



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child

Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Ghana*

I. Introduction

1. The Committee considered the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Ghana (CRC/C/GHA/3-5) at its 1991st and 1993rd meetings (see CRC/C/SR.1991 and 1993), held on 19 and 20 May 2015, and adopted the following concluding observations at its 2024th meeting (see CRC/C/SR.2024), held on 5 June 2015.

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the combined third to fifth periodic reports of the State party and the written replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/GHA/Q/3-5/Add.1), which allowed for a better understanding of the situation of children's rights in the State party. The Committee expresses appreciation for the constructive dialogue held with the high-level, multisectoral delegation of the State party.

II. Follow-up measures undertaken and progress achieved by the State party

3. The Committee welcomes the ratification of or accession to the following instruments:

(a) Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, in 2014;

(b) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in 2012;

(c) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, in 2012;

(d) International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), in 2011.

* Adopted by the Committee at its sixty-ninth session (18 May–5 June 2015).



4. The Committee notes with appreciation the adoption of the following legislative measures:
 - (a) Mental Health Act of March 2012;
 - (b) Amendment to the Criminal Offences Act of 2012;
 - (c) Education Act of 2008;
 - (d) Criminal Code (Amendment) Act of 7 August 2007;
 - (e) Domestic Violence Act of 4 May 2007;
 - (f) Persons with Disabilities Act of 11 August 2006;
 - (g) Ghana National Commission on Children (Repeal) Act of 24 March 2006.
5. The Committee welcomes the establishment or adoption of the following institutional and policy measures:
 - (a) Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, in 2013;
 - (b) Department of Children within the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, in 2013;
 - (c) Child and Family Welfare Policy, in 2015;
 - (d) National Neo-natal Health Care Strategy 2014–2018;
 - (e) National HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections Policy, in 2013;
 - (f) National Employment Policy 2012–2016;
 - (g) National Human Resource Development Policy, in 2011;
 - (h) Education Strategic Plan 2010–2020;
 - (i) National Plan of Action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in Ghana 2009–2015;
 - (j) National Policy and Plan of Action on Domestic Violence 2009–2019;
 - (k) Under-5 Child Health Policy 2007–2015.
6. The Committee notes as positive the open invitation the State party extended to United Nations special procedures on 21 April 2006.

III. Main areas of concern and recommendations

A. General measures of implementation (arts. 4, 42 and 44 (6))

The Committee's previous recommendations

7. **The Committee recommends that the State party take all measures necessary to address the recommendations made in its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/GHA/CO/2) that have not been implemented or not sufficiently implemented, in particular those related to data collection, dissemination of the provisions of the Convention, corporal punishment, HIV/AIDS, harmful practices, child labour and juvenile justice.**

Legislation

8. The Committee welcomes the adoption of various child-related legislative measures. Nevertheless, the Committee reiterates its concern about their insufficient implementation and, in some instances, the evident gap between law and practice.

9. **The Committee recommends that the State party continue and strengthen its efforts to bring all its legislation into conformity with the Convention and to ensure the effective implementation of child-related legislation.**

Comprehensive policy and strategy

10. While noting the various national plans, policies and strategies adopted by the State party on thematic areas of children's rights, the Committee is concerned at the low rate of their implementation, owing mainly to the lack of sufficient resources and overlapping and duplicate interventions, as well as inadequate coordination. The Committee is also concerned about the absence of a comprehensive policy and strategy on children.

11. **The Committee recommends that the State party develop a comprehensive policy and strategy to address children's issues, including the provision of sufficient human, technical and financial resources, and ensure the effective implementation of the existing strategies.**

Coordination

12. The Committee notes with appreciation the creation of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the establishment of the Department of Children, with offices at the national and regional levels. However, the Committee reiterates its concern (CRC/C/GHA/CO/2, para. 13) about the lack of effective interministerial coordination of all activities related to the implementation of the Convention, the limited resources allocated to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, which relies on international cooperation, and the particularly inadequate implementation of children's rights at the local level owing to the limited capacities of the District Assemblies.

13. **The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation (para. 14) and recommends that the State party establish an appropriate body at a high interministerial level with a clear mandate and sufficient authority to effectively coordinate all activities related to the implementation of the Convention at cross-sectoral, national, regional and local levels. The State party should ensure that the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Department of Children and the District Assemblies are provided with the necessary human, technical and financial resources for their effective operation.**

Allocation of resources

14. The Committee welcomes the State party's progressive increase of budget allocations in the areas of health and education. However, it is concerned that there is no specific budget allocated for the implementation of the Convention and that the budget for expenditure related to children appears to be insufficient to respond to national and local priorities for the protection of children.

15. **In the light of the recommendations issued by the Committee following its day of general discussion on the theme "Resources for the rights of the child: responsibility of States", held on 21 September 2007, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Prioritize and substantially increase the budgetary allocations in the social sectors, ensuring implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights of**

children, particularly for the improvement of health-care services, education and the protection of vulnerable groups of children;

(b) Establish a budgeting process that integrates a child rights perspective and specifies clear allocations to children in vulnerable situations, including children with disabilities, children infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS, children in street situations, children living in poverty, children affected by the worst forms of child labour and asylum-seeking children, and that incorporates specific indicators and a tracking system;

(c) Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the adequacy, efficacy and equitability of the distribution of resources allocated to the implementation of the Convention;

(d) Take immediate measures to combat corruption and strengthen institutional capacities to detect, investigate and prosecute corruption effectively.

Data collection

16. In the light of its general comment No. 5 (2003) on general measures of implementation of the Convention, the Committee reiterates its previous concern (CRC/C/GHA/CO/2, para. 19) and urges the State party to expeditiously improve its data collection system. The data should cover all areas of the Convention and should be disaggregated, among others, by age, sex, disability, geographic location, ethnic origin and socioeconomic background, in order to facilitate analysis on the situation of all children, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

Independent monitoring

17. The Committee welcomes the re-establishment of the Women's and Children's Unit, which deals specifically with children's rights as part of the Legal and Investigations Department of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice and receives individual complaints on matters related to children's rights. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned about the limited human and financial resources of the Commission, and the Women's and Children's Unit in particular.

18. In the light of its general comment No. 2 (2002) on the role of independent human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, the Committee recommends that the State party ensure that sufficient human and financial resources are allocated for the effective functioning of the Women's and Children's Unit within the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice. It also recommends that the State party ensure that the Commission functions in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles), including with regard to its funding, mandate and immunities. To that end, the Committee recommends that the State party seek technical cooperation from, among others, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme.

Children's rights and the business sector

19. The Committee notes that private investment, particularly in the cocoa, mining and fishing industries, reportedly does not adequately benefit local communities. The Committee is concerned that at times, such investment has harmful consequences for families and children, such as the use of child labour and exposure to harmful substances. The Committee notes the lack of information on any legislative regulatory framework

regarding the social and environmental responsibility of national and international business corporations and industries to prevent possible negative impacts of their activities on children.

20. **In the light of its general comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Establish clear regulations and a nationwide legislative framework, including through the adoption of agreements between private enterprises and the State party at the local level, requiring companies operating in the State party to adopt measures to prevent and mitigate adverse impacts of their operations in the country on children's rights;**

(b) **Require companies to undertake child rights assessments and consultations, and make full public disclosure of the environmental, health-related and child rights impacts of their business activities and their plans to address such impacts and promote the inclusion of child rights indicators and parameters for reporting;**

(c) **Be guided by the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, accepted unanimously in 2008 by the Human Rights Council, while implementing these recommendations.**

B. General principles (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12)

Non-discrimination

21. While noting the anti-discriminatory provisions contained in the laws of the State party, the Committee reiterates its concern (CRC/C/GHA/CO/2, para. 25) that discrimination against certain groups of children, particularly girls, children with disabilities, unaccompanied or separated asylum-seeking children, children of migrants, children of asylum seekers, children infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS, children living in rural areas and children in street situations, still exists in practice.

22. **The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation (para. 26) and urges the State party to adopt a comprehensive strategy to eliminate de facto discrimination against all groups of children in vulnerable and marginalized situations and to ensure full implementation of all legal provisions in full compliance with article 2 of the Convention.**

Best interests of the child

23. The Committee remains concerned that, despite its legal recognition, the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken into account as a primary consideration is not adequately and systematically interpreted or applied by administrative, legislative and judicial bodies, including in family, criminal and asylum procedures.

24. **In the light of its general comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, the Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to ensure that this right is appropriately integrated and consistently applied in all legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings and decisions, as well as all policies, programmes and projects that are relevant to and have an impact on children. In this regard, the State party is encouraged to develop procedures and criteria to provide guidance to all relevant persons in authority for determining the best interests of the child in every area and for giving them due weight as a primary consideration.**

Right to life, survival and development

25. While taking note of the legislation adopted by the State party for the protection of children with disabilities, the Committee remains seriously concerned that children with disabilities are still often exposed to inhuman and degrading treatment, particularly in so-called “prayer camps”, which compromises their development. It is also concerned about the high levels of neonatal, infant and under-5 mortality, malnutrition, child abuse and child poverty, which compromise the inherent right of the child to life, survival and development.

26. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Develop and implement awareness-raising campaigns to counter superstitious beliefs concerning children (and adults) with disabilities, prohibit their admission and treatment in prayer camps and investigate and prosecute perpetrators of acts of inhuman and degrading treatment;**

(b) **Allocate sufficient resources to prevent and protect children from neonatal, infant and under-5 mortality, malnutrition, child abuse and child poverty, and spend the resources effectively.**

Respect for the views of the child

27. The Committee notes with appreciation the existence of children’s clubs and the efforts made to facilitate children’s participation in policy discussions. However, the Committee is concerned about the scarcity of information about the clubs and of efforts in rural and remote areas, as well as the involvement of and outreach to children in vulnerable situations. The Committee is also concerned that the views of the children concerned are rarely taken into account in decisions made at the family level and in administrative and judicial proceedings.

28. **In the light of its general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard, the Committee recommends that the State party take measures to strengthen this right in accordance with article 12 of the Convention. To that end, the Committee also recommends that the State party conduct programmes and awareness-raising activities to promote the meaningful and empowered participation of all children in all matters concerning them in the family, community, school or other settings, paying particular attention to girls and children in vulnerable situations.**

C. Civil rights and freedoms (arts. 7, 8 and 13–17)

Birth registration

29. While noting the significant improvement in birth registration coverage from 17 per cent in 2002 to about 58 per cent in 2014, the Committee reiterates its concerns (CRC/C/GHA/CO/2, para. 32) about the many challenges facing the State party, such as understaffing and inadequate funding, and about the difficulties in ensuring that the births of children in rural areas and of asylum-seeking and refugee children are registered.

30. **The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations (para. 33) and recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Implement the recommendations of the UNICEF-supported birth registration bottleneck analysis;**

(b) **Ensure that the Birth and Death Registry and the Ghana Health Service enter into a formal partnership and collaboration agreement;**

(c) **Allocate sufficient funds to strengthen birth registration initiatives;**

- (d) **Extend free birth registration and issuance of certificates, at least for children under 5 years of age;**
- (e) **Expand the use of mobile birth registration units to ensure nationwide coverage, particularly in rural areas, for asylum-seeking and refugee children, and for children whose birth has never been registered;**
- (f) **Amend the Refugee Act (1992) to ensure that recognized refugee children born outside the State party can be issued with substitute birth certificates;**
- (g) **Increase public awareness about the importance of birth registration and the process by which children are registered.**

Nationality

31. While welcoming the additional information provided by the State party during the dialogue, the Committee is concerned that nationality is not granted at birth to children born on the territory of the State party who would otherwise be stateless.

32. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Review the Ghanaian Citizenship Act (2000) and other legislative instruments relating to nationality in order to bring them into line with international standards on the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless children;**
- (b) **Conduct a study mapping statelessness in order to improve efforts to prevent statelessness and protect stateless children or children at risk of statelessness;**
- (c) **Consider acceding to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.**

Access to appropriate information

33. While noting the study carried out by the Department of Children in 2007 in Accra on the use of the Internet by schoolchildren and other efforts made by the State party, the Committee is concerned about the disparity in access to digital information and the risks posed by digital media and information and communications technology (ICT) to the safety of children. It is also concerned that media reports sometimes violate children's rights to privacy and dignity.

34. **In the light of the recommendations issued by the Committee following its day of general discussion on digital media and children's rights, held on 12 September 2014, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Develop and effectively implement a comprehensive child rights-based regulatory framework that includes support and supervision of the implementation of self-regulatory measures of the ICT and other industries, to ensure that all children can safely access digital media and ICT;**
- (b) **Encourage cooperation with ICT companies and other relevant industries and facilitate the development of voluntary, self-regulatory, professional and ethical guidelines and standards of conduct and other initiatives, including the training of journalists in ethical reporting and the protection of children in the media;**
- (c) **Strengthen information and education programmes to raise awareness among children, parents, guardians, teachers, journalists, Internet service providers and the general public about opportunities and risks relating to the use of digital media and ICT.**

D. Violence against children (arts. 19, 24 (3), 28 (2), 34, 37 (a) and 39)**Abuse, neglect and corporal punishment**

35. The Committee welcomes the measures taken by the State party to address domestic violence and eliminate corporal punishment against children, particularly through the Child and Family Welfare Policy and the setting up of complaints procedures. However, the Committee expresses its deep concern about:

(a) The high incidence of domestic violence, gender-based violence and child abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse and incest, mainly in the family, schools and care institutions, mostly affecting girls;

(b) The fact that corporal punishment is still widely practised in society and accepted as a form of discipline, and that the Children's Act still allows for a degree of "reasonable" and "justifiable" punishment.

36. **Recalling the recommendations contained in the United Nations study on violence against children (A/61/299), the Committee recommends that the State party prioritize the elimination of all forms of violence against children. Urging the State party to take into account its general comments No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence and No. 8 (2006) on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, the Committee reiterates its previous recommendation (para. 37) and, in particular, requests the State party to:**

(a) **Amend all legislation, particularly the Children's Act (1998) and the Juvenile Justice Act (2003), in order to explicitly prohibit corporal punishment as "reasonable" and "justifiable" correction or discipline;**

(b) **Pay particular attention to and address the gender dimension of violence;**

(c) **Further strengthen awareness-raising and education programmes, including campaigns, with the involvement of children, in order to formulate a comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating child abuse and corporal punishment;**

(d) **Establish a national database on all cases of domestic violence against children and child abuse, and undertake a comprehensive assessment of the extent, causes and nature of such violence;**

(e) **Ensure the allocation of adequate human, technical and financial resources to all domestic violence and child abuse related entities to enable them to implement long-term programmes for addressing the root causes of violence and abuse;**

(f) **Encourage the establishment of community-based programmes aimed at preventing and tackling domestic violence, child abuse and neglect and corporal punishment, including by involving former victims, volunteers and community members, and providing training support to them;**

(g) **Ensure the availability and quality of prevention, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, including health services and psychosocial support, free helplines and adequate shelters for victims;**

(h) **Ensure children's access to justice, including by providing legal support and making available child-friendly and confidential complaint mechanisms in institutions, schools, detention centres, hospitals and any other relevant setting.**

Harmful practices

37. While noting that the Children's Act (1998) sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for boys and girls, and welcoming the establishment of the Anti-Child Marriage Coordinating Unit, the Committee is deeply concerned about:

- (a) The increase in the number of forced and early marriages of children, especially girls, in the State party;
- (b) The prevalence of female genital mutilation, especially in rural and traditional communities, despite the State party's criminalization of harmful practices;
- (c) The cultural practice of accusing some girls of being witches, subjecting them to violence and confining them in so-called "witch camps".

38. **In the light of its general comment No. 18 (2014) on harmful practices, the Committee urges the State party to:**

- (a) **Take firm measures to prevent and eliminate forced and early marriage of children and implement the existing legislation;**
- (b) **Raise awareness among families, traditional and religious leaders, teachers and the general public about the negative consequences of child marriage and female genital mutilation and the importance of education;**
- (c) **Disseminate the law criminalizing female genital mutilation among all ministries, police officers, law enforcement officials, teachers, traditional and religious leaders and the general public, particularly in rural communities;**
- (d) **Ensure that cases of female genital mutilation are promptly investigated and prosecuted;**
- (e) **Ensure the closure of all witch camps and raise awareness among families, traditional and religious leaders, teachers and the general public about the negative consequences of confining girls believed to be witches in witch camps;**
- (f) **Establish protective mechanisms and services to safeguard children, especially girls, who are at risk of being subjected to forced or early marriage, female genital mutilation, or being accused of being a witch, and ensure that all victims of these practices have access to social, medical, psychological and rehabilitative services and legal redress.**

Trokosi (ritual servitude)

39. Although the practice of *trokosi* has been criminalized in the State party since 1998, the Committee is deeply concerned about its continued prevalence, especially in rural and traditional communities, and the fact that not one case has been reported and investigated.

40. **The Committee urges the State party to:**

- (a) **Take all measures necessary, without delay, to prevent and eliminate the practice of *trokosi*, including by allocating sufficient human and financial resources, and in particular ensure that all children that are subjected to the practice are immediately released;**
- (b) **Raise awareness among families, traditional and religious leaders, teachers and the general public about the negative consequences of *trokosi* and the importance of education;**
- (c) **Ensure that cases of *trokosi* are promptly investigated and prosecuted, as necessary;**

(d) **Establish protective mechanisms and services to safeguard children who are at risk of being subjected to *trokosi* and ensure that all victims of the practice have access to social, medical, psychological and rehabilitative services and legal redress.**

E. Family environment and alternative care (arts. 5, 9–11, 18 (1 and 2), 20, 21, 25 and 27 (4))

Family environment

41. The Committee welcomes the adoption in 2015 of the Child and Family Welfare Policy and the steps taken to develop a national targeting system to be used by all government agencies in identifying, prioritizing and selecting households that are in vulnerable situations. However, the Committee remains concerned about the situation of children from single-parent families and those from disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

42. **The Committee encourages the State party to continue its family support programmes, increase their coverage and improve their long-term impact. It also recommends that the State party take the measures necessary to support and strengthen the capacity of parents, in particular those in difficult circumstances, to fulfil their responsibilities in the upbringing of their children through family support programmes and to facilitate the work of civil society organizations in that regard.**

Children deprived of a family environment

43. The Committee notes with appreciation the adoption of the National Plan of Action for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (2010–2012) and the Care Reform Initiative, in 2007, aimed at strengthening the legal framework for alternative care and promoting deinstitutionalization. However, the Committee is concerned about:

(a) The increasing number of children living outside their family environment who are placed in institutions owing to socioeconomic pressures;

(b) The poor conditions of a number of alternative care centres for children, including the lack of proper records, care plans, licensing, registration, monitoring and quality services;

(c) Informal kinship and informal foster care mechanisms being under strain owing to socioeconomic pressures.

44. **In the light of the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (see General Assembly resolution 64/142, annex), the Committee emphasizes that financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely attributable to such poverty, should never be the sole justification for removing a child from parental care, for receiving a child into alternative care or for preventing a child's social reintegration. In this regard, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Strengthen the implementation of the Care Reform Initiative, prioritizing the adoption of measures to support and facilitate family-based care for children wherever possible for children in single-parent families and for orphan children with AIDS, and establish a system of foster care for children who cannot stay with their families, with a view to reducing the institutionalization of children;**

(b) **Ensure the registration, certification and licensing of existing alternative care centres for children, in accordance with the Children's Act;**

(c) **Strengthen and ensure the periodic review of the placement of children in foster care and institutions, and monitor the quality of care therein through the Department of Social Welfare, including by providing accessible channels for reporting, monitoring and remedying ill-treatment of children;**

(d) **Ensure that adequate human, technical and financial resources are allocated to alternative care centres and relevant child protection services, in order to facilitate the rehabilitation and social reintegration of children resident therein to the greatest extent possible.**

Adoption

45. The Committee notes that new national adoption regulations have been drafted. However, the Committee is concerned about:

(a) The lack of proper oversight and monitoring mechanisms for adoption practices in the State party, rendering the current legislation on adoption inadequate;

(b) The continuation of the moratorium placed on domestic and intercountry adoption in the State party in 2013, which has had some positive effects, but has contributed to the prolonged stay of children in institutions and to illegal adoptions;

(c) The lack of a central adoption authority in charge of, inter alia, compiling a national database of children available for adoption, and the negative effects of the decentralization of court decisions on intercountry adoption to first-instance and high courts;

(d) The practice of some orphanages and homes, which allegedly operate as illegal adoption agencies.

46. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Expedite the finalization and adoption of the adoption regulations and the amendment of the Children's Act;**

(b) **Assess the impact on children of the moratorium that has suspended all domestic and intercountry adoptions in the State party since March 2013;**

(c) **Establish a central adoption authority and centralize intercountry adoption decisions at the High Court only, in order to properly monitor adoption in the State party;**

(d) **Expedite the ratification of the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption.**

F. Disability, basic health and welfare (arts. 6, 18 (3), 23, 24, 26, 27 (1–3) and 33)

Children with disabilities

47. The Committee welcomes the creation in 2010 of the District Assembly Common Fund for persons with disabilities and the efforts of the State party to promote inclusive education and accessibility for children with disabilities. However, the Committee notes with deep concern that:

(a) Children with disabilities, especially those with mental disabilities, are subject to abuse, violence, stigma and exclusion, particularly in traditional communities;

(b) Children with disabilities who are confined in psychiatric institutions and so-called “prayer camps” are subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment as a result of cultural and traditional beliefs;

(c) There is limited access to inclusive education and well-trained teachers.

48. In the light of its general comment No. 9 (2006) on the rights of children with disabilities, the Committee urges the State party to adopt a human rights-based approach to disability, to set up a comprehensive strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities and to:

(a) Prohibit the admission of children with disabilities to prayer camps and their treatment therein;

(b) Investigate and prosecute perpetrators of acts of inhuman and degrading treatment against children with disabilities, including in prayer camps and psychiatric institutions;

(c) Develop and implement awareness-raising campaigns to combat superstitious beliefs concerning children and adults with disabilities;

(d) Strengthen its efforts to implement the inclusive education policy for children with disabilities;

(e) Allocate sufficient resources to implement the inclusive education policy for children with disabilities.

Health and health services

49. The Committee welcomes the decline in the under-5 mortality rate and the stunting rate of children under-5, owing to the State party’s interventions, the successful nationwide bed net distribution and campaign to prevent malaria in 2011 and 2012, and the implementation of the Community Health Planning and Services strategy. However, the Committee is concerned about:

(a) The insufficient funding allocated to the health sector, despite its increase;

(b) The insufficient number of qualified and experienced health-care staff and their inequitable distribution nationwide, causing regional disparities in the provision of health services, as mentioned in its previous concern (CRC/C/GHA/CO/2, para. 49);

(c) The fact that neonatal mortality accounts for 60 per cent of infant deaths in the State party;

(d) The decline of breastfeeding rates between 2008 and 2011 and the insufficient monitoring of the implementation of the Breastfeeding Promotion Regulation 2000;

(e) The high numbers of malnourished and severely stunted children, particularly in rural areas;

(f) The persistently high rate of maternal mortality, including among pregnant teenagers and adolescent mothers.

50. The Committee draws the State party’s attention to its general comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, and recommends that the State party:

(a) Allocate sufficient financial and human resources to health services, particularly to child health and nutrition, and provide effective access to trained and qualified health care;

- (b) **Finalize and operationalize the national newborn strategy and action plan;**
- (c) **Take all measures necessary to reduce mortality rates by improving prenatal care and preventing communicable diseases;**
- (d) **Continue encouraging exclusive breastfeeding for six months with appropriate introduction of an infant diet thereafter, aimed at reducing neonatal as well as under-5 mortality;**
- (e) **Strengthen monitoring of the implementation of the Breastfeeding Promotion Regulation, implement a system of deterrents and sanctions and ensure that the Food and Drugs Authority is committed to enforcing the Regulation;**
- (f) **Expedite the approval of the national nutrition policy;**
- (g) **Continue to combat malaria, address environmental causes and strengthen the availability of bed nets and insecticides, especially in areas where malaria is most prevalent, and ensure that all children, regardless of economic status, have access to impregnated nets;**
- (h) **Implement and apply the technical guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce and eliminate preventable mortality and morbidity of children under 5 years of age (A/HRC/27/31) and to reduce preventable maternal morbidity and mortality (A/HRC/21/22 and Corr. 1 and 2).**

Adolescent health, including drug and substance abuse

51. The Committee takes note of the initiatives undertaken by the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana in addressing sexual and reproductive health issues affecting young people and the efforts of the State party to strengthen its health-care services for adolescents. The Committee reiterates its concern (CRC/C/GHA/CO/2, para. 51) about the high incidence of teenage pregnancy, the inadequate reproductive health and mental health services for adolescents, as well as the high numbers of adolescents who resort to illegal and unsafe abortions. The Committee also reiterates its concern (para. 71) that many children and teenagers are affected by alcohol and drug abuse.

52. **In the light of its general comments No. 4 (2003) on adolescent health and No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Adopt a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents and ensure that sexual and reproductive health education is part of the mandatory school curriculum and targeted at adolescent girls and boys, paying special attention to preventing early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections;**
- (b) **Assess, operationalize and enforce the adolescent health and development programme that is already in place within the Ghana Health Service;**
- (c) **Take measures to raise awareness of and foster responsible parenthood and sexual behaviour;**
- (d) **Develop and implement a policy to protect the rights of pregnant teenagers, adolescent mothers and their children and to combat discrimination against them;**
- (e) **Review its legislation on abortion, notably with a view to guaranteeing the best interests of pregnant teenagers and preventing teenage girls from resorting to clandestine abortions at the risk of their lives;**

(f) **Address the incidence of drug use by children and adolescents by, inter alia, providing children and adolescents with accurate and objective information, as well as life skills education, on preventing substance abuse, including tobacco and alcohol abuse, and develop accessible and youth-friendly drug dependence treatment and harm reduction services.**

HIV/AIDS

53. The Committee notes with appreciation that the HIV prevalence rate in the State party has been reduced from 3.7 in 2005 to 1.7 in 2010 and welcomes the HIV/AIDS-related policies, programmes and interventions implemented by the State party. Nevertheless, the Committee still remains concerned about:

- (a) The continued high prevalence rate of HIV;
- (b) The limited number of HIV-infected children and mothers who have access to antiretroviral medication and the limited amount of HIV/AIDS testing;
- (c) The high rate of child mortality as a result of AIDS;
- (d) The high number of orphan children infected and/or affected by AIDS in the State party.

54. **In the light of its general comment No. 3 (2003) on HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Sustain the measures in place to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS and develop a road map to ensure the implementation of effective preventive measures;**
- (b) **Improve follow-up treatment for HIV/AIDS-infected mothers and their children to ensure early diagnosis and early initiation of treatment;**
- (c) **Improve access to quality, age-appropriate HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health services, including confidential services, particularly for adolescents;**
- (d) **Improve access and coverage of antiretroviral therapy for HIV-infected children, mothers and pregnant women, and improve access and provision of prophylaxis, particularly for adolescents;**
- (e) **Improve protection and support for orphan children infected and/or affected by AIDS;**
- (f) **Seek technical assistance from, inter alia, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and UNICEF in this regard.**

Standard of living

55. The Committee welcomes the achievements of the State party in reducing overall poverty. However, the Committee remains concerned about the widespread and severe regional disparities in the implementation of children's rights. It is also concerned about the limited access of children to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, particularly in rural areas.

56. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Strengthen measures for fulfilling children's rights in the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, including by holding targeted consultations with families, children and children's rights civil society organizations on the issue of child poverty;**

(b) **Improve its efforts to accelerate the expansion of the national cash transfer programme in order to cover the 2.2 million people who are still living in extreme poverty today, including children;**

(c) **Improve access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities and ensure sustainability, availability, sufficiency and affordability for all, particularly children;**

(d) **Finalize and implement the water sector strategic development plan and investment plan;**

(e) **Strengthen its efforts to continue implementing the Rural Sanitation Model and Strategy.**

G. Education, leisure and cultural activities (arts. 28, 29, 30 and 31)

Education, including vocational training and guidance

57. The Committee welcomes the adoption of the Education Act (2008) and the Education Sector Plan (2010–2020), particularly the policy measures deriving from the Plan, such as free compulsory basic education, the capitation grant and the school feeding programmes. It notes the achievements of the State party in relation to school enrolment over the reporting period. The Committee is, however, concerned that the education system continues to face serious challenges, and is particularly concerned about:

(a) The fact that primary education is not genuinely free, particularly owing to the limited efficacy and efficiency of the free compulsory basic education policy and the capitation grant, as parents and guardians still have to pay levies, which mainly affects children in difficult socioeconomic situations;

(b) The persisting gender and geographical disparities with regard to access to and quality of education, and the lack of teachers, as well as teachers' absenteeism;

(c) Girls still facing difficulties in accessing secondary education;

(d) The fact that a significant proportion of children living in rural areas, children with disabilities, children from poor households, working children, orphaned children, and children infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS are deprived of their right to education;

(e) The numerous challenges encountered while implementing the school feeding programme, including inadequate programme monitoring owing to limited resources;

(f) The fact that private education is developing very quickly, without the supervision of the enrolment conditions that is needed, the quality of education provided or the transparency and efficiency of the management of education resources.

58. **In the light of its general comment No. 1 (2001) on the aims of education, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Take the measures necessary to ensure free primary education for all children and to strengthen its efforts to ensure that all children are enrolled in primary and secondary education by taking targeted measures to reach children who are deprived of their right to education, particularly girls and children living in rural areas;**

(b) **Take the measures necessary to improve the quality of education, notably by providing teachers with quality training;**

(c) **Allocate sufficient financial resources for the development and expansion of early childhood education in rural areas, and continue strengthening efforts to efficiently implement the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy (2004);**

(d) **Develop and promote quality vocational training to enhance the skills of children and young people, especially girls and those who drop out of school;**

(e) **Ensure that resources are focused on the most marginalized children, improve transparency and budget tracking and adopt the inclusive education policy;**

(f) **Assess and address the consequences of the rapid development of private education in the State party and its impact on the full realization of children's right to education in accordance with the Convention, and ensure the effective and efficient regulation and monitoring of private education providers, through the Private School Desk within the Ghana Education Service.**

H. Special protection measures (arts. 22, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37 (b)–(d) and 38–40)

Asylum-seeking, refugee and unaccompanied children

59. The Committee welcomes the general practice of the State party in hosting refugees and asylum seekers and providing them with access to the national health insurance system. It notes with appreciation the efforts taken to protect refugee, asylum-seeking and unaccompanied children against sexual and gender-based violence in refugee camps, including the establishment of special protection committees, regional task forces, awareness-raising activities and reporting mechanisms, including a helpline. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned about the limited legal and procedural guarantees and assistance for asylum-seeking children and unaccompanied or separated asylum-seeking children during the refugee status determination procedures.

60. **In the light of its general comment No. 6 (2005) on treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, and its recommendations issued following its day of general discussion on the rights of all children in the context of international migration, held on 28 September 2012, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Review the Refugee Act (1992) and amend it accordingly, in order to ensure that the specific needs of asylum-seeking children are taken into account during the refugee status determination procedures;**

(b) **Include guarantees that personal interviews of minors will be conducted in a child-appropriate manner and specific procedural safeguards will be in place for unaccompanied or separated asylum-seeking children;**

(c) **Seek technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in this regard.**

Economic exploitation, including child labour

61. The Committee notes with appreciation the adoption of the National Plan of Action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour in Ghana (2009–2015) and the efforts undertaken by the State party to combat child labour. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned that the enforcement of the existing legal framework and policies is inadequate, the Plan of Action is not effectively implemented and children remain exposed to hazardous labour, mainly affecting their education and health, especially in fisheries, mining, quarrying and in the so-called “prayer camps”, in the ritual servitude (*Trokosi*) system,

commercial sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, as porters of heavy loads, in agriculture and as street beggars.

62. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure the effective implementation of the legal prohibition of hazardous child labour and mining work for anyone under 18, including by allocating adequate resources;**

(b) **Ensure the implementation of the National Plan of Action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including through the use of appropriately trained labour inspectors and the application of high penalties for those who exploit children;**

(c) **Conduct a status review of the National Plan of Action when it ends and identify actions that are yet to be taken and prioritize them for follow-up;**

(d) **Implement the recommendations in the Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6 Child Labour Report published in August 2014;**

(e) **Take measures to address the socioeconomic factors contributing to child labour;**

(f) **Establish protective mechanisms and services to safeguard children who are at risk of being subject to child labour, including hazardous child labour, and ensure that child victims of these practices have access to social, medical, psychological and rehabilitative services and legal redress;**

(g) **Consider ratifying ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189);**

(h) **Strengthen its work and cooperation with the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour.**

Sexual exploitation

63. The Committee takes note of the implementation in the past of the programme for children in tourism in Cape Coast and Elmina in the Central Region and the national time-bound programme aimed at withdrawing children from commercial sexual exploitation. However, the Committee regrets that the State party has not presented information on the studies it has undertaken to ascertain the scope and magnitude of commercial sexual exploitation of children (see CRC/C/GHA/CO/2, para. 67). The Committee reiterates its concern about the fact that sexual exploitation of children, particularly commercial sexual exploitation, is on the rise in the State party.

64. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Establish mechanisms, procedures and guidelines to ensure mandatory reporting of cases of child sexual exploitation;**

(b) **Amend legislation to ensure that all children subject to any form of sexual exploitation are treated as victims and are not subject to criminal sanctions;**

(c) **Conduct awareness-raising activities to combat the stigmatization of victims of sexual exploitation and ensure accessible, confidential, child-friendly and effective reporting channels for such violations;**

(d) **Take measures to address the socioeconomic factors contributing to sexual exploitation;**

(e) **Ensure the development of programmes and policies for the prevention of child sexual exploitation and the recovery and social reintegration of victims, in**

accordance with the outcome documents adopted at the World Congresses against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

Children in street situations

65. The Committee welcomes the initiatives taken by the State party to provide protection to children in street situations. While noting that the State party carried out an in-depth study and a systematic assessment of the street children phenomenon in the Greater Accra Region, the Committee regrets the lack of information about the study's findings and remains concerned about the absence of national data on the prevalence of children living and working in the streets.

66. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Undertake an in-depth study and statistical analysis of the root causes and scope of the phenomenon of children in street situations in the State party;**

(b) **Develop a national strategy and plan of action to support children in street situations and allocate sufficient financial, human and technical resources to it, and address the socioeconomic disadvantages and other root causes that lead children to end up on the streets, as well as the violence to which they are sometimes exposed, including at the hands of law enforcement officials;**

(c) **Ensure the appropriate implementation of initiatives to provide children in street situations with adequate nutrition, clothing, housing, health care and educational opportunities, especially informal education and life-skills training, in order to support their full development and, when it is in the best interest of the child, ensure their return to their families and community;**

(d) **Provide, as appropriate, all child in street situations who are victims of physical, sexual or substance abuse with reintegration and recovery services.**

Sale, trafficking and abduction

67. The Committee notes the establishment of a national stakeholder and intervention database on human trafficking and a secretariat within the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, a human trafficking desk at the Ghana Immigration Service, and a unit within the Ghana Police Service, pursuant to the Human Trafficking Act (2005). However, the Committee is concerned about:

(a) The insufficient implementation of the anti-trafficking legal and policy frameworks and the limited coordination among relevant institutions in this regard;

(b) The lack of formal agreements with neighbouring countries concerning child trafficking;

(c) The limited number of investigations into and prosecutions of trafficking offences;

(d) The lack of protective mechanisms and services to safeguard children who are at risk of being subject to trafficking;

(e) The lack of data on the number of children trafficked, as mentioned in its previous concern (para. 69).

68. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure the effective enforcement of relevant legislation, policies and programmes to combat trafficking in children and their body parts, including through**

the appropriate allocation of human and financial resources, particularly to the police anti-human trafficking unit;

- (b) Finalize and adopt the national anti-trafficking plan of action;
- (c) Adopt a legislative instrument to implement the Human Trafficking Act (2005) effectively;
- (d) Increase its efforts to investigate and prosecute human trafficking offences and convict and punish perpetrators of human trafficking;
- (e) Establish protective mechanisms and services to safeguard children who are at risk of being subject to trafficking, and ensure that victims of trafficking have access to social, medical, psychological and rehabilitative services and legal redress;
- (f) Improve data collection to ensure that reliable data are gathered on child trafficking, particularly by strengthening the work of the national stakeholder and intervention database on human trafficking;
- (g) Strengthen awareness-raising programmes, including campaigns on trafficking, in particular in rural areas, border areas and areas of poverty;
- (h) Address the root causes of trafficking, child labour and sexual exploitation by, inter alia, increasing efforts to improve and expand access to education for both girls and boys, particularly among children in vulnerable situations.

Administration of juvenile justice

69. The Committee notes as positive, inter alia, the initiative to draft a justice for children policy, the implementation of probation programmes of special rehabilitation for children and of several training programmes for professionals who work in the administration of juvenile justice, the child-related work of the Ghana Legal Aid Scheme and the implementation of the 2013–2014 project on access to justice for children in conflict with the law, aimed at providing legal assistance to children aged 13 to 17. However, the Committee is concerned about:

- (a) The evident gap between law and practice, particularly between law and community approaches to dealing with child justice issues;
- (b) The limited functioning of the child panels established under the Children's Act to deal with children in conflict with the law;
- (c) The lack of specialized juvenile court facilities and procedures;
- (d) The limited alternatives to detention for children in the Juvenile Justice Act and the limited number of remand homes;
- (e) Children being detained in adult detention facilities, contrary to the Juvenile Justice Act, as noted in its previous concern (para. 73).

70. **In the light of its general comment No. 10 (2007) on children's rights in juvenile justice, the Committee urges the State party to bring its juvenile justice system fully into line with the Convention and other relevant standards. In particular, the Committee urges the State party to:**

- (a) Expedite the adoption of the justice for children policy, aimed at ensuring stronger linkages between the formal justice system and community practices, including the participation of elders, traditional and religious leaders, chiefs and community members to support the monitoring, rehabilitation and reintegration of juvenile offenders;

(b) Promote alternative measures to detention, such as diversion, probation, mediation, counselling or community service, wherever possible, and ensure that detention is used as a last resort and for the shortest possible period of time and that it is reviewed on a regular basis with a view to withdrawing it;

(c) Accordingly amend the sections of the Juvenile Justice Act to introduce such alternatives measures to detention;

(d) Raise awareness among judges and the police regarding the need for children not to be held in pretrial detention, unless it is necessary for their own safety;

(e) Reform the concept of child panels to ensure greater access to justice for children at the community level;

(f) Expeditiously establish specialized juvenile court facilities and procedures with adequate human, technical and financial resources, designate specialized judges for children and ensure that they receive appropriate training;

(g) Strengthen the provision of qualified and independent legal aid to children in conflict with the law at an early stage of the procedure and throughout the legal proceedings, and continue implementing initiatives such as the 2013–2014 project on access to justice for children in conflict with the law;

(h) In cases in which detention is unavoidable, ensure that children are not detained together with adults and that detention conditions are compliant with international standards, including with regard to access to education and health services;

(i) To that end, make use of the technical assistance tools developed by the Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice and its members, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNICEF, OHCHR and non-governmental organizations, and seek technical assistance in the area of juvenile justice from members of the Panel.

I. Ratification of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure

71. The Committee recommends that, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, the State party ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.

J. Ratification of international human rights instruments

72. The Committee recommends that, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, the State party ratify the core human rights instruments to which it is not yet a party, namely the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

K. Cooperation with regional bodies

73. The Committee recommends that the State party cooperate with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of Children of the African Union on the implementation of the Convention and other human rights instruments, both in the State party and in other African Union member States.

IV. Implementation and reporting

A. Follow-up and dissemination

74. The Committee recommends that the State party take all appropriate measures to ensure that the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations are fully implemented. The Committee also recommends that the combined third to fifth periodic reports, the written replies to the list of issues of the State party and the present concluding observations be made widely available in the languages of the country.

B. Next report

75. The Committee invites the State party to submit its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports by 1 September 2020 and to include therein information on the follow-up to the present concluding observations. The report should be in compliance with the Committee's harmonized treaty-specific reporting guidelines adopted on 31 January 2014 (CRC/C/58/Rev.3) and should not exceed 21,200 words (see General Assembly resolution 68/268, para. 16). In the event that a report exceeding the established word limit is submitted, the State party will be asked to shorten the report in accordance with the above-mentioned resolution. If the State party is not in a position to review and resubmit the report, translation thereof for the purposes of consideration by the treaty body cannot be guaranteed.

76. The Committee also invites the State party to submit an updated core document, not exceeding 42,400 words, in accordance with the requirements for the common core document in the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties (HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6, chap. I) and General Assembly resolution 68/268 (para. 16).