



Education Budget Cuts: A ticking time bomb for SA's future

Cape Town, October 25, 2023 - It is anticipated that funding for basic education will be slashed in the upcoming Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS), which, in turn, will drastically reduce the number of children able to access the early childhood development (ECD) subsidy. This will worsen the already disastrous situation of 40% of South African children aged 0–4 years not attending any ECD programmes, with significant consequences for South Africa's future.

This is according to Deb Zelezniak, CEO at the Santa Shoebox Projects, who explains that access to quality ECD programmes has been proven to play a critical role in breaking the cycle of poverty, protecting children from poor nutrition and supporting them in reaching developmental milestones. This in turn, results in enhanced school performance, lower dropout rates and fewer social problems later in life.

"However, if the budget is cut, it will disproportionately affect underprivileged children who rely on ECD subsidies to access this foundational phase of their education, setting them up to lag behind their more privileged peers," she points out. "The implications are grim, as this will further exacerbate the existing skills shortage amongst our youth and ultimately impact the future of the South African economy."

Zelezniak's central concern is that a thorough assessment of need has not been carried out in terms of resource allocation. "Compounding the problem is that most ECD centre owners are unable to confidently report shortfalls in their offering, with the associated fear that their inability to meet the Department of Basic Education (DBE) requirements may result in them not receiving the subsidy for every child in their care. Furthermore, these requirements differ by region, making the process even more challenging."

"Fewer subsidies will also mean centre owners will be unable to accept more children, hampering their ability to become financially sustainable and upgrade the facilities they offer. This would not only put them in a better position for the registration of their ECD centres with the DBE, but would also enable them to provide food and safe toilets and meet other basic needs of the children in their care," she highlights.

"ECD practitioners could be hit hard by the budget cuts too, as the bulk of Government funding is spent on children in grade R rather than those in ECD programmes," adds Zelezniak. The latest Public Expenditure and Institutional Review (PEIR) attributes this discrepancy in spending to the differences in the annual average cost of grade R educators compared to that of ECD practitioners, with salaries among the former being five times higher.

She calls for this injustice to be addressed. "Many ECD practitioners are under- or unqualified which puts them on the back foot when it comes to making salary demands. It's a catch-22: they can't earn a higher salary because they're unqualified, and they can't become qualified because they're earning too little to afford to upskill themselves. DBE funds would be well spent in offering formal qualifications to ECD practitioners."

"If South Africa is to improve its society and economy, it needs to make investment in early childhood development a priority," concludes Zelezniak.

About the Santa Shoebox Programmes

Traditional Santa Shoebox: Over the last 17 years, 1 152 587 Santa Shoeboxes each containing eight specified items of treats and essentials have been given to underprivileged and socially vulnerable children throughout South Africa and Namibia. From 01 September each year, Santa Shoebox donors choose their beneficiary child/ren by name, age and gender and are given the child's clothing size. Each personalised shoebox reaches the very child for whom it was pledged. Using the Santa Shoebox app, donors are able to track their shoebox from the moment it is pledged to the magical moment it is handed to the child.

Virtual Santa Shoebox: These shoeboxes are purchased online by donors and are available year-round, meeting the needs of donors who live too far from drop-off points, are too busy to shop or have health issues. Components are chosen by the donor on the Santa Shoebox website, the shoeboxes are packed by the Santa Shoebox Team and delivered to children attending far-flung rural facilities. A Virtual Santa Shoebox contains the eight specified items, as well as additional items, such as a lunchbox and books. A Virtual Santa Shoebox costs R450 plus an optional delivery fee of R30.

Santa Shoebox Legacy: All Santa Shoebox Project operating costs are covered by corporate sponsors. Privately donated funds have been accruing under the SSB Legacy Fund which are now being used to bring permanent change to the lives of Santa Shoebox beneficiary children and the impoverished communities in which they live.

Fiduciary information: As a Level One Contributor to B-BBEE, the Santa Shoebox Project earns 100 points on the generic scorecard, and with Section 18A status, is able to provide a tax-deductible receipt in recognition of donations. The Project is an initiative of the JOG Trust (IT2671/2009). The Trust is registered as a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO-930031301), a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO 102-098) and holds a current ICPR in support of 100% SED compliance.

Social media:

TikTok: @santa.shoebox

Facebook: /SantaShoebox

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Instagram: /santashoebox

YouTube: The Santa Shoebox Project

Pinterest: /santashoebox