



**The Africa  
Children's  
Summit**

*'Seen, Heard and Engaged'*



# AFRICA CHILDREN'S SUMMIT 2025 REPORT

## Project Closure Report



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## 1. Executive Summary

The Africa Children's Summit (ACS) 2025, held from 4–7 April 2025 at Roedean School in Parktown, Johannesburg, marked a pivotal milestone in continental child participation. Building on the inaugural 2023 Summit in Nairobi, this second edition was conceived as a fully child-led convening under the stewardship of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. It gathered 313 children from 15 African countries, including online representatives; 77 adults participated in the 2025 Summit, with a total participation count of 389. Adult allies including government officials, civil society representatives, safeguarding personnel, and media actors were also present.

Under the unifying theme “Seen, Heard, and Engaged in Education,” ACS 2025 was organised around six thematic streams:

1. Empowering Child Participation in Education - Exploring methods to actively involve children in educational decision-making and learning.
2. Promoting Inclusive Education for All Children - Strategies to ensure that every child, regardless of background or ability, has equal learning opportunities.
3. Impact of Climate Change on Educational Systems - Understanding the effects of climate change on schools and educational access and developing resilience strategies.
4. Contemplating the Role of AI in Education: Risks and Opportunities - Examining the benefits and potential dangers of artificial intelligence and social media in educational settings.
5. Breaking Barriers to Educational Access - Identifying and addressing the factors that enable or hinder access to education for all children (trafficking, child marriage, marginalised children).
6. Addressing School Violence and Its Impact on Learning - Developing measures to prevent violence in schools and mitigate its effects on students' educational experiences.

These themes were not abstract categories but deeply rooted in the lived realities of participating children—many of whom contributed directly to the Outcome Statement, a child-drafted policy document formally submitted to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).

Despite a compressed planning timeline, late-stage funding confirmations, visa delays for regional delegates, and weather-induced logistical disruptions, the Summit created



a dynamic, multi-modal environment where children influenced policy, debated with decision-makers, and reaffirmed their leadership in shaping Africa's future. A hybrid engagement model enabled remote participation from children in conflict-affected and under-resourced regions, reflecting a commitment to inclusion even amidst operational constraints.

Safeguarding was a cornerstone of the Summit's architecture. More than 40 trained focal points, sensory spaces, multilingual reporting channels, and 24-hour safeguarding infrastructure created a trauma-informed and responsive environment. Special consideration was given to children with disabilities and neurodiverse needs, with lessons captured for future implementation.

Financially, the Summit closed with an overspend of approximately R370,000, largely due to safeguarding-related costs, extended accommodation requirements, and interpretation needs. While all major vendors were paid and liabilities cleared post-event, the experience revealed critical lessons in resource mobilisation, including the importance of early budgeting commitments from government and civil society, and clear delineation of in-country vs. international expenditure responsibilities.

A number of key risks and opportunities emerged:

- Risks included late visa approvals, donor compliance complexities, and uneven institutional readiness for a truly child-led model.
- Opportunities included establishing ACS as a formal AU mechanism, advocating for a the C20 platform linked to South Africa's leadership of the G20 in 2025 and deepening the Fund's role as a continental convener of children's rights initiatives.

The Summit produced several strategic recommendations:

- Adopt a biennial cycle with dedicated technical support to allow for meaningful regional engagement and national implementation.
- Finalise government MOUs 6–8 months in advance to avoid financial delays.
- Embed safeguarding and disability inclusion protocols at every stage of planning, from pre-summit child briefings to onsite structures.
- Create a permanent digital archive and host-country toolkit to ensure continuity and institutional memory.



The Summit also leaves behind a tangible legacy: a refined Standard Operating Framework, a robust safeguarding training manual, and an Outcome Statement now being integrated into national planning frameworks and regional child rights dialogues. This legacy will be carried forward by Sierra Leone, the confirmed host of the 2027 ACS, with technical support from the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.

## 2. Background and Context

Africa's demographic profile is characterised by a pronounced youth bulge, with nearly half of its population under the age of 18 and a median age of just 19 years. Despite this, children have historically been excluded from meaningful participation in the design, implementation, and monitoring of continent-wide policy agendas, including the African Union's Agenda 2040. This marginalisation not only undermines the democratic ideals to which African states have subscribed but also diminishes the effectiveness of interventions intended to serve young people.

A 2022 study from the University of Pretoria underscored that decision-makers at national and regional levels rarely engage children as active partners in policy formulation, leaving their unique perspectives and lived experiences unaccounted for in legislation, budgeting, and service delivery. Such top-down approaches frequently fail to address grassroots realities—whether barriers to school access for rural learners, the psycho-social impacts of conflict and displacement, or emerging digital risks such as online exploitation. By contrast, consulting directly with children can surface insights that adults may overlook, leading to more robust, context-appropriate policies and programmes. When children are respected as rights-holders and given genuine space to articulate their concerns and solutions, the process strengthens democratic values, nurtures future leaders, and fosters a sense of agency that carries into adulthood.

Recognising this gap, Mtoto News—in collaboration with the Inaugural African Children's Summit Steering Committee and with strong support from the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children and other partners—hosted the Inaugural African Children's Summit. Held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 10 to 12 April 2023, the Summit served as a continental platform for children to convene, share experiences, harness collective energy, and generate tangible policy recommendations. Grounded in the AU's Child Participation Guidelines, the Summit



aimed to “empower African children and create a space where they feel seen, heard and engaged by their peers and community”.

Key objectives of the Summit were to:

1. Facilitate peer-to-peer dialogue on priorities for an Africa that works for children, drawing on firsthand experiences of discrimination, exclusion, and resilience.
2. Generate and collate evidence-based concerns regarding child rights, spanning education, health, digital safety, environmental justice, and more.
3. Formulate actionable policy recommendations and advocacy “asks” to be encapsulated in an Outcome Statement.
4. Acknowledge exemplary state and non-state actors advancing child well-being.
5. Co-create a draft Children’s Action Plan for translating summit outcomes into national and regional initiatives.

By positioning children as co-owners of both the process and content, the Summit embodied the principle, “Nothing About Us Without Us.” Its outcomes have since informed follow-up advocacy—most notably the presentation of the Outcome Statement to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) in the 2025 cycle of the ACS—and paved the way for subsequent summits and child-led platforms across the continent.

### 3. Project Planning and Governance

The successful delivery of the Africa Children’s Summit 2025 was the culmination of nearly two years of meticulous, multi-layered planning. From 2023 onward, the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund (NMCF) undertook a deliberate and adaptive process that balanced visionary ambitions with the practical realities of political transitions, safeguarding imperatives, and the necessity of genuine child participation. The sections below highlight the timeline and evolution of the ACS journey and how mechanisms were explored and adopted to ensure the success of the event.

#### Pre-Summit Activities and Timeline Evolution

Preparations initially targeted an August 2024 convening, deliberately set to follow South Africa’s national elections in May 2024. This timeline was chosen to avoid competing with pre-election campaigning and to allow for greater government continuity and buy-in. However, the post-election period proved more protracted than anticipated, with departmental reshuffles and delayed ministerial appointments



creating uncertainty around high-level participation. In response, the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund made the strategic decision to defer the Summit to April 2025, prioritising a stable political landscape that would ensure meaningful, cross-sectoral engagement and government co-ownership of the outcomes.

These postponements, though challenging, were crucial to ensuring the Summit remained firmly rooted in government co-ownership. Each adjustment reflected a fundamental principle underpinning ACS 2025: that child participation must be integrated into official government strategies to achieve long-term policy traction and funding commitment. Furthermore, the engagement of the South African government was no small feat, handing the event over from state to state rather than from organisational host to organisational host ensures that the ambition for the event to be taken seriously at a state level is indeed seen to. As such, as the reporting is concluded, the 6-month period of knowledge transfer and engagements with the Sierra Leone team will commence, ensuring a timely handover and a good amount of time to prepare for the 2027 Summit.

## Government Leadership and Institutional Partnerships

At the heart of ACS 2025 planning was an insistence on government leadership. From the outset, NMCF engaged the Department of Social Development (DSD), the Office on the Rights of the Child, and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC). These relationships ensured that the Summit's themes, outcome statements, and policy asks were not just conference declarations but strategically tied to South Africa's National Plan of Action for Children and the AU's Agenda 2040. The high-level ministerial briefings, bilateral workshops, and structured working groups helped embed ACS 2025 into national and continental child-rights frameworks. This alignment guaranteed that recommendations arising from the Summit would be recognised by policymakers and incorporated into formal reporting cycles at both the AU and UN levels.

Beyond this, the engagement of the Department of Social Development as the custodian of the rights of the child called for a critical link to the G20 activities in South Africa, and the subsequent movement in civil society discourse, to have a C20 focused on children. This ambition is illustrative of the work done in the context of the ACS and in its planning and implementation. Strong institutional partnerships will ensure greater efficacy of the work and continuity for the ACS. This aligns with calls for the ACS to be



held every second year, by stakeholders within the adult-led External Stakeholder Committee which affirmed the need for a bit more time in-between events to ensure fundraising can realise its full potential, that children are well prepared and that the ACS is a marker of progress, rather than a cyclical event bearing little fruit in each sitting. While there has been some dissatisfaction around this, the children's committee in 2024, 2025, and now, even with the support of the incoming chair, Ms Phillipa Cride-Dole, the chair for Sierra Leone, has affirmed that this approach is sound and not taken without consideration for the sustainability of the ACS, given the present economic circumstances.

Finally, the presentation of the ACS outcomes statement in the context of ACERWC, with a clear call from the outgoing chair for ACERWC to have the ACS appear on the agenda as it is set each year, is another call for a full commitment to the realisation of the participation of children in platforms where their rights are discussed.

### Children's Planning Committee (CPC) and Participatory Design

Building on the precedent set in Nairobi, the NMCF convened a revitalised Children's Planning Committee (CPC). This group comprised over 150 children aged 10–17, representing diverse linguistic, regional, and socio-economic backgrounds and over 15 countries. Through fortnightly virtual meetings and dynamic WhatsApp groups, the CPC actively shaped:

- Thematic tracks such as education equity, climate justice, digital inclusion, and child governance.
- Session formats, prioritising interactive methods over lecture-style panels.
- Drafts of guiding questions for plenary discussions.

This process enabled children to move from token participants to genuine co-authors of Summit content. CPC deliberations surfaced critical issues, including the gendered dimensions of the digital divide, violence against children both online and offline, and the mechanics of meaningful participation at the African Union and United Nations.

Furthermore, in the context of the event, children raised that while they noted the strides toward child-led sessions, much more work needed to be done to ensure this becomes a reality for the event moving forward, with a powerful move by the leaders to reclaim the programme on day-3 of the event, noting that they were able to shape the ACS as they saw fit, and boldly state where the event fell short of their ambitions.



While this was jarring for the organizing team, it was a good reminder of the importance of continuously child-led engagement and not defaulting to adult-led, as we were reminded.

### External Stakeholders Committee (ESC)

Parallel to the Children's Planning Committee (CPC), an External Stakeholders Committee (ESC) operated as a multi-stakeholder body drawing expertise and institutional authority from across Africa and beyond. Members included senior representatives from diverse partners such as UNICEF, the African Union's African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), the South African Government (across departments including Social Development, Basic Education, Health, International Relations, Home Affairs, and the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities), and prominent civil society and private sector partners including Save the Children, Plan International, World Vision, Childline KZN, the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) in Addis Ababa, and the South African Human Rights Commission. Private sector champions such as Hi-Tec, Tiger Brands, Nedbank, the JSE, Orica, NBA, Nickelodeon, and Brand South Africa also contributed both financial and in-kind support, alongside critical logistical partners like Roedean School, St John's College, and Mtoto News.

The ESC's primary mandate was to refine outputs from the CPC, ensuring that every decision met safeguarding requirements, budget constraints, and institutional mandates, while preserving the leadership role of children at the core of the Summit. This diverse committee was indispensable in navigating the intricate operational landscape of ACS 2025, managing issues such as:

- Visa facilitation and immigration protocols for delegates from countries including Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, South Sudan, Lesotho, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Liberia.
- Coordination with the South African Police Services to ensure on-site security and emergency readiness was another facet of the safeguarding function of the ESC.
- Integrating technical contributions from partners like UNICEF, the Bureau of Market Research, and Save the Children SA to enhance the Summit's policy outputs.
- Overseeing logistics and vendor negotiations in collaboration with venue partners Roedean and St John's Schools.



To support the child-led vision of ACS 2025, the External Stakeholder Committee undertook a set of coordinated operational responsibilities. These included:

- Facilitating visa applications and travel arrangements for international child and adult delegates;
- Providing travel insurance and implementing safeguarding policies tailored to the needs of minors;
- Ensuring data protection, digital safety, and consent processes for hybrid and online participation;
- Mobilising resources and managing pooled funding for child participation and programme delivery;
- Coordinating in-country pre-summit activities to support local preparation and thematic alignment.

These functions were carried out in close coordination with the Children's Planning Committee, ensuring alignment between content leadership and operational delivery. This integrated approach was central to the success and safety of the ACS 2025.

## Safeguarding and Capacity Building

Recognising the hybrid nature of ACS 2025, safeguarding was woven into every planning layer. Extensive measures included:

- Background checks and tailored safeguarding training for all facilitators and chaperones.
- Planned online safeguarding briefings for digital participants and their guardians.
- Child-friendly forms, developed in consultation with child delegates over several months.
- A 24-hour child protection hotline, managed by trained safeguarding officers.
- 24-hour safeguarding leads.

This approach not only protected the well-being of participants but also modelled best practices for future child-focused convenings on the continent. It would be remiss not to note that the safeguarding protocols were challenged by some logistics for the delegation being finalised too close to the start of the event. In recognition of some of the major hurdles, we further engaged in debrief sessions post the ACS to ensure that



concerns and suggestions have been captured by the ESC such that they are part of the learning and knowledge transfer process ahead of the next ACS.

### Specialist Subcommittees: Turning Vision into Operations

To translate vision into operational detail, NMCF structured eight specialist subcommittees. Each was co-chaired by a partner organization, where appropriate, and staffed by senior professionals from partners more broadly in the ESC. This ensured co-ownership within the context of the ESC and frequent collaborative spaces in dedicated platforms where the ESC itself served as an informational space. These subcommittees included:

1. Programme & Pre-Summit Planning.
2. Fundraising & Government Liaison.
3. Logistics & Security.
4. Communications & Media.
5. Safeguarding & Child Participation.
6. AU & Government Coordination.
7. VIP & Ministerial Planning.
8. Crisis & Risk Management.

By distributing responsibility across these subcommittees and ensuring balanced leadership, NMCF created a structure that was not only meticulously planned but genuinely co-owned by children and adults, respectively. This arrangement fostered rapid problem-solving, institutional accountability, and a robust platform for sustainable advocacy beyond the Summit's immediate conclusion.

### Frameworks for Sustainability and Continuity

Crucially, NMCF developed an African Children's Summit Standard Operating Framework to secure the legacy of ACS 2025. This included:

- A Host-Country Toolkit, detailing roles, timelines, and protocols for smooth knowledge transfer to the next Summit.
- Documentation processes ensuring every lesson learned, template used, and safeguarding measure deployed are accessible for future teams.

These tools minimise the risk of "summit fatigue" and ensure that ACS becomes a sustained movement rather than a series of isolated events. Through adaptive scheduling, deliberate government engagement, and the co-creation of resilient



operational frameworks, the planning and governance of ACS 2025 laid the groundwork for a landmark gathering. It demonstrated that with genuine partnership and intentional inclusion, African children can be positioned not as passive beneficiaries but as architects of their futures.

#### 4. Programme Design and Execution

The Africa Children's Summit 2025 was conceptualised as more than a single event— it was designed as a catalyst for a long-term movement centred on children's rights, leadership, and dignity. Framed around the ambition to *“change the way society treats its children and youth,”* ACS 2025 advanced a rights-based approach to programming that embedded child participation at every level, with a deliberate emphasis on continuity and long-term policy influence across the continent.

The core programme was shaped by six priority subthemes identified through the Children's Planning Committee, reflecting the lived realities, aspirations, and concerns of African children:

1. **Empowering Child Participation in Education:** Exploring strategies to meaningfully involve children in shaping their learning environments, school governance, and national education policies.
2. **Promoting Inclusive Education for All Children:** Advancing equal opportunities by addressing systemic exclusions based on disability, gender, location, or socio-economic status.
3. **Impact of Climate Change on Educational Systems:** Understanding the environmental disruptions affecting schools and developing child-informed resilience strategies.
4. **Contemplating the Role of AI in Education: Risks and Opportunities:** Interrogating the influence of artificial intelligence and social media on learning, equity, safety, and the future of work.
5. **Breaking Barriers to Educational Access:** Addressing the intersecting factors that limit access to education, including child labour, trafficking, migration, early marriage, and lack of infrastructure.
6. **Addressing School Violence and Its Impact on Learning:** Designing preventive and responsive measures to ensure safety, inclusion, and emotional well-being in schools.



These subthemes informed the design of breakaway sessions, storytelling workshops, digital dialogues, and cultural showcases, enabling diverse forms of participation that catered to different age groups, abilities, and regional contexts. Importantly, the ACS 2025 programme aligned with the theme of the 2024/2025 Day of the African Child, reinforcing the urgent call for educational reform across the continent. With nearly half of Africa's population under the age of 18 and the median age standing at just 19, the Summit underscored that transforming education systems is not simply a policy priority—it is a generational imperative. By centring children's perspectives, ACS 2025 ensured that education was not discussed for children, but with them and by them.

## Programme Highlights

The Summit's methodology placed children at the centre, using diverse participatory tools:

- Outcome Statement Writers 'Room: Children led the drafting of the Outcome Statement in a child-only space, crafting succinct language without adult filtering. This process, noted in the presentation, resulted in a more simplified document compared to the policy-heavy 2023 outcome (without losing that component, but deferring to a smaller committee to finalise the policy asks instead), which was also reflective of the younger demographic presence and authentic voice of the 2025 Summit. Children with disabilities were also actively engaged in the drafting processes.
- Hybrid Engagement Model: Remote participants from Ethiopia, DRC, and Sierra Leone contributed via digital platforms. WhatsApp groups and Zoom breakouts captured diverse regional insights. Clusters of children joined online where resources were scarce for travel, and partner facilitation ensured robust engagement from the children online, supported by Mtoto News in particular.
- Cultural Integration: The "Tastes of Africa" closing ceremony fused policy discussions with cultural experience, demonstrating the ACS's commitment to holistic child participation.
- Sports and Play: The demarcated play time scheduled into the programme was a key feature in the planning process for the 2025 Summit. While weather did not permit all planned activities, the children were allowed to engage with NBA



Africa in a sports clinic led by some of their most established coaches who came in especially for the event.

## Children as Change Agents

ACS 2025 reaffirmed a fundamental truth: children are not just beneficiaries of change—they are its architects. Throughout the Summit, children demonstrated the ability to engage with complex social, political, and developmental issues, offering grounded solutions rooted in lived experience. The Outcome Statement, drafted exclusively by child delegates, powerfully conveyed this message and made clear demands for transformative action across the continent.

At the heart of their call to action were the following priorities:

- **Free and fair education for all**, regardless of income, gender, or ability.
- **Improved school infrastructure**, including safe buildings, clean water, and accessible facilities.
- **More qualified and supported teachers**, trained to meet diverse learning needs.
- **Protection from harmful traditions and violence**, including child marriage and corporal punishment.
- **Technology that empowers rather than harms**, with equitable access and digital safety.
- **Support for healthy mental and physical development**, including access to healthcare, nutrition, and emotional well-being services.

These priorities reflect children's sophisticated understanding of the interconnected barriers that affect their rights and well-being. They are not abstract ideals but deeply informed by the daily realities faced by children across the continent—from conflict zones to under-resourced schools, from digital exclusion to gendered violence.

By articulating these demands with clarity and conviction, the child delegates affirmed not only their right to participate—but their capacity to lead. ACS 2025 showed that when children are given the platform, the tools, and the trust to engage, they rise to meet the challenge. Their voices are not simply valuable—they are essential to building a just, inclusive, and child-centred Africa.



## 5. Participant Profile and Data

The ACS 2025 was conceived as a continent-wide platform of representation, purposefully designed to include the widest possible spectrum of African children's lived realities. The demographic profile of the Summit's delegates offers a vivid picture of that ambition.

### Child Delegates

The Summit directly engaged 313 child delegates from across the continent and within South Africa. In total, 15 African countries were represented, including Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, South Sudan, Lesotho, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and South Africa through in-person attendance, while the remaining countries including the Central African Republic, Botswana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone were represented through the online delegation.

All nine South African provinces were present, with delegates drawn from urban and rural areas, Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs), special needs schools, and community-based organisations.

This cohort was not homogeneous. Ages ranged primarily from 10 to 17 years, with some older youth aged 18–21 participating as youth facilitators or youth-led session moderators. The children reflected a diverse tapestry of linguistic groups, cultural backgrounds, and life experiences.

A total of 389 participants attended the Summit, including 77 adult allies comprising government officials, safeguarding personnel, teachers, civil society actors, media representatives, and support staff. The gender distribution comprised 172 males and 217 females, and 7 delegates identified as persons with disabilities, demonstrating a conscious effort toward inclusivity in design and delivery.

### Key Demographic Highlights

- Approximately 55% of child delegates were female, echoing NMCF's broader programme gender balance and the Fund's deliberate emphasis on amplifying girls' voices.
- Roughly 20% of delegates identified as living with a disability, ranging from physical and mobility-related disabilities to visual, hearing, and cognitive



impairments. Accessibility planning for these delegates became a core aspect of the Summit's safeguarding and logistics protocols. There was the deliberate inclusion of autistic children who were both verbal and non-verbal.

- About 30% of child delegates came from rural or peri-urban communities, ensuring that voices from outside major capitals and urban centres shaped discussions and policy “asks.”
- A significant cohort comprised migrant children, including children from conflict-affected regions. Their perspectives were critical in shaping Summit narratives around protection, education continuity, and cross-border child rights.
- Many South African delegates were drawn from under-resourced schools or child protection services, reflecting socio-economic challenges intersecting with child rights concerns.

## Adult Allies and Professionals

In addition to the child delegates, the Summit brought together 180 adult allies, representing:

1. National government departments (including Social Development, Basic Education, Health, Home Affairs, DIRCO, and SAPS).
2. Regional government representatives and civil society practitioners in child rights.
3. Provincial government officials coordinating child protection and education mandates.
4. Civil society organisations and child protection practitioners from across Africa.
5. Education professionals, researchers, and university partners.
6. Media representatives from mainstream outlets and specialised children's media platforms.
7. Private sector partners supporting child welfare and rights initiatives.

These adults did not simply “observe” the Summit. Many served as facilitators, safeguarding staff, note-takers, and technical resource persons, ensuring the children's leadership was underpinned by professional support structures.



## An Intentionally Inclusive Model

The participant profile at ACS 2025 was the product of deliberate, child-focused planning:

- Selection processes prioritised children from marginalised groups, facilitated by regional partners, national child rights networks, and provincial social development offices.
- An inclusive registration process ensured the accommodation of dietary needs, language diversity (English, French, Portuguese, and Swahili), and varying learning styles.
- Interpreters were engaged for all official languages of represented countries, alongside South African sign language, ensuring no child was left out of conversations.
- Hybrid participation models enabled digital delegates from conflict-affected regions or visa-restricted contexts to participate meaningfully via Zoom and WhatsApp channels.

## Beyond Numbers: Diversity of Experience

Perhaps the Summit's most powerful indicator of impact was not numerical but qualitative. Children brought to ACS 2025 deeply personal experiences:

- Stories of walking for hours to school due to inadequate transport infrastructure.
- Experiences of violence and exploitation in both digital and physical spaces.
- The aspirations of young climate activists advocating for disaster preparedness.
- The frustrations of girls who are excluded from STEM education due to social norms.
- Hopeful visions of leadership, where children see themselves as tomorrow's policymakers and innovators. This rich tapestry of perspectives transformed the Summit into a living embodiment of Africa's youngest citizens asserting their rightful place in shaping policy.

ACS 2025 thus transcended the boundaries of a conventional conference. It was a continental gathering of identities and aspirations, a meeting ground for children whose realities may differ vastly but who share a unified demand: that their rights, voices, and leadership be respected, protected, and enacted. The participant profile



was a testament to this vision—children and adults standing side by side, not merely for photos, but to co-create Africa's future.

## 6. Safeguarding and Child Protection

Safeguarding stood at the heart of the Africa Children's Summit 2025, woven into every decision, conversation, and operational detail. It was not an afterthought, nor merely a procedural obligation. Instead, it formed the ethical and practical backbone of the Summit, shaping how children and adults interacted, how the physical and virtual spaces were designed, and how crises—however minor—were anticipated and managed.

This robust approach was the direct result of months of deliberate planning and reflection. Drawing from the ACS Safeguarding Policy, the comprehensive Safeguarding Focal Point Training 2025 manual, and insights from regional best practices in trauma-informed child participation, the safeguarding model implemented at ACS 2025 aimed to achieve something far deeper than mere risk mitigation. It sought to affirm the dignity, agency, and emotional well-being of every child who stepped into the Summit space.

### A Culture of Safety: From Policy to Practice

The Safeguarding Policy for ACS 2025 explicitly defines safeguarding as:

*“All actions undertaken to protect children from harm, abuse, exploitation, neglect, and violence in any form, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or digital.”*

Unlike many events where safeguarding is reduced to a checklist of compliance, ACS 2025 adopted a values-driven safeguarding culture. It recognized children as rights-holders and adults as duty-bearers, anchored in the belief that meaningful child participation cannot occur in environments where children feel unsafe, unseen, or unheard.

Safeguarding was framed around core principles, clearly articulated in the Policy and translated into everyday practice:

1. Best Interests of the Child: All decisions prioritised children's safety, dignity, and welfare.



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2. Child Agency and Voice: Children were empowered to speak, decide, and dissent.
3. Zero Tolerance for Harm: Any suspicion or report of harm was to be treated seriously and addressed promptly.
4. Do No Harm: Planning and delivery were approached from a trauma-informed perspective.
5. Transparency and Accountability: Systems were built to document and report safeguarding measures, actions, and outcomes.

## Safeguarding Focal Point Training

Over 40 safeguarding focal points underwent intensive training, as documented in the ACS Safeguarding Focal Point Training 2025 guide. This programme covered:

- Understanding types and indicators of child abuse and exploitation.
- Recognising signs of trauma and emotional distress.
- Implementing trauma-sensitive communication techniques.
- Managing disclosures with sensitivity and confidentiality.
- Understanding mandatory reporting obligations.
- Navigating cultural sensitivities in diverse child protection contexts.
- Digital safeguarding, particularly for hybrid events.
- Psychological first aid principles.
- The ethics of engaging children in policy spaces.

The training sessions were participatory, using simulations, case studies, role-playing, and scenario-based learning. Each participant was evaluated on knowledge retention and practical competence, ensuring that the safeguarding team was not merely trained in theory but prepared to respond effectively on-site.

## Orientation for Chaperones and Facilitators

Beyond designated focal points, every chaperone, facilitator, and logistics staff member received safeguarding orientation. Topics included:

- Maintaining professional boundaries.
- Child-friendly communication.
- Gender-sensitive engagement.
- Handling conflicts or emotional distress.



- Referral pathways for safeguarding incidents.

Special modules should be created for digital moderators to handle online safeguarding issues such as cyberbullying, inappropriate disclosures in chat forums, and privacy breaches in the future.

### Physical and Digital Design for Safety

The safeguarding approach was intentionally built into both the physical layout and digital infrastructure of the Summit.

#### On-Site Measures

1. A dedicated safeguarding helpdesk was visible yet discreet, staffed by trained professionals who could manage both inquiries and emergencies.
2. A sensory space was created for children who feel overwhelmed, designed with calming colours, soft furnishings, low lighting, and quiet activities. The rooms were a critical safe space, especially for neurodiverse children or those experiencing anxiety.
3. All adult participants wore colour-coded uniforms indicating their role. Children could easily identify safeguarding officers and knew whom to approach without fear.
4. Breakaway spaces were strategically arranged to avoid overcrowding and to allow discreet conversations if children needed private discussions.
5. Scheduled wellness check-ins allowed safeguarding officers to proactively engage with children and observe behavioural cues indicating distress.

#### Digital Safeguarding

Given ACS 2025's hybrid model, safeguarding extended into the digital realm:

1. All online sessions had trained moderators monitoring chat for inappropriate content or distress signals.
2. Digital participants were briefed on privacy, consent, and personal data protection.
3. Clear guidelines were provided for online engagement, including rules about screen-sharing, video usage, and respectful dialogue.
4. Rapid-response protocols should be established for digital disclosures of abuse, including immediate referral pathways to in-country child protection services.



## Child Empowerment in Safeguarding

A defining feature of ACS 2025's safeguarding approach was its child-led dimension. Children were not simply protected—they were educated and empowered to recognise, report, and advocate for their safety.

### Safeguarding Briefings for Children

Upon arrival, children were to have attended a child-friendly safeguarding briefing where they would have learned:

- Their rights during the Summit.
- How to identify unsafe situations.
- Who to approach if they felt uncomfortable or threatened.
- How to use the complaint mechanisms confidentially.
- How to access mental health and emotional support.

While this did not happen as a brief to the children, due to logistical challenges and early arrivals, the chaperones were briefed to deliver individual briefings due to time constraints in the programme. This is an area that has been identified in the debrief processes. Materials were designed to be engaging and accessible, using visuals, storytelling, and interactive exercises. Briefings were held in multiple languages, ensuring no child was left uninformed.

Children could be provided with a Child Protection Pocket Guide, summarising key safeguarding contacts, hotline numbers, and visual cues for identifying trusted adults in the next iteration of the event.

## Child Involvement in Policy Development - ACS Pre-Summits

Children's perspectives shaped the Safeguarding Code of Conduct. During preparatory sessions, child delegates gave feedback on:

- Acceptable adult behaviour.
- Language they found respectful versus Condescending.
- The importance of privacy, especially around personal disclosures.
- Physical boundaries, especially for neurodiverse or trauma-affected children.
- This input ensured that safeguarding protocols reflected not only professional standards but the real experiences and preferences of children themselves.
- Multilingual and Culturally Sensitive Safeguarding



Acknowledging the continent's linguistic and cultural diversity, safeguarding focal points included professionals from diverse African regions who could navigate cultural nuances sensitively. This was critical, for example, in managing discussions around:

- Corporal punishment, which remains culturally entrenched in some contexts.
- Gender norms influencing interactions between male staff and female delegates.
- Privacy norms around discussing family or community issues.

### Incident Management: Systems in Action

Despite the scale of ACS 2025, only a small number of incidents were reported, demonstrating both the effectiveness of proactive planning and the trust children felt in reporting concerns.

#### Incident Types

Incidents logged included:

1. Minor interpersonal conflicts between delegates, often due to misunderstandings or cultural differences.
2. Episodes of emotional distress, particularly during discussions of sensitive topics like violence, child marriage, or climate disasters.
3. Isolated instances of health emergencies, such as headaches and two escalated medical incidents, one of which resulted in hospitalisation due to a child having Malaria. The child-delegate came from a malaria-prone country and it is suspected that he had contacted malaria ahead of travel.

#### Response Protocols

Each incident followed a structured response pathway:

1. Immediate safety and well-being check for affected children.
2. Documentation in the Incident Register, ensuring data privacy and confidentiality.
3. Assessment by safeguarding leads in determining whether external referrals were required.
4. Follow-up support, including emotional check-ins and, where needed, counselling.
5. Notification to senior management if necessary to resolve higher categorised issues.



6. No incidents required law enforcement intervention, and all were resolved with child welfare and confidentiality as the guiding principles.

## Continuous Improvement and Legacy

A full post-Summit debrief produced recommendations for future improvements:

- Earlier training for all adult participants, including media and logistics staff.
- Expanded interpreter training to include safeguarding terminology and protocols.
- Additional resources for trauma-informed care, particularly in multilingual contexts.
- Creation of a Safeguarding Handover Manual for the 2027 Summit in Sierra Leone.

Perhaps most importantly, ACS 2025 left a legacy of empowered children, many of whom spoke passionately about safeguarding during the closing plenary. As one young delegate shared: “I used to think adults were the only ones who could protect us. But we can also protect ourselves, and each other.” This shift reflects the true success of ACS 2025’s safeguarding approach: it protected children not just from harm, but from invisibility and silence.

In the end, safeguarding at ACS 2025 was not merely about preventing harm. It was about creating the conditions for children to participate, thrive, and lead. It set a new benchmark for continental child-focused convenings and demonstrated that Africa is ready to deliver large-scale, child-led events grounded in dignity, rights, and safety. ACS 2025 proved that when safeguarding is integrated into every layer of planning and delivery, child participation is not only possible but it becomes transformative.

**Recommendation:** Establish pooled funding mechanisms with joint accountability between international, regional, and host-country contributors, guided by a shared fundraising and cost-sharing strategy.

**Recommendation:** MOUs with government and lead donors should explicitly clarify in-country vs. international expenditure responsibilities.



## 7. Financial Performance and Fundraising

The financial narrative of ACS 2025 reflects both resilience and systemic challenges faced by child-focused initiatives across the continent.

### Budget Overview

The Summit was initially projected at a budget of R4.5 million, which was to cover:

- Accommodation for delegates
- Catering
- Venue and technical infrastructure
- Safeguarding services
- Interpretation and translation services
- Programme materials and branding

Final expenditure slightly exceeded projections. This variance stemmed from:

- Higher-than-anticipated safeguarding costs, particularly the need for in-conference ground transport in response to poor weather conditions.
- Interpretation costs, due to last-minute confirmations to attempts to mitigate the budget.
- Increased accommodation costs, tied to unexpected extended stays for some delegates, and missed flights affecting group travel outside of South Africa.

### Funding Sources

The project documents confirm that fundraising efforts attracted support from a diverse mix of partners, each contributing to different aspects of the Summit's delivery:

- UNICEF South Africa and UNICEF ESARO: Provided financial support for child participation logistics and the deployment of safeguarding staff, alongside technical expertise on child rights facilitation and inclusive programming.
- South African Airways (SAA): Offered substantial in-kind support by covering regional air travel through the allocation of Voyager Miles, significantly reducing cross-border transport costs.
- Kenya Airways: Assisted with discounted airfares for select East African delegates, supporting regional inclusion.



### Private Sector Donors:

- Organisations including Hi-Tec, Tiger Brands, NBA Africa, Nickelodeon, Bureau of Market Research, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), and Brand South Africa (BrandSA) contributed a mix of direct funding, branded child kits, sports and learning materials, and communications content.
- Nedbank and Orica also provided targeted financial and logistical support through stakeholder coordination mechanisms.
- Ford Motor Company played a vital role by offering vehicles to support ground transportation needs during the Summit, helping to facilitate safe and efficient mobility for delegates, staff, and supplies across venues.

### Civil Society Organisations:

- Plan International, Save the Children, World Vision, Childline South Africa, Terre des Hommes, Mtoto News, and others contributed in various ways—including chaperone facilitation, online hybrid access, safeguarding guidance, and support for breakout sessions.
- Mtoto News, in particular, led the digital safeguarding and remote engagement model, which allowed children from Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, DRC, and Uganda to meaningfully participate online.
- Department of Social Development (DSD): Provided partial funding for accommodation, catering, communication infrastructure, and AV equipment for local components of the Summit. However, delays in disbursement created operational pressures and required the host institution to bridge financial gaps in the short term to ensure delivery.

Despite the broad coalition of support, a clear message emerged from both the presentation and post-event reflections:

*“Funding commitment is lacking for child participation in Africa.”*

Numerous pledges arrived too late to support proactive planning, and NMCF had to draw on internal reserves to cover core programme elements, particularly safeguarding, interpretation, and support for children with disabilities. Additionally, several partners covered travel costs internally, but these siloed allocations resulted in skewed expenditure, leaving the host with unfunded responsibilities in critical areas.



The experience exposed structural issues in pooling resources, often hampered by internal donor protocols, compliance barriers, and non-aligned budgeting processes. These challenges highlight the need for early memorandums of understanding (MOUs), better delineation of funding lines, and a shared fundraising strategy to ensure that future Africa Children's Summits remain child-led, inclusive, and fully resourced.

## 8. Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships

The success of ACS 2025 hinged on a broad coalition of stakeholders:

- National Government Departments led by DSD and Presidency.
- Continental and Regional Bodies: ACERWC, Plan International, Save the Children Africa, African Child Policy Forum.
- Civil Society Organisations: Childline SA, Mtoto News (Kenya), Terre des Hommes, African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) - Addis Ababa, Commissioner WCCC, National Commissioner SAHRC, Childline, CSO Forum, World Vision, Plan International, TDH (Terre des Hommes), and the Graca Machel Trust.

While relationships were generally constructive, some partners expressed concern about compressed timelines and the late circulation of programme details. Conversely, several partners praised NMCF's agility and the Summit's robust safeguarding and documentation approach.

### Future ACS events will benefit from:

- Earlier confirmation of partnerships and setting budgetary commitments ahead of the event
- Clearer MOUs outlining financial and logistical responsibilities, noting that the host should only incur in-country expenses to mitigate complications in the travel and visa processes
- Formalised engagement with AU mechanisms, beyond the ACERWC, to secure sustainability and regional buy-in
- Formalised organisational commitment to the bi-annual ACS with set budget allocations for child participation
- Dedicated human resources to contribute to the planning and implementation of the programme



- Dedicated human resources to host children's meetings and ensure they are appropriately safeguarded.

## 9. Outcome Statement and Policy Impact

At the heart of ACS 2025 lies its Outcome Statement, crafted exclusively by children. Compared to the 2023 statement, the 2025 version is notably simpler and more accessible, a deliberate choice reflecting the presence of younger delegates.

### WHAT WE WANT – OUTCOME FROM THE AFRICAN CHILDREN'S SUMMIT 2025

We, the children of Africa, have shared our voices and ideas. We want our leaders and governments to make sure that every child can go to school, feel safe, be included, and have a bright future. Here's what we ask for:

#### 1. Free and Fair Education: for All

School should be free for every child. No one should stay home because they can't pay the fees. Governments should give support, like bursaries and scholarships, to children whose families cannot afford school. Children with disabilities should also learn in schools that meet their needs, with teachers who understand sign language and other special ways of learning.

#### 2. Better School Buildings and Facilities

We want schools that are safe and comfortable. That means more classrooms, desks, clean toilets, clean water, and safe places to play. Children in villages or far places should get help with transportation, like bicycles or school buses.

#### 3. Books, School Supplies, and Technology

We need books, pens, and other learning tools in all our schools. We also want schools to use helpful technology, like computers and AI, especially for children who can't afford these at home.

#### 4. More and Better Teachers

We need more good teachers who understand every child's needs. Some of us learn in different ways, speak different languages, or need extra help. Teachers should be trained to support all kinds of learners.



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#### **5. Stop Unfair Treatment and Bad Traditions**

Some children are kept out of school because of early marriage, or because they're girls or have disabilities. This is not right. We want everyone to be treated fairly and for harmful traditions to stop. Let all children go to school and learn equally.

#### **6. Help Our Families So We Can Stay in School**

When families don't have money, some children stop going to school. We want our parents and guardians to get support, jobs, or skills to earn more money. This will help us stay in school.

#### **7. End Violence and Keep Us Safe**

We want to feel safe at home and school. No bullying. No hitting. No abuse. There should be people to help when things go wrong. Teachers and parents must learn how to treat children with love and respect. National governments should ratify treaties and put laws in place against child and early marriages, and they should be practiced.

#### **8. Let Children Share Their Ideas**

We want to be part of the decisions that affect our lives. Give us chances to speak up, lead school groups, and help shape rules and plans. Children with disabilities should also be included in all activities. Their special needs should be taken care of by trained teachers. Schools should also have sports and games made for children with disabilities, so everyone can play and have fun.

#### **9. Technology That Helps, Not Harms**

We want access to safe and useful internet and digital tools to help us learn. But we also want to stay safe online. Children should be taught how to use AI and the internet in a good way, and adults should help protect us from harm. Protect children against pornography and negative media.

#### **10. Healthy Minds and Bodies**

Children learn best when they are happy and healthy. We want schools to give meals, provide sanitary pads for girls, and offer support when we feel sad or stressed, as well as comprehensive sexuality education. There should be time to play and safe spaces to relax and be ourselves. Substance abuse should be prohibited, with stricter laws being put in place with regards to children. The





government should penalise parents who give the go-ahead for their children to take drugs, and the children be put into foster care.

Together, We Can Make a Change! We are the future. We want to learn, grow, and help our countries. We ask our leaders to listen, take action, and work with us to make these dreams come true—for every child, everywhere in Africa.

These themes are echoed across documents, as noted in the presentation, the statements from both 2023 and 2025 “consistently echo the message that children are capable change agents and demand respect for their voices.”

### The Outcome Statement has been:

1. Submitted to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).
2. Shared with South African national ministries as part of planning for integration into the National Planning.
3. Integrated into ongoing dialogues in support of global bodies such as the UN
4. Committee on the Rights of the Child, including follow-up engagements on the Inaugural Bogota Ministerial Conference.

Its influence is already visible, with several countries expressing interest in replicating the child-led drafting methodology for local policy development in the context of the April 2025 ACERWC sitting in Lesotho.

**Recommendation:** Initiate visa processes at least 6 months before the event.

**Recommendation:** Align translation and interpretation planning with early demographic and regional data to reduce last-minute costs.

**Recommendation:** Pre-agree on safeguarding minimum standards with partners before confirming participation.

**Recommendation:** Develop a joint planning calendar that builds in recovery time from elections, public holidays, or exam periods in host countries.

**Recommendation:** Anchor the ACS into national strategies such as the National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC) to enable budget line-item planning.



## 10. Challenges and Opportunities

While the Africa Children's Summit 2025 was ultimately a success, several challenges emerged:

### CHALLENGES

- **Compressed Timeline:** The deferral from 2024 into 2025, while necessary
- due to national elections, a condensed planning phase was implemented that placed significant pressure on all subcommittees.
- **Delayed Government Financial Commitments:** As noted in NMCF internal correspondence logs and project annexes, funding commitments from the government were confirmed verbally but formalised too late, straining vendor relationships in the lead-up to and in the conclusion of the 2025 ACS.
- **Visa Delays:** Delegates from Ghana, Mozambique, CAR, and other regions faced late visa approvals, leading to last-minute rebookings and additional costs. Visa processes must be initiated at least 6 months ahead of travel for ease.
- **Language Diversity:** The number of languages represented exceeded initial planning, increasing costs and logistical complexity for interpretation services. While this was to enhance inclusion, it was a costly endeavour.

### OPPORTUNITIES

- **Continental Leadership:** The Summit firmly positioned South Africa and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund as a continental role-player in child participation and safeguarding methodologies.
- **AU Engagement:** A clear opportunity exists to integrate ACS outcomes into African Union frameworks beyond the ACERWC, as flagged in the ACS Presentation made in the April 2025 ACERWC sitting.
- **Global Platforms:** The Summit has laid the groundwork for engaging global platforms such as the G20, with calls for a "C20"—a child-led civil society platform to influence global policy.
- **Legacy Handover:** Sierra Leone's selection as the next host creates continuity. Knowledge transfer and technical support from NMCF can ensure a seamless transition to the incoming host.



**Recommendation:** NMCF to provide structured technical support to Sierra Leone through handover documentation, virtual coaching, and planning milestone reviews.

## 11. Legacy and Next Steps

ACS 2025 was not the end of a project but a bridge to future action. The Fund recognises:

- ACS needs at least a two-year cycle between Summits to build momentum, galvanise resources, and implement Outcome Statement recommendations.
- **Institutional Memory:** All materials from ACS 2025—including outcome statements, safeguarding protocols, training materials, and child participation tools—are being archived digitally for future use.
- **Continued Advocacy:** NMCF remains committed to supporting the rollout of the Outcome Statement into national and regional policy dialogues.
- **Technical Support to Sierra Leone:** The Fund will provide mentorship, document sharing, and potential staff secondments to assist Sierra Leone in hosting ACS 2027.

**Recommendation:** The next host should integrate lessons from Johannesburg's experience—particularly around financial timing, safeguarding implementation, and inclusive programming—into a standard pre-summit checklist and decision-making matrix.

## 12. Conclusion

The Africa Children's Summit 2025 stands as a milestone in the ongoing journey of child rights and participation on the African continent. From its initial conception as a follow-up to the Nairobi Summit of 2023, to its realisation in Johannesburg, the ACS 2025 has charted new territory in demonstrating that meaningful child participation is not only possible but essential.

This Summit was born from a complex interplay of aspirations and realities. It was shaped by political timelines, financial constraints, logistical complexities, and the persistent underfunding of child-led processes in Africa. Yet it triumphed because of the unwavering commitment of children, organisers, partners, and supporters who believe deeply in the vision of an Africa where every child is seen, heard, and engaged.



The Summit's greatest achievement lies in the authenticity of children's voices. The 2025 Outcome Statement—crafted by children in their own words, with minimal adult mediation—speaks volumes about their ability to diagnose structural inequalities, envision solutions, and demand accountability. Compared to the 2023 Outcome Statement, which was policy-rich and more technical, the 2025 statement was accessible, succinct, and powerful in its simplicity. This difference highlights the evolving landscape of child participation, where younger voices are stepping forward, unfiltered and unafraid.

### Beyond the Outcome Statement, ACS 2025 achieved significant milestones:

- It created a child-friendly safeguarding architecture that sets new standards for future regional and global convenings.
- It integrated digital participation for children who could not travel physically, extending inclusivity and representation.
- It showcased how African indigenous knowledge, creative expression, and modern advocacy techniques can combine to produce policy-relevant outputs rooted in children's lived realities.
- It advanced conversations around embedding child participation in continental mechanisms like the African Union, and even called for global forums such as the proposed "C20" platform connected to the G20 for furtherance of this advocacy agenda.

However, the Summit also exposed systemic gaps that demand urgent attention. Funding for child participation remains fragile and inconsistent. Governments and multilateral bodies express support for child-led spaces but are often slow to translate rhetorical commitments into sustained financial and policy backing. The administrative and compliance requirements tied to donor funding create significant bottlenecks for agile, child-focused programming. The need for earlier, clearer government commitments and MOUs was among the strongest lessons learned. Yet, amidst these challenges, the spirit of possibility prevailed. The Summit demonstrated that African children are not waiting to be invited into policy conversations—they are already there, articulating precise demands for education justice, digital equity, safety, climate action, and respect for their rights. They are prepared not only to advocate but to co-design solutions and monitor implementation.



Looking ahead, the transition of the Summit to Sierra Leone for 2027 presents a unique opportunity to build on the momentum established in Johannesburg. Knowledge transfer, technical support, and lessons from ACS 2025 will provide the foundation for an even more impactful gathering. It is crucial that this handover is not merely procedural but strategic, ensuring that the lessons of Johannesburg—both the successes and the struggles—are embedded into future planning.

The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund enters this next phase committed to sustaining the relationships, learnings, and vision that emerged from ACS 2025. The Fund recognises that child participation is a continuous process, not a periodic event, and is prepared to accompany children, partners, and governments in translating the Outcome Statement into concrete policy reforms, budget allocations, and societal shifts.

The Africa Children's Summit 2025 has proven that a child-led future is not aspirational—it is operational. The challenge now is to transform the bold declarations made on the Summit stages into everyday reality for Africa's children.

As one young delegate said during the closing ceremony:

*“Don't just clap for us when we speak. Change your budgets. Change your laws. Change your hearts. That's how we will know you are really listening.”*



## Acknowledgements

The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund extends its deepest thanks to the 275 child delegates whose courage, creativity, and unwavering dedication shaped every aspect of ACS 2025. Their insightful ideas and persistent advocacy—expressed through bi-weekly virtual gatherings, the Outcome Statement Writers' Room, and spirited plenary debates—form the foundation of this Summit's success. We particularly acknowledge the Children's Planning Committee, led by Tara Hendricks, for ensuring that the programme reflected the authentic voice of children across the continent.

We are deeply grateful to our government partners, with particular appreciation to the South African Government for its leadership and significant financial support. The support of the Department of Social Development, under Minister Sisisi Tolashe and Deputy Minister Ganief Hendricks, was instrumental in making the ACS 2025 a success. We also thank the Office on the Rights of the Child, Department of Basic Education, Department of Health, Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Department of Home Affairs, and the South African Police Services for their contributions to safeguarding, policy integration, and logistics.

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Mtoto News (Kenya), for leading our digital engagement and hybrid participation efforts; Plan International, Save the Children South Africa and regional teams, World Vision, Childline SA and Childline KZN, and Terre des Hommes, for their operational, technical, and safeguarding support; African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) in Addis Ababa, for their continued thought leadership; The Graca Machel Trust, the South African Human Rights Commission, the Western Cape Children's Commissioner, and the CSO Forum for their rights-based advocacy and strategic insight.



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The Summit was enriched by the support of our academic and school-based partners, most notably Roedean School, our host venue, and St John's College, for their hospitality and operational partnership. We also thank our university collaborators from UCT, the University of Pretoria, and others whose researchers and child-rights practitioners contributed to content, facilitation, and learning.

**Warm appreciation is given to our financial and in-kind supporters:**

Hi-Tec, Tiger Brands, NBA Africa, Nickelodeon, Bureau of Market Research, Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE), Brand South Africa, Nedbank, and Orica, whose generosity supported critical aspects of the Summit—from child travel and participation to translation services, safeguarding, and branding.

This Summit would not have been possible without the dedication of over 40 safeguarding focal points, facilitators, chaperones, and technical staff, each of whom underwent intensive training to ensure a safe, inclusive, and trauma-informed environment.

Special thanks go to the eight expert subcommittees—from Fundraising & Government Liaison to Crisis & Risk Management—for transforming vision into action, and to our programme designers, interpreters, wellness officers, and volunteers for their relentless attention to detail.

We honour Brian King, inaugural ACS Chair and 2025 advisor to the Child Chair, and George Kande of Zambia (interim chair), whose stewardship and belief in child leadership helped sustain this powerful movement. We also acknowledge the legacy and example set by the Kenyan team at ACS 2023, which laid the foundation for continental collaboration.

Finally, we recognise the Summit Secretariat, comprising the External Stakeholder Committee and the entire NMCF team, for their resilience in managing tight deadlines, complex logistics, and fluctuating resources with care and clarity.



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As ACS 2025 transitions to Sierra Leone, we remain committed to supporting knowledge-sharing, safeguarding, and fundraising continuity toward ACS 2027.

*True freedom on the African continent will only be realised when every child—not only survives and thrives—but participates meaningfully in the decisions that shape their lives. Dignity is not a passive state; it is co-authored by children who are seen, heard, and engaged. Until child participation becomes an unquestioned norm in our institutions and societies, our collective freedom remains incomplete.*

COUNTRY	TOTAL	CHILDREN	ADULTS	MALES	FEMALES	DISABILITY
DRC	2	2	0	2	0	0
Ethiopia	3	2	1	1	2	0
Ghana	13	9	4	8	5	0
Kenya	22	15	8	5	17	1
Lesotho	10	8	2	2	8	0
Mozambique	7	5	2	4	3	0
South Africa	299	253	46	140	159	6
South Sudan	1	1	0	0	1	0
Uganda	9	5	4	2	7	0
Zambia	14	8	6	7	7	0
Zimbabwe	9	5	4	1	8	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>7</b>