

# Poverty

3



### 3.1 The right to life, the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to social security.

The Constitution says:

- Everyone has the right to life.<sup>14</sup>
- Everyone has the right to have access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents, appropriate social assistance.<sup>15</sup>
- Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food.<sup>16</sup>
- Every child has the right to basic nutrition.<sup>17</sup>
- Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient water.<sup>18</sup>

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says:<sup>19</sup>

- The government must do all within its power to ensure that every child is able to survive and develop.
- Every child has the right to a standard of living that is adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
- Every child has the right to benefit from social security and the government must take the necessary measures to achieve the full realization of this right.<sup>20</sup>

What do these rights mean for children?

- Parents and caregivers must do their best to ensure that their children's basic survival needs are provided for (food, water, shelter, clothing) and that their children are provided with educational, cultural and recreational opportunities to ensure their optimal development.
- The government must create a society that assists parents and caregivers to provide for the basic and developmental needs of their children.
- If parents or caregivers are unable to provide for the basic needs of their child, or do not want to provide for these basic needs, the government has a duty to step in and assist the child.

- Everyone must be able to get at least 25 litres clean, safe drinking water per day. The water supply should not be further than 200 metres from any home.<sup>21</sup>
- Everyone must have access to proper sanitation facilities.<sup>22</sup>
- Children in especially vulnerable situations, such as children living with sick parents, children living on their own, and children living on the streets must be provided with material assistance immediately to ensure their survival and development.
- Government has a responsibility to ensure that children can go to school and that they have access to recreational and cultural opportunities.

### 3.2 children's experiences

Like most HIV-affected children in South Africa, the majority of the children who attended the National Children's Forum live in a context of poverty. The children's experiences speak clearly to the fact that existing social security measures in South Africa are not meeting the needs of poor children.

#### 3.2.1 "You feel that you are going to be poor and hungry"

The children spoke about how HIV/AIDS affects household income and about the fears associated with the death of a breadwinner.

**Nolwando, 18 years old:** "Sometimes if you are living with someone who is living with AIDS in the family, you feel sad and scared that he is going to die. Sometimes if he is a breadwinner you feel that you are going to be poor and hungry. You don't know where you will get money."

“ Sometimes if you are living with someone who is living with AIDS in the family, you feel sad and scared that he is going to die - if he is a breadwinner you feel that you are going to be poor and hungry. ”





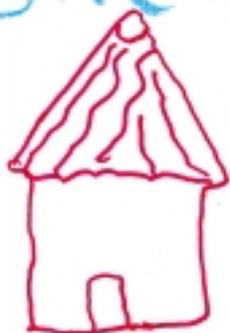
**Aphiwe, 13 years old:**

“ This is me and my little sister. My sister is 6 years old. I must look after her. And after school, I must go to fetch firewood at the veld. It is not that far. My sister must come with me on my back because there is no one to watch her when I go. I look after the chickens, and this is where I cook food outside, and I must sweep the house. If I fetch water from the tap I have to pay but I do not have any money, and so I have to walk a long distance. On weekends I wash clothes. My sister and I cook and clean. I don't have parents, it's just me and my sister ... I need water, inside the house. ”

“ I need love and care,  
and school shoes, and money  
and food, and a place to stay.”



Shelter



Money



**Sizwe, 11 years old:** “The problem that the child has is that his or her parent is not working, and the child struggles. They are not working because they are sick.”

**Pumla, 12 years old:** “If we can have some money to get some food and a car for when I go to school. I think money is good, because I do not have many clothes. My uncle works but he gets [very little] money. He was working at XX and they fired him because my mother got AIDS.”

### 3.2.2 “I work for my uncle and people in the village”

With the illness or death of a caregiver or breadwinner, children’s roles in the household often change. The

children spoke about how they become breadwinners in order to support younger siblings and sick parents and to be able to continue with their education.

**Joseph, 9 years old:** “I don’t have parents. I wake up, wash then take my books to school. During break I go home to eat. After school I go and herd cattle and goats for my uncle. The money they pay goes towards my school fees. Sometimes I do not go to school. Then I come back late with them and drive them into the kraal. I work for my uncle and people in the village.”

“ I need a proper house. A house in a good condition. I need someone who will wash my grandmother and our clothes because it is very hard for her because she is old. I also need money to pay for school fees.”

**Bheki, 17 years old:** “My father died in 1999 and my mother died in 1996. There is my older sister, me and 3 little children. We get food from Babomkhulu in return for ploughing people’s fields for him. [We] must also herd his cattle and goats everyday.”

### 3.2.3 “I need food. I need clothes. I need a house”

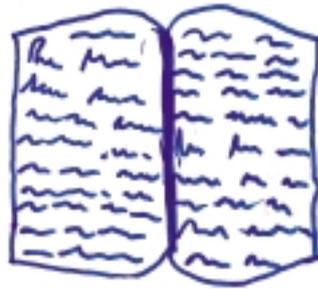
It was clear from the forum that children’s very basic needs are not being met. When asked what they needed help with, the most common responses from children were that they needed food, housing, water, school fees, clothing, medication, transport and love.





Clothes

Shoes



Education



Many of the children's pictures of the things they need contained drawings of school books, school uniforms, school shoes and stationery.

The children spoke about how they have to travel long distances to get water and other crucial resources.

**Douglas, 17 years old:** "My grandmother gives me power because she is very supportive. My grandmother helps us to look like other children. She is very old. We need water. We get clean water once a month if the truck of water ever comes. I will be happy if we can get clean water next to our home."

**Tiko, 13 years old:** "I need electricity, water, clothes, food, money. My problem is that squatter areas are unhygienic with no running water or sanitation."

Some of the children mentioned that they needed access to better housing or that they did not have anywhere to stay.

**Douglas, 17 years old:** "We ask also for a proper house. In winter our life is in trouble because it is cold and we don't live in a good condition."

**Tsakane, 10 years old:** "I stay at Sedibeng and I do not have parents. They are chasing us away where we are staying now. My grandmother does not stay with us. She sleeps out at work. We do not have food or money for rent."

Every one of the 9 groups of children mentioned the fact that they needed food and that they often went hungry.

**Vincent, 13 years old:** "I need clothes, shoes, food, money, education, love and health."

**Lumka, 13 years old:** "I need love and care, and school shoes, and money and food, and a place to stay."

**Thabang, 13 years old:** "I need not to get beaten, and to have enough food."

**Sefale, 8 years old:** "I do not have a mother. I stay with my grandmother and my father. At home there is no food most of the time. My grandmother and father do not have money. They are not working. My father is ill. I need food."

School fees, school uniforms and stationery were repeatedly mentioned by the children as things that they needed but could not afford.

**“ I need a grant to help my mother's sister who has also got her own children to raise – help her get something in order to raise me also. ”**

**Delene, 10 years old:** "I live with my mama who is sick, she's got a sore stomach and coughs, she is very sick. My pa does not live at home, he is in hospital. I sleep in the same bed with my mother, sister and brother. I go to school on the bus, where I have to pay. But sometimes I don't go because my mother does not have money."

**Samantha, 10 years old:** "We need to be safe and to have shoes, school books, clothes, love and education."

**Gazana, 13 years old:** "I need school shoes and a school bag, and school fees."

**Tebogo, 11 years old:** "My problem is that I haven't paid school fees and my mother has passed away. I am staying with my aunt ... At school they still want school fees. My aunt sells alcohol. Sometimes when the alcohol has not been bought we sleep with hunger. We do not take a lunch box when we go to school. Sometimes we do not eat in the morning. At school they don't give me food from the feeding scheme because I have not paid school fees."

### 3.2.4 "My grandmother needs a grant – she cannot cope"

Many of the children who attended the forum are in the care of older siblings, grandparents and other extended family. Very few of these households were eligible for the child support grant because the children were older than 7 years.

The children who were living with grandmothers stressed the fact that their elderly caregivers are struggling to cope and need financial support.

**Sindile, 14 years old:** "There are many needs – I want someone who will look after my grandmother when I am at school. You find that you don't have money to help her when she is ill. We are far away from the hospitals. I wish we can get help from government. The government can help children who are affected by HIV/AIDS by giving them opportunities like other children. Someone who can help my grandmother to raise us because she is not working. She only gets a pension."

The children asked for assistance in the form of social security grants. They spoke about how the grant process is long and difficult and about the need for grants to be available for children older than 7 years.

“ There are many needs – I want someone who will look after my grandmother when I am at school. You find that you don't have money to help her when she is ill. We are far away from the hospitals. ”

**Delani, 16 years old:** "I live with two uncles and they are not working. It is hard because my grandmother is very ill. I need them to get employment because they pay my fees. I need money to buy my medication. To get money I need to tell everybody that I am HIV positive even if I don't want to tell them. If government can improve the process of finding the grant. Their process takes too long. To help us to get healthy food. We need clean water. If they can help the organization that helps us because it is our only hope to service the challenges of HIV/AIDS."

They also spoke about other ways in which Government and non-governmental organizations could work together to alleviate poverty.

**Tebogo, 11 years old:** "They can also send food to parents or NGO's that are helping us now and there should also be a feeding scheme at school."

**Tsakane, 10 years old:** "If we can be taught sewing and how to use machines we can make our own dresses. We'll also need material to do this. The clothes will be beautiful."

**Lefa, 10 years old:** "I think our problems about clothes, blankets, shoes, food and school fees can be solved if we can have a woman who takes care of us. This woman should be loving, understanding and take care of us. She must also love us and she will support us, give us love and make our house warm. Maybe a house that will be given to the children by the government. It will be a place where we live. The government will help the person who helps us by giving her all the things that we need."

**Boitumelo, 9 years old:** "But maybe the government does not have money? Will they be able to do all those things?"



## 3.3 Conclusion

The children's experiences demonstrate how HIV/AIDS exacerbates peoples' vulnerability to poverty. The existing social security system is not meeting the needs of vulnerable children and children's basic rights to water, food, shelter and care are not being realised. As a result of the high mortality rate of young adults, children are increasingly taking responsibility for earning household income. These children struggle to continue with their education. The children complained about the fact that grants are inaccessible, particularly in rural areas and to children living in child headed households. They also questioned the government's policy to limit the child support grant to children under the age of 7 years and requested the urgent extension of the grant.