

# A Taste of Success

*Examples of the Budget Work of NGOs*

## **Analyzing and Affecting Policy The Children's Budget Project, South Africa**



THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
BUDGET  
PROJECT

A Project of the  
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities  
820 First Street, NE, Suite 510  
Washington, DC 20002  
Ph: 202-408-1080 ♦ Fax: 202-408-1056  
<http://www.InternationalBudget.org>

**October 2000**

*The Children's Budget Project is a good example of how targeted budget analysis can influence the policy debate and outcomes surrounding a specific issue.*

### **Background**

The Children's Budget Project (CBP) is a sub-project of the Budget Information Service at the Institute for Democracy in South Africa. BIS analyzes the allocation and use of public resources to understand the impact of the budget on the poor and disseminates its material to civil society and legislatures to enhance participation in the budget process. The Children's Budget project does not promote a separate budget for children. Rather, it attempts to examine what resources government is allocating to children's programs, and whether these programs adequately reflect the needs of children. It analyzes this with respect to policy and legislation for children, government expenditure, and service delivery. The project analyzes the link between government policy commitments to children and government budget allocations.

### **Issue**

South Africa recently began to review policy, legislation, and service delivery related to children, both in terms of international instruments and the South African Constitution. At the same time, the country has also undertaken a budget reform process. The Children's Budget Project decided to capitalize on these activities to highlight key issues related to a children's budget.

### **Action**

The Children's Budget Project conducts research on the national and provincial budgets in South Africa to keep civil society organizations, government departments, and legislatures informed about the effectiveness and efficiency of government expenditure on children's programs. The information is presented in a manner that is accessible to a broad audience, and the research findings are disseminated as widely as possible through publications, radio, newspaper, the project's web page, and training and workshops conducted by project staff.

In its first phase, the Children's Budget Project teamed up with other stakeholders in the children's sector to produce the report "First Call: The South African Children's Budget." The study tracks government expenditure on children in areas such as health, education, welfare, justice, and policing. The project raised the question of whether the government is directing its spending in the best way to deliver on its policy commitments to children, and recommended ways in which social spending could be more efficiently directed in these areas.

CBP's second study, "Where Poverty Hits Hardest," examines the link between government spending on social services aimed at children, children's ability to access these services, and the impact of social services delivery on the lives of children. The study focuses its analysis on the health, education, welfare, and criminal justice sectors in all nine provinces from 1995 to 1998. The study uses indicators that measure issues of equity in expenditure on basic social services, access to services, and redress to children who live under especially difficult circumstances.

Finally, the CBP is in the process of completing its third children's budget study. The aim of the study is to comment on government's performance in addressing child poverty, focusing on the role of the budget in its poverty alleviation strategy.

### **Results**

The publication of the two children's budget research studies firmly established the CBP as an important source of information and guidance regarding children's policy in South Africa. The report "First Call: The South African Children's Budget" was attached to the government of South Africa's report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, the project has been asked by the Office on the Status of Disabled Persons to conduct research on expenditure for children with disabilities and has acted as a resource for organizations requiring budget information on children.

The CBP has also helped to bring issues facing South Africa's children into the public eye. During the research process for the budget reports, a series of popular articles were published in daily newspapers, which broadened the target audience and deepened understanding of the issues surrounding government expenditure on children.

Equally important, the CBP has been a model for other organizations attempting this work elsewhere. The Children's Budget Project is also part of a larger international project on child-focused budget studies involving countries around the world. Because the CBP has been conducting this work for several years and is currently completing its third budget study, the project has been able to provide information and guidance regarding methodology and resources, insight into the opportunities and constraints to the previous studies, and advice on the overall structure and function of the project.

CBP is now moving to do pioneering work on children with disabilities and those with HIV/AIDS, applying a similar method to that used in the project's current work.

### **Lessons**

CBP's success seems to draw on the following lessons:

- Provide targeted, accessible research. Substantive research and analysis on the resource implications of various policy options plays a critical role in informing and influencing policymakers. In the case of the Child Budget Project, therefore, it is important that the research and analyses focus on the allocation of resources from state budgets and donor financial aid and provide child-focused data and statistics. In addition, the research should come with recommendations to guide policymakers.
- Build capacity. Political credibility is largely dependent on increased capacity within the country to understand the issues and engage in public debate. The fact that the CBP engaged in information sharing and training activities aimed primarily at national and provincial legislatures and children's rights advocates has enabled legislatures and civil society to present government with policy critiques and alternative proposals. Moreover, strengthened legislative and civil society capacity to engage in public policy and resource allocation debates provides increased checks

and balances to ensure that government makes the right interventions in the most cost-effective manner.

- Build coalitions. Political credibility is also largely influenced by the extent of stakeholder involvement and successful consensus building. A partnership between civil society and government is critical to the broad-based ownership of research and analysis. Moreover, institutional factors and constraints may necessitate the formation of a research and information partnership that draws on information, capacity, and expertise from government, universities, think tanks, and civil society.
- Be aware of the context. Resource allocation processes are based on political and economic factors that are specific to a nation or region. Research and advocacy strategies should be designed to mobilize resources within the given specific political and economic institutions, processes, and factors.

For more information about the Children's Budget Project, visit the Budget Information Service at Idasa's website: <http://www.idasa.org.za/bis/default.htm> or contact the organization directly:

Albert van Zyl, Programme Manager  
IDASA Budget Information Service  
PO Box 1739  
Cape Town 8000  
South Africa  
Phone: 27 21 461 2559  
Fax: 27 21 462 0162  
Email: [albert@idasact.org.za](mailto:albert@idasact.org.za)

For the reports discussed above and additional reading on the Children's Budget Project, see:

*Do Children Receive Their Fair Share of the Budget?* Shirley Robinson, 1998.

This is the Executive Summary of the Children's Budget Book "A First Call for Children"

<http://www.idasa.org.za/final/publications.asp?id=460>

*Children and the Budget*. Judith Streak, February 2000.

This is one of a number of documents prepared by BIS in relation to the year 2000 Budget. This article also appeared in The Sunday Independent Reconstruct supplement, Sunday 27 Feb 2000.

<http://www.idasa.org.za/bis/briefs/brief33.htm>