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**Monitoring Child Rights in a Society in  
Transition: The Opportunities Afforded by a  
Transformed Statistical Agency and the  
Culture of Child Rights Activism**

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## **ABSTRACT : MONITORING CHILD RIGHTS IN A SOCIETY IN TRANSITION: THE OPPORTUNITIES AFFORDED BY A TRANSFORMED STATISTICAL AGENCY AND THE CULTURE OF CHILD RIGHTS ACTIVISM**

*This paper traces the growth of child rights activism dating back to the apartheid era. The paper argues that the culture of child rights activism was well developed in South Africa but that it lacked a strong empirical basis to make informed advocacy strategies. The Monitoring Task Group (MTG) of the National Program of Action (NPA) for children, largely housed at the official statistical agency Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) sought to fill in the niche. The MTG was in the advantaged position of operating from within a transformed statistical agency. The statistical agency that was in place during the apartheid era in South Africa and up to the early 1990s was old-fashioned in its approach. The policies it adopted (largely a reflection of national policies) not only restricted access to information it also excluded the mainly African population in the collection and reporting of statistics, affecting the integrity and credibility of the existing data. After the 1994 elections, the Government of National Unity saw a need for conducting a census that included all South Africans. The statistical agency, as it, was needed transformation if it was to carry out this task. The paper outlines crucial elements of the transformation of Stats SA and shows how it created an enabling environment for the development of a data based approach to monitoring.*

### **1. Introduction**

In tracing the growth of child rights activism to the apartheid era in South Africa, this paper argues that while the culture of child rights activism was well developed, it lacked a strong empirical basis on which to formulate advocacy strategies. The Monitoring Task Group of the National Programme of Action for children, largely housed at the official statistical agency Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) sought to fill this niche.

This paper argues that the statistical agency that was in place during the apartheid era in South Africa and up to the early 1990s was biased in its approach. The policies it adopted, largely a reflection of the national policies, not only restricted access to information, but also excluded the mainly African population in the collection and reporting of statistics.

During the political transformation in South Africa, and after the 1994 democratic elections, the Government of National Unity saw a need for conducting a national census that included all South Africans. The statistical agency was required to transform in order to carry out this task. This paper outlines the crucial elements of the transformation of Stats SA and shows how it created an enabling environment for the development of a data-based approach to monitoring child rights.

## **2. Culture of Child Rights Activism in South Africa**

From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, the role of the non-government organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) in the growth of child rights activism in South Africa was as a response to the situation of children under apartheid. During this period several key events, at a national and international level, contributed to the development of child rights in South Africa. This part of the paper presents an overview of the NGO contribution to the growth of child rights activism and how, during the transition period in South Africa, this led to the formation of the National Programme of Action (NPA) for children.

## ***2.1 Growth of Child Rights Activism during Apartheid***

During the 1970s and 1980s, South African children were denied human rights. For example large numbers of children were arrested, imprisoned and held in custody for participating in political activity (IDAF, 1988 and Skelton, 1999: 89). This contributed to the worsening plight and vulnerability of children under apartheid. During this period, it is important to recognise that NGOs and CBOs had child rights programmes which were not co-ordinated because they served localised children's interests, for example in the Western Cape, Natal and Johannesburg (Mabusela: 2000). Also, during the late 1980s several international conferences and events were held focusing on this impact of apartheid on the lives of children, women and families in South Africa.

In September 1987, for example, a Rädga Barnen<sup>1</sup> sponsored conference, entitled "Children, Repression and the Law in Apartheid South Africa" was held in Harare, Zimbabwe. At this conference delegates from a wide range of NGOs and from the Mass Democratic Movement (name given to the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa) spoke out about the effect of apartheid on children and their rights.

While the conference was an important event for the international mobilisation on issues of the worsening plight of children in South Africa (Tambo Papers: 1987) it provided a further impetus for child rights activism within South Africa. The 1987 Harare Conference in conjunction with other international conferences and efforts provided an opportunity and challenge for the African National Congress (ANC) in exile, and the Mass Democratic Movement, to strongly advocate for the protection, survival and development of children's rights in South Africa. UNICEF's publication "Children on the Frontline: The Impact of Apartheid, Destabilisation and Warfare on Children in Southern and South Africa" (published in 1987 and 1989), motivated organisations to lobby and campaign more ardently for the protection of children's rights in South Africa (Knutsson and O'Dea, 1998: 21).

## ***2.2 Child Rights Activism during the Negotiation Phase***

In April 1990, following a number of meetings between members of the Mass Democratic Movement, NGOs from South Africa and UNICEF, the National Committee on the Rights of the Child (NCRC) was formed in Botswana. The NCRC is an umbrella body of more than two hundred NGOs and CBOs who were working with children in South Africa. An agreement was reached with child rights structures, which operated in various provinces, to become one national structure. Although there were difficulties, most organisations agreed, in the interest of child rights, to be part of the child rights national structure (Mabusela: 2000). The NCRC (National Children's Rights Committee) became the first national organisation in South Africa promoting the rights of children.

The NCRC, in collaboration with UNICEF, recognised the need for a situational analysis of women and children in South Africa. This was necessary to determine the needs of women and children in South Africa and, the assistance UNICEF was to provide. Interestingly, at that time UNICEF was not into child rights but focused on specific child survival issues (Mabusela: 2000). South African NGOs and CBOs stuck to the child rights approach, which UNICEF only really affirmed in 1996.

During the 1991 to 1992, Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) negotiations the NCRC addressed the major political parties in the country on the need for the Government of National Unity to prioritise the rights of children. The NCRC highlighted the point that during the transition period the situation of children had not been prioritised, even though children were also victims of apartheid, and had actively participated in the anti-apartheid movement. At the CODESA

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<sup>1</sup> Rädga Barnen (Save the Children, Sweden) was founded in 1919 in Sweden as a member organisation, working primarily for children's rights. It is a non-governmental organisation. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a fundamental tool in its effort.

negotiations children were also given an opportunity to participate. Children submitted the South African Children's Charter to the participants at CODESA.

The South African Children's Charter was based on the document drawn up by those children who participated in the May 1992 Children's Summit, organised by Molo Songololo, as part of the NCRC social mobilisation effort. This Charter was also presented again at an International Conference on Child Rights held in Cape Town in June 1992. Participants at the conference argued that children's rights were only achievable through the ending of apartheid, the election of a democratic government and the drawing up of a new constitution for the country (Knutsson and O'Dea: 1998, 32).

At the time of constitutional writing the NCRC played a very critical role in getting child rights entrenched in the constitution of South Africa. With Rädä Barnen's support, the NCRC brought together experts from all provinces of the country to develop child rights input for the Human Rights Committee of the Constituent Assembly. The prioritisation and recognition of the situation of children in South Africa was evident in the drafting of the Interim Constitution for the country. The Interim Constitution, which was adopted in 1993, had made provisions for the inclusion of the protection of children's rights in the country. The result of this effort is section 28 of the Constitution as we have it today in South Africa.

On 16 June 1993, the NCRC and UNICEF launched the publication "Children and Women in South Africa: A Situation Analysis". The situation analysis was a significant piece of work highlighting the plight of the children and women in terms of education, health, nutrition, violence and abuse. One of the main objectives of the report was to provide baseline data on the situation of children in South Africa (UNICEF/NCRC, 1993:1). In this regard the report found that there were major data constraints. These included the under-enumeration in the national statistics of the black population, especially of those residing in the independent homelands; the methods of collecting, reporting and classification of data resulted in under-reporting and poor quality of data especially with regard to vital statistics; and that national policies had had an effect on the reliability of the data (UNICEF/NCRC, 1993,13). The report recommended that in the developing of future information systems for data, racial, geographic, gender and urban/rural disparities would need to be taken into account. It argued that such a system would be important not only to the delivery and planning of social services but also to assess and monitor changing trends in the situation of women and children in South Africa (UNICEF/NCRC, 1993,131).

The report was also an important tool for advocacy and mobilisation. The NCRC and UNICEF also used the launch of the publication to call for a National Programme of Action for Children (NPA). This was based on the Agenda for Action of the 1990 Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit of Children and on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF/NCRC, 1993:preface). The launch of the NCRC/UNICEF report was followed by a two-day conference, held in Thembisa, entitled "The State of the African Child: An Agenda for Action". At this conference the report on the situation analysis of children and women was examined and proposals for the formation of the National Programme of Action for Children was discussed. The NCRC and UNICEF were mandated to oversee and follow-up on the recommendations from the Thembisa Declaration (adopted on 19 June 1993) for the establishment of a National Forum for Children as well as the National Programme of Action (NPA) for children.

In December 1993, in Sweden, Messrs. F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela jointly signed the 1990 Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Guided by its mandate from the Thembisa Declaration the NCRC, its fourteen regional committees and UNICEF began work on the outline of the national programme of action for children in South Africa. The outline of the NPA was also based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1990 Plan of Action of the World Summit of Children. In February 1994 a conference was held to discuss the draft NPA outline. Representatives at the conference included NGOs, CBOs, trade unions, political organisation, etc. The conference was significant for the following reasons: Firstly it made recommendations as to the way forward for the establishment of

the NPA, the structures and processes that were needed, the consultative mechanisms, and technical resources that would be required. Secondly it established an elected NPA Task Team drawn up from the NCRC, UNICEF and representatives from organisations across the country. The NPA Task Team was responsible for preparing the NPA outline for presentation to the government-to-be in June 1994.

### ***2.3 Child Rights and the National Programme of Action (NPA) for Children***

On the 16 June 1994, at Orlando Stadium in Soweto, President Mandela was presented with an outline of the National Programme of Action. At this ceremony the President promised to not only put children first, but that the newly elected government would prioritise children's rights at the highest level. The President established the Interministerial Cabinet Committee on the rights of the child to oversee the development of the government led NPA process. The Interministerial Cabinet Committee's Steering Committee comprised of Director-Generals from the departments of health, justice, education, welfare, water affairs and forestry, the NCRC and UNICEF. Other structures that came on board, later on, included the Youth Commission, the South African Human Rights Commission, representatives from the nine provinces, the departments of finance and foreign affairs and the Office of the President. They were tasked with the developing and ensuring the implementation of the NPA Framework.

At a broader level, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) Office, which was headed by the Minister without Portfolio, was to focus on promoting growth and addressing the poverty and inequalities of apartheid. The NCRC seconded a child rights officer to work in the RDP office in order to ensure that children's issues are part of the RDP. The RDP Office commissioned the National Institute of Economic Policy (NIEP) to undertake a second situation analysis of children in South Africa. The NIEP/RDP report, "Children, Poverty and Disparity Reduction: Towards Fulfilling the Rights of South Africa's Children" was published in 1996. The report apart from being a comprehensive look at children and poverty in terms of effects of apartheid on access to health services, education, housing, water, food security, land etc, it also highlighted the lack of empirical data on children. The report argued that a major constraint was the lack of reliable, representative national and provincial data on children, especially data on Black/African children in South Africa (NIEP: 1996, 9/10). This point was also raised in the report published by the UNICEF/NCRC in 1993. The NIEP/RDP report also argued that without reliable and representative data the development of specific service-delivery programmes for poverty reduction, especially for children, was problematic.

In June 1995 South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in 1996 Cabinet approved the formation of the NPA. The NPA is the instrument by which government's commitment to putting children first is being carried out. Initially the NPA was co-ordinated nationally from the Department of Health. Provincial Programmes of Action (PPAs) were launched in the nine provinces.

During the 1990s, the civil service also underwent massive transformation. This transformation saw former child rights activists occupying senior positions in different rights-based governmental organisations. As some of these organisations were part of the NPA Steering Committee (NPASC), the NPA while part of government continued to be filled by established child rights activists. The NPASC was drawn from a cross-section of government departments, parastatals, NGOs, the NCRC, UNICEF, the Human Rights Commission and the Youth Commission. More governmental departments were added to the initial group.

A major task that the NPASC and Children's Desk undertook during this period was the preparation of the Initial Country Report for submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. In 1997 South Africa submitted its Initial Country Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. In January 2000, South Africa presented its Initial and Supplementary Country reports to the Committee.

In 1998, The NPA co-ordination was moved from the Department of Health to the Office of the Deputy President. This relocation of the NPA was seen as a necessary and significant step towards the mainstreaming, within government departments, children's rights and issues. The mainstreaming approach calls for each government department to prioritise children's issues within its own budgets, workplans and programmes.

Based on workshops held in 1998 to evaluate and assess the NPA structure and process the NPA also underwent restructuring. In 1999 after the second democratic elections, the Children's Desk was relocated to the Office of the President. The NPA is now located and co-ordinated from the Presidency. Among their tasks of working with stakeholders and NGOs to improve children's situations and rights, the Office on Child Rights (as it is now called) also plays an advisory role, in that they advise the President and his Office on the situations and needs of the children in the country. This process is aided and facilitated by the NPASC. There are four project groups that focus on Communications and Information; Advocacy, Mobilisation and Participation; Research, Policy Review, Reporting and Evaluation; and Monitoring. These groups assist in facilitating the work of the NPASC.

### **3. Stats SA's Involvement in the NPASC**

In April 1996 the Monitoring Subcommittee of the NPASC met in Cape Town to discuss the monitoring of the NPA and CRC (NPA Monitoring Task Group: 1996). The Subcommittee recognised that, while the culture of child rights activism had been well developed in South Africa, there was a lack of empirical data to support the actions for improving situations of children. At this meeting, Stats SA was identified as an important role-player, and as the statutory body responsible for monitoring the NPA/CRC (Bah, 1999: 2). Recommendations were made for Stats SA to be brought on board the NPA and MTG process. It was felt that Stats SA was a key role-player to this process because of the surveys it undertakes, the its sources of data and data sets, as well as in the development of indicators for monitoring child rights.

In October 1996 the NPASC constituted the Monitoring Task Group (MTG), which was chaired by Prof. Marion Jacobs of the University of Cape Town Child Health Unit. The mandate of the MTG, at this point, was to develop a framework for monitoring the implementation of the CRC and NPA. It was also tasked with providing support for the development of guidelines, instruments and surveys, the development of indicators and facilitating the production of reports to Cabinet and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

During this phase of the MTG, Stats SA played an important and active role in achieving some of the goals set out for the MTG. However during May 1997, discussions were held in which the greater involvement of Stats SA in the MTG was discussed. Stats SA took time to come on board the NPA and to drive the MTG process. While Stats SA was undergoing transformation and in principle had recognised the need to assist government by producing statistics of relevance to the national policies and priorities, it expressed concern and doubts as to whether it had the capacity to undertake the monitoring of the NPA/CRC. Stats SA was faced with the challenge of reducing the backlog in its publications and with the human resources capacity and logistic problems and therefore taking on board children's issues was seen as a problem at that time. Officers at Stats SA had to buy into the NPA, its MTG process and child rights issues, if they were to become more deeply involved in driving the MTG process.

On 18 June 1998, Stats SA was nominated to chair the MTG. During 1998/1999, after much discussion and deliberation, Stats SA began to own up to its role as the driver of the MTG of the NPA.

In understanding how Stats SA created an enabling environment for the development of a data-based approach to monitoring child rights, it is important to examine the transformation that it has been undergoing since 1994.

### **4. The Transformed Statistical Agency**

During the apartheid era and up to the early 1990s the statistical agency, then called Central Statistical Service (CSS), was old fashioned in its approach. As indicated earlier on in this paper, the policies CSS adopted were largely a reflection of national policies drafted during the apartheid era. These policies had impacted on the organisation structure of the agency and on the collection, processing and reporting of data. The data, as indicated in the UNICEF/NCRC and NIEP reports, was not reliable, representative and up-to-date (UNFPA, 1997:3). In this section of this paper some of the key transformation strategies of the statistical agency during the post-independence phase are examined.

After the 1994 democratic elections, CSS was the responsibility of the Minister without Portfolio in the Office of the President. Within this context, CSS was tasked with providing necessary information and statistics that would enable the RDP programmes to be monitored and assessed (CSS: 1994, 9). In 1994, the Minister for RDP set up a task group to address the restructuring and rationalisation of CSS. In 1995 responsibility for CSS was relocated from the RDP Office to the Office of the Deputy President, then headed by Mr. Thabo Mbeki. Since 1997, the responsibility for the CSS lies with the Department of Finance.

In 1995 the statistical agencies from the TBVC (former independent homelands of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei) were incorporated into CSS. The incorporation of these statistical agencies in CSS also needed to be addressed in the restructuring and rationalisation process (CSS, 1995: 5).

The transformation of CSS, since 1994, has been shaped by three key national policies, namely, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Growth Employment and Redistribution Policy (GEAR) and the goals for public service transformation set by the Department of Public Service and Administration (Stats SA (a), 1999:8). Transformation of CSS was necessary for meeting the needs of the RDP and the government's policies and programmes.

During the political transformation in South Africa, and after the 1994 democratic elections, the Government of National Unity saw a need for conducting a national census that included all South Africans. Transformation of CSS was necessary beforehand since, the first comprehensive national census was scheduled for 1996. While in principle the Cabinet Committee looking into the 1996 Census had agreed on the need for a national and more representative census many changes had to be made to meet this goal. A Census Advisory Committee, made of representatives from government, NGOs, provinces, parastatals, universities and other stakeholders were tasked with reviewing and advising on the timing, cost, method, questionnaire design and other issues relating to improving the coverage and quality of the 1996 Census (CSS (b): 1995). This collaborative process was important for improving the reliability, representativity and legitimacy of data collected and produced by CSS (CSS (b): 1995, 4-5).

#### ***4.1 Transformation of the Statistical Agency and the drafting of a New Statistics Act***

The strategic changes within CSS were necessary if it was to move away from its historical and political past and become a key role-player at an international and national level. CSS needed to bring its vision in line with best practices carried out by other leading international statistical agencies. As part of its transformation CSS developed a mission statement: to be relevant to policy making for growth and development, reliable in producing timely and accurate statistics, representative in staffing and advisory committee and responsive to user's needs.

Several key strategies were implemented for CSS to meet the challenges it outlined in its mission. In particular, a task force was established to review the Statistics Act 66 of 1976. The task force, later the Interim Statistics Council, was mandated to increase the statutory independence of the statistical agency, and its Head, and to improve lines of co-operation and collaboration with stakeholders from the private and public sector. In terms of the programme of technical assistance Statistics Sweden, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), with funding from their respective governments or organisations, assisted in



the transformation and restructuring of CSS, as well as in the changing of the Statistics Act. The main assistance came from Statistics Sweden.

In August 1998, the Government gazetted changes in the statistical agency's name and logo. In September 1998, CSS underwent a name and logo change from CSS to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA). These changes were influenced by the fact that the previous name and logo embodied the apartheid administration's dual language policy of Afrikaans and English. Also, a new image was required to reflect the professionalism and accessibility appropriate to statistical production in the new South Africa, and was in keeping with the transformations that the statistical agency was undergoing. The change in name was in keeping with the international trends, in which countries names are usually attached to their national statistical agencies (Statistics Sweden, Statistic Canada, Australian Bureau of Statistic etc). And it reflected integration of the former TBVC statistical offices into CSS.

During 1997 and 1998, the Interim Statistics Council, with expert assistance from Statistics Sweden, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Statistics Canada produced a draft policy paper, and a framework for drawing up new statistics legislation. Developing a new Statistics Act was important for several reasons (Denell, 1999). Government departments needed the new Act to signify the break between the apartheid government and the new government and its constitution. Secondly the new Act would give recognition to the new responsibilities of both national and provincial governments. Most importantly the new Act would reflect methodological and technological development since 1996, as well as enhance professional independence of the statistical department and extend the status and responsibility of the Statistical Council. The new Act would also open up the lines of collaboration and statistical coordination among organs of the state. In terms of the collection of statistics and conducting of surveys, the new Act would ensure the right of privacy of the respondents and confidentiality of submitted data.

The changes in the Act were also in line with the United Nations principles of official statistics. The principles of official statistics adopted included the following; that official statistics was important to the developing of governments economic, social and environmental situations, and that co-ordination among statistical agencies within a country was necessary to promote consistency and efficiency (CSS (a): 1995, 10).

The change in the Statistics Act has made provision not only for a system of producing official statistics, but also for statistics that are relevant and reflective of the needs of the government in terms of priority and policy. It has opened up the room for collaboration, co-operation between Stats SA and other government departments, parastatals, NGOs etc.

#### ***4.2 The Gradual Emergence of an Enabling Environment as the Statistical Agency Works Towards Developing a New Statistics Act***

The new principles or concepts embodied in the new Statistics Act 66 of 1999 (passed on 21 April 1999), included legitimacy and professional independence, a system of official statistics and the high quality both of individual surveys and of the systems as a whole (Denell, 1999).

The concept of a system of official statistics covers not only the activities of Stats SA but also of other government producers of statistics, users, respondents, suppliers of statistics and competing organisations. The Statistician-General (S-G), that is, the head of the statistical agency, can promote co-ordination amongst producers of official statistics. This can be done in order to advance the quality, consistency, comparability and optimum use of statistics. The Act also makes provisions for the S-G to enter into an agreement with the head of any other organisation of state in respect of information or the data. It stipulates that the purpose of official statistics is to assist in planning; decision-making; and monitoring or assessment of policies, decision-making and other actions (Statistics Act No. 6 of 1999).

The new Statistics Act is significant in two regards. Firstly in moving towards establishing a system of official statistics it has made room for, and given senior officials within the agency, the confidence to start new statistical series, which are of relevance to the government's decision-

making and policies. In establishing new series and producing statistics of relevance statistical agency is then able to respond to government's requests for data. Statistics are being produced because of their relevance to the development and growth in the country and the government.

Secondly the statistical agency or senior officers can engage in collaborative initiatives that will be of relevance to the governments' decision making and policies. In doing so, duplications in data collection or surveys conducted can be avoided, and the quality of the data collected and published can be improved. In creating co-ordination among statistical agencies or producers of statistics within the country, it promotes optimal use of the data, and so in doing responds to government's need for data for implementing, monitoring and assessing policies and programmes.

The poverty monitoring initiatives and gender unit at Stats SA are such examples of the responses to reflect the needs and policies of government. The gender unit at Stats SA has been established with funding from the Norwegian Development Agency NORAD, and technical assistance from Statistics Norway (Stats SA: 2000, 28).

## **5. The Opportunities Afforded by A Transformed Statistical Agency for Monitoring Child Rights**

The environment for engaging and collaborating with other organs of state and relevant stakeholders has given officers at Stats SA more room to utilise the Act to further national policy interests and priorities. It has also enabled Stats SA to become more involved in the monitoring of the NPA and the CRC. Stats SA is able capitalise on the principles of the Act in order to effectively carry out its role as the driver of the MTG.

Currently, the Office on Child Rights (the Presidency), UNICEF, Statistics South Africa, the Departments of Welfare, Health, Education, Water Affairs and Forestry and Gauteng PPA Co-ordinator (on behalf of the PPAs) are represented on the MTG core group. At a national level, the new Statistics Act has created the opportunity for Stats SA to co-ordinate and collaborate with other organs of state that are the main producers of data and statistics on children.

The Child Information System is the NPA MTG strategy to use data to study/monitor the situation of children in South Africa. The use of existing data sources from government and civil society information systems, will facilitate in the system of monitoring, advocacy, policy review and collective action for improving the situation of children. In this way, data from all levels of government and civil society is effectively and meaningfully used for monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and advocacy purposes.

The Child Information System places emphasis on the NPA priority areas and the structure of its reference groups as a source of accessing existing data and data sources on children. The priority areas identified by the NPA are infrastructure; special protection measures; education; early childhood education (ECD); child and maternal health; nutrition; leisure and recreation; and peace and non-violence. The NPA has also identified HIV/AIDS, peace and non-violence, disability, and gender as being cross-cutting issues to be addressed within each priority area group.

Each priority area group will have a reference group. These reference groups will comprise representatives from national, provincial and local government departments, NGOs, CBOs, children and children's groups, relevant international organisations, academic and research institutions, parent groups/organisations, trade unions, traditional leaders, the private sector, commissions, etc.

The transformation of Stats SA created an enabling environment for the development of a data based approach to monitoring child rights. In this regard, Stats SA has initiated the Children's Statistical Newsletter, as a vehicle for the Child Information System. The newsletter, launched in December 1999, is distributed to a wide range of NGOs, CBOs, government departments, researchers etc who either use or produce statistics on children and child-related issues. The aim of this newsletter is to inform role players about developments in compiling statistics on children. It is a tool for strengthening the monitoring of the CRC by developing a more collaborative approach between government, non-governmental organisations, tertiary institutions and civil society has to

be developed in collecting and analysing data on children. These organisations and departments are also encouraged to make contributions on their existing and new data and surveys on children.

In coordinating and collaborating with producers and users of child-centred statistics, especially through the newsletter, this becomes a vehicle for responding to government's request for data on children. In utilising a wider range of data source it enables government to get a better representation of the situation of children in South Africa and this facilitates in the monitoring and assessing of government policy, strategy and programmes aimed at improving child rights.

Another feature of this is the coordinating role that Stats SA has played in the collating of data for national reports such as the Report on the State of the Nation's Children (annual flagship publication of the NPA). Also for international reports such as the Initial and Supplementary Country Reports to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and now the National Report for the End Decade Review of the World Summit for Children Goals.

The opportunities afforded by a transformed statistical agency resulted in officers becoming advocates of the MTG approach for monitoring child rights, the NPA and the CRC. It has opened up room for greater involvement in the monitoring process and in initiating new collaborative effects.

## **6. The Way Forward**

While Stats SA was, initially, slow to owning up to its role as driver of the MTG process, since its transformation it has taken steps towards developing a systematic approach to monitoring child rights, and to initiating collaborative efforts through new series and data collations for publications on the situation of children in South Africa. It has recognised that while the culture of child rights activism was well developed in South Africa the lack of a strong empirical basis impacted on advocacy strategies and service delivery for children in the post-independence phase. While Stats SA has sought to fill this niche, there are challenges it has to overcome.

The process for monitoring child rights at a provincial, district, local and community level still needs to be established. The provincial offices of Stats SA are currently part of the Provincial Plans of Action. While Stats SA has opened up dialogue with its provincial offices on monitoring of child rights, at this level there are still logistical and capacity problems, which currently impede the process. Stats SA does not as yet have a children's unit, as is the case of a gender unit.

Another factor is that no budget exists for funding the activities of the MTG and Stats SA initiatives. So in order to deepen its involvement in the monitoring of child rights at national, provincial and other levels, Stats SA and the MTG would have to secure external funding for its activities. The establishing of a children's unit would be the way to go if Stats SA is to match the importance the Government has placed on children's issues (in its establishment of the Office on Child Rights in the President's Office).

One lesson that can be shared with other countries is the central relevance of statistical offices in the monitoring of child rights. Since children's issues cut across different sectors, the official statistical agency is an ideal institution for working with the statistical aspects of children's data.

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