

Foreword

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Universities have a critical role in defending democracy and supporting a culture of human rights. Increasingly universities around the world are connecting research and other academic work to the public good through engagement with a range of external constituencies around various kinds of development needs. The work of the Children's Institute is an example of how research and evidence-based advocacy can contribute to this endeavour.

On 1 December 2005, the Children's Institute launched South Africa's first annual review of the situation of the country's children. The *South African Child Gauge*, now in its fourth year of publication, has gained a reputation as an invaluable resource that monitors the country's progress in realising children's constitutional rights. The *Child Gauge* illustrates the situation of children with numbers and policy and legal analysis, but also tells stories of their lives and circumstances, with special emphasis on children in the context of poverty and HIV/AIDS. It is intentionally designed to make academic research and analysis useful and accessible to a wide range of readers, in government and civil society, as a basis for improved policy and practice towards full realisation of children's constitutional rights.

This issue of the *South African Child Gauge* focuses on the right to education, in particular on meaningful access to basic

education. The issue goes to press on the heels of President Zuma's announcement of two ministries of education, namely, a Ministry of Basic Education and a Ministry of Higher Education. A critical question is how the new structures will address the failures of South Africa's public school system.

Problems in the public school system range from curriculum design to assessment, number and quality of school teachers, training and quality of principals, infrastructure, security, discipline, career paths, management structures, resources, fee policies and much more. Impediments to meaningful education lie not only within the schooling system but also in school culture and in the multiple conditions of poverty, disease and violence under which many children live in South Africa. The *South African Child Gauge 2008/2009* is a collaborative effort on the part of the Children's Institute and invited contributors to present an analysis of some of these problems and to suggest possible solutions.

In her foreword to the first issue, Mrs Graça Machel commended the Children's Institute for promising to produce a new issue of the *Child Gauge* every year. At UCT we can be proud that this promise continues to be fulfilled and that the Children's Institute continues to play a leading role in promoting children's rights and well-being.