

INTRODUCTION

INHERITING POVERTY?

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The message this book has to impart is simple and self-evident, but bears saying nevertheless; policy decisions which reduce poverty and unemployment will enable South Africans to meet the obligations to children contained in the Constitution's Bill of Rights as well as in international conventions like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which have been ratified by South Africa. The reverse is equally persuasive – policy decisions which allow general poverty to continue and which do not restructure the economy to provide jobs will have a devastating impact on this generation of children – as children, and almost inevitably as adults as well, they will inherit poverty.

IDASA, the Children's Institute of the University of Cape Town and Save the Children Sweden held a one-day seminar on 14 October 2005 to consider the interface between the wellbeing of children and unemployment in South Africa. The intention was to provoke a conversation about the impact of a fundamental economic question – the availability and the creation of jobs – on the achievement of a national imperative – the rights and wellbeing of the children of South Africa.

In this book, one of the contributors, Deborah Ewing, quotes the words of a child living in a shelter in Cape Town who was interviewed during the preliminary research commissioned for the seminar:

*"Dear Mr President,
I am Lettie. I am 14 years old. I wrote this letter to you, as we are children we ask you to help us to stay with our family. Help the children on the street, give them enough care and love. Can you please give our family money and give them jobs so that they can feed us enough food.
Yours faithfully,
Lettie."*

In this letter are encapsulated the concerns of the seminar and the approach that it took. The participants, supported by this initial research and by the general approach of the organisers, took a child's eye view of the larger world of South Africa and asked some critical questions – how do the economic policy debates impact on them? To what extent are the consequences of these debates making a difference to those who are neither part of the debate nor the primary beneficiaries of these policies?

Their tentative conclusions confirm the insights of young Lettie – that while individual children need a safety net, the best option for children would be a family with an income and jobs.

This publication, comprising some papers from the 2005 seminar and later additions reflecting on its outcomes, describes the issues and notes some of the legislation and programmes that have been established to meet the needs, achieve the rights, and provide what the children of South Africa deserve. Not all the papers given at the conference are drawn together here. They can be found on the websites of the organising partners, IDASA and the Children's Institute, along with the summary report of the seminar itself.

Present at the seminar were participants from government departments, academic institutions, and non-governmental organisations of a research bent and those more directly involved in advocacy. The papers gathered here reflect that diversity – and

gain from it. Insiders' views enable the reader to discover the extensive obligations under which the state labours, the plans it has made to meet these obligations and some of the constraints it faces as it attempts to implement these plans. Some of the constraints are environmental, some are imposed by decisions about policy and some are apparently more mundane – finance, administration, communication and inter-governmental complexities: the normal challenges facing any government.

At the same time, sympathetic but critical outsiders focus correctly on the mismatch between intentions and outcomes and dig deeper into whether the policies adopted are capable of achieving the goals set out or are tainted by internal contradictions or inaccurate assessments of the context in which they are meant to function.

A conversation of this nature could be fraught with tension and defensiveness, but none of that is in evidence here. I think there are a number of reasons for this inclusiveness, all of which provide lessons for other engagements of a similar nature.

First, there is the intense focus on the problem itself – millions of children continue to live in poverty despite consistent economic growth in South Africa since 1994. And that poverty is having immediate consequences as well as laying down a particular foundation for the future which may itself be inimical to sustainable peace and prosperity. Then there is the agreed rights-based framework created by the South African Constitution, which enables a principled discussion based in part on agreed outcomes, if not agreed ways of reaching those outcomes. Finally, there is a community of people who have engaged with one another over time, whether through collaborative work, history, advocacy or dialogues of this nature. In particular, the development of legislation such as the Children's Act, because of the pre-determined requirements of public participation, force social actors to engage with one another in the space provided by Parliament, which is a locus of our representative and participatory democracy.

The first chapter plunges the reader directly into the research question addressed at the seminar. What do we know, if anything, about the relationship between employment and the wellbeing of children? As Debbie Budlender concludes, the "presence of employed adults in a household is likely to improve the wellbeing of children". From her initial analysis it is clear that the level of wellbeing will differ according to whether these adults are male or female, and depending on the geographic and class position of the household, the size of the household and the type of employment – so much is obvious. She asks what the policy implications of her initial findings might be, and in the seminar it became clear that some participants thought she may be overly optimistic given the definitions of employment and unemployment she chose to adopt and the immediate availability of data. The pessimism is about whether children benefit enough from living in families where income levels are low, even if some form of employment is present. It does not really undermine the finding that there is an important relationship between employed parents and caregivers and the wellbeing of the children in their immediate care.

The same point is made by Deborah Ewing. Children understand that their life chances are enhanced by living in a household with employed adults as opposed to being waifs and strays or living in households without employment. A number of the chapters tackle the issue of child labour, invariably more likely in such income-poor households, and seek to understand how to implement the Child Labour Action Programme in a context within which economic circumstances demand survival strategies from so many – adults as well as children. Katerina Nicolaou and

Monet Durieux provide a broad framework for this debate in their chapter on developing a poverty strategy. Charles Meth summarises the challenge – which underlies both this book and the seminar:

South Africa is committed to the modest goals of halving poverty and unemployment (poverty's main cause) by 2014. So large are the numbers of poor and unemployed that even if these goals are attained...a very large number of people in both predicaments will remain....It is clear that for children's rights to be met, a minimum condition is that their caregivers be raised out of the poverty which prevents millions of them from discharging their responsibilities.

He proposes a much greater emphasis on advocacy around the national budget and on social protection (where the majority of effort is expended) and social assistance (which receives less attention and where the impetus for a Basic Income Grant seems to have foundered, although this may now once again be on the agenda as it should be).

Mario Claasen concludes the book with a classic budget analysis which emphasises the value of the approach Meth suggests for children's advocates. It uncovers a variety of capacity issues and provokes a discussion about provincial equity, internal departmental challenges and social partnerships for delivery of services.

Embedded in this book, inevitably, is the spectre of HIV and AIDS which exacerbates poverty and unemployment. Christele Tiki, and Rachel Bray and Rene Brandt tackle this head on, the former looking at policy and Bray and Brandt offering some remarkably counter-intuitive results from an ethnographic perspective burrowing down to the day-to-day lives of a group of adults caring for children in the midst of the epidemic.

Can we make a difference to the wellbeing of children directly through the social interventions in social protection and social assistance? Or can we make a more fundamental difference through an indirect concentration on particular interventions in macro-economic policy and state administration? This debate was addressed at the seminar and should continue with the publication of this book. In its report on the seminar, IDASA's Children's Budget Unit and the Children's Institute of UCT summarised the issues:

The point was made that what is really at issue here is trying to examine the trade-offs South Africa has made on the macro-economic front. In the context of this seminar, the real question is not about economic growth per se, but about the implications of pursuing economic growth in the way we are – and what this means for children who are poor right now.

On the one hand it was suggested that the best thing to do for poor children right now may well be to chase economic growth. This was countered, on the other hand, by highlighting the rights of children, framed in the Constitution, which cannot be traded off now for possible benefit later. It was also noted that it was misleading to pose the challenge of economic growth in terms of short-term sacrifices in exchange for longer-term gain. Current poverty, unemployment and, by implication, low demand were identified as the real obstacles to economic growth.

The report proposed that discussion should take place on "what could be done, with the resources already available for public spending in South Africa, to produce better outcomes for children right now and in the longer-term". The seminar raised ques-

tions and ideas around macro, meso and micro solutions – from whether a Basic Income Grant would work, through the thresholds to escape from poverty such as number of years of schooling, down to community-based investments in safety, recreation or public transport.

All these remained open questions, but what was clear was that an agenda had to be established which linked the wellbeing of children directly with the larger economic debates which take place in South Africa. The seminar report lists an extensive series of research questions, and these are worth reproducing here, in the raw state in which they were recorded at the time, because they point the way to a future conversation that will, indeed must, still take place.

- How do we maximise the impact of policies directed at children and improve inter-sectoral collaboration?
- Which coordinating activities amongst government spheres, sectors and departments – and between government, the private sector and civil society – are the most important?
- What is an "effective partnership"? What forms should public-private partnerships and public-civil society partnerships take?
- How best do we support the Office on the Rights of the Child (in the Presidency) to strengthen its impact on the advancement of child rights?
- Do children's socioeconomic rights in section 28 of the Constitution call for setting out norms and standards? How much progress have we made in this regard?
- What should a coordinated poverty alleviation strategy look like? How best do we get a coordinated poverty alleviation strategy onto the government's agenda?
- How do we involve children and their caregivers directly in identifying, developing, implementing and evaluating anti-poverty strategies? How may the European Union's children's commissioners be able to assist in this regard?
- Which countries have effectively solved poverty and how? Why was it possible? Does globalisation prevent this in the future?
- What is the relationship between poverty and inequality?
- What are the dynamics of poverty? What are the thresholds involved in "getting out of poverty"? Does getting out of poverty mean joining the middle class? Is there an affordable way to solve poverty?
- Are children in rural areas worse off than those in peri-urban areas? And if so, how long will this continue?
- How well are we matching ethnographic data with quantitative data?
- How do we measure youth employability in peri-urban and rural areas?
- How can we better understand the dynamics of children-in-communities so as to strengthen their resilience and capacity within the communities in which they live?
- What is the impact on children when their parents do not have access to comprehensive HIV/AIDS treatment?
- What is the impact of household indebtedness on children's wellbeing?
- What mechanisms do communities currently have to enhance their effectiveness, and how do we strengthen them? How can we deliver services to communities in a way that enhances their capacity?
- Why do we not have more philanthropy?
- What success stories are there in South Africa (especially in low per capita parts of the country) in the areas of employment-creation, improving child outcomes, crime reduction, and so forth? Which of these success stories provide sustainable models for intervention?
- Can we identify or develop implementation strategies where the resources of a community remain in that community?

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- How can poverty alleviation strategies take into consideration the fluid nature of households and migration patterns?
- What are the gender implications of directing investment in job-creation specifically to Early Childhood Development (ECD) and other social services?
 - What models for the delivery of ECD are most likely to help reduce poverty and create employment?
 - What is the best way to finance ECD?
 - What is the best way to implement ECD for the 0-5 age bracket?
- Enforcing government's child labour strategy will have the immediate impact of reducing the income of the households in question. What are the implications of this for child poverty and development?
- How do we develop a mechanism to coordinate assistance and referral to deal with this impact?
- Questions about orphans:
 - How are community resources best mobilised in relation to orphans?
 - How do we best prevent children from being orphaned?
 - How do we best care for orphans?
 - What kinds of partnership between the state and communities are needed?
 - What is/should be the role of the not-for-profit sector in relation to orphaned children?

The rawness of these questions underlines their preliminary nature. It may also underline the urgency with which a number of them should be addressed. This book has been published to act as a reminder of these questions.

As importantly, it is also a reminder that the great economic debates of the day – and the policies that particular answers lead to – have implications for the most vulnerable in our society, the children who depend on adults in one form or another for their wellbeing no matter how resourceful and strong they may be. The answers that we give will determine not only how our children live now, but how our society lives tomorrow when these children become adults. Are we bequeathing them further poverty, or are we doing what is needed to ensure that they grow up free from these burdens?

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