



CHILD PROTECTION WEEK 2003: FACT SHEET NR 2: CHILDHOOD POVERTY

Prepared by the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town
For more information, contact Paula Proudlock on tel. 021-689 5404

Poverty, unemployment and inequality appear to be increasing in South Africa. At least 45% of the population live in absolute poverty.¹ This figure varies between 45% and 55%, depending on the poverty line and measure used. For children, the statistics show that between 57% and 75% of children in South Africa are living in poverty².

According to key stakeholders in the children's rights sector³, the major challenges facing children in South Africa currently are:

- Poverty
- Child abuse and violence (including unsafe environments)
- HIV/AIDS

A rapid assessment on the situation of children in South Africa recently completed by the Children's Institute⁴ has indicated that key stakeholders in the children's rights sector view *poverty and HIV/AIDS* as part of the underlying and exacerbating causes of violations of children rights.

To protect children, we therefore need comprehensive programmes that adequately support children and families living in poverty and those affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS. Existing programmes are not extensive enough in their coverage and do not reach the majority of children living in poverty.

MEASURING CHILD POVERTY

Poverty can be measured in different ways, which produce different quantities and perspectives:

- Child and family poverty can be measured in *relative* terms. People are ranked according to per capita, or household income, with the poorest being found in for instance the bottom 40% of households in the population.
- Poverty can also be measured in *absolute* terms, calculating the minimum income that would be required to provide for *basic needs*, survival and a healthy life. Thus the poorest children are identified as those in household with incomes below the poverty line.

Research in 2001⁵ indicated the following trends in childhood poverty:

- When using the relative poverty measure, **59.2% of 0 – 17 year olds live in poverty – an estimated 10.5 million children.**
- When using an absolute poverty measure of R490 per capita income per month as the minimum income required for basic needs, survival and a healthy life, **75% of 0 – 17 year**

¹ Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive Social Security System. 2002. *Transforming the present, Protecting the Future: Consolidated report*

² Cassiem S, Streak J. 2002. *Budgeting for Child Socio-Economic Rights: the popular version*. Children's Budget Unit, Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)

³ Berry, L, Guthrie, T. 2003 (forthcoming). *Rapid Assessment on the Situation of Children in South Africa* on behalf of Save the Children UK and Save the Children Sweden (draft document)

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Cassiem S, Streak J. 2002. *Budgeting for Child Socio-Economic Rights: the popular version*. Children's Budget Unit, Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)

olds live in poverty – an estimated 14.3 million. *This equates to 3 out of every 4 children in South Africa living in poverty.*

- When using an absolute poverty measure of R245 per capita income per month as the minimum income required for basic needs, survival and a healthy life, **57% of 0 – 17 year olds live in dire poverty – an estimated 11 million.**

The research concluded that: “It is estimated that in 2002 about 11 million children under 18 years in South Africa are living on less than R200 per month and hence are desperately in need of income support”.

Whether analysing child poverty using an absolute or relative measure, it is evident that between 57% and 75% of children in South Africa are living in poverty of varying degrees.

PROVINCIAL CHILD PROVERTY RATES

2002 calculations⁶ based on a minimum household income of R490 in real terms, indicated that the provinces with the highest percentage in child poverty are:

- KwaZulu-Natal (23%)
- Eastern Cape (21%)
- Limpopo (17%)
- These are followed by Gauteng (10%), North West and Mpumalanga (both 8%), the Free State (6%), Western Cape (5%) and Northern Cape (2%).

POVERTY ALLEVIATING MECHNISMS

It is estimated that last year, about 14.3 million children are living in poverty, or less than the R490 (in 2002 terms) required to meet their basic needs. These children have the right to assistance through social assistance grants, yet in October 2002 only 42.1% of the eligible children (very poor children between 0 – 7 years) were benefiting from the Child Support Grant (CSG)⁷. The Minister of Social Development reported yesterday (Monday) in his speech to launch Child Protection Week that 2.7 million children are now receiving the grant.

While the Government has implemented different poverty alleviating mechanisms and this year announced a roll-out extension of the CSG to children up to 14 years over a three-year period, these efforts still fall short of meeting children’s basic needs and promoting their socio-economic rights. *Parents and caregivers are currently very confused about the extension of the CSG and many find themselves turned away at registration points because the three-phased extension has not been communicated properly to government officials and the public. Furthermore, officials are reporting that they do not have the capacity (staff, offices, resources) to process the applications and are therefore refusing to process children aged 8 years old, despite the National Department clearly stipulating that, as of 1 April 2003, children aged 7 **and** 8 qualify for the extension.*

There is an urgent need to re-examine the Government’s poverty alleviating interventions. Most importantly, South Africa does not have a comprehensive and integrated national poverty strategy and interventions therefore appear to be uncoordinated and fragmented.

An important and possible first step towards a comprehensive social security system would be to extend the CSG immediately to all children up to 14 years. This should be followed with a clear commitment to extend the CSG to all children up to the age of 18 years as the first phase of implementing a Basic Income Grant for all South Africans, as recommended by the Taylor Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive Social Security System.

TOMORROW: FACT SHEET NR. 3: CHILDREN AND HIV/AIDS

⁶ Analysis based on October Household Survey (1999) conducted by Woolard, reported in *Budgeting for Child Socio-Economic Rights*. IDASA

⁷ Grant Voucher Uptake: SOCPEN daily record Oct 2002. Poverty Levels: Streak, 2002, using a poverty line of R400 per capita per month (in '99 terms).