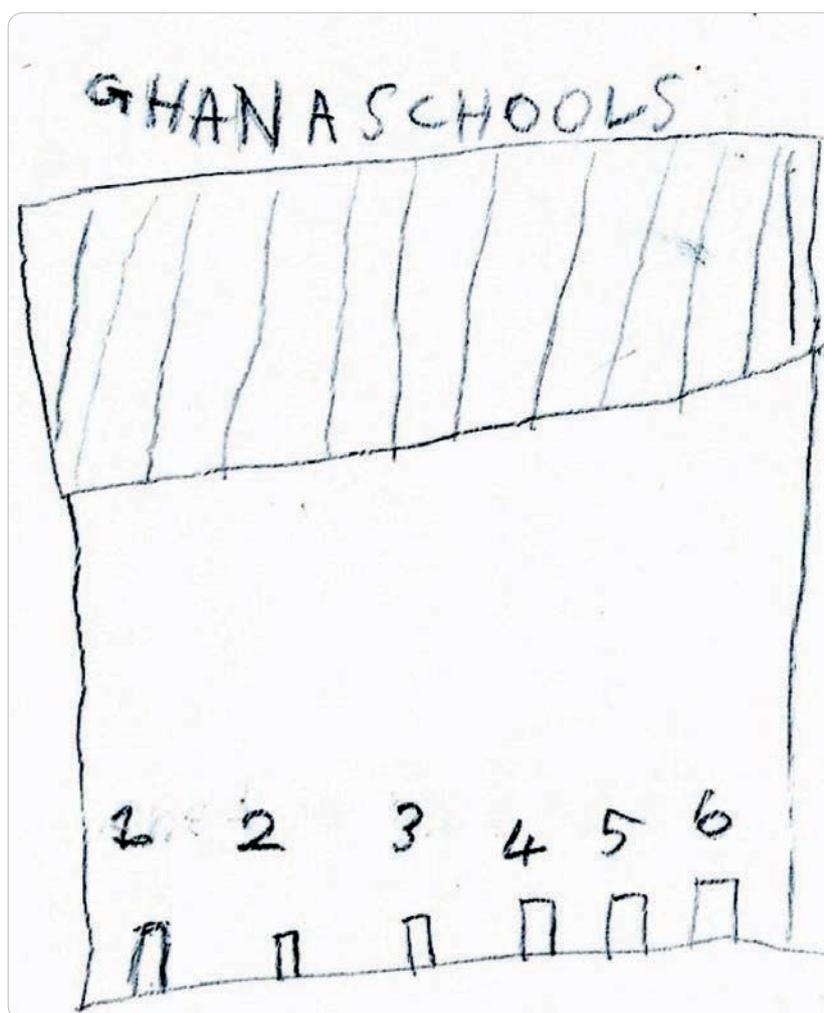
Theme 4: Children want to go to good schools with good teachers. Schooling was understood by children to serve many functions, including learning new skills, opening doors to better futures, for being with friends, for protecting children from otherwise having to work for money or unpaid domestic tasks or from being on the streets, where they can experience abuse, harassment and be exposed to 'negative habits' such as drug use and begging. Boys and girls of all ages, levels of ability, in all living circumstances, in all three countries, stressed the need for governments to

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support children to go to school, to have access to materials and uniforms, and to be provided with decent, trained teachers who support children's learning and do not physically or verbally abuse them. They asked that governments support parents to send children to school by providing parents with jobs (so that they can pay the fees and other costs) and by informing them of the importance of children's schooling so that children no longer have to do chores that make them late for class and can be given time and space in the evenings to study. Girls in Malawi wanted parents and guardians to stop insisting they leave school to get married.

"Government should provide more schools...government should ensure that children are taken to school" (boys in Ghana, 10 and 12, living in residential care, previously with employers)

"Children are not supposed to be employed. They need to attend schools" (girls in Kenya, 12-17 years, living in residential care)



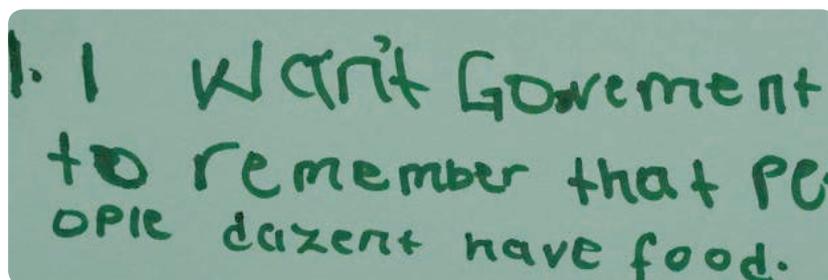
"School makes me happy" (boy, 11, living in residential care in Ghana (previously with employer))

Theme 5: Children want enough food to eat, decent living environments, amenities and infrastructure.

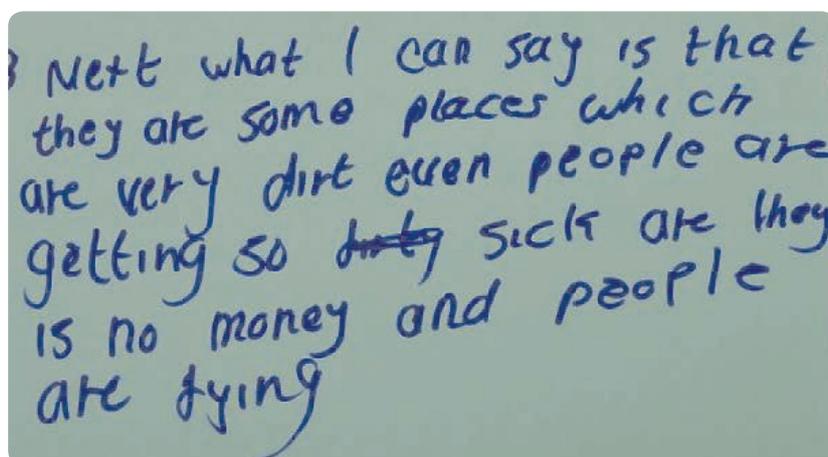
Food, shelter, bedding, clothing, and medical care were identified in all contexts as priority areas for government and community intervention and support. When boys and girls spoke of the things that made them feel happy and safe and sad and unsafe, they frequently mentioned their experiences of hunger and their need for good quality food in order to function well at school. They also referred to how having a protected place to sleep helped them to feel safe from the threats they face on the street and in particular domestic arrangements (eg when living with unrelated carers or employers, or on the street). Likewise, knowing that they and their loved ones could access decent medical care when they needed it helped them to feel that their health and well-being was not in constant jeopardy. They asked that governments prioritise affordable and accessible medical care for all, and that it make every effort to eradicate corruption within hospitals so that people can get appropriate and timely care when it is needed.

"I at least have food and clothes though they are inadequate but there are many other children who are sleeping on empty stomach. There are also many others who do not have shelter. The Government of Malawi should do something to reach out to people like these" (boy in Malawi, 17, living in extended family care).

"All children [should] get enough food...have parents or caregivers...be provided with good clothing...safe water...have better place for sleeping and reading" (boys in Kenya, 13-17 years, living in residential care)



1. I want Government to remember that people don't have food.



Next what I can say is that they are some places which are very dirt even people are getting so ~~dirty~~ sick are they is no money and people are dying

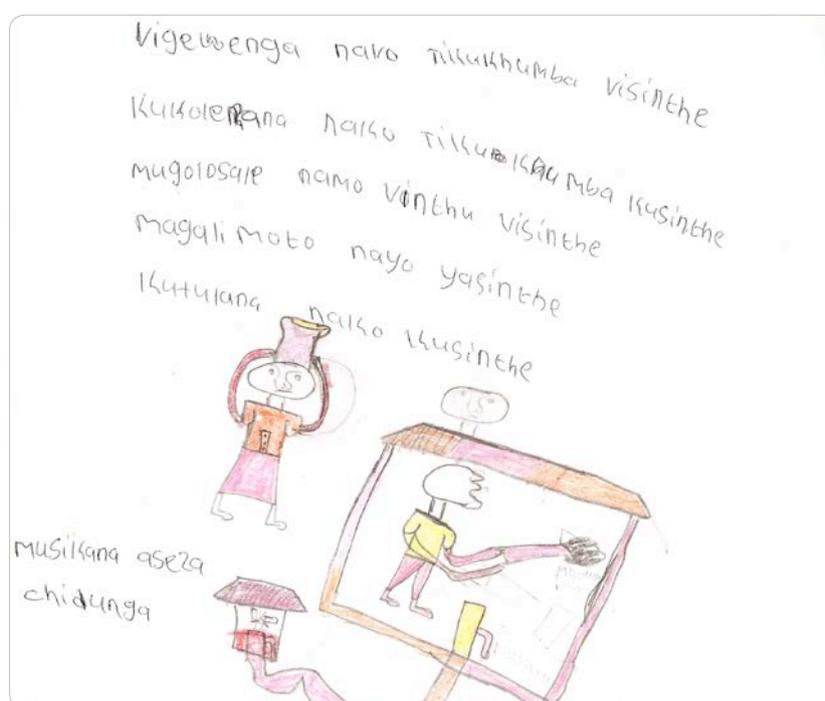
Priorities of girls, 13-17 years, living in residential care in Kenya

Theme 6: Children want to be free from child labour, mistreatment and exploitation. Many boys and girls conveyed a sense of the challenges they face as a result of the often overwhelming need to contribute money and labour to the household and for their own personal survival (in the case of children living on the street). Few begrudged their families the burden of these responsibilities; most were more focused on the risks they were exposed to as a result of performing particular jobs, including to physical pain and exhaustion, to sexual and physical abuse, to exploitation, illness and to separation from family. It was recognised that parents' difficulties in finding decent means of earning income had significant implications for children's everyday lives, both in the present (eg inability to attend school, exposure to risk, etc) and in the future (eg reduced opportunities, greater likelihood of following a 'bad' path as a result of exposure to risks such as drug use, commodification of sex, etc).

"Child labour is due to poverty so my mother should work, government should provide jobs for all parents" (boy in Ghana, 15, living with extended family, previously with employers)

"Child labour which is common in tobacco estates should be stopped because any child who is involved in child labour cannot have time to go to school and they end up being uneducated" (boy in Malawi, 17, living in extended family care)

"Government [should] work shoulder to shoulder to stop child labour" (girls in Kenya, 13-17 years, living in extended family care)



"In my picture are a girl and boy. The girl is carrying a bucket of water while the boy is sweeping in the house. Children should not be given too much work before going to school because that delays them, I am happy to assist with various household chores but only after coming back from school" (girl, 10, living with extended family in Malawi)

Theme 7: Children want time for rest, friendship and play. Boys and girls in all three countries stressed their desire to have time to rest and to play freely with their friends and siblings. Their objection was not with the need to contribute to household chores or to their family's livelihood. Rather their concern was that greater attention be given to their need to relax and recharge, to laugh and enjoy themselves.

"Children should be given enough time to play with friends" (girls in Malawi, 8-12 years, living in extended family care)

"I become happy when I play with my friends at school" (boy in Ghana, 12, living in residential care, formerly with employers)



"I am happy when I play with my friends" (girl, 12, living in extended family care in Malawi)

Children's priorities for change

Children in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi made the following suggestions for ways in which governments and policy-makers could improve the lives of children like them:

- stop child marriage
- provide markets for produce so that parents who depend on farming for their livelihoods can provide for their children
- provide adults with jobs and better wages so that children can go to school instead of going to work
- provide family planning programs so that families can take care of all of their children (this was a high priority for boys and girls in Ghana)

- do not promise things that cannot be delivered – prioritise children’s needs and follow through with commitments that are realistic
- provide toys and other things to play with in schools so that children whose parents cannot afford to them can have a chance to play with them
- make sure that good quality education is provided to all children, no matter what
- build schools near enough to children’s homes that distance does not become a reason why they cannot study.

“Children have the right to be raised and supported by parents, the right to go to school and the right to have food and clean water...most children do not go to school and they also do not have adequate food and clean water, most especially those who live in the village” (boy in Malawi, 15, living on the streets)

Conclusion

The children in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi who participated in these consultations were informed and articulate about those things they think should be included in the post-2015 development framework. Several of the issues and concerns that they highlighted are inter-connected and cross-cutting in nature.

Many of the priority areas identified by children in these three countries are clearly laid out in the existing MDGs. Among them, poverty reduction, hunger and schooling stood out as important areas for policy and government intervention. Basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, water and sanitation and decent, affordable and accessible health care were also priorities. Boys and girls also stressed the need for services and amenities to be equally accessible and available to all children, regardless of where they lived or the material well-being of their family.

Children also identified additional priorities for a new global development framework that to date have remained largely unarticulated. The majority of these concerned improvements to the non-material aspects of their wellbeing, including the need to reduce violence, abuse and maltreatment; to support children and families to live together in safe and caring environments; to be treated equally with other children and to be recognised by adults as fellow human beings; and to be granted time for friendship, rest and play. While some groups placed greater emphasis on certain issues than others, these priorities were shared by all children in all contexts. They represent a critical dimension of development which must be accounted for.

These findings suggest that a post-2015 global development framework should revitalise efforts to address access to basic services and material well being, asserting the need to reduce poverty, to eradicate hunger, to provide all children and families with access to clean drinking water, good health care and decent shelter and living environments. The new framework should also include goals and targets in the following key areas:

1. **Child protection:** All boys and girls should live a life free from all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse and be supported in safe and caring family environments. Specifically, children in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi want to end harmful child labour and

violence in homes, schools and communities, to grow up within safe families, and to avoid institutional care.

2. **Accessible, safe, quality and relevant schooling:** Current goals should be expanded to ensure that all children have equal access to good schools, staffed by trained teachers who support children's learning and do not physically or verbally abuse them.
3. **Safe opportunities for leisure and play:** All boys and girls should have the opportunity to play and rest.

Finally, many of the comments from girls and boys suggest changes in the way that the post-2015 development framework should be implemented and monitored. For example, children expressed a strong desire for greater equality and to be treated with dignity and respect. To address these concerns, efforts must be made to ensure that any gains from a new framework reach all sections of the community, including the most vulnerable. Indicators should be put in place to measure progress towards the reduction of disparities between people. Services and support should be delivered in appropriate ways and efforts should be made to monitor the quality of service provision, including the ways in which users are treated by service providers. Accountability, universality, participation and non-discrimination should be the fundamental principles underlying a new development framework. These principles and ethics must inform the policy choices that governments make.

The findings from these consultations clearly demonstrate that children have meaningful insights and experiences and that their views must be listened to and incorporated into the elaboration of a new development agenda. Boys and girls have a clear sense of what they need and want, and they have an important role in shaping the present and future world in which they live. Their participation in the development, monitoring and implementation of a post-2015 framework is critical to its success.

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