

Press statement

Budget analysis and budget

The Coordinating Assembly of NGOs successfully convened a meeting for NGOs and other civil society actors to reflect on the expectation of the national budget to be presented by the Minister of Finance on Wednesday the 9th March 2004.

The participants were able to review the government policy statement referred to as the Smart Programme for Economic empowerment and Development (SPEED) which serve to outline key government policy directives for 20054/20006.

To facilitate common understanding on this complex issue of national budget process, participants were exposed on the budget process in Swaziland, where they were able to analyse the role players involved in this national exercise. The participants lamented that the process is largely government owned and excludes participation of citizenry including their representatives in Parliament. However, noted some efforts efforts being made by government to involve citizens in the budget process.

Notwithstanding that the process is not yet open, the participants expressed their expectation of the budget to be presented on the 9th March 2005. It was the view of participants that the budget should address the following priority areas, which are largely outlined in the Kings Speech and the government policy statement.

- Education sectors where permanent posts should be created as part of efforts to ensure quality education, investment in special education, universal primary education and infrastructure development.
- Health sector - where more resources need to be allocated for drugs and supplies, invest in staff retention just to mention a few
- Revamped Social Welfare Department to ensure access to social security for the elderly and other vulnerable groups.
- More resources for HIV/AIDS to match donor's support. This was based on the observation that government in the past years allocated about twenty Emalangeni (equivalent to Rands) to the organisation responsible for coordinating the fight against HIV/AIDS.

- Effective poverty reduction programmes including support for small business enterprises; ensure that the poor access resources to engage in income generation project and more importantly to provide resources for training to unleash their potential. The participants also expressed more budgetary allocation for the agriculture, as currently over 200,000 are dependent on food aid.
 - The participants further expressed the need for government to show greater commitment to fight corruption in the country. To this end, the Anti Corruption Unit was expected to be given power and requisite resources to effectively fight corruption.
 - The participants stressed the need for a transparency in debating all budget allocations.
 - They also highlighted need for the budget to create jobs
 - It should facilitate equitable distribution of national resources. Hence, it should deal with inequalities in society and not perpetuate them.

Statement prepared by the Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organisations (CANGO)- Mbabane (4 March 2005) -.

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