

South Africa, 23 February 2011 - South Africa's world-class government-led programmes are failing to reach poor children on the margins, according to child experts.

Speaking yesterday (WED) at the release of the "Government-funded programmes and services for vulnerable children in South Africa" report, South African Human Rights Commissioner Lindiwe Mokate said it was doubtful as to whether government had a human rights approach when it came to the country's vulnerable children.

She said it was time the country did more to ensure the meaningful participation of children in decisions that affected them.

"We must not just bus them in to sing and clap at events," Mokate said.

Professor Linda Richter of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), one of the collaborators in the report, said the country needed a demand based service for children, not the current provision-led approach.

"Otherwise we will continue to see the situation where those who have get more and those who need get less," Richter warned.

Author of the report, Patricia Martin of Advocacy Aid, said there was no doubt that the phenomenal policies had made a difference in the lives of many children, but that services were failing to reach those children in the marginalised areas.

She said it had been left to over-burdened civil society organisations to meet the demand in these vulnerable, mostly rural areas.

Richter added that there was definitely a "growing blindness" towards those living in rural areas in South Africa, where poor roads and an inability to afford transport were major hurdles towards children accessing a range of critical services.

The report, which aimed to review how government had discharged its onus through different government departments, assessed how among others home affairs, social development and health served vulnerable children.

The cost of applying for birth certificates was identified as a major barrier - this included the cost of travel, photographs and photocopies.

There were also insufficient accessible home affairs service points in rural areas although it was pointed out that this hurdle was overcome spectacularly at election time when mobile clinics went to the most far flung areas.

The health department was found to have insufficient sites in rural areas and informal settlements, unavailable devices for children with disabilities and a poor or non-existent

approach to nutrition. The high cost of transport was also found to be a major barrier to children accessing health services.

Martin noted that children were still being confronted by the "legacy of AIDS denialism" - with an expectation that this would still continue for the next five years - as access to HIV services was found to be poor for vulnerable children.

Babies are diagnosed late, treatment is initiated late, drop-out is high due to long distances to support services and knowledge was low.

The Department of Social Development was found to have failed in making its services accessible, especially in the child's first year. The department also often failed to assist in making documentation needed available.

The departments of water, basic education, housing, police, agriculture and justice were also found to have delivered sub-optimal services to vulnerable children.

Martin said many were quick to point out that 85% of children needing grants were receiving it, however it hid the fact that the 15% equalled millions of children, often the most vulnerable.

The report is a collaboration between New York University, UNICEF and the HSRC.

Source: AllAfrica.com