



**Commissioner
for Children**

1 August 2023

For Attention: United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

Dear Madam / Sir

Respect for children's views: Little voices MUST count

Introduction

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children (WCCC) has worked with children since the inception of her office on 1 June 2020. She established a Child Government Monitors (CGM) forum on WhatsApp, since it was the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Child Government Monitor is a Western Cape nomenclature for Child Human Rights Defenders. These CGMs are self-nominated, selected by other children, nominated by organisations or adult community leaders. They chat to the Commissioner weekly on a WhatsApp forum to exchange experiences of their lived realities and to learn about child rights.

The office has since implemented four child participation practice models:

- The CGM forum which is a direct communication channel with the Commissioner to make submissions on governance.
- The Community Child Rights Workshops conducted in especially rural or disadvantaged communities.
- Topical conversations where the Commissioner collects insights from WhatsApp surveys or during workshops.
- Child Rights Government Budget Monitoring where children are empowered to make input into government plans and budgets.

Children's substantive engagement in government decision making is not yet a feature of our democracy. There are initiatives that aim to foreground children's voices, but unfortunately, they are not taken seriously by the adults in power. In most cases, there is little evidence that children's views influence law, policy and practice. For example, the



Commissioner for Children

Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament¹ and most junior city or town councils, are roleplaying exercises and do not influence governance decision making. Sadly, these initiatives do not challenge the power hierarchies in society, the superior citizenship power of the adult voter, nor government decisions. In order for children's voices to count they must learn and understand the adults' systems of governance which are usually very technical and not child-friendly. In as much as the State Report claims that children's views are respected, systems of governance are not child-centred in South Africa. To change this will require changing the hearts and minds of those who govern.

The CGMs developed a submission in relation to the List of Issues Prior to Reporting in 2020. This submission is a follow up after South Africa's State Report was tabled. The CGMs did not believe the State Report was child friendly. The WCCC team analysed the State Report and highlighted the issues previously advocated for by the CGMs in the List of Issues Prior to Reporting in order to see how these issues were represented in the report.

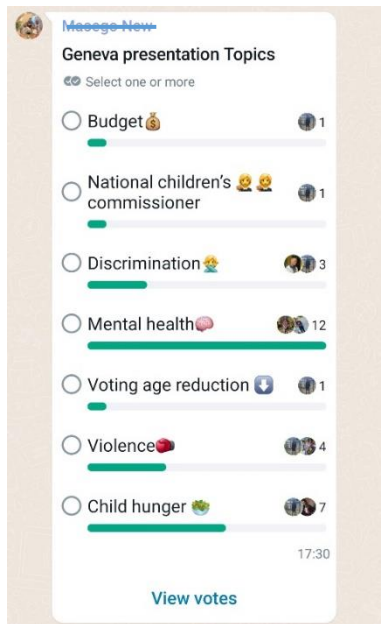
¹ South Africa's Combined third to sixth periodic report submitted under article 44 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – paragraph 115



Commissioner for Children

Engagement with Child Government Monitors

The WCCC engaged the Child Government Monitors on South Africa's State report. We provided the CGMs with a poll of the issues they continuously advocate for. This included mental health², child hunger³, violence⁴, discrimination⁵, budget⁶, national children's commissioner⁷, and the reduction of the voting age. The CGMs believe that these issues deserved special attention in the State Report. They ranked the issues according to importance as follows:



1. Mental health
2. Child hunger
3. Violence
4. Discrimination
5. Child participation in government budgets
6. National Children's Commissioner
7. Reduce the voting age from 18 to 16 years

This submission will profile all issues ranked by the CGMS. The three most salient issues are prioritised with recommendations to the South African Government.

² Ibid - paragraph 207

³ Ibid - references to malnutrition paragraphs 181, 183, 184, 230

⁴ Ibid- paragraphs 13, 16, 24, 36, 44, 58, 91, 99, 131, 133, 135, 140, 141, 142, 150, 155, 180, 255, 288

⁵ Ibid - paragraphs 73, 74, 83, 84, 86, 90, 93, 94, 111

⁶ Ibid - paragraphs 53 and 54

⁷ Ibid - paragraph 62 Child Rights Commissioner in the South African Human Rights Commission



Commissioner for Children

Mental health

“Mental health is one of the biggest issues children face in South Africa, and the fact that the government didn't address it scares me actually.” – Vimbai, 17 years old

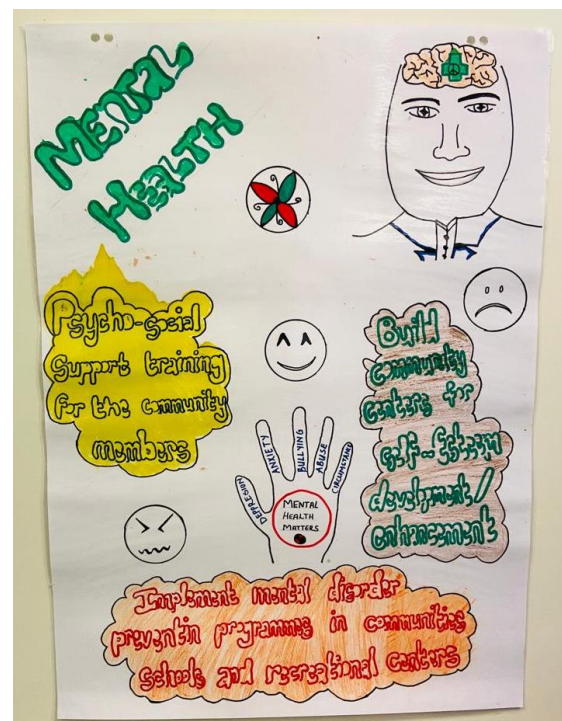
“Children “[speak] about this all over and on every single platform. It's something we mention whenever we speak yet it's not recognised as a problem, children from other countries have spoken out about it and are being harmed everyday as well as our countries kids but still it's not mentioned.” – John-Lee, 15 years old

“This should be taken seriously. Mental health is a very big thing and it can lead a lot of bad things. If a person's mental health is not on point they can't take care of themselves and those around them”. – Imivuyo, 14 years old

“Mental health is important, and I feel like it's constantly overlooked by the government like they don't prioritise mental health especially children's mental health. Like I feel people are always like 'you're a child, you shouldn't have mental health issues'”. – Tara, 14 years old

Our recommendations to the South African government are:

- Psycho-social support training for the community members.
- Build community centres for self-esteem development / enhancement.
- Implement mental disorder prevention programmes in communities, schools and recreational centres.





Commissioner for Children

Child Hunger

"Hunger is rooted in a number of issues such as interconnected issues of poverty, inequity, conflict, climate change, gender discrimination, weak government and health systems and so forth."- Ande, 17 years old

"Child hunger is such an important topic and is such a big issue, as a lot of children face this and their only meal in a while could be the day they get it at school, if they even do go, as many parents use the money they get from the government for their wants instead of the child's need for food." – Liliitha, 14 years old

"Here where I live is a lot of children that starve from hunger" – Andle, 13 years old

"I think the government could do something about it, like giving out child grants in vouchers". – Phiwokuhle, 17 years old

Our recommendations to the South African government are:

- Government must support food gardens.
- Adults must create soup kitchens.
- Food vouchers must be given for when grant money runs out.
- Parents must use grant money to buy children food.





Commissioner for Children

Violence in the home

"Violence is the main cause of a lot things and its genuinely bizarre, like it's scary that violence can actually [affect] kids badly as it does lead to a bad mental health, trauma , PTSD, grades and in the long run it genuinely messes with people's heads". – Tara, 14 years old

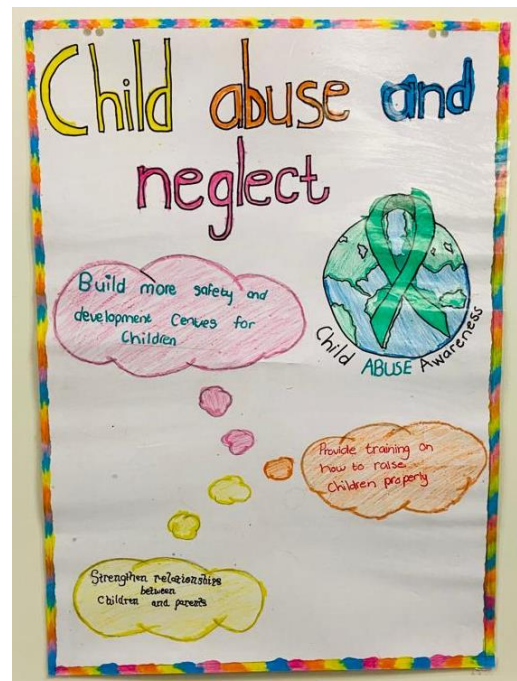
"A large portion of deaths in South Africa is caused by violence."⁸ – Vimbai, 17 years old

"Violence in homes should be taken as serious as other crimes." – Imivuyo, 14 years old

"Majority of homes are filled with violence and the violence in the homes, lead to mental health [issues]" – John-Lee, 15 years old

We recommend that the South African government:

- Build more safety and development centres for children.
- Provide training on how to raise children properly.
- Strengthen relationships between children and parents.



⁸ In the Western Cape, the second most common cause of death among children is homicide; 1058 children were murdered in the Western Cape since 2017 and boys between the ages of 14 and 17 years are most vulnerable to injury – See the Western Cape Commissioner for Children 2021/22 Annual Report – https://www.westerncape.gov.za/childrens-commissioner/sites/childrens-commissioner.westerncape.gov.za/files/atoms/files/WCCC%20Annual%20Report%202021-22_WEB.pdf



Commissioner for Children

Discrimination

CGMs want policies to protect children from discrimination against the LGBTQI+ community.⁹



⁹ Strategic Planning Camp between the Western Cape Commissioner for Children and Child Government Monitors and Mentors 25 – 27 February 2022

https://www.westerncape.gov.za/childrens-commissioner/sites/childrens-commissioner.westerncape.gov.za/files/atoms/files/WCCC%20Strategic%20Report%202022_Final.pdf



Commissioner for Children

Child participation in government budgets

“Children having a say [in the budget] is [a] must because children have to know what goes on around them, how specific money is used in their daily lives and activities, example, if a certain amount of money is allocated to education, a child should have all knowledge as to what goes on with that money and how extras are handled.” – Vimbai, 17 years old

“It’s important yes because children they can be educated on how funds are allocated and also children are the future citizens and leaders so it is more beneficial for them to know how the budget works.” – Phiwokuhle, 17 years old

*“Children’s opinions should definitely be heard on the budget especially where **children** are concerned.”- Taliep, 17 years old*

Child Government Monitors were recorded making three presentations after they were trained to read and analyse the provincial government budget¹⁰. They wish to share the video with the Committee on the Rights of the Child to illustrate that children can understand the budget when empowered in a child-centred approach.



¹⁰ CGMs analyse the Western Cape Government Provincial budget - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMGPoLYBd4Q>



Commissioner for Children

National Children's Commissioner

"It is important to have a National Commissioner for Children cause some children might find it weird that there is only one Commissioner for Children, yes there is organisations but those organisation could not be providing the necessary needs or information or the help that the children are seeking". – Lilitha, 14 years olds

"National [Children's]Commissioner is important and the fact that SA report didn't mention it should be definitely addressed." – Vimbai, 17 years old

"If there are kids advocating for something that means that they actually need it to help".
–John-Lee, 15 years old

"Every province needs a Commissioner. With [that] being said, the Commissioner for every province should care for children and be the right candidate." – Zoey, 12 years old



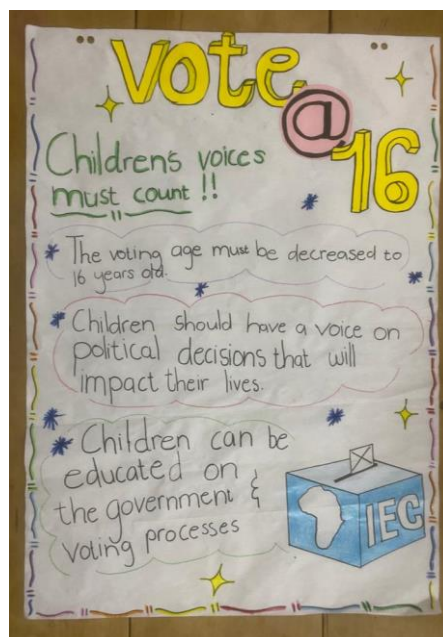


Commissioner for Children

Decrease the voting age to 16

"Children would also like to vote for a political party to represent us. We are tired of being taken advantage of or we are tired that we are promised things that never happen, so we should be educated first of all, about voting cause I'm sure there are children that would also like to vote, voice their opinions." – Liliitha, 14 years old

A Child Government Monitor presented at the UPR Pre-Session in 2022 to recommend a decrease in the voting age to 16 years.



Conclusion

"All the issues listed in this submission must be taken seriously and be directly thought about, also from a child's perspective." – Liliitha, 14 years old

Three CGMs have been selected to present the posters and videos and their journeys as Child Human Rights Defenders in the office of the WCCC at the Children's Pre-Session Meeting in September 2023.



Commissioner for Children

Participating Child Government Monitors

Aidan - 17 years old

Ande - 17 years old

Andle - 13 years old

Bhea-Leigh – 15 years old

Cai - 15 years old

Cailin - 17 years old

Imivuyo - 14 years old

Isabella - 16 years old

John-Lee - 15 years old

Layla - 14 years old

Lilitha - 14 years old

Phiwokuhle - 17 years old

Ruan - 15 years old

Rushaan – 15 years old

Sanelisiwe - 16 years old

Solakha – 16 years old

Tara - 14 years old

Vimbai - 17 years old

Willgarth - 17 years old

Zoey - 12 years old