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**Title: Child grants cushioned blow during recession**

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Kliptown - Two studies have revealed that child support grants (CSG) reduced the depth and severity of poverty during the economic recession in South Africa.

The reports entitled, 'The Impact of the International Financial Crisis on Child Poverty in South Africa', and 'Vulnerability of Children and Poor Families to the Economic Recession of 2008 - 2009', were released on Monday.

They were conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund, Financial and Fiscal Commission of South Africa and Social Development Department, with the aim of looking at the impact of the 2008 - 2009 economic recession on children in South Africa.

They found that child grants served as a form of diversified income, making poor households less susceptible to the effects of the shock.

"As occurred globally, there was little time for an anti-poverty policy response when the economic recession struck South Africa. The existence of a well functioning social protection system before the crisis was therefore very important for protecting the poor... The studies found the CSG to be one such viable pre-crisis social protection instruments," the reports noted.

While the quantitative study found the CSG to have a significant ameliorating effect during a recession, the qualitative study showed that in addition to social grants, unemployment insurance provided a critical source of income that cushioned many of the affected individuals and their families from the adverse effects of the recession.

"Affected households, who were not receiving state support, were impacted more negatively by the recession as they were more likely to cut food expenditure, change the type of food eaten in the household and reduce the number of meals eaten per day in the household than those who were receiving state support," say the studies.

The reports recommended that public awareness should be raised regarding the grants and other services offered by the Department of Social Development through more outreach programmes. This will help people know where to go for help. They also noted that the Social Relief of Distress Grant was unknown by most households.

They recommended that more be done to reach some two million eligible children who are not receiving the CSG, due mainly to administrative reasons.

The consolidation of various social protection instruments, including CSG and UIF, should be accelerated as the combined effects are significant for child poverty reduction.

"The optimal provision of free public health care should also be addressed to ensure that all poor people,

especially children, have access to health care," the reports recommended.

Social Development Minister Bathabile Dlamini said the research reports gave an indication that government has been instrumental in ensuring that vulnerable South Africans have access to food and other basic needs.

"The Department of Social Development has had to play a specific role in ensuring that food shall be plentiful and that no one should go hungry. The right to social security is entrenched in our Constitution and we have been very conscious that our social assistance programme does provide a basic safety net for the millions of South Africans, especially young, aged and the disabled," Dlamini said.

By the end of March this year, 10.3 million children were benefiting from the CSG. Child foster care benefits were provided to over 512 000 children in the same period.

The minister stressed the need for the department to go out and search for all eligible children who are not getting grants.

"There are two million children eligible for CSG but not receiving it because they live in remote areas or lack required documents. It's our responsibility as the department to go out and look for vulnerable children and ensure that they receive the grants," she said.

UNICEF representative Aida Girma commended the South African government for its social assistance programme in place to protect the children during the recession.

"Failure by government to protect the young can lead to children suffering from malnutrition, absence from school and the damage can last a lifetime," said Girma. – BuaNews

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