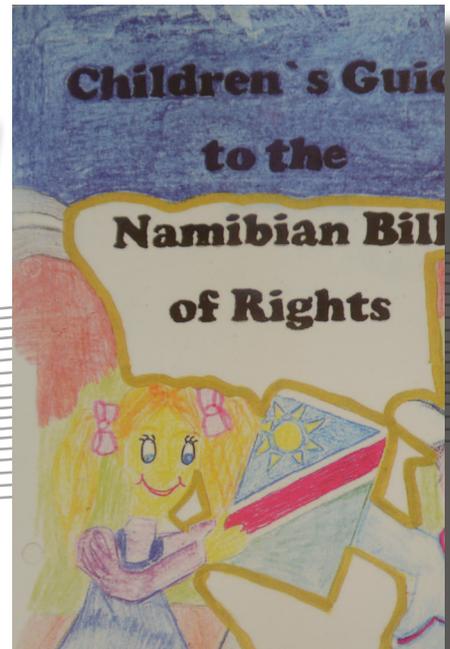


HOW ARE WE TREATING THE FUTURE LEADERS OF OUR COUNTRY?



Our eyes met, and I saw the emptiness in his. Simon* looks older than his mere 14 years. A boy that hangs out at the local shop, sleeps in a river bed and zulas for life. He is but one of two hundred and seventy five thousand Namibian children living in poverty according to the Child Poverty in Namibia Report 2009/2010.

It recently came to light that up to twenty five children between the ages of one and five died due to malnutrition in Grootfontein since September 2013. These are only the known cases. I beg to ask: "Is Namibia failing its children"?

Hailed by our Southern African neighbours as a regional framework and viewed by many as a great piece of legislation (it only took nineteen years to perfect), the Child Care and Protection Bill when passed will replace the Children's Status Act of 2006. The Children's bill provides for the establishment of a Children's Ombudsman, family plans and children's courts. More residential homes for vulnerable and orphaned children are also detailed in the plans. Could this be the seven children's homes that were recently built and

furnished, but is not utilised as no operational budget was allocated to this project? Another question that bothers me is why is it taking so long to pass this bill in Parliament?

The Namibian Child Rights Network was officially formed in 2013. It now has ten civil society members. This network is linked to the Children's Rights Network Southern Africa and has children's rights at the heart of its mission. The network will work towards strengthening child participation, advocacy for children's rights and issues, and will also develop tools to monitor the adoption of the international, regional and national instruments, which Namibia ratified. The instruments to be adopted include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights of the Child and the soon-to-be-passed Child Care and Protection Bill.

KAYECT Trust under the Youth Development Programme decided to take advocacy one step further. They launched their Children's Federation on the 1st of November 2013. The Federation held their first National Forum, where two hundred and seventy children from nine regions

came together and addressed three main concerns. These concerns were: The Child Care and Protection Bill, alcohol and drugs, as well as Namibian schools. Children participated freely and aired their views on these matters.

It seems that many, such as the members of the Namibian Child Rights Network, the National Children's Federation and the Office of the Ombudsman have decided to take action on behalf of children and are using various strategies to get the bill before Parliament to get it passed.

Mauritius, South Africa and Tunisia topped the list of fifty two African countries investigated on the welfare of the child in the recently launched African Report on Child well-being by the African Child Policy Forum. Namibia ranked second five years ago and dropped twenty four places over the last five years. That tells me that we are failing our children and that more needs to be done to turn this around for children like Simon.

*Simon not his real name.

By Concerned Child Rights Activist