Youth: An opportunity to interrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty

The current status of youth

- Just under 50% of South Africa’s population are under 25, and 10.2 million (20%) are youth aged 15 – 24.¹
- Poverty affects youth disproportionately.
  - Six out of 10 young people live in households with a per capita income of less than R620 per week.²
  - Income poverty remains strongly associated with race: 65% of African youth live below the poverty line, compared to just over 4% of White young people.¹
  - Poverty levels among youth remain strikingly similar to those of their parents’ generation, suggesting that post-apartheid policies have not yet leveled the playing field.¹

Access to education, housing and basic services

- There has been some progress in accessing to housing and basic services. Yet, in 2011, one in five young people still lived in traditional informal housing; nearly a third did not have access to piped water on site, and one in six did not have access to electricity.¹
- Access to education has improved significantly, but this has not resulted in increased employment.

Education outcomes and employment

- Schooling outcomes remain poor with high drop-out rates and low levels of skills. Just over one million learners started grade 1 in 2003 and of these only 49% made it to matric in 2014, 37% passed and 14% qualified for university entrance.²
- Post-school education increases young people’s employment chances and earning potential, yet only 8% of youth aged 18 – 24 attend college or university. Those who manage to secure a place in an institute of higher learning are faced with a range of expenses that may push them back out of the system. First year university tuition fees can be as high as R45,000.³
- The official unemployment rate for youth aged 15 – 24 rose from 33% in 2008 to 37% in 2015 – this rate increases to 45% if discouraged work-seekers are included.⁴

Patterns of deprivation in the youth population, 1996 and 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Information/ media</th>
<th>No piped water</th>
<th>No toilet</th>
<th>Unemployment rate</th>
<th>Income poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
</tr>
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Source: South African Child Gauge 2015

Multiple dimensions of deprivation

- Poor young people tend to experience multiple forms of deprivation simultaneously - with limited economic opportunities and limited access to quality education, health care, housing and basic services.¹
- Spatial inequalities persist with young people in the former homeland areas continuing to experience the highest levels of poverty and deprivation.¹
- Poverty is often associated with experiences of social exclusion, heightened stress, violence and trauma, which may increase risks of mental illness, substance abuse and risk-taking behaviour.¹
- Yet, despite these challenges, many young people maintain high aspirations and are actively involved in social and religious groups, volunteer work and social media.¹

Opportunities to break the cycle

The South African Child Gauge 2015 highlights a number of cross-cutting strategies that have the potential to improve outcomes for today’s youth and disrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty. More research is needed to inform practical implementation, evaluate effectiveness, exploit potential synergies and then take interventions to scale.

School

- Make quality education accessible for everyone, starting with the foundation phase.
- Find ways to remediate the learning ‘backlog’ that has accumulated by the time learners reach high school.
- Decrease drop-out rates by offering comprehensive support, including financial and psychosocial support, health care, family support, etc.

Post-school education

- Provide clear career guidance – starting early to guide subject choices in high school and highlight the post-school learning pathways.
- Create a viable alternative route for those failing in mainstream schools.
- Provide comprehensive support to enable students to access and complete post-school education.

Labour market

- Make young people more employable by investing in skills programmes and learnships.
- Motivate employers to increase their demand for youth employees.
- Explore how the social grant system, travel vouchers, saving schemes and better access to clear information can help young people access jobs.
- Create more jobs that suit the skills levels of young people.

Health

- Monitor the implementation of youth-friendly clinics and the Integrated School Health Policy to ensure welcoming, confidential, quality and easy-to-access health care services.
- Adopt an integrated approach that addresses the links between poverty, mental health and risk behaviour.

Parenting

- Provide support for parents – including those of teenagers and slightly older youth.
- Prioritise support services for teen parents including early antenatal care, social assistance, parenting programmes and child care services so teen mothers can complete their education.

Mobility

- Develop “youth-friendly cities” with easy, affordable transport, an appropriate range of social and rental housing options, improved digital access, and safe public spaces for recreation and socialising.

Belonging

- Take youth seriously and recognise them as legitimate citizens with an equal voice in society.
- Provide bridging relationships and structural support including mentoring, career guidance, skills development programmes and access to sporting and cultural activities.
- Evaluate, support and scale up dedicated youth programmes that encourage active citizenship and facilitate employment.