

LEARNING BRIEF

Building the capacity of children for public budget advocacy

AUGUST 2023



**Commissioner
for Children**
OF THE WESTERN CAPE

**#littlevoicesMUSTcount
#kleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak
#amazwiamancinciMAKAVAKALE**

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Children have the right to participate in all decisions affecting their lives. This includes decisions about government budgeting to realise child rights.

Introduction

Children have the right to participate in all decisions affecting their lives. This includes decisions about government budgeting to realise child rights. The Western Cape Commissioner for Children (WCCC) partners with children to give effect to her oversight mandate. These Child Government Monitors, also known as child human rights defenders, are equipped with tools to understand and monitor public budgets at a local, regional, and national level. The Commissioner implemented two training workshops for children from 13-17 years old from across the Western Cape. The first workshop was conducted in July 2022 in Van Rhynsdorp and the second workshop was implemented in October 2022 in Prince Albert. This brief, targeted at practitioners/technicians in government and civil society, will provide an overview of the capacity-building process and detail the children's inputs into budget programme analysis, the Municipal / Provincial Economic Review and Outlook, as well as the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement 2022.



*Western Cape
Department of
Premier Director
General Dr. Harry
Malila participating in
the tuck-shop activity*



Capacity building process

In 2005, the Children's Budget Unit of the Institute of Democracy in South Africa developed a child-centred training manual for children to learn public budget monitoring from a child rights-based approach. The manual is titled: Budget monitoring from a rights-based framework: Children's participating in governance. This resource is the base of building the capacity of the Child Government Monitors (CGMs) partnering with the Western Cape Commissioner for Children. This section will reflect on the value of creating child-centred methods, explaining a child rights analysis framework, conducting public budget analysis, understanding the politics, and preparing inputs with children.

CREATING CHILD-CENTRED ACTIVITIES

Children of all ages enjoy learning through play. They naturally gravitate to creativity to express their view. More recently, social media has also become a popular medium for expression by children. Acknowledging this, child-centred activities can easily be designed to pique their interest in complex matters and provide them with a process to digest the technical information presented. WCCC presented activities to help children learn budget basics and to read the complicated outputs presented by the departments of the National and Provincial Treasury.

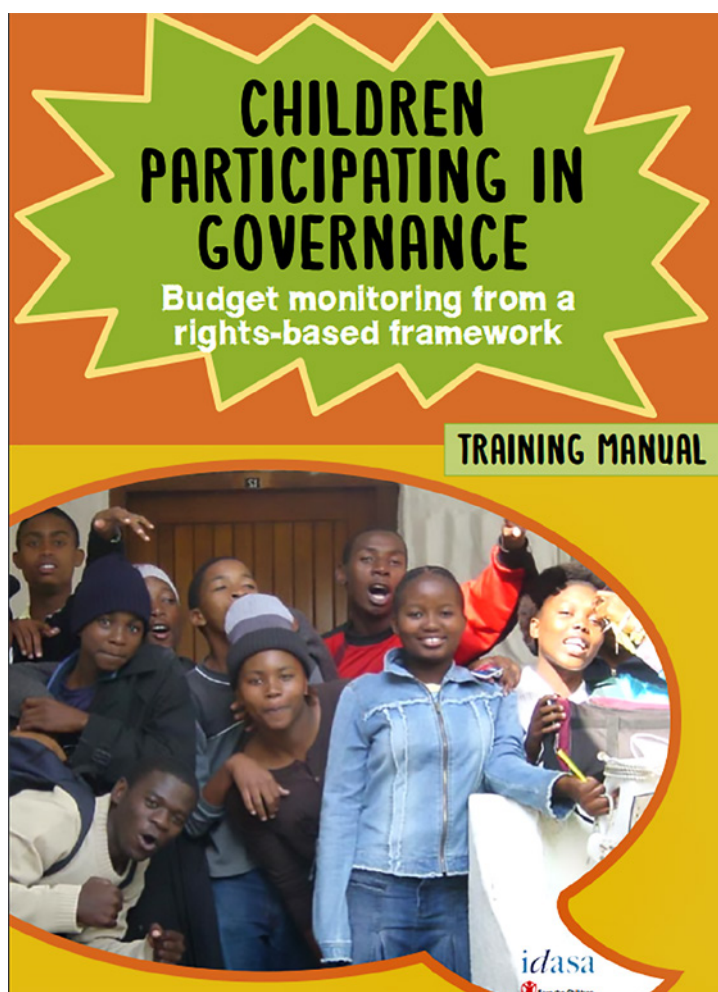
LEARNING BUDGET BASICS

Budget basics are presented from the basic unit of analysis, i.e., how to budget your own spending money or buy from a tuck shop. Children learn about a

defined fiscal envelope and planning for their needs and wants. They elevate their analytical skills by reviewing household budgets and decision-making dynamics. They start to understand who has the power to make the budget decisions and why. Children are also able to connect with realistic levels of income in poorer households and some of the hard trade-offs that need to be made. Organisational budgets (a format like local government budgets) are the next level of analysis. During the training workshops, CGMs were enabled to analyse the budget of the WCCC office, even getting a glimpse of the Commissioner's salary slip. Children were able to understand the cost of programmes, such as the training workshops they attended, as well as ask critical questions about why certain organisational goals, such as staffing, were hard to achieve. They also

Children Participating in Governance training manual

WCCC presented activities to help children learn budget basics and how to read the complicated outputs presented by the departments of the National and Provincial Treasury.



started to understand the bureaucratic process that enables good governance. Now, they were ready to understand national, provincial, and local government budgeting.

DEVELOPING A BUDGET LEXICON

When orientating towards a new knowledge area, it is best to start from the current knowledge base. Providing some budget terms for children to explain in their own words provides insight into the starting point for introducing a new lexicon. Children are likely to associate new concepts with existing information or describe them through a lens they understand. Therefore, a good way to introduce new concepts is to associate them with what children already know. Using novel methods like a cake to explain the division of revenue, or a puzzle to understand the functions

of the different levels of government is always a hit with children.

The children asked the adults (The Director-General and the Acting Premier) questions to build their understanding of the system of governance. At the end of the session, some children were left feeling empowered while some were overwhelmed by a whole new world they had not been privy to before. As time went on, during the training workshops, the children felt more and more confident in what they had learnt. They felt ready to engage the information products produced by the Treasury. For example, more recently, we applied storytelling to engage with high-level government officials when engaging with the governance lexicon. The officials and the children benefited from this exchange.

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Child Government Monitors partaking in the treasure hunt activity



READING BUDGET BOOKS AND TREASURY OUTPUTS

Information produced by the government is rarely presented in a child-friendly manner. Instead, children must gain courage to open books with hundreds of pages and try to understand the information therein. To make these weighty tomes less intimidating, a treasure hunt is a great tool to help children navigate the governance outputs like budget books. Asking them to answer questions that will help them see the value of the information, with a healthy dose of group competition with prizes, enabled children to compare how they found the answers to their questions. After this activity, a more deliberate group activity can help them delve deeper. By dividing them into groups they could start becoming budget analysts. We used the groups for 'I like storytelling', 'I only like maths a little' and 'I love maths' to affirm their strengths as the basis for deciding who would tell us the story of the rights framework for a programme, who would explain the layout of tables and who would make calculations, for example, nominal budget growth rates. We also introduced the children to other information products produced by Western Cape Provincial Treasury to do their work.

WCCC also aimed to get children to grapple with quantitative data and statistical information that informed governance decision-making. With toys, we built our communities, and children from other groups could ask about the number of service sites. Capitalising on their love for cell phones, we introduced them to statistical information sites like StatsSA and Wazimap. They could also interview key informants in their group for the state of service provision in the area. Children started to understand, from known community-level information,

about development planning and decision-making. They learnt to ask critical questions and use credible data sources to make a case for development. This would stand them in good stead when engaging outputs like the Municipal and Provincial Economic Reviews and Outlook documents.

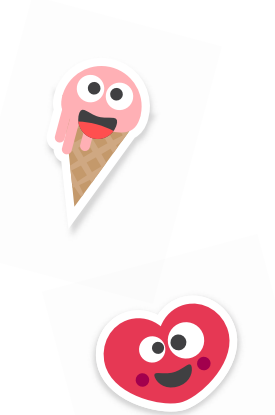
Children noted that it was important to have the budget and development planning information presented at a level they could understand while learning the jargon that would help them become public budget analysts and enable them to speak comfortably to key decision-makers. They felt empowered that they were being consulted on and included in matters that adults consider to be their domain. Children were very keen to become more active citizens by contributing constructively to child rights and governance advocacy.

Explaining a child rights analysis framework

Children are being enabled to be self-advocates for the promotion, fulfilment, and realisation of child rights. Basic onboarding activities in our weekly WCCC WhatsApp group meetings with new CGMs, are to orientate them to the main international and national legal instruments which frame child rights.

CHILD RIGHTS LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child are important to understand the scope and meaning of child rights internationally. On a national level, the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution (containing additional special rights for children) is the foundational law. WCCC developed an activity where children plot their daily activities and match them to the rights



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they are fulfilling. A deeper analysis can include a reflection on whether all children enjoy the same rights in their lived realities. In this manner, we build self-awareness and an understanding of social justice issues in society.



Conducting public budget analysis

Children's unique value-add in budget analysis is presenting a view of the budget from a child's perspective. Once children conquer their fear of reading the documents presented by the National or Provincial Treasury and engaging their knowledge, they can become very adept at budget analysis. They can work alongside helpful adults as resources to develop very credible analyses.

ANALYSING PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN

In the July 2022 training workshop, the child rights budget analysts interrogated the Western Cape Provincial Budget 2021/2, specifically the Child Protection Programme in the budget vote for the Department of Social Development. The CGMs concluded that the Western Cape Department of Social Development relies heavily on non-governmental service providers to fulfil their child protection mandate.

The children looked further into other social sector programmes that they considered invaluable for child well-being, development, and rights. Each group created a collage and accompanying motivation for why the programme was beneficial for children (on next page).

Understanding the politics

Politics is key to governance – who has power and how it is exercised provides the milieu for engagement between

government and the people. Children needed to understand who was in power and how policy and budget priorities were determined.

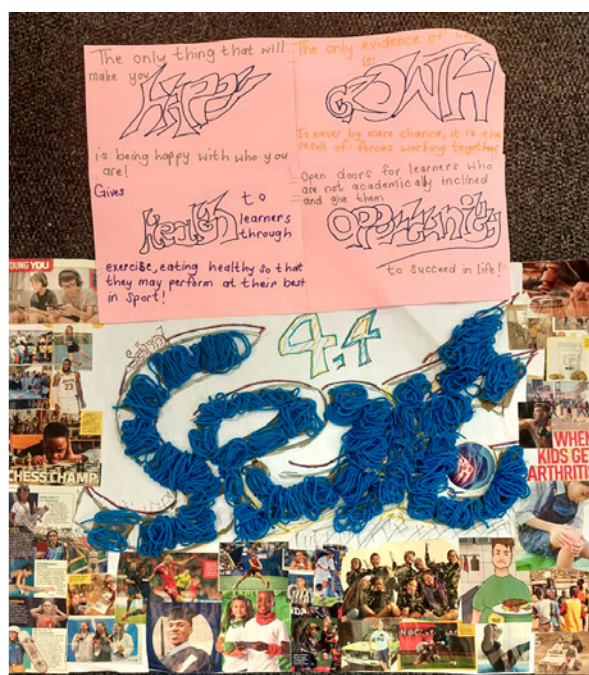
DETERMINING POLICY PRIORITIES

In the October training workshop, children were asked to analyse four political parties' most recent national election manifestos. They created a one-page child -friendly, crayon drawing of these manifestos. When shared with political parties, they were impressed by the children's ability to conceptualise their main issues in a concise manner. The children then enacted campaigning, an election, and a cabinet meeting. In the enacted cabinet meeting, each Minister was apprised of a conditional grant allocation which they debated with others. The re-enactment of behaviours they had seen on television in the National Parliament, was interesting to note. The children now understood that policy and budget priorities are set by the ruling party in a democracy. They also understood that to get their views across on these matters they would need a strategy to engage these decision -makers.

LOBBYING DECISION-MAKERS

The Commissioner is both a bridge into key decision-making forums and a platform to enable children to raise their voices. With her links in government and civil society, she can connect children to decision-making spaces such as opportunities to make written and oral submissions in Parliament, engage government officials directly and speak in civil society spaces. They can even make their voices heard in mainstream media and social media via the WCCC. Building capacity with children before an opportunity to engage in governance is important. Then they can credibly and confidently raise their voices and be

Once children conquer their fear of reading the documents presented by the National or Provincial Treasury and engaging their knowledge, they can become very adept at budget analysis.



Posters of budget priorities selected by children

reassured that their sentiments will be shared with decision-makers. The true impact of child participation will mean that their voices make an impact on the final decisions made.

Preparing inputs with children

Consistent provision of information and support to children is required long before they are expected to articulate a position statement of laws, policies, or practices. Building a child rights and social justice consciousness takes many sessions of discussion, debate, and expert input. Only then can children be fairly asked to make well-considered inputs into critical governance junctures like the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement 2022.

LISTENING TO THE MTBPS

After two budget monitoring and advocacy training workshops CGMs were asked to listen to the mini-budget speech and provide inputs. The Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement is named the mini budget, but it charts a course for public finance for the coming three-year period, compared to the annual budget speech which only focuses on one year. The children were asked to listen to: 1. When or if children were mentioned by the

national Minister of Finance in his speech and how (does it prioritise children's needs); 2. Does the Minister talk from a family's point of view; 3. Bad decisions for child rights; and 4. Good decisions for child rights. Some children watched the speech live on YouTube and television and some read it from the PDF produced by the government. Importantly, the timing of the budget speech clashed with school times, so many children could not be fully part of the live experience. They were disappointed because children were rarely mentioned.

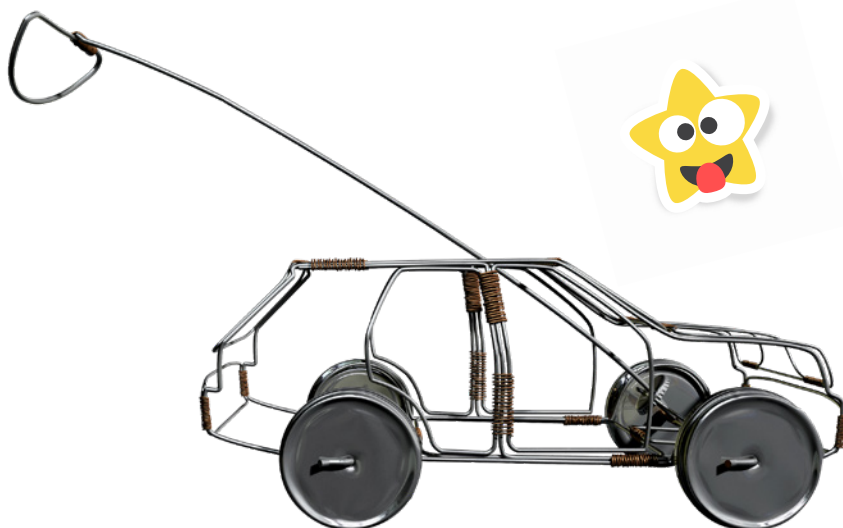
Child rights budget analysis outputs

As a result of two budget monitoring and advocacy camps, the children were able to produce very credible outputs for decision-making by the government. These included:

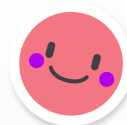
- An analysis of the Child Protection Programme in the Western Cape from Budget 2021
- Identifying important Western Cape social sector programmes from Budget 2021
- Making inputs from a child's perspectives on the information presented in Western Cape 2022 Mero and Pero
- Developing a children's survey to ask children's views on development priorities
- Creating child-friendly versions of 2019 national political party manifestos for four parties

The outputs produced by the children are represented in an authentic format on the next pages, for example, pictures of the posters developed. An additional explanatory note will be provided below each picture.

As a result of two budget monitoring and advocacy camps, the children were able to produce very credible outputs for decision-making by the government.



2021 WC Child Protection Programme Analysis



I love maths



I love storytelling



I love maths a little



Case study: Did the Child Support Grant increase or decrease in real terms ⁱⁿ the last 3 years?

Step 1: The ~~CSG~~ CSG for three years ^{in nominal terms} was:

2020/21	—	R 445
2021/22	—	R 460
2022/23	—	R 480

Step 2: What ~~per~~ inflation rate did we use for the 3 years?

2020/21	—	4.8%
2021/22	—	4.2%
2022/23	—	4.2%

Step 3: To change nominal ^{allocation} ~~number~~ to real allocation we use the following formula:

$$\text{Real} = \frac{\text{nominal}}{\text{price deflator (Ask treasury)}}$$

2020/21	—	1
2021/22	—	1.04
2022/23	—	1.09

Step 4: When applying the price deflator the ^{real} CSG amount is as follows for the 3 years:

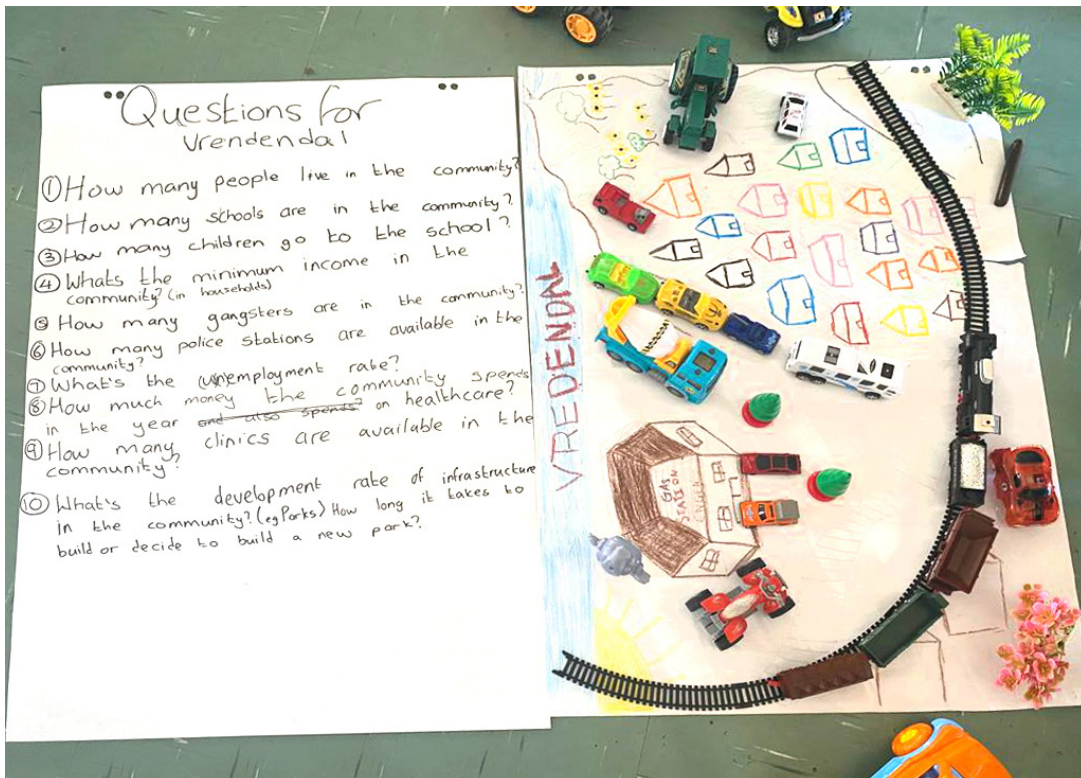
2020/21	→	R 445
2021/22	→	R 442.31
2022/23	→	R 440.37

Step 5: Did children receive more or less in real terms year on year?

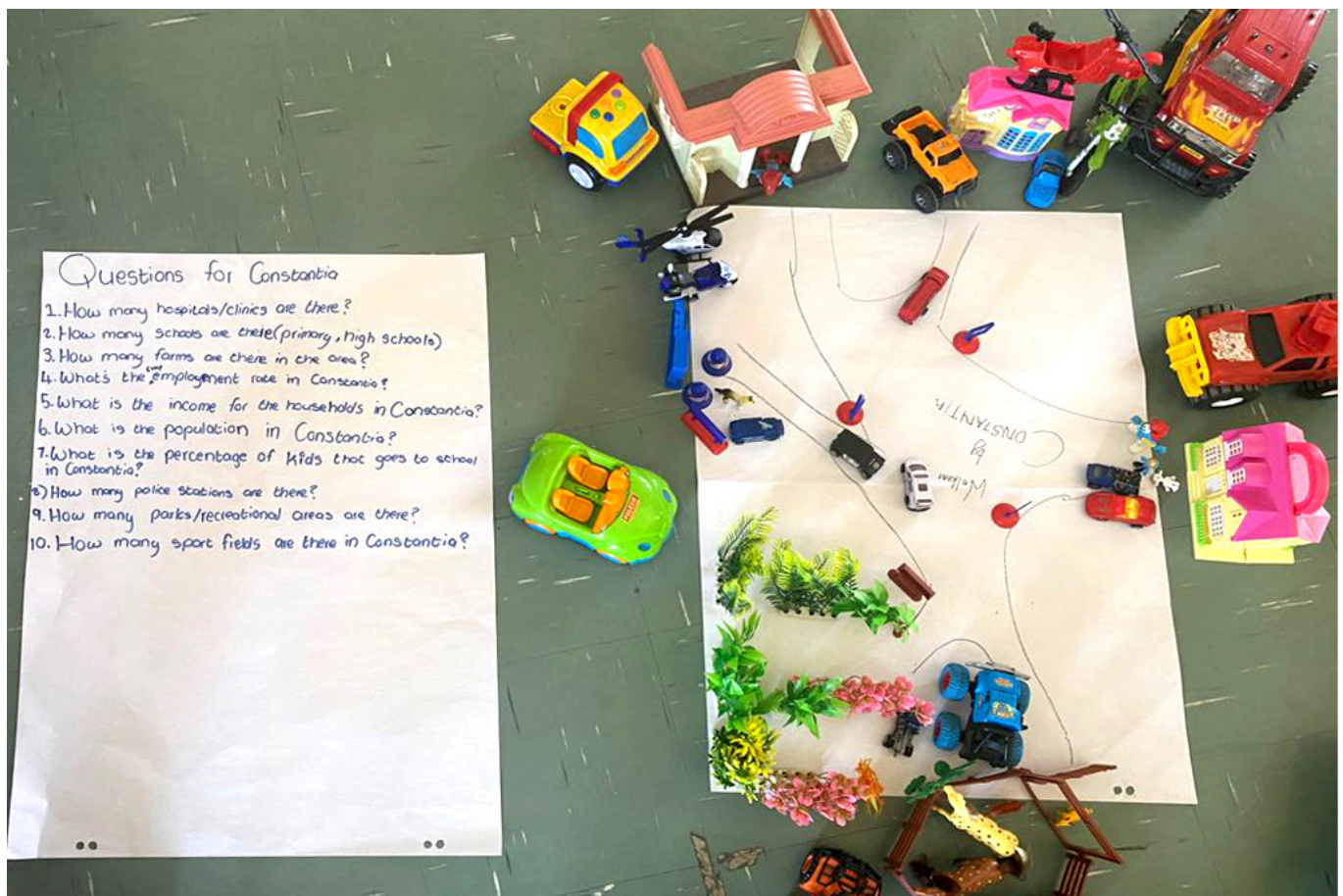


Analysis of
the Child
Support
Grant

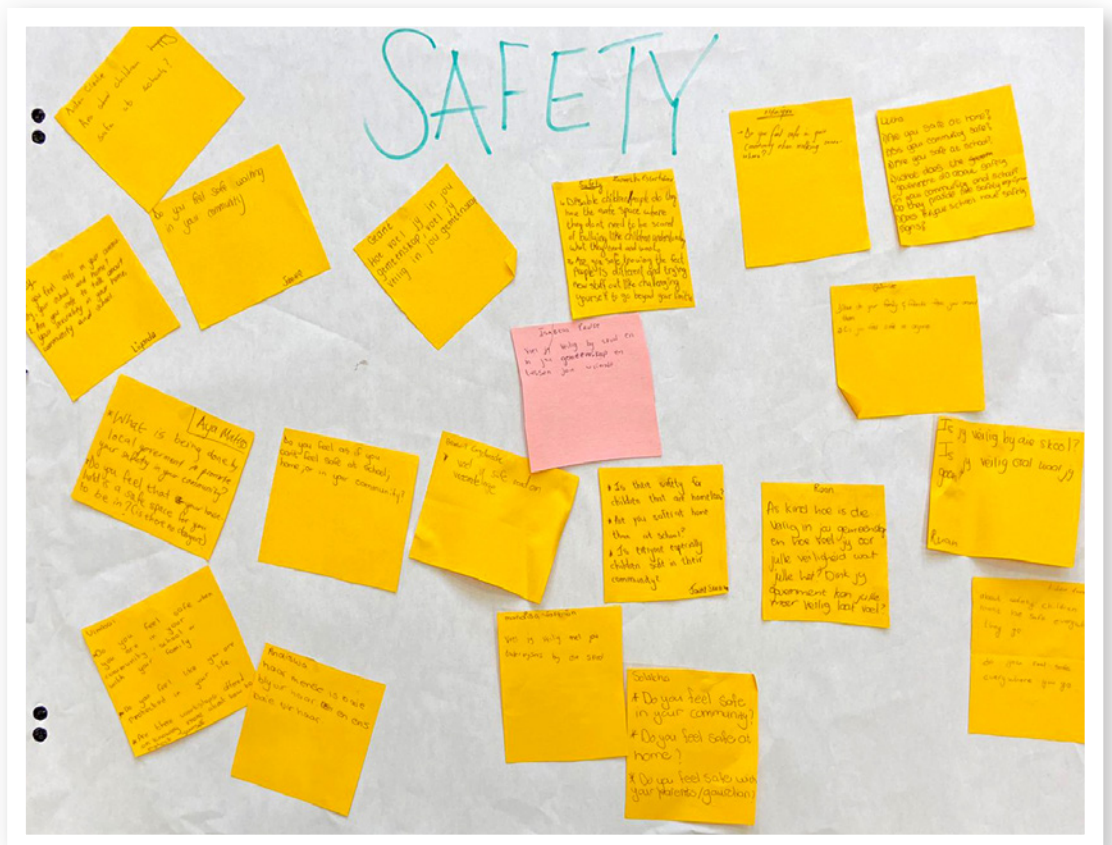
Child's perspectives on Western Cape 2022 Mero and Pero



Information children want to be presented in a child friendly version of Mero and Pero

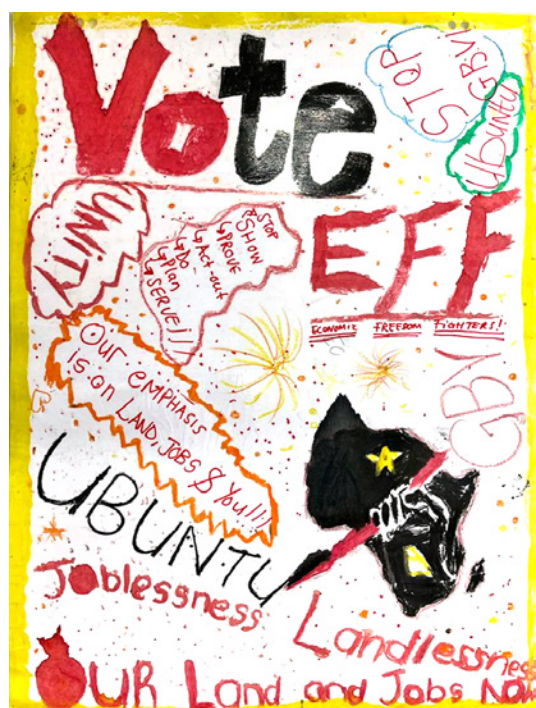
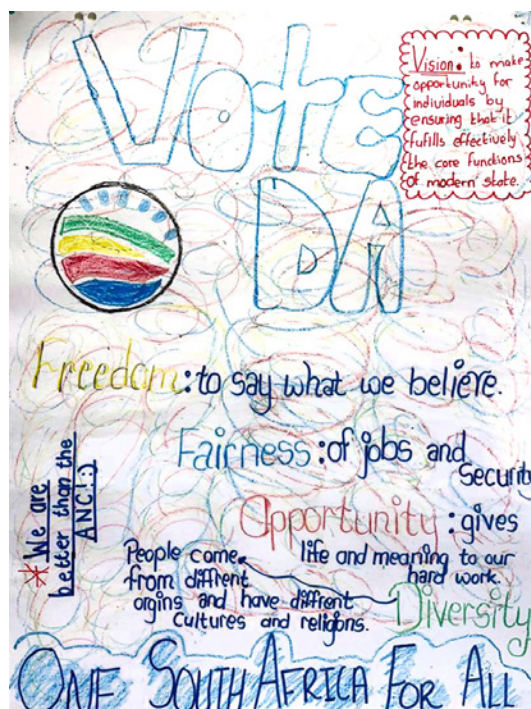
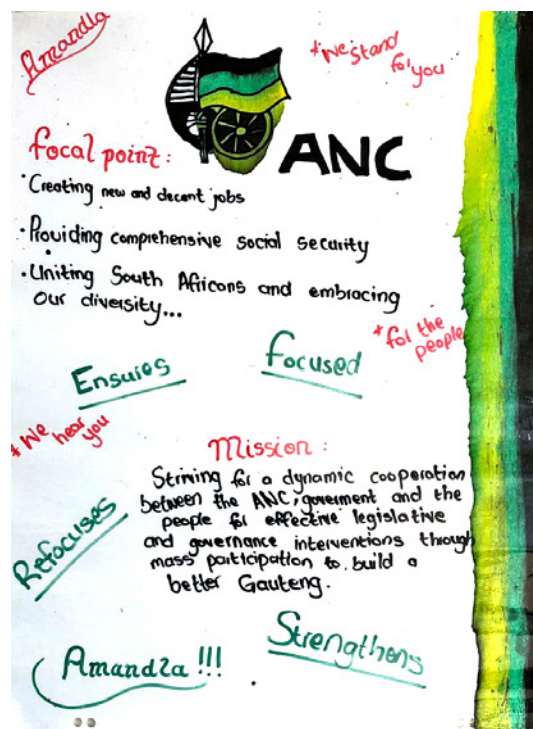


A children's survey on development priorities





2019 National political party manifestos: Child-friendly versions



Child friendly posters of political party manifestos: African National Congress, Democratic Alliance, Economic Freedom Fighters and Good Party



NOTES



A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.



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