Greetings to ACESS members and friends of the Alliance. This is ACESS's second newsletter for 2002 and it provides details on new policy and law developments relating to ACESS members' areas of interest and ACESS's advocacy and research projects. Please read and pass the messages on to as many people as possible in order to ensure that children's social security needs are continually on everyone's agendas.

Cabinet has just released the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive Social Security System and the Department of Social Development is launching a three year Child Support Grant Campaign. ACESS will be actively engaging in these two processes and we provide more details below on how members can get more involved.

In the midst of all these developments, ACESS has embarked on an organizational development process aimed at establishing ACESS as a separate entity with staff, governance structures and active membership. Depending on funding, a National workshop of members will be held later this year to agree on the final nature and form of the Alliance. The National Workshop will be preceded by provincial workshops and other opportunities for members to give input into the process. We welcome any ideas and suggestions that you may have on this topic.

Yours sincerely
Shirin Motala and Paula Proudlock
ACESS Task Team
2. Commission of Inquiry into a Comprehensive Social Security System for South Africa

The long awaited report of the Committee of Inquiry was released by Cabinet in May and has been welcomed by ACESS as being innovative in its recommendations to deal with the worsening situation of poverty and unemployment in our country.

In particular ACESS fully supports the Commission’s call for a universal, Basic Income Grant (BIG), which would be provided as an entitlement without means-testing to all persons in South Africa. The arguments put forward by the Commission in favour of BIG include that it will reduce the poverty gap in South Africa, (we are one of the most unequal societies in the world), and that such a grant would greatly enhance the access of poor persons to the basic services that are their right.

ACESS is of the view that the means-test almost always excludes those persons most in need of assistance, and leads to perverse incentives, contributing to the ‘welfare trap’.

In releasing the report the Department of Social Development has given South Africans until the 15 June 2002 to make their voices heard. What is of particular concern is that while submissions are being invited, there appears to be no effort on the part of the State to make the contents of the report more easily accessible in terms of printed copies being available and also of ensuring that the document is available in a more user friendly form, which also takes into account language needs.

The short time for comment has also been criticised as it does not allow for much consultation and discussion.

We are of the opinion that such an intervention is the government’s obligation to provide at least minimal assistance to the poorest persons currently not supported; namely children between 7 and 18 and unemployed adults.

ACESS is of the view that the means-test almost always excludes those persons most in need of assistance, and leads to perverse incentives, contributing to the ‘welfare trap’. Considering that between 60 and 70% of children live in poverty in South Africa, the expenses and administrative burden cannot be justified in targeting only a small percentage of those in need.

(A photo taken during the child participation process in Mpumalanga)

Initial responses from the Minister of Social Development are of some concern. Although he welcomed the proposal here is what he had to say:

Children Can’t Wait – they need our active involvement now!
Minister Skweyiya's Response

"We have problems now distributing pensions to the elderly only and children. The system is not up to date at the present moment. Can you imagine if we have to give this (Basic Income Grant) to almost everybody? Will it ever be able to administer and manage that within two months? Do we have a civil service that is able to do that?"

• "Now you want to give six-year old children their own money. Now really. The system is not there, we need to create the system. I am not talking about the money part of it all, but the ability to be able to manage, that is not a small thing."

• Minister Skweyiya also says government is in no financial position to care for children orphaned by the AIDS epidemic and will have to lean even more heavily on non-governmental organisations and churches to care for them and the private sector to provide the funds.

Excerpts from Health – e 30/4/2002

Make your voice heard on this matter. The ACESS Task Team will be distributing a summary of the Report and facilitating the ACESS submission drafting process. We will be calling for your ideas, input and comments for the submission in the first and second week of June. If you would like to be more involved in the submission drafting process:

Please contact
Paula Proudlock
Telephone No. 021 - 685 1583
E-mail: paula@rmh.uct.ac.za

3. Child Grants Empowerment and Awareness Campaign - an ACESS, SOUL CITY and State Partnership

ACESS has since its inception committed itself to both the development of a new comprehensive and effective social security system while at the same time working towards the improvement of the existing social security system for children. One of our projects focussing on fixing the current system is the Child Grants Empowerment and Awareness Campaign. To this end ACESS has committed itself to a partnership with Soul City and the Department of Social Development towards improving current access to child grants.

The Child Grant Awareness And Empowerment Campaign has the following objectives:

• To increase awareness about available grants that impact on the lives of children. (CSG, CDG and FCG)
• To increase the number of children accessing the Child Support Grant through a national grants awareness and empowerment campaign.
• To facilitate grant applications with a specific focus on marginalized communities by mobilising community organizations, children’s sector agencies, government departments and
decision-makers, and media resources to this end.

- To promote the strengthening of social security delivery systems.

The overall objectives of ACESS’s involvement in the campaign is to work towards the establishment of an enabling environment for the registration of beneficiaries to ensure that they are able to access child grants. ACESS intends to achieve this through -:

- Providing communities with information on the process of accessing the respective grants.
- Setting up advice desks to suggest ways in which to deal with bottlenecks.
- Information would be provided on all the grants which apply to children i.e.
  i. Child Support Grant
  ii. Care Dependency Grant
  iii. Foster Grant

Soul City will be using its various media vehicles which include radio programmes in all 11 languages, Soul Buddyz and Soul City TV series and print media to disseminate key information about the grants and how they can be accessed.

ACESS partners will provide advice and legal support to applicants to assist them in applying for the grants and negotiating administrative hurdles.

In May, ACESS and Soul City met with representatives from the National and Provincial Departments of Social Development to discuss the partnership and to gauge the state's level of readiness to respond to the expected increase in applications across the country as a result of the ACESS public awareness and empowerment campaign.

At the meeting, ACESS learnt that the Department was about to launch a Presidential Campaign to promote the Child Support Grant. The Department reported that it intends to reach 5 to 6 million children within the next three years. This is groundbreaking news as the Department’s previous target was 3 million children by April 2003. Considerable management, staff and budget re-allocations will have to take place in order to enable the state to reach these new targets. While the Department was not able to provide concrete information on the operational plans that lie behind the Presidential Campaign, it was clear that the Campaign is supported by top-level decision makers.

ACESS’s Grants Awareness and Empowerment Project will thus take place in this environment where state departments and officials will already be on board with plans to improve the CSG administration and take-up.

The success of such a campaign lies in the extent to which ACESS partners, you the members, are able to embrace this project and be part of a process of reaching the children in need.

If you are interested and able to make your contribution contact ACESS and tell us how you can be involved. Contact:

Shirin Motala, Children’s Rights Centre
Tel. No. 031 209 6230
Cell: 083 78 68844
shirinm@wn.apc.org
4. Barriers to Child Support Grant Research Project

ACESS is of the view that despite significant increases in CSG take up rates in SA over the past year\(^1\) there remains a critical problem in the manner in which the targeting has occurred.

From some very preliminary analysis of take up rates undertaken for ACESS by the Children’s Institute\(^2\) with the support of Julian May we have noted the following :-:

- In the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces out of every 5 children who should be receiving the grant - according to targets set by the state - only one child is receiving the grant.

- In the Free State Province for every 4 children who should be accessing the grant only 1 child is getting the grant.

- Meanwhile in Western Cape and Gauteng the situation is different. For every 2 children in those provinces who should be getting the grant 3 are getting it.

Two points need to be mentioned to understand these stats.

1) All the children currently in receipt should be getting it as they clearly meet the criteria. It is not suggested that children in Johannesburg or Cape Town should not be getting the grant. The problem is that the state had clearly underestimated the numbers of eligible children in some of the better off provinces but more importantly what it shows is that the more rural and poorer your province is, the less access a child has to social security.

2) ACESS is not even entering into a debate with the state about its limited targeting of 3

\(^{1}\) According to officials in the Dept of Social Development we have about 1.8 million recipients currently.

\(^{2}\) Teresa Guthrie, Social Security Co-ordinator in the Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town

million children, which ACESS believes excludes large numbers of poor children in SA. It is our view that at least 70% of all children in 0-7 age bracket should be targeted for the grant, approximately 6 million children (see page 3 with respect to the Department of Social Development’s new target).

ACESS is currently examining other evidence which may explain this worrying trend of poor take up rates in certain provinces. To understand the nature of obstacles to accessing the grant, ACESS is inviting your input into this process.

In the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces out of every 5 children who should be receiving the grant - according to targets set by the state - only one child is receiving the grant.

We are looking for examples of problems that applicants have had with getting the CSG in general but in particular relating to lack of documents, proof of income, delays in processing applications etc.

Ideally we would like CASE Studies of actual people and their experiences - initially this will mean a social worker, development worker or health worker detailing for us the nature of problems they have been dealing with and actual
examples. If this case is seen as relevant then we will be in contact to seek consent of and participation of the person affected so that their experiences can be addressed by actions, which ACESS will take on behalf of all affected people using these individuals as examples.

Evidence which would be particularly helpful are reports on the extent to which a particular problem affects people. The objective is to find evidence - either anecdotal or actual case studies to support this view and would appreciate any assistance you may be able to offer.

If you have such information but are hampered by time and capacity to write it up then contact us urgently so that we can assist you with this. This may mean an interview with a particular staff member or community leader or reviewing case or interviewing an applicant to hear what problems they had.

If you can contribute then please contact Shirin Motala urgently on:
Tel No. 031 2096230,
Fax 031 - 3076074
E-mail shirinm@wn.apc.org.

5. The ACESS Children's Participation Process

In response to the Committee of Inquiry’s failure to give children a voice in the policy formulation process, ACESS committed itself to facilitating such a process. ACESS’s participation project involved initially a provincial process involving children within a particular setting to share their experiences of living without safety nets and hearing their ideas of how we can make South Africa a child friendly society in which each and every child is free from abject poverty. This was subsequently followed up by a much smaller initiative at the national level where a group of these children had an opportunity to meet with and share their experiences with key decision makers.

“For my side the biggest problem is food. Sometime we end up not getting any food at home and don’t have money to buy food. The other problem is to have school shoes.”

(A picture drawn by a child about her sources of strength during the ACESS Child Participation process)

If the recommendations put forward by the Committee of Inquiry are taken on board by government, this child may for the first time in his life go to bed with a full stomach.

The consultation meant a great deal to the children.

“I liked it that you listened. When you talked about the actions after these workshops it gave me courage. I hope to hear the report goes to government.”

And go to government it did! The provincial consultations culminated in a meeting with national decision-makers, including government officials and parliamentarians, in Cape Town earlier this year. At that meeting, ACESS heard from children that if they don’t pay school fees then they had to sit on the floor or were refused admission to school.

Just getting to school is also a problem for most of these children: "I will be happy if I can have some money for transport because I am far away from school. I walk a long distance to school and I pass
next to the dangerous place and I walk a long distance to school without having anything to eat.”

The child participation process achieved two things that it set out to do; firstly to confirm the value of engaging children as partners in decision making not because it is the acceptable thing to do but more importantly because children’s insights have enlightened us even further on their needs and secondly to ensure that their concerns about the inadequacies and shortcomings of current social security and development initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty are clearly understood from the perspective of children.

A report of that process is currently in preparation and will be widely distributed. To receive a copy of the report and for more information contact Maddy Semaar at Soul City Tel. No. 011 643 5852 or email: maddy@soulcity.org.za

6. Submission on the Child Care Act Review

The South African Law Commission (SALC) invited comment on its Discussion Paper on the review of the Child Care Act. The Children's Institute, ACESS and the Aids Law Project of Wits, compiled a joint submission to the SALC in April. The submission called for the new Child Care Act to include a children's rights charter that would be all encompassing and that would impact on all government departments. We also called for the new Child Care Act to legislate for primary prevention to prevent children from ending up on the streets, being abused, and going hungry. The SALC is having to decide where to locate children's social security needs - in the Child Care Act or in the Social Assistance Act? ACESS called for the new Child Care Act to clearly set out and interpret children's social security rights.

The next step in the process is expected sometime in July when the SALC hands over its final Report and a draft bill to the Minister of Social Development.

For a copy of the ACESS submission, please contact Paula Proudlock on 021 - 685 1583 or paula@rmh.uct.ac.za

7. Building the Alliance

Many networks and alliances evolve (relatively quickly) into a core group of organisations or representatives of organisations who are willing to take the initiative, and make key decisions. While this is a useful way to ensure that things get done, it does not ensure that everyone owns the process.

To address this and other critical challenges in building an effective Alliance, ACESS Task Team and Reference Team members have been engaged in an organisational development process. During
this process ACESS has been examining the nature Alliances in South Africa, and has been interrogating ACESS's plans for the future. A number of issues came into the discussion including governance of the Alliance, membership and mandates and the longevity of the Alliance.

It is envisaged that the ideas for ACESS’s ongoing existence will be discussed more extensively later in the year when ACESS hosts provincial workshops and a national membership conference (once donor support has been secured). Make sure you have registered as a member of the Alliance and that you are on our mailing list.

ACESS is in a process of hiring two staff members - A National Co-ordinator and an Advocacy Officer.

ACESS is in a process of hiring two staff members - A National Co-ordinator and an Advocacy Officer. We will have the pleasure of introducing them to you within the next few weeks. Having two staff members will ensure that all members are kept up to date on new developments and that ongoing opportunities for dialogue and input are created.

Please spread the word about ACESS and encourage more organizations to sign up as members. We have included copies of the ACESS pamphlet with member registration forms in your package for wider distribution.

If you have opportunities to distribute the ACESS pamphlet and registration form to a wider audience, we will gladly send a package of ACESS pamphlets to you in the post. Please contact:

Zama Mvulane on 021- 685 8303
E-mail: zama@rmh.uct.ac.za

This Newsletter was compiled with reference to various reports and documents developed by the ACESS Task Team. Acknowledgements are due to Shereen Usdin, Gail Smith, Laura Pollecute and Teresa Guthrie for their contributions to this document.

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For the ACESS Task Team

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Contact the Alliance

For further information on ACESS and its activities, please contact one of the Task Team or Reference Team members listed below:

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