

Reflections

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South Africa's Constitution outlines government's obligation to protect and promote the rights of the child, and these rights are further strengthened by enabling legislation and policy frameworks.

Realising the rights of children is not only fundamental for their development and well-being, it is pivotal in achieving inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. The primary responsibility to provide for the well-being of the child rests with the family and government plays a supportive role to protect such a child against the risk of falling into abject poverty. Social protection has the potential to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

South Africa has often been described as having one of the best social assistance programmes globally. The introduction of the Child Support Grant (CSG) in 1998 was a major step towards extending this right to every poor child living in our country. Since the CSG was introduced, it has consistently expanded its scope, and by 2012 all children whose caregivers met the income threshold became eligible for the grant. Currently we have just over 28% of the country's population – or 16 million children, people living with disabilities and the elderly – receiving social grants at an annual cost of R140 billion, which is equivalent to 3.2% of South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP).

There is strong evidence that South Africa's social grants are well targeted and account for a substantial share of the income of poor households. Grants are associated with a greater share of household expenditure on food and hence improved nutrition, education and health status of young children. Despite the many positive impacts that the programme has delivered over the years, there are still a significant number of critics who argue that the programme is fiscally unsustainable and, at worst, that the



programme creates a culture of dependency amongst recipients.

It is important to recognise that any fiscal system has to strike a balance between fiscal and political sustainability. South Africa's fiscal system can thus not only be judged on its fiscal outcomes, but also on its constitutional obligation to further the progressive realisation of socio-economic rights, especially in the case of children, persons living with disabilities and the elderly. The system has to deliver on both of these outcomes, giving tangible expression to the transformative vision of the country's Constitution.

It was not easy expanding the programme over the years to where it currently is today, and this was only possible due to political

will and active lobbying from civil society. Today the programme has matured and take-up rates have begun to level off to the point where we are starting to see a decline in the cost of the programme relative to GDP.

As government, we are also determined to expand social security as well as provide social services for children. The Children's Act and Social Assistance Act set out a range of provisions and services relating to the care and protection of children. We are proud of the progress made, but more work lies ahead. My ministry is, in particular, committed to working with other ministers, departments and partners in ensuring that all eligible children receive government support, that violence against children is eradicated, that children in rural areas receive the same access to resources as those in urban areas, that children living with disabilities experience a society that values and respects their rights, and that all children – no matter where they are born – have the chance to achieve their full potential.