



THE WEEKEND READER

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Socio-Economic Justice"

2023 NATIONAL BUDGET: CITIZENS' ASPIRATIONS

2023 National Budget public consultations were running this week (3rd – 7th of October 2022) led by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Finance and Economic Development. A pro-people budget is the cornerstone of human centred economic development. As such, the budget should reflect key priorities for the citizens. ZIMCODD has been tracking citizens' key budget asks and documented the following:

Health and Wellbeing: There was a remarkable increase in allocation towards the health sector in the 2022 National Budget with 14.9% falling 0.1% short of the Abuja Declaration of 15%. However, there must be improvements in expenditure towards the sector as health facilities continue to deteriorate. Health expenditure must reflect the 15% Abuja threshold. The 2023 Budget must prioritize Maternal Health Services and access to the medical care needed to ensure reproductive health, namely family planning services: antenatal, postnatal, delivery care, neonatal, infant care, delivery Care and Infant Care. The citizens demanded that the health budget be increased up to 25%-30% allocation prioritising maternal health service. The health sector has a huge deficit in terms of infrastructure, equipment, drugs and workforce, thus the need to allocate more resources to restore decent service.

Infrastructure Development: At the centre of economic transformation is the need for efficient road networks both in the urban and rural set-ups. The government should prioritise the roads that are in a horrible state in marginalised areas. Lives have been lost due to lack of accessible roads. Residents of Nkayi, Gokwe North and Gokwe South districts bemoan the state of their roads and ask for more resources to be allocated to improving the road networks for easy access to hospitals and markets. Despite the many schools that were built after independence, it is sad that in some rural areas pupils still travel long distances (up to 13km one way) to school in face of many risks especially for the girl child.

Water and sanitation: Considering climate change, spending on water and sanitation must also be a government financing priority. The 2023 Budget allocations should thus allow the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, and local authorities to implement both short term and long-term measures to address the challenge. Government, through Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, must also show efforts in fulfilling its commitment to the eThekweni Declaration which aim to spend 0.5% of national GDP on water and sanitation. Women and young girls are disproportionately affected by the shortage of water, as they spend most of their productive time queuing/ and in search of water.

The 2023 Budget is expected to prioritise the completion of Muda and Kunzvi Dams and allocate more financial resources towards water treatment chemicals to local authorities so as to ease the burden of water crisis for the citizens.

Youth, Sport and Culture: The state and nature of youth, sports and culture in Zimbabwe is worrisome. Youths have fallen to the drug pandemic due to unemployment and idle minds. In sports, Zimbabwe has been banned from participating in football tournaments. Therefore, the 2023 budget must revitalize Vocational Training and Rehabilitation Centers for those who might have become victims of drug abuse. Under sport and recreation, priority must be on rehabilitation and upgrading of sports facilities and recreational centers. In arts and culture, the budget must prioritize initiatives that increase access to facilities and programs for the youth to bring cohesion within communities. Ministry of Sports Arts and Culture should be allocated more resources to capacitate it to increase and improve vocational facilities. Youth are of the view that most who have resorted to use of drugs and substances because they did not have productive activities to keep them occupied.

Transport, Infrastructure and Utilities: There is need for measures to improve on the Mass Public Transport System (MPTS) by increasing more buses or private players into the ZUPCO franchise. In addition, the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructural Development must accelerate road infrastructure development including road networks, air, railways, hospitals, electricity and availability of cheap and affordable broadband services. Most areas including Manicaland, Harare, the transport that has been availed for the public does not match the growing population.

Climate Change Financing: Increased Climate variability has continued to worsen the livelihoods of citizens especially the rural sector who rely on rain-fed agriculture (due to droughts, cyclones etc.). Our budgeting thus far has not catered for this increasing vulnerability. Ministry of Finance and Economic Development should seek a 'green budget' which also considers financing sustainable methodologies to secure future farming initiatives and livelihoods can recover from shocks of climate variability.

Strengthen social safety nets: The government must enforce a budget that caters for resilience and sustainability with women and young girls with disabilities in mind. Government should review and increase cushioning allowances for vulnerable groups in tandem with the poverty datum line thresholds.

Tax reforms: Government should scrap or reduce regressive taxes like the 2% tax. Ministry of Finance is called upon to develop a framework for prudent tax incentives. The current haphazard and off-the-cuff determination is vulnerable to abuse and not beneficial to the nation.



Finally, it is the demand of citizens that the government must budget in US dollar terms to eliminate the need for a supplementary budget as experienced in the current budget. Also, the government needs to improve on its time of disbursements. Timely disbursements are key in attainment of set goals by local authorities which improves the quality-of-service delivery.

Conclusion

The effort in holding consultations is notable and applauded. What remains now is the implementation of the harvested asks. ZIMCOPP will also be sending these key asks to Parliament to pursue their adoption in the 2023 budget.