



Press release: South Africa's children still live in unequal worlds

CAPE TOWN, 17 OCTOBER 2012: Rising income inequality has serious consequences for children today, and for South Africa's future.

This is one of the key concerns raised in the *South African Child Gauge 2012*, which is released today [eds: Wed, 17 October]. The seventh issue of this annual review of the situation of South Africa's children is published by the Children's Institute (CI), University of Cape Town, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UCT's Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU).

"South Africa's children have equal rights under the Constitution, but the worlds into which they are born and their opportunities in life are very unequal," explains Katharine Hall, senior researcher at the CI. "While child poverty is decreasing, income inequality is rising, and this affects children's survival, development and life trajectories. It also means that high rates of inequality are likely to persist into the next generation."

Hall says reducing inequality in the future requires shifting opportunities for children in the present. This goes beyond tackling poverty, she explains. "As children don't start off on an equal footing, policy-makers need to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to tailor policies and programmes that help close the inequality gap."

Patterns of inequality are quite different for adults and for children, says SALDRU's research associate Ingrid Woolard. The General Household Survey (GHS) 2010 shows that children are more likely than adults to be living in poor households: 41% of children are living in the poorest 20% of households. The *Child Gauge 2012* highlights that particular groups of children experience multiple forms of deprivation – very young children, children with disabilities, poor children and those living in rural areas, especially in the former homelands.

Children living in former homelands remain the most deprived. Large numbers of children are affected, especially in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The GHS shows that nearly half of all children live in the former homeland areas, where there is limited access to services and economic opportunities.

Hall points out that children in rural areas are twice as likely to be living with neither parent than those in urban centres: "Children's care arrangements are fluid, partly because parents seek economic opportunities in urban areas while drawing on the support of family to care for children staying behind."

There are also high levels of inequality within the urban child population. Especially those in informal settlements are exposed to risks associated with city life, such as overcrowded households, crime and a lack of affordable and safe child care facilities.

"A better understanding of where children live, and how they move, will help to target services better and plan for growing child populations in areas of in-migration", according to Hall.

George Laryea-Adjei, the deputy representative of UNICEF in South Africa, flags issues of governance and regional planning: “What are the underlying factors for weak implementation in some sectors? Do they simply lie in the organisational capacity of implementing arms of government, or rather in the design of the country’s intergovernmental arrangements, or perhaps both?”

In his contribution, Trevor Manuel, Minister in the Presidency responsible for the National Planning Commission, describes how the National Development Plan focuses on children. He cites plans to improve nutrition for pregnant women and children under two; extend access to quality health care for mothers, infants and children; provide all children with two years of quality pre-school education; improve the quality of schooling; and build safer schools and communities.

The *Child Gauge 2012* reflects on the potential of such measures, particularly social assistance, early childhood development, education and health care, to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and reduce inequality.

The Child Support Grant, which now reaches more than 11 million children, is associated with increased school attendance, and better nutrition. But Woolard says it is not reaching many children before their first birthday – when nutritional support is most critical – because of difficulties in accessing birth certificates and identity documents.

Investing in the first two years of a child’s life gives children a good start in life and offers good economic returns, according to Linda Biersteker of the Early Learning Resource Unit. “Yet services are failing to reach the very young, those with disabilities, and those in poor households who cannot afford to attend an ECD centre.”

Improving the quality of education, the National Health Insurance and reengineering of the primary health care could also address inequalities. “The vast majority of children rely on the public health system, where resources are thinly stretched, particularly in rural areas”, explains David Sanders of the School for Public Health, University of the Western Cape. Unequal access to health care is striking: only 31% of medical practitioners, 25% of specialists and 46% of professional nurses work in public health.

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The South African Child Gauge 2012 can be downloaded at www.ci.org.za

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