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Submission of the WCCC including Child Government Monitors on the 2024 Division of Revenue Bill and 2023-24 Second Adjustments Appropriation Bill – 08 March 2024

1. Introduction and Background

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children (WCCC) must protect and promote children's rights in the Western Cape. The WCCC is an oversight mechanism for social sector departments namely the Western Cape Education Department, the Department of Health and Wellness, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, and the Department of Social Development. The Commissioner has been working in partnership with a group of Child Human Rights Defenders, called Child Government Monitors (CGMs), since the establishment of the office in June 2020. These CGMs are self-nominated or recommended to the WCCC by child rights organisations or community members. The Commissioner engages with the CGMs weekly via a WhatsApp group to educate children on their rights and how the government works, as well as to understand children's lived realities in the Western Cape. It is the institutional mission of the WCCC to make little voices count with decision-makers - #littlevoicesMUSTcount, #amazwiamancinciMAKAVAKALE, #kleinstemmetjiesMOETsaakmaak. The WCCC consulted with about 50 Child Government Monitors and Mentors on their views on the MTBPS to inform this submission.

The WCCC notes that the Appropriation Bill (2024) contains allocations to national government votes for 2024/5 with more details provided in the Estimates of National Expenditure. The office is mandated to oversee 3 of the 7 budget functions i.e. social development, learning and culture, and health, at provincial level. Thus, the WCCC will focus its analysis on these three votes. This analysis will investigate the impact of austerity and consolidation measures on conditional grants in these three budget functions that children in our office are keen to track. We also have a keen interest in allocations to the Western Cape province in this regard.

The WCCC is particularly interested in how the Minister of Finance and the National Treasury have responded to our calls made in a submission on the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS). In that submission the WCCC called for:

- Developing a child-centred and child-friendly governance system
- Considering the debt burden on children



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- Reconsidering the proposed reconfiguration of the State from a rights perspective
- Avoiding cuts to Social Sector spending in real terms
- Bolstering the diminishing Child Welfare and Child Protection budget

Therefore, we preface our analysis of the Appropriations Bill with the impressions of our Child Government Monitors on Budget 2024/5 and the extent to which government heeded their calls.

2. Children's views of Budget 2024/5

Developing child-friendly and child-centred budgets

The Commissioner conducted a WhatsApp session with children (who had been trained in public budget monitoring) on the evening of the Budget Speech, 21 February 2024. Due to the timing of the speech, many children were attending school and had to rely on alternative sources such as YouTube recordings, the pdf document, and infographics available on the National Treasury website, as well as some PowerPoint slides shared on the National Treasury LinkedIn account. During the evaluation, the CGMs expressed their opinions on the accessibility and child-friendliness of the communication formats provided. They collectively agreed that none of the formats were tailored to children's understanding. They said:

*I just see words and numbers, nothing is really drawing my attention to read it.
– Liliitha*

...the colouring is okay but I feel like children would [not] be able to understand it because of the numbers and words.- Jenicton

Child friendly doesn't just mean colourful- Johnlee

The CGMs highlighted that the communication materials contained technical jargon that was not explained, making it challenging for them to comprehend the content. Despite the presence of colours and images in the infographics and PowerPoint slides, the children still found it difficult to engage with and understand Budget 2024/5. One child, Liyanda, suggested,



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With the PowerPoint they were trying but (the) only problem (was), the words they used are hard, if maybe they used the pictures there and break down the words and maybe make the money seem like cartoon money.

They were heartened to note that the Commissioner's office had been approached to advise the National Treasury Public Participation strategy for Budget 2024/5. It would be quite hard for them to determine whether the budget was child centred as it would need to be presented in digestible pieces for them to chew on. However, the office tried to break down the main issues for social sector spending for them below.

3. Considering the debt burden on children

Children were alarmed to hear that debt service costs are R356 billion in 2024/5 which is 20% of revenue and 75.3% of GDP. They are aware that debt service costs and disasters are covered by a contingency reserve which is separated from the allocations to departments. They understand that revenue comes from taxation and were impressed to hear some of the tax proposals. Moreover, the children deliberated on the implications of utilising funds from the Reserve Bank. They were also intrigued by the newly proposed pension draw-down measures. They were particularly impressed by the decision not to increase the VAT rate, a suggestion they had put forward themselves. Additionally, they appreciated the consideration given to the impact of industrial activities on climate change within the taxation proposals. *They engaged the Commissioner in the following ways:*

Commissioner noted: There will be a tax off companies who cause pollution," to which one child, Tara, responded enthusiastically, "AS THERE SHOULD BE - save the environment!!!"

Another child, Liyanda, expressed a strong sentiment, stating, "Serves them right, they are damaging our environment and killing nature!"

Ultimately, children are worried that they will need to take care of financially vulnerable parents in the future and be burdened with the enormous debt the country still owes. They said:

We will suffer the consequences of their financial actions today in the future so they just making it worst for us - Johnlee.

The children understood that the debt burden will be inherited by them. The pension draw-downs today may lead to financially vulnerable parents in their old age, meaning their children must be prepared to financially support them. The children



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were most willing to do this even commenting on what they want to secure their parents wellbeing when they are earning their own money. However, they wonder if all children will be able to do this in the future.

4. Reconsidering reconfiguration of the State

While the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) of 2023 hinted at potential alterations in the State's structure, no concrete evidence of such changes was observed in Budget 2024/5. It is likely that any restructuring initiatives are being reserved for post-election periods, a prospect that the WCCC will monitor closely. Of particular interest to the Commission is whether thorough human rights impact assessments will be conducted prior to these structural adjustments and how these changes might impact the realisation of children's rights.

5. Avoiding cuts to the Social Sector

For our purposes, the social sector includes the budget functions of learning and culture, social development, and health. The WCCC will focus on monitoring changes in conditional grants, which serve as indicators of national government policy priorities, to discern any shifts in prioritisation within these sectors. Specifically, the Commission plans to analyse selected conditional grants per department, comparing the adjusted appropriation for 2023/4 with the allocation for 2024/5 below. This comparative analysis aims to identify significant fluctuations in funding levels from one year to the next.

In addition to examining the financial data, the WCCC will closely review the narratives accompanying the conditional grants. These narratives can provide valuable insights into whether budgets are child-centred and shed light on the intended priority programming associated with them.

Most of the provincial funding is derived from the Provincial Equitable Share (PES). In the Western Cape, for instance, the PES constitutes approximately 75% of the budget, with Conditional Grants making up around 18% of the total budget. Combined, these sources of funding represent 93% of the provincial budget.

Of particular concern to the WCCC are changes in conditional grants allocated to the national counterparts of the Commission's provincial mandate departments,



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including Social Development, Basic Education, Health, as well as Sports, Arts, and Culture. The Commission is especially interested in conditional grants that will be transferred to provinces for programme implementation, as these grants directly impact service delivery at the provincial level.

It is important to gauge prioritisation of a department by the share of the budget they are allocated. The table below indicates the proportions of each department's share of the total budget in comparison to other departments. While the table indicates marginal increases or decreases in budget allocations at the national level, the WCCC will continue to closely monitor any shifts in the share of funding at the provincial level, as these changes may have implications for the delivery of services and programmes affecting children.

Department	2023/2024	2024/2025	
Health	5.53%	5.41%	Marginal decrease
Basic Education	2.83%	2.93%	Marginal increase
Social Development	24.52%	24.95%	Marginal increase
Arts and Culture	0.57%	0.55%	Marginal decrease

Table 1: Data Extracted from National Treasury

Together the department of Health, Education and Social Development are allocated 33.29% of the budget in 2024/5. The Department of Social Development is afforded the highest allocation at 24.95% of the budget attesting to the importance of the commitment to provide social grants to millions of South Africans in need.

The Departments of Social Development, Health, Department of Basic Education as well as Sports, Arts and Culture are analysed below.

5.1 Department of Social Development (DSD)

The purpose of the vote is to “ensure protection against vulnerability by creating an enabling environment for the provision of a comprehensive, integrated and sustainable social development survive”.

The DSD consists of seven programmes, including:

- *Administration*: Provide strategic leadership, management and support services to the department and the sector;
- *Social Assistance*: Provide social assistance to eligible individuals whose income and assets fall below set thresholds;



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- *Social Security Policy and Administration*: Provider for social security policy development and the fair administration of social assistance;
- *Welfare Services Policy Development and Implementation Support*: Create an enabling environment for the development of equitable developmental welfare services through the formulation of policies, norms, standards and best practices; and the provision of support to implementing agencies.
- *Social Policy and Integrated Service Delivery*: Support community development and promote evidence-based policy making in the department.

When assessing the programmatic budget, the WCCC was most concerned about the decline of the “Children” sub-programme in programme 4. Here, the WCCC observes a 7.4% decline in the budget, which decreased from R82.9M in 2023/24 to R76.8M in 2024/25. Since this sub-programme is responsible for developing, supporting, and monitoring the implementation of policies, legislation, norms, and standards for the provision of social welfare services to children, the WCCC is concerned that monitoring of the Children’s Act will be compromised. Additionally, the reason for the year-on-year budget reduction is not provided. The WCCC is interested in understanding why this budget was reduced.

For the 2024/25 National MTBPS, the Minister noted that ““Provincial (Social Development) budget allocations will not increase in line with inflation, leading to a funding gap for core services and transfers to non-profit organisations. The sector needs to reprioritise and realign resources to avoid adverse effects on service delivery”. Considering this, the WCCC recommended that the Minister must consider increasing the Provincial Department of Social Development budgets in line with inflation. After assessing the 2024/5 Estimates of National Expenditure as well as the 2024/25 Appropriation Bill, it is unclear whether provincial DSD budgets have changed, because those allocations have yet to be disclosed in the tabling of provincial budgets. The WCCC will continue tracking these developments following the tabling of the 2024/25 provincial budgets.

Further to the DSD Budget, the WCCC assessed the social grant allocations to determine whether they have increased in line with inflation. For this exercise, the WCCC only assessed the grants where children were direct beneficiaries, which includes the Child Support Grant, the Foster Care Grant and the Care Dependency Grants. Below is an overview of the afore-mentioned grant allocations for 2023/24 and 2024/25:



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Grant Type	Adjusted Appropriation	Expenditure Estimate	Percentage Difference	Increase/ Decrease
	2023/24	2024/25	Year-on-year Difference	
Foster Care Grant	3 790 857	3 644 419	-3.9%	Decrease
Care Dependency Grant	4 091 619	4 399 995	7.5%	Increase
Child Support Grant	81 871 141	85 807 124	4.8%	Increase

Table 2: Data Extracted from National Treasury

As can be discerned from the table above, there is a 3.9% decreased in the Foster Care Grant. Much like the decrease in the children sub-programme, this decrease has been implemented without any explanation in the budget documents. The WCCC is concerned that less foster children will benefit from the grant in 2024/25 given the budget cut.

5.2 Department of Health

The Department of Health plays a crucial role in leading and coordinating health services to promote the health of all people in the country through an accessible, caring, and high-quality health system based on the primary health care approach. The department's mandate, derived from the National Health Act (2003), focuses on providing a structured and uniform health system for South Africa, with a mission to improve health by preventing illness and disease while promoting healthy lifestyles. The department aims to enhance the healthcare delivery system by prioritising access, equity, efficiency, quality, and sustainability.

The Department of Health budget includes several key conditional grant allocations:

- *National Health Insurance (NHI) grant*: This grant is intended to prepare for the introduction of national health insurance, aiming to reform the healthcare system by providing universal access to quality healthcare services.
- *District Health Programmes Grant*: This grant aims to support the prevention and treatment of communicable and non-communicable diseases by strengthening primary healthcare. It also funds outreach services, including community health workers, interventions for TB and malaria, and chronic medication dispensing.



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- *National Tertiary Services Grant*: This grant supports highly specialized referral services provided at central and tertiary hospitals. It aims to address service backlogs and the unequal distribution of tertiary services, with a focus on strengthening these services through the purchasing of machinery, equipment, and recruiting medical specialists.
- *Human Resources and Training Grant*: This allocation focuses on strengthening the healthcare workforce by supporting training initiatives and human resource development within the healthcare sector.
- *Health Facility Revitalisation Grant*: This grant is dedicated to maintaining, repairing, and refurbishing public health facilities, including clinics, hospitals, nursing colleges, and emergency medical services base stations.

Regarding whether the decrease/increase in the specific conditional grant aligns with inflation targets, it is essential to consider the inflation rate. The South Africa Reserve Bank (SARB) benchmark the inflation target between 3-6%. The percentage difference of more than 7% for the Health Facility Revitalisation Grant, District Health Programmes Grant, and National tertiary services grant exceed the upper limit of the inflation target range is a positive sign for addressing infrastructure needs within the healthcare sector.

However, the WCCC has also noted a 34.36% decrease in the NHI grant which significantly lower than the inflation target. Apart from the allocation of R6.9 billion, the budget does not address NHI grants, and there is no information given on the long-term funding of the NHI scheme. Although the WCCC is cognisant of the fact that the NHI legislation is not yet into effect, the silence in funding for the NHI grant could impact or delay the access to essential health services, preventive care, and timely treatments, potentially leading to worsened health outcomes, especially among children. The NHI grant is crucial for strengthening health systems and preparing for the implementation of national health insurance. Decreases in funding for this grant may hinder progress towards achieving universal health coverage and providing comprehensive health services to vulnerable populations, including children. This reduction could slow down improvements in health care access and quality, particularly for children reliant on public health service. The table below provides an overview of the aforementioned conditional grants allocations.



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Department of Health	Adjusted Appropriation	Expenditure Estimate	Percentage difference
	2023/2024	2024/2025	Year-On-Year
Current			
National health insurance grant	694675	455956	-34.36%
District health programmes grant	2931257	3238337	10.48%
Human resources and training grant	5449066	5517102	1.25%
National tertiary services grant	14023946	15263784	8.84%
Capital			
Health Facility Revitalisation grants	6679860	7151841	7.07%

Table 3: Data Extracted from National Treasury

As it can be noted from the table above, the increase in funding for certain grants surpassing inflation targets suggests positive developments in addressing infrastructure needs, whilst the significant decrease in the National Health Insurance grant raises concerns about potential impacts on essential healthcare services, especially for vulnerable populations like children. Balancing grant allocations effectively is essential to fortify healthcare systems and enhance service delivery within the provinces and beyond.

5.3 Department of Basic Education

The purpose of the vote is to “provide quality basic education for all, and lead the establishment and development of a South African schooling system for the 21st century.”

The Department of Basic Education's mandate includes overseeing the quality of education provision, delivery, and performance standards. The mandate is derived from three Acts namely National Education Act (1996), the South African Schools Act (1996) and the Employment of Educators Act (1998). Together, these laws aim to ensure that children aged 7 to 15 years receive access to quality, compulsory education with competent educators.



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The department is focused on prioritizing several key areas. These include accelerating the delivery of and enhancing school infrastructure, offering opportunities to learners with profound intellectual disabilities, ensuring access to high-quality learner and teacher support materials. Additionally, there is a focus on increasing the supply of quality teachers and preparing them to teach new subjects to equip learners for a changing world. Furthermore, the department aims to improve the quality and expand the reach of early childhood development services while also providing nutritious meals to learners through the national school nutrition program.

The DBE has specific key conditional grants aimed at achieving the above objectives:

- *The Learners with Profound Intellectual Disability Grant:* This grant is designed to enhance the provision of quality education for learners with severe intellectual disabilities. The allocation for 2024/5 amounts to R278.9 million, reflecting a 7.11% increase from the previous year. Reports received by the World Children's Congress Committee (WCCC) indicate a pressing need for additional resources in schools catering to learners with special needs to ensure that all children's right to education is upheld.
- *The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Grant:* This grant supports the delivery of ECD services by subsidizing children attending ECD programs, providing pre-registration support packages, offering infrastructure support, and piloting the construction of low-cost ECD centres. The allocation for the ECD grant in 2024/5 is R1.58 billion, marking a substantial increase of 34.16% from the previous year. However, challenges persist as many ECD sites in the Western Cape remain unregistered and ineligible for government subsidies, impacting the quality of early childhood education. An additional R197 million in the 2024/5 budget is designated for piloting a nutrition programme targeting low-cost ECD centres, a commendable initiative.

The National School Nutrition Grant: With an allocation of R9.79 billion, this grant plays a crucial role in providing nutritious meals to over 10 million children in schools. Aimed at addressing poverty-related challenges, particularly in quintile 1-3 schools, the grant seeks to enhance children's nutrition and learning capacity. The grant saw a 5.6% increase, slightly below the upper limit of the inflation target, highlighting the ongoing issue of child hunger and its adverse impact on children's development.

- *The HIV/AIDS (Life Skills Education) Grant:* This grant focuses on providing comprehensive sexuality education, HIV/AIDS awareness, and life skills training.



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An allocation of R249.7 million represents a 16.78% increase above inflation, emphasising the importance of education in addressing critical health issues.

- *The Maths, Science, and Technology Grant:* Geared towards improving math and science outcomes, this grant provides schools with information and communication technology and equipment. The allocation for 2024/5 is R443.8 million, showing a notable 15.8% increase from the previous year, exceeding the inflation rate.
- *The Education Infrastructure Grant:* This grant serves as a primary funding source for maintaining existing and constructing new school infrastructure to meet minimum norms and standards. While the 2024/5 allocation appears to have increased by 11.43% to R13.68 billion, surpassing inflation rates, it is important to note that the grant was reduced by R611 million. The WCCC expresses concerns about the provinces' capacity to build and maintain schools, as the condition of school infrastructure significantly impacts the quality of education children receive.

The table below provides an overview of these grants and show notable increases from the previous year (2023/2024), reflecting a commitment to enhancing various aspects of education provision. However, challenges such as unregistered ECD sites impacting subsidies and reductions in infrastructure grants raise concerns about the overall effectiveness of these initiatives and the quality of education delivery.



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R Thousand	Adjusted Appropriation	Expenditure Estimate	Percentage difference:	Increase/ Decrease
	2023/4	2024/2025	Year-On-Year	
Current				
Learners with profound intellectual disabilities grant	260 424	278 947	7.11%	Increase
Early childhood development grant	1 184 434	1 589 075	34.16%	Increase
National school nutrition programme grant	9 278 942	9 798 106	5.60%	Increase
HIV and AIDS (life skills education) grant	213 863	249 742	16.78%	Increase
Capital				
Maths, science and technology grant	383 275	443 842	15.80%	Increase
Education infrastructure grant	12 277 518	13 681 440	11.43%	Increase

Table 4: Data Extracted from National Treasury

Additionally, the *school infrastructure backlogs grant* was also reduced by Cabinet by R1.2 billion and has been allocated R1.6 billion for 2024/5. The school infrastructure backlogs grant is used to replace inappropriate or dangerous school structures, the building of new classroom and the provision of water, sanitation, and electricity. The implication of this is that only building projects that are the implementation phase may be completed according to the tabled budget. This does not bode well for the addressing overcrowding issues in classrooms.

5.4 Department of Sports, Arts and Culture

The Department of Sports, Arts, and Culture plays a crucial role in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for the sports, arts, and cultural sectors. The primary objective of the department's vote is to facilitate the development, transformation,



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preservation, protection, and promotion of sports, arts, and culture across all levels of participation. By doing so, the department aims to cultivate an active, successful, creative, and socially cohesive nation.

Despite its significant role in fostering holistic child development, the Department of Sports, Arts, and Culture often goes unrecognised for its contributions. Regrettably, it consistently receives the lowest vote allocation among the cluster of departments of interest, accounting for only 0.55% of the total share in the 2024/2025 budget. This underfunding highlights the department's undervaluation and the need for greater recognition of its importance in shaping the well-being and development of children.

To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the department's initiatives, the WCCC has conducted visits to various service sites across the Western Cape province in recent years. These visits have focused on assessing the outcomes and benefits of programmes shedding light on the department's efforts to promote active lifestyles, talent development, and social cohesion through sports and cultural activities. Of special interest are the conditional grants below:

- *Mass Participation and Sport Development Grant.* This grant supports various programs like the Move for Health Day, the national indigenous games festival, National Recreation Day (integrated with the Big Walk), the Nelson Mandela Sport and Culture Day, and outreach programs such as the ministerial outreach program. It enables provincial departments in charge of sport, arts, and culture to provide development and support programs for talented athletes. For instance, it allocates R56.8 million to support 90 school sport leagues at the district level and R80.9 million to facilitate 4,000 students showcasing their skills at events like the national school sport championship. Additionally, R40.2 million is allocated to support 90 organized community-based sport and recreation activities, and R78.4 million is designated for providing sports equipment and attire to schools, hubs, and clubs, promoting participation in sports and recreation.
- *Community Library Services Grant:* This grant aims to enhance access to knowledge and information by constructing 66 libraries and upgrading 135 community libraries, totalling a projected cost of R798.6 million over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) period.

The table below indicates positive year-on-year increases in allocations for these grants, demonstrating a commitment to enhancing sports, arts, culture, and



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knowledge access within communities. These adjustments signify progress towards achieving the department's objectives despite historical undervaluation.

R Thousand	Adjusted Appropriation	Expenditure Estimate	Percentage difference	Increase/ Decrease
	2023/4	2024/5	Year-on-year	
Current				
Mass participation and sport development grant	560 960	618 462	10.25%	Increase
Community library services grant current	1 311 097	1 398 534	6.67%	Increase
Capital				
Community library services grant current	191 703	213 373	11.30%	Increase

Table 4: Data Extracted from National Treasury

As can be noted from above, the undervaluation of the Department of Sports, Arts, and Culture is a pressing concern that warrants immediate attention. The WCCC emphasises the urgent need for greater recognition of this department as the cornerstone for nurturing children's talents and providing safe spaces for them to thrive. Acknowledging and adequately funding this department is fundamental to ensuring the holistic development and well-being of our nation's future generations.

6. Transfers to provinces

National government distributes more than half of the revenues generated nationally to nine provinces and 257 municipalities, enabling them to carry out their designated responsibilities and support their communities. Provinces are responsible for overseeing vital services like basic education, healthcare, infrastructure, social welfare, and agriculture. In the 2024 Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) period, provinces and municipalities are granted R2.8 trillion, which accounts for 51.1% of total non-interest spending. Of this allocation, R2.3 trillion is designated for provinces, with the



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Western Cape receiving R76.926 billion. These funds are allocated in the form of equitable shares and conditional grants to support the operational needs of provinces and municipalities. However, as highlighted by Mireille Wenger, the MEC of Finance and Economic Opportunities in the Western Cape, during her Provincial Budget Speech on March 7, 2024, "Simply put, as the third largest province by population, the Western Cape only receives the fifth largest PES allocation amongst the provinces".

7. Conclusion and Recommendations:

In conclusion, the submission by the WCCC, incorporating the perspectives of Child Government Monitors, highlights the critical need for a child-centred and child-friendly governance system. This is exemplified by Isabella's statement,

"Only a child knows how it is to be a child so why not consult? ...why not ask us?"

This emphasises the importance of children's rights to being consulted and seeking the input of children in matters that directly affect them.

Therefore, we propose the following recommendations:

- *Develop Child-Centred Budgets:* The submission emphasises the need for child-friendly and child-centred budgets, as highlighted by the Child Government Monitors (CGMs). It is recommended that future budget communications and formats should be tailored to be more accessible and understandable for children. This includes the use of simplified language, visual aids, and engaging formats to ensure that children can comprehend and engage with budgetary information. Centring children in the budget requires the application of technical expertise.
- *Budget Allocation in Line with Inflation:* The WCCC recommends that budget allocations to social sector departments, particularly in the areas of social welfare services for children, should be increased in line with inflation. This is crucial to ensure that essential services and support for children are not compromised due to funding gaps or budget cuts.
- *Avoiding Debts:* The submission emphasises the importance of considering the debt burden on children and the potential impact of debt service costs on their future financial responsibilities. It is recommended that measures be taken to avoid accumulating excessive debt that could burden future generations,



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including exploring sustainable fiscal policies and responsible financial management.

Christina Nomdo

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