

# Reflections on children and poverty

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“Let the little children come to me”, Jesus famously said, “and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

Judaeo-Christian tradition is not alone in requiring society to bear particular responsibility for children. It is not surprising therefore that, among the eight Millennium Development Goals, two (on universal primary education and child mortality) are specifically focused on children, and that several more have child-related targets and indicators.

Though our country is prosperous in overall terms by the standards of our continent, income inequality is widening, and child poverty is on the increase. Research shows that children remain among the most susceptible to the consequences of poverty. We cannot afford to compromise the generation of tomorrow, and the rights of children today, by allowing this to continue.

Faith communities and civil society organisations are beginning to build partnerships with government around children's rights. For example, children's concerns figure among the key areas for co-operation highlighted in the 2004 Memorandum of Understanding between the government and the National Religious Leaders' Forum. Yet we need to



track the extent to which we effectively implement these and other commitments to realising children's rights.

Monitoring is an essential tool in programme development and delivery. Our efforts must be directed where they are needed, in ways that will work. Too often in the past, design has failed to take into account lived realities on the ground. The growing trend to engage grass roots communities must be strengthened and

encouraged, despite the greater resources this often demands. But we must not be lulled into focusing on what is easily measurable, in preference to tracking what accurately reflects the actual situation.

The *South African Child Gauge* is therefore a vital contribution to maintaining the focus on this most-needy sector of our population – a sector that has so little voice within the political and decision-making structures of our country.

A safe life, adequate shelter, sufficient nutrition and access to education, and, where needed, health care and other support – our Constitution enshrines these special rights for children, and it obliges us to make them a reality. The *South African Child Gauge* is a reminder to us all that we cannot cease our efforts until every child in our nation is assured of their constitutional rights.