

Introducing Children Count – *Abantwana Babalulekile*

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According to the South African Constitution, everyone in South Africa has a right to adequate housing, health care services, sufficient food and water, social security and basic education. Children are specifically mentioned, and every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services. These form part of what are collectively known as socio-economic rights. While these rights are guaranteed by the Constitution, the question is: *How well are government and civil society doing in realising these rights for all children?*

The only way to answer that question is by monitoring the situation of children. Most data about the social and economic situation of people living in South Africa does not focus on children, but instead counts people, families or households. This is standard for national data collected by central statistics organs, such as Statistics South Africa. But it is of limited use for those interested in children's rights and well-being. Data is needed that specifically depicts the situation of children in South Africa, which can be used as a tool for measuring the realisation of their rights.

Child-centred data

In 2005, the Children's Institute launched a project called *Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile* (isiXhosa for 'children are important'). The project presents child-centred data on basic demographics and care arrangements for children, as well as on many of the areas covered under socio-economic rights. It draws on the most recent national survey data and on administrative data from relevant government departments, as well as other credible data sources. There is still a lot of information that is not available, but we hope that this project is a good start towards monitoring the situation of children in South Africa and the realisation of their socio-economic rights.

Whenever new data is released, it is made available on the *Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile* web site at: www.childrencount.ci.org.za. As this project continues and new data is included with the release of national surveys and other data sources, it will be possible to track changes in the conditions of children and their access to services

over time. This year, a second year of data extracted from the *General Household Survey 2005* was added. Therefore, two years' data is presented (2004 and 2005) for most of the indicators included in this publication. Caution must be applied however in comparing 2004 with 2005 because confidence intervals¹ for this data are not available.

The indicators in this *South African Child Gauge* are a sub-set of the *Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile* indicators on demographics and socio-economic rights. The tables on the subsequent pages give basic information about care, health status, housing, water and basic services, social security, and education. Each table is accompanied by commentary that provides some context and gives a brief interpretation of the data. The data is presented for all children in South Africa where possible, and by province. More detailed information and a wider range of data – disaggregated by age, sex and race – and accompanying web links, documents and interpretation are available on the *Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile* web site.

Data sources

A number of data sources have been used by this project. Some are administrative databases used by government departments to monitor the services they deliver. The administrative sources that have been used are from the Departments of Health, Education, and Social Development. Some of the HIV/AIDS data are from the ASSA model, a statistical model developed by the Actuarial Society of South Africa, which uses many different types of data sources to derive estimates of the incidence of HIV and treatment needs. Most of the indicators that are presented are unique to the project, and have been developed by using the *General Household Survey* conducted by Statistics South Africa. These data sets were analysed for the project by Debbie Budlender of the Centre for Actuarial Research at the University of Cape Town. Technical notes and definitions for all the indicators can be found on pages 83 – 86, while information about data sources are displayed on pages 86 – 87.

The theme of this *South African Child Gauge* is children and poverty. The multi-dimensional nature of poverty as it exists in South Africa, and its particular impact on children's access to services, care arrangements, and health status, is evident throughout many of the indicators and rights areas presented in this *Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile* section.

Demography of South Africa's children (pages 67 – 69)

The section on demography provides a useful profile of South Africa's child population. In this section, and this publication as a whole, the population is referred to in the racial terms still customary in South Africa, i.e. 'coloured', 'Indian', 'African' and 'white'. These terms are used for the purposes of measuring and monitoring inequalities that still exist.

The demography section also details the number and distribution of children living in the country, as well as the number of orphans and children living in child-headed households in South Africa. Although many adult deaths – especially of men – are a result of violence, increases in the number of orphans can be understood in the context of the burgeoning HIV/AIDS pandemic. The same explanation applies to the prevalence of child-headed households, though the proportion of children living in these circumstances is small, and such households are often temporary.

Furthermore, the majority of children in South Africa experience severe poverty. Some 66% of children are living in income poverty, which is defined here as children living in households that have less than R1,200 per month to spend on the needs of all their members.

Children's access to social assistance (page 70 – 71)

The impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has made many children more vulnerable and in need of extra care and support – in particular financial support. One way in which the South African government is responding to the needs of children and families is by making social assistance, in the form of cash grants, available. There are three social grants for children, namely the Child Support Grant (CSG), the Care Dependency Grant (CDG), and the Foster Child Grant (FCG).

The CSG is the primary poverty alleviation mechanism for children. To date, some 84% of eligible children are accessing the grant, although a number of children eligible to receive the grant have yet to gain access.

The CDG is available to children with special care needs. It is aimed at children with severe disabilities. In July 2006, over 92,000 children were receiving the CDG.

The FCG is available to parents who look after a child who has been removed from his or her original family and placed

¹ A confidence interval is a statistical term that gives a level of confidence in the accuracy of the data.

in their care by an order of the court. This grant is increasingly being used to provide financial support to children who have been orphaned because of the HIV/AIDS pandemic or other causes. In July 2006, over 350,000 children were receiving a FCG.

These grants assist very poor households to meet the basic needs of their members and contribute towards living expenses. However, many children and families cannot access these grants due to eligibility criteria and administrative requirements.

Children's access to education (pages 72 – 73)

Education is critical for children's development and for employment opportunities later in life. It is encouraging that high attendance rates at educational facilities were reported in the *General Household Survey* 2004 and 2005. However, these figures do not indicate the regularity of children's school attendance. The increase in the learner-to-educator ratio at public schools over the past few years is concerning. Furthermore, many children are travelling long distances or walking for a long time to get to schools – close to one-third (32%) of children of secondary school-age attend schools situated far from their homes.

Child health – the general context and HIV/AIDS (pages 74 – 77)

The health sections present data that shows that South Africa has a high child mortality (death) rate. This reflects the poor socio-economic conditions that children live in, issues related to women's access to antenatal, obstetric, and post-natal care and increasingly the impact of HIV/AIDS. Fifty-nine babies out of every 1,000 born alive die within a year of their birth, and 95 children out of every 1,000 born alive die before they turn five years old. Of those who do not live to their fifth birthday, 40% die as a direct consequence of HIV/AIDS. In the 0 – 5-year age group, 3.6% of children are estimated to be HIV positive in 2006, and some 360,000 children under the age of 18 years are estimated to be living with HIV infection. Estimates from the ASSA model further depict that nearly one-third (30%) of new cases of children who required antiretroviral treatment in 2005 were able to access treatment. Although access to treatment for children seems to be increasing at a rapid rate, much effort is still required to ensure that all children who need treatment are indeed receiving it.

Children's access to water, sanitation and electricity (pages 78 – 79)

There are numerous health and safety risks associated with poor access to water, sanitation and electricity as well as implications for the environment and issues around child labour in collecting water and fire wood. While the data shows that there has been improved access to water, sanitation and electricity in some areas, there are still millions of children without these basic services. In the Eastern Cape province alone, over two million children live without basic sanitation and water on site.

Children's access to housing (pages 80 – 82)

Housing has important implications for children's overall health, safety, privacy and personal space, and has bearing on their access to services. More than 4.8 million children live in overcrowded houses and approximately 2.7 million live in informal dwellings and backyard shacks on the periphery of cities and towns. In addition, more than half of South Africa's children (54%) live in rural areas. A strong racial bias is evident, as only 60% of all African children live in formal housing, while 98% of all white children live in formal housing.

In conclusion

A striking feature in many of these indicators is the great disparities between the provinces. The poorer children live in the poorer and more rural provinces, which face a historical backlog of under-development and consequently struggle with adequate service provisioning in terms of clinics, schools, housing and basic services. Furthermore, in nearly every indicator, the racist legacy of apartheid is evident in the heavy burdens of poverty and inequitable access to assets and resources by the majority of African children.

The *Children Count – Abantwana Babalulekile* data and this publication provide benchmarks against which improvements in children's living conditions can be monitored and serve as useful resources for those tasked with developing policy, laws and programmes that shape the lives of children in South Africa.