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PRESS RELEASE

CIVIL SOCIETY PROPOSES ALTERNATIVE, PEOPLE-CENTERED BUDGET

Broad collective of socio-economic rights organisations offer example of a budget which takes ordinary South Africans seriously.

Minister Gigaba will be asked to make hard, but essential budget choices in his first budget speech in Parliament tomorrow.

But the Minister's task will be to allocate funds in such a way as to ensure that South Africa's chronic poverty and inequality are alleviated, and that effect is given to the rights of the most vulnerable.

A broad cross-section of South African civil society has collaborated to draft an alternative 'Human Rights Budget', which sets out what a budget that takes the rights of ordinary people seriously would look like.

After much political uncertainty over the last few weeks, Cyril Ramaphosa has been sworn in as president. In his maiden State of the Nation Address, President Ramaphosa, highlighted that, "tough decisions have to be made to close our fiscal gap, stabilise our debt and restore our state-owned enterprise..." Dealing with all these factors is necessary, but the trade-offs that we anticipate should not impede upon people's access to their constitutional rights.

For example, national budgets for land reform and restitution have been in decline for more than a decade. These allocations have constrained land reform. The state paying market price has limited how much land can be acquired. Land redistribution has been limited by the diversion of funds according to internally competing departmental priorities. And the capacity of the department of Rural Development and Land Reform has been constrained by operational budgets. The empty posts in the department's land reform programme stand at 26%, and over 21% in the restitution programme.

Approximately 63% of the country's population resides in urban areas. However, the Urban Settlements Development Grant, which is used for the upgrading of informal settlements and the acquisition of well-located land is regularly underspent.

The baseline funding available for basic education was revised downwards by both former finance minister Pravin Gordhan and by Minister Gigaba in 2017. This means we are investing less in basic education today than we had planned to prior to 2017.

The need to increase investment in basic education has never been more persuasive. South African learners are failing to meet basic literacy and numeracy standards: 78% of grade 4 students cannot read for meaning.

On the other side of the coin, the Department of Higher Education and Training must engage the Finance Minister and National Treasury to explore alternative ways of funding free higher education – cutting the bloated Cabinet, reducing the employment of consultants, and stamping out tax evasion by the very wealthy. The solutions must be unashamedly pro-poor.

Though fiscal conditions remain tough, the President and Minister of Finance should undertake to increase the resources available to the state for advancing these rights. Where cost-cutting is necessary, it should not be at the expense of people's rights.

For civil society's human rights budget: [read here](#)

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