

children.

West Africa's centralized institutions of governance which are characterized by strong executives and parliaments that are struggling to perform policy oversight functions are inadequate as a governance framework for the nature of dialogue and policy consultations required. At their best, parliaments are organized on the basis of geographic-spatial constituency representation or representation determined by numbers and strengths of political parties. Children as a group are the least able to represent themselves; moreover, none of these forms of representation has been known to provide adequate representation of children's interests. This is why for governance institutions to adequately reflect ; children's interest, they must include in representatives of children advocacy organizations and related groups that operate in civil society and in some cases, children themselves. Experience has shown that quite often, it has not been good enough for these groups to only be involved with articulating children's interests, they must have access to and be allowed to make direct inputs into the policy-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes. This is also why policy dialogue and consultations about children's issues must be all-inclusive and take place in a coordinated manner at all levels of governance-from the local to the sub-regional.

#### *A New Children-Centered Policy Strategy*

With respect to the content of the dialogue and consultations, development policies and programs must be centered around the issues and concerns that affect children. They must seek to strengthen and empower the family. Strategic analysis backed by experience has shown that children-centered development approaches are by their very nature inclusive of all other concerns and bring forth the best for all other interests. Planning and implementing development programs become more effective when the needs of children are made the center-piece. For example, programs and projects for the delivery of health care, housing and shelter, agriculture and food security, education, urban and rural reconstruction, road and transport networks, for the promotion of justice, human rights and economic empowerment or any other type of development undertaking, tend to provide clearer and more effective focus and the prospects of attaining more productive and enduring results when implemented if children's issues are made their center-pieces. This is why children's issues must be central to both the institutional processes as well as the substantive content of a governance framework that is capable of attaining development.

#### *The Need for Accountable, Transparent and Participatory Governance*

Children-centered development requires the highest order of governance probity and accountability because unlike other groups in society, children do not constitute an influential political, social or economic" constituency; therefore, de-prioritizing children' s programs, misuse of allocated resources and other malpractices may easily obtain in program management. One way of attaining a high level of accountability is to ensure clarity of goals, objectives, processes, benchmarks and expected outcomes in the formulation and implementation of policies, programs and projects. It is also essential that the appropriate role and responsibility analyses are undertaken for all actors. Monitoring and evaluation processes must take place at