



*Building up knowledge  
to break down Poverty*

Chiawelo Budgeting for Change, Community Statement on  
COVID-19 realities, and demands for a more adequate and  
people-centred response

21 July 2020



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**Chiawelo Budgeting for Change, Community Statement on COVID-19 realities, and demands for a more adequate and people-centred response.**

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**Introduction of the Statement**

“In Chiawelo, we are united as a community; people are kind, loving and supportive but most of all it's a place full of diversity- it allows us to learn different cultures, languages and teaches us to respect different people”. These are the words of eighteen-year-old Sanele Nkosi, the youngest member of our Chiawelo Budgeting for Change (CBC) Group, based in Soweto, Johannesburg. We are definitely a reflection of Sanele’s words, with our group including many different people from many different walks of life. Chiawelo Budgeting for Change includes Traditional Healers from the Traditional Healers Organisation (THO), people committed to community upliftment through a group called Give ‘n Take, Chiawelo Community Practice (CCP) clinic workers, Community Health Workers, Ward Based Outreach Teams (WBOT), Clinic Committee members, Local government officials, committee members from a variety of community health promotion clubs, amongst others.

The purpose of our group is to promote public participation in government budget processes in order to improve healthcare delivery and access to health rights. In the context of COVID-19, we have established a community WhatsApp group, led by a community elected Steering Committee, for coordination and communication. We share vital information such as the latest COVID-19 updates, information for budget advocacy and engagement, as well as issues that concern our Municipality from a health perspective. We also ask each other for advice and coordinate community actions in order to address important problems.

We support our community in fast and effective ways and we expect the government to do the same for our people! Government needs to do better for us; they claim that they address our needs, but we do not see that on the ground. We had hoped that in this COVID-19 pandemic, the government would increasingly consider the difficult realities of the people but, unfortunately, the government continues to fail us as our socio-economic problems and access to health rights worsen. We are putting together this submission as a group of engaged citizens, actively working for change. We have the right to health! We have the right to dignity! It is time that the people are heard and acknowledged in order for us to see better realities where our constitutional rights are realised! We seek responses from the Government that consider and respond to the realities of people like us, as well as the urgent transformation and development of Chiawelo! In this Community Statement, we highlight the realities

we face and the problems we experience, all framed from the perspective of health. In this statement we address the following important issues, which we experience on a day-to-day basis:

- **Lack of access to social protection**
- **Gender-based violence**
- **Recklessness in the reopening of educational institutions**
- **Youth unemployment**
- **Lack of support to the small business sector**
- **Lack of mental health support in the context of chronic unemployment**
- **Lack of support to community-led COVID-19 responses**
- **Lack of safe transport**
- **Lack of access to electricity**
- **Lack of access to food security**
- **The exclusion of Traditional Healers from the current COVID-19 reponse**
- **Lack of access to adequate health services**
- **Poor functioning of Municipalities**
- **Poor sanitation services**
- **Lack of support to community safety initiatives**
- **Poor working conditions for Community Health Workers (CHWs)**

We raise these issues and make demands for positive change, which we hope will be able to influence effective policy decisions.

### **Lack of access to social protection**

Many within our community have not been able to access the Social Relief of Distress (SRoD) Grant and have been greatly disturbed by the poor communication process in relation to applications and rejections. Both this grant, as well as other grants, are currently insufficient to make a difference to the lives of the people. The expanded unemployment rate for Black South Africans is currently at 43% (PMBEJD) and in addition to this awful reality, recent findings in relation to COVID-19, show a *further* 18% decline in employment, with an additional 3 million people having recently lost their jobs, and with 1-in-3 having recently lost their income (NIDS-CRAM). The COVID-19 situation is greatly increasing existing inequalities and it is primarily Black South Africans, low wage earners, manual labourers and womxn who have experienced the greatest impacts (NIDS-CRAM). According to recent

findings, a significant number of the newly unemployed are in households with no grants (NIDS-CRAM). The people of South Africa cannot be condemned to starve with no options for employment! There needs to be an immediate expansion of social protection in South Africa, in order to benefit both the economy and the people, and to empower us to access and create opportunities for ourselves! Increased social protection is vitally important for a number of positive health impacts, including mental health and increased access to health systems and services.

- **We demand that the poor communication in relation to the SRoD Grant be urgently addressed.**
- **We demand that the improved implementation of the SRoD Grant be considered as the *first step* in establishing permanent social protection for those between 18 and 59.**
- **We demand the immediate implementation of a Basic Income Grant/ Guarantee to the people and suggest that this should be Universal in order to alleviate the implementation woes that we have all seen too clearly in relation to the poor roll out of the SRoD Grant.**
- **We demand the immediate raising of the Child Support Grant (CSG) to *at least* the level of the Food Poverty Line (R561). Recent research has shown that the CSG is well targeted to alleviate child hunger. Increasing the CSG is essential when the stunting levels for children under 5 in South Africa currently reach up to 30%.**

### **Gender-Based Violence**

Gender-based violence is increasing at an alarmingly high rate during the lockdown. Both before and during this pandemic, we are seeing a gross violation of the human rights of womxn, as well as members of the LGBTQI+ communities. There can be no realisation of the rights to health and dignity while GBV remains inadequately addressed!

- **We demand increased resources to organisations that provide shelter, counselling and legal aid to survivors of GBV.**
- **We demand improved access to police and courts that are trained in gender sensitivity and appropriate and supportive responses to GBV.**
- **We demand mass gender sensitivity education to the public, especially for the youth; informing people of their rights, how to access justice and support, and dismantling gendered stereotypes which lead to harmful outcomes.**

- **We urgently need to create an environment of zero-tolerance and demand stricter sentencing for perpetrators of GBV in order to achieve justice for survivors and actively discourage further crimes.**

### **Recklessness in the reopening of educational institutions**

We are concerned about the reopening of higher education institutions and schools in the country. Since the reopening of schools at the start of June, hundreds of learners and teachers across South Africa have tested positive for COVID-19. We feel that the decision to reopen schools was reckless given that some schools do not have enough space to implement social distancing measures nor do they have adequate water and sanitation infrastructure to ensure hygiene practices. Water tanks are still yet to be delivered to several schools that do not have running water.

Over 100 schools in South Africa had to be temporarily closed since they reopened in June as cases of Covid-19 infections were reported at these schools. Moreover, South Africa's largest teachers union (South African Democratic Teachers Union-Sadtu) is pleading to government to close schools as infections among teachers and learners continues to rise.

The opening of higher education institutions is also problematic because students are likely to consume alcohol and this sometimes leads to poor decision-making such as unprotected sex or violent behaviour.

- **Government needs to listen to the demands of our academic staff , support staff and learners, who are at more risk of contracting of COVID-19. Schools should be closed until we see that infection rate has dropped drastically.**
- **Government needs to support teachers and learners with online learning processes.**
- **This pandemic has made very clear the poor state of school infrastructure. We ask government to make long term investment to improve the infrastructure in our schools. This should include water and sanitation facilities and spacious classroom.**

### **Youth Unemployment**

South Africa has one of the worst youth unemployment rates in the world. According to the first Quarterly Labour force Survey of 2020, there are 16.4 million people in the country that are not in employment, education or training. Of those 16.4 million, 8 million people are below 35 years.

Addressing high unemployment among our youth in Chiawelo is a high priority because this is one of the most serious problems in the community. Many young people have not had the opportunity to gain any work experience after finishing school and there are others who have just given up job searching after years of being unemployed. Joblessness also has an impact on health outcomes for the youth as lack of financial resources compromises their access to healthcare services- for instance , a person needs money to take transportation to the clinic.

**We call on the government to create better opportunities for young people in South Africa.**

- **The country needs to tackle nepotism when it comes to hiring employees. Companies, government and non-government institutions should hire people because they are the most suited to the job.**
- **Government also needs to create a more enabling environment for the youth to start their own businesses. Young people have innovative ideas, however, they are restricted in making these ideas become profitable because of the hassles involved in starting a business. The process to register a business should be uncomplicated and funding opportunities should be easily accessible.**
- **If South Africa is committed to pursuing sustainable development, the youth need to be included in decision-making processes ,especially in implementing the framework for the 2030 National Development Plan. The youth will be at the forefront of steering development in the future so they need to gain the experience and skills to do this effectively.**
- **From a health perspective, we demand increased pathways to employment and support to entrepreneurship initiatives in South Africa. The livelihood of the township depends on local economy. As such the youth in our township should be receiving support to launch their own small businesses so they can have a source of income and be able to access vital services like healthcare.**

#### **Lack of support to the small business sector**

To qualify for the SMME relief programme, SMMEs must prove that they were in good financial health prior to COVID-19, despite the fact that many SMMEs battled before the pandemic with a lack of access to finances, late payments from clients, etc. Problematically, the current relief scheme also excludes the use of funds for operational expenses such as salaries and rent.

COVID-19 has already created one of the worst economic disasters we have ever witnessed, and the problems are likely to still increase. The lifeblood of the township economy is small businesses and



yet, the majority of our small businesses are not eligible to apply for financial support from our government or from the banks.

Most owners of SMMEs in our townships are still experiencing the impacts of our country's systemic racist past and do not have access to generational wealth to rescue businesses in times of financial stress. Access to income and opportunities have direct impacts on the health of our people!

- **We call on the Government to establish more realistically responsive systems when it comes to supporting SMMEs, particularly in township contexts. We demand that the barriers to access for the current relief programme be urgently assessed and addressed.**
- **We demand that the Government, banks and other financiers relax the currently stringent and insurmountable requirements for applying for financial support, in ways that ensure that township based SMMEs do not continue to be excluded.**

#### **Lack of mental health support in the context of chronic unemployment**

Chronic unemployment needs to urgently be addressed, particularly in relation to the youth, and this response must include increased mental health support for those dealing with depression in response to the difficult realities they face.

- **We see unemployment as a mental health issue and, with unemployment being chronic in South Africa, we demand increased access to mental health services at the District level, with increased capacity for mental health professionals at all public clinics and hospitals and through increased support to measures such as mental health helplines.**

#### **Lack of support to community-led COVID-19 responses**

Concerning the fight against COVID-19, we should be enabled to take the lead as a community in responding to COVID-19 in Chiawelo, as we know our community better than anyone else from outside. In our community, we still have some people who have limited information on COVID-19 which has led to them having fear and paranoia about the virus. Communication on COVID-19 needs to be better and related services need to be far more accessible. Communities like ours need to be more supported in community driven responses, such as [Community Action Network \(CAN\)s](#), Primary Health Care initiatives and Community Healthcare Workers (CHWs).

- **We support the NIDS-CRAM recommendations that there should be increased support to community health initiatives. We need support to strengthen local coordination structures to promote key preventative behaviours: with a focus on mask-wearing and physical distancing.**
- **Additionally, we need clear, concise, and consistent communication: to improve knowledge of symptoms, especially weakness/tiredness, and treatment. This messaging needs to include community media such as radio stations, newspapers and flyers.**
- **In order to address fear, panic and stigmatisation within our communities, messaging needs to be anchored in hope and a positive vision for the future.**

### **Lack of safe transport**

Despite the current and increasing severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government recently announced that taxis can operate at 100% capacity. We think this is a reckless, anti-poor decision as it poses a major health risk for commuters who do not have access to alternative means of transportation and who are forced to use taxis on a daily basis.

- **We demand that the Government urgently withdraw the decision for taxis to operate at full capacity and re-enforce the decision for taxis to operate at 70% capacity. This is urgent in order for the poor not to be condemned to contracting the virus.**

### **Lack of access to electricity**

Lack of access to electricity poses very serious health risks. While the state-owned power utility, Eskom, has been receiving immense financial bailouts from the government for several years, it is still failing to deliver electricity to the people and it is constantly implementing heavy load shedding, which disproportionately affects locations like ours. Additionally, Eskom continues to be at the centre of corruption and mismanagement stories.

It is very distressing that we have neighbourhoods that have gone without electricity for two years. Electricity is vital for our health, especially in these cold winter months when people are more vulnerable to flu and, more seriously, to COVID-19. There are people with chronic diseases in Chiawelo who have compromised immune systems and thus require increased protection measures at this time. We have recently seen a tragic situation in which one of our community members who required access

to electricity for their chronic health support died due to a lack of access to electricity. It is vitally important that access to electricity is seen as access to health and to life!

- **We demand that the government clamp down on corruption at Eskom and ensure funds are used effectively to supply electricity to all communities in South Africa.**
- **We demand that the government urgently consider access to electricity as access to health and to life and immediately investigate and implement alternative and more environmentally friendly and accessible methods of power generation, beyond a sole reliance on Eskom.**
- **We demand the increased and more accessible service provision of electricity to townships!**
- **In the context of people needing electricity for health and for important life support, we call for loadshedding to be seriously reconsidered and reduced, particularly in townships, and particularly during the winter season!**

#### **Lack of access to food security**

As a community we are severely concerned with a lack of access to food security for the majority of our people. Many of us in Chiawelo have direct experience with hunger and we are not alone! Recent studies show that *half* of all South African households (47%) ran out of money to buy food in April (NIDS-CRAM). This situation has been further frustrated by recent corruption and misadministration in relation to food parcels, which many community members were not able to access and which are now no longer being distributed. Access to sufficient nourishment has also been frustrated by recent lack of access to the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). Food security is essential for the realisation of our Constitutional rights to health and dignity!

- **We demand that the issue of food security be immediately and decisively addressed! We recommend increased support and funding for community led food relief efforts as an important and necessary way to do so!**
- **Recent research has shown that families living on low incomes my now be spending 30% more on food than they did two months ago. We demand that the rampant profiteering by supermarkets, at the expense of the people, be immediately addressed and reversed.**
- **We call for more progressive thinking in relation to VAT on essential food items, and, when this severely impacts communities like Chiawelo, we demand that this be abolished!**

### **The exclusion of Traditional Healers from the current COVID-19 response**

Within our community group, we have many Traditional Healers, some of whom represent the Traditional Healers Organisation (THO). As Traditional Healers, we are disturbed by the current exclusion of our indigenous knowledge systems as part of a comprehensive COVID-19 response. Especially in times of distress, people seek the comfort of their familiar and accessible health systems and these need to be more actively included in a public health response to the pandemic. This would significantly increase access to health systems at the Community level.

- **We demand that Traditional Healers are immediately and respectfully drawn into the pandemic response, being properly equipped and supported to provide frontline health services and beneficial indigenous medical knowledge, perspectives and advice.**

### **Lack of access to adequate health services**

According to recent findings, 1-in-4 respondents, or 23%, reported they were unable to access medication, condoms or contraception during the COVID-19 pandemic (NIDS-CRAM). In our community, we are also experiencing the increased inaccessibility of medication due to people being too fearful to access clinics and health services.

- **We demand that the inaccessibility of vital medications be urgently addressed.**
- **We demand the increased visibility of safety measures and messaging in clinics in order to protect and encourage those needing to access urgent health services at this time.**
- **We demand that the lack of capacity and understaffing of clinics be urgently addressed and rectified.**
- **We demand increased protection for all clinic workers so they are not unnecessarily infected and removed from delivering frontline health services.**

### **Poor functioning of Municipalities**

Municipalities are primarily responsible for the frontline delivery of essential services in South Africa. In the face of a severe and worsening service delivery crisis, it is essential that Municipalities are empowered to serve the people. Municipalities require better resources for administration and improved systems with increased oversight into corruption and underspending. It is also important that Municipalities are adequately resourced to perform their frontline functions. If we care about the people of this country, and their constitutional entitlements to Dignity and Health, we have to urgently prioritise strengthening and resourcing this system as one of the most impactful and necessary for the realisation of socio-economic rights in South Africa.

This is necessity in the current context where preliminary reports on the economic impact of COVID-19 on Municipalities have shown an aggregate 30% drop in revenue in April 2020, with some Municipalities seeing a drop in revenue as high as 60% in the same month ([COVID19 Response DoR Amendment Bill p.6](#)). What is also a huge cause for concern is that people are increasingly unable to pay their Municipal bills, as they prioritise trying to feed themselves and their families. All of this forms a stark picture of the urgent and immediate need for increased allocations and resources for improved capacity at this level.

From what we have seen, as members of the Chiawelo community, our Municipalities also need to be better equipped to provide the basic medical equipment to our health facilities, and to respond to the challenge of understaffing, which undermines our health rights. This is essential for the realisation of the health of the people.

- **If we are serious about the realisation of socio-economic and health rights for the people, the strengthening, capacitating and resourcing of Municipalities needs to be an urgent and visible priority**
- **We demand that, in the context of the reality of Municipalities simply not currently being able to generate any kind of significant income on their own, that the allocations to the Municipal level, through the Municipal Equitable Share be significantly increased.**
- **Municipalities faced a R 5.6 billion cut to their budget in the February Budget Review, the majority of which came from cuts to Local Conditional Grants. In the COVID-19 situation, where the tasks that need to be performed by Municipalities is substantially increasing, we demand that these allocations be urgently revised and the Percentage Share that Municipalities receive be substantially increased.**

### **Poor sanitation services**

We understand that Health is not only about the care you receive from the clinics and hospitals, but it also stems from our surroundings. Because a healthy environment contributes positively to our state of well-being, we demand better sanitation in our community. We want to see an improvement on waste collection services so that our streets can be cleaner. We cannot live in healthy environments when it takes a long time to get sewer maintenance fixed.

- **We demand cleaner and safer sanitation not just for our health, but for the sake of our children.**

- **We reject the recent reductions made in the Water Services Infrastructure grant, on the basis that any disinvestment from this infrastructure hinders the realisation of our rights to proper sanitation and health.**
- **We demand that when sanitation complaints have been logged, that they be addressed in a timely manner.**

#### **Lack of support to community safety initiatives**

Safety has always been a big concern in our communities. Criminal activity plays into the broader well-being of the community members. The Community Policing Forum is a community led coalition that seeks to provide a more immediate response to security and safety. The presence of the CPF has given us a sense of security that the Police services have failed to do. Support to community safety initiatives is also important for reducing police brutality which has seen multiple violent deaths occur during the lockdown.

- **We call for better support to be given to CPF officers in the community. We also call for CPFs to be given more formal authority.**
- **We, as a community, strongly reject acts of excessive force by the police. We are calling for an immediate commitment from the government to end police brutality.**
- **Corruption of police officers needs to urgently be addressed in order to restore confidence and to create more beneficial engagements between communities and the police.**
- **We call for better security in and around health facilities, so that community members feel safe accessing health services.**

#### **Poor working conditions for Community Health Workers**

We are very proud to have Community Health Workers represented in our Chiawelo Budgeting for Change group. Our CHW's play a vital role, not only in sharing health information throughout the community, but also in bridging the inaccessibility gap to our current health system. CHWs serve and respond to the needs of our people by visiting homes and bringing health care to our doorsteps. While our CHW's had received some basic training on how to operate during this time, we are incredibly disheartened that some of our Community Health Workers are being expected to pay for their own masks and sanitisers. This is unacceptable when CHWs are risking their lives in order to deliver frontline health services.

- **We demand better and free access to PPE for our Community Health Workers in order to enable their safety while delivering better health access to the communities they serve.**

- **As a community, we strongly condemn the recent attacks on Community Health Workers protesting for better working conditions in Bhisho, in the Eastern Cape.**
- **Recognising and respecting the vital importance of CHWs for the COVID-19 response, as well as for better Primary Healthcare Services towards the implementation of the NHI, we demand better working conditions for all CHWs, including better remuneration at a more reasonable living wage, and improved contract security as permanent employees.**

### **Conclusion**

We appreciate this opportunity to be seen, heard and understood. Voices from the community are essential for ensuring adequate responses that are people-centred. We hope that this statement can form a record of experiences on the ground, from those most severely impacted by COVID-19, in order to positively influence the creation and implementation of effective actions! While we do everything we can to proactively better our own reality as a community, we desperately need recognition, assistance, support and resources to further enable us. In the end, our demand is simple; a people-centred response to the COVID-19 pandemic and access to the rights we are entitled to!