

Workshop targets coherence of poverty alleviation programmes

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The targeting of poverty alleviation programmes to children was in the spotlight at a Children's Institute and Save the Children Sweden workshop in September 2007. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Institute's *Means to Live* research with representatives from a range of government departments and civil society sectors.

The research focused on targeting aspects of six national poverty alleviation programmes related to children's socio-economic rights – the Child Support Grant, the School Exemption Policy and No-fee Schools, the National School Nutrition Programme, the Housing Subsidy, Free Basic Water, and free primary health care. Overall, the workshop was aimed at informing strategies to improve the coherence of programmes through their targeting and implementation.

A number of speakers addressed the meeting. Mabel Rantlha, the head of the national Office on the Rights of the Child in the Presidency, focused on collaboration between sectors as an important way to address the rights of the child and the huge disparities in South African society. She emphasised the need for a clear understanding of the causes, history and nature of poverty in the country as the basis for addressing child poverty, and reiterated the government's obligation to focus specifically on children at all levels and across sectors.

Vusi Madonsela, Director-General in the Department of Social Development, emphasised the government's commitment to engage with civil society through regular interaction. He described the "progressive realisation" of rights in its practical application within the department as the planning and measurement tool upon which the department's long-term plans and targets are based. He also drew attention to the interrelatedness of rights and the interconnection of programmes. For instance, access to social grants should also mean access to education, housing, and other goods and services.

The findings of the *Means to Live* research were presented in two sections. The first provided an overview of the targeting methods for the six programmes that it focused on. The research had evaluated the design and implementation of the programmes, individually and in combination. The presentation highlighted key obstacles in the public sector, as well as the conceptual and existing linkages between sectors. These provided opportunities for more inclusive targeting, provided that they built on the strengths of key programmes such as social grants and housing.

The second presentation turned to integrated poverty alleviation and focused on generic issues of targeting across programmes. These included findings that point to an "arbitrariness" in means-tested targeting in the context of changing household size and composition, erratic and fluctuating income, static income thresholds over time, and the varied definitions of 'poverty' across different programmes and sectors. Targeting gaps were highlighted – particularly the low age threshold for the Child Support Grant, which led to multiple exclusions for older children and also resulted in intra-household cross-subsidisation, which diluted the effect of the grant for young beneficiaries.

This, in particular, made proposed conditionalities nonsensical. Broad recommendations from the research were:

- to harness existing and possible cross-references between programmes, and to ensure that existing linkages do not lead to multiple exclusions;
- to develop more inclusionary approaches to programmes that act as gateways to other forms of poverty alleviation. One option was to consider a "wealth" test for poverty targeting, as opposed to an array of poverty lines that distinguish between the ultra poor, the poor, the not-so-poor, and so on – with the burden of proving poverty falling on the poor;
- to urgently address cross-cutting barriers: weak institutional and local government capacity, road and service infrastructure in rural areas, Home Affairs implementation inefficiencies, and other obstacles to integrated planning and service delivery (including budgeting and administration of programmes);
- to adopt context appropriate approaches to poverty alleviation that take into account population movement and child mobility, dual housing in urban and rural areas, spatial poverty and unemployment.

The meeting was facilitated by the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute.

The Means to Live report will be available at the end of April. Contact [Katherine Hall](#) for a copy or more information on the project

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