

- Support ECOWAS efforts to strengthen its capacity to perform its mission effectively and in turn demand high standards of performance from it.

## CONCLUSION

The protection of the rights of West Africa's children is the most important responsibility of the people of West Africa and should be the over-riding preoccupation of their governance institutions. Institutional arrangements of governance and their policy and program outputs have for 40 years failed to successfully address the plight of children and improve the quality of life of African peoples in appreciably substantive ways. Clearly, current governance orthodoxies should not suffice. West African governments and peoples should therefore be prepared to mobilize their creative resources and artisanship to fashion the type of institutional arrangements that best suit their needs and do so in a manner that recognizes and preserves aspects of their institutional heritage that are helpful and build upon them. Good governance requires a judicious mix of the tried and tested, and the new and innovative. Attaining these is not possible without collaboration of government and civil society and the support of the sub-region and the larger international community.

West African governments must accept the fact that a growing and empowered civil society will henceforth be a major player in national processes. Civil society organizations must also accept that as repositories of state power, government's leadership role is critical for creating and sustaining a conducive environment for enduring peace and development, among others. Demonstration of responsible leadership by leaders of government and leaders of civil society is a national imperative. Unless leaders develop a leadership culture characterized by a shared vision and willingness to strive together to pursue a common national agenda, they would have forfeited the right to expect international support.

ECOWAS as a sub-regional organization has the responsibility to provide a 'higher order of coordination and resource mobilization, set and police standards and ensure linkages with the region and larger international community; this too, requires a mix of orthodoxies and innovations including the healthy involvement of non-governmental actors at the sub-regional level. The international community needs to engage Africa more specifically on a well considered African agenda and be supportive of its implementation. At all levels of governance, there cannot be a more important item on the African agenda than the promotion and protection of the rights of Africa's children.