



For an Equitable Sharing
of National Revenue



POLICY BRIEF

Strengthening Interventions in Family and Community Welfare Services



The Financial and Fiscal Commission

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The vision of the Commission is to provide influential advice for equitable, efficient and sustainable intergovernmental fiscal relations between the national, provincial and local spheres of government. This relates to the equitable division of government revenue among the three spheres of government and to the related service delivery of public services to South Africans.

Through focused research, the Commission aims to provide proactive, expert and independent advice on promoting the intergovernmental fiscal relations system, using evidence-based policy analysis to ensure the realisation of constitutional values. The Commission reports directly both to Parliament and the Provincial Legislatures, who hold government institutions to account. Government must respond to the Commission's recommendations and the extent to which they will be implemented at the tabling of the annual national budget in February.

The Commission consists of women and men appointed by the President: the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson; three representatives of provinces; two representatives of organised local government; and two other persons. The Commission pledges its commitment to the betterment of South Africa and South African's in the execution of its duties.

For an equitable sharing of national revenue.



Policy Brief

Strengthening Interventions in Family and Community Welfare Services

21 January 2021

Executive Summary

Secure and supportive families contribute towards social cohesion and stable communities, and are associated with higher productivity and lower crime, violence and substance abuse. The wellbeing of families should be a priority for any government, especially in South Africa where many families deal with multiple socio-economic challenges and limited family time, as a result of the apartheid spatial legacy. The Department of Social Development (DSD) is the custodian of government's broad suite of family-related programmes. The Commission's research looked at the services provided by the nine provincial DSDs, to understand the approach to (and funding of) interventions aimed at strengthening families. The Commission identified three issues that need to be addressed in order to strengthen these interventions: the disconnect between policy (which is developmental and emphasises non-statutory, preventative services) and practice (which remains more focused on statutory interventions); the lack of priority given to family-strengthening interventions; and insufficient integration of "care and cash" interventions, (social programmes and social grants). There needs to be balance between statutory and non-statutory interventions, which can be difficult because provincial departments are legally obligated to prioritise statutory interventions, which are also more immediate and urgent. The Commission recommends that the DSD lead the development of a specific and proactive programme aimed at strengthening at risk families and establish a holistic package of interventions that combines income support with family programmes.

Background

Secure and supportive families play a crucial role in moulding and caring for a country's future assets: its children. They also contribute towards social cohesion and stable communities, and are associated with high levels of productivity and low levels of crime, violence and substance abuse. Therefore, the wellbeing of families should be considered a public good and a key priority for any government.

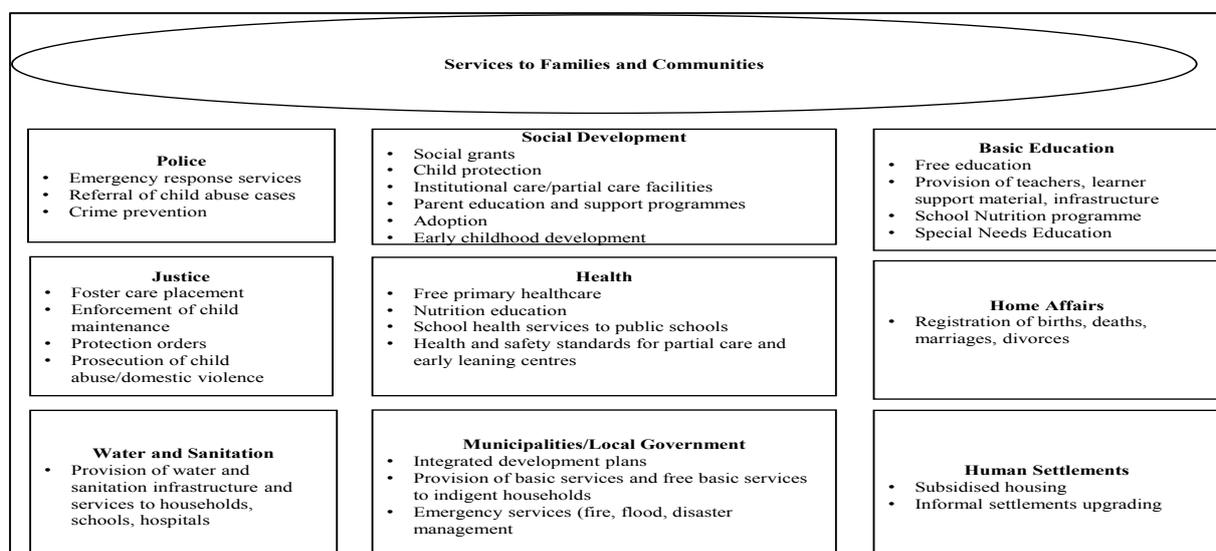
This is especially true in South Africa, where many families are dealing with multiple socio-economic challenges. Poverty, unemployment, crime and gender-based violence, the impact of HIV/Aids (orphan-headed households), substance abuse and interpersonal violence (the second highest cause of death in the country) all contribute to child abuse and neglect, and the disintegration of the family unit. In addition, the majority of families, and by extension the communities in which they live, have to deal with the spatial legacy of apartheid, whereby people live far away from their workplace, which limits their family time. While these challenges are not new, they have been amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent national lockdown.

Many families struggle to ensure education and health care for children, the elderly and disabled. Therefore, the Commission's research looked at the services provided by the nine provincial DSDs, to understand the approach to (and funding of) interventions aimed at strengthening families.

Research Findings

In South Africa, government provides a broad range of public services to families and communities, ranging from free primary health care to pregnant women and children, to water and sanitation, subsidised housing, early childhood development (ECD) services, and inclusive education that ensures children with special educational needs are catered for. The DSD is the custodian of government's policies and programmes for families.

Figure 1: Services provided to families and communities by government



The Commission's research identified three issues that, if addressed, would strengthen the family and community welfare interventions.

1. **Disconnect between policy and practice.** The 1997 White Paper for Social Welfare introduced *developmental* social welfare, which represented a significant shift in focus and approach. The emphasis shifted from statutory interventions (such as providing alternative state care and protective services) to non-statutory services, which are preventative and early intervention services. The approach is more proactive, identifying at-risk children, families and communities. Therefore, instead of intervening *after* a need has arisen, the intervention takes place *before* a need arises, i.e. before abuse, neglect or exploitation happens. All subsequent family and community welfare-related legislation and policies¹ take their lead from the White Paper and emphasise prevention and early intervention for at-risk individuals, families and communities. For example, the Children's Act (Clause 146) requires provinces to allocate funds to prevention and early intervention programmes, such as parenting skills and trauma counselling for children. However, in practice, very few large-scale parenting programmes are being implemented nationally,² and none are fully funded by government.
2. **Family-strengthening interventions are not prioritised.** The Commission's analysis found that provincial departments tend to prioritise the funding of statutory services over preventive and early intervention services. This makes no economic sense and hinders the real transformation of South Africa's poor and vulnerable communities. Prevention and early intervention services are cost effective because they reduce the demand for more costly government services later on, such as alternative care in children's homes, and are an investment in human capital, providing the space for children to develop to their full potential.
3. **Interventions are insufficiently integrated.** "Cash and care" initiatives refer to holistic interventions that leverage the opportunities of integrating cash transfers with programme support. In the case of families and communities, this approach increases the gains derived from cash transfers, such as the child support grant. For example, research found that the local Sihleng'imizi ("we care for families") Family Programme complements and scales up the positive benefits of the child support grant in South Africa. Given South Africa's well developed social security grant system, the adoption of a cash and care approach would not only benefit beneficiaries but also ensure that the State receives greater value for money.

Notwithstanding the above, meeting statutory and developmental obligations is not an "either-or" decision but rather requires a balance. Achieving this balance can be difficult because

¹ For example, the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005), the Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse Act (No. 70 of 2008), the White Paper on Families (2013).

² There are a number of effective parenting programmes in South Africa, such as the Early Learning Resource Unit's Family and Community Motivator programme, and the Foundation for Community Work's Family in Focus Programme, but none of these programmes are offered throughout the country.

statutory interventions are more urgent and immediate than proactive or preventive interventions. Following the Nawongo court case, provincial DSDs are obligated to prioritise the funding of statutory services, and so preventative programmes tend to be deprioritised in stretched provincial budgets.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research highlighted that the social development sector needs additional, new funding and a well-thought out plan to ensure that the funding is used to implement developmental programmes, which are more cost effective in the long run.

The Commission recommends that:

1. The Department of Social Development (DSD) lead the development of a three-year progressive realisation sector plan to ensure the establishment of interventions that proactively strengthen and stabilise at-risk families and communities.
2. The DSD consider establishing a holistic package of family interventions that combines income support with targeted family care interventions.

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