



South African Congress for Early Childhood Development

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**SUBMISSION TO
THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
ON
THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO A COMPREHENSIVE
SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM FOR SOUTH AFRICA**

9 AND 10 JUNE 2003

INTRODUCTION

The South African Congress for Early Childhood Development (SACECD) is a national democratic body for early childhood development in South Africa. The organisation represents the interest of over 6 million young children (0-9 years), 70 000 ECD practitioners, 25 000 ECD sites and the ECD field in general. To date we have regional committees in all nine provinces in South Africa which are formally constituted. We are a Section 21 organisation (that is a not for gain organisation).

The organisation promotes awareness of the needs of young children including those children with special needs. We hold workshops for ECD practitioners and also fund trainers to build the capacity of ECD practitioners. The organisation has

formed partnerships with donors and funders to assist in building ECD sites with equipment and resources that are most needed in very poor communities.

I am the third national vice-chair for the SACECD and am presenting on behalf of the SACECD today.

HOW EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT COULD HELP ALLEVIATE POVERTY

We are very concerned about the effects of poverty on the young child and we therefore support the introduction of a comprehensive social security system for all children in South Africa. We recommend that ECD should be an important part of the comprehensive social security system.

We at SACECD support the recommendations of the Committee of Inquiry, as we have found that poverty adversely affects children, particularly in their early years. Approximately 60% of young children in South Africa grow up in conditions of abject poverty and neglect. Children raised in such poor families are most at risk of infant death, low birth-weight, stunted growth, further their schooling is affected by - poor adjustment, increased repetition or school drop out.

Therefore an early action plan to remedy this should be put in place. Timely and appropriate intervention can reverse the effects of early deprivation and maximise the development of potential. The challenge of the Government is to help break the cycle of poverty by: increasing access to Early Childhood Development programmes, particularly for poor children, and to constantly improve the quality of these programmes, to the benefit of the child.

Early childhood development refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to 9 years of age. Its purpose is to protect the child's rights to develop his/her full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential.

It is a process by which children from birth to at least 9 years of age grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, morally and socially. In simple terms it is a programme for the holistic development of the child.

Access to quality ECD programmes for children in the early stages of their development lays a firm foundation for their future growth economically, thus contributing to the country's economy as a whole. They will eventually become productive citizens of our country, which would help push back the frontiers of poverty and expand access to a better life for all by improving growth and development. This would ensure that the health of our economy is sound and inflation rates are kept as low as possible. Building on progress made thus far

and targeting opportunities and assistance to those whose livelihoods are most vulnerable in order to eradicate inequalities, would ensure that economic growth is sustained into the future.

The bottom line is to sensitise everyone to understand the importance of ECD. To date there is no outright commitment by government to address the issues of this very grey area through the Departments of Education and Social Development. Noting the contribution that ECD could make to poverty alleviation in the medium to long term, government can no longer afford to drag its feet. Research has shown that only 1% of the country's children have access to ECD programmes.

We therefore would have liked to have seen the Report deal with ECD in more detail. However, this could be remedied by inclusion of ECD in the next stage of the policy process.

COMMENT ON THE REPORT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

We support the recommendation that there should be a package of grants and services to provide comprehensive social security. Poverty is not only the lack of money or income but also the lack of access to all facets of life:

- EDUCATION
- HEALTH
- NUTRITION
- SANITATION
- HOUSING
- RECREATION
- CLEAN WATER
- ELECTRICITY
- RELIGION
- AFFORDABLE TRANSPORT

The increase added to the spending plans over the next 3 years by Government I agree would boost social services, infrastructure investment and local development programmes. But the monitoring of these funds is imperative. Government must increase spending on policy priorities that have the potential to substantially change the lives of South Africans for the better. This includes extending social grants to more people, fighting crime, more money for health, education, water, electricity and other basic household services.

Improvement to the quality of service delivery in schools, hospitals and government administration should receive total commitment by the Government at all levels. Substantial funding from Government should be directed towards fighting the

pandemic HIV/AIDS which is presently ravaging our country and impacting on the lives of thousands of South Africans contributing drastically to poverty. Even in this instance, Honourable Members, children pay the biggest price. There are many child-headed households due to the impact of HIV/AIDS.

The SACECD supports a number of the detailed recommendations made by the Committee of Inquiry, specifically the following:

Child Support Grant - the extension to all children up to 18 years, to assist the child in acquiring early education, primary education and completing education.

Care Dependency Grant (CDG) - support the extension to children with moderate disabilities and chronic illnesses, including HIV/AIDS.

Free education for all children, including ECD as a part of the package.

Basic Income Grant - to reduce the suffering of families from hunger and lack of basic needs.

SACECD support these recommendations for the following reasons:

Extension of the Child Support Grant (CSG)

So that parents would not have to make choices they currently have to make between education and food for the family, as the extra income would relieve some of the costs of feeding their child while their education is free.

Extension of the Care Dependency Grant (CDG)

It is vital that children with special needs and disabilities have their needs met. Their needs demand more from a family's income, than may be available, therefore they should be able to access the CDG. We believe that children with moderate disabilities should also be entitled to receive the grant. The assessment process for the CDG should incorporate the child's social, economic, environmental etc. needs.

IMPROVING GRANTS DELIVERY

There is a distinction between provinces as to how they implement policies to address poverty and which people are targeted by those policies or programmes. We believe that handing the administration of social grants by all provinces back to the National Government will make the grants more accessible to the poor.

The assignment of the administration of social grants to the Provinces is unlawful and unconstitutional. The National Department agrees that it is so. The assignment of the administration of social grants to the different Provinces created a patchwork of different application processes, benefits, obstacles & forms; resulting in utter chaos. The assignment is the subject of legal challenge before the High Court in Pretoria in the case of *Samuel Mashavha vs the President of the Republic of South Africa*.

Honourable Members, it is a travesty of justice to allow the administration of the Social Grants to be continued by the Provinces and at the same time declare it illegal. I urge the Government to correct the situation.

NEED TO IMPROVE ECD

There is an urgent need to extend the recommendations of the Taylor Committee in as far the provision of a comprehensive social security system is concerned to cover ECD as well. The recommendations are currently vague and ambiguous in how the proposed benefits will reach the ECD sites and ultimately benefit the child.

According to the White Paper on ECD in South Africa, the following are the key areas requiring attention with regards to the provision of ECD:

- The extent of ECD provision
- Inequality in existing ECD provision
- Inequality of access to ECD services
- Variable quality of ECD services
- Incomplete, fragmented legislative and policy framework for ECD that results in un-coordinated service delivery

The extent of ECD provision

The ECD services don't reach every child in the country due to lack of infrastructure (buildings, water, sanitation), and the poverty of parents. If there was uniformity of subsidies and grants, children would get the benefits of ECD.

On the other hand, poverty is affecting poor children who are even attending ECD centres. This has to be dealt with immediately by providing grants for all and extending the nutrition program to children in community sites to address the impact of poverty on children, based on observations made by myself:

- Inability to concentrate
- Inactive
- Non-participation in group activities

No constructive contribution or any contribution at all during discussions
Poor reflexes
Lethargic movement
Sleepiness
Vague expression
Lacking in cleanliness
Dis-orderly and haphazard, compared to children from well off communities.

Inequality in existing ECD provision and access to ECD services

At present there are stark contradictions and inequalities in the manner in which ECD provision takes place. On the one hand there are overly provided for and equipped centres. On the other, there are centres that lack even the most basic of requirements necessary for an environment conducive to the early development of a child.

Variable quality of ECD services

There is an urgent need for a uniform standard of provision of ECD. This would ensure that each child's right to holistic development is made real. International best practice in this regard already exists, and this Committee can draw from this to assist in the development of our own standards. In addition, the Department of Education in South Africa has already conducted an ECD survey and audit. Even though there are concrete recommendations that have come out of the latter process, there is still no clarity as to where or who takes responsibility for the under five-year olds.

Incomplete, fragmented legislative and policy framework for ECD that results in un-coordinated service delivery

We would also like to recommend that a system of subsidies be provided on a "per-site" basis. The introduction of this system will have to entail revised criteria for qualification. The present criterion is problematic in that it is too cumbersome, with the result that the poorest of the poor are usually unable to satisfy the requirements. The recommended system will ensure that all children have access to quality ECD provision. Furthermore, these centres, once properly resourced, will provide for the care, protection and educational stimulation by qualified and trained practitioners for children who would have otherwise been victims of crime and abuse. This, in addition, will ensure that parents have peace of mind and can take their rightful place in the workplace.

We are concerned about those children who are under 6 years of age and should be attending an early childhood development centre but because of poverty they

are restricted from gaining access to these centres. Parents cannot afford to pay a monthly fee to these ECD sites and would rather send the young child to a formal school even though the child is not yet school-ready, which is detrimental to the child's development. The allocation of a standard subsidy from government to these sites in order to provide for basic services and early education, would go a long way to supporting the early development of children.

CONCLUSION

There is no quick fix to the present situation of poverty in this country when one considers the magnitude and the extent to which poverty was allowed to span. The figures released by the Committee of Inquiry into the Social Security System of South Africa is alarming. It recorded that between 45%-55% of our population live in poverty. This in actual figures translates into 20 - 28 million people living in poverty.

To add to these figures noted by the Committee of Inquiry in 2001 - 37% of working age adults did not have jobs. The problem of unemployment in South Africa is massive and increasing at an alarming rate.

I firmly believe that if the future leaders and citizens of our country, who are our children, are nurtured and groomed into becoming productive people, poverty will eventually phase away. This is a long term vision.

The starting point of the long term vision is none other than ECD, for knowledge is power.

In conclusion I thank the Portfolio Committee for allowing me this invaluable opportunity to make a presentation on behalf of the South African Congress for Early Childhood Development. Lets us build communities through partnership.

Hazel Jeer-Jodhun
National Vice-Chairperson

The following are the millennium development goals, to be realised in 2015, by all 189 United Nations member states. They have pledged to:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality & empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases
- Improve maternal health
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development.

All of the above are crucial for the development of an economy.

Honourable Members, the entire world is focusing on issues affecting children. We need to join the International community in this movement. I make the most humble appeal to Government and all organisations working with children to prioritise the importance of ECD. For ECD has been identified as the bedrock for lifelong learning and the starting point of human resource development strategy. I also urge you to take cognisance of the information and facts I stated earlier in my presentation.