

His Excellency Victor Gbeho, Foreign Minister of Ghana
His Excellency Lloyd Axworthy, Foreign Minister of Canada
His Excellency Olara Otunu, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on
Children and Armed Conflict
Distinguished Panelists
Your Excellencies, Foreign Ministers of ECOWAS Countries
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to congratulate the governments of Ghana and Canada for sponsoring this conference. I am pleased to have been invited and I thank you for the invitation.

INTRODUCTION

For many years since independence, children have been viewed as one of the targets whose lot should have been improved in Africa's quest for development but our development strategies failed to do so. One only has to review Africa's numerous "false starts" to realize that we have been applying the wrong approaches to attain development. You will recall that at different periods of our quest for development since 1960, our strategies have been dominated variously by investment in elaborate physical infrastructure, mechanized agriculture, and light industries development, among others. While we have benefited from all of these somewhat, development has remained elusive, the quality of human life in Africa has not improved substantially. Today we know that with children-centered strategies we can not only improve the lot of children but can attain development in every aspect of human endeavour. UNICEF has played the lead role in guiding us to this discovery through painstaking research, incisive analyses and persistent advocacy on behalf of children world wide. It has taken us long to discover the centrality of children to both the outcome and the process of development.

This presentation draws some conclusions about the failure of West Africa's development strategies to better the lot of West Africa's children in the critical areas of human survival, development and learning, protection and participation, and offers some ideas as to the way forward in ensuring the promotion and protection of the rights of West Africa's children. The basic thesis of this presentation is that the critical factor that has led to the sorry plight of our children is *poor governance policies and practices*.

What is needed is an appropriate governance framework within which children-centered development policies and strategies can be pursued to enhance the lot of children and spawn development generally.

SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE STATE OF WEST AFRICA'S CHILDREN

The first order of business, however, is the question of what is called "war-affected children." Who are war affected children? How do they differ from other children? I have tried to provide empirical answers to these questions using the views of Liberian children who are undoubtedly