

SOUTH AFRICA

Addressing Basic Needs of Orphans at Rekgonne Primary School

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1. Frame of Reference

The first democratic elections, held 27 April 1994, gave birth to the new Constitution in 1996. The rights of the learners are well spelled out in Chapter 2 of the Constitution Act 108, of 1996. In 1996 the South African Schools Act (SASA), Act 84, give provision for the protection of learners and the provision of quality education.

South African Government provides free hot meals for every child in a school classified as quintile 1, 2 & 3 under the National Nutrition School Programme. One of the Government priorities is to provide shelter for every citizen in the country under the RDP (Reconstruction Development Programme). There is a positive movement towards CRC implementation in most South African Schools.

The principle embraces 3 Ps, namely: Provision, Participation and Protection.

Provision: food, health, social security and education.

As a school we have a responsibility to ensure that children have access to equal education, food, access to documents, access to health care services.

Protection: neglect, maltreatment, vulnerability to child labour.

As a school we will also provide a healthy environment for learning and teaching so as to avoid any outside interference/abuse. The child will be developed in totality, that is: emotional aspect, social aspect, physical as well as spiritual aspect.

Participation: right to act in decision making. Participation will enable learners to develop life skill for example vegetable garden management.

The legacy of apartheid in South Africa has resulted in rampant poverty and cross racial disparities in education and health care has made black South Africans susceptible to HIV/Aids. Based on statistics given by the Department of Health study of 2010, the study estimates that, HIV/Aids amongst pregnant women is highest in Kwazulu Natal Province with 39.5%, then Free State Province is 30.6% being number 3 in 9 Provinces, the lowest province is Western Cape with 18%. The statistics show that many children are left as orphans looking after the young ones/siblings at a young tender age. The total number of orphan learners, registered with Free State Basic Education is 26 450, and Motheo District with 7959 orphans.

Orphans in our schools have shown a significant rate of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, peer relationship difficulties, suicidal urges, delinquency and homelessness. Orphans are particularly vulnerable to poverty, malnutrition, exploitation, sicknesses and sexual abuse which lead to intense psychological trauma. This clearly shows that, there is an urgent need to address the basic needs of the children.

Currently we want to strengthen the implementation of the CRC at Rekgonne Primary School, main focus being on the 242 Orphans within the school.

Baseline

Number of Orphans at Rekgonne Primary School was 422 when we started the project. And our definition of an orphan embraces learners who have lost both parents and one parent. The SBTS (School Based Support Team) was responsible for profiling them. SBST is that group of dedicated teachers who volunteered to work with change agents to handle the orphan project. They all have the love of the children from their hearts; and go that extra mile by scouting for food and sponsors for them. But, the key duties are to find IDS and birth certificate for them. IDS are key identification documents in South Africa because they are a passport for free state grants and housing as well as school registrations imperatives.

Those learners already receiving social grants and living in the Reconstruction Developmental Project houses [free houses given to orphans and needy by the state] are removed from the database by the SBST. As we peruse our data during the writing of this report there were 159 who do not have IDS documents. They do not have it because their late parents could not register them with Home Affairs Department, which is responsible for that; or some were just irresponsible, because of lack of education amongst them. Be aware that the living conditions of orphans are characterised by poor families, high unemployment rate, living in shacks, high illiteracy rate, various infectious diseases like: HIV-AIDS/TB/cancer and malnutrition. Parents who work are migrant labourers ie: they work in mines far from their places like Welkom and Johannesburg. The migrant labour encourages separation of parents and their children thus non-attendance of schools. Fathers neglect their homes and wives, and find marriages elsewhere; thus increase of illegitimate children. No one at home registers the children to acquire IDS. The latter become street children and thus makes it tough for the authorities to register them as they cannot be traced and have no fixed addresses. Even, when the social workers find them in the streets, it becomes difficult to absorb those children into the school system. The problem of lack of IDS thus becomes perennial.

The SBST tries to counter-act the abovementioned situation by organising the Jamoborees (events whereby all stakeholders are called to offer services to needy and orphans).





2. Purpose

Improve the living conditions of the orphans at Rekgonne Primary School, enable them access to school, access to funds, access to documentation and to strengthen their participation in their education.

3. Methodology

Our point of departure was to profile the orphans. The guardians were called to parents' meeting; organised by SBST, SGB (School Government Body) and the change agents. During the meeting a brief talk on Sweden visit was outlined and all were told about the project. They were given forms to complete about the orphans in their care covering: needs for IDS; housing, uniform, grants as well as whether the child had lost one parent or both.

The list was collated by the SBST and the Principal; and it was agreed that as the needs are met, each and every orphan will be ticked or removed from it.

Secondly, we planned a series of meetings with stakeholders as shown below by the following table.

Activity/Date 2012-2013	Service Provider	Those consulted	Purpose
Meeting the DMT <i>12 November</i>	Change Agents	District Managers	Sell the project to them and ask for permission to implement
Meeting with SMT (School Management Team) / SGB / Staff, SBST <i>15 November</i>	Principal	Stakeholders	Advertises the project
Meet interested NGOs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Office • Old Mutual • Prosecutors • Love Life • Social Development Representatives • Inclusive Education <i>3 February</i>	Change Agents	Stakeholders	Information about the project. Asking for financial help.
Meeting with all learners Meet Only Orphans & Their Guardians <i>7 February</i>	SGB and Change Agents	Learners	Involve them

Jamboree <i>7 September</i>	Change Agents & Sister Department Representatives	Community	Provide Identity Documents
Food Garden (Municipality) <i>October</i>	Environment Committee Principal Municipality Representatives	Learners	Start a food garden to provide food
Mentor's visit <i>November</i>	Change Agents	Parents & NGO:s	Share ideas
Meeting all stakeholders with the mentor <i>November</i>	Mr. Matsaneng (Provincial Coordinator for Change Agents(& Principal	NGO:s	Follow the implementation process
Class visits and meeting with parents, teachers, learners and stakeholders <i>November</i>	Bodil & Principal	Learners, parents	Real class implementation, information

4. Results

Our next step after drawing the list of orphans data was to give all stakeholders the report from a visit from Sweden. The DMT (District Management Team) (was met by Me. Senoee and Deliwe as planned; whereas the Principal was to meet the school stakeholders. The former DMT was there to inform them so as to influence them to buy—in and offer support in a form of permission to sell the project at school, and assist us with transport.

As stated above the principal met the school communities to inform them about the project and expectations from them. He met the SMT (school heads of departments, staff, SGB[school governance] as well as guardians of orphans identified. We were fortunate because after our explanations and clarifications of what the project entails, all agreed to work with us.

The other step was to meet orphans and the needy. We met both group because it was difficult for us to separate the two, although it was easy to distinguish them! We were sensitive not to discriminate unawaresly.

What was regarded as a key meeting was between the principal and other change agents with the SBST and SMT of the school. Why? They will be driving the project from the school and community level. And they will be dealing with the orphans directly on a daily basis. It was on the 15th November 2012 when we were dealing with the advocacy. Positive responses were received from them, as seen from their inputs eg: orphans must be part of the decision-making. This was a bonus for us as it addresses the other P (Participation).

We cascaded the message further to the NGOs (non-governmental bodies) like: Old Mutual; Shoprite; Prosecutors; Post Office Staff members as well as South African Police Service (S.A.P.S). The idea was just to formalise our project, because most of them were already helping the school. They intensify the sponsoring of the school with the following basic needs of the orphans: shoes; groceries; toys; uniforms of the school as well as money to buy clothes.

The school organised a general parents' meeting so as to inform all parents about the 3 Ps and ideals of CRC. More than 700 parents converged at the school hall. This was a sizeable number according to the register of the day. The experiences from Sweden pull them, as they want to hear more about this child-friendly country. The agenda was: Sweden compared with SA and briefly on why we visited Sweden and who have sponsored us. We took the advantage by practicalising the 3 Ps. We encouraged the parents to apply them at their homes. The parents were excited because of their inputs like: desire to start a food garden and to produce cheap uniform of all the learners, although the orphans will either get a free one or at a discounted price. The concept orphan got a new meaning. One who must participate, be protected and provided for.

The children, orphans and needy, were met separately. The reason for this was to sell the ideas of the 3 Ps to them and encourage them to talk and shape the direction of the project. They became aware that help starts with them. They became drivers of food garden by removing weeds and deciding on when to water it.

They responded positively as seen from their inputs from the essay competition they participated in. To select a few suggestions from the easy will amplify the above as:

- let us work in the garden;
- the school must start a suggestion box;
- include the needy during the school giving days.

The striking one was the desire to participate and protection from bullying at school.

Change agents from the district level reinforced the above by organising a workshop for them. Case-studies and role-playing as techniques were used. We asked them how will they distribute donated shoes if learners in need of new shoes are many. The majority response was to give to the most needy first. The SBST has adopted that approach.

A Jamboree became the continuation of the support to this vulnerable group of children. It was held the 7th September 2013, with Sister Departments (Education, Health, South African Police Service, Home Affairs, Community and all learners from neighbouring schools were assisted e.g. with Birth Certificates, Identity Documents, Certifying of Required Documentation and Health Services. According our records from the registers that circulated during that day; more than 275 families arrived and got assistance. It was a bit disappointing as less than 32 learners were referred to regional offices to complete IDS forms. Only interviews were done and they were referred for further help. The Jamboree events deepen our knowledge about the orphans, as some were not from our school. This necessitated the need to cascade the project to the adjoining schools. We agreed that SBST of those schools will be invited so as to know more about the project, especially the 3 Ps.

The demand for shoes, housing and participation was greater than we expected, as inferred from the Jamboree day.

As agreed during our stakeholders meeting, food garden was logically the other practically thing to do. It unfolded this way.

Parents volunteered in the garden project, and also local municipality *Mangaung Metro* provided the school with their staff members to assist parents with the development of vegetable garden to alleviate poverty. Nature blurred our goals in these ways: we had a bit of a drought period; birds ate some of our crops as well as loitering dogs from the adjoining locations. We thus failed to harvest. The parents are not helping as they want to be compensated. But the team from the Mangaung

Municipality is involved. The learners are being trained in skills for gardening. And we hope after some expert training and motivation they will be involved.

Our greatest motivator for the project was mentor's visit which took this shape. Bodil Rasmusson visited the school from the 21st to 25th November 2013. She met with staff, NGO's, chief director for curriculum development & support, learners and also change agents and principals.

The school and parents communities will never forget her as they keep on talking about this warm lady. Her donation of garden have instil the sense of working; as planting was reinforced (see attached visit photos as they will do more appealing).

Evidence of successes

Before and after:





Above: Charity begins at home: Principal Leburu donated shoes.



Above: Sponsor from Windmill Casino



Above: Sponsor from Shoprite Supermarket



Above: Sponsor from Local Post Office



Above: Parents preparing vegetable garden



Above: Feeding scheme at school





5. Discussion and Reflections

As much as we have succeeded on our project, we have also experienced some challenges as a team. Parents involvement is still lacking in our schools, we need to educate our parents that is important for them to take part in their children's education. Many people in our communities still need government services that are far from their living areas. Children in need still need more services from the school and the government and awareness on the rights of the children. All the challenges mentioned will never stop us as change agents from taking the project forward.

Other challenges were also there:

Time: We were unable to meet as we wished because of different work schedules like: exam-times; department yearned for high marks thus great pressure on us; introduction of new curriculum and lack of finances.

6. Way Forward

The challenges will never stop us from taking the project forward. As change agents we realise that political landscapes will change, but the orphans will still be there. We have to spread the gospel of CRC and to share our experiences.

Even though in 2014 South Africa is celebrating 20 years of democracy there is still much that needs to be done. Many people are still suffering from high rate of unemployment and crime which includes child and women abuse. As South African change agents we strongly feel we need to spread the idea of the 3Ps to many schools and other departments that have interest on the child. As change agents we have to strengthen our relations with home affairs to speed up the issuing necessary documents like birth certificates and identity documents so that they can access education easily. The vegetable gardens to be sustained at school and to be introduced to the learners homes. Department of health, Justice, women and children, NGOs and other stakeholders to be persuaded to assist in educating the children and the communities about the rights of the children and work together to create a child friendly school. Skills development programme is also needed in the area to assist parents who are unemployed to open their own bakeries at home and mini market that will learners to have food on the table to avoid long time dependency. Working together will assist us to change the lives of the learners at Rekgonne, the community of Bloemfontein and the province.

As South African change agents we strongly feel we need to:

To spread the ideals of the 3 Ps and CRC to other schools.

- To influence the Department of Home Affairs to provide Identity Documents on time.
- Local Housing Department should be persuaded to provide houses to learners living in shacks.
- To sustain a productive food garden that can support the needy with fresh vegetables.
- To increase companies and NGOs involvement in the projects.
- To encourage guardians to produce school uniforms or buy bread making machine (introduction of skills development programmes)
- To model REKGONNE SCHOOL into a child- friendly school that can be emulated by others.

- Organise needy day where the children play different games and debate issues affecting their welfare.
- Write about the project in the weekly newspaper on term basis e.g.: CRC Imperatives/News about child rights.
- Jamboree to be reorganised again because of the absence of South African Social Security Agency.
- School Based Support Teams must twin and network so as to sustain the project, after being workshoped by the change agents
- Food garden to be run by the orphans themselves to promote learner participation.

The project will never die because our mentor fuelled it during her visit. The 3 Ps is now the buzzword and we promise to change the lives of the orphans for the better.

We want to thank LUNDS STAFF AND SIDA for caring about the children's rights, keep going.

“Forward ever, backward never”

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