

25 June 2020

**Joint statement on supplementary budget: Activists lament the lack of additional funding to Basic Education sector, concerned COVID-19 mitigation measures come at expense of long-term infrastructure needs**

Despite the education sector facing new challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, the [supplementary budget](#), tabled by Finance Minister Tito Mboweni on 24 June did not provide additional funding to the basic education sector, opting to roll back key programmes to fund COVID-19 costs.<sup>1</sup>

- **R2.1 billion has now been cut** from the National Department of Basic Education's budget. Some funding that was previously allocated to longer-term projects like support for maths, science and technology and for learners with profound intellectual disabilities, has been cut.
- **A net total of R1.7 billion has been cut from school infrastructure grants alone, and a further R4.4 billion has been reallocated from these grants to cover COVID-19 expenditure needs.** It is astonishing that in a moment which has highlighted the painful consequences of government's failure to provide schools with adequate infrastructure and basic services such as clean water and safe toilets, school infrastructure funding has been further reduced.
- **No new funds have been allocated to the National School Nutrition Programme.** R50 million has been reprioritised within the programme to fund emergency hygiene measures. This is a missed opportunity to boost a programme that reaches millions of learners and, by extension, their families, and could therefore be expanded to assist in meeting escalating food relief needs.

**We are extremely concerned about the outlook for basic education now and in the long-term.** The right to basic education is immediately realisable by law, and the sector serves millions of children every day. But despite facing demonstrable funding shortfalls *before* the COVID-19 crisis, basic education has not been provided with new funds to cope with COVID-19. This is symptomatic of government's commitment to austerity budgeting despite a massive socio-economic crisis. Cuts to education funding will have an impact on the right to basic education and equality for learners across the country for years to come.

**Funding for basic education was diminishing before the pandemic**

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<sup>1</sup> National Treasury. 2020. Supplementary Budget Review. Available at:  
<http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2020S/review/FullSBR.pdf>

Yesterday's budget represents a continuation of concerning trends of underspending on basic education. Recently published [research](#) shows that government spending per learner on basic education *decreased* by an average of 2.3% between 2009 and 2018.<sup>2</sup> The February 2020 budget deepened this trend by cutting the total basic education budget in real terms<sup>3</sup> - possibly the first time this has happened in the democratic era.

**What this means is that the poorest schools in many provinces do not receive adequate funding per learner.** We have also seen the effect of these budget cuts in the suspension of the hiring of teachers resulting in overcrowded classrooms; and a lack of maintenance and upgrading of dilapidated or dangerous infrastructure, leading to learners facing great indignities, and even death, while at school.

### **Implications of cutting school infrastructure budgets**

**No new funding has been allocated to school infrastructure. Instead, existing budgets have been cut and money has been shifted around - or "reprioritised" - to cover emergency costs.**

#### *Education Infrastructure Grant*

The Education Infrastructure Grant (EIG) allocates school infrastructure funding to provinces.

- R2.2 billion has been **cut** from the grant – R600 million of which was transferred to the School Infrastructure Backlog Grant (SIBG).
- R4.4 billion has been "reprioritised" within the EIG. This is one of the largest reprioritisations in the budget and is aimed at funding the purchase of sanitisation materials and equipment, as well as funding salaries for temporary staff to screen learners and clean and sanitise school facilities.
- While R11 billion was allocated to the EIG for the current financial year in the February budget, the reprioritisation and reduction of these funds has left only R4.3 billion for planned projects.

#### *School Infrastructure Backlog Grant (SIBG)*

The nationally administered SIBG will receive an additional R600 million - from the EIG - to provide temporary access to water and sanitation in schools. A total of R60 million has been cut from this grant.

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<sup>2</sup> This calculation takes into account that inflation in education tends to be higher than CPI inflation, because major cost drivers such as salaries, may increase faster than inflation.

<sup>3</sup> When inflation is taken into account

**Table showing changes to education infrastructure grant funding**

| '000                                | Additional funds     | Funds cut                | Net Change         |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>EIG</b>                          | 0                    | (2 221 000) <sup>4</sup> | (2 221 000)        |
| <b>SIBG</b>                         | 600 000 <sup>5</sup> | (60 000)                 | 540 000            |
| <b>Total infrastructure funding</b> | <b>600 000</b>       | <b>(2 281 000)</b>       | <b>(1 681 000)</b> |

Source: [Supplementary Budget Review](#)

While we welcome plans to deliver water tankers, soap, sanitisers, mobile toilets and mobile classrooms to schools to ensure minimum safety and hygiene standards during COVID-19, we caution that **these interventions are stop-gaps to problems which government has historically failed to resolve**. These interventions are temporary and some will require upgrades and frequent maintenance.

**Cuts to infrastructure funding jeopardises long-term infrastructure projects** already in the pipeline: plans to build new schools and replace unsafe ones, scheduled repair and maintenance projects, or plans to deliver permanent water and sanitation infrastructure, will now be forced to grind to a halt.

**The near total suspension of the education infrastructure programme for the 2020/21 financial year is an extreme and regressive measure.** It sets the achievement of [Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure](#), including the eradication of plain pit toilets, back by yet another year. This will mean that learners and teachers continue to go to schools that are dangerous, unhygienic and unfit for learning.

#### **Lack of transparency and engagement prior to the tabling of the Supplementary Budget**

In the interests of transparency, we have written to the National Treasury and the Department of Basic Education on two occasions to highlight our concerns regarding funding towards COVID-19 safety measures at schools, and have received minimal feedback.

**Transparency is critical to ensure that budget allocations prioritise the greatest need and that financial loss due to corruption and maladministration is limited.** This is especially true in the current circumstances, where emergency procurement and urgent funding is required.

South Africa is an [Open Government Partnership](#)<sup>6</sup> (OGP) signatory - and the government's limited disclosure in advance of yesterday's tabling is telling. Minister Mboweni's supplementary budget did

<sup>4</sup> Brackets around a figure indicate that it is a *negative* change - here, 2 221 000 has been shifted out of the EIG.

<sup>5</sup> This money was cut from the EIG and allocated to the SIBG. Therefore, it does not reflect new funding being allocated to emergency infrastructure delivery.

<sup>6</sup> The Open Government Partnership (OGP) has emphasised the need for governments to disclose not only their detailed economic recovery plans (including budgeting and procurement plans) but also their service delivery interventions in sectors such as health and education.

little to allay concerns regarding transparency in the budgeting and decision-making process. Notably - Minister Mboweni stressed the need for communities to hold departments to account for the delivery of services. This is simply not possible in the absence of clear, credible information that is accessible to oversight actors and the public.<sup>7</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While difficult decisions need to be made about resource allocation in the context of COVID-19, we reiterate that education infrastructure and other programmes are critical to fulfilling the constitutional rights to basic education and equality. Without additional funding to address COVID-19 safety measures, the already hamstrung basic education budget is placed under further strain - jeopardising the realisation of learners' rights to basic education and equality.

[END]

### **To arrange an interview, contact:**

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<sup>7</sup> In our previous engagements with the Department of Basic Education and National Treasury - we listed our core concerns pertaining to access to budget and planning information.