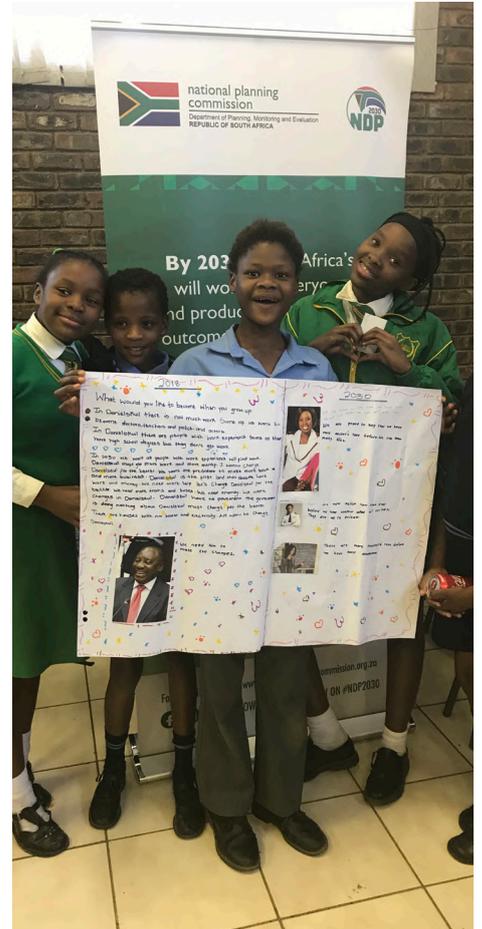


# CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

## LESSONS FROM THE CHILDREN'S NDP INITIATIVE



# EXECUTIVE

# SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>

In this, the second report of the Children's National Development Plan (NDP) initiative, the National Planning Commission (NPC) analyses children's lived realities and makes recommendations for meaningful development planning.

Using a play-based, experiential learning method expertly facilitated in workshops in each province with a carefully selected sample of children, we extracted insights about the children's experience of care, basic and social services delivery and the value of their voices in society.

Topics covered included children's rights, how government works and policy debates. When the children trusted the authenticity of the process they shared their opinions freely and even felt comfortable challenging power hierarchies. The report analyses the inputs and experiences of the Children's NDP facilitation team, drawing on quotations from children in the workshops and on salient research.



The theme that emerged most strongly was that they understood that many children live with limited resources that have constrained relationships with caregivers that undermine their development and experience ubiquitous violence that destroys their self-confidence. Dysfunctional communities exacerbate the experience of poverty and lack of safety.

The children understood that education was the key to unlocking better opportunities, but their experiences at schools were of deprivation and trauma. They experienced the health system as broken and were sceptical about the possibility of achieving goals of health promotion and general disease prevention.

They accepted that grants were critical to the provision of income support for those living in impoverished circumstances. Although the children yearned to be active citizens and nation builders, their voices were constrained by those in power and undermined by the experience of violence that affects their self-confidence.

# LESSONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

- There is a need for a responsive health system with respectful health practitioners.
- Children's ubiquitous experience of violence in all settings affects their interpersonal relationships and acts as a key driver of gender-based violence.
- Grant income support is critical.
- The school system must accommodate differences in approach rather than homogeneity while equalising access to resources.
- Children's lived realities continue to reflect the effects of poverty, inequality and unemployment.
- Children need safe spaces in communities if they are to feel free and normal.
- Authentic engagements with children will affirm their agency and citizenship.
- The burden of care should not be disproportionately placed on children.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CHILDREN'S NDP



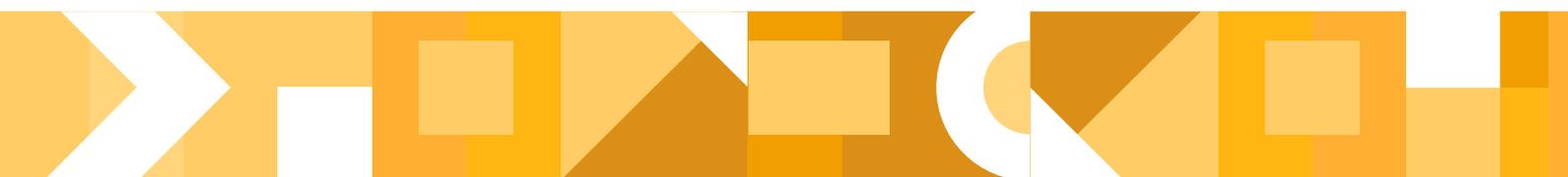
Invest in life-course development support for children.



Affirm children's citizenship and agency.



Ensure that adults deliver on their responsibilities towards children.



# INTRODUCTION

The first National Planning Commission (NPC), appointed in April 2010, was tasked with providing South Africa with a vision and long-term plan for the country's future. The commission delivered on this mandate when it tabled the National Development Plan: Vision 2030 (referred to as the NDP or the Plan) in Parliament on 12 August 2012.<sup>2</sup> The NDP, which was adopted by all political parties at the time, was subsequently incorporated into government's medium-term strategy. When the second commission was appointed in September 2015, its mandate included consultation with key stakeholders to assess the implementation of the NDP.<sup>3</sup>

The NPC identified children as an important stakeholder group, partly because they will be the adult population in the future the plan envisions. The primary protectors of children's rights are their parents or caregivers, with the state playing a secondary role. It was, therefore, important to elicit the children's views on their future.

Their relevance as stakeholders was, however, also based on the intrinsic understanding of children as an important part of society in general and as agents, in particular. It was this understanding, coupled with the fact that children were not consulted during the process of developing the NDP, that prompted the NPC to embark on a countrywide process of engaging children in each province about the NDP.<sup>4</sup>

The engagement was designed to educate them about the NDP and its proposals for the future and to assess gaps in both the process and in the content of the NDP.<sup>5</sup> The NDP makes proposals about proper nutrition<sup>6</sup>, quality and



holistic education<sup>7</sup>, basic welfare services<sup>8</sup>, safety from harm and crime<sup>9</sup> and appropriate health services that will decrease the under-five mortality rate<sup>10</sup> and the rate of HIV/AIDS infections.<sup>11</sup> In the Children's NDP initiative, the second NPC set out to investigate children's lived realities and their recommendations for meaningful development planning.

While the method of authentic engagement with children is well-documented in the *Children's NDP: Final Process Report*,<sup>12</sup> it is important to understand the process in order to place the findings of this report in context. A fundamental aspect of the process was immersing commissioners in the children's circumstances in order to create the conditions for authentic engagements with the children.



# CHILDREN ARE AN IMPORTANT STAKEHOLDER IN DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

This informed the NPC's examination of children's understanding of rights, governance and the NDP. The NPC set out to engage children on the margins of society,<sup>13</sup> in communities in all nine provinces of South Africa. The initiative recognized, as demographic data will show, that children on the margins are the main beneficiaries of much of the development planning that aims to address the NDP's goal of alleviating poverty, inequality and unemployment.

Most of the children who participated in the workshops came from rural or remote settings. If they lived in urban areas they did not live in privileged circumstances. The NPC also engaged children in prisons, in conflict with the law and in state care. By meeting the children in the context in which they lived and learned, the commissioners were able to understand the environment and the children were more comfortable about expressing themselves and recognised the NPC's willingness to engage them. It had the additional benefit of exposing commissioners to the realities of poverty faced by these children.



The report contains a child rights analysis of the NDP.<sup>14</sup> It analyses the inputs and experiences of the Children's NDP facilitation team drawing on quotations from the children in the workshops, as well as salient research. It demonstrates the value of a model of authentic consultation with children to inform development priorities.

First, it describes the context of childhood in South Africa by providing graphic depictions of demographic data. Second, the report articulates how engaging children on the margins can help adult policymakers understand their lived reality, as well as their experiences of care and social services. Third, it presents overall findings on the value of children's voices in development planning, including them in nation-building but not overstating their responsibilities. Fourth, it draws key recommendations from the process and content as uncovered in the Children's NDP initiative.

The conclusion consolidates insights emerging from the children themselves about children's rights, citizenship and the role government and other organizations should play to build human capacity from childhood in order to give effect to and enhance the proposals in the NDP.

# METHOD OF

# ENGAGEMENT

The value of children's participation in governance is not often well understood.<sup>15</sup> Children are rarely explicitly engaged in authentic consultations to inform policy-making, as talking and listening to children about policy issues requires particular skills. The Children's NDP workshops used play-based, experiential learning activities that were expertly facilitated to communicate the complexities of children's rights, how government works and contemporary policy and planning issues.

In addition to conveying content, children's rights were demonstrated in the workshops.<sup>16</sup> To give effect to the belief that children had valuable experiences and opinions to share, the facilitators ensured an environment where rights were clearly stated and respected. Children were encouraged to share this invaluable information through co-operative activities such as role-playing, debates, group work and poster making. The process confirmed that using the correct methods and skilled facilitation, children can contribute to the complex issues that affect them, thereby participating in governance.

At the outset, the NPC understood that while children are viewed as future citizens and leaders, they are not construed as active citizens. During the workshops, children were encouraged to view themselves as agents for change in the present. At first, they were very tentative as their experiences dealing with adults had taught them to be guarded and they were unsure whether they could truly challenge power hierarchies without negative consequences. They were also sceptical about whether facilitators would actually listen to their views or whether what was required from the process was simply for them to endorse adult views. This was often illustrated by their body language and behaviour towards the facilitators.

Once the children decided to trust the facilitators and the process they were more relaxed and shared openly and even felt comfortable with challenging power,<sup>17</sup> including the power of the facilitator.<sup>18</sup> By the end of the two-day workshops, when they presented their Vision 2030, they spoke with pride and confidence about their ideas.

## CHILDREN ARE CITIZENS AND LEADERS TODAY



They were assured that their views would be taken forward. A group from each workshop was nominated to form part of a reference group for outputs to be developed. This process reaffirmed the understanding that children would express themselves if they were supported in developing and sharing their views in processes that acknowledge them as active citizens.

The process of the workshops was memorable because, although there were core elements of an engagement strategy, there were also opportunities for fun and creative learning. Complex subjects were simplified through play. There was a great deal of flexibility and when in-depth discussions were needed about specific topics such as inclusion or sexuality they were accommodated. Facilitators worked from a child-rights perspective, which meant that practising equality and protecting dignity was key.<sup>19</sup>

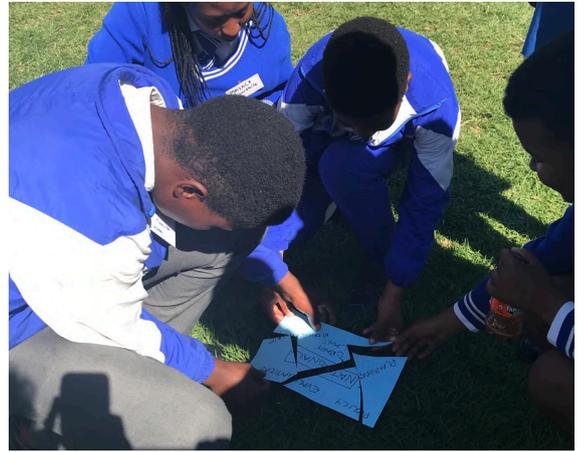
The core facilitators dressed casually, regardless of their social status and qualifications. Several became role models for children who, for example, saw someone who had grown up in a village transformed into a nuclear scientist<sup>20</sup>, or a township person who had evolved into a social change agent. In contrast to their daily realities, they saw people of their parents' generation who had managed to 'beat the system' of disadvantage to triumph in their personal development. This model of learning was unique for most participants but, more importantly, the experience made the children realise the possibilities education could unlock.

The process also left a lasting impression on the commissioners who attended the workshops. Those who were used to working with children and youth commended the model for the authenticity of engagement.<sup>21</sup> Those who did not work with children and youth in their daily lives hailed the process as providing unique insights into the lived reality and ability of children to be active agents in development planning.<sup>22</sup> Engagements like these, which foster equality, will change the views of both adults and children about how to work together.

**CHILDREN HAVE  
VALUABLE  
EXPERIENCES  
AND OPINIONS  
TO SHARE**





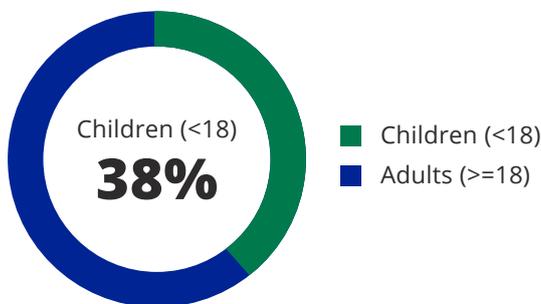


# CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN<sup>23</sup>

Data shows children make up 38% of the South African population. They live in households where only 39% of adults are employed. About 66% of all South African households live in a formal dwelling. On average, households only earn R29 400 per year but 40% of child-headed households have no income at all. Sixty-one percent of child-headed households live in formal houses. Only 42% of all South African households have piped water inside their homes, 74% of households have in-house prepaid electricity meters, and 59% have flush toilets. In terms of education, 43% of all the population in South Africa have earned a matric.

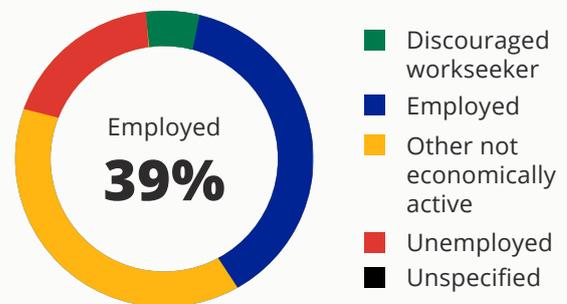
## POPULATION BY AGE CATEGORY

Source: Community Survey 2016



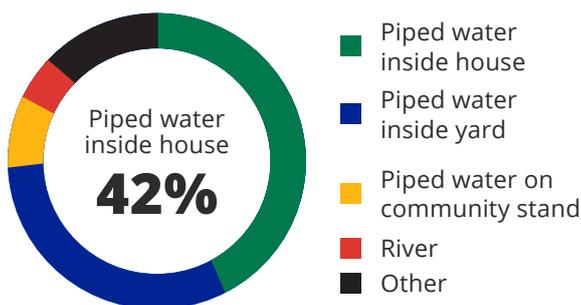
## POPULATION BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS

\* Universe: Individuals 15 and older  
Source: Census 2011



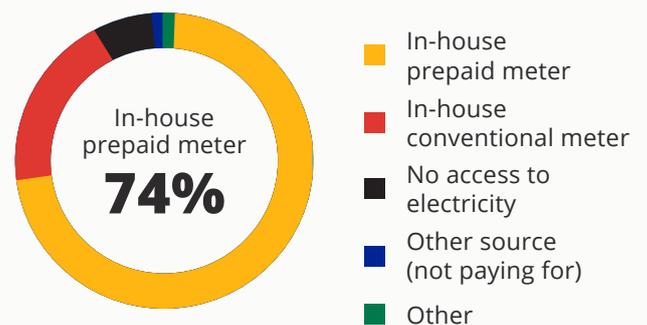
## POPULATION BY WATER SOURCE

Source: Community Survey 2016



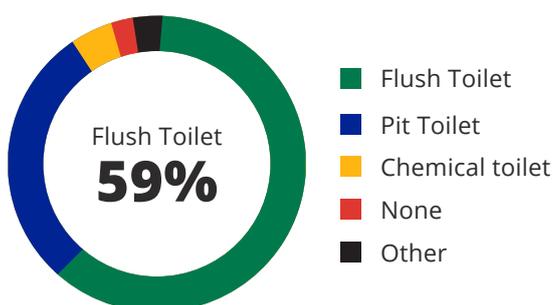
## POPULATION BY ELECTRICITY ACCESS

Source: Community Survey 2016



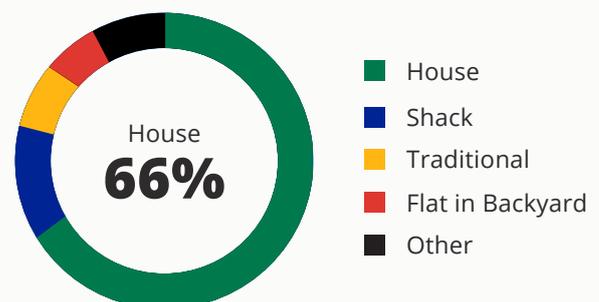
## POPULATION BY TOILET FACILITIES

Source: Community Survey 2016



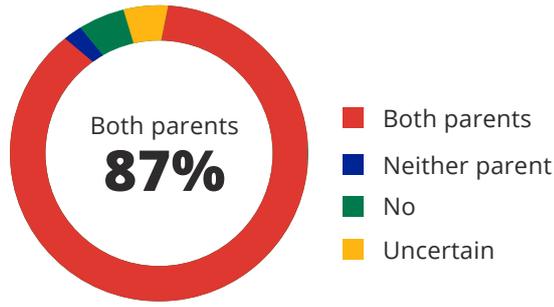
## POPULATION BY TYPE OF DWELLING

Source: Community Survey 2016



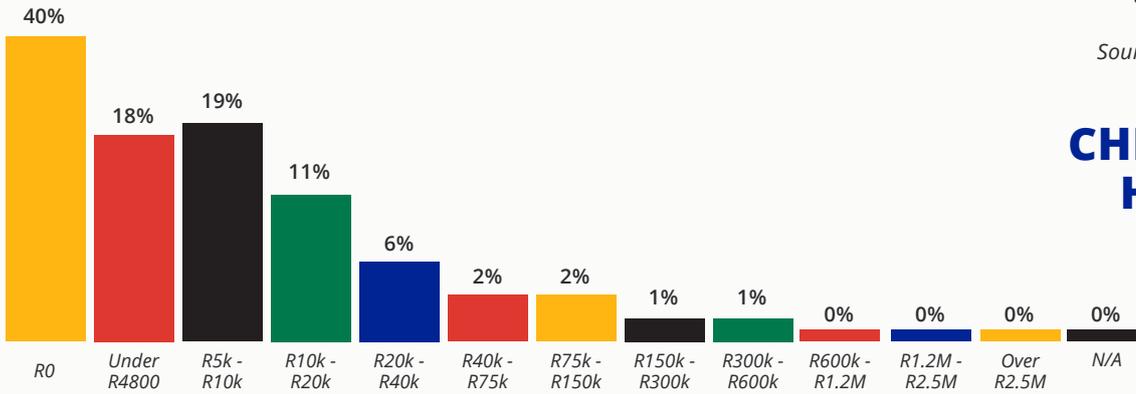
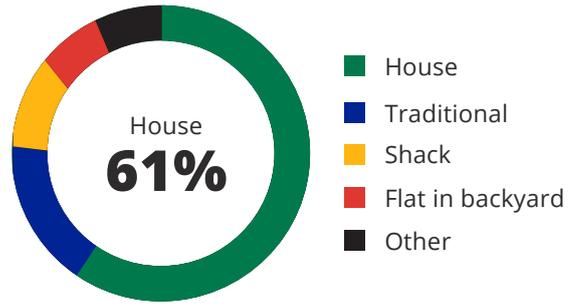
### CHILDREN 14 AND UNDER BY BIOLOGICAL PARENTAL SURVIVAL

\* Universe: Individuals 14 and older



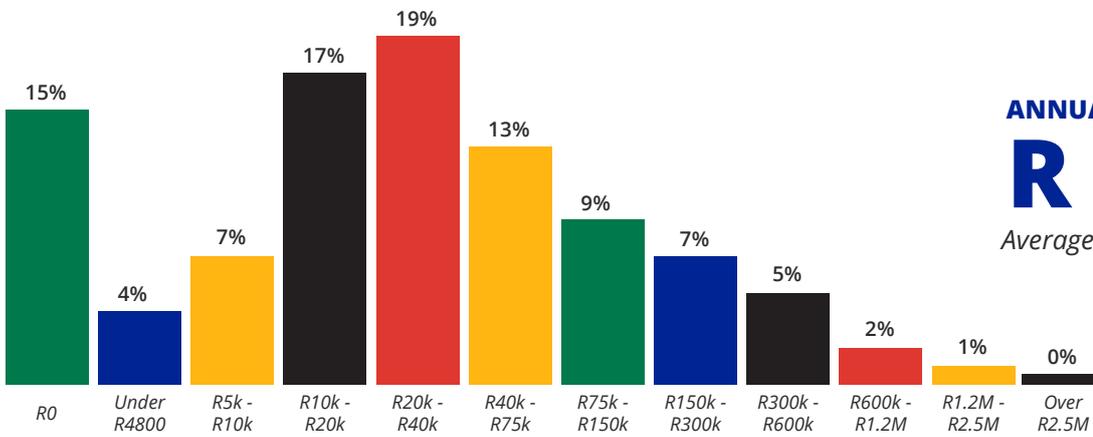
### CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE OF DWELLING

\* Universe: Households headed by children under 18



\*Universe: Household headed by children under 18  
Source: Community Survey 2016

## ANNUAL CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLD INCOME

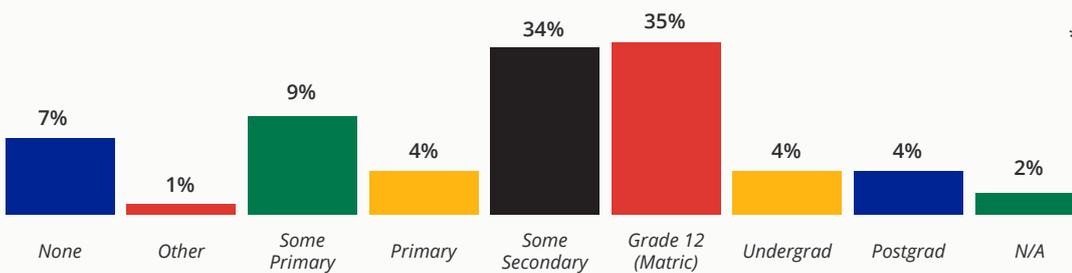


Source: Census 2011

## ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

# R 29 400

Average annual household income



\*Universe: Individuals 20 and older  
Source: Community Survey 2016

## POPULATION BY HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL



# ANALYSIS OF



# CHILDREN'S INSIGHTS

## EXPERIENCES OF CARE

### *Living with limited resources*

The NPC found the children often did not problematise poverty upfront because they had resigned themselves to it in that they understood that many households in South Africa have limited resources. Instead, they related their own experiences of parental joblessness and its effect on the quality of life of their households.<sup>24</sup> They expressed frustrations about experiences of persistent deprivation and anticipated that the NDP would eradicate all poverty by 2030.<sup>25</sup>

Most participants reflected on their low household incomes, modest homes, intermittent basic services and absence of recreational facilities. Their depictions of a brighter future for themselves in 2030 were illustrated with examples taken from lifestyles lived by the wealthy in South Africa. This indicated a keen understanding that some in South Africa live good lives whereas others suffer in impoverished circumstances,<sup>26</sup> including experiencing hunger.<sup>27</sup> The impact of this type of deprivation is addressed in the NDP, which includes evidence showing that stunting is linked to poor wellbeing and learning.<sup>28</sup>

While the children were not able to articulate the structural underpinnings of the failures in the economy that result in poverty, inequality, and unemployment, they focused on daily realities and lived experiences of deprivation, frustration and hopelessness. Unfortunately, they seemed to accept the prevailing narrative<sup>29</sup> that people were responsible for their own economic wellbeing.<sup>30</sup> The understanding that economic prosperity should be a collective responsibility was absent in the context of support structures that abdicate their obligations and make the individual solely responsible.



### *Strained relationships with caregivers*

Children, especially adolescents, were further stressed by feelings of alienation from their adult caregivers. Sometimes these relationships were devoid of love, kindness and empowering guidance.<sup>31</sup> These strained relationships with a parent or primary caregiver were often characterized by abuse experienced in homes and other spaces. Even though children were aware of their rights, they were constrained from claiming and exercising them. The primary adults in their lives tended to uphold power hierarchies, preferring children to be subservient and obedient. When children failed to defer to adult power, they faced the possibility of physical punishment. This dysfunctional relationship was especially evident at critical junctures in their lives when they needed information to make life choices. In these circumstances, caregivers often responded with authoritarian attitudes, judgment and information that the children did not see as useful.

One example was discussions about sexuality. While this is a difficult topic for most adults to address, the children in the workshops appeared to experience a particular dearth of information. They were not only unable to approach the adults in their lives, but they also did not have access to technology and other information systems because of the costs of data. In two of the workshops, facilitators conducted sexuality information sessions, which had been expressly requested by the children after only one day.<sup>32</sup>

This illustrated that the trust created in the workshop and in the process allowed the children to understand that their questions would be answered honestly. While some asked basic questions about bodily changes during puberty, others raised issues that pointed to the need to clarify their own values and identity.



This indicated that caregivers and other adults in their lives shared very little information about their bodies and about healthy relationships. This level of trust must be understood in the context of the evidence of ongoing conservatism in many of these communities, where adults' perceptions are often shaped and constrained by traditional and religious institutions and values.<sup>33</sup>

The lack of information and intolerance in this area leaves adolescents ill-equipped to make responsible life choices and leaves room for the perpetuation of myths and stereotypes, especially in critical areas such as understanding identity, sexuality and relationships skills. Evidence shows that a lack of guidance about positive interpersonal relationships with intimate partners is one of the drivers of the gender-based violence pandemic in South Africa.<sup>34</sup>

# EVIDENCE SHOWS A LACK OF GUIDANCE TO MAKE RESPONSIBLE LIFE CHOICES

## Ubiquitous violence

South Africa's Constitutional Court only recently (September 2019) outlawed corporal punishment of children in all settings, including the home, pointing out in its judgment that corporal punishment as a form of discipline compromised children's dignity.<sup>35</sup> The judgment must be understood in light of the experiences shared by the children in our workshops who continue to experience physical punishment in their homes and schools.

In the children's view, perpetrators act with impunity, which makes them lose hope of enjoying childhoods free from personal experiences of physical assault. When the opportunity was available, often in personal conversations with the facilitators, they disclosed their painful experiences of abuse at the hands of primary caregivers and this loss of dignity was evident in their low levels of self-confidence.

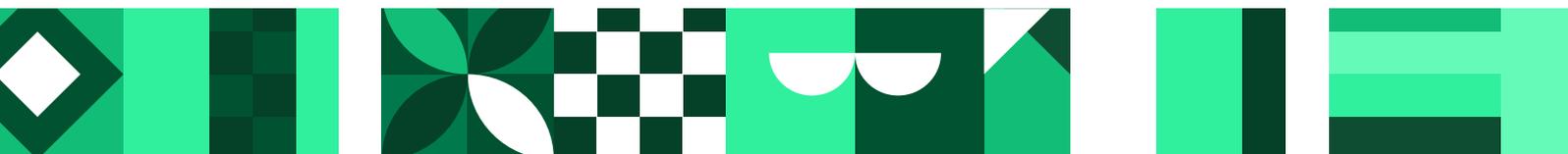
However, when discussing violence in schools, they were more strident in their belief that the practice should stop. The ease with which they condemned violence in schools compared with violence in the home was based on their understanding that school violence was a common experience for most children, making it less shameful than the incidents in the home. In addition to these personal experiences, the children were also aware of complex and omnipresent violent threats to their bodies in their communities in the form of human trafficking and *muti* killings.



The experience of violence from adults they were supposed to trust and respect and with whom they spent the most time had a deeper effect. Most of the children had internalized the notion that violent punishment under the guise of discipline was essential for their upbringing<sup>36</sup> and would ensure they respected their elders and recognized them as their superiors. When this attitude becomes the norm and leads to models of parenting behaviour, violence can become justified as it is replicated from generation to generation.<sup>37</sup>

Failure to deal with violence experienced early in life leads to the need for elaborate strategies and plans to combat the effects of the resultant trauma and maladjustment, which become evident in later childhood and adulthood.<sup>38</sup> As a result, the burden on the state of implementing appropriate programmes and assigning resources to manage the consequences increases exponentially when this should have been prevented at the outset.

Ultimately, this diverts attention from the NDP's aspirations to create wellbeing and capability. If the current rate of gender-based violence continues it will completely undermine the goals of the NDP. Interventions prioritizing primary prevention of violence are, therefore, an urgent first step in getting the aims of the NDP back on track.



## BASIC AND SOCIAL SERVICES DELIVERY

### *Dysfunctional communities or communities that work*

Communities are not meeting the basic NDP standard, which aims to have people experience a decent life which 'propel[s] South Africa on to a higher developmental trajectory as well as build a more cohesive and equitable society'.<sup>39</sup> The lack of capacity for delivery at local government level means children do not understand what a functioning state is expected to provide as a basic service package. Based on their daily experiences and in the absence of proper civic education they do not know who should be held accountable for making their communities functional.

Families are forced to live in poor-quality houses. Regular supplies of electricity, water, sanitation and waste removal are a luxury rather than the norm.<sup>40</sup> Children have to play in the street because parks are too dangerous, inaccessible<sup>41</sup> or non-existent.<sup>42</sup> However, most streets are not well lit and night times are particularly risky. As a response to crime (especially the threat of drug peddling),<sup>43</sup> caregivers tend to keep children confined to their homes, despite significant evidence of the critical importance of play to early development.<sup>44</sup>

The proliferation of shebeens or taverns in the community means that children's safety is under threat from drunken adults, who also tend to become rowdy and disturb their ability to study. While the children understood that freedom and normality were possible with the development of safe spaces in communities, they did not understand the socially accepted principles governing communities. In this regard, the NDP stresses the importance of communities working in partnership with prevention-oriented policing to enable the feeling of safety and wellbeing.<sup>45</sup>



### *Good education is the key*

Current data on the low quality of education and the resultant unemployability of young people who leave the school system were a source of dismay for participants in the workshops. Children with disabilities felt even more ill-prepared to meet the challenges of becoming employable.<sup>46</sup> These doubts are supported by the lack of commitment to meeting the employment target for persons living with disabilities.<sup>47</sup> It was difficult for these children to envisage better life chances for their generation, especially in remote settings far from urban economic hubs.



Obtaining a decent education is a challenge when just getting to school is a perilous experience, in both rural and urban settings.<sup>48</sup> The schools lack many things: educators who are subject experts, educators who can translate information to allow for different ways of learning beyond the established norm, infrastructure such as libraries and science and computer laboratories that would affirm their boundless potential<sup>49</sup> and, most importantly, a culture of teaching and learning that is fun, energizing and empowering instead of authoritative, undermining and traumatic.<sup>50</sup>

There was a yearning for an education system that includes all children, regardless of whether their natural talents are in sport, the performing or creative arts, academia or a trade.<sup>51</sup> A sense of anxiety prevailed among participants about the fact that the South African school system does not give equal credence and resources to all these options. Children's experiences in schools included feeling like misfits and being traumatized by violence and a sense of foreboding that all their efforts would be meaningless.

This was even more acute for children with disabilities, who have learning or physical challenges, where inclusivity means fitting into what already exists instead of having more appropriate infrastructure and learning methods that acknowledge differences.<sup>52</sup> The national planning system is based on homogeneity and does not allow for deviations and differences.

## A CULTURE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING THAT IS FUN, ENERGIZING AND EMPOWERING

## Health as a prerequisite for capacity development

There is a recognition that healthy individuals (free of diseases)<sup>53</sup> are needed to build a capable society,<sup>54</sup> but the health system in most areas has broken down. There are not enough health practitioners or clinics, health facilities are not close enough to the people who need them and being attended to means standing in queues before dawn.<sup>55</sup> These disincentives to seeking health services mean that only the very sick seek help. Ironically, the health system also cannot deal with emergencies at a local level as operating hours and the absence of specialists means that those who need care have to wait for it.<sup>56</sup>

Alternatively, they need to pay someone in their community with a car to take them to a distant secondary or tertiary care facility.<sup>57</sup> Despite these interventions at personal cost, patients still have to deal with queues, and triage only alleviates the burden for some with critical health concerns in an overburdened system.<sup>58</sup> Health promotion and general disease prevention measures are, for most people, a distant and elusive goal.

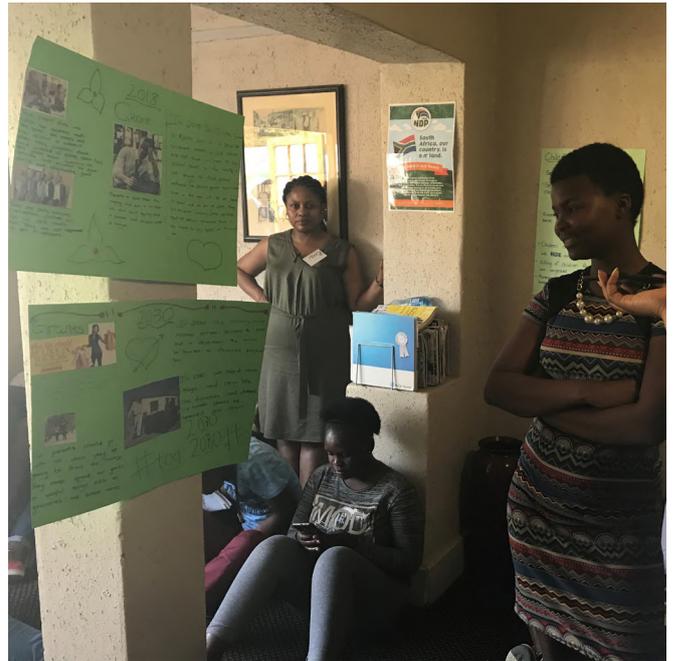
In a system overburdened by providing for basic health care needs, it is not surprising that adolescent health needs are not well addressed. In addition to the system being overwhelmed, there are particular challenges for adolescents who seek health care. Sexual and reproductive health care needs are rarely positively managed and there is no privacy in clinics, where people know each other. Even the nurse might know you and tell your parents that you asked for contraceptives.<sup>59</sup>

The societal taboos around adolescent sex are often held by the health practitioners themselves, which limits young people's access to impartial and open-minded healthcare. There is, thus, a disconnection between conservative cultural values and the constitutional goals and values that ensure everyone the right to dignity.

A strained health care system that is unresponsive and health practitioners who lack empathy result in a largely unwell population. When people are not well they cannot extend themselves to focus on becoming skilled. They are not able to go to school or to work regularly nor can they contribute to building a capable society.<sup>60</sup>



# THERE ARE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES FOR ADOLESCENTS WHO SEEK HEALTH CARE



## Grants for income support

While children understand that income support is required to compensate for the wider failures in the economy,<sup>61</sup> their feelings about the existence of a grant system are complex. They would like everyone to be self-sufficient,<sup>62</sup> however, they cannot envisage their way out of grant dependency to a situation in which there are increased levels of employability.

They, therefore, resort to self-flagellation, perpetuating the societal myth that young women and girls, who are their peers, 'fall' pregnant to access a grant.<sup>63</sup> In blaming the young women and girls they do not make the link with possible sexual inexperience or sexual abuse: the lack of information about sex results in most first sexual encounters being coercive.<sup>64</sup>

No responsibility is assigned to the males who are part of the sexual encounter. Their behaviour is not judged as harshly as the character of the young woman or girl who must go through a sometimes unwanted pregnancy.<sup>65</sup> This allows for the perpetuation of toxic masculinity, which exempts male 'blessers' from taking responsibility for sexual abuse and its consequences.

# OVERALL

# FINDINGS

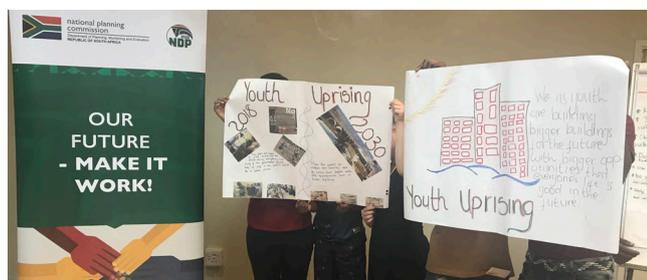
## Constrained voices

Children's 'voices' are constrained by a lack of information, power and access to decision-making. The Children's Act promises children that they will have an influence on all decisions affecting their lives.<sup>66</sup> While they are aware of their fundamental rights because they know they have intrinsic worth, it is not always possible to exercise those rights because of the power dynamics in their relationships with adults.

Children are always told to be quiet and not to articulate their own views, especially if those differ from the perspective of those in power – caregivers in the home and educators at school – who tend to deal with children as objects rather than providing a nurturing and empowering environment. Some educators silence children with harsh punishment, as do some parents. Very rarely do parents ask their children for their opinions – about which school they want to attend, for example.

Children who are too vocal at school are not appreciated for their energy and sometimes those who challenge power are victimised.<sup>67</sup> The unequal power dynamic is not helpful in building the foundations of a society in which everyone's voice counts. It is apparent that there is value in teaching children about equality in an unequal society

All of this takes place in a context in which children are also affected by prejudice. Children with disabilities are often marginalized and are unable to participate fully in society, making them even more invisible to those in power. Able-bodied children also face prejudice such as racial prejudice, even after 25 years of democracy.<sup>68</sup>



This prejudice is extended to children who are newcomers to our society, as evidenced in xenophobic attacks against persons from other African countries. It is apparent that we need to change the attitudes of people and adjust systems in government that continue to perpetuate these prejudices so that as a society we can appreciate difference and celebrate diversity.

This engagement exercise revealed that, fundamentally, children's individual worth is generally not recognized and thus their dignity is violated. Confidence about forming and articulating their own views is undermined and individuality is destroyed. Ultimately the bedrock of ability and confidence, the understanding that each person is able to make a unique and valued contribution to society, is affected by these childhood experiences. In this way, the adults in the lives of these children unwittingly perpetuate the models of disempowerment that have been experienced for generations.

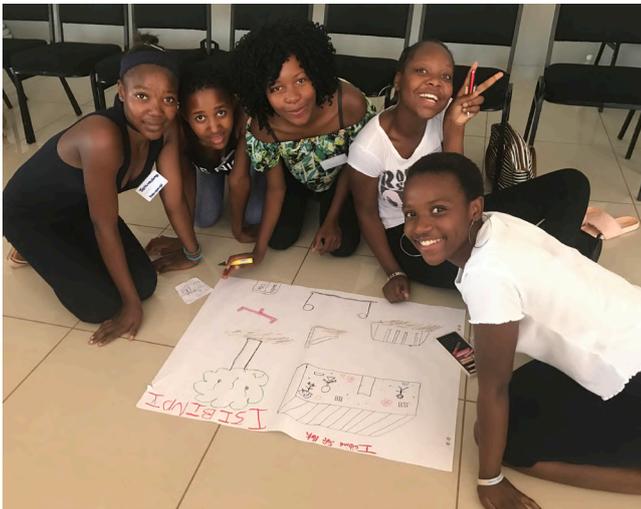


## Children as nation-builders

Children want to play an active role in building their nation, but they are not currently acknowledged and recognized as persons. Narratives portraying them as 'the future' and 'leaders of tomorrow' discount their value as people who can make a difference during their childhood years.

This futuristic worldview gives some adults the permission to abdicate their responsibilities to children in the present. For example, development planners often forget that children are part of society and have particular needs and interests, for which they should provide.

This is illustrated by their concern about the state of their environment in the form of their personal circumstances, the built environment, their natural surroundings and the sustainability of the planet.<sup>69</sup> So, structurally, children become invisible and voiceless despite having to live with the consequences of the decisions made by adults. Often these consequences will remain in place when these children are adults themselves.



# CHILDREN WANT TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN BUILDING THEIR NATION

## *Overstating children's responsibilities*

The recent global actions related to climate change are a testament to the power that children<sup>70</sup> can have in the present to shape their future when they have the confidence to use their voice. Children understand that they are agents in their own lives and in all spheres of society. They have views on all they see and experience but it is hard for them to find adults with whom they can share these views.<sup>71</sup>

They need adults who will acknowledge them, truly listen, and affirm their contribution;<sup>72</sup> adults they can trust to be interlocutors and champions in a system they are unable to influence. Ideally, they should speak directly, in their own voices, to those making decisions.

The way to achieve this optimal state is for children to be informed so they can form an opinion, be empowered to articulate that opinion and be provided with access to the decision-makers. It is equally important for adults to listen to children's opinions and allow their contributions to influence the decisions made.

This is particularly crucial if the decision addresses critical aspects of children's lives such as who they live with (if parents have passed on), what school they attend, what the park in their community looks like and the values of the society.

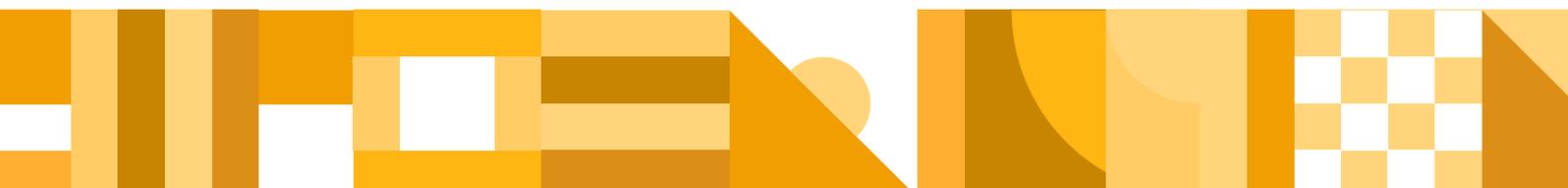
The current reality is that children feel alienated from decision-makers. They are sceptical about being taken seriously and, more importantly, they often do not trust the integrity of those in power, pointing to a culture of corruption among both politicians and bureaucrats.<sup>73</sup>

There is no system that systematically engages children and provides an opportunity for leaders and decision-makers to take them seriously. Instead, there are token initiatives that simulate conditions of citizenry but where children have no real influence on decision-making. At best, for the few children chosen to participate, this serves as practice for when they become 'real' citizens able to vote at 18 years old.

Some children take disproportionate responsibility for their own wellbeing. Due to their circumstances or resulting from requests from their caregivers they take on the burden of their own care and the care of other children in their household.<sup>74</sup> Sometimes older siblings assume the main responsibilities for younger siblings while caregivers are away at work. In circumstances where the adults in the household are unable to find a job, the children may even resort to income generation activities of their own.

While in international law children's responsibilities can extend to chores that will support their families, it is never intended that they should become responsible for their own wellbeing; this responsibility lies with caregivers and the state.<sup>75</sup> Confusing responsibilities and rights leads to adults making those rights conditional.

The NDP quotes a bill of responsibility for children that makes basic rights such as equality, dignity, care and access to education, among others, conditional on certain behaviour.<sup>76</sup> All rights are entitlements and should not be extended on condition that the rights holders behave in a certain way. It is the responsibility of everyone in society, including children, to promote a human rights culture that benefits all.



# RECOMMENDATIONS



## LIFE-COURSE DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

The formulation of development plans must acknowledge children by considering their needs and interests, as well as the provision and protection of their rights, including their right to participate. Children are eager to be active citizens and have opinions about their physical environment as well as about the strategic issues that shape the society in which they live and which they will inherit.



## AFFIRMING CHILDREN'S CITIZENSHIP AND AGENCY

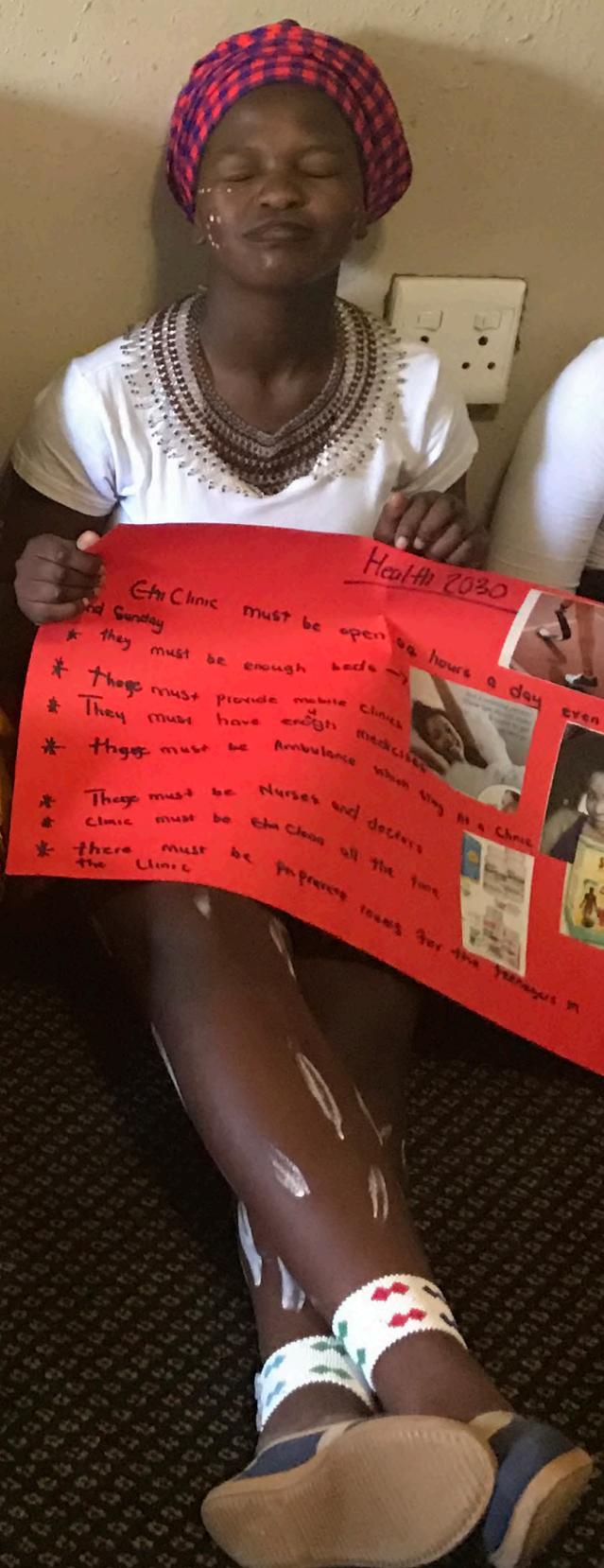
Development planning should adopt a life-course support approach to cater adequately for children. They need support in the earliest phase of their lives and the current understanding is that the first 1 000 days are critical to ensuring good outcomes.<sup>77</sup> Thereafter, support at critical junctures in their development is also crucial.



## ADULT RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS CHILDREN

The NPC must synchronise the responsibilities of each sector of society to ensure results that deliver on children's rights and fulfil adult responsibilities to respect these rights. The stakeholders identified throughout the NDP, including caregivers, government, business entities and civil society, must assume their responsibility as enablers of children's rights.





**Health 2030**

Eth Clinic must be open 24 hours a day  
 and Sunday

- \* they must be enough beds
- \* They must provide mobile clinics
- \* They must have enough medicines
- \* They must be ambulance when they go to a clinic
- \* There must be nurses and doctors
- \* Clinic must be clean all the time
- \* There must be preventive issues for the patients in the clinic



# CONCLUSION

Realising children's constitutional rights to the provision of services, protection from harm and participation in decision-making will build the responsible citizens we need for a more democratic South Africa in the future. Continuing to awaken children's understanding of citizenship with models of authentic engagement will translate into the active citizenry required to ensure a functioning democracy. Enabling children to engage in participatory governance at this stage will result in long-term benefits for the country.

However, if the government, business entities and civil society only pay lip service when they declare that children are the future of South Africa it will undermine the children's belief in their abilities and in the role they should play as citizens. Real investment is required in viable opportunities that will build human capacity from earliest childhood.

A conclusion of this report is that, while the NDP proposals are laudable, they have not been implemented adequately because not all stakeholders take development planning seriously enough to benefit all South Africans. The NDP also fails to acknowledge the granular differences of persons in the society and thus discounts the lived realities of women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

To remedy this deficiency the Children's NDP provides a model of engagement with precisely the people whom development planning aims to support but consistently ignores. Authentic models of engagement, such as this, should be replicated in future to ensure the NDP and further development planning is nuanced appropriately.

**REAL INVESTMENT  
IS REQUIRED FROM  
EARLY CHILDHOOD**



# END NOTES

1. C. Nomdo and Z. Adhikari-Rahman, *Children's Participation in Governance: Lessons from the Children's NDP initiative*, National Planning Commission, South Africa, 2019.
2. [www.parliament.gov.za](http://www.parliament.gov.za) – Minutes of Parliament, 12 August 2012.
3. Presidential mandate letters to National Planning Commissioners.
4. The first NPC's only engagement with the youth was an online 'jamming' session.
5. *Children's NDP: Final Process Report*, August 2019, [www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/publications\\_reports](http://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/publications_reports).
6. 'Improving Education, Training and Innovation', National Development Plan, Chapter 9, pp 297–300.
7. 'Improving Education, Training and Innovation', National Development Plan, Chapter 9.
8. 'Social Protection', National Development Plan, Chapter 11.
9. 'Building Safer Communities', National Development Plan, Chapter 12.
10. 'Promoting Health', National Development Plan, Chapter 10, pp 330–333.
11. 'Promoting Health', National Development Plan, Chapter 10.
12. [www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/Childrens%20NDP%20Process\\_August%202019.pdf](http://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/Childrens%20NDP%20Process_August%202019.pdf).
13. The authors' definition of being on the margins is children who are vulnerable to the effects of poverty, abuse, lack of adult care and an environments in which education levels and outcomes are low.
14. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, [www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text](http://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text).
15. G. Lansdowne, 'Promoting children's participation in democratic decision making'. UNICEF, Innocenti Centre, Italy, 2001, [www.unicef-irc.org/publications/290-promoting-childrens-participation-in-democratic-decision-making.html](http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/290-promoting-childrens-participation-in-democratic-decision-making.html); C. Nomdo and S. Cassiem, *Activating Children's Citizenship: The politics of the girl child in democratic South Africa*, in *Organising Across Divides: Gender and Democratisation in South African Civil Society*, edited by H. Britton, J. Fish, and S. Meintjies, 2009.
16. Children were asked to call facilitators by their first names. This allowed us to have a debate about having the right to equality and dignity as well as the deeper meanings of respect (Facilitator comment).
17. In the Limpopo workshop children conducted a robust debate on the role, duties and value of traditional leaders (L 2018).
18. Children felt comfortable about making their own suggestions about rules for some games or the flow of the programme. This was not seen as a sign of disrespect of the facilitators, rather it was a claiming of agency by the children (Facilitator comment).
19. The facilitators had to tread carefully because the content of discussions might potentially cause the children to feel shame about the circumstances in which they lived. This was balanced with messaging about rights and building of self-esteem (NC 2018).
20. We still borrow scientists from outside the country. Why don't we have our scientists? She's our scientist that we need. We should also be education and have education so that we can be like her? (KZN 2017).
21. The Children's NDP is a good model for children's participation in policy and rights issues because it is a model that uses information and methodology to promote equality, democracy and active citizenry. The model's content takes the general knowledge children may have about politics and communities and translates it into lessons about political systems and governance in an accessible way. They are encouraged to co-create the learning experience by sharing ideas and knowledge about governance and rights with others. The methodology encourages children to see themselves as valuable contributors to knowledge. Creating an inclusive methodology that employs performance art and creativity ensures that all children have an opportunity to be heard whether they have the confidence to express themselves verbally or not. By having the children enact Parliament and do posters that effectively write their own version of the NDP makes practical the ideas of democracy, governance and citizenship. Even the final act of electing a representative for the group who represented them at later meetings teaches democratic principles in practical and relatable ways,' Commissioner Tessa Dooms.
22. To me, this was a learning curve and an eye-opener. To experience all kids from different walks of lives expressing their view, more importantly, sharing their experiences. It was also emotional to a certain extent as this journey continued to highlight the plight of children raised in a dysfunctional society. It showed me that as a nation we continue to fail our children, therefore creating a troubled future generation. I have gotten to appreciate the value of a strong support structure in raising children. More importantly, I'm so grateful that I could be amongst the kids, some of whom have gone through what I went through. I would like them to know that you can survive child abuse and still come out to be a better human being. I did because my mother was there for me and every child needs someone to be there for them. I choose to be that someone who will be there for one or two children around me or the ones I come across and make the universe a better place one child at a time,' Commissioner Pulane Molokwane.
23. Information sourced from Wazimap: <https://wazimap.co.za/>
24. Liv[ing] in shacks which is an improper state' (KZN 2017) and 'people go[ing] to sleep without food' (NC 2018).
25. they say: 'the poverty issue will be done in 2030' (KZN 2017).
26. South Africa has the biggest gap between rich people and poor people' (MP 2017).
27. Children need food at school because some of them go hungry at night to bed and some of them come hungry to school.' (NC 2018); 'Free food should be provided for poor kids' (L 2018); 'Some children sell themselves for sex to get food to survive.' (NC 2018); 'We need the vegetable garden at school and we also need fruits at school so that children can be healthy.' (NC 2018).
28. C.G. Victoria, L. Adair, C. Fall, P.C. Hallal, R. Martorell, L. Richter and L. S. Sachdev for the Maternal and Child Undernutrition Study Group. 'Maternal and child undernutrition: consequences for adult health and human capital', National Development Plan, pp298–299; Lancet 2008, pp 371:340-357.
29. I have long said that entrepreneurial skills should be included in the basic education curriculum.' President C. Ramaphosa, 7 November 2019, 'Remarks by President Cyril Ramaphosa at the SMME Programme of the Second South Africa Investment Conference', University of Johannesburg, Soweto.
30. Business workshops should be mandatory [at school]. We now start businesses as young people then one way, it some[how] reduces poverty in the long run.'
31. What can we do to make our parents more open to us?' (EC 2018).
32. Children asked some of the following questions: 'How do you know when you have feelings for someone?' 'If you have sex standing will you become pregnant?' (EC 2018).
33. S. Palm and F. Colombo, 'Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities', 2019, <https://jliflc.com/resources/evac-case-studies/>.
34. S. Mathews, R. Jewkes and N. Abrahams, "'I had a hard life": Exploring childhood adversity in the shaping of masculinities among men who killed an intimate partner in South Africa'. *British Journal of Criminology* 51(4), 2011.
35. <https://collections.concourt.org.za/handle/20.500.12144/36570>
36. In the workshop in Bloemfontein, with children who are in state care, a young girl gave a chilling speech in which she stated she believed she deserved to be beaten by her parents (FS 2018).

- 37.** The NDP addresses community safety (NDP 73) but does not grapple adequately with the experiences and effects of violence children experience in private spaces such as their homes and the continued violence experienced in schools, despite its banning in the 1996 South African Schools Act, [www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/12218](http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/12218); [http://genderlinks.org.za/wp-content/uploads/imported/articles/attachments/12769\\_gender\\_based\\_violence\\_indicators\\_research\\_report\\_23february.pdf](http://genderlinks.org.za/wp-content/uploads/imported/articles/attachments/12769_gender_based_violence_indicators_research_report_23february.pdf).
- 38.** <https://theconversation.com/why-societies-must-protect-children-if-they-want-fewer-criminals-64925>.
- 39.** National Development Plan, p 457.
- 40.** People have to come and fetch rubbish every week. We must not go and throw things at the field or near the street' (NC 2018); 'People [in this community] don't have water and electricity or anything' (NC 2018).
- 41.** Here are parks that are not user-friendly, people in wheelchairs mostly do not go to parks' (NW 2018).
- 42.** Children don't have anywhere to play. They play in the streets. So there is a dirty place where the park is [supposed to be] and there is a dirty toilet' (NC 2018).
- 43.** Old men sell small, young children drugs so that they can smoke, send them to steal things from their homes and sell them for money' (NC 2018).
- 44.** UNICEF, 'Learning through play: Strengthening learning through play in early childhood education programmes', [www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/UNICEF-Lego-Foundation-Learning-through-Play.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/UNICEF-Lego-Foundation-Learning-through-Play.pdf).
- 45.** National Development Plan, Chapter 12.
- 46.** This clearly shows that if the government and the media do their work people with disabilities could be recognized (NW 2018). The bigger question here could be why aren't people with disabilities being recognized because that is actually a huge stigma people with disabilities are faced with' (NW 2018).
- 47.** [www.labour.gov.za/DocumentCenter/Reports/Annual%20Reports/Employment%20Equity/2018-2019/19th%20Commission%20for%20Employment%20Equity%20Report%202018-%202019.pdf#search=disabled](http://www.labour.gov.za/DocumentCenter/Reports/Annual%20Reports/Employment%20Equity/2018-2019/19th%20Commission%20for%20Employment%20Equity%20Report%202018-%202019.pdf#search=disabled)
- 48.** Because they don't want to be late for schools, they climb at the back of the trains, and they hold on to the trains' (G 2017).
- 49.** We [are] moving from one step to another. If you do not have a library, more libraries should be made available. We move from [providing] libraries to paperless classrooms' (G 2017).
- 50.** Education in 2017 is boring. Same old teachers, same old lessons, and not even half the class fully understands, we see the same people progressing all the time' (MP 2017).
- 51.** When you get to phase 2 [high school] you have four types of schools and it is your choice, [according to] the type of person you are and the type of thing you want to do' (MP 2017).
- 52.** School should change to accommodate you; they should change for you' (NW 2018).
- 53.** Many families lose their loved ones because of HIV' (KZN 2017).
- 54.** National Development Plan, p 44.
- 55.** Local clinics and hospitals should be nearer' (KZN 2017); 'the lack of doctors and medication' (MP 2017); 'We don't have enough ambulances, that's why people must wait for an hour or two' (NC 2018).
- 56.** Long queues, you have to wait an entire day at a state hospital to get cured for your sickness. Some people get sicker and babies die in these queues as they wait for medication and help. What happens in the clinic [is] I have TB, you have malaria, we sneezing and everything is going on and then there's this cross pollination of disease, everyone is just sharing, it's the same WhatsApp group' (MP 2017); 'Everyone needs to be helped quickly in the process' (WC 2017) 'National Health Insurance ... it's for the people who are less privileged because not all of us can afford medical aid' (MP 2017).
- 57.** The mummies don't have transport and the hospital is far away' (WC 2017).
- 58.** Young people are dropping out of school because of the community they are staying at' (MP 2017).
- 59.** You just feel more important if you are cared for by a person who is passionate' (MP 2017); 'There must be private rooms for teenagers. When you arrive at the clinic and it is full of adult woman and you do not know what they are saying' (EC 2018).
- 60.** National Development Plan, p 53.
- 61.** Social security we found is there to improve the standard of living. The social grant is not enough, so budgets must be improved' (MP 2017), [www.treasury.gov.za/documents/mtbps/2019/mtbps/FullMTBPS.pdf](http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/mtbps/2019/mtbps/FullMTBPS.pdf).
- 62.** Allowing the education system to come up with different ways so that other people can be more skilled to come up with job creation, so that there is more money to be passed around.' (MP 2017)
- 63.** '...the government is doing something but not really much to create awareness of teenage pregnancy, because young girls fall pregnant because they want money' (MP 2017).
- 64.** We have a lack of HIV and AIDS awareness; this goes together with teenage pregnancy, which is really one of the biggest social problems in our community and it affects a lot of things' (MP 2017); Marcia Russell, et al, 'Intimate partner violence among adolescents in Cape Town, South Africa', 15 Prevention Science, 2014, pp283–95, 289.
- 65.** Government should start implementing new ways so that people can help themselves. Instead of giving away, free money to children and elders and to actually give money to those who work for it instead of those who just fall pregnant and expect money' (MP 2017).
- 66.** Children's Act 38 of 2005, article 10 [www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/2005-038%20childrensact.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/2005-038%20childrensact.pdf).
- 67.** We want teachers who love their jobs; it should be a passion' (G 2017).
- 68.** We are trying to work in harmony with each other. We want to see more white people helping black people. We want to see white people bend over [become humble], swallow their pride and come down to earth and work with black people' (G 2017).
- 69.** There's lots of people who don't care about the environment, they think environment is just for beautiful inspiration to their children, not to them' (KZN 2017); 'here we draw factories, factories release smoke that smoke is going up, that is causing Ozone layer to fall, and that makes the sun to burn us even more' (KZN 2017).
- 70.** <https://yourstory.com/herstory/2019/10/5-young-climate-change-activists-autumn-peltier-ridhima-pandey>.
- 71.** People are not interested in what people with disabilities have to say. In 2030, radio stations and televisions could broadcast about people with disabilities and also on social media' (NW 2018).
- 72.** The adults don't want to let children give their own opinion. But now [in 2030] everyone has [given] his opinion; look how much we are developing [services in the country].' (MP 2017)
- 73.** There are people spending state funds, building their own fortunes' (MP 2017).
- 74.** In the Northern Cape children were evidently being sexually exploited to raise money for food for their households. No personal disclosures were made despite confidential follow-ups, but state actors were informed.
- 75.** African Children's Charter, Article 31.
- 76.** National Development Plan, p 461.
- 77.** National Development Plan, p 299; K. Hall, W. Sambu, C. Almeleh, K. Mabaso, S. Giese and P. Proudlock, South African Early Childhood Review 2019. Cape Town: Children's Institute University of Cape Town and Ilifa Labantwana; Center on the Developing Child, 2010, The Foundations of Lifelong Health Are Built in Early Childhood, [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu).



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank the following office-bearers of the National Planning Commission for their support for this initiative: former Minister and Chairperson, Mr Jeff Radebe; Deputy Chairperson, Prof. Malegapuru Makgoba and the Secretary for National Planning, Mr Tshediso Matona. We recognize the encouragement of the Enhancing Quality of Life for the Poor (EQL) work stream of the National Planning Commission, especially Commissioner Vivienne Taylor and Ms Mastoera Sadan.

Commissioner Tessa Dooms, Dr Selina Palm, Mr Alexander Henry, and Ms Joyce Siwani are thanked for reviewing the report. Support for the design of the report was kindly provided by UNICEF South Africa. The report was designed by Digital Cloud.