



Call for national leadership of children's rights as a national development priority in 2021 and beyond

Joint summary statement by the South African National Child Rights Coalition (SANCRIC) and the South African Civil Society Coalition for Women's, Adolescents' and Children's Health (SACSoWACH)

9 February 2021

The evidence and law are clear: to secure long-term, inclusive, sustainable development requires that every child, especially the chronically marginalised, develop to their full potential. This requires the realisation of their rights to health, nutrition, responsive parenting, protection from harm, education (from birth), and social protection. Realising only one or some of these rights for only some children is not enough to build South Africa's human capital to sustain inclusive social and economic development.

It is therefore critical that the President and Premiers use their upcoming State of the Nation Address (SONA) and State of the Province Addresses (SOPAs) to identify and commit to making children's rights a national rights-based development priority. They should display visible and transformational leadership by committing to making the realisation of children's rights to survive and to develop to their full potential a national priority that must be actioned by all organs of state. This commitment must then be operationalised in the national and provincial budgets, line department's annual performance plans and budgets, and the progressive monitoring of and accountability to Parliament, chapter nine institutions and civil society.

As South Africa moves into 2021, the country's focus must be to minimise the consequences of COVID-19 and to ensure we achieve our ongoing goal of eliminating poverty and inequality. On this there is consensus. Where the country lacks consensus and adequately visible, high-level national leadership is on just how important children's rights are to secure these outcomes.

South Africa's national recovery and development plan does not currently adequately identify children's wellbeing and development as central to the country's recovery and sustained, inclusive development. It also does not create an explicit government-wide duty to prioritise and mainstream children's rights in all planning processes.

In the absence of effective, visible leadership and mandatory child-centred governance there is little prospect of breaking the inter-generational poverty trap identified in the President's last three SONAs as the biggest challenge facing the country. In the absence of the required leadership, the majority of our children are at risk of remaining trapped in poverty and becoming the heads of the next generation of poor households. In its absence, South Africa is at risk of failing to achieve its development goals and at risk of failing to meet its child rights treaty obligations.

High level political leadership is required to change this inevitable trajectory. The President and Premiers must make children's development an explicit national priority to be realised through the adoption of a national child rights governance system by every organ of state.

Covid 19 has weakened the capacity of already vulnerable families to provide children with the care they need. Evidence clearly indicates that:



1. 3 million jobs were lost between February and April 2020, with bounce-back being low in households caring for the majority of children in South Africa.
2. In June 2020 it was found that 3.4 million women were precluded from economic activity due to child care.
3. The closure of schools deepened education inequality with children losing an estimated 40% of the teaching year in 2020. Poor children were deeply affected.
4. A whole cohort of children lost crucial early childhood education. In 2020 only 13% of children attended ECD programmes – the lowest figure in 18 years.
5. Hunger and food insecurity increased to compound already alarming malnutrition statistics.
6. The health system's diversion of resources to COVID 19 impacted hugely on children's access to essential preventative and health promoting services.
7. Child protection services were already under strain because of our weak systems. This deepened during COVID.
8. Children with disabilities continue to fall further through the cracks.

Government is, now more than ever, duty-bound to meet its obligations and provide support to overcome the challenges preventing children receiving the nurturing care needed to secure their optimal and equal development. Government must, as a matter of urgency, adopt a system of child-centred governance. That is to say, a coherent, child-centred approach to governance that guarantees that children's developmentally critical rights are advanced in every decision made by every organ of state.

Changing South Africa's long-term development prospects requires the clear prioritisation of children's rights under the leadership of a child-centred, capable developmental state. This is a non-negotiable. This requires:

1. **Political leadership at the highest level:** The President and Premiers should provide visible and vocal leadership and commitment in the SONA and SOPAs to advancing children's rights as an explicit national development priority. They should prioritise children's rights and demand state-wide planning and accountability for securing services necessary for children's holistic development to their full potential.
2. **Executive leadership and accountability:** The Medium Term Strategic Framework should be reviewed and amended to secure government-wide responsibility to mainstream the required support for nurturing care. The responsibilities should be written into ministerial service delivery agreements.
3. **Parliamentary oversight and accountability:** Parliament should monitor and hold government to account for its child rights governance responsibilities. Parliament should call for a review and revision of the MTSF to make children's rights an actionable national development priority. Given the multi-sectoral task at hand, we recommend that Parliament establish a joint standing committee on children's rights to ensure sustained, government-wide oversight.
4. **Civil society advocacy:** Civil society, including children, must be vocal advocates and hold government to account.
5. **The SAHRC and other chapter nines must be vigilant:** Chapter nines should be adequately resourced, robust advocates for government's fulfilment of its treaty implementation responsibilities through an effective national child rights governance system.



*The South African
National
Child Rights
Coalition*



6. **Effective state-wide coordination:** Realising the equal rights of every child to develop to their full potential requires action and accountability by multiple role players. This requires effective, national high-level political leadership and mandatory, coordinated, child-centred governance.

We therefore call for the urgent establishment of an appropriate, adequately institutionalized and resourced Department of Children / Office on the Rights of the Child in the Presidency.

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