

**Address at the Launch of the South African Child Gauge 2013.10.10**  
**By Vivienne Taylor <sup>1</sup>**

The Title of this year's South African Child Gauge 2013 – "Stepping up national development: prioritising essential services for young children" – produced by the Children's Institute in collaboration with UNICEF and Ilifa Labantwana provide compelling evidence of the situation and experiences of children in South Africa.

The Children's Institute, as a centre within the University of Cape Town, continues to demonstrate academic leadership and engaged scholarship through its research, advocacy and educational endeavours. The Institute shows us what can be achieved through on-going collaboration with social partners including Government, NGOs, donors and UNICEF.

The SA Child Gauge helps us in 5 ways:

1. To better understand the many environments of the child – from conception, to within households, in neighbourhoods, schools, clinics, and in communities;
2. To look back at different times, different children and the different issues on the national agenda and to ask what progress have we made on these.

For example in 2005 the SA Child Gauge theme was Children and HIV/AIDS; in 2006 Children and Poverty; in 2007/8 Children's Constitutional right to social services; 2008/2009, Meaningful Access to basic education; 2009/2010 Healthy children: from survival to optimal development; 2010/2011 Children as citizens: participating in social dialogue; 2012: Children and inequality: closing the gap.

3. To identify common and unique statistical trends and development indicators on children in SA and how these compare with the region and globally.
4. Lizette Berry, senior researcher at the Children's Institute and lead editor of the *South African Child Gauge 2013*, says the unequal society in which South Africa's children are growing up is "threatening their development and that of the country in the long term". We need to engage with this continuing trend of inequalities, especially in social provision and basic services. The Report also highlights a finding from the General Household Survey of 2011 which shows that 58% of children aged 0 – 9 years live in households with an income of less than R604 per person per month. This level of income poverty has many damaging effects on children's abilities and life chances. It keeps children and households trapped in intergenerational poverty and limit their capabilities to use opportunities available to them.

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4. The SA Child Gauge helps to influence debates, and change perceptions and myths about the needs and conditions of children

And

5. It situates the child in his or her own reality and focuses on the role of care and of professional practice in improving the conditions and opportunities for children.

Reports such as the SA Child Gauge play a vital role in helping policy makers and professional rethink conceptual frameworks for understanding what matters in early childhood development. Such reports enable us to refine our diagnostic tools to better link issues affecting children and society with the need for changes in policy and appropriate resource allocations. The Child Gauge and the many other reports on the situation of children provide insights on what services are available to children, who provide these services and whether the types of services and provisions are making the appropriate impacts. They should also make us question whether the ethical and professional standards that regulate and guide professional practice when it comes to children are valid in theory and useful in practice.

As a country trying to overcome a terrible history since 1994 is given renewed impetus through the country's National Development Plan: Our Future-Make it Work. The National Development Plan embeds its approach within a theory of change and sees this theory of change as one that promotes enhanced capabilities and active citizenry within the framework of South Africa's Constitution. The South African Child Gauge shows us that when we speak about early childhood development as a response to the variations in social and economic needs a theory of change should inform this process. All of society must work together to influence the debates on change, on achieving equitable and sustained development.

Advancing the NDP's Vision 2030 requires us to prioritize the needs, conditions and issues that affect children. It proposes that all children have at least two years of preschool education and other significant steps towards increasing the quality of education for all children. The NPC brought together a range of expertise to determine the critical factors that require priority attention in SA. Among others we were told that proper nutrition and diet, especially for children under age three, are essential for sound physical and mental development. The National Planning Commission makes recommendations on child nutrition, helping parents and families to break the cycle of poverty, and providing the best preparation for young children – including a proposal that every child should have at least two years of pre-school education. High-quality early childhood education, with access rates exceeding 90 % are seen as essential requirements for the realisation of Vision 2030 and South Africa's future generation of leaders.

Achieving the conditions that will build capabilities and improve the life chances of all and especially children requires a social compact to reduce poverty and inequality, and raise employment and investment. Significantly, a social compact that influences what happens to children and to all of society requires Government to work in partnership with all sectors of society. With an emphasis on development as capability enhancing, equitable and sustaining people, environments and institutional systems that generate accountable and a more humane practice the future of children will be more certain.

At another level the country requires analytical tools that help us better understand different times (especially contemporary South Africa), different children and different contexts across race, class, gender and spatial divides. Such analytical tools combined with policy and legislative mandates can help to change the many environments in which children live and develop.

The SA Child Gauge can help us to advance an agenda to make citizenship and rights a reality for children and achieve Vision 2030.