



**A C E S S**

# **Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security**

## **The problems with the phased in approach to the extension of the child support grant to age 14**

**Presentation by ACCESS to the NCOP Select Committee on Social  
Services**

**3 June 2003**

### **Introduction to ACCESS**

ACCESS, the Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security, is a national alliance of over 400 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and faith-based organizations (FBOs). The Alliance was established to engage in a coordinated way with social security policy and law reform processes to ensure children's survival, development and protection.

ACCESS members believe that all children should be able to benefit from a comprehensive social security system. The system must enable all children to survive and develop to their full potential. The system must provide social assistance, adequate food, water and sanitation, healthcare, education, and protection from abuse and neglect.

### **The announcement to extend the CSG to age 14 years**

On the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2003, ACCESS celebrated the announcement by the State President to progressively extend the Child Support Grant (CSG) to poor children up to the age of 14 years. This announcement was a historic moment for the children of this country. The 400 member organizations of ACCESS have been working and campaigning for an extension of this grant to all children for the past 5 years.

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The Child Support Grant was introduced in 1998, and has been limited to very poor children under 7. The state's primary child poverty alleviation programme now reaches 2,7 million of South Africa's 14,3 million poor children.

When the grant was introduced there was a clear commitment by the State to progressively extend the cut off age beyond 7. The Social Assistance Act of 1992 clearly provides a section that enables the Minister of Social Development to increase the cut off age. This commitment was made in the face of widespread unhappiness that the grant would terminate at age 7.

It is now nearly six years later and the first step to realising this commitment was taken in February this year when the President announced Cabinet's final decision to extend the grant to children under 14 years of age.

When the announcement was made, ACCESS immediately started thinking of how to help ensure that the new policy was implemented quickly. However, when we heard that the extension would be phased in over a three year period using age as the determining factor, we were very disappointed. From our member's direct experiences of the complicated and difficult application processes we knew that the phased approach would cause a number of problems. As predicted, these problems are manifesting across the country, especially in the provinces with the highest poverty problems.

We set up a help-line monitoring system to get the details of the problems. Caregivers reporting problems are assured of the national policy line, the details of their cases are recorded and they are assisted to access their grants.

Our monitoring system essentially gathers information to answer the following questions:

- Are children under 9 years able to access their Child Support Grants?
- What happens when a child with a CSG turns 9 before 1 April 2004?
- What about caregivers with children aged 9 to 14 years?

So far our monitoring has revealed the following problems

### **The problems being experienced by care givers**

#### **1) Provincial Social Development offices are not all applying the national policy**

We are receiving reports of provinces deviating from the national policy and refusing to register children under 9 for various reasons.

In Mpumalanga, we are receiving reports of the officials saying that the policy is to register only those children who were previously getting the grant but lost it

when they turned 7. Therefore 7 and 8 year olds who were never registered for the grant are turned away despite being eligible in terms of the law because they are under 9.

In the North West, Mpumalanga, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo, we are receiving reports of officials turning away children who are eight years old.

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**Case Alert: The Story of Maropeng of Ingwavuma in Kwazulu Natal**

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Twelve-year-old Maropeng lives with his very ill and unemployed mother and eight-year-old brother Siphoh. They do not get any form of assistance from the Government. However, Maropeng's brother, who is 8 years old, does qualify for the child support grant.

"There is no food and no money at home," says Maropeng. "We are so hungry we have no time to go to school because we have to go and look for food in the neighbourhood."

"My mother tried to register Siphoh for the children's grant early this year. But she was told he [Siphoh] does not qualify," said Maropeng.

"Sometimes the neighbours give us some food if we do jobs for them like fetch water for them or chop wood and bring it to them. We hope the government can do something for us because we are suffering," said Maropeng.

Despite the fact that Siphoh qualifies for the child support grant as amended early this year, his mother was turned away several times by officials saying he will only qualify next year.

If Government had taken a decision to immediately extend the child support grant to all children under 14 years this year, at least Maropeng and his younger brother would be able to buy food for their family with the income from the grants.

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**Case Alert: Nomsa Mogabudi from Bethal in Mpumalanga**

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Nomsa Mogabudi phoned us after officials in Bethal told her that her eight year old son, Bonginkosi who was born on 16 July 1994 does not qualify for a Child Support Grant. Despite Nomsa repeatedly telling the official that she is legally entitled to the grant, she has been turned away twice since we published her story in April.

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**Case Alert: Sara Mokwena from KwaNdebele in Mpumalanga**

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Thoko Mkhwanazi pays just over ten rands from Kwamhlanga Township in KwaNdebele to social services offices in Kwakga. She's been to the social services offices more times than she can count. Every time she is told that her 8-year-eight-month old daughter, Sara Mokwena who was born on 25 August 1994, will only qualify for the child support grant after the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2004.

"I have explained to the officials that on the radio they said she [Sara] qualifies for the grant," says Mkhwanazi. "But they insist that she will only qualify next year."

She has used what ever she could get from doing domestic chores in the area to pay for transport to the city, only to be told that her daughter does not qualify for the child support grant. Although she insisted that she heard on a radio interview that all children under nine years do qualify for the CSG, the officials were not aware of the new policy position.

In fact, according to Mkhwanazi many parents and caregivers of children in the area, born in 1994 and who are still eight years old are turned away everyday.

After follow ups through Case Alert, Mkhwanazi was finally given forms to register Sara for her long awaited grant. However, the officials in Kwakga have indicated that Sara's child support grant would be cut on her birthday in August and she will have to reregister next year 1<sup>st</sup> April.

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**CaseAlert: "Pay Day is Birthday, so no Child Support Grant": The story of Thembi Khumalo in Nelspruit (Mpumalanga)**

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Unemployed Thembi Khumalo is relying on friends and family members to provide for her eight-year-eleven-months son Simphiwe who was born on 4 June 1994. Simphiwe was getting the child support grant but was cut after reaching seven years two years ago.

After hearing on radio that all children under nine years should register for the grant, Khumalo went to register Simphiwe. All her hopes for an improved life for her son came crashing down when she was told that Simphiwe's child support grant would not be paid until next year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 because he is turning 9 years exactly on the payday for the first monthly installment of the child support grant of the child support grant (4 June) and would have to re-register again next year.

"I wanted to buy him a new school uniform and shoes," says Khumalo. "But that's not going happen this year."

However, Regulation 24 (2) (c) specifies, "A child support grant shall lapse - on the last day of the month in which the child in respect of whom the grant is paid attains the age of 9 years. "

Therefore, in terms of the law, she should be paid the CSG for the month of May as the grant only lapses on the last day of June. However, the officials have registered her but said that she will only receive the May 2003 payment when she re-registers on 1 April 2004.

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### **The Story of Xolile Sibeko from Leslie in Mpumalanga**

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Xolile Sibeko is unemployed and earns a disability grant of R 700, that she has to share with her whole family. Her son Jabulane who was born in July 1995 will be turning 8 years this year.

But Shabangu has been told by officials in Leslie that Jabulane will only qualify for the child support grant next year because "it is only children who are under 8 years who qualify for the grant this year."

"I don't know what to do," said Sibeko. "On the radio they say we must go and register our children but the social workers are saying we must come next year." According to Sibeko there's a big sign in the offices which says "Only children under 8". "When you go there they just say didn't you see the sign on the door?"

"We just have to leave. The social workers don't have time to explain why you should come next year. If you keep on asking the people will shout at you and say you are wasting their time."

#### **What is the policy position?**

We phoned Fezile Makiwane, the Chief Director of Social Security in the National Department of Social Development and Mr Makiwane said: "the Department has issued a clear directive to all its officials across the country to register all children under nine years. All children who qualify for the child support grant as according to the new regulations can not be turned away in any social services offices for whatever reason".

Lesego Monama, of the Gauteng Provincial Department of Social Development said, "the new policy position is that any child who is 8 years and less than twelve months does qualify for the child support grant".

According to Mr. N. J. Mabilo, Head of Social Development in the Mpumalanga Province, "the policy position from national to all provinces and social development officials is that all children under 9 years must be registered for the

child support grant.” “It is our duty as government to use all forms of communication to disperse the right information to our officials and to the people,” he said. However, despite the fact that the new policy came into effect on 1 April 2003, it was only on the 23 and 24 of April that the Province had an Imbizo to devise a clear communication plan “to disperse the information as widely as possible to both government officials and parents in the province.” Mabilo also undertook to issue a circular in the next weeks and meet with all head of social services offices in the province to devise mechanisms of training and informing all officials, “especially on the new regulations and dealing with parents and caregivers in a proper manner.”

According to Mbulelo Musi, a spokesperson for the Department of Social Development “The Department started the extension of the CSG immediately after the President’s announcement.” A few days after that the Minister issued a clear directive and met with all MECs and Heads of Social Development to fast track the registration of all children under 9 years, and it is the duty of each Province to make sure that they register these children regardless of whether they have the capacity or not. Come 31<sup>st</sup> March next year, each Province will have to account to the Minister as to why they didn’t register children under 9.”

When we asked in the beginning of May about a National Communication Strategy on the extension of the CSG, Musi said “the Department and GCIS are working on a comprehensive communication plan which is in final stages.” We recently requested a copy of the communications strategy and the circular/directive that was sent to the provinces but were informed by Musi and Mabilo that the document was confidential.

The Department’s website has a procedure manual for officials that clearly says that children under 9 do qualify for the extended grant.

### **Why are people being turned away?**

We have been given a number of reasons:

- lack of capacity
- confusion as to what the new regulations actually mean (this was why we requested a copy of the communications strategy and the directive/circular in order to see how the regulations were being communicated, interpreted, explained)
- its not worth registering an 8 year old if they will fall off the system before 1 April 2003

### **What are ACCESS members doing to help clear up the confusion?**

- distributing posters and grants books across the country in partnership with the Department. These media appear in at least 4 languages and clearly specify that children under 9 do qualify.

- organised road shows and registration campaigns in partnership with the Departments of Social Development and Home Affairs
- organised and participated in a number of radio jamborees and talk shows to spread the word and answer queries
- assisted with the development of a series of Public Service Announcements that provide information on the extension
- Soul City and Soul Buddyz TV, radio and print media are also spreading the word
- We ensure that our 400 members, mainly CBOs working with children in poverty, are kept updated through the distribution of Case Alert. Our members then spread the word further.

**2) Children who are registered this year but turn 9 years before 1 April 2004, fall off the system and will need to register again on 1 April 2004**

Each year, approximately 500 000 children will have to be registered twice.

This adds to the transport and other costs that care givers have to incur every time they register a child. They now have to incur double the costs.

It also adds work to officials who are bearing heavy workloads already.

The fact that many 8 year olds will fall off the system before next year is potentially one of the reasons why officials are reluctant to even bother registering children who are older than 8 and a half. The following case demonstrates this point.

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**Case Alert: Asanda Magxala of Manyano Township in the Eastern Cape**

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Asanda turned 9 on 25 May 2003 and this means that she won't qualify for the CSG.

Asanda Magxala's father died of a short illness in December 2002. She's living with her mother who earns just over R 500 per month in a factory at Mzamohle Township in the Eastern Cape.

After hearing that 8 year old Asanda will now qualify for the child support grant, Asanda's mother went to social services at Indwe to register her for the child support grant. But her hopes were dashed when social services officials told her that Asanda will only qualify for the child support grant next year after 1<sup>st</sup> April because she was turning 9 on 25 May 2003.

"I have to raise four children," says her mother. "I had hoped that the R160 for Asanda's grant will add to my R 500 and probably make things a little better for us."

“But they [officials] are saying we have to wait until next year. How are we going to live until next year?,” said her mother.

According to the new Regulations, Asanda did qualify for the child support grant when her mother went to make an application for the child support grant because she was less than nine years old at the time of application. However because her birthday was on the 25 of May 2003 and she would soon be 9 years olds, the officials turned her away. Asanda will have to wait until next year to register for the child support grant.

### **3)The need and expectations are high and the new policy position has not been clearly communicated to the public**

The announcement of the intention to extend to 14 was first made after the ANC Policy Conference in September 2002. The decision was confirmed at the ANC National Congress in December 2003. The final decisions were then made by Cabinet and announced in the President’s speech.

With expectations raised and the need being so desperate, many people thought that the grant was already available for children under 14 and started queuing.

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#### **Case Alert: Winnie Leyane from Pienaar in Nelspruit (Mpumalanga)**

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Winnie Leyane from Pienaar (KaDantjie) in Nelspruit was only told after queuing for a week that her 9-year-old son Joseph, who was born in 1993, will only qualify for the child support grant from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2004.”These people gave me a number and let me queue for a week,” she says. “Then they tell me that I must come next year.”

It is estimated that over 300 parents and caregivers flock to the only social services offices in the area of a population of over 2 million (including from Luphisi, Mpakeni, and Spelanyane) - everyday to register for the child support grant.

“I’ve been waking up at 4 for the whole week. Most of these people [the caregivers] are turned away because we don’t know what’s the right age,” says Leyane.

“All the papers that they give us are written in English and we can’t read. We don’t know if they [the social workers] are telling the truth or not because some people are saying it’s all children under 14,” added Leyane



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**Case Alert: Delsile and Khanyisile Nkosi (Mpumalanga)**

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Maria Mambane and her husband Jan Nkosi are both unemployed. They live on “small monies” and offerings earned by Nkosi from doing piecemeal jobs in the area. Had the government taken a decision to extend the child support grant to all children under 14 years this year, their lives could have been better off with two grants for Delsile who is 12 years and Khanyisile who is 13 years old, totalling R320.

The government current policy to progressively extend the child support grant to children under 14 starting with children under 9 as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2003, children under 11 as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 and children under 14 as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005, means that these two children will never see the light of the CSG and as a result could be deprived of any chance of finishing their education and gaining other opportunities for a better life.

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**Twenty days too late for Child Support Grant: The story of Busi Shabangu from Bronkhospruit in Mpumalanga**

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Busi Shabangu, a single mother of two in Bronkhospruit at Enkangala, earns a mere R250 per month from a firm in the area. She is struggling and often relies on family friends for providing for her two daughters and unemployed husband.

One of the two children Zanele who was born on 10 March in 1994 just missed the child support grant by twenty days. According to the new three-year-implementation plan on the extension of the child support grant Zanele has to wait until 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 to qualify for the child support grant. “I don’t understand why I have to wait until next year just because of twenty days”, says Shabangu.

“The government said all children must register for this grant. Now they [the officials] are saying I must come next year.”

“At school they want textbooks, calculators and I have to make sure that they eat every day with what I can get. It’s difficult. I don’t understand this,” added Shabangu.

**ACCESS’s recommendations****As ACCESS, we believe that:**

All the confusion and disadvantage to caregivers and children could be avoided if Government took a decision to IMMEDIATELY extend the child support grant to all children under 14 and committed to a reasonable timeframe for the extension of the grant to all children under 18 years.

While government is deliberating on the new social security system and considers the above recommendation:

(Cabinet is considering the Committee of Inquiry Report in July and a number of social security of social security related policy and law reform processes are underway):

- There is an urgent need for a clear communication strategy on the new policy position.
- The messages should be widely distributed in all forms of media in different languages to both government officials and caregivers/parents across the country,
- A policy decision should be taken that once a child has been registered for a CSG, they do not fall off the system until they reach age 14 years. This would also avoid the unnecessary bureaucratic process of registering a child three times before they reach 14 and causing unnecessary costs to parents/caregivers. This is in effect what will happen to most children aged 8 who turn 9 years before 1 April 2004.
- Provinces with large rural populations need extra support to implement the extension. Social workers in rural areas are struggling with very large populations of people to provide grants and food parcels to.

### **Conclusion**

Thank-you for the opportunity to present to you. We hope that you will help to ensure that the 14, 3 million poor children in South Africa go to bed at night with at least one meal a day. With only 2, 7 million currently receiving the CSG, we have a long road ahead of us and we therefore call for policies and programmes that are designed to reach as many children as possible in a short space of time.