



Africa Platform on Children Affected by Armed Conflicts

Launch Concept Paper

I. Introduction

The Africa Union's commitment to protecting children in humanitarian situations, including armed conflict in Africa, has been demonstrated in a number of their policy decisions at the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the AU's 10-year Continental Education strategy (CESA 16-25) supported by Africa Ministers of Education Decision during the 2nd Ordinary Session in Cairo, Egypt on October 21-23, 2017.

The AU's resolve in protecting children reinforces the moral imperative and legal responsibility for children and reinforces UN Security Council's decisions on the matter. The international humanitarian law and international human rights law therefore are all underscored by the AU's efforts towards protecting children's rights during armed conflict with special regard to children who often have no means to defend themselves against abuses¹.

The Six Grave violations against children during armed conflicts

Despite legal frameworks ensuring the protection of children during armed conflict and other humanitarian settings, abuse of children during such times are perpetrated with impunity. The UN Secretary-General therefore identified six grave violations against children during armed conflict, based on their suitability for monitoring and verification, their reprehensible nature and the severity of their consequences on the lives of children.

The Six Grave Violations are:

- a. Killing and maiming of children,
- b. Recruitment or use of children as soldiers,
- c. Sexual violations
- d. Abduction
- e. Attacks against schools or hospital
- f. Denial of humanitarian access

The legal basis for these violations lies in relevant international law, which in turn encompasses international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international criminal law. The full descriptions of the Six Grave violations is attached as an addendum.

2. Rationale for the formation of an African Platform on CAAC

The AU has demonstrated commendable support for the safe school's agenda as evidenced by PSC and STC-EST's recommendations for endorsement of the SSD and implementation of

¹ Human rights treaty law applies at all times, but certain treaty-provisions allow for suspension in times of emergency. See, for example, art. 4 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966).



the Safe Schools Guidelines. Such policy support was also showcased when over 60 participants at an SSD event organized by Save the Children on 6 September 2017 and co-hosted by the embassies of Liberia, Norway and Argentina recommended, among others, the establishment of a GoFCAAC at the AU. Speakers on the occasion including Ambassadors Bankole Adeoye of Nigeria, George Patten Sr. of Liberia and Smail Chergui, then Peace and Security Commissioner all underscored the importance of sustaining the discourse and advocacy on safe schools at the AU level. Participants therefore recommended for the establishment of an African Platform (AP) with membership from AU Ambassadors in Addis Ababa. In addition to interest demonstrated by many AU Ambassadors. The recommendation for establishing AP-CAAC at the AU is expected to keep the issue of protecting children high on the agenda of the AU and ensure that the needs of children affected by war remain a priority for decision makers. The AP-CAAC is therefore expected to promote the prioritization of CAAC issues at various departments of the AU Commission and help keep the issue at the center of policy making at the continental level.

Given that only 29 out of the 55 AU Member States have so far endorsed the SSD, an internally driven AU mechanism such as the AP-CAAC for sustaining advocacy for endorsement of the SSD and, implementation and reporting on the Guidelines will be complementary to civil society -driven advocacy on the issue of protecting education for children affected by armed conflict on the continent.

The AP-CAAC will bring together individual AU Ambassadors committed and engaging to sustain advocacy for the protection of children in humanitarian situations, in particular during armed conflict in Africa. This Group's ambition will go a long way to promote the mainstreaming of the children and in particular the CAAC agenda in AU Commission including the AU Chairperson's Office. The Departments of Political Affairs Peace and Security, Health, Humanitarian Affairs & Social Development, and Education, Science Technology and Innovation. have already made commendable contributions to the well-being of children and a response and alignment with UN resolution on the issue as a way of demonstrating ownership. In addition, SSD events organized at the AU level for participants from AU Missions, Departments, UN, International Agencies, CSOs and non -AU Missions and Donors have recommended among others, the need for establishing an African Platform of CAAC to lead the advocacy for more endorsements of the SSD and implementation and reporting on the Guidelines.

3. Overall Goal and objectives of AP-CAAC

The overall goal of the AP-CAAC is to protect children affected by conflicts and crises from the 6 Grave violations through policy making and reporting at the AU level.



Specific outputs/outcomes include:

- a) The Peace and Security Architecture increasingly prioritizes policy decisions for the protection of children from the Six Grave violations during armed conflict and other humanitarian situations as well as commitment of AU Member-States to guarantee the rights and welfare of children under the overall umbrella of Africa Governance Architecture (AGA). AU Ambassadors and their Head of States, including counterpart Ministers of State include CAAC issues in their public statements.
- b) The PSC and other policy organs of the AU prioritize policy decisions on six Grave violations in respect of their humanitarian policy decisions at the AU.
- c) Increased number of member states endorsing the SSD, domesticating the Guidelines and reporting on their implementation.
- d) AU Assembly adopts recommendations of PSC Decisions and STC-EST2 recommendations on the protection of education from attacks and military use by January 2019. (*The AU Assembly's approval of the safe schools agenda would mark an important milestone and a demonstration of AU's ownership of the agenda*)
- e) Improved prioritization of CAAC and child well-being issues at AU Chairperson's Office, and Departments of Political and Social Affairs.

4. The strategic focus of the Africa Platform on CAAC

Given the commendable strides the AU has made in the area of attacks on schools, compared to the other five Grave Violations, it is being suggested for the Platform to consolidate the gains on the safe schools' agenda as a priority and then adopts a phased approach to the rest of the violations based on capacity and emerging opportunities.

By way of strategy on safe schools, the Platform will not only advocate for more member states endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration but also focus on promoting the implementation of the Safe Schools Guidelines and related instruments, as well as reporting on them on AU platforms to be agreed. In this regard, the Group will challenge members whose governments have endorsed the Declaration to identify and play leadership roles in the implementation and reporting on the safe schools agenda in their own member states. For example, chairing a theme on the implementation and reporting at the PSC could be one way of leading on domesticating the agenda.

In addition, the Platform will advocate for the appointment of a Special Envoy on CAAC in light with the AU Assembly decision on the same. The Platform will also advocate for the adoption and implementation of the policy on mainstreaming child protection in APSA and child protection in AUPSOs as well as the implementation of the decision of the Assembly to establish a child protection architecture as a subset of APSA.

5. Working Methods for the AP-CAAC

The following methodologies will guide the members of the AP-CAAC:



- a) Setup functioning of a steering committee for the Africa Platform on CAAC with membership of five AU Ambassadors each representing the 5 AU regions with the AU Commission for PAPS as Lead Convener and the AUC-PAPS, and Save the Children and AP-CAAC as facilitators;
- b) Engage other AU Ambassadors in particular within the PSC and PRC towards their membership in the AP-CAAC;
- c) Identify and engage with AU key moments for creating awareness and support for more endorsements of the SSD and implementation of the Guidelines;
- d) Identify country level opportunities for field visits and interactions with children and other stakeholders affected by attacks on education and other grave violations.
- e) Setting agenda on the grave violations at PSC open and closed sessions;
- f) Target and lobby key actors, including the AU Chairperson and Commissioners at the AU Commission for the prioritization of CAAC issues in policy making;
- g) Identify mechanisms for bilateral and multilateral engagements with peer Ambassadors for their countries' endorsement of the Declaration and implementation and reporting on the Guidelines;
- h) Organize review and reflection meetings on progress made on addressing the 6 Grave violations at the AU, as deemed appropriate;
- i) Organize ad hoc meetings informed by developments at the PSC and the AUC, as appropriate.

6. Progress at the AU level on protecting education from attacks and military use

The AU has taken credible policy steps towards the protection of children during armed conflict and has prioritized the issue at the PSC and the Department of Education, Science, Technology & Innovation (ESTI)). Firstly, the PSC and the African Committee of Experts for the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) jointly adopted the decision about 2 years ago to hold one Open Session each year dedicated to discussing issues affecting children affected by armed conflict (CAAC). Since then, the PSC has seen increasing interest in the issue of attacks on schools and their military use and thus recommended in 5 different sessions condemning the phenomenon and called for the endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) and the implementation of the Safe Schools Guidelines.

Secondly, the AU's continental education strategy (CESA 16-25) approved by the AU Assembly in January 2016 recognized the issue of protecting education from attacks and military use as contributing to high schools drop outs in Africa. In particular, Education Ministers and Experts in the 2nd Ordinary Session of the Specialized Technical Committee on Education Science and Technology (STC-EST 2) held on the 21-23 October, 2017 in Cairo, Egypt adopted a decision calling for all AU member states to endorse the SSD and implement



the Guidelines. In addition, the PSC has condemned the recruitment of children as arm combatants as well as sexual violations during armed conflicts on the continent.

The increasing interest by the AU in stopping attacks on education and their military use as one of the contributors to achieving its aspiration of *silencing the guns by 2020* are commendable policy steps with potentials of ensuring the harnessing of the demographic dividends for Africa's development.

Most recently, in November 2020, in the historic Communique 965 the PSC strongly condemned the attacks schools which hinders the access of children to education and the unlawful occupation of schools by armed actors and use of these school facilities for military purposes infringing on the provision of social needs and a healthy environment for children.

Preventing and responding to attacks on education and protecting schools and universities from military use is therefore critical to ensuring the safety and the rights to education of children and youth. It is also essential to safeguarding the future of communities as education is critical to a state's economic, social, and political development.

7. Secretariat/ Funding

Save the Children Pan-Africa and AU Liaison Office will serve as the secretariat of the AP-CAAC and provide funding for the operations of the Group.

The main roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat are to:

- a) Support the delivery of high-quality technical services, reporting and coordination mechanisms for the AP-CAAC at the AU;
- b) Provide administrative and logistical support to the AP-CAAC
- c) Develop and implement innovative approaches to facilitate knowledge sharing among AU member states and other stakeholders;
- d) Develop and nurture existing and new partnerships for the delivery of the CAAC including the safe schools agenda at AU and national levels

8. Timeframe of the Launch: July 5th 2021