



11 July 2024

TO: OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENCY

E-mail:

SUBMISSION BY THE ARTICLE 12 AMBASSADORS ON BEHALF OF SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN:

DEMANDS FROM CHILDREN TO BE CONSIDERED FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY'S FIRST LEKGOTLA TAKING PLACE FRIDAY, 12 JULY - SUNDAY, 14 JULY 2024

For more information, please contact:

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1. ABOUT THE WEBRANGERS - WHO WE ARE:

The Web Rangers are young people from across South Africa who participate in a digital literacy programme developed, designed and implemented by Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) to allow young people to gain critical skills and knowledge about online safety.¹ The programme is focused on creating young digital citizens, who know how to use the internet responsibly and encourage their peers to do the same. We are working towards safer online spaces and combatting disinformation online. The Article 12 Policy Working Group is made up of Web Ranger ambassadors who have been trained in digital literacy and have a special interest in policy work. All of the Article 12 members are children, ranging in age from 13 to 17 years old. Article 12 members engage in ICT-related policy submissions and discussions that ensure that their voices are heard, and opinions are considered by policymakers and industry leaders. Article 12 members work on submissions to ensure that policies and decisions that affect children are more child-friendly and relevant and relatable to children and their daily lives.

MMA has been working with children and building critical media and digital literacy skills since 2003. MMA has developed original and human rights-based approaches and programmes ensuring that children's right to participation is recognised and respected.²

This submission was developed by working with the Article 12 group where child participation experts facilitated their input. The views expressed that follow have been collated from extensive notes taken and reflect the views of the Article 12 members.

2. WHY ARE WE MAKING THIS SUBMISSION:

One of our biggest priorities is to work with others to improve the lived experiences of children both online and offline. Therefore while our expertise as Article 12 Working Group is centered around child online safety and digital citizenship, our engagement at various levels in the policymaking process has exposed us to the many injustices that children face. With that said, developing this submission was quite enlightening as it forced us to think of the government's efforts in ensuring the welfare of South African children over the last 30 years (which was before our time), as well as to critically look at issues that need urgent attention by the new Government of National Unity. We hope that this submission will be taken into consideration and placed on the national agenda because it pertains to very important concerns from a child's perspective. More importantly it provides you with the opportunity to hear from us as children on all matters that affect us.

"We really look forward to working with you in the future. Like John Maxwell once 'where there is no hope in the future, there is no power in the present'"

Tino (member of the Article 12 Policy Working Group)

¹ For more information see webrangers.co.za.

² For more information see www.mediamonitoringafrica.org.

3. METHODOLOGY:

A one day workshop was held on Saturday, 6 July 2024 at MMA's offices in Johannesburg ahead of the cabinet Lekgotla with 6 Article 12 members. The workshop structure (a workshop outline is provided under Annexure A) followed a child rights driven participatory method.

Informed written consent was sought from both parents or guardians of all the children that participated in the workshop. A copy of the consent form template used to seek parental/guardian consent is available on request.

MMA together with input from the members involved in the National Strategy for Accelerated Action on Children (NSAAC) drafted 6 open ended questions that the children worked through. The members were then taken through a series of open-ended activities to solidify and ensure that the views of the children were collected and could then be accurately reflected. Their feedback and input is summarized below.

“This is a long process but it will be worth it in the end. I’m interested in how the new cabinet will conquer this changing world”

A quote from Motheo (member of the Article 12 Policy Working Group regarding the preparation for the submission)

The following questions were asked to the children to solicit their views. Below are their direct responses:

4. FEEDBACK

Question 1: From the perspective of being children in SA, over the last 30 years - what are the top 3 things that you believe the government has done for children that actively advances and promotes children's rights in the country ? (this could be anything)

The top 3 things that we believe the government has done for us to actively advance and promote children's rights in the country are as follows:

4.1.1 Policies introduced in schools that actively **advanced our right to Basic Education:**

We want to start by acknowledging the 1994 government have been clear, to an extent that they believe in the right to basic education for all children by creating and implementing three policies:

The first is around making it mandatory for all children to attend school in South Africa. We recognise how this has contributed to establishing education as a fundamental right that needs to be respected and fulfilled by you as the government, together with our caregivers.

Secondly, the introduction of the non-fee paying school policy in public schools based on the socio-economic conditions of the surrounding community, has also reassured us that the government is prioritising education for all children regardless of affordability.

Lastly, we also commend the government for the introduction of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) in all under-resourced and underprivileged schools. Without a balanced

nutritious meal to help the body and brain to function at its best, no meaningful learning can be achieved.

4.1.2 Policies introduced that **advance our rights to access to social services and service delivery specific to children:**

The establishment of social services (e.g The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) child support grant, Childline, being able to fast track the registration of births in hospitals, as well as the establishment of children's homes) are all commendable initiatives that actively support children's right to an identity, housing and shelter, food and safety. The provision of these services to us ensures that we are able to live a dignified life.

4.1.3 Policies introduced that **advance our rights to protection in the digital world that are specific to children:**

Policies like POPIA and the Cybersecurity Act³ have gone a long way in safeguarding and protecting our digital rights and also holding social media platforms, institutions and big tech accountable around privacy and safety violations online. We also feel more can be done.

Question 2: "Imagine the ideal life a child in South Africa could have. Now think about how life really is for many children here. Can you describe both and tell us how they're different?"

4.2.1 We want to acknowledge that while the below statements describe the life of most children (age from 0-18 years old) living in South Africa, we do consider ourselves to be fortunate, to an extent, that the majority of South African children have access to the very basics of shelter, food and education despite the reality that these basics do not give them the highest quality of life. These statements highlight our reality and the gaps that need to be filled to ensure that we start to move towards our ideal:

- I wake up in the morning in either a shared bed or the floor in an overcrowded home. I want this to change, I want to wake up in my own bed, in my room, where I can enjoy my privacy.
- I get ready for the day by taking a bath in a bucket with cold water or water heated from an open fire because there is no electricity. I want this to change, I want to be able to turn the tap and bathe with hot water in a shower or a bathtub so I can be hygienic.
- I get dressed in my school uniform that is worn out and has holes or a new one that has been handed down to me. I want this to change, I want my parents to be able to afford brand new uniform for me so I feel comfortable and dignified.
- I have breakfast at home or at school.
- I walk to school everyday and on days where it has rained heavily, I can't go to school because of flooding. I want this to change, I want to go to school close by or use a bus provided by the school so I don't have to walk and get to school exhausted.
- I attend classes in a school building that is not well maintained or resourced. Learning is hard as we are overcrowded and there are no practical parts to our learning. I want this to change, I want to attend classes in a well resourced school that has a mixture of learning styles - from experiments using technology to audio and speech so I learn and gain essential skills.
- I have lunch at school from the NSNP.
- After school, I walk home and take care of my siblings. I want this to change, I want to attend extra-mural activities at the school or at a nearby community centre so that I develop other socio-cultural skills outside of the schooling curriculum.

³ We understand the Article 12 members were referring to the Cyber Crimes Act 2020.

- I do my homework under candle light, if I have time after finishing my house chores. I want this to change, I want to be able to have time and resources to do my homework so I am better prepared for learning.
- I eat my dinner alone or with my siblings because my parents/guardians are away and come back home late. I want this to change, I want to enjoy a nutritious meal with my family, talking and watching TV.
- My relationship with my parents/guardians is strained because they are either always away at work, not available for me, are addicted to drugs and alcohol or victims or perpetrators of domestic violence and/or child abuse. I want this to change, I want to be able to spend time with my parents/guardians and know that they are accessible, show me love and affection, and present in my life(both parents). They must also be financially and emotionally stable to support me as a child.

Question 3: How do you think the newly elected cabinet can better support schools, teachers and parents so they better understand the lived experiences, challenges and opportunities that exist for SA children today?

4.3.1 For parents, the cabinet must work to develop interventions or structures that can support parents to better deal with:

- The financial distress of taking care of a family in these tough economic times.
- The emotional and psychological trauma of living in a country will cause so much violence, abuse and inequality.

We feel that parents of children across all age groups find it hard to overcome the above mentioned challenges and this impacts on their ability to develop strategies or approaches to help them deal with the everyday challenges facing a child in South Africa - online or offline. They are just not equipped and this will worsen as we become more integrated into the digital world.

“Our parents are close-minded and sometimes even delusional about what’s really going on”

A quote from Gomolemo (member of the Article 12 Policy Working Group)

4.3.2. For teachers, the cabinet must support the improvement of:

- Trainings for teachers
- Provide anger management classes to deal with trauma and distress
- Support teaching and learning by providing teachers with resources and efficient tools to teach.
- Substantially increasing teacher salaries so their salaries are competitive in the job market.

“It feels like they [teachers] are not interested in being at school, from the way they walk to how they speak to us. They also say that they are just here for the salary”

A quote from Busisiwe (member of the Article 12 Policy Working Group)

4.3.3. For schools, the cabinet must ensure that schools:

- Are better equipped with resources for teaching and learning
- Have fully trained social workers or counsellors in all schools to aid the psycho-social development of children.
- Create a more accountable parent-child system to hold parents and learners accountable.

- Create a transparent system for the selection of the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) so they represent the child's best interests and have more learner participation in decision making.

Question 4: As Article 12 members, you represent the views and opinions of SA children on issues of child online safety - for you as a group, what are the big and urgent issues that this newly elected cabinet should prioritise that will go a long way in advancing children's rights in the media ?

4.4.1 Digital and media literacy for children: The GNU must enforce policies that encourage Digital platforms to invest in digital and media literacy skills for children in and out of schools, because digital literacy speaks to basic child online safety to ensure that all children with access to a connected device have the necessary skills to successfully engage in the online world, can spot credible and fake news and thus have the ability to take full advantage of the internet to hone talent and skills. This responsibility on platforms is also acknowledged by the updated UNESCO Guidelines on Regulating Digital Platforms, where we also shared a submission outlining the very same issues.

4.4.2. Internet Access in Schools: Unequal access to the internet is still one of the biggest problems facing children in South Africa because without access to the internet, children can't participate in the online world. This means that children will continue to be left behind, and the digital divide will grow wider. We would like the government and platforms to share their strategy on the role they can play in fulfilling children's right to access to the internet. We believe that universal access to the internet for children means:

4.4.2.1 Children should have access to stable internet connections (this could be WIFI/data)

4.4.2.2. Children should have access to a free device at their school and community centre for educational purposes and entertainment.

4.4.3. Build resilience of caregivers: The GNU must prioritise digital and media literacy training for parents and teachers by raising awareness and building resilience around digital harms, CSAM and cyberbullying. Unfortunately as we become more technologically advanced, the people that engage in digital harms are also getting smarter so we are going to continue to face the risk of children being violated online, so now more than ever before parents and teachers must be equipped and build their resilience so they can provide the necessary support to their children - online and offline.

Question 5: As Article 12 members, your participation at different levels in the policy making processes has been important in ensuring your voices are heard on important matters that affect children. What advice can you offer the elected cabinet regarding developing structures that ensure active participation of children in decision making processes that shape the country's future?

4.5.1. We are not sure how to answer this question because from what we know there is a structure created (in the form of the Children's Parliament) but what we are not sure about is whether or not it is efficient. We would like more clarity from the GNU and other stakeholders involved in the Children's Parliament. These questions are:

4.5.1.1 Please be transparent about the children's parliament, what has it achieved in advancing children's rights in the country?

4.5.1.2 Do they represent children today in all their complexities ?

4.5.1.3 Who are they working with to realise children's rights in the country?

4.5.1.4 Who is responsible for ensuring that they are more visible to other children on the ground?

- 4.5.1.5 How are they selected to represent the opinions and voices of all children in the country?
- 4.5.1.6 Do they have any power to make change?

Question 6: What other rights outside of the ones related to ensuring children are safe and protected in the digital world, if not realised, could have an impact on the quality of life children are able to enjoy in the digital environment ?

4.6.1. This question is hard because we believe that all our rights are important and interlinked, however the ones we believe have a direct impact on the quality of life that children are able to enjoy both online and offline are the following:

- 4.6.1.1 If our right to housing and shelter is denied, we don't have connections or devices to connect and therefore it is almost impossible to have an online experience. The experience that we will have offline is one that is marked by trauma and abuse.
- 4.6.1.2 If our right to safety and security is denied, we are exposed to both physical and digital harms and unfortunately in the digital world today, if we are not safe online, it can have a direct impact on our safety offline in the 'real world'. This shows that physical safety and security can no longer be prioritised over digital safety and security.
- 4.6.1.3 If our right to food and nutrition is denied, our development and growth as children will be disturbed and that has long lasting consequences not only for the kind of life we will live but directly impacts our learning, physical health and our ability to work and contribute to the economy as adults.
- 4.6.1.4 If our right to education is denied, we just can't function and exist as productive, creative and innovative citizens. If we can't read and write - we cannot engage with any kind of information whether in class or online.

5. OUR LIST OF DEMANDS:

"Please strive for excellence in your work for the South African people. We are counting on you GNU"

A quote from Gomolemo (member of the Article 12 Policy Working Group)

In addition to the above input, we would like to present to you our urgent list of demands that we urge you to respond to during your cabinet lekgotla.

5.1. Quality Education for all children:

- 5.1.1 We demand quality education for all South African children by focusing on a competitive curriculum aligned to international standards, reviewing the existing pass rate, focus on reading and writing for meaning, total removal of pit toilets in rural schools, build more well resourced public schools for children living with disabilities (i.e. more schools for Autistic children etc), work hard to better integrate Science, Technology and Mathematics and coding into children's everyday lives, and build capacity for teachers in all the mentioned areas.

5.2. Quality public healthcare for all children:

- 5.2.1 We demand quality public healthcare and supportive structures for all children especially for births, newborns and well as for children living with disabilities.

5.3. Creating economic opportunities for parents and caregivers:

- 5.3.1 We demand that the GNU prioritise employment opportunities for not only graduates but also for middle aged citizens who are our parents and guardians. If they are not

earning a living, they depend on social grants which can never be enough to support the holistic growth of a child. According to data from the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (Pacsa)⁴ In March 2017, it was estimated that it costs R578.45 per month to provide a child with three healthy meals daily over a period of a month. The current SASSA child social grant is R530.00, and while we appreciate this financial support for caregivers who are unable to adequately provide for their children, if parents are unemployed, they will continue to depend on this grant and it's just not enough.

5.4. Digital Rights for all children:

- 5.4.1 We demand meaningful access and connection for children in all schools, with a special focus on regions that are extremely underdeveloped like the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Limpopo.
- 5.4.2 We demand digital literacy initiatives be rolled out in all South African schools and from Early Childhood Development centres – these must be long term, well resourced and comprehensive and implemented on a national basis.

Finally, we demand that cabinet members commit to the following pledge of service to all children in South Africa:

5.4.3 “We pledge to prioritize the well-being of our children and young people by ensuring their active participation, physical and mental health, emotional development, education, safety, positive relationships, economic stability, access to healthcare, and access to opportunities, including platforms to engage and contribute.”

6. SUBMISSIONS PREPARED BY:

Article 12 Group members:

- Gomolemlo Poee
- Rofiwa Matamboye
- Nombulelo Mzobe
- Tinotenda Gohodzi
- Busisiwe Daza
- Motheo Moagi

⁴ <https://businesstech.co.za/news/lifestyle/170981/how-much-it-costs-to-feed-a-family-in-south-africa-in-2017/>