

ACCESS is an alliance of more than 1,500 diverse organisations ('alliance members') working independently – on a range of varied issues and approaches - in the children's sector across all nine provinces, but aligned towards a common vision of a comprehensive social security package that "gives practical substance to children's rights" in South Africa.

ACCESS was established in March 2001 at a workshop attended by NGOs, CBOs, faith-based organisations, service providers, members of Parliament, and representatives of government. It was decided that an alliance structure representing the children's sector would be an effective way to promote a comprehensive social security system. ACCESS was mandated to undertake advocacy and capacity-building activities to achieve the Alliance's objectives.

#### **Our Purpose: What does ACCESS exist to do?**

Broadly speaking, ACCESS aims to "open doors for children" through contributing towards the development of a comprehensive social security system in South Africa. ACCESS aims to:

- Establish children's rights as a core value in society, so that the rights of children are normalized and mainstreamed, rather than treated as a specialized, marginalized sector.
- Make people aware (from local household level to high-level policy) of the rights of children as an integral part of the human rights agenda.
- Hear the voices of children and local communities, and to promote that those "small voices" be heard at the highest levels of decision-making.
- Advocate strongly for better quality of life for children through social protection mechanisms, making options available to the poor.
- Empower people with knowledge, skills, intent and opportunities to advocate for themselves, and to defend their own rights.
- Help the "man on the street" participate in the process of democracy so that he can actively inform and shape policy and practice. ACCESS aims to bring policy to the grassroots level, affirming that each person is capable of interacting with government, and that ordinary people are capable of – and responsible for – advocacy.

#### **Activities**

ACCESS works to achieve these aims through a comprehensive set of activities and interventions:

1. **Advocacy** is a foundational activity, effecting change for children. Advocacy takes place through several processes, including:
  - a. **Lobbying:** preparing and delivering submissions to high-level authorities, engaging with policy through participation in roundtable forums. <http://www.access.org.za/index.php/resources-a-publications/advocacy-publications>
  - b. **Research** into topical issues pertaining to children, policy, practice and governance. <http://www.access.org.za/index.php/resources-a-publications/research-publications>
  - c. **Consultation** with stakeholder organizations and communities in order to demystify the democratic process and collect information and evidence. This promotes a sense inclusion and promotes participation, encouraging greater **social mobilization**.
  - d. **Facilitating linkage** between government and Alliance member organizations. ACCESS is a liaison body – a point of connection – to close the gap between policy-makers and practitioners.
  - e. **Litigation** sometimes becomes necessary to address particularly serious infractions on children's rights or to prompt action or influence legislation.
  - f. **Monitoring** the implementation of laws, policies and service delivery on behalf of The Alliance.

2. **Training and Capacity Development**, equipping alliance members to be able to advance positions and engage with issues through their own structures and initiatives.

<http://www.aces.org.za/index.php/resources-a-publications/literacy-&-training>

3. **Material and Tools Development** by ACCESS to resource, amongst others, Alliance member organizations and their respective beneficiaries, is prolific. Materials are context-appropriate depending on the intended audience (varying from local communities to organizations to high-level policy) and accessible to a broad cross-section of society (translated into multiple languages, with illustrations, so that they can be easily understood).
4. **Communications** through publications, update newsletters, media, fact sheets, and routine invitations to training opportunities and special events.
5. **Special Events coordination** linked to raising awareness and social mobilization (eg. campaigns) or piloting models of coordinated service delivery (eg. jamborees and paralegal outreach networks).  
[STORY: ACCESS' first Jamboree event was the first in the country, laying down a blueprint for similar events that was adopted and replicated by government]
6. **Strengthening the Alliance.** ACCESS is fundamentally an alliance of organizations, served and coordinated through a secretariat. This alliance framework is a core value, and the secretariat exists to maximize the collective expertise of the member organizations in that network.

What we're most proud of		Story/Illustration
1	<b>Quality</b> ACCESS is well known for coordinating and hosting events (eg. jamborees, celebrations, conferences) that are "5-star quality". This often creates the impression of expense and extravagance, but really reflects exceptionally hard work by the ACCESS staff to procure donations, negotiate good deals with suppliers and service-providers, and encourage volunteerism.	Athlone June 16 <sup>th</sup> Event
2	<b>Personal relationships</b> ACCESS project staff have invested time to cultivate quality personal relationships with government staff, and are able to access and influence political leadership in a more effective way than many other organizations and structures.	
3	<b>Embedding language</b> Adoption of ACCESS-coined language and terminology by government shows the extent of influence and the effectiveness of advocacy and lobbying efforts.	"Enabling documents" becomes commonly used in government-issue documents.
4	<b>Policy input</b> As a result of its activities and advocacy focus, ACCESS is a recognized contributor to national policy on children's issues, often invited to review draft policies and make submissions and contributions.	Oral submissions to Parliament on the Children's Bill.
5	<b>Child Support Grant extension</b> ACCESS achieved its original vision to have legislation passed extending the Child Support Grant (CSG) from 14 years to 18 years old	Auntie Rose and the Child Support Grant
6	<b>Social responsibility</b> ACCESS demonstrates social responsibility in action, and the whole team (not only programme staff, but administrative staff and management) feels a joint commitment (and contribution) to making a difference.	
7	<b>Team</b> ACCESS enjoys a solid team setup. Staff are encouraged in a learning environment, where people are respected. There is an authentic sense of "family" even amongst alliance member organizations.	Siya develops personally and professionally through learning from other staff.
		Kevin is greeted with a hug at a members meeting.
8	<b>Materials &amp; Publications</b> ACCESS produces a wide range of tools, publications and documents that are attractive, innovative, widely distributed and easily understood.	Development of Advocacy Toolkit and Board Game
9	<b>Crossing boundaries</b> The work of ACCESS and the way of working with people straddles the world of professionals and technicians, with actual real-life experience, at the same time confronting issues of race and gender. This can be a significant position from which to promote understanding, and influence reconciliation.	Nongoma (Caryn Alan)
		Meeting with the Education MEC
		Imbizos
		Grassroots people are brought into meetings with high-level policy makers.

# Our Approach

Ways of Working	Illustration/Story	Tools/Resources
<p>Work as “real people”, being authentic and personal in our dealings with alliance members and government, not aloof or professionally distant. People are people – even politicians are fathers and husbands and mothers. ACCESS’ 1500 members represent real people, not just numbers or issues.</p> <p>The same principle applies inside the office. Value people. Be real.</p>	ACCESS staff wellness practises	
<p>Even in difficult environments, work by relationship (not intimidation, demand, control) in order to build genuine partnership and trust. Deal with people as people, and not as functions or programmes.</p>	ACCESS’ personal campaign model contrasts with Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) more militant campaign style.	
<p>Find people who are like-minded and work with them.</p>		
<p>Appreciate strength/capacity/intuition of all people, at every level. Working from this position, there is no need to over-manage or condescend.</p>		
<p>ACCESS seeks to serve the alliance, without imposing an external agenda. Respond to stimulus/invitation from membership organizations. The members are the conscience of the alliance.</p>	The ACCESS Hotline	
<p>Act apolitically – don’t play politics</p>		
<p>Practise integrity throughout, balancing vision and resources. Respect commitment to donors: work from an agreed plan and sensitively negotiate adjustments with donors; but be willing to turn down funding opportunities that don’t fit the vision, or don’t match conviction.</p>		
<p>Programming follows a human-rights approach</p>		
<p>Always encourage ownership and offer support to empower members to take responsibility for their own action.</p>	Experience from Messina	
<p>ACCESS values participation in the response, standing alongside the work of member organizations and communities.</p>		
<p>Strive for Impact/Real Change. ACCESS has a built-in measurement mechanism to constantly review and revise programmes and initiatives in order to improve effectiveness and impact. ACCESS is intentionally reflective so as adapt appropriately, renegotiating priorities, and reprioritizing activities to ensure sustained impact over time.</p>		Built-in M + E Tool
<p>Internal operations (eg financial management) aim for transparency, setting goals to be efficient, effective, and electronic (automated, easily accessible).</p>		

# Our results

Results/Outcomes	Indicators	Illustration/Story	Tools
Progress made on Home Affairs Campaign	Language used in press releases showed clearly the input and influence of ACESS.		Research report
High level of logistical capacity during the Child Support Grant campaign led to success.	Events are a success because they are well coordinated, and logistical operations are detailed and well prepared.	<i>10 Days of Activism</i> event (ability to work under pressure; to respond to issues; to operationalise a concept)	
Events are more than talk-shops. Participants leave with firm resolutions, and civil society commitments.	Influence on Minister's office and policy-language	Pledge around the Charter of Rights: a precedent – no commitment or agreement previously.	
		Foster-care grant workshop	
Relationships of trust have been developed with policy-makers and decision-makers, such that ACESS is often privy to advance information in order to secure its contribution and participation.	Government departments or individuals initiate a relationship with ACESS, often volunteering information that is not shared with or available to other organizations.	Government dept so familiar with ACESS that we were accidentally copied in on private correspondence.	Built-in M+E Plan/process
Training material and delivery is recognized as being of high quality.	Apart from other civil society users, government initiates a training process with ACESS, and then goes on to use those materials in other settings.	Training Material made available to The Gates Foundation.	Training manuals  Publications and fact-sheets
General increase in Child support beneficiary statistics	Increase in number of CSG recipients	Umlazi + Medical Research Council (MRC)	Training of Trainers (ToT) material
		Health Systems Trust (HST) request support for training in CSG (100% coverage)	
Jamborees have been very successful events, and have been taken up by others.		ACESS designed and implemented the first ever Jamboree in the country.	
Increased demand for ACESS' work has resulted in increased capacity to meet demand, and increasing interest from funders.	Numerical growth in staff in order to match capacity with demand.	The work done on "enabling documents" is a niche area	
		Relationship with Home Affairs	
Society's changing values regarding the treatment of children.	Decrease in corporal punishment		Norms and Standards process and draft document
	Increase in quality of parenting		
Effectively linking grassroots action to high-level government.	Grassroots people brought into meetings with policy-makers	Sifihiso Mahlanga and mother as spokespeople	

## What are we learning? What can we share?

### Lesson learned

### Story/Illustration

1	The absolute priority of “staff wellness”. People cannot be productive or creative or motivated if they are running on empty. ACCESS has implemented a policy to carefully monitor and manage the amount of time staff members spend traveling away from home (and has effectively reduced that time). Staff members who have been traveling are required to take time out of the office to rest.	Reducing travel time, and providing mobile internet access to staff so that people have a chance to work from home, especially after traveling.
2	Entering into partnerships on a good-faith basis often leads to misunderstandings and confused expectation. Tighter agreements (MOU’s) are needed when entering into partnerships so that roles, responsibilities, accountability and deliverables are clear to all parties before joint-implementation begins.	
3	<p>Transparency and openness in the office environment are essential ways of working in order to keep the professional team motivated. Procedures need to be clear. Goals need to be well communicated.</p> <p>Transparency doesn’t always have to equal consistency. Sometimes decisions are made at a management level, but these are acceptable as long as these changing decisions are clearly shared and understood.</p> <p>The value of regular, routine staff meetings cannot be overstated. They are a priority – for the purpose of communication and shared staff understanding – not an option or a luxury.</p>	.
4	Relationship-building is essential with the personal assistants of influential people and political leadership. In the parliamentary realm, secretaries are the determinants for whether a verbal submission can be made to Members of Parliament.	<p>Home Affairs negotiation</p> <p>Strategy and review workshops</p>
5	A specific set of personal qualities should characterize the approach for working with government: humble; human; not arrogant; personal; respectful. Avoid becoming demanding or insistent. Practise patience and learn how to not become easily frustrated.	
6	Presence with people builds confidence and reassurance	Jamboree, Hlabisa Sports Ground, KZN
7	Accreditation of training has added value, both within the organization and its credibility, but also for those trained by the organization.	-

## What are our challenges? What can we learn from others?

1	<p><b>Intellectual property</b></p> <p>ACCESS produces a wide range of resources – materials, tools, documents, etc. – with the primary aim to equip people. What is the best way to find a balance between “open-source” access where these materials are available to all at no cost, and some form of “control”/coordination of content to ensure quality implementation?</p>
2	<p><b>Measurement</b></p> <p>What is the best way to measure impact of ACCESS’ advocacy work, when there are so many actors involved in the sector? Is there a way to trace a clear causal link to progress that may have taken place as a direct result of ACCESS’ work only alone? (refer to ACCESS’ <i>Impact M + E tool</i>)</p>
3	<p><b>Partnerships</b></p> <p>What is the most meaningful way to reconcile diverse agendas/conflict amongst partner-organisations engaged in a collaborative effort, particularly when those partners are working with different funders? This can too often become disruptive and limiting of progress.</p> <p>Are there transferable principles about the strategic inclusion or exclusion of partners at a certain stage in a project’s life (for instance, if a partner wants to join an existing project but wasn’t involved from the very beginning, at what stage is it no longer feasible to consider that interest)?</p> <p>In a consortium of partners, what is the best way to effectively manage the hierarchy that is created amongst partners (eg. a lead agency; a sub-grantee), when in their own rights the organizations making up the consortium are used to being autonomous? Is there a way to work with donors who encourage these consortiums to negotiate a better way that could reduce competition?</p>
4	<p><b>Child participation</b></p> <p>What strategies could be applied to substantially increase direct engagement from children or with children? Where are the actual children’s voices in the consultation and policy processes, as opposed to organizations speaking on their behalf?. (eg. Child Support Grant Breyani Party)</p>
5	<p><b>International solidarity</b></p> <p>Who else in the world is doing similar work to ACCESS, so that we could cross-share and learn?</p>
6	<p><b>Managing resources</b></p> <p>How do civil society organizations continue to do unfunded work based on invitation and demand (important work, but not allocated any designated funding) without jeopardising core work that is being funded?</p>