

Foreword

Francie Lund

Chair of the former Lund Committee on Child and Family Support

The Lund Committee on Child and Family Support was convened in December 1995 and submitted its report and recommendations to Cabinet in August 1996. The main recommendation, for a child cash benefit, was rapidly accepted, and on 1 April 1998 the first applications for the Child Support Grant were taken. This is breakneck speed for the design and implementation of a national-level social policy reform.

It is a pleasure, 20 years later, when millions of children are receiving the grant, to have been asked by the Children's Institute to reflect on the policy process and on challenges that remain. The policy reform gained in three critically important ways from the context of transition itself. First, then-President Nelson Mandela had committed to "First Call for Children" – his palpable love for children was backed by a team of people who understood the crucial significance of nutrition and support for cognitive development in the first few years of a child's life.

Second, the fragmented former provinces, bantustans and homelands had in a remarkably short time been integrated into the nine new provinces. In the past they had all delivered pensions and grants to identified vulnerable groups in poor households. The administrative knowledge and infrastructure was there to deliver an additional new grant, aimed at one segment of the population – children in poor households.

Third, within a short period following the democratic transition, the revenue service powerfully improved and widened its revenue-raising capacity, and allocated substantial amounts of that surplus to support for the new grant. The treasury and revenue services undoubtedly were influenced to commit the extra allocation because results from rigorous research showed the effectiveness of the other social grants, especially the grants for older persons and for persons with disabilities. Research showed that grants addressed poverty alleviation, as well as opened space for the pursuit of economic objectives such as job creation and job search. There was a wealth of evidence about this from existing grants. Subsequent research on the Child Support Grant has similar findings, as a number of chapters in this publication make clear.

Having a national committee of enquiry bear one's name was, of course, pretty mind-bending, and remains so. The proceedings were compressed and hectic, and the work placed a toll on the child care and family responsibilities, as well as professional responsibilities, of a number of committee members. I take this opportunity, 20

years on, to remember with respect the participation and commitment of Marj Brown, Debbie Budlender, Laura Joyce Kganyago, Pieter le Roux, Jackie Loffell, Este Lohrentz Ndivhuho Sekoba, Marilyn Setlaltoea, Marion Stewart, Jean Triegaardt and Servaas van der Berg. I value enormously the support and advice received throughout from Leila Patel and Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi.

It is often said, in post-apartheid South Africa, that there are many good policies, but there is a huge gap between policy and implementation. I think that within this, one of the problems is that different policy purposes are loaded onto the initial focus, and the implementers – whether the civil service, the NGOs, or other parties – cannot possibly bear the weight or do the work. In the child support policy reform, we restricted the focus

to a cash transfer, and its implementation; we understood that for a number of reasons (not just fiscal) the old State Maintenance Grant would have to be phased out. These were terribly difficult and painful policy choices.

Authors of this issue of the *South African Child Gauge* report are engaged in a new wave of possible reforms of support for children and families, including options for extending the Child Support Grant. I urge those advocating for different options for reform: Keep your policy intention and your purpose clear. For the Lund Committee at that time, the policy purpose was clear: nutritional support for children in their earliest years.

This report of the *South African Child Gauge* will be invaluable for many who are learning and teaching about social policy. It contains the most recent research about child support policies, and adds to the valuable stock of research-based publications that are hallmarks of the work of the Children's Institute.

