WHERE ARE WE NOW?

South Africa has made significant progress in reducing child poverty. It has a rights-based constitution, excellent laws and policies, and one of the best-developed social assistance systems for children on the continent. An estimated 12.6 million children, through their caregivers, are currently receiving child support grants (child support grant, foster care grant, care and dependency grant – ‘cash’); and basic social services such as health and education are at scale.

Despite these advances, wide socio-economic and gender inequalities, high unemployment and pervasive violence continue to impact negatively on children and households across the country. Nearly two thirds of children live below the poverty line and one fifth of children in the country are stunted. One third of children experience violence during their childhood, be it physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Many children experience repeated and multiple forms of violence, most often by people they are close to and in places where they should be safe – at home, in their communities and in schools. Even for those children who receive social assistance grants, the quality of care and protection services that they can access varies considerably. Residents of rural areas and urban informal settlements are less likely to access the care and protection they require; girls face more difficulties than boys; and very young children, orphans and children with disabilities are often at higher risk.

Families, parents and caregivers play a central role in ensuring the well-being of children and adolescents. They are the first duty bearers with the responsibility to offer identity, care and protection as well as economic security and stability. But the impact of poverty, migration, unemployment, violence and HIV, coupled with high rates of orphanhood, has disrupted traditional family structures and weakened social cohesion. Only one third of children in South Africa live with both of their biological parents. Grandparents, relatives, children and adolescents are frequently obliged to take on parenting roles when they lack the resources, support and skills to offer adequate and loving care. Many children find themselves moving from one caregiver to another, leading to fluid and inconsistent care and attention. Only a limited number of such households currently access valuable parenting support through community child and youth care workers and other social service professionals.

The combination of these factors means that large numbers of disadvantaged children continue to be left behind. Even if their basic material needs are partially met through social assistance grants, the lack of consistent, nurturing care and timely referrals is hindering them from accessing critical education, health and protection services, and jeopardizing them from achieving their full potential.

Integrated Case Management

A structured process to help individual children and families through direct interventions to support and improve social functioning. It involves a holistic assessment of the child, development of a tailored action plan, support to implement the plan and a process of review and adaptation where necessary to ensure that the plan continues to address the child’s needs.

Child Status Index (CSI)

A framework that uses a mobile application to support Integrated Case Management. It includes a simple dashboard to identify the needs of children and track and analyse data regarding:

- Food and nutrition
- Shelter and care
- Protection from violence
- Health (including HIV)
- Psychosocial support
- Education and skills training

Real time data helps to monitor children’s well-being, ensure better care, and refer them to the right services.
WHERE DO WE NEED TO GO?

To ensure the most marginalized children of society survive, thrive and develop to their full potential, requires an integrated package of social and child protection services that prioritizes those most in need, and ensures linkages to care. We must build on what is working, remove access barriers and strengthen the interconnectedness between cash, care and protection systems. By ensuring Integrated Case Management across social service actors and tracking data in real time using the Child Status Index, children’s needs and vulnerabilities will be clearly identified and referrals to critical services will be strengthened. This will ensure that those who receive Cash through government grants, also receive holistic and tailored Care and Protection through family visits and parenting advice from community child and youth care workers and other social service professionals.

At the same time, there is a need to deepen communities’ and families’ commitment and capacity to provide a nurturing and supportive environment for children through interactive engagement and expansion of community support systems and safe spaces, such as Isibindi – which provides holistic family strengthening and child protection support through home visits of child and youth care workers; and Safe Parks – which are safe places for play, recreation and learning with adult interaction and supervision. By leveraging religion, music and sport to promote greater connectedness and create circles of care within communities, South Africa can build resilience, challenge social norms and generate a national movement for social change. This will not only promote better results for millions of children, but also multiply the impact of the individual support delivered, and ensure improved return on the substantial national investments that are already being made in terms of social grants and social services.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

UNICEF is helping Government and partners to link cash, care and protection at national, provincial and community levels. This entails support to concrete initiatives across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention and protection:
Prevention:
- Reduce the exclusion error for the child support grant to ensure all eligible children receive this important social assistance.
- Develop an electronic App, built around the Child Status Index to make case management manageable, and ensure real time data informs prioritization of care and resources across service providers.
- Spearhead a positive communication strategy and campaign to encourage and empower caregivers to foster safe and supportive care environments for children.
- Accelerate cross referral pathways between community care workers, teachers, health workers and justice to ensure children at risk receive a rapid response.

Early Intervention:
- Scale up access to evidence-based family strengthening services, including Isibindi home visits and Safe Parks through Social Compacts that combine efforts and resources of Government, civil society, private sector and the community.
- Promote an integrated case management approach, to ensure that the most at-risk children are targeted and prioritised, and services are appropriately tailored to their vulnerabilities.

Protection:
- Accelerate access to child- and survivor-friendly justice including for children and adults who are victims of sexual offences through the Sexual Offences Courts.
- Strengthen referral, tracking of children and collaboration between early intervention programmes, including child and youth care workers, and statutory child protection services.

Circles of Care: linking cash, care and protection for children in South Africa.
HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Today’s children will determine the future of South Africa. Violence against children undermines their ability to grow into responsible and actively contributing citizens who can create peaceful, non-violent families and communities. In this way, it reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty, inequality and violence, and contributes to poorer economic growth. The Sustainable Development Goals and South Africa’s National Development Plan – Vision 2030 outline clear targets related to the survival, growth, development and well-being of children. Yet the country still has a long way to go, and will only achieve these through collective effort by all sectors of society.

Supporting Government and UNICEF to leverage strategic partnerships to further link cash, care and protection in South Africa represents a tremendous opportunity to help South Africa’s most marginalized children to survive, thrive and reach their full potential. Through new and unique partnerships with Government, the private sector, bilateral donors and civil society, UNICEF builds on the knowledge, expertise and innovation of each to ensure the most effective and efficient use of combined resources. By uniting with UNICEF, you gain a credible and respected partner who can support Government to deliver a comprehensive and results focused strategy that makes a real difference in the lives of children.

CONTACT US

To explore concrete and tailored partnership opportunities, please contact:

Sandra Bisin  
Chief, Communications and Partnerships  
Email: sbisin@unicef.org

Carine Munting  
Partnerships Manager  
Email: cmunting@unicef.org

Mayke Huijbregts  
Chief, Social Policy and Child Protection  
Email: mhuijbregts@unicef.org