

# Foreword

Marian Jacobs

(Dean: Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town)

This is the fifth issue of the *South African Child Gauge*, and it has been a privilege to watch its growth and development – from a newborn publication, through its tentative first steps, to a robust, confident, five-year-old which has taken its rightful place among those publications which contribute to nation-building.

The original intent of the *Gauge* was to provide an annual account of the lives of children in South Africa – through monitoring those commitments made to them by adults who make laws, policies and promises; through focusing, year on year, on a special sector or aspect of their lives, such as education or HIV/AIDS; and through providing some numbers which can help to track progress through a quantitative lens. There can be no doubt that this intent has been fulfilled, and that the *Gauge* has found that oft-times elusive middle road between a scientific publication, read mainly by researchers, and one which has a wider readership of people – in state and civil society structures – who seek and appreciate research-based evidence that is presented in a more accessible and policy-relevant format.

Over its short life, the *Gauge* has been faced with the same challenges as those that affect the health of children in the first five years of their lives: to survive; to develop; and to be protected. These challenges have been successfully addressed through efforts by the Children's Institute staff and their collaborators; through the generosity of funders; and especially through the readers, whose positive feedback and interest



have been the greatest inspiration to the *Gauge* team.

This issue presents a very important focus on the health of children – an area in which comprehensive action is urgently needed. For in South Africa, despite having 16 years of policies, programmes and interventions to promote, protect and manage the health of children, there remains an unfinished agenda, parameters of which are captured in the essays as well as in the numbers in this issue.

Where to from here for the *South African Child Gauge*? Discussions on the global stage suggest that the coming years hold much promise for children.

While the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child last year offered a chance to reflect on both gains and unmet agendas for children, the upcoming global Summit on the Millennium Development Goals provides another opportunity for making real plans which can be scaled down to country level. In terms of our Constitution, laws and policies, South Africa is poised to act to implement plans and to embark on a refreshed agenda for children.

Within this, this issue of the *Gauge* makes an important contribution to describing the current state of health of South Africa's children, reviewing policies and interventions, and in so doing, being a significant knowledge broker between all of those who can, and do, make a difference for the health of our children.