



**Commissioner
for Children**

Western Cape Commissioner for Children and Child Government Monitors response to the Provincial 2023 Medium Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) – 11 December 2023

Introduction

As we celebrated International Human Rights Day on 10 December, we recognise the #ChildBudgetAnalysis campaign of the child human rights defenders in South Africa. The Child Government Monitors (CGMs) in the Office of the Western Cape Commissioner for Children (WCCC) are following the money for child rights realisation. They started with the 2023 National Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS), now commenting on the Western Cape (WC) MTBPS. They were tasked with reading Chapter 4 of the WC MTBPS which delineates the budgetary policy priorities. Subsequently, they were instructed to identify three aspects they liked and disliked in the chapter. It is noteworthy that most of the priorities identified by the Western Cape Government aligned to the children's advocacy issues, shared with the Commissioner and presented at local, national and international platforms.

Background

The WCCC submitted inputs on the 2023 National MTBPS with a focus on developing 1.) A child-centered and child-friendly governance system, 2.) Considering the debt burden on children, 3.) Cutting social sector spending in real terms, 4.) Diminishing the child welfare and child protection budget, and 5.) Reconfiguring the state from a rights perspective. In consultation with the CGMs, they emphasise the need for a more child-centered approach to governance, advocating for the inclusion of children's perspectives in governmental processes and the development of child-friendly communication method. The WCCC also highlights the adverse effects of increasing Value Added Tax (VAT) on children and families, especially those already struggling to survive, and recommends against its increase. Furthermore, the WCCC expresses concern about the deprioritisation of social sector spending and recommends increasing the Department of Social Development's budget in line with inflation to stabilize critical social services. Funding deficits on Designated Child Protection Organizations (DCPOs), has led to the closure of offices, affecting vulnerable children. Additionally, the WCCC emphasises the importance of using human rights impact assessments, especially children's rights assessment tools, when reconfiguring the state, to consider the human rights impact of service delivery withdrawals.

The WCCC has also submitted recommendations on the Division of Revenue Amendment (DORA) Bill in Provincial Parliament, focusing on significant cuts of social sector conditional grants which will undermine child rights realisation. Furthermore, the WCCC advocates for the immediate implementation of child rights impact assessments to prioritise the realisation of children's provision, protection, and participation rights mandated by the Constitution. The WCCC and CGMs have decided to analyse the WC MTBPS for child rights alignment.

WC MTBPS framing

Children appreciate the provincial government's prioritisation of 'Safety' and 'Wellbeing' as well as acknowledging the value of prioritising 'Growth for Jobs' for their parents to realise socio-economic rights of children. The government is advised that human rights are for everyone living in the Western Cape not just the citizens – "everyone" even includes adults and children who are undocumented. Children noted that the Provincial Economic Review is used to frame the orientation of the government and asked the Commissioner why the government cannot use a 'Child Happiness' lens instead, which would give planning a more outcomes and futures orientation. The Commissioner has decided to work with children to give expression to this analytical orientation which finds global expression. Ultimately, the WCCC and the CGMs would like to partner with the Western Cape Government to pilot a child-centred governance system which will increase accessibility, transparency and accountability. The children emphasised some issues in the WC MTBPS which they liked and also disliked, which are presented below

"I like how they emphasised that despite all the budget cuts they are using from the provincial reserve to "make up for the shortfall" and that they are going to do their best to work for the people and not give in." - Isabella

"The things I like in chapter 4 is the conclusion how it tells us what the WCG does which is promoting growth for jobs, safety and wellbeing and enabling the public service to deliver services effectively." – Vincent

Children's voices

Violence prevention pillar

The issue of safety in homes and communities has been a pressing concern for children in recent times. The children have been advocating for the government to prioritise the reduction of crime and violence in the province. The government's prioritisation of this issue has instilled in the children a sense of hope that proactive measures are being taken to address the pervasive violence in their communities. Furthermore, the children are gratified that the strategy includes enhancing the relationship between caregivers and children, as they perceive children as being particularly susceptible to violence, especially in their homes.

"I like how they mentioned in Violence prevention the strengthening of the relationship between caregivers and children, youth development to ensure young people are diverted from high-risk behaviour and crime, violence against women and children

and educating men and boys to prevent gender-based violence will remain crucial to them, I like the way they mentioned children in Violence prevention"- Lilitha

"Violence prevention. Love that it is targeted towards caregivers and children because they are more at risk of violence," -Johnlee.

"Safety- maintain over 1000 law enforcement officers that will be available when help is needed or that will make communities feel safe" - Cai

Improving mental health services

The CGMs highlight mental health as a significant challenge faced by school-going children. The children identified various socio-economic factors such as peer pressure, family life, and school as the primary triggers of mental health issues. They expressed the need for improved mental health services and psychosocial support. The children were grateful for the government's acknowledgment of the situation, and they highly appreciated the prioritisation of improving mental health services and psychosocial support.

"Acknowledgement of mental health issues post Covid-19"- Jarred.

"Talks about increasing mental health services and psychosocial support,"-Vimbai.

"I like that they mentioned the increase in mental health issues, especially since Covid hit"- Kristen

Youth development and funding of CYCCs

The children are concerned that the lack of development opportunities for young people makes them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. They believe that elevating the funding of youth development facilities and Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs) will help protect these vulnerable children and young adults. Without activities to keep them occupied, young people can become bored and engage in risky behaviour. Protecting vulnerable children and youth is a top priority for them, and funding CYCCs gives hope that the government is taking action. They concur that by elevating youth development facilities and providing more funding for CYCCs, the government can create a safer and more supportive environment for young people, helping to protect them from exploitation and abuse.

"I like how the budget wants to focus on child development and how children should be exposed to different activities and cultures and for them to choose their direction in life. I really like how the budget wants kids to be their own person and if they exposed to activities at a young age they can develop a lot of skills they might need in the future."- Imivuyo

"In the 16 times that children are mentioned [in the MTBPS] it is focused on protection [and] safeguarding children which I stand for (Involves protection programs, centre's, schools and libraries, violence protection and education)"- Johnlee

"There was an emphasis on youth development centres and after-school programmes, which is really good"- Ande.

Supporting the foundations of learning

Children appreciate that the WCG has decided to strengthen the foundations of learning. Here, CGMs have highlighted the WCG's intention to support language and literacy development, which is necessary for learning to occur. Furthermore, CGMs have welcomed the emphasis on supporting Early Childhood Development (ECD) services, which CGMs recognize as the beginning of a child's education journey.

"The focus on ECD centres as that's the stage where a lot of things start" - Ande

"A decisive step was taken to add an extra 2 hours per week allocated to reading and 1 extra hour per week for Mathematics, for all Grade 1 to 3 learners in the Western Cape (definitely needed imo [in my opinion]!!)" - Tara

"How they're investing in plans on rolling out literature and reading programs" - Tara

"How they will have the School Nutrition Programme grant continue to feed students which I personally think is still extremely important cos sometimes that's a child's only meal." - Tara

Climate change

The children are worried about climate change and its effects on them. They are grateful that the government is choosing to prioritise this issue. They especially applaud the hydrogen plan and the commitment to energy resilience, which forms part of the WCGs intention to transition to net carbon zero.

"Love the hydrogen plan, global warming sana! The heat outside! It's a good thing that the gov is investing in a less carbon dioxide emitting solution" - Phiwokuhle

"I like how they mentioned Climate change and the impact of Flood damage and I like how they know that the reasons why there is floods it's due to Climate change and that they are considering climate change when mitigating the impacts of flood damage." - Lilitha

"I like how they are going to ensure the availability of affordable electricity supply and that they will create an environment for the transition of fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. I think that's a good thing and it's about Time especially since fossil fuel cause harm to the environment and it's also one of cause of global warming so it's about time that they started to recognize that. I like how they are trying to rely less on Eskom(I'm sooo tired of loadshedding 🙄🙄)and I'm currently in loadshedding as I'm writing this 🙄) I also like how they have energy projects." - Lilitha

Children not mentioned in the health services provision

The fact that children are not mentioned as a health priority has caused concern among them. They perceive this omission as a sign that the government is not giving importance to their health and well-being. They worry that this could lead to a reduction in the quality of care they receive, as well as a decrease in the preventative care they require.

"[Child] Health was not directly mentioned in context with children, which is suspicious" – Vee

"When it came to health, children weren't directly mentioned, especially children with disabilities and special needs"- Kristen

"Direct link between children and health services?"-Ande

"Children were not mentioned in health and mental health services which is wrong and weird."- Lilitha

MTBPS not child friendly

Children believe that understanding the MTBPS is crucial to providing valuable and meaningful input. While some children have received government budget analysis training from the WCCC, this is not the case for others who would like to provide input into the budget. This can only be possible if the MTBPS is easy to read and understand. However, the children noted that the MTBPS is not child-friendly. The use of technical terms confused some children, and they had to look up some of the words. Although they appreciated the "little" illustrations and colors on some pages, they believe that more needs to be done to make the document more child-friendly. To make the MTBPS easier to understand, the children recommended using simple language, colorful illustrations, easy-to-understand tables, cartoons, Instagram or TikTok reels, and animations.

Conclusion

Government communication of, for example, budget policy should be more child-friendly, as this will help many others in our province understand and enable engagement. Children applied themselves to reading the very technically stated WC MTBPS and liked to hear all the plans to support children's safety and wellbeing. They would like to understand more about how government's money goes towards child rights realisation. Therefore, they will continue to follow the money by listening to the 2024/5 budget allocations and try to check what these allocations mean for improving the children's lived realities in their communities.

#ChildBudgetAnalysis

#UhlahloLwabiwoLwemaliYabantwana

#BegrotingVirKinders

#LittlevoicesMUSTcount

#KleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak

#AmazwiamancinciMAKAVAKALE

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