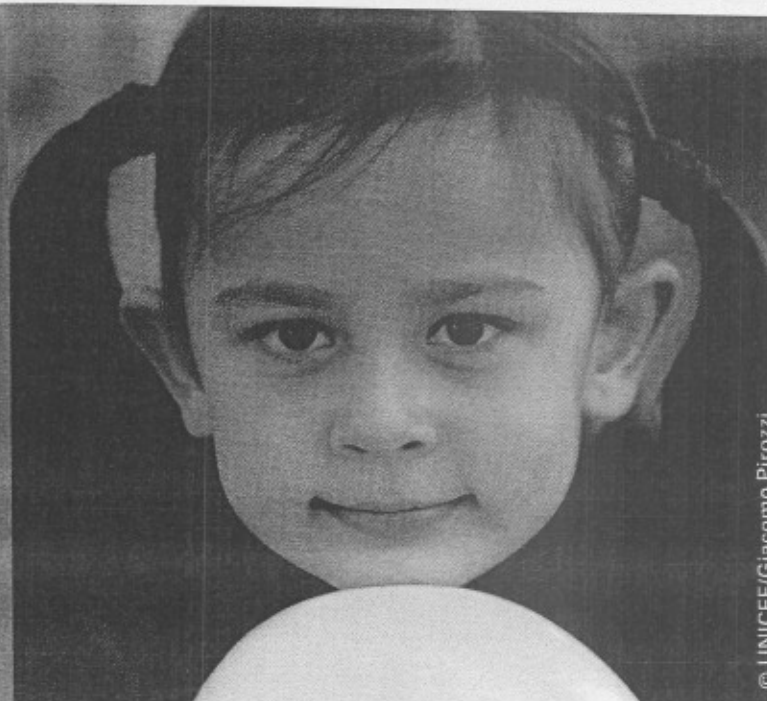


INVESTING IN CHILDREN: PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE



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What are the issues?

Protecting children from violence, exploitation and abuse is not only a basic human value, but is also an obligation clearly set out in Article 28 of South Africa's Constitution. This Constitutional right is given effect in the Children's Act and other pertinent legislation. Yet violence remains a massive, under-recognised and under-reported barrier to child survival and development in South Africa¹. In 2006/07, 43 per cent of reported indecent assaults were committed against children. An estimated 21,736 children were victims of common assaults and 19,687 were victims of assault to commit grievous body harm in the 2007/08 period. Too many children are deprived of adequate parental care, due in part to the impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Statistics show that by 2015 about five million children will have lost one or both parents². Many more are living in households dealing with chronic illness of caregivers. The foster care system is overburdened with about 500,000 current placements, and a backlog of some 160,000 applications³. Extreme poverty coexisting with a dynamic South African economy also creates conditions for child exploitation: in 2002, it was estimated that from 28,000 to 30,000 children under the age of 18 were used for purposes of prostitution in South Africa, approximately half of whom are between the ages of 10 and 14⁴. There is also evidence that considerable numbers of children are trafficked into South Africa from the sub-region⁵.

What must be done?

Parliamentarians should monitor the government's performance in making a reality of children's right to care and protection as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Article 28 of the Constitution; and ensure that financial resources are allocated to the maximum extent possible to support the implementation of the Children's Act and other policies and legislation critical to child protection. Some areas of oversight include that:

- The government fully complies with reporting obligations as party to the CRC, and that concluding observations and recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child are debated in Parliament and followed up by the relevant ministers. This committee monitors the progress made by states in achieving the realisation of the Convention obligations.
- Progress in implementation of the Children's Act is monitored, and in particular that national strategies, norms and standards are developed; and that the critical shortage of social workers required for its implementation is addressed.
- There are clear accountabilities and intersectoral collaboration in the management of child abuse and neglect.
- Prevention and early intervention programmes are available to support parents and at-risk children to avoid recourse to the statutory care system.
- Orphans and children made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS are reached by community-based care and support programmes
- The performance of the justice system is tracked in prosecuting sexual offenders and in the application of standards for the protection of child victims, witnesses and alleged offenders.
- The data reflecting the scale and nature of violence, abuse and exploitation is collected, analysed and fed into policy-making.

1 South African Police Service (2008). *Crime Situation in South Africa*.
2 Statistics South Africa (2007). *Children's Institute Analysis*.
3 Statement by the Minister of Social Development, 27 October 2008.
4 International Labour Organisation, *Unbearable to the Human Heart*, ILO/ IPEC, 2002.
5 "Kids drugged, abducted," *City Press*, 19 April 2009.

When visiting constituencies, parliamentarians could enquire about the following:

- What are the programmes available to support parents in meeting the challenges of raising children?
- What programmes are available to support children living without adequate family care?
- What are the primary challenges that social workers, law enforcement agencies, teachers, and civil society groups face in responding to the needs of vulnerable children?
- How are cases of child abuse and neglect raised, and who is involved in their management?
- Do adult female and child victims of violence have access to integrated care and justice services?
- Are there child and youth care centres in the constituency, what programmes are offered by them, and how do they assist children in reintegrating into the community?

Enquiring about the above issues will enable parliamentarians to contribute to:

- Improved care and developmental outcomes for those children living with challenging family circumstances.
- Prevention and protection against abuse, exploitation and violence against women and children.
- Improved social justice and equity in favour of the least powerful in society.

Vital statistics

INDICATORS	DEFINITION	VALUE	YEAR	SOURCE
GENERAL DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS				
Total population		48.7 million	2008	Statistics South Africa, 2008: Mid-year population estimates, 2008
Child population	Number of persons aged 0 -17	18.8 million	2008	Statistics South Africa, 2008: Mid-year population estimates, 2008
Children in age group birth to 4 years	Number of children in age group birth to 4 years	5.1 million	2008	Statistics South Africa, 2008: Mid-year population estimates, 2008
GNI per capita	Gross national income divided by mid-year population	US\$ 5,760	2007	UNICEF State of the World's Children, 2009
Total adult literacy campaign	Percentage of persons aged 15 years and over who can read and write	89.47%	2007	Statistics South Africa, 2008: General Household Survey, 2007
Life expectancy at birth	The number of years newborn children would live if subject to the mortality risks prevailing for the cross-section of population at the time of their birth.	52 years	2008	Statistics South Africa, 2008: Mid-year population estimates, 2008
JUSTICE				
Child abuse	Number of children reported neglected and ill-treated	4,106	2007/08	South African Police Service (2008). Crime Statistics 2008.
Children awaiting trial	Number of children awaiting trial, monthly	842	31 Jan 2009	Department of Correctional Services
Rape	Number of rapes reported annually in South Africa	36,190	2007	South African Police Service (2008). Crime Statistics 2008.
Child rape	Approximate number of rapes committed against children	16,068	2007/08	South African Police Service (2008). Crime Statistics 2008.

UNICEF SOUTH AFRICA

351 Schoeman Street 6th Floor Metro Park Building P O Box 4884 0001 Pretoria Tel +27 12 354 8201 Fax +27 12 354 8293 www.unicef.org/southafrica

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