



Publication		
NEW AGE		
Page	Date	AVE (ZAR)
2	Thurs 12 Oct 2017	9660.3



'Poor children's learning abilities compromised'

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THE learning abilities of the large number of South African children who still live in poverty and without access to basic services are being compromised, according to a new report.

The South African Early Childhood Review 2017, which looks at progress made in early childhood development (ECD) service delivery found that children in rural areas were the worst affected.

"We know that two thirds of South Africa's children are living in poverty and their development may be compromised if they don't receive quality early childhood services," Colin Almeleh, executive director of Ififa Labantwana and co-author of the South African Early Childhood Review 2017, said.

"Plans to deliver these services should differentiate between the needs of rural and urban populations."

The review showed that many rural children still lack access to healthcare services and were not exposed to early learning programmes.

These children were also not being given a proper diet and this was compromising their development and exposing them to infections.

The report showed that a fifth of children under the age of five were stunted.

"Young children need quality early learning programmes from the time they turn three. Without it, they are not prepared for school.

"Our poorest children aren't getting quality early learning. This is consistent across all provinces. A four year old from a low-income household has only a 50% chance of being enrolled in an early learning programme, compared to a wealthier child who has a 90% chance," Sonja Giese, co-author of the report said.

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