

# SOUTH AFRICA

## Child headed families and their needs for support from school, other authorities and community

*Nefthaly Maine, Sibongile Lekaota, and Elias Mohlahledi*

### 1. Frame of Reference

The Republic of South Africa as a constitutional democracy has its constitution as the supreme law of the land (Act 108 of 1996). The constitution contains the Bill of Rights that enshrines the fundamental human rights of all the people in the country including children. Chapter 2 of Bill of Rights Section 28 acknowledges the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as adopted and ratified by individual/specific member state (Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989). The Bill of Rights Section 29 1(a) states that “everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education.”



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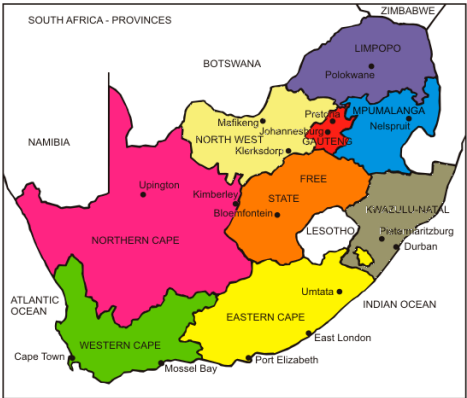


Figure 1. Map of South Africa

## Child Headed Household in South Africa

There are 105 000 Child Headed Households in South Africa of which 63% of these children still have parents, 10% of these children are double orphans and 26.2% of these kids have single parents.

It is in this context that children's rights to provision, protection and participation in education are infringed and undermined in the semi urban areas of Parys and Vredefort due to poor socio economic conditions. Parents in these areas as a result of unemployment, poverty and hunger are compelled to leave their children behind and migrate to urban areas in search of work. Increasing morbidity and mortality rates among adults as a result of HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty, violence, crime and motor vehicle accidents are the result of growing numbers of orphans and vulnerable children and child headed families.

In South Africa Child Headed Families are families where the main caregiver is younger than 18 years rather than 15. These children have to take charge of household in terms of decision making and responsibility to provide for physical, social and emotional needs of others living with him/her regardless of the relationship. In addition the definition takes account of the fact that children younger than 21 do not have the legal capacity to perform certain key act. The two focus schools, Barnard Molokoane Comprehensive School in Parys and Boiphihlelo Secondary School in Vredefort in Free State Province have a challenge of poor performance, late coming, ill-discipline and poor attendance by learners who come from child headed families. The previous training projects of Child Rights, Classroom and School Management in the province dealt with issues such as teenage pregnancy, preventing sexual abuse, improving the conditions of the orphans and enabling access to school and identity documents and all these problems are experienced by children living in Child Headed Families. Almost all challenges raised and addressed in the previous batches were dealt with in/by batch 21 as an extension to complement and enhance the good work covered by previous batches as change agents in CRC.

The UN Convention on Rights of the Child as adopted in 1989 provide a useful framework for addressing the rights of child headed household by aiming at promoting the protection of children, encouraging their participation in society especially with matters that affect them and to prevent harm being done to children as well as to provide assistance to ensure that children's basic needs are met.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child (1990) specifically says that states shall: "Ensure that any child who is parentless or who is temporarily or permanent deprived of his/her family environment shall be provided with alternative care which could include among others, foster placement or placement in a suitable institution for the care of the children". The Social Assistance Amendment Act (Act No. 6 of 2008) addresses social security by regulating access to social grant for children living in poverty whereas the Children's Care Act (Act No. 38 of 2005), as amended by Children's Amendment Act (Act 41 of 2007), set out principles relating to the care and protection of children. The two acts will guide the stakeholders regarding issues relating to provision, protection for Vulnerable Children and Children from CHH.

In pursuit of providing education to all, children in the context of the Child Rights Convention still perform poorly because they are unsupervised at home. Their participation is not guaranteed because of non-attendance to school. Learners who are neglected and not protected through parental guidance would also come late to school. Educators have the responsibility to take care of the learners, based on the legal principle of *loco parentis* (De Waal et al 2001:151). The educators are therefore, obliged by the law to report and protect the child against any harmful activities. In the same breath the school is expected to play a role of helping child headed households in their development and must develop supportive relationship with parents and vulnerable children as well as organisations that have an interest in lives of these children. In dealing with vulnerable children the teacher must be sensitive to the diverse needs of these children and construct an appropriate learning environment, demonstrate sound knowledge of the learning area or subject and be inspirational to these children.

## 2. Purpose

The purpose of the project is to give learners an opportunity to be children, encourage the parents to take responsibility and care of their children by ensuring that they are always in the care of an adult in case of the working parents to learners find alternative placement for orphans living in a child headed families' set up. Ensure that the school is a safe and child friendly environment as well as mobilizing available resources to support vulnerable learners.

### What should be changed?

- Parents neglecting their children by leaving them alone at home without adult supervision when they migrate to urban areas for work and some orphans are left to grow up in child headed households.
- The negative attitude of teachers and their approach towards vulnerable children at school.
- Learners living in CHH have a tendency of absenting themselves from school which result in them embarking upon activities such as drug abuse, sexual activities that lead to teenage pregnancy, and poor performance.

### Desired Changes

- Improved parental involvement and protection of learners against maltreatment and exploitation and social workers will provide alternative/proper accommodation to vulnerable children and orphans living in child headed households.
- Teachers should be able to act in *loco parentis* and develop supportive relationships with parents and vulnerable children as well as organisations that have interest in the lives of these children.

- Improve performance of learners to maximum expectations by eliminating the tendencies of absenteeism, late coming, poor attendance and ill-disciplines of the learners as well as reducing teenage pregnancy and drug abuse by involving Inclusive Education, School Based Support Teams, Health workers and Police to hold workshops and awareness campaigns for the learners.

## Target group and stakeholders

Our target groups are Learners (especially Child Headed Households and Vulnerable Learners), parents and educators and stakeholders are as follows:

| Stakeholders                                      | Roles  |
|---|--|
| Social Workers (Department of Social Development) | To place learners, arrange for adoption arrange for them to access social grants                       |
| Police  | For the learner's safety and protection  |
| SBST & Inclusive Education                        | Identification, profiling of learners and provide counseling for affected learners                     |
| Health Department                                 | Provide medical services to the learners   |
| Home Affairs                                      | Provide identification documents for learners I  |
| Neighboring Schools & Department of Education     | Identifying of the siblings and getting support from District Support Based Teams and Subject Advisors |
| OVC & Non-Governmental Organizations              | To support the affected learners by providing them with basic needs                                    |
| Business People                                   | Support the needy  |
| Committee   | To coordinate the activities of the project and to ensure sustainability                               |

## Objectives

- To improve performance of the learners to maximum expectations by eliminating the tendencies of absenteeism, late coming, poor attendance and ill disciplines of the learners.
- To find placement for orphans.
- Get adequate parental involvement in the upbringing of their children.
- Protect learners from all sorts of maltreatment, sexual abuse as well as exploitation.

## Baseline



Figure 2: Barnard Molokoane Secondary School

The school was established in 1991 in Tumahole, Parys, FS. Province. It is currently having 1268 learners from Grade 8 to 12. The school has 45 teaching staff members and 8 non-teaching staff members and it has never produced less than 85% pass rate of grade 12 results for the past 11 years.



Figure 3: Boiphihlelo Secondary School

The school was established in 1986 in Mokwallo Vredefort, FS. Province and it is currently having 776 learners doing Grade 8 to 12. The school has 28 teaching staff and 4 non-teaching staff and it has never produced less than 80% pass rate of grade 12 results for the past 5 years.

Number of Child Headed Families in Barnard Molokoane were 23 and in Boiphihlelo was 57 when the project started. These statistics as per our definition accounts for the 80 we had identified in the two schools. Identification analysis of need and placement of these children was done by the SBST. The school, through the SBST did not have the coordinated approach on how instruments of childcare can deal with this challenge. The schools' lists of learners did not provide a consistent profiling that relates to all the challenges that the project intended to cover.

Most of these learners if not all were either identified by chance or by accident. The suspicion was that the number might be larger than 80 but some go undetected because they did not report to the school or teachers were unable to notice them until they were on the wrong side. Teacher's attitude plays an unintended negative role as they did not question learner attendance and absenteeism. Non completion of school work, pregnancy, abuse and use of drugs were subtle indications of neglected learners that schools missed to detect and thus these learners escaped the safety net of being cared for by the school. The SBST (School Based Support Team) is made up of small number of teachers within the school and it is therefore unrealistic to expect that only SBST should deal with this problem. All the teachers must take part.

Other organisations like the department of justice, welfare, health, police, non-government organisations, faith based organisations and interest groups were only invited and not actively participating in school affairs. There was also a distance between the school and the parent body. Childcare issues were dealt with as if they were events that occur once in a while, whereas they are an integral part within the existence of a school as schools are established for children and their development.

### 3. Main Activities

#### **Workshop with stakeholders**

Programmes and workshop aimed at promoting the rights of the child and awareness of Child Headed Families were organized with different stakeholders. SBSTs of the neighboring schools were workshopped on how to identify and to deal with learners from Child Headed Household background. Learners participated in drafting of class rules together with their class teachers and participated in amendment of school policies and school code of conduct for 2016 and they have clearly indicated that all learners have to support vulnerable learners by ensuring that when they did not attend school those that attended must ensure that they give them information on what they are supposed

to do as well as making it their responsibility to inform the SBST if they suspect that a learner might need any kind of help.

### **Identification of siblings in the neighboring schools and new learners in the Barnard Molokoane and Boiphihlelo Secondary schools**

The neighboring schools were made aware of the project and this promoted the involvement of the community and schools in supporting affected learners. The SBSTs of the neighboring schools have adopted the project and they have started with the identification and profiling of learners. A template for profiling the learners was developed and the same format is now used at all schools involved (attachment 1).

### **Every Child Is My Child Launch**

The two schools held a successful launch of Every Child is My Child campaign which was blessed by the mentor. The reason for the launch was to advocate the programme to the entire school and the community whereby close to 1000 and 800 parents, teachers, learners, officials from Department of Education and sister departments, business people as well as principals and SBST from neighboring schools attended the launch respectively at Barnard Molokoane and Boiphihlelo. The officials from different departments made presentations on how each department is supporting the school regarding the CHH and Vulnerable learners. Parents and educators who have adopted the learners and those that are giving support to the learners also told the house how they are assisting these learners and challenged other parents and teachers to join them in helping the needy children. The launch resulted in more parents and teachers, learners, sister departments and NGOs committing to participate in supporting the CHH and Vulnerable learners.

Representatives from sister departments, NGOs, parents, learners, principals from neighboring schools and their SBSTs, District Based Support Team attended the launch and during the launch Me. Radebe who have adopted Toka from Boiphihlelo Secondary School shared her stories with the crowd, she indicated that adopting Toka was the best thing and that they have a healthy mother and son relationship with the boy. One educator from Barnard Molokoane, Me. Molakeng also shared her story of adopting Gibido who is a learner at Barnard Molokoane Secondary School who was staying in CHH setup. During the interview with the learner he told us that he is grateful of what Me. Molakeng is doing for him and he promised to return the favor by ensuring that he gets best academic results.

A 19 years girl from Barnard Molokoane who is having a baby and stays with her brother shared her story being the head of the family. She further told the house how the programme has benefited her and her brother. Amongst the speakers at the two events were Social Workers, Home Affairs officials, Reverent who addressed the learners and parents on the importance of taking care of the vulnerable children and ensuring that the children are always protected also the procedures to follow in order obtain birth



Figure 4: Every Child My Child Launch at Boiphihlelo Secondary School 19 October 2015. (From left to rights: N. Maine. Principal of Barnard Molokoane, S. Lekaota Official, B. Rasmusson. Mentor & E. Mohlahledi Principal of Boiphihlelo)

certificates for the children as well as the operations of Social Development in placing the vulnerable learners and providing them with social grants were highlighted. The two schools together with the stakeholders signed “- Every Child is My Child Pledge” whereby they declared that: **All children below the age of 18 shall be:**

- Protected from all forms of abuse and maltreatment
- Provided for family, society and legislative means created by the state.
- Afforded the rights to participate freely in activities that enhance his/her well-being and personal development.

## 4. Results

Through *Every Child is My Child Programme* the community is able to take care of the children in case of parents who are working. Educators who stay in the same vicinity as these learners monitor the learners and ensure that they attend school and get support from the teachers. Some educators are staying with the identified learners. This has improved the performance of learners in the two schools.

During the inception of the project 23 learners from Barnard Molokoane and 57 from Boiphihlelo were identified and since the learners were made aware of the project and launch 121 learners from Barnard Molokoane and 57 learners from Boiphihlelo have been identified and profiled and even though not all of them have alternative placement or adult supervision the two schools are supporting these learners according





Figure 5. Boiphihlelo SS Pledge and Figure 6. Barnard Molokoane SS Pledge

to their needs (e.g. provision of food, school uniform, extra classes and support from the fellow learners, stakeholders and educators). Social workers work with the schools to address the challenges that the learners are experiencing and some learners are adopted by the community.

Learners who come from CHH are now free to open up to the SBST and the Representatives of Council of Learners about their situation and there are willing to get any assistance from the school. SBSTs of neighboring schools have started identifying the learners in their schools and taking the approach of the two schools in addressing the issue of CHH.

Involvement of other stakeholders, sister department, Inclusive education as well as the involvement of the community has assisted in ensuring that the learners are protected. Involvement of other stake holders, sister department, Inclusive education as well as the involvement of the community has assisted in ensuring that the learners are placed and those that are still staying alone have adult supervision from the community. This has assisted the schools in curbing late coming and absenteeism.

Learners from CHH background in Barnard Molokoane SS, visit Relebohile Day Care in the morning for breakfast and after school to be assisted with homework. These learners used to depend on the meal that they get from National School Nutrition Program (NSNP) at school, meaning that they will come to school on empty stomachs and wait to eat only at 11 o'clock during break and go back home and sometimes sleep on empty stomach. With the partnership between the schools and the NGOs the learners get breakfast and supper from the center. The affected learners would be given home work at school like any other learners but sometimes it became difficult for them to solve the task as sometimes the task will require them to get information on the internet which these learners will not have access to or simply to get an adult who will sign their homework books. With the help of Relebohile day care the learners are able to utilize their facilities to do research on the Internet and the housemothers at the centers are responsible to check the learners' progress and sign for their homework books just as the parents will do.

ISIBINDI (Meaning courage in English) is a non- profit community based organisation that provides service to the needy children. The affected learners sometimes ab-

sent themselves from school when they are having their periods due to lack of sanitary towels. The organisation proved to be committed to the partnership by providing the learners with sanitary towels as well as providing home visits and counseling for vulnerable learners. During their interaction with the CHH they discovered that one of the reasons why the absent themselves from school was that they are not able to buy sanitary towels. As a result they are forced to stay home during that time as they are afraid to soil their clothing.

Educators are able to differentiate cognitive levels of our learners, and are able to identify the vulnerable children and to refer them to the SBST or Social Workers. Life Orientation educators are overall guardians for all learners but class teaches will oversee the whole process of identifying learners and ensuring that affected learners get support both internally and externally.

Majority of learners identified at Boiphihlelo SS were able to progress to the next grade. Their esteem increased and they no longer isolate themselves. Learners understand the challenges faced by learners who come from CHH setup as a result they committed to give them support by sending them information on what was done at school during their absence.

CRC activities at Barnard Molokoane has enhanced the school performance tremendously, the school has achieved 95% in grade 12 and 53% average bachelors which is quality results.

This is because targeted learners were supported in the sense that they were protected allowed to participate in matters relating to their education and provided for their needs.

The problems encountered of high rate of absenteeism and late coming were curbed due to the project because learners are always under adult supervision and teachers have a better understanding of why learners were late and absent.



Figure 7. Isibindi organisation providing sanitary towels to girls

## 5. Reflection

The project has benefited the schools by assisting the schools and the department to come up with the structured intervention to assist CHH and Vulnerable learners in our schools, the SBSTs used to concentrate mainly on orphans within the CHH and thought that those that still have their parents, though not staying with them, do not need attention. It is due to the project that we realize that every child has the right to protection, provision and to be treated with dignity as well as to enjoy the benefits of being a child. Before the project, schools used to deal with the matter as and when it appears, but since the project the two schools realized that there are many such cases in each school. As a consequence we started profiling the learners and attending to their challenges as individuals. Some parents and teachers in our schools used to think that the problems of our focus learners is for the SBST, but since the inception of the project all the stakeholders within the schools are willing to give support to the learners. Children in CHH and vulnerable learners were not always free to come forward and request assistance from the school. But since the project more learners are coming forward to make the schools aware of the situation and accept to be supported by the different stakeholders.

**Successes:** There is a changing attitude of teachers, parents and learners in the two schools regarding the CHH. The school community understands that the focus learners need support and that they should not treat them as outcasts. The focus learners are now able to discuss their frustrations with relevant stakeholders within the school and are willing to accept any kind of assistance from the school community. Orphans found alternative placement where they will be taken care of. There is great cooperation from the stakeholders and business community within the communities of the schools. Our schools are moving toward child friendly schools as teaching and learning conditions have improved, vulnerable learners are getting support from teachers, parents and fellow learners and learners are participating in the development of the school and support of focus learners.

**Challenges:** Some learners are shy and are not ready to come out. As a result they are not profiled and they cannot access the assistance from the schools and different stakeholders. Some parents do not agree to let their children to be under other people's supervision when they are at work due to cultural believes as well as the societal norms. The SBSTs of the neighboring schools are reluctant to attend the meetings when they are invited. Ensuring that the program is sustained in the neighboring schools due to the movement of principals because of promotion and the new principal takes time to adapt to the programmes of the school as well as monitoring of the programme by the team in the neighboring schools due to different work related challenges.

## 6. Way forward

First time enrolments at the two schools will be screened and if there are learners from CHH they will be profiled and referred according to their needs.

The two schools will track the siblings of their targeted learners from the neighboring schools and ensure that they also get the support. The SBSTs of the two schools together with the change agents will continue to workshop and monitor the neighboring schools in order to identify and support the vulnerable learners. This will result in the project spreading and the communities of the two schools will benefit from this project and as a result the project will be sustainable. The project of batch 21 encompasses the projects from the previous batches as a result the team will have a network meeting in order to form partnership as well as to discuss how to integrate all the projects for the sustainability of the network and the project.

Schools will ensure that more stakeholders are brought on board to ensure that the project is sustainable.

Monitoring of the project at the neighboring schools by the team should be done at least once a term to ensure sustainability and the team will ensure that the newly appointed principals in the neighboring schools will be brought on board by arranging information session on CRC by the team.

*Every Child is My Child* Pledge will always be part of the programmes that take place in the two schools. This will ensure that children who come from CHH are protected from any form of abuse and maltreatment, and that these children are always provided with their needs and that they are always under adult supervision when they are at home at schools.

## 7. References

- De Waal et al (2001:151) Perspectives in Education The Social Assistance Amendment Act (Act No. 6 of 2008)
- Children's Care Act (Act No. 38 of 2005)
- Care and Support for Vulnerable Children in Schools (Kamla-Raj 2013)
- Chapter 2 of Bill of Rights Section 28

# Appendix 1

## Template for profiling of learners

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### LEARNER INFORMATION

SURNAME: \_\_\_\_\_

NAMES: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH: \_\_\_\_\_

ID NR: \_\_\_\_\_

### PARENTS/GUARDIAN INFORMATION

MOTHER:

SURNAME: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPATION: \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT NO: \_\_\_\_\_

FATHER

SURNAME: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

OCCUPATION: \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT NO: \_\_\_\_\_

### SIBLINGS INFORMATION

| NAME | SCHOOL | AGE | GRADE |
|------|--------|-----|-------|
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|      |        |     |       |
|      |        |     |       |
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ANY OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION ( MEDICAL)

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