



2013/14: Issue 3

Knowledge platforms for the progressive realization of children’s socio-economic rights

In this issue of *From Evidence to Action* we focus on **PAN: Children**, a knowledge portal launched just over a year ago in a partnership between UNICEF and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). Our **Feature** traces the ideas and inspiration behind the portal, where we are after a year online and our plans to expand PAN: Children’s facilities and reach. As a learning network we have consulted widely with experts and other platforms and our **Case Study** highlights an expert retreat and exchange we held in May 2013 where we refined our strategic plans and grappled with issues around policy influencing and key institutional arrangements which we need to put in place. We shine our **Spotlight On** PAN: Children’s topical guides, the rationale behind them and how they can be updated by online users. Under **Toolkits and guidelines** we have sourced some useful documents on children’s participation, one of the priority areas for PAN: Children. Our **Resources** Section collates information about events, opportunities and related documents.

FEATURE: PAN: Children: Building a knowledge hub on children’s rights in southern Africa

The context

Since the attainment of democracy in 1994, South Africa has succeeded in making many inroads into realizing the rights and protection of children, particularly through its legal and social services frameworks. Through the Constitution, the Children’s Act and other legislation, the country has among the most progressive laws on children’s rights in the world.

The laws and accompanying policies strive to address extreme poverty through a massive social grants system which

has been growing in strength from year to year. Moreover, primary healthcare is free for pregnant women and children under the age of six. In addition, South Africa’s poorest children are exempt from paying school fees, a policy meant to increase enrolment and retention of children who cannot afford school fees.

Although progress has been made in many areas, challenges remain. Key among them is the policy challenge of reducing inequities and bottlenecks in delivery systems which impede impact. As statistics

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demonstrate, an enabling legal framework on its own does not necessarily translate into positive service delivery for children.

Close to two thirds of South African children live in poverty. Income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, has gone up in the past two decades and South Africa ranks as one of the most unequal countries in the world.

Compared to a child growing up in the richest income quintile, a child in the poor-est quintile is two times less likely to have access to adequate sanitation and water; two times less likely to be exposed to early childhood development programmes; three times less likely to complete secondary education; seventeen times more likely to experience hunger; and twenty-five times less likely to be covered by a medical scheme¹.

Evidence-informed policymaking

Within this context, the concept of 'evidence-informed policy' has been gaining currency in recent times. It refers to an approach which helps people make well informed decisions about policies and programmes by putting the best available evidence at the heart of policy development and implementation.

Evidence-informed policy and practice requires researchers and analysts to harness what is already known about an issue or problem, and to identify interventions that are likely to be effective ('what works'), efficient (at what costs) and equitable (for different social groups).²

By feeding this evidence into the policy making process, 'better' (more likely to have positive impact) policies can be developed. As such, increasing the use of evidence-based policy making contributes to addressing systemic constraints in achieving the fulfilment of child rights.

In South Africa, as elsewhere, a gap typically exists between the research community and the policymaking community, due to a number of underlying reasons at both ends.³ The notion of evidence-informed policy making is however gradually taking hold.

The Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD)⁴, a partnership between the Presidency and the European Union, promotes evidence-informed policy interventions which address poverty and inequality, and has

a strong focus on capacity building. The HSRC has established the Policy Action Network (PAN)⁵ which aims to disseminate information on the 'how to' of evidence informed policymaking, act as an information resource, and build an active network to support the advancement of policy expertise and greater participation in policy development processes.

The lack of a specific knowledge hub on children has been recognised by various stakeholders in the field. The 2010 National Stakeholders Meeting on Equity & Child Rights (UNICEF, 2010)⁶ called for 'an easily accessible platform that collates data, research and international best practices related to supporting children and women'.

Likewise, the 2011 Child Poverty Roundtable organised by the Presidency, Department of Social Development and UNICEF

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1. South African Human Rights Commission and UNICEF (2011). South Africa's Children – A review of Equity and Child Rights. Pretoria: UNICEF.
2. Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (2010). Report on training on Rapid Evidence Assessment, 3-5 November 2010. Pretoria: DPME.
3. See Godfrey L, Funke N, Mbizvo C. (2010). Bridging the science-policy interface: A new era for South African research and the role of knowledge brokering. South African Journal of Science; 106(5/6).
4. See <http://www.psppd.org.za>.
5. See <http://www.pan.org.za>.
6. UNICEF (2010). Discussion Paper on Equity and Child Rights in South Africa – National Stakeholders Meeting on Equity and Child Rights. Pretoria: UNICEF.



(PSPPD, 2011)⁷ posed that ‘the systematic gathering and storage of data and evidence is crucial for driving an evidence-based national agenda for children’. It recommended the establishment of a community of practice in child poverty research and policy development.

PAN: Children Phase I commenced as a partnership between HSRC and UNICEF in 2012 to start to fill this gap with the establishment of an online platform with facilities such as topical guides, policy dialogues and an exploration into the feasibility of an online helpdesk or rapid response research facility linked to the portal.

The strategic objectives of the project include the consolidation of highly credible information on socio-economic rights of children, greater understanding of criteria for effective programmes and projects on improving the situation of children in South Africa, improved evidence informed policy-making and improved communication

and linkages between researchers and policymakers.

Lessons learned: Evidence and policy

There is a growing body of international and South African literature focusing on the issue of evidence-based policy making and how to address the challenges that characterise this process (see, for example, ODI, 2004; Court et al., 2004; MRC, 2007; Funke et al., 2008; Strydom et al., 2010) (see *under resources*).⁸ The picture that emerges from the existing literature is fairly consistent in terms of its recommendations about how to improve evidence uptake into policy.

Walter et al. (2005)⁹ reviewed 93 empirical articles published since 1990 and concluded that ‘the two best ways to promote evidence-based policy and practice are

- to create ways for researchers and research users to get together; and
- to create, in service delivery organisations, a climate conducive to research uptake.’

The MRC (2007) found that research and policy networks are particularly important in influencing the uptake of evidence, assisting policy makers in interpreting evidence, and introducing new ideas and

concepts. Knowledge Hubs are a key tool for building these networks, facilitating dialogue and sharing knowledge resources.

Lessons have also been drawn from other successful policy-oriented knowledge hubs, in particular the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC) operated by the University of Birmingham in partnership with the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) (See *our case study below on how PAN: Children’s recent exchange with GSDRC*).

Some of the factors that have led to the success of the GSDRC include being an independent centre based at a university; the ability to offer an independent research service that responds rapidly to needs as they arise; and hiring staff with particular research and communication skills specifically for the research synthesis roles.

Phase II of PAN: Children will see the consolidation and expansion of additional facilities and services including the establishment of the online helpdesk/rapid response research facility linked to the online facility, email bulletins, dialogues and an annual event.



7. South African The Presidency, Republic of South Africa (2011). Child Poverty Roundtable Report, 11 May 2011. Pretoria: PSPPD. &HSRC (2011). From Evidence to Action – A Newsletter from the Policy Action Network: Focus on child-centred policy, June 2011.
 8. Overseas Development Institute (2004). Bridging Research and Policy in International Development. An analytical and practical framework. Briefing Paper.
 9. Walter, I., Nutley, S., and Davies, H. (2005). “What works to promote evidence-based practice? A cross-sector review.” Evidence & Policy; 1(3): 335-631.



We spoke to Andre Viviers, Senior Social Policy Specialist at UNICEF and the driving force in the PAN: Children Secretariat to deepen our understanding of this innovative project.

Please tell us about your first year. PAN: Children turned one recently – it must have been an exciting time!

Indeed it was an exciting time. One that I will always treasure fondly as one does not often see the birth and growth of a project of this nature, especially one close to your heart. One could literally see the growth of the online network on a weekly basis and all related to key policy issues pertaining to children – our most treasured asset as a nation (and a globe). It was also a time when the partnership between the HSRC and UNICEF gained momentum and PAN: Children grew into a joint operation – for the advancement of child rights and the achievement of equity for all children.



There were naturally growing pains and some major challenges at various levels. These were debated from all angles with honesty and diligence – and resolved one by one by the implementation team.

When talking about influencing policy, how do you see the contribution that PAN: Children can make?

Firstly PAN: Children provides a one-stop facility with all the latest evidence and practice based information children for policymakers to use. This is not only related to South Africa, but also to the sub-region (SADC, Africa and the world). It links policy and practice through evidence. It monitors and collects and post the best information that every policymaker and practitioner needs. Policy should not only be based on theory and concepts, but be informed by solid evidence – then it will touch the children who need it the most, and be implementable by those who have an obligation to fulfill the rights of all children.

PAN: Children not only provides the scientific evidence related to policy, but also provides links to implementation case studies related to the current policy discourse. These can either be in South Africa (as we have many good practice and case studies that can be tapped into) or other parts of the world, including the South and the North.

PAN:Children needs to build a network, how can people get involved?

There are various ways that people can get involved in PAN: Children. The most easy and obvious way is to subscribe to the news feeds and be updated with relevant child rights policy issues as they unfold. People can also participate in and contribute to the Communities of Practice where they can debate issue with like-minded people and drill deeper into specific topics. People can also attend open policy dialogues and contribute to policy related discussions (although invitations are usually sent for these). Policymakers can also contact the help desk facility with specific enquiries and will receive tailored responses.

The important thing is to USE PAN: Children. It is there to serve the needs of policymakers! And the PAN: Children secretariat is very receptive to comments and recommendations on how to improve its facilities.



PAN: Children has its roots in a call from stakeholders in the child rights arena who said in 2010 that there is a need for 'an easily accessible platform that collates data, research and international best practices related to supporting children'. The resource is now there for the stakeholders to use!

What are the most important issues we are facing today in South Africa?

There are many issues facing children in South Africa today. It is not always easy to list these as it is different for children in different parts of the country (and in different communities). I think one major issue that cuts across so many policy areas is children experiencing inequality and poverty in the country. Inequality and poverty are different for children than adults. Poverty and inequality can significantly impact on child development outcomes, including child survival, education, protection and participation.

Another major policy issue in the child rights field is early childhood development (ECD), in particular those investments in quality interventions across the health, social development and education sectors which ensure that all children have the best start in life.

I also believe that on a policy level we need to give more pertinent attention to children's right to access to information (if you know your rights – as stipulated in policy – you can claim those rights) and the right to participation (meaningful involvement of children in policy development, implementation and monitoring).

What do we have to look forward to from PAN: Children?

PAN: Children is growing daily and provides a free service to those who take evidence in the advancement of child rights seriously.

I think that in the next few months PAN: Children will emerge more and more as the knowledge hub of choice for those involved in policy and the implementation of policy, from Ministers, Directors-General, Members of Parliament, Members of Provincial Legislatures, senior government officials and practitioners.

PAN: Children is a gathering place for those who put the best interest of children first. With the active involvement of all stakeholders in the children's rights field it will become the premier child rights facility in the region.



CASE STUDY: LEARNING FROM OTHERS: PAN: CHILDREN/ GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE CENTRE (GSDRC) EXCHANGE

As learning network PAN: Children is always interested in learning from others. The PAN: Children secretariat, comprising staff from UNICEF and HSRC, organized a three-day event and invited Brian Lucas, the director of the GSDRC at the University of Birmingham to attend as a facilitator and in an advisory role on planning the way forward for PAN: Children.

PAN: Children is to some extent modeled on the GSDRC facility, and was interested in learning about GSDRC's approach to building its rapid response research service (through an online helpdesk), the research, editorial and review process adopted for its topic guides as well as other facilities offered. The emphasis was on systems adopted, lessons learned and how these could best be adopted by PAN: Children.

On the first day Brian provided extensive background information on how the GSDRC has evolved since its inception in 2001, including capacity requirements, funding models, partnerships and

clients, and organisational structures. The second day was more widely attended, including research staff from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and UNICEF, communications specialists, representatives from the PAN: Children advisory committee (which has a strong focus on government departments) and the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD).

The second day focused on conceptualizing and brainstorming future strategies and directions for PAN: Children, beyond the website platform. These discussions were very active and there is a wealth of information to draw on as we plan our journey forward.

The value that this process has added to PAN: Children's strategic planning has been valuable and this approach will be adopted by PAN: Children going forward. If you would like to find out more about the exchange or propose similar knowledge sharing events please contact vfichardt@hsrc.ac.za.



SPOTLIGHT ON: Topical guides

10 Topical guides on key issues have been developed by PAN: Children in the first year online. The PAN: Children topical guides are concise, 12-page overviews of an important issue which provide essential and core information to support and inform the policymaking process.

The existing ten topical guides (user-friendly guides to key topics or sectors) are intended primarily as a reference to policymakers. They will be reviewed and updated regularly and five to six additional topical guides will be added per year. We see these topical guides as living documents and recommendations on additional resources can be submitted to children.pan@hsrc.ac.za.

Each guide summarizes the current state of affairs in South Africa and is divided into the following sections:

- International, regional and national instruments
- National policies and laws
- Situation assessment and analysis
- Guidelines and advice on the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes
- Case studies

The topics for the additional topic guides will be determined in consultation with the Advisory Committee and key policymakers.

The following topical guides are available online (with one on corporal punishment in production):

- Child poverty and inequality <http://children.pan.org.za/node/9058>
- Child protection <http://children.pan.org.za/child-protection>
- Child survival <http://children.pan.org.za/child-survival>
- Children and HIV and AIDS <http://children.pan.org.za/children-and-hiv-and-aids>
- Children's participation <http://children.pan.org.za/childrens-participation>
- Early childhood development <http://children.pan.org.za/eccd>
- Education <http://children.pan.org.za/child-education>
- Food and nutrition <http://children.pan.org.za/food-and-nutrition>
- Social protection for children <http://children.pan.org.za/social-protection-for-children>
- Youth employment <http://children.pan.org.za/social-protection-for-children>
- Coming soon: Corporal punishment in the home

In addition to the topical guides a repository can be searched under each thematic area. This is updated regularly and can be found under the Related Publications heading under each theme.



RESOURCES

Toolkits and guidelines

An important objective in the longer term is to develop a section of the PAN: Children website which speaks directly to children. We thought it would be useful to profile the following guidelines on children's participation.

So you want to consult with children?: A toolkit of good practice

<http://children.pan.org.za/node/9369>

This toolkit is mainly aimed at governments, international agencies and NGOs who want to involve or consult with children in a meaningful way. It is not intended for project workers or researchers working on their own unless they are involved in structured consultations or focus group work. It is designed to create a participatory environment in which children can express their views and take part in policy debates and consultations rather than being about participatory learning.

UNICEF handbook: Children as advocates – Strengthening children and young people's participation in advocacy fora

<http://www.pan.org.za/node/9370>

This Handbook is a practical tool for UNICEF and partners in promoting and strengthening child participation in global advocacy. It is based on many years of experiences and lessons learnt. It incorporates minimum standards, protocols and guidelines that UNICEF has used to guide this process.

Child and youth participation resource guide

<http://children.pan.org.za/node/9371>

This selective and annotated bibliography presents resources on child and youth participation from Asia, Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, Australia and the Pacific. The main audiences for this resource guide are practitioners and managers involved in promoting child and youth participation in government, community-based organizations, child-led organizations, NGOs and UN and donor agencies.

Training opportunities

Free e-course on child rights policies

<http://www.policyforchildrights.org/>

UNICEF and the Economic Research Foundation (ERF) offer this e-learning programme focusing on socio-economic policies for child rights with equity. The topics covered include: the human rights-based approach to development; socially-responsive macroeconomic policies such as fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policies; equitable sector policies; public finance and social budgeting; multidimensional poverty; social protection, migration and climate change.

Free online training: Justice in matters involving child victims

<http://www.unodc.org/justice-child-victims/>

This is a free online self-learning tool developed by UNODC, UNICEF and IBCR with the support of the Government of Canada. The course can be taken by any professional or policy-maker interested or working in the area of support to child victims and witnesses of crime. The course does not require any authorisation, it can be taken at your own pace and using your own computer.

Rights of the child

http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base_id=846&language_id=1

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by more countries than any other human rights instrument. The treaty's nearly universal acceptance makes it an important tool for human rights defenders around the globe. This rapid e-course provided by *Human Rights Education Associates* gives an overview of the institutions and mechanisms that serve to fulfill the rights of children.

Child protection: 30 October – 10 December 2013

http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base_id=1570&language_id=1

This course aims to equip professionals with a basic understanding of the key issues pertaining to child protection and safeguarding. It is designed primarily for staff who hold responsibilities for child safeguarding within their organisations. The course involves approximately 30 hours of reading, on-line working groups, interaction with students and instructors, webinars and assignments and is offered over a 6 week period.

Child rights programming: 9-11 October 2013

http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base_id=593&language_id=1

This online course introduces staff members of (international) development agencies and NGOs to child rights programming. A child rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international children's rights standards and operationally directed to promoting, protecting and fulfilling children's human rights. The course focuses on practical tools for child rights situation assessment, programme planning, implementation, child rights indicators, and monitoring and evaluation within the child rights-based conceptual framework.

Children's rights in Africa course: 4 - 8 November 2013: 4-8 November 2013

http://www1.chr.up.ac.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1134&Itemid=839

The Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, will host a one-week intensive short course on children's rights in Africa from 4 to 8 November 2013. Participation in the course is opened to interested participants from all over Africa, with priority being given to participants from the SADC region and government officials and judges. The primary goal of the course is to equip participants with theoretical and practical knowledge in children's rights and wellbeing, as well as skills for the monitoring and implementation of the rights and welfare of children. The deadline for applications is 23 October 2013.

Child rights and child law for health and allied professionals: Children's Institute (UCT): First week of December 2013

http://www.ci.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=695:child-rights-education-for-health-professionals&catid=36&Itemid=171#sthash.Q77hcVEU.dpuf

This accredited five-day course provides cutting-edge education in child rights and child law for health and allied professionals – including up-to-date training on consent to medical treatment and the reporting of child abuse and neglect as outlined in the Children's Act. It examines the relationship between children's rights and child health, and aims to equip health and allied professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to realise children's rights in their daily practice.

The right to education: 29 January-11 March 2014

http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base_id=714&language_id=1

This certificate course offered jointly by HREA and the Right to Education Project provides human rights, development and education advocates with concepts, skills, and tools to deepen their knowledge and strategise their work on the right to education. The course will look at the theoretical foundations of the right to education, how to apply them in order to identify stakeholders, obligations and violations, and what strategies may be used to promote and realise the right.

Monitoring children's rights: 27 August-7 October 2014

http://www.hrea.org/index.php?base_id=332

This e-learning course is a basic introduction to the concept and practice of children's rights monitoring. It will address the monitoring cycle, including tool development methodologies for carrying out monitoring (respecting child participation), and the application of results for improving the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. This certificate course involves approximately 30 hours of reading, discussion, webinars, quizzes and a written assignment and is offered over a six-week period.

NOTE: In 2014 a new course on Juvenile Justice will be offered by HREA as well so please keep an eye on their website at www.hrea.org

Getting involved: How to join the PAN: Children network

There are a number of ways to link into the PAN: Children network:

- Subscribe to receive notifications about new material that has been loaded onto the site.
- Initiate blogs and debates after subscribing and manage responses.
- Submit resources including current news that you think would be useful for PAN: Children.
- Make suggestions on topics for new topical guides and opinion pieces.
- Our topical guides are living documents and are constantly under review, let us know if there are additional case studies or policy developments for updating.
- Make submissions on child-related issues to the Policy Action Network newsletter at www.pan.org.za.
- Let us know about opportunities such as training, workshops and conferences.
- Partner with PAN: Children in workshops and dialogues.
- Introduce PAN: Children to your networks.

Subscribing is easy, your details are confidential and your membership means that we can keep you up to date on issues relating to children's socio-economic rights.

We hope to hear from you soon

The PAN: Children Team

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This newsletter is supported by the HSRC and aims to inform policy-makers, researchers and development practitioners in South Africa of emerging developments, results and good practice in the application of evidence-based policy-making. The HSRC has attempted to make the information in this newsletter as accurate as possible and it is intended for personal and/or educational use only. It is provided in good faith without any express or implied warranty. The content of this newsletter can in no way be taken to reflect the views of these partners, including the HSRC.

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