



ACCESS Newsletter

ACCESS -The official Newsletter of the Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security-

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-From the ACCESS Desk-

Greetings to ACCESS Members and friends of the Alliance. This is ACCESS's first update for 2002 and it provides information on activities that the Alliance has been working on since last year, in keeping with its mission to mobilise support for a comprehensive social security system for vulnerable children and their families. The update identifies a range of actions that your organisation, institution or community can take towards building a society which ensures that the constitutionally guaranteed right of every child in South Africa to social security can be brought into practice.

Inside This Issue

- 1 ACCESS: A dynamic alliance
- 2 Review of activities following the Special Assignment exposure of child malnutrition in Mt Frere
- 3 ACCESS response to Mt Frere
- 4 ACCESS and the Basic Income Grant
- 5 Social Security problems in the Northern Province
- 6 ACCESS commitment to partnerships towards increasing take up rates of the CSG
- 7 Children's participation in Social Security Policy Making
- 8 People's Budget Campaign
- 9 Functioning of ACCESS
- 10 ACCESS Research Agenda

1. ACCESS: A Dynamic Alliance

Just under a year ago ACCESS came into existence with a commitment to building a broad based alliance of child rights activists and institutions towards the goal for a Comprehensive Social Security System for South Africa in which the needs of all vulnerable children and their families would be addressed.



Over the past several months ACCESS has had an opportunity to refine its thoughts and recommendations based on the deliberations of that historic meeting in Cape Town in March 2001. ACCESS's **"FIRST CALL FOR CHILDREN"** makes two key recommendations -:

1st Recommendation: ACCESS believes that an essential ingredient in the new social security system is the implementation of a Basic Income Grant (BIG) for all adults and children in South Africa. In such a system the state, via its taxation

system, is able to reclaim from those households who do not require the grant and in this way the state avoids the situation of putting scarce resources in the hands of the better off in our society. More importantly such a system avoids the enormous and often wasteful costs of means testing and also ensures that all eligible people are able to access their grants.

2nd Recommendation: It is acknowledged that to transform a system requires careful and adequate planning and implementation. This may take a considerable amount of time and the harsh reality is that children and their families **CANNOT WAIT**. The State has a Constitutional imperative¹ to provide social security to children in need, as a matter of urgency. Currently, the Child Support grant reaches only 7% of children *in need*, and only 33% of those *targeted*. Thus ACCESS makes a demand for the immediate improvements to, and extension of the existing social security provisioning to all children.

Some of the key demands made by ACCESS regarding the improvement and extension of the existing grant system for children are:-

- ❑ All children aged 0 to 18 years should be eligible for the CSG, with age being the only eligibility criteria. The current means test must be abolished.
- ❑ All children should benefit from indirect social security, through services such as free health care up to the age of 18 years and free education if they cannot afford school fees.
- ❑ All caregivers of children with special needs due to a health condition (disability or chronic illness) should be provided with a Care Dependency Grant. Eligibility for assistance should be based on need, in terms of poverty, health condition and/or a compromised home environment.
- ❑ Administration of grants must be fast tracked and the requirements for registration should be reviewed with specific regard to the problems in accessing relevant documentation such as birth certificates and identity documents.

¹ *Government of the RSA and others v. Grootboom & Others* [2000(11) BCLR 1169(cc)].

- ❑ ACCESS believes that all children, whether they are non-citizens, temporary residents or refugees should be able to access the grants. This is in keeping with our ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which stipulates that:

“State Parties must respect and ensure the rights set forth in the Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his/her parents legal guardians’ race, , national, ethnic or social origin, , birth or other status”.
(Article 2).

ACCESS now has a membership of over 65 organisations across South Africa. While that represents a very substantial grouping of concerned stakeholders, the ACCESS network needs to be broadened even more, especially if we are to convince decision makers that the views espoused by ACCESS have wide spread support.

Action: We have included a membership form with this newsletter to enable you to go out and encourage others to join in this effort. It is our responsibility to the children of South Africa.

2. Child Malnutrition in Mt Frere: the urgency of ensuring access to the child support grant and increasing social security provisions for all vulnerable household members

It took a Special Assignment documentary programme in August 2001 on the links between childhood malnutrition and the difficulties experienced by primary caregivers in accessing the Child Support Grant to draw the attention of the Ministry’s and Departments of Social Development and Home Affairs to respond to the desperate needs of large numbers of vulnerable children. ACCESS played an extremely crucial role in bringing media exposure to this issue initially by drawing Special Assignments attention to this

issue in the first place and then through ACCESS members providing considerable background information to the producers of the show regarding the Child Support Grants and problems experienced throughout the country.

The TV documentary, reported on the work of the University of Western Cape's Public Health Programme, which in conjunction with the Health Systems Trust and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine had been conducting research into childhood malnutrition in the Mt Frere region of the Eastern Cape Province.

The critical importance of the timeous processing of the child support grant was illustrated by the research findings. An observation by the researchers illustrated this as follows -:

" If the family had received the child support grant 10 months earlier when they first applied, it is almost assured that this child would not have needed to be hospitalised for severe malnutrition several months later. Even with the new hospital treatment protocols, this child had a one in three chance of dying from such a severe condition, and the costs of emotional trauma to the family, and an expensive hospitalisation to the health care system, would have been avoided."

(University of Western Cape: Public Health Programme; Health Systems Trust and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: Study of the Management of Severe Malnutrition, unpublished draft report, 2001.)

3. ACCESS Response to Mt Frere

ACCESS welcomed the response of the Minister of Social Development in going out to Mt Frere and in ensuring that certain activities were initiated to address the problem. However ACCESS took it a step further in drawing the Ministers attention to the fact that the Mt Frere scenario was not unique to the Eastern Cape and that it could be found elsewhere in South Africa. Further ACCESS made recommendations to the Minister on actions which he could take to remove the obstacles to people's access to the child support grant, administrative obstacles which in effect

denied the very people for whom the grant was intended, the right of access.

Since September 2001, ACCESS has communicated with the Minister and the Department of Social Development on three occasions making recommendations and offering its support in ensuring that administration of social security does not thwart vulnerable people's efforts to access the grant. To date we have not had a response. At this stage and in order to ensure that the constitutional rights to social security are not denied, ACCESS is considering other actions that it may be able to embark on.

It must be noted that these efforts by ACCESS were in addition to the extensive submission, which we made to the state and parliament on the Amendments to the Social Assistance Act Regulations. Copies of this submission were circulated to ACCESS members in July 2001.

4. ACCESS and the Basic Income Grant Coalition

As we indicated at the very beginning ACCESS is committed to the Basic Income Grant as an effective social security mechanism for reaching vulnerable children and their families. ACCESS is a member of the BIG Coalition and has participated in several activities in support of the BIG. More recently ACCESS participated in a workshop hosted by the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) on the affordability and cost issues relating to implementing the BIG. We are hoping to share the report of this workshop as soon as it is available.

5. Northern Province – A Problem of budgeting, a denial of rights

In November 2001, ACCESS became aware that a large number of old age pensioners, disability grant recipients and children who qualified for the child support grant (it was suggested by the Sowetan that over 150 000 people were affected) were not receiving their grants even though their grant applications had been received and processed. The problem according to some

officials was that the Dept of Social Development in the Northern Province had run out of budget and intended beneficiaries were advised to come back in the new year to receive their grants. The MEC for Health and Welfare, Mr Moloto was quoted as saying

"It should be expected that government might not have the money to accommodate all who are supposed to be beneficiaries."

ACCESS, working in partnership with the Legal Resources Centre and the National Council for Child Welfare ensured that the Provincial and National Government Authorities attention was drawn to this problem and a response was requested as to how the matter would be addressed. In response to media reports in November 2001 the MEC for Social Development in Northern Province had blamed bad budgeting and lack of adequate data on the number of beneficiaries for the problem. However interestingly, it was the very same Mr Moloto in an address to the NCOP in June 2001, during the policy debate on the Social Development Budget vote who acknowledged that since 1994 his department had struggled to quantify the numbers of beneficiaries eligible for social assistance and hence had not been able to budget accordingly. He advised the NCOP in June 2001 that this matter had now been rectified!

Table: Actual changes in budget for the Northern Province in comparison with National budget data for the period April – Dec 2001:

Northern Province		National
OAP	+6.6%	+7.5%
DG	+1.7%	+17.2%
CSG	-5.0%	+55.7%

(Source SOCPEN data Dec 2001)

To date ACCESS has had no response from either the Provincial or National Department.

6. ACCESS commitment to partnerships towards increasing take up rates of the Child Support Grant

Soul City and ACCESS are currently exploring the idea of engaging in activities aimed at increasing the take up rate of the child support grant particularly in those provinces and areas where the access is currently very low. This would be in partnership with state parties. ACCESS will keep you informed about its deliberations in this regard. The intention is to run a national CSG registration campaign together with the Department of Home Affairs and Social Development.

7. Children's Participation in Social Security Policy Making

The Alliance at the very outset made a commitment to ensuring that children's voices are heard in the policy making process. To this end ACCESS has, facilitated 18 workshops with groups of children in all 9 provinces between September and December 2001. Children living in different environments and experiencing different problems and needs have been engaged in the consultative process. A report of this process and the key findings, which have emerged, will be available shortly to all ACCESS members.



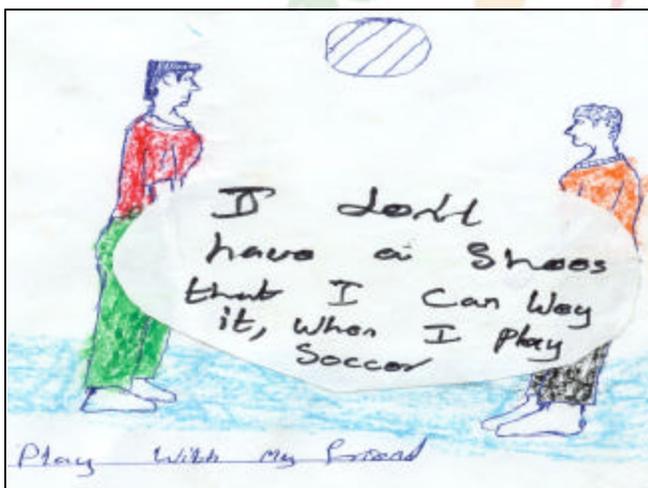
In addition a smaller group of these children will be presenting their findings and engaging in

discussions with key decision makers in Cape Town in February 2002. As a member of ACCESS you will have received an invitation to this workshop. Unfortunately there is no funding available to cover transport and other costs for those wishing to attend. The children would appreciate your presence at the meeting.

Look out for copies of the Children's participation newsletters to read what the children have to say about social security. These are some of the things that were said by the children:

"My family had no money for food. When I was alone sometimes I thought I am a problem at home and maybe it's better to leave home and get my food alone." (16 year old boy living on the streets)

"I think that they should give Deaf children a special class at the school. I am 18 and I want to learn in Sign. I learned Sign at Hammanskraal and there it was all Deaf children. I had to leave there because we had no money. Here they put me with the Grade 1 class and I am with small children – I can learn nothing. I am just reading books. I like to read so much. I read everything but I have a favourite book - I will bring it for you tomorrow – I read this book all the time – it is a dictionary with many pictures. I know the signs for all the words in the dictionary – I read it all the time." (18 year old boy who is deaf)



"In my family there are two little ones – I look after them, they are the ones I said I wash and

dress everyday before I go to school. They get a grant. It helps with the food and clothes for them. I have heard it stops at 7 years. The older is 6 – what will we do when it stops?" (16 year old girl from Mpumalanga)

"The teachers shout at you. They say that we cannot sit on the seats at school because we don't pay school fees. People who sit on the chairs are those who pay school fees. The teachers like to swear at us. They don't have a good way of approaching children. They keep on teasing us about the school fees. It is not nice because we also like to pay we just don't have money". (11 year old girl from the Northern Province)

8. People's Budget Campaign – Prioritising Child Social Security!

People's Budget Campaign (PBC) was officially adopted at SANGOCO's National NGO Week in 1997. SANGOCO, SACC and COSATU then launched the PBC in 2000, representing three key pillars of civil society, churches, non-governmental organisations and trade unions.

The PBC attempts to define fiscal strategies that advocate for a pro-poor budget, support economic development, greater social spending and promoting ordinary people's involvement and participation in the budget process.

The Draft People's Budget Framework Outline included the following key proposals...

1. Establishment of a National Health Insurance
2. Integrated HIV/AIDS Treatment and Prevention Plan
3. Basic Income Grant
4. Free Basic Services

For 2002 SANGOCO has proposed that the demands concerning the Child Support Grant be brought on board the PBC priorities and to this end the PBC has resolved the following-:

- To include in the PBC Educational Booklet a section on children's social security

- ❑ To include in a PB key demand proposal a section on children's social security in relation to Child Support Grants, Child Care Dependency Grant, Foster Care Grant, etc.
- ❑ To establish a Child Social Security Budget Task Team which will be tasked with developing a press statement reflecting the expectations and demands of the Child Social Security Campaign; analysing the Budget from a Child Social Security perspective and making a public response to the Budget via press releases and Press Conference.

Teresa Guthrie of the Children's Institute [CI] drafted and coordinated the submission from ACESS on Children's Social Security for the PBC and Paula Proudlock, also from the CI will serve as our representative on the Budget Task Team. Contact either of them for more information.

9. Functioning of ACESS

As indicated previously ACESS has operated with a small core of organisations that have committed both their own personnel and resources to the ACESS Alliance. This has had its limitations, most obvious of which is the limited communication between the Alliance and its 65 odd members nation wide.

In a strategic planning session recently ACESS explored how to address these and other constraints to embarking on a massive campaign on social security for all. It is our hope that together we can as an Alliance make a difference to the lives of vulnerable children in South Africa.

Two key activities, which ACESS hopes to be able to facilitate, are provincial/regional meetings of ACESS members and the convening of a national consultative meeting of the child rights sector to chart a pathway for ACESS for 2002 and beyond. Our fundraising efforts have been initiated to support these plans. Your ideas and support are vital.

10. ACESS's Research Agenda

Research is being undertaken and information gathered that will enhance the development of a comprehensive social security system. Progress in this regard has been limited by lack of funds for full-time researchers.

If you know of people who should become members of ACESS, share this information with them and invite their participation. Only as an Alliance can we become a force that will not be ignored.

Yours sincerely

Shirin Motala

For Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security

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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