



children's
institute

child rights in focus
Research • Advocacy • Education

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Submission from the Children's Institute, UCT on the 2020 Revised Fiscal Framework and Revenue Proposals

To the Standing and Select Committees on Finance

Introduction

The supplementary budget of June 2020 prioritises strengthening South Africa's response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the performance of the economy. These are difficult times and the choices of how to prioritise spending are tough. The allocation of R40,9 billion for six months "support to vulnerable households" in the form of social grants is welcome and the increase to the health budget is unsurprising in the context of a global health pandemic. However, we are concerned about the invisibility of what the President called the "second pandemic" of violence against women and children.

Why does the supplementary budget completely fail to mention the struggle to end violence against women and children? This silence in the national budget documents puts violence prevention and protection services at the provincial level at high risk of cuts or stagnation. The provinces are entering the final stages of their supplementary budget decisions and are required to make extensive cuts to enable a re-prioritisation of R20bn towards the COVID19 response. Without express prioritisation of violence prevention programmes by national, these programmes are not protected at a provincial level.

Widespread violence against women and children has a substantial impact on the economy

Several South African studies point to the saturation of violence in the everyday lives of children. The Birth to Twenty Plus study found that 99% of children had experienced or witnessed some form of violence, and more than 40% had multiple experiences of violence in their homes, schools and communities. At the same time, almost half of South African women experience intimate partner

violence during their lifetime and a study from KwaZulu-Natal found that nearly 40% of women reported physical abuse during pregnancy. There is an urgent need to change attitudes and behaviour regarding violence in the home and society, promote positive parenting practices and tackle inequality that normalises violence and power over women and children.

A recent study investigated the social burden and economic impact of violence against children in South Africa. Researchers found that preventing children from experiencing and witnessing violence reduces multiple social problems. For example, self-harm could be reduced by 23% in the population if children did not experience physical violence. Other population wide benefits include reducing HIV infection, substance (drug and alcohol) abuse, and interpersonal violence. The study also shows that violence has a substantial impact on the economy. The team calculated that the long-term cost of violence against children in 2015/16 stood at R238 billion or nearly 5% of the country's gross domestic product.

The impact of budget cuts on ending violence against women and children

Over the past year, the President has made multiple commitments to address the levels of gender-based violence and femicide and violence against children. Most recently, in his address to the nation on 17 June 2020 he promised “the women and children of South Africa that our criminal justice system will remain focused on gender-based violence cases and that we can expect more arrests and more prosecutions against perpetrators to follow.” Those commitments need to be backed with funds. We instead see cuts of R180million to the National Prosecuting Authority budget and R348million to the Court Services Programme within the Department of Justice; and R132million to detective services within SAPs. These cuts could negatively affect the prosecution and conviction of crimes against women and children, and the provision of support services within Thuthuzela Centres. There is no indication in the budget documents that these departments will prioritise posts, goods, services and infrastructure that are essential for improved prosecution and conviction of crimes against women and children when these cuts are implemented.

In addition to the changes to national priorities, provinces are required to re-prioritise R20billion from the PES to fight the COVID pandemic alongside cuts to conditional grants. This carries a significant risk that violence prevention and victim support services for women and children within provincial DSD's will be reduced. With no direction from National Treasury to protect programmes to address violence the concern is that this will result in cuts to critical services that address the structural drivers of violence, and services that support women and children who have experienced violence.

What needs to be done

In May, the President signed the National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBV-F NSP), but the financing plan is not yet provided even though it includes targets for service delivery in 2020/21. Without a budget, the GBV-F NSP cannot achieve the deep changes needed; both at a systems level in government to improve response and as well as services for survivors to reduce revictimization. The supplementary budget fails to provide any information on allocations to the GBV-F NSP. With this budget we again see the pattern of failure to allocate towards initiatives to intervene in this second pandemic that increases the risk to the majority of our population. The National Treasury must present a funding framework for the GBV-F NSP.

Additionally, National Treasury must issue direction to provinces on the protection of programmes to address violence and support women and children who have experienced violence.

Yours sincerely,



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