



A C E S S

# Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security

## CHILDHOOD POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA NOVEMBER 2002

**Poverty is the "inability of individuals, households or communities to command sufficient resources to satisfy a socially acceptable minimum standard of living"<sup>1</sup>**

However, poverty is more than just insufficient income. It also includes a lack of opportunities, lack of access to assets and credit, as well as social exclusion. Poverty is complex, multi-faceted and fluctuates in depth and duration.

### THE EXTENT OF POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA:-

The *Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive Social Security System for South Africa* found that between 45 and 55% of all South Africans live in poverty, depending on the poverty measure used.<sup>2</sup> Statistics South Africa calculated that 60.8% of all persons in South Africa are living on less than R250 each per month, based on the Census 1996 data.<sup>3</sup>

In 2001, unemployment rates were as high as 37%.<sup>4</sup> In 2002, COSATU estimated the inflation rate to be 10,2%, which has resulted in spiraling food prices. Poverty, unemployment and inflation are steadily increasing, however the same cannot be said of social services spending to date. While social services spending increased from 58% of GDP in 95/96 to 61% of the GDP in 99/2000, when you adjust for inflation, the spending on health, education, welfare and social security spending has gone down in 99/2000.

### THE EXTENT OF CHILD POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA<sup>5</sup>:-

**TABLE 1: Summary Of Child Poverty Analyses**

Analysis based on OHS 1999 dataset	Using Relative Poverty Measure of Lowest two Quintiles in 1999 terms	Using Absolute Poverty Measure of R490 in 2002 terms	Using Absolute Poverty Measure of R245 in 2002 terms ( <i>ultra-poor</i> )
% of 0-17yr olds living in poverty	59.2%	75%	57%
No. of 0-17yr olds living in poverty	10.5million	14.3million	11million
% of 0-6yr olds living in poverty	59.3%	75%	57%
No. of 0-6yr olds living in poverty	3.8million	5.2million	3.9million

Source: Cassiem & Streak (2001: 20-23<sup>6</sup>) & Streak (2002).

<sup>1</sup> Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive Social Security System. 2002. *"Transforming the present, Protecting the Future: Consolidated Report"*. p15.

<sup>2</sup> Differing measures of poverty i.e relative or absolute, household or per capita, varying poverty lines, create differing rates of poverty.

<sup>3</sup> STATS SA & World Bank. 2001. *Measuring Poverty in South Africa*. The single income question used in the census 1996 did not capture information regarding other sources of income for households, and thus produced higher percentages of poverty.

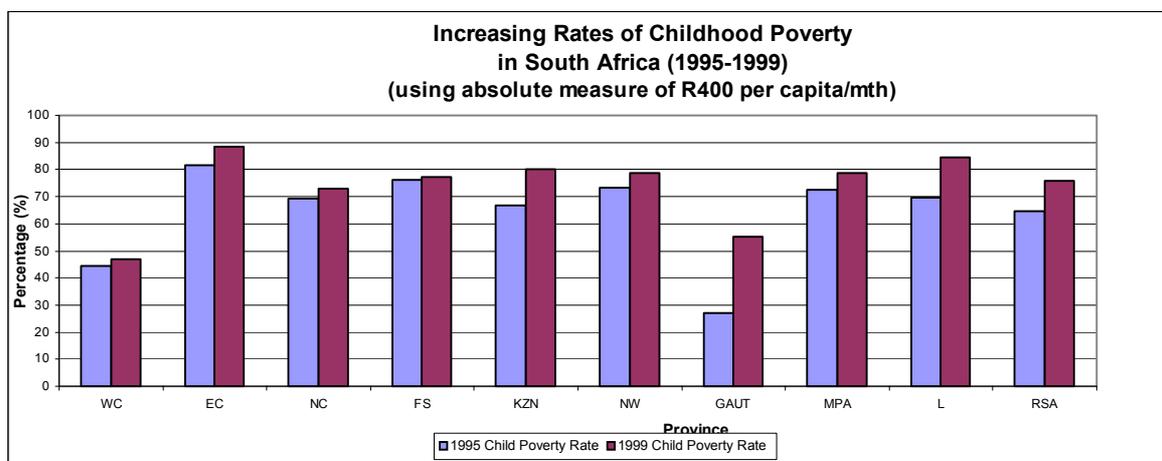
<sup>4</sup> May 2000. Committee of Inquiry. 2002:20.

<sup>5</sup> For full details of poverty analyses, refer to: Guthrie T. 2002. *"Childhood Poverty In South Africa: a Short Summary Of Available Evidence"*. Children's Institute, UCT. Prepared for ACCESS.

**Child poverty appears to be increasing.** The analysis of the October Household Survey data (1995 & 1999) by Ingrid Woodard for IDASA shows that child poverty rates have increased. Between 1995 and 1999 the rate of child poverty in South Africa (on a poverty line of R400.00 / month per capita) increased from 64.7% to 75.8%, and the rate of children in *dire* poverty (calculated on a poverty line of R200.00 / month per capita) increased by 19.2%, from 38.9% to 58.1%.

In 2002, it is estimated that 11 million children (between the ages of 0-18) are living in dire poverty in South Africa on less than R 200 per capita per month (R245 in 2002 real terms), and therefore living on less than half the minimal R400 per capita per month required to meet their basic needs<sup>7</sup>, and 14.3 million children are living in poverty on less than R400 per capita per month (R490 in 2002 terms). Only 15% of these 14.3 million children receive the Child Support Grant.

***“It is estimated that in 2002 about 11 million children under 18 years in South Africa are living on less than R200 per month and hence are desperately in need of income support”<sup>8</sup>***



Source: Guthrie 2002. Prepared from analysis of OHS conducted by Woolard reported in Streak 2002.

### **THE CAUSES OF THE INCREASING RATE OF CHILD POVERTY:-**

The causes of poverty are numerous and diverse. The increasing child poverty rates reported above are partly attributable to different data collection techniques in the OHS 1999 which did not capture other sources of income and therefore over-estimated poverty rates. However the increasing rates may also be attributable to: increasing unemployment and the impact of HIV/AIDS on breadwinners in the households. Both of these factors are continuing to increase, which also likely means future increases in the rates of child poverty in South Africa.

### **CHILDREN LIVING WITH POVERTY:-**

For the children who make up these statistics, these numbers translate into extreme hardship and real suffering. In their own words, poverty means:-

*“...the biggest problem is food. Sometimes we end up not getting any food at home... The other problem is to have school shoes.” (Boy, 15, Limpopo)*

<sup>6</sup> Cassiem S, Streak J. “Budgeting for Child Socio-Economic Rights: Government’s Obligations and the Child’s Right to Social Security and Education”.2001. IDASA.

<sup>7</sup> IDASA did not attempt to estimate the minimum level of income needed to provide a decent standard of living for children to find the poverty line. The Committee of Inquiry recommended the amount of R400 per capita as a useful poverty line for South Africa (Col 2002:62). The amount of R200/month per capita was chosen to indicate those children in dire poverty i.e. who are *ultra-poor*.

<sup>8</sup> Streak J. 2002. *Child Poverty Monitor*. No.1. IDASA.

*"We need water. We get clean water once a month if the .... water ever comes." (Boy, 17)*

*"I do not have parents. They are chasing us away where we are staying... we do not have money for food or .... for rent." (Girl, 10)*

### **POVERTY, AND IT'S REAL EFFECT ON CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING:-**

The high level of child poverty can be seen in the following harsh facts:-

- 21.6% of children between 0-9 years suffer from starving, 10% are underweight and 4% are wasted<sup>9</sup>
- The infant mortality rate is 49 per 1000 (average for SA)<sup>10</sup>
- Most children use pit latrines for toilets<sup>11</sup>
- 24% of schools have no water in walking distance, an average one toilet per 20 learners, and 11.7% do not have any sanitation at all.<sup>12</sup>

### **LEGAL OBLIGATIONS:-**

Children living in poverty are being denied their basic and fundamental Constitutionally guaranteed rights to *"basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services, and social services"* (S28(1)), and their *"right to a standard of living adequate for his/her development"*, as provided for in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child ratified by South Africa in 1995.

To meet these obligations; the government must implement a comprehensive social security system which prioritizes poor children through, among other things:-

- Extending the Child Support Grant to all children below the age of 18, and removing the means-test;
- Improving access to free basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity;
- Providing free and good quality primary health care;
- Ensuring access to subsidized education and school uniforms;
- Ensuring access to adequate and affordable public transport;
- Improving the management of, and extending the primary school nutrition programme to grade R and secondary schools; and
- Introducing a Basic Income Grant for everyone.

**Drafted by Patricia Martin and Solange Rosa (ACCESS), based on a paper prepared by Teresa Guthrie (Children's Institute, UCT).<sup>13</sup> Thanks to Judith Streak and Shaamela Cassiem of IDASA for their permission to use their data.**

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<sup>9</sup> National Food Consumption Survey, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Shung King M et al. 2002. *Child Health in the South African Health Review* 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics South Africa (SSA). 1999. October Household Survey 1996. (Statistical Release P0317). Pretoria.

<sup>12</sup> School Register of Needs 1997 – quoted in *"State of the Nation's Children Report"* 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Guthrie T. 2002. Children's Institute, UCT

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