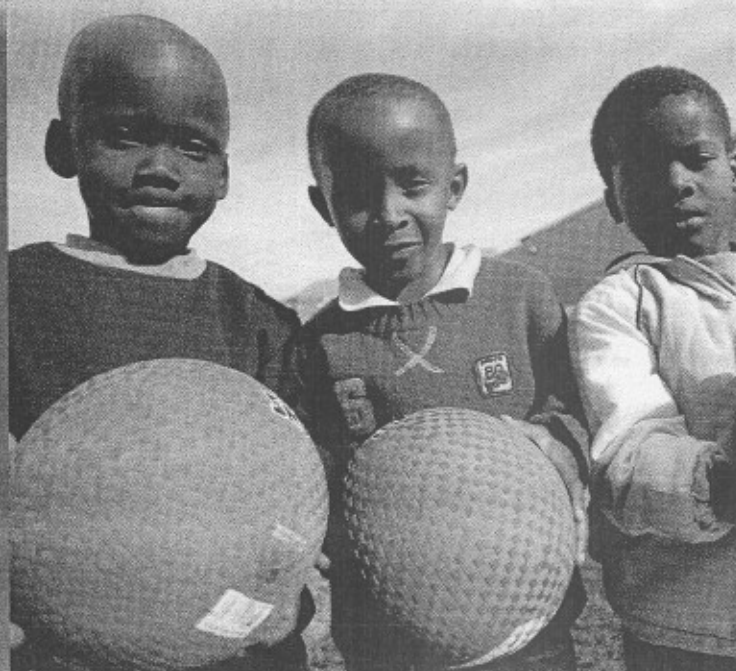


INVESTING IN CHILDREN: POVERTY REDUCTION BEGINS WITH CHILDREN



What are the issues?

When poverty strikes families, the youngest members become its most innocent and vulnerable victims. Poverty causes lifelong damage to children's minds and bodies, turning them into adults who perpetuate the cycle of poverty by transmitting it to their children. Poverty is the main underlying cause of millions of preventable child deaths each year, the reason why millions of children go hungry, miss out on school or are forced into child labour. Investments in children are the best guarantee for achieving equitable and sustainable human development. This is why poverty reduction must begin with the protection and realisation of the rights of children. Since 1994, South Africa has made important progress towards alleviating poverty through an array of policies and programmes. Of these, the Social Grants Programme is perhaps the single most important incentive for poverty eradication. This system has expanded significantly over the past ten years, with coverage increasing from 2.5 million beneficiaries in 1998 to more than 12.3 million in 2009¹. This achievement is largely due to the extension of the child support grant, which in 2008 reached over 8 million children each month². The grant, as well as other social cash transfers designed for children such as the child foster grant, plays an important role not only for the alleviation of poverty, but also as a contributing factor to help poor children to realise their rights to education and basic health services. In spite of these social protection schemes, many South African children remain disproportionately affected by poverty. In 2006, 68% of children lived in households with monthly expenditures of under R1,200³. In addition, disparity in child poverty persists among racial groups, and the youngest children (0-4 years) continue to be more at risk of suffering poverty than older children. Furthermore, disparities in child well-being exist between urban and rural areas and across provinces. It is evident that much still needs to be done, especially regarding the problem of poor access to and quality of critical services such as child protection, early childhood development (ECD), health facilities and quality schooling.

What must be done?

As members of the Portfolio Committees, parliamentarians could monitor the government's performance against its commitments to eradicating poverty, especially among children. Specifically, you could:

- Track improvements in the social grant system, in particular the various grants that support children, ensuring that these lead to better coverage and reduced leakages.
- Work with the executive arm of the government to ensure the extension of the child support grant to reach all deprived children under 18 years.
- Advocate for a broader social protection agenda that will lead to the eradication of child poverty in all its forms.
- Advocate for social protection measures and other national development strategies to be integrated with growth-promoting and employment-generating policies (not working at cross purposes).
- Draw attention to the urgent need in addressing the racial and spatial inequalities in poverty across the country.
- Advocate for timely universal birth registration. Birth registration enables improved access to services and provides important information to policy-makers.
- Promote debates in Parliament on issues pertaining to critical areas of child poverty.
- Probe and monitor national budgets from a child perspective and pressure the government to ensure that substantial resources are allocated to sectors that directly contribute to the eradication of child poverty.

1 The Presidency (2008). *Development Indicators*.

2 The Presidency (2008). *Development Indicators*.

3 Statistics South Africa (2006). *General Household Survey*.

- Ensure and support the participation of young people in monitoring governments' assistance to children.
- In the context of the high level of poverty in many communities, track the efficiency of spending and the quality of service delivery to children. For example, the quality education, in particular ECD, and health facilities, especially those aimed at saving the lives of mothers and children.

When visiting constituencies, parliamentarians could enquire about the following:

- Facilitate and encourage debate and dialogue between the government and civil society, including children themselves, on how to improve access to and quality of critical services such as ECD, health, social work and education, as well as more sustainable poverty reduction measures.
- Engage with the Premier's Office and the Treasury on the allocation of sufficient resources to address child poverty in a synergistic way.
- Enquire about the number of children receiving grants, particularly newborns to two-year-olds, and the experiences of caregivers who receive services.
- Ensure that communities understand the purpose of the social assistance system and how it is intended to contribute to improved food security, improved children's nutritional status and decreased school absenteeism.
- Engage with children on an ongoing basis to determine their feelings, opinions and views on their rights and wellbeing.

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

- Increased awareness of the rights of all children to social protection and a decent standard of living and to reduce poverty.
- An expansion of the coverage of poverty eradication programmes for parents, caregivers and children.
- An increased awareness about the need to register births and the benefits thereof.
- Greater participation of communities in ensuring that the rights of children are upheld.
- Ensuring that the Department of Social Development and the Department of Home Affairs expedite the realisation of children's rights through the extension of the child support grant and birth registration.

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
Child poverty	Proportion of children living in households with monthly expenditures under R1,200	68%	2006	General Household Survey, 2006

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