



Child Friendly budgeting key to attainment of children's rights

Child Friendly Budgeting Initiative (CFBI) is a fairly new concept in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. The Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children (ZNCWC) adopted the CFBI in 2014 in an effort to ensure that children's rights are promoted, respected and fulfilled. Since then ZNCWC has partnered with other child rights organizations to train children, policy makers and other CSOs on child friendly budgeting so that they can apply the concept in their programmes and activities. There have been encouraging results from these trainings at all levels starting from the children themselves through the Junior Parliament and Junior Council, child led groups, local council authorities and at national programming. However, child rights advocates still have a lot of work to do to ensure that financial support towards children's programmes is adequate to address children's needs.

Simply defined, child friendly budgeting refers to a process of allocating adequate financial resources to sectors of the economy (government ministries) that affect children's rights and welfare directly and indirectly. It is budgeting that ensures the best interests of children are given priority when it comes to policy making at both local and national level. As such, a child friendly budget should cater for the needs of children in order to meet at least the minimum basic standards whilst ensuring progressive realization of children's rights. At an organizational level, a child friendly budget also indicates how the children are actively participating and contributing in the organization's activities and how they are influencing resource allocation in activities. Thus child friendly budgeting can be implemented starting at family level, local council authorities' level, organizational level and national level to ensure that in allocation of resources children's programmes are prioritized and adequately funded.

In order to ensure the progressive realization of children's rights, a budget at all levels should have at least the following elements. Firstly, a budget should be adequate. The amount of money that is allocated to sectors that affect children must be able to meet the basic needs of the child. Secondly, the budget should prioritise sectors that affect children. Thirdly, the budget should make sure that money allocated to children's issues must yield desirable measurable outcomes for children over time (progressive realization of children's rights). Fourthly, the budget must be equitably distributed. Finances must be allocated fairly and proportionally across all geographic locations so as to ensure that all children are reached. Lastly, the budget should be used efficiently and effectively with child representatives monitoring the execution of the budget so as to address questions of whether the money was spent, disbursed and how much of the money went to employment costs.

One of the fundamental elements in coming up with a child friendly budget at all levels is to make sure that children actively participate during budget making process. This allows children to come up with their own budget priority issues as informed by their daily life experiences. ZNCWC, working with other partners such as The Regional Network of the Children and Young People Trust and NANGO, has been engaging and supporting Junior Councils in identifying children's priority areas for the 2018 National Budget.

In order to promote investment in children, Child Rights Network for Southern Africa (CRNSA) which is a regional network for national child rights networks in southern Africa developed an Investment in Children Advocacy Strategy for Southern Africa 2016-2020. Since then CRNSA has been conducting capacity building trainings for its members. As a member of CRNSA, ZNCWC has been trained. Last week there was a training workshop on investment in children-child friendly budgeting hosted by CRNSA in Gaborone, Botswana. It is encouraging how the concept is gaining popularity and is seen to be at the core of child rights advocacy activities.

CRNSA outlines at least six powerful arguments as to why governments should invest in children's rights. The rights argument-based on article 4 of the UNCRC, which notes that state parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, states shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international co-operation.

The posterity argument says national budgets should ensure that children get the best start in life, have access to school, protection from violence and exploitation, live free from HIV/AIDS, and grow up healthy to realize their full potential. Budget tracking should look beyond income and consumption data and service delivery, to identify key structural, social and political constraints as well as economic constraints at household and societal level that hinder children's development.

There is the demographic imperative argument. In Africa children under age of 15 accounted for 41 percent of the population in 2015 and young persons aged 15 to 24 accounted for 19 percent. In guaranteeing a blissful future for southern African states, investment in children must be amongst the primary focus of state parties. True investment in children places premium focus on hearing voices of children in structuring local and national budgets. As such, being a significant population, children should be provided with platforms for them to articulate their views.

The economic argument posits that when national budgets prioritise children, there will be high return in that investment because children will live to fulfill their potential as well as contribute to the development of their societies

The political argument says child sensitive local and national budgets subsequently contribute to peaceful societies and strengthen the social contract between citizens and their governments, resulting in stable political environment.

The moral and social argument states that investing in children is the right thing to do, it contributes to equal and happy societies. Inadequate social investment and high levels of inequality and poverty undermine children's rights. Investment in children can reduce inequality and ensure that adequate services are delivered to children.

As a result of capacity building from CRNSA and other partners like Save the Children and Teres Des Homes Germany, ZNCWC has been able to carry out some activities on child friendly budgeting that will help popularize the concept for it to be used at all levels of budgeting. Working with other partners has paved way for trainings of junior parliamentarians and councilors on child friendly budgeting. There has been an analysis of the approved national budget to check if children's submissions were taken note of. For example, an analysis of the 2015 national budget led to development of a child friendly budget explanatory that children could easily understand.

ZNCWC has also managed to mobilize CSO child rights sector to come up with submissions for the National Budget 2018 priority areas for children. These submissions were made to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare after the committee had requested for input from the child rights sector. There has also been training of journalists on child friendly budgeting. However, there is need to improve efforts on child friendly budgeting in order to keep up the momentum.

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The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO). ZNCWC is a member of NANGO.