



Fifth Forum 2011 on Angolan children: a perspective viewpoint¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to be a descriptive account of the Fifth Forum on Angolan children. The Forum took place in the city of Luanda, Angola in 2011. Our participation in the event allowed us to observe that it is important to understand the context in which children live to improve the effectiveness of public policy regarding their development.

Keywords: Fifth Forum 2011; Child; Angola.

V Fórum sobre a criança angolana 2011: ponto de vista⁴

RESUMO

Este texto pretende ser um relato descritivo do V Fórum sobre a criança angolana. O Fórum ocorreu na cidade Luanda, Angola, em 2011. A partir da nossa participação, observamos que é importante compreender o contexto no qual as crianças estão inseridas para uma melhor efetividade das políticas públicas em relação a esta fase geracional.

Palavras-chave: V Fórum 2011; Criança; Angola.

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1 Background

At the invitation of Dr. Ana Teresinha⁵, we participated as special guests in the Fifth Angolan National Forum on Children in Luanda, in 2011. The theme was “*Por um futuro melhor, cuidemos da criança*” (Let's build a better future for our children). The Forum was held from 22 to 24 June 2011, at the Angolan Parliamentary building in Luanda, organized by CNAC⁶.

The objective of this paper is to examine the effort that is being undertaken by the Angolan Government with regard to public policies that regulate children's education, and share the results with the academic community. Due to the length of the material proposed for the Fifth Forum, we will only draw attention to the main points highlighted in each *documentum laboris*, i.e., stressing the most relevant aspects of the speeches delivered at the opening and closing sessions, and the statements of speakers during the plenary sessions and panels. According to the basic document, 452 participants and guests were expected to attend the event (CNAC, 2011, p. 16). In fact, 410 people participated, among which the following authorities stood out: Fernando da Piedade Dias dos Santos⁷, some ministers and deputy ministers, parliamentarians, military, ecclesiastical and diplomatic authorities, representatives of the United Nations, and of civil society. Also present were international guests, delegates and coordinators of provincial and municipal secretariats of Education, 20 *sobas*⁸ and 36 children ranging from 14 to 17 years of age, coming from 18 provinces that make up the Republic of Angola, representing all Angolan children.

2 The Forum's main theme

The main theme of the Fifth Forum was proposed and defined in the plenary held on 16 December 2010, when the following goals and objectives were set: (1) to review the progress made in implementing the commitments to Angolan children from zero to 18 years old, undertaken at the Fourth Forum held at the Talatona Convention Centre in Luanda,

⁵ Head of the National Bureau of Early Childhood Care.

⁶ CNAC is an acronym for the Angolan National Children's Council, created by Decree No. 20/2007, April 20, of the Council of Ministers. This institution includes 20 ministerial departments and civil society organizations. It is a social dialogue body, responsible for monitoring and controlling the implementation of policies to promote and defend children's rights. It is a clear demonstration that the responsibility for ensuring children's rights must be shared between the Government and civil society.

⁷ Vice President of the Republic of Angola.

⁸ Traditional authorities.

from 15 to 16 June, 2009, under the motto: "Angola - 11 Commitments for Children. Think nationally, act locally"; (2) to analyze the constraints experienced and lessons learned until May 2011; (3) to indicate perspectives for sustainability of projects and intervention programs for the biennium 2011-2013, in order that they can ensure a better future for all children in Angola; (4) to focus on the review of commitments to children, adopted at the Third Forum held in June 2007, as described in the Narrative Report of the degree of fulfillment of the 11 commitments to children:

The statements made at the level of the provincial and municipal ministerial departments allow identifying the various constraints that will help to draw relevant conclusions and lessons, setting out the goals of intervention that will lead to strengthen ongoing actions and provide new responses to emerging opportunities (CNAC, 2011, p. 6).

This procedure aims to raise awareness of the Angolan government, the NGOs, the church authorities and society in general about the many critical challenges and the reaffirmation of their commitment to implementing the 11 Commitments, as recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in October 2010, regarding the following aspects:

To provide harmonization of the national legislation in favor of the child, increasing the budget allocation, specifically for children, to reinforce the integrated system of indicators for the child, to strengthen operational management of multiple activities of the biennial plan, to reduce maternal and child mortality rates and increase birth registration (ibid., p. 7).

The government of Angola and the National Children Council (CNAC) have established priority in favor of children, reaffirming, in other words, what is enshrined in article 80 of the Constitution of the Republic of Angola:

- 1 - Children shall have the right to receive special attention from the family, society and the state which, by working closely together, must ensure that they are fully protected against all forms of neglect, discrimination, oppression, exploitation and abuse of authority, within the family and in other institutions.
- 2 - Public policies regarding the family, education and health must safeguard the principle of the higher interests of the child, as a means of guaranteeing their full physical, mental and cultural development.
- 3 - The state shall ensure special protection for children who are orphaned, disabled, abandoned or in any way deprived of a normal family environment.

4 - The state shall regulate the adoption of children, promoting their integration into a family environment and striving to ensure their full development.

5 - Minors of school age are forbidden to work, under the terms of the law. (2010, p.34-35).

The ‘11 Commitments to Angolan children’ was the working tool of the Fifth Forum, divided into four categories, as follows: (1) Children up to 5 years old, who have benefited greatly from significant progress in the areas of life expectancy, food security, birth registrations and early childhood education; (2) Children aged 6 to 18 years. This roundtable was dominated by issues related to primary education and vocational training, and juvenile justice); (3) All children aged zero to 18 years old, which covered issues such as HIV/AIDS prevention and reducing its impact on families and children, the prevention or reduction of violence against children, social protection and family responsibilities; and (4) the category dedicated to guarantee the durability of progress made, involving the commitments to children and communication, children in the general State budget and the Angolan child indicator system.

The opening session took place at 9 p.m. on June 22. The presiding table was formed by the Vice President of the Republic of Angola, Mr. Fernando da Piedade Dias dos Santos; the students Miqueias Louis and Maura Coragem, representing all Angolan children; the representative of civil society, Dino Manjar; the first Vice President of the National Children's Council, José Van-Dun; the president of the National Children Council and Minister of Welfare and Social Reintegration, João Batista Kussumwa; the Deputy Governor Jovelina Imperial, representing the provincial governor of Luanda; the Vice President of the National Children Council, Ana Paula do Sacramento Neto; and the Interim Coordinator of the UN System in Angola, Koen Vanormelinger.

3 Sessions and panels

The event was divided into the following sessions: official opening ceremony, plenary panels and launch of the ‘Gegê’⁹ mascot.

⁹ Gegê is a television character, which appears as protector and defender of good moral, civic, ethical and cultural values among children.

The first panel consisted of reading the narrative report on compliance of the 11 Commitments to the Angolan children focused on progress and setbacks or constraints, in the period between June 2009 and May 2011.

The second panel consisted of an analysis of the degree of fulfillment of the 11 commitments to the Angolan child. This session also included a roundtable on "Children and the preservation of the Angolan culture."

The plenary session ended with the presentation of the 3rd and 4th panels on "children's voice" and on issues related to the "sustainability of achievements."

The working groups (WGs) with their respective themes were distributed as follows: WG 1: Children up to five years (Commitments: life expectancy, food security and nutrition, birth registrations and early childhood education); WG 2: Children aged 6 to 18 years (Commitments: primary education and vocational training, and juvenile justice); WG 3: All children 0-18 years of age (Commitments: HIV/AIDS prevention and reducing its impact on families and children, the prevention or reduction of violence against children, social protection and family responsibilities); WG 4: Ensure the sustainability of achievements for children (Commitments: children and media, culture and sports, children in the general State budget and the Angolan child indicator system).

4 Conclusions

Days 23 and 24 were devoted to group discussions, presentation, assessment and approval of conclusions and recommendations in plenary session from which the following items were extracted:

4.1 The overall assessment of activities found that some difficulties remain in the coordination mechanisms and the involvement of all living forces of the nation to solve problems affecting Angolan children, defined as an absolute priority of the whole society.

4.2 The report of the degree of compliance with the 11 commitments was generally accepted by the participants, who recognized the need to supplement it with data from some provinces and sectors.

4.3 The 2011-2013 Biennial Sectorial Plan was accepted, based on which provincial teams prepared an outline of the Biennial Provincial/Municipal Plan. The draft should be further discussed at the local level, validated, finalized and submitted to the Secretariat of the CNAC until 20 July 2011.

4.4 There is a considerable improvement in the preparation and presentation of work in some provinces, showing a strengthening technical capacity of its staff.

4.5 There is, however, still a quantity and quality shortage of human resources for service management, especially in rural areas.

4.6 The documents submitted to the 5th Forum regarding the implementation of the 11 commitments by the government to Angolan children were an asset for the quality of discussions and for goal achievement envisaged for the event.

5 General Recommendations

5.1 To improve the Annex to the Report on the degree of compliance with the 11 commitments, depicting the situation at the municipal/ communal level to be included in the final documents of the 5th Forum.

5.2 To consider the 2011-2013 Biennial National Plan as a guideline for the implementation of the 11 commitments at the local level, and the Angolan child indicator system (SICA) as reference for the preparation and/or improvement of provincial and municipal Plans.

5.3 To document and disseminate information on best practices presented by the various provinces and strengthen the exchange of experiences as a way to encourage the development of attitudes and local initiatives for child welfare.

5.4 To continue developing actions for the promotion/creation of spaces for the participation of children, disseminating them through media, to convey and discuss issues related to the 11 commitments, not limited solely to programs broadcast on specific dates allusive to children.

5.5 To adapt the policy document for Early Childhood from zero to five years old, with the recommendation to extend to all children from birth to eighteen years old, and submit it promptly to superior decision-making bodies.

5.6 To consider the National Strategies to improve nutrition, birth registration, preventing and combating violence, and the creation of the SOS system and children's observatory as an indispensable tool for planning, budgeting and implementing the 11 commitments within the Children's National Policy.

5.7 To provide free access to primary education to all children in association with the competent organs of the government.

5.8 To internalize and spread the spirit and objectives of the "Child-Friendly Municipality" system as an ideal instrument to promote the 11 commitments at the provincial, municipal and community levels.

5.9 To institutionalize the National Fund for Children, as soon as conditions permit to do so, to raise funds from different sources in order to finance activities that are developed under the principle of the child's best interests. Meanwhile, and until it becomes effective, increase the INAC budget allocations at both national and provincial levels.

5.10 To ensure intersectoral coordination mechanisms and broad participation of civil society and children themselves in planning, implementation and monitoring of the 11 commitments at all levels.

5.11 To use the opportunity of decentralization to connect the 11 commitments to concrete and realistic local plans, linking up with the "Child-Friendly Municipalities" program.

5.12 To ensure that the activities provided for in sector, provincial and municipal plans are properly budgeted and included in the State Budget.

5.13 To ensure that the activities described in the biannual plans are actually monitored regularly, developing accountability mechanisms to ensure their implementation.

5.14 To ensure the development of legal instruments for the different strategies and mechanisms aimed at improving the sustainability and alignment with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

5.2.1 Recommendations and mention to some of the 11 commitments

The conclusions and recommendations presented by each working group were upheld by the plenary, with contributions suggested by the participants. The following conclusions and recommendations were highlighted:

5.2.1.1 Nutrition Strategy for Early Childhood:

a) To include aspects of nutrition education and promotion of local products; b) to enable traditional authorities and community-based organizations to use local produce and prepare healthy and balanced diet; c) to encourage the cultivation of plants with high nutritional value (moringa, spirulina algae), and promote their use in school lunches and child nutrition.

5.2.1.2 Early Childhood Policy:

a) To discuss the document at the provincial level with the involvement of key sectors; b) to submit the document to the technical committee within the next 45 days from the date of its approval.

5.2.1.3 Strategy for increasing Birth Registration:

a) To encourage registration campaigns, with the involvement of traditional authorities, brigades, community agents and churches, to survey the number of children in communities and municipalities; b) to use mobile teams (itinerants) during the school enrollment period; c) to intensify information, education and communication on the importance of birth registration through the ministries of family and promotion of women, youth and sports, and media (Gegê mascot); d) to recruit and train staff personnel to make birth registrations in hospitals and similar locations.

5.2.1.4 Education for all:

a) To review the goals and strategies of the national education plan for all in terms of its compatibility with the 11 commitments; b) to develop a strategy on free education for all by the end of 2011.

5.2.1.5 Protecting vulnerable children:

a) To increase assistance and social support to families with orphans and vulnerable children; b) to take actions to reduce stigma and discrimination against those who are infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

5.2.1.6 Culture, Sports and Media:

a) To encourage local initiatives in disseminating information and education for child development.

5.2.1.7 Sustainability of achievements:

a) The budgets for activities addressed to children should be included in the biennial plan, and additional funds should complement the State General Budget.

6 Viewpoint on the Fifth Forum: some considerations

After approval of the conclusions and recommendations on the implementation of the "11 Commitments to Angolan children" by the participants of the Fifth Forum, the President of the National Council of the Child, John the Baptist Kussumwa, presided over the closing ceremony, on June 24, 2011.

From our point of view, we believe that the Fifth Forum was just another effort to foster democracy in Angola. It was significant because the government, through the CNAC, invited children, traditional and church authorities, NGOs, provincial and municipal governments to participate in the discussions to solve problems affecting children in Angola.

The Government of Angola has shown that in the global world, "the most important thing is to solve people's problems," according to the ideals of Agostinho Neto, the founder and first President of the MPLA¹⁰. These people are the people of Angola from Cabinda to Cunene, from Moxico to Benguela, including all ages, from the elderly people to newborn babies, without discrimination as to race, tribe, class, language or religious beliefs.

In everything, we must renew the pledge to continue on the path of the ideals of freedom, democracy and equal opportunities for all Angolans.

Solidarity is the awareness of Angolan citizens to feel responsible for their neighbors. Their motivation is based on the maxim "one for all, and all for one".

The above can be regarded as some of the reasons why 410 people gathered for two days at the Fifth National Forum on Children, under the motto: "Let's build a better future for our children".

¹⁰ MPLA is the People's Liberation Movement of Angola. It was created in 1956 from the merger of several small anti-colonial groups, including the newly formed Luanda cell of the Portuguese Communist Party, which started its operation in 1961. Since the late 1950s and early 1960s, it brought together the leading figures of the Angolan nationalism among students abroad, especially in Portugal, and wrestlers against colonialism that fled from the interior of Angola. It should be remembered that there were other revolutionary movements in Angola, for example, the UNITA - National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, which is an Angolan party, founded in 1966 by dissidents from the FNLA and GRAE (Resistance Government of Angola in Exile). Jonas Savimbi, UNITA's founder, was the minister of Foreign Affairs. The FNLA - National Front for the Liberation of Angola is a political movement, founded in 1957, originally named Union of Peoples of Northern Angola (UPNA) that, in 1958, changed its name to Union of the Populations of Angola (UPA). In 1961, the UPA and the Democratic Party of Angola (PDA), another anti-colonial group, jointly formed the FNLA.

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