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Commissioner for Children

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Children speak on the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) ahead of National Children's Day.

The MTBPS is not child-friendly nor child-centred, yet affects the children's fundamental lived realities. Furthermore, children are not consulted in these decisions that directly impact their lives.

"I don't think it was in a child-friendly way. Regardless of the fact that there were big words." – Kristen

These are some of the opinions raised by the Child Government Monitors (CGMs) in the Office of the Western Cape Commissioner for Children. These CGMs serve as the Commissioner's link to urban and rural communities, enabling her to stay connected with the realities of children's lives.

Asked about their general impression of the MTBPS and whether they heard words such as "child" or "children" during the speech, some of the children said:

"Not once did I hear child, children or kids" – Lilitha Kopolo.

These children cannot believe that we pay more for debt than for basic education, health care, or social development.

They urge the government to prioritise these essential services that affect children's lives. They also call for increased child participation in government decision-making processes.

When asked which areas the government should invest in to improve children's lives, the children responded.

“Since they said they would allocate money to the police departments make sure those police departments keep the children safe in those communities” – Vimbai Watambwa

“Textbooks, school supplies quality teaching /learning” – Jenicton Julies

“Having more access to clinics and hospitals nearby instead of having to travel very far” – Lilitha Kopolo

The CGMs suggest that Minister of Finance, Enoch Godongwana, use simple language, colourful infographics, and clear explanations to communicate the budget policy story.

They say that children may not understand complex issues like Eskom and local government debtors. They only see that there is no load shedding during the Rugby World Cup, while it returns on the day when matric learners start their exams. This, they believe, reflects how little the country values its children.

“Y’all but its so true that they kept the power on to watch the rugby but put it off when learners are writing exams.” Johnlee Platjies

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children is training children aged 12 and older to understand how the government budget affects children's rights.

To understand this, the children attend workshops to learn a budget lexicon on how government works and child rights budget advocacy. Training of these child rights budget analysts began last year in July in Van Rhynsdorp, followed by Prince Albert in October 2022, and most recently in Malmesbury in July 2023.

This weekend the WCCC team will travel to Plettenberg Bay for local government budget training with the inaugural Bitou Municipality Junior Town Council. The main objective of the training is to equip the children with knowledge about local budgets, which is crucial for advocating for child rights within budgetary processes.

Child participation is a fundamental aspect of the WCCC's mandate, ensuring that children have a voice in decisions that affect them, including decisions regarding government budgeting for the realisation of child rights.

The Bitou Council Speaker Claude Terblanche and his Office's commitment to child participation in governance has greatly impressed the Commissioner. The children will be given a chance to engage the Senior Council and lobby them to put resources into safer and better parks as well as refuse removal. These issues are also the main basic service delivery concerns of other child government monitors around the province. The Speaker says:

About the Western Cape Commissioner for Children:

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children is an independent governance institution in the Western Cape. The Commissioner is mandated to protect and promote the rights, needs and interests of children in the province by working with the departments of Education, Health, and Social Development as well as Cultural Affairs and Sport. The Commissioner for Children reports to Provincial Parliament on activities, functions and progress on objectives.

“ It’s important to ensure that we include children in what we plan for them so that there is a conducive environment for them to grow into the productive and prosperous citizens they should become.”

As the nation observes Children's Rights Day on Saturday, the Commissioner would like to reiterate that children's rights are not limited to a single day. Their rights should be respected and acknowledged daily. Children are not just adorable beings, but also important members of society who have their thoughts and ideas. Therefore, they should be consulted and included in decisions that affect them.

Commissioner Christina Nomdo says: “Children have a valuable contribution to make to governance. They provide a unique perspective on lived realities. If only we provide more accessible governance information, many more would be active citizens”.

Members of the media are invited to cover the workshop, which will take place from Saturday to Sunday (November 4-5) at Plettenberg Bay.

Ends.

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