

Foreword

Jonathan D Jansen

Rector and Vice-Chancellor, University of the Free State

There is hardly a school in rural South Africa where you will not find older women preparing large pots of food from early morning onwards in preparation for the lunch break. For many children in this country, this gift of food could be their only main meal of the day. Now leap over grade school and you find university students in the same country, such as those on the *No Student Hungry* programme of the University of the Free State, dependent on a food bursary in order to survive; in fact at this institution, 59% of students have been found to be food insecure.

There's something that is particularly devastating about poverty – if you were born poor and struggle to secure food, there is a good chance you will become a young child, adolescent and young adult still poor and uncertain of where you will find your next meal. Like *bitter knowledge*, the subject of my book on the intergenerational transfer of knowledge among young people, poverty travels from one generation to the next and across children of the same parents.

We know from research that when children do not eat regularly and well, the social, physical and educational consequences are severe and cycles of deprivation repeat themselves. Unless, of course, something intervenes to disrupt the reproductive nature of poverty.

I have enormous respect for the many non-governmental organisations, religious bodies, foundations, welfare societies and committed citizens who provide access to food, clothing, sanitary towels for girls, shelter, medication and, of course government, subsidies for the poor. But we must have a long-term strategy



for lifting and keeping whole communities out of poverty and it should come as no surprise if I make the very obvious point that an accessible, high-quality education changes not only individual fortunes but also domestic economies as well as the course of nations.

This year I again asked students at the 2015 graduation ceremonies: “How many of you are the first in your families to go to obtain a university degree?” Two things grabbed our attention. One, that about 80% of the new graduates put up their hands and, two, that not all the raised hands were Black. Suddenly, a poor child in the family has a role model to look up to; a family can look forward to a decent though shared paycheck; and a neighbourhood has a graduate it can consult for legal advice or medical assistance or

psychological counselling or going to university.

But none of this is possible without solid research and illuminating stories that bring to public attention the status of children in South Africa society, the consequences of neglect of the young, and powerful cases of what can happen when innovative approaches to intractable problems affecting youth are taken to scale. The annual *South African Child Gauge* is without question the pre-eminent national publication on the subject of children, and society owes a debt of gratitude to the Children’s Institute for this evidence-led investment in the future.

I urge government, civil society actors, the donor community as well as the media to act on the critical information in the *South African Child Gauge 2015* especially with regards to the interventions described and outcomes anticipated that could still change the fate of millions of poor children and their families.