

Advocacy and Finance - South African Regional Budget Project

Overview

The overall goal of the Economic Justice Network¹ and Christian Aid Southern African Budget Advocacy Project is to contribute towards pro-poor national budget allocations, expenditures, and outcomes in Southern African countries by building the capacity of church bodies and their national partners to become advocates for the poor in national budget processes.

EJN and CA aim to achieve the following objectives:

- To raise awareness among churches of the importance of Government budgets and their allocation as a tool for reducing poverty
- To build the capacity of churches to analyse national, regional, and local budgets
- To support existing activities and build the capacity of churches to advocate for pro-poor budget resource envelopes, expenditures, and outcomes
- To build the capacity of churches to monitor budget income, expenditure, and outcomes
- To support the creation of a budget learning and sharing network among churches in southern Africa
- To contribute to global advocacy for an increase in aid, better quality (poverty reducing) aid, more debt relief, better loan management and improved participation of citizens in economic policy-making in developing and least developed countries.

The project started in October 2002 and will run until December 2005 over three different phases. In phase one, budget awareness raising and learning activities will take place at a regional level (October 2002 to April 2003). In phase two, budget awareness raising, learning, advocacy, and monitoring activities will take place at the national level (May 2003 to December 2005). In phase three, a regional learning and sharing network will be set up and experiences will feed into global advocacy initiatives (January 2005-December 2005).

Progress to Date - Phase One

In April 2003 delegates from five Southern African countries gathered in Malawi for a five and a half day workshop on analysis, advocacy and monitoring of government budgets. Only five out of the 11 countries whose councils of churches are members of FOCCISA took part in the training week. They were self-selected according to whether budget work is an existing or planned priority in their core activities and according to their capacity to benefit from such training. The national Church Councils of Zimbabwe, Zambia, Swaziland, Malawi and Mozambique selected the core participants to the workshop. National delegations were made up of office

¹ EJN is a project of the Fellowship of Christian Councils of Southern Africa, a loose grouping of 11 Christian councils in southern Africa. FOCCISA rotates its secretariat every few years. It is currently headed by the Swaziland Council of Churches.

bearers from within the Councils, volunteer church activists, members of other church-related agencies, accompanied by resource persons who were NGO experts and even one member of a national Ministry of Finance. Observers attended from Rwanda, Ghana and Angola in the hope that a multiplier effect may take place in these regions.

The training was based on adult learning methods and emphasised the practical application of skills. The objective was for participants to develop a process in their own organisations and networks back home to pass-on their knowledge and skills.

Implementing Phase Two

Participants at the regional training workshop jointly decided to continue working together under the umbrella of the EJM to integrate applied budget work in the core activities of their churches, councils and organisations. They wanted the EJM and Christian Aid to assist them in this endeavour by facilitating continued networking and learning amongst themselves and by assisting them to find the resources needed to start up or expand applied budget work. Participants from six countries – Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – have indicated that they wish to participate in phase two of the project.

Each country delegation drew up a plan outlining the process they will follow to develop a proposal for national applied budget activities. Each proposal will necessarily propose a different type of budget project, based on different starting points, challenges and needs faced by church communities in the six different countries. Activities would range from setting up an economic justice desk to manage the project (where this does not exist), to budget literacy training for church members, community-level monitoring of budget delivery, national budget analysis and advocacy, targeting decision-makers, parliaments and donors, and regional capacity (based in EJM) to manage the project. Participants advised that they would need a three-month period to prepare national proposals (April to July 2003) given the necessary consultation processes with the structures and networks they hope to include in the proposal.

Future Work

Christian Aid and the Economic Justice Network are committed to assist in developing the proposals and to consolidate all six proposals into a regional budget project, managed by the Economic Justice Network as part of its core activities over the next three years. We believe that this bottom-up process of developing the project is very important for its sustainability when outside funding comes to an end.