

## **RESPONSE TO UNITED NATIONS INDEPENDENT EXPERT ON THE QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND EXTREME POVERTY: DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION (DBE)**

**Questionnaire on lessons learned, progress and challenges to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for the most vulnerable addressed to Governments by the Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty**

### **MDG 2 - Achieve Universal Primary Education**

#### ***1. People from which population groups are most likely to drop out of primary school in your country and why?***

Enrolment rates at primary level are generally very high, for both girls and boys, standing at about 98% for 7 – 13 year old aged children. Studies indicate that most out-of-school children in this age group live in rural areas, particularly on farms. However, vulnerabilities identified as being likely to affect a child's enrolment, retention, progression and achievement, in education include:

- children living in extreme poverty
- children with a disability
- orphaned children
- children living with relatives rather than their biological parents
- child-headed households
- undocumented children born outside of South Africa
- children who are abused and/or exposed to violence and/or neglect
- children in child marriages
- teenage mothers
- chronically ill children
- children living in households affected by HIV and AIDS.

#### ***2. Please describe specific social protection policies and programmes that have been put in place to prevent school drop-out amongst the most vulnerable. Are there any social protection policies that have had an impact on the withdrawal rate of children from primary and secondary education?***

Government has introduced a number of social protection policies to prevent drop-out amongst the most vulnerable. These include: the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), the No-Fee Schools Policy, the Scholar Transport Programme, the Early

Childhood Development Programme, a School Hostel Strategy for farm and rural areas and Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy. Details of some of these programmes are discussed below:

### **2.1. National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP)**

Many young children living in poverty are food-deprived and are therefore not able to participate fully in their own development. The national school nutrition programme aims to promote better quality education for the poorest learners by providing a meal to learners benefiting from the programme. The rationale of the NSNP is to actively enhance children's learning capacity. This is done by providing an incentive for children to regularly and punctually attend school. Further, the programme addresses particular micro-nutrient deficiencies.

In 2008, the programme provided meals to learners at all Quintile 1, 2 and 3 primary schools, that is about 6 million learners in over 18 000 schools during the 156-day school year. During the period under review, National Treasury provided R200 million as additional funding to provincial education departments to improve food-related infrastructure at schools, such as kitchen equipment, garden tools, and eating and serving utensils. Many information workshops on food safety, hygiene and food production were also conducted.

### **2.2 School Health Screening Programme**

The Department is implementing a School Health Screening Programme together with the Department of Health. School health screening receives its policy mandate from the School Health Policy developed by the Department of Health in 2003 and White Paper 6 (2001a) within the Department of Education that focuses on inclusive education. The School Health Screening Programme is being implemented through two School Health Weeks schedule for March and October 2010, respectively. The focus of the screening programme in 2010 is on 50 000 Grade 1 learners located in the most disadvantaged education and health communities for 'deserving' learners. Such a phased approach towards implementation was adopted to ensure that the most vulnerable learners are able to access health services while resources and systems are strengthened to scale up the programme.

## **2.3 Free Education**

The South African government has introduced a number of measures to ensure access to free education for learners whose parents cannot afford to pay school fees.

In 2007, the government adopted a policy of “no fee” schools. The aim of this policy is to progressively give effect to the constitutional imperative of the right to a basic education. It is a policy and budgetary response to the need to make education truly accessible by removing fees as a barrier. The South African Schools Act has been amended accordingly and schools in the lowest two quintiles have been declared “no fee” schools. In compensation, Government subsidises the schools’ loss of fee income. The government is committed to extend the proportion of learners in “no fee” schools from 40% (Quintiles 1 and 2) to 60% (Quintiles 1-3) over the next Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) cycle. The Department of Education has also secured funding in the MTEF to compensate schools in the higher quintiles that provide fee exemptions for learners whose parents cannot afford to pay (DoE, 2008).

By 2009, 55.2% of public schools (about 14 000 schools) covering 42% of learners (over 5m learners) were classified as no-fee schools.

## **2.4 Learner Transport**

Findings from the National Household Travel Survey, conducted by the Department of Transport in 2003, revealed that, while the majority of learners (75%) took less than 30 minutes to walk from home to school, as many as 5% of those walking (or more than 570,000 learners) took longer than one hour to reach their education sites. Nationally, 25% of primary school learners (1,7 million) and 36% of high school learners (1,8 million) walked longer than 30 minutes or about three kilometres in one direction. Provinces, such as KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and North West in particular, were found to have a high proportion of learners walking longer than 30 minutes to reach their education sites.

The DoE introduced free learner transport for those learners who lived far from schools. In 2005, more than 200 000 learners country-wide were benefiting from this transport. Budgets of provincial education departments (PEDs) indicate an upward trend in subsidies towards the provision of learner transport. The Department is in the process of developing a Policy on Learner Transport aimed at promoting equity in the provisioning of learner transport across all nine provinces.

## **2.5 The Quality Improvement, Development, Support and Upliftment Programme (QIDS-UP)**

The Quality Improvement, Development, Support and Upliftment Programme (QIDS-UP), is a national initiative, which allocates learning resources to schools, especially those situated in poor and disadvantaged communities. It provides teacher and district development support to some 5 000 low-performing primary schools with a view to improving learning especially in literacy and numeracy skills. It is projected that QIDS-UP would cost R12.5 billion over the first five years. Under-performing secondary schools are also in line for special attention and support.

## **2.6 Safety of learners**

The Department has initiated several interventions to facilitate the creation of safe and caring education institutions across the country, including the formal abolition of corporal punishment (NEPA, 1996a; SASA, 1996b). Advocacy about alternative forms of discipline and sponsorship of sport and cultural programmes are part of these interventions.

The Department, in collaboration with provincial school-safety co-ordinators, identified 585 schools with high levels of crime and violence. As part of a ministerial intervention project, nine schools (one in each province) have been identified for a pilot study. A minimum package of infrastructural changes has been compiled for schools to address incidents of crime and violence. The minimum package consisted of hand-held metal detectors, the appointment of security officers, installation of a security fence and appropriate lighting.

The impact of the department's intervention will be monitored over six months at each of the nine schools. In collaboration with provincial education departments, the remainder of the 576 schools with high levels of crime and violence will be targeted, with focused developmental programmes to curb incidents of crime and violence. An early warning system, "Be Aware-Take Care", has been developed and piloted in three provinces (Eastern Cape, Limpopo and the Western Cape) in partnership with the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention. Further, partnerships have been strengthened with the Departments of Safety and Security and of Social Development; Business Against Crime; and the Centre for Justice and Crime.

## **2.7 Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) Programme**

Disease and poverty have resulted in a growing number of orphans and vulnerable children and youth, and in increased absenteeism and drop-out from schools. Available evidence demonstrates that children will most likely drop out of school when there is insufficient support to cope with their circumstances in life. In response, in 2008, the Department began to implement the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) Programme, a SADC initiative. The vision of the programme is for all education institutions in SADC Members States to become inclusive centres of learning, care and support where every learner, especially the most vulnerable, are able to access schools, are retained in school and can perform to their maximum potential. The CSTL programme builds on existing programmes within the Department and aims to achieve coherence amongst the various modalities of care and support currently being provided. In particular, it aims to facilitate an integrated governmental response towards health and social barriers to learning.

## **2.8 Drug and Substance Abuse Prevention and Management Programme**

In response to growing levels of substance use amongst young people, and in particular, its strong association with a host of high risk behaviours such as unprotected sex and violence, the Department implements a Drug and Substance Use Prevention and Management Programme. The programme is guided by the 2002 Drug Abuse Policy Framework (2002) as well as National Guidelines for the Management and Prevention of Drug Use and Abuse in all Public Schools and Further Education and Training Institutions. The programme is largely implemented through the Life Orientation Learning Area of the school curriculum. Schools also implement random search and seizure as well as drug testing procedures in order to detect drug use early on and to refer learners for appropriate treatment, care and support.

## **2.9 Learners With Special Education Needs**

White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education (DoE, 2001a) defines learners with special education needs as not only those with physical, mental or neurological impairments but also those experiencing learning difficulties because of socio-economic deprivation. The policy envisages an inclusive education and training system, providing support within public ordinary schools for learners with mild to moderate disabilities. Alongside this

system are ‘full service schools’ – some 500 converted primary schools which are being phased in over time. They serve a dual purpose of catering for learners with severe disabilities and acting as a resource centre for educators and schools in the area. Professional support personnel to assist learners with special needs are appointed to the district and deployed from there, rather than being appointed to a specific school.

The number of learners with special support needs varies from 2 to 4% of the learner population. Of these, about 0.64% (88,000) learners attend 400 special schools.

In recognising the enormous challenges faced in this area, government has increased funding for inclusive education considerably over recent years, from R1.8 billion in 2004/05 to R2.2 billion in 2007/08 (DoE, 2008).

Given the large gap between the numbers of learners with special education needs and the capacity of special schools to absorb them, it is evident that conditions have to be created in mainstream schools to ensure that learners with special education needs are well catered for. The establishment of full service schools attempts to deal with this problem at some level, however the challenges are great, and many schools limp along with whatever resources they have to cater for learners with special education needs.

Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001a) envisages a chain of support to learners with special needs stretching from the professionals at national and provincial level to multi-disciplinary district-based support teams (DBSTs) that advise school-based support teams (SBSTs) comprising a group of teachers who volunteer for the task of supporting their colleagues in the classroom. School-based support teams are therefore the mechanism by which individual teachers are to be assisted to identify children who experience barriers to effective learning and plan appropriate interventions. Support teams can be highly effective when the members know their roles, are well informed, motivated and co-ordinated, and able to work collaboratively with frontline teachers.

***3) What processes and mechanisms to ensure participation of users in decision-making as well as transparency and accountability have been most useful in preventing school drop-out of the most vulnerable and which have been less useful?***

In a review of a pilot Peer Education Programme conducted by the Department in 2007-2008, strong advocacy was made for child participatory approaches to be adopted as one of the main principles in the design of programmes. As a result, young people have since

been engaged at every discussion or sitting regarding Peer Education, Learner Pregnancy and HIV and AIDS. Young people have also been given an opportunity to shape the agenda of the renowned HIV-prevention-focused Health Mate publication of the Department, which mainly communicates health and social information that has the potential of leading to school dropout. Young people in school have submitted notable correspondences leading to the conclusion that learners do appreciate the notion that “schools protect children”.

The South African Schools Act envisages School Governing Bodies as realising the vision of democracy in schools. The School Governing Body should be the pre-eminent vehicle for the development of an educational community and practice around the school but is dependent on inter-sectoral, cooperative governance and management practices accompanied by creative and intensive capacity building.

Partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders to improve the quality of education is high on the agenda of the South African government as reflected in its Quality Teaching and Learning Campaign (QLTC).

### **MDG 3: PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN**

The Constitution of South Africa and the South African Schools Act (SASA) provide for a democratic, non-racist and non-sexist education system. The (SASA) established a national non racial, no discriminatory education system. The SASA aims to promote access, quality and democratic governance in education, and makes schooling compulsory for all South Africans aged 7 – 15 years. SASA was enacted with the aim of creating a uniform education landscape in South Africa, underpinned by quality education for all.

South Africa is justifiably proud of its participation rate, with overall gender parity having been achieved. An analysis of the GER of the entire schooling system reveals that overall gender parity was achieved for the period 1997 to 2007 (Table 1). In all instances, the GPI was between 0.99 and 1.03. However, learner enrolment at the primary school level was only equitably distributed between female and male learners in the years 1997 to 1999, after which there was a male advantage. By contrast, throughout the reporting period the secondary-level GPI reflected a female advantage. The apparent male advantage in primary enrolment may be misleading. On the contrary, it reflects greater male repetition, which eventually contributes to greater male drop-out rates in secondary

schools, which is why the GPI favours females by the time the learners reach secondary school level.

**Table 1: Gross enrolment rate (GER) of female and male learners by level of education: 1997-2009**

Year	Primary			Secondary			Total		
	Female	Male	GPI	Female	Male	GPI	Female	Male	GPI
1997	116	120	0.97	90	77	1.16	106	103	1.03
1998	115	118	0.97	92	80	1.15	105	102	1.03
1999	113	116	0.97	91	80	1.14	104	101	1.02
2000	103	109	0.95	87	77	1.13	97	96	1.01
2001	103	107	0.96	89	79	1.12	97	96	1.01
2002	103	108	0.95	84	78	1.08	95	95	1.00
2003	101	106	0.95	83	77	1.08	93	94	0.99
2004	102	107	0.95	93	85	1.09	98	98	1.00
2005	101	105	0.96	92	85	1.08	97	97	1.00
2006	100	104	0.96	95	87	1.09	98	97	1.01
2007	102	105	0.97	93	88	1.06	99	98	1.01
2008	97	99	0.98	87	84	1.03	92	93	0.99
2009	96	99	0.98	83	82	1.01	92	90	1.02

*Source: Data for 1997 to 2001 and for 2007 obtained from DoE databases and Mid-Year Population Estimates by Single-Year Ages, provided by Statistics South Africa; 2002 data from DoE, 2004; 2003 data from DoE 2005a; 2004 data from DoE 2005b; 2005 data from 2006a; 2007 data from DoE 2007d.*

**Note:** Data for 1997 is for public schools only. Data for independent schools was not available for that year.

Further to these, there are several other initiatives addressing social ills that affect girl children with regards to their access to schooling. These include learner pregnancy and sexual abuse in schools. The South African Constitution criminalises discrimination on the basis of pregnancy. In addition, the measures for prevention and management of learner pregnancy in schools were introduced in 2007. The Measures provide a framework for:

- (i) ensuring that learners are fully informed about reproductive matters and have the information that assists them in making decisions;
- (ii) informing affected learners about their rights to education; and
- (iii) supporting teachers in managing the effects of learner pregnancy in schools.

These instruments guide response to teenage pregnancy in the school system. The Department has also put in place programmes to address sexual harassment in public schools. In addition, the Department educates learners about the prevention of pregnancy



and sexually transmitted diseases, and about positive lifestyles choices through the Life Orientation Programme.

Lastly, the Girls and Boys Education Movement and other Peer Education programmes, provide empowerment girls and boys with reliable information and knowledge, to guide them in discussing and addressing issues that are of concern to them in their schools and communities, and to act together to bring about positive changes in their lives and those of their peers.

## **MDG 6: (COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES)**

### ***1) Which population groups amongst children have the highest prevalence of major diseases (HIV and AIDS)?***

HIV and AIDS prevalence in South Africa is highest among Blacks. However, the overall prevalence of this disease has decreased between 2005 and 2008, largely due to the successful implementation of programmes such as the prevention of mother to child transmission programme. Similarly, the first turn in the tide of the epidemic has been reported amongst young people aged 15-24 year in 2008. High risk for HIV infection amongst children and youth emanate largely from the social conditions in which they grow up. Children and youth at risk include:

- orphans
- children living without their biological parents
- child-headed households
- children who are abused and/or exposed to violence and/or neglect
- children who drop out of school
- children growing up in poor areas (informal & rural)
- children living in poverty

### ***2) Specific policies and programmes that ensure access to health care services for those most vulnerable.***

As 95% of learners within the schooling system are HIV negative, the thrust of interventions in the Department have been on prevention activities. As such, the HIV and AIDS Life Skills Education Programme forms the core of the Department's response to HIV and AIDS and has been implemented in all public schools since 2000. The programme finds its policy mandate from the National Policy on HIV and AIDS for

Learners and Educators in Schools (1999). The main objective of the life skills programme is to integrate HIV and AIDS and relevant life skills into the school curriculum as a strategy to prevent and mitigate the spread of HIV and AIDS. As some learners are both infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, the programme also includes a component of care and support that includes referral to health care and social welfare services to access the necessary support.

3) *What processes and mechanisms to ensure participation of beneficiaries in decision-making as well as transparency and accountability have been most useful in improving the coverage and quality of health services to the most vulnerable and which have been less helpful?*

Peer education is used as a strategy within HIV and AIDS to empower learners to influence decision-making for themselves and their peers as well as to create linkages to health and welfare services.

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