The first call for children and women
Poverty in South Africa

One of South Africa’s greatest challenges is breaking the grip of poverty on a large portion of its population. Close to one in two South Africans are poor, with children disproportionately affected. Two-thirds of all South African children live in poverty. Most children living in poverty are found in provinces with the largest number of children – Limpopo, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. These areas are also the least developed of all the provinces in the country.

Poverty is devastating for children. It denies them their human right to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. It also robs them of their right to protection from exploitation, violence and abuse. In addition, poverty constrains children from enjoying their fundamental freedoms, now, and when they grow into adulthood. Unless the cycle is broken, children living in poverty become adults who pass poverty onto the next generation.

The Statistics

South Africans living in poverty 45.2%

Children living in poverty 52.9%

Proportion of poor children who are African 72.5%

Unemployment rate 24.5%

Unemployment rate for young adults 24 years and below 48.1%

Gini coefficient1 0.6


1 The Gini coefficient is a measure of inequality of income or wealth. A value of 0 means complete equality while 1 indicates complete inequality
Children’s vulnerability

Poverty intersects with other causes of vulnerability in South Africa, including the country’s severe AIDS epidemic, high unemployment and the inadequate delivery of basic services in several parts of the country. This creates a web of deprivation for millions of South African families that struggle to provide the basics for children. Child and maternal mortality levels are increasing, and many children living in poverty do not get a quality education.

South Africa has ample resources to improve the quality of life for all its citizens but the poorest municipalities are not able to meet the basic needs of their people. The South African Index of Multiple Deprivation of Children lists 49 of the 284 municipalities where children experience extreme vulnerability. Most municipalities do not have the right expertise to plan, implement and monitor services and are grappling with a massive backlog of service delivery from the past. Moreover, public participation in service provision is weak.

A polarised society

South Africa also has one of the most unequal income distributions in the world. Two economies exist side-by-side, one which is technologically advanced, skilled and prosperous and the other poor, unskilled and largely African. The Gini coefficient of 0.6 shows an unacceptably high level of income inequality. Interestingly, inequality has worsened in spite of higher economic growth in recent years. Closing the gap between the rich and the poor is yet another of South Africa’s challenges.

Reducing poverty

A social safety net to alleviate the worst poverty is implemented through a massive social grants system, a national school feeding programme, a no-fee policy for the poorest schools and free healthcare for pregnant women and young
children. The Child Support Grant, which reached nine million children under the age of 15 in 2009, is one of the government’s key interventions for improving the living standards of children living in poverty.

What UNICEF is doing

Investing resources to help children and women survive and develop to their full potential is, first and foremost, a moral imperative. But investing in children also yields positive benefits to economies and societies by breaking the cycle of poverty, disease and violence, accelerating the spread of knowledge, promoting fundamental freedoms and enhancing the production capacity of the economy.

For UNICEF, some of the greatest investments in children happen ‘behind the scenes’ at the national level. The UNICEF Social Transformation and Strategic Leveraging programme is part of this seemingly invisible yet very important work. It supports the South African government to develop and strengthen policies, budgets and programmes that improve the quality of life for children and women.

Social policy

UNICEF helps to analyse how social and economic policies affect the well-being of children and women. Analytical studies are used to improve the design, implementation and monitoring of child and women-friendly policies. An example is UNICEF’s work on simulating the impact of South Africa’s recession on child poverty and exploring policy instruments that will provide the most mitigating effects.

Tracking public spending

Government priorities are reflected in how it spends on health, education, social welfare, social grants and basic infrastructure. Continuous tracking is required to assess the extent to which these services are prioritised in national, provincial and local government budgets.

UNICEF’s support to expenditure reviews and tracking helps to develop child-friendly budgets which ensure that government funds are properly prioritised as well as progressively distributed to support the most excluded children and families.

An example of UNICEF’s role in the prioritisation of budgets is the groundbreaking study on Public Expenditure Tracking of Early Childhood Development Services in South Africa. This study is expected to contribute to the government’s reform agenda on early childhood development.

Evaluating policies

Part of the search for evidence of what works best for children lies in policy evaluation. In South Africa, UNICEF supports impact
evaluations of major social programmes such as the Child Support Grant. This type of institutional support is vital to scaling up and managing large social programmes that benefit millions of children and women.

**Institutional support for municipalities**

UNICEF is starting a programme to strengthen the capacity of municipalities to provide services for children. The initiative will guide local government in including children’s rights as a key part of their goals, by-laws, programmes and budgets. This will include the right to health, education, water and sanitation, shelter, protection against violence and abuse, as well as children’s right to participate in decision-making on matters that affect their well-being.

**Working with Parliament**

As custodians of the South African Constitution, parliamentarians play a key role in determining how the government invests its resources. UNICEF works with Members of Parliament to improve their awareness, knowledge and capacities so that they are able to pass legislation and exercise oversight over government departments on issues affecting children and women.

**What UNICEF plans to achieve**

Investing in children is sound economic and social policy. Evidence consistently shows that where children and mothers have good health, nutrition and education, they are more likely to pull themselves out of poverty, become productive members of society and leave a positive legacy for the next generation. UNICEF is looking for funding for 2010 and 2011 to continue investing in policies, budgets and programmes that make a tangible difference to the lives of children and women.
If you are interested in supporting the UNICEF Social Transformation & Strategic Leveraging programme, please contact:

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Budgets for children
The context

South Africa’s transformation has brought about remarkable social achievements. Almost all children are enrolled in primary education and a high percentage are immunised against potentially deadly diseases. Nine million children under the age of 15 benefit from the Child Support Grant, a critical lifeline for children living in poverty.

A sound fiscal policy after 1994 enabled the government to increase spending on health, education and the social grants system dramatically. Today, South Africa’s social spending is higher than that of countries at the same level of development. Yet, the quality of services lags behind and the country performs poorly in a number of areas. Almost twice as many women die in pregnancy or childbirth in South Africa than in Namibia. In 2009, the matric pass rate was 60.7 per cent, down by two per centage points from 2008. This raises serious concerns about the effectiveness of the government’s spending.

What is UNICEF doing?

The new Children’s Act provides the basis for government financing of child welfare services, including early childhood development, support for vulnerable children and their families, and foster care and adoption. The lives of poor and marginalised children could be vastly improved if government resources were properly channelled, managed and spent.

UNICEF supports the Government of South Africa to address two budget-related challenges – matching health, education and other social sector outcomes with the scale of investment, and increasing the level of resources for child welfare services.

What has been achieved?

UNICEF provided technical and financial support for a public expenditure tracking study of early childhood development, the first of its kind in South Africa. The study involved tracking financial resources from the point
of allocation to the level of service delivery in communities. The recommendations will assist government on how to reduce inefficiencies and improve the quality of early childhood development services. The study will also form a key part of the policy reform to expand quality early childhood development services in the country.

UNICEF is supporting a full budget review (both state and private sector resources) of child welfare services. The objective is to assess the relative contribution of the government and the private sector in enhancing the provision of child welfare services, the resource shortfall and how this can be bridged.

UNICEF is also planning to support a public expenditure review of key social services. The purpose is to unravel why the relatively huge investments by the state in health, education and other social sectors are not resulting in desired outcomes.

UNICEF is working with partners to establish a Rapid Analysis Mechanism – to analyse the possible effects of economic shifts or key social policies on children within weeks of their announcement. UNICEF’s ongoing work on assessing the impact of the economic recession on child poverty has provided insights into how the Rapid Analysis Mechanism will be set up.

**Going forward**

As an advocate of pro-child budgets, UNICEF needs to continue its work in this critical area. In 2010 and 2011, funding is required to carry out a number of important activities:

- **Public expenditure review of key social sectors.**
- **Budgeting for child welfare services.**
- **Complete the public expenditure tracking study of early childhood development.**
- **Establish a Rapid Analysis Mechanism to track possible effects of policy shifts on children before they are implemented.**
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Child friendly communities
What is a child friendly community?

A child friendly community puts children’s interests at its heart. Children are able to:

- Influence decisions about their community
- Participate in family, community and social life
- Get good healthcare, education and shelter
- Drink clean water and have access to proper sanitation
- Be protected from violence and abuse
- Meet friends and play
- Receive support for their basic needs

The context

Many of South Africa’s municipalities are failing to provide their residents with the quantity and quality of services they need and want. This is happening despite a decentralisation policy, which aims to bring government closer to the people.

Children are most affected by poor service delivery. About seven million South African children live in households with no clean drinking water, 4.8 million in over-crowded homes and 40 per cent live far from a primary health clinic. Children are dying every day of easily preventable diseases and many leave school with poor grades and a bleak future.

The poorest municipalities are the worst off. They inherited the greatest service delivery backlogs from the days of apartheid, and most of their households cannot afford to pay for new services. Municipal workers need to have the right technical and managerial skills to do their jobs properly. There is also a general perception among poor South Africans that the State is too remote, not easily accessible and is not really listening to them.
What is UNICEF doing?

UNICEF is supporting the government to launch the Child Friendly Community Initiative in South Africa. The initiative helps to guide local government in including children’s rights as a key part of their goals, by-laws, programmes and budgets.

What has been achieved?

The Ministry of Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities, in collaboration with UNICEF, consulted a wide range of partners interested in joining the movement in July and August of 2009. A steering committee was set up to take the initiative forward.

Going forward

The Child Friendly Community Initiative plays a strategic role in making local government more accountable to its citizens and in empowering ordinary South Africans to demand and enjoy the services they are entitled to.

UNICEF is working with a range of partners to design and implement the programme, starting with three municipalities in 2010. The aim is to develop a national accreditation system on the basis of which municipalities in all parts of the country will be designated as ‘child friendly’ (or not).

There are four stages to the launch of the initiative:

- Assess the situation and needs of children in selected municipalities, and the local government response to realise children’s rights.
- Develop a South African system of accreditation, including child friendly criteria, assessment tools, guidelines and communication material.
- Pilot the system by training 500 municipal workers and 2,000 young people and community groups in municipal planning and monitoring of child rights.
- Implement a scale up plan to bring the Child Friendly Community Initiative to all municipalities in the country.
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Social protection

unite for children
Social protection

The context

As many as two-thirds of South African children are poor. Black children represent the majority of children living in poverty, having inherited the inequalities of the past. They find themselves living in areas where schools, primary healthcare services, roads and water supply systems have historically been neglected. The poorest municipalities are unable to provide basic social services, a crisis that led to violent protests and riots in townships in 2009.

The government is fighting poverty through its vast and well-resourced social grants programme. Of the 13 million poor South Africans on social grants in 2009, almost nine million were children under the age of 15 whose families received the Child Support Grant. That same year, the foster child grant helped close to half a million foster parents look after orphaned children.

The government spends 12 per cent of its total budget on social grants, making the country proportionally one of world’s biggest spenders on social security. The social grants system has grown from 2.5 million recipients in 1998 to its current level, largely as a result of the extension of the Child Support Grant.

What is UNICEF doing?

As grants continue to reach an ever-increasing number of children, UNICEF is supporting the South African Social Security Agency to improve the effectiveness of the system and to develop other social protection instruments for vulnerable children.

What has been achieved?

UNICEF is supporting the Department of Social Development and the South African Social
The following activities need funding in 2010 and 2011:

- Identification of policy instruments that will complement social grants to accelerate the reduction of child poverty.
- Support for provincial and local governments to design and implement comprehensive social protection strategies that address the multiple causes of child poverty.
- Support to the Department of Social Development and the South African Social Security Agency to improve the administration of social grants.

Security Agency to remove the barriers many families and children still face in accessing the Child Support Grant. This is as a result of a joint research project that reviewed how the Child Support Grant was implemented and the impact it had on different aspects of child welfare. A priority is to make it easier for orphaned children between the ages of birth and two years to benefit from the grant.

UNICEF is also an advocate for the extension of the Child Support Grant to cover all children, a policy that the government has now adopted. The Child Support Grant will be broadened even further to include children up to the age of 18 by 2012.

Another area of UNICEF support is social insurance for children. This is particularly important when thousands of children are losing their parents to AIDS-related diseases. UNICEF is helping to change legislation to make it easier for children as dependants or surviving beneficiaries of their parents’ pension funds, to claim what is rightfully theirs. A review was published in 2008, which is contributing to the reform of the social security system in the country.

**Going forward**

South Africa’s social grant system is one of a kind on the African continent. Its impressive reach demonstrates the country’s commitment to uplifting its citizens from poverty and improving their living conditions. But numbers are not enough. Whether or not the child support and other grants are having their intended effect of helping a child stay in school or protecting a child from abuse is what concerns UNICEF most. UNICEF is committed to continuing its important work in this area.
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