

## **Thinking around the budget- the importance of budget advocacy by Civil Society Organisations and a rights driven budget that advances better lives for all**

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Tlameo M Mothudi

The state's budget is a policy document, which outlines how funds are raised through taxes, fees and loans and spent. Budget should also outline the amount of money available for the government projects across national, provincial and local spheres of government<sup>1</sup>.

### The Constitution and the budget:

The Constitution of South Africa<sup>2</sup> obliges government departments to realise various socio-economic rights including the rights to education and healthcare. For socio-economic rights that are immediately realisable the realisation must be done within available and constrained resources. In order to effectively realise these rights through the delivery of public services, government departments and private service providers responsible for the management of public resources must implement effective accountability and service delivery systems<sup>3</sup>.

### The budget advocacy and community participation:

While the amount of budget allocated is important, the allocation alone does not assist with insight on the extent to which the budget is being used in compliance with the government's human rights obligations. A careful analysis of the budgetary allocations assists with general oversight over the government's human rights obligations and outline of its priorities.<sup>4</sup>

Budget advocacy is a strategic approach to influence governments' budget choices, with its aim being to achieve clear and specific outcomes. While outcomes like healthier population, less poverty and quality education are longer-term objectives, it is through efficient advocacy that the smaller steps like increased oversight on how the funds are used and increased budget allocations can be taken to achieve the longer-term objectives<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> National Treasury How the Budget works for us (Accessed at [https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/EducationPubs/16.02.15\\_Budget\\_pamphlet\\_eng.pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/EducationPubs/16.02.15_Budget_pamphlet_eng.pdf) on 3 June 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Act 104 of 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Parliament Budget Analysis Manual 2011 P. 8 (Accessed at <http://pmg-assets.s3-website-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/130715budgetanalysismanual.pdf> on 3 June 2020).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Human Rights and International Budget Partnership Realizing Human Rights Through Government Budgets 2017 P.89 (Accessed at <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/RealizingHRThroughGovernmentBudgets.pdf> on 3 June 2020).

<sup>5</sup> International Budget Partnership Orientation to Budget Advocacy (Accessed at <https://www.internationalbudget.org/budget-advocacy/orientation/> on 3 June 2020).

When communities influence, direct and engage in programmes that address their needs for purposes of needs analysis, service delivery must be informed by the need. Communities play an important role in devising people centred health systems. Civil society and Government engagement with communities assists with the realisation of health targets due to the intimate knowledge possessed by communities relating to local needs and adaptive strategies<sup>6</sup>.

Communities have an important role to play in demanding and/or supporting improvements to government services where they are lacking and are able to organise around budget advocacy by undertaking various kinds of budget work. While engaging communities in budget advocacy work, it is important to have an idea of the communities' capabilities and how best this space can be utilised to unpack what is deemed a priority within the community space.

[Citizens in communities, acting as individuals or in groups can participate in budget related work](#). They can do so by influencing the budget processes by making inputs during the legislative process in the second stage of the budget cycle and monitoring and assessing the performance and expenditure of the respective government departments against their budgets during the implementation stage of the cycle. Citizens can also work alongside civil society organisations to support budget advocacy initiatives. Citizen participation in the budget cycle can happen through identifying pressing local needs, overseeing the budget approval process and monitoring of budget execution, procurement and the implementation of projects<sup>7</sup>.

#### The role of civil society in advancing budget advocacy at a community level:

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has outlined that an amount of [R500 billion is needed for a relief package](#) making the fiscal purse more constrained. As such, how the budget is reprioritised and is likely to be allocated going forward post pandemic, directly affects us all as individuals within our communities. It is important that we understand the budget and how it works so that we can advocate for a budget that will respond to people's needs.

Civil society organisations<sup>8</sup> (CSOs) can make a positive difference in international development. They provide developmental services and humanitarian relief, innovate in service delivery, build local capacity and advocate with and for the poor. Acting alone, however, their impact is limited in scope, scale and sustainability<sup>9</sup>. Functions of CSOs in development include representation (organisations that aggregate citizen voices), advocacy,

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<sup>6</sup> George, A.S., Scott, K., Sarriot, E. *et al.* Unlocking community capabilities across health systems in low- and middle-income countries: lessons learned from research and reflective practice. *BMC Health Serv Res* **16**, 631 (2016) ( Accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-016-1859-7> on 3 June 2020).

<sup>7</sup> P Samy Participatory Budget: Let the people decide Civil Society Academy September 2017 (Accessed on 9 June 2020 at <https://www.civilsocietyacademy.org/post/participatory-budgets> ).

<sup>8</sup> Civil society refers to a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations- A Jazard *Who and What is Civil Society* World Economic Forum (Accessed at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/what-is-civil-society/> on 9 June 2020).

<sup>9</sup> J Court, E Mendizabal, D Osborne, J Young Policy Engagement How Civil Society could be more effective 2006 (Accessed at <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/200.pdf> on 4 June 2020).

capacity building, technical inputs, service delivery and social functions (organisations that foster collective recreational activities)<sup>10</sup>.

Within civil society communities of practice, there is a need to come together and work closely with communities to advocate for government budget decisions that prioritize human rights and lead to a more equitable economy. Under the banner of budget advocacy and within the community of practice, civil society actors have access to information about budget allocations, the skills to understand the implication of such allocations and the platforms to advocate for more progressive alternative allocations.

Applied budget work involves an analysis of budgets with an intention to advance certain policy goals, which assist the most disadvantaged groups in society. Communities that are usually excluded from the conversation on the budget must be invited to participate and engaged on the budget to better understand how the budget can be used to advance their needs. It is important that the budget be demystified, simplified and converted/ (translated) to official languages to extend opportunities to engage with the budget to those who would ordinarily not have a platform for engagement.

Specialised budget groups and CSOs can engage communities on needs, priorities, and service delivery failures using various methods. These groups can also train community members on the budget processes to assist in identifying ideal advocacy opportunities in the budget processes.

Information obtained from these engagements can be used optimally to lobby the government to allocate budgets that are responsive to constitutional rights and the needs of communities. Communities that are involved in budget work assist in holding those that are tasked with the safekeeping of public funds accountable while exercising an oversight function over service delivery.

As negotiators in matters of public concern, it is important that CSO's become more effective in [abstracting needs based information from communities](#) to use in the furtherance of their rights driven advocacy<sup>11</sup>.

Tlameo M Mothudi  
Health Researcher : Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM)  
School of Journalism and Media Studies  
T: +27 (0) 46 603 8828 Cell: 071 256 8254  
16B Prince Alfred Street, Grahamstown, 6139  
PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa  
[www.psam.org.za](http://www.psam.org.za) Twitter: @PSAM\_AFRICA

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> F Yusuf Community Participation in the Municipal Budget Process: Two South African Case Studies Foundation for Contemporary Research (FCR) and Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN), South Africa (Accessed on 9 June 2020 at <https://internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/Community-Participation-in-the-Municipal-Budget-Process-Two-South-African-Case-Studies-NL30.pdf>) and J Molepo, C Maleka Community Participation and Budgetary Process in Local Government: The Case of Moses Kotane Local Municipality Journal of Public Administration Volume 53 Number 3 September 2018 (Accessed on 9 June 2020 at [https://journals.co.za/docserver/fulltext/jpad\\_v53\\_n3\\_a10.pdf?expires=1591689685&id=id&accname=57780&checksum=EBBBA2FEDD4D57C9F1D75E59CEB488FF](https://journals.co.za/docserver/fulltext/jpad_v53_n3_a10.pdf?expires=1591689685&id=id&accname=57780&checksum=EBBBA2FEDD4D57C9F1D75E59CEB488FF)).

