



## **Children's Budgeting: Briefing for Children and Young People's Committee**

### **Children's budgeting and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**

Save the Children welcomes the Committee's inquiry into children's budgeting. Save the Children is of the view that routine analysis of public expenditure on children is a powerful tool for understanding and monitoring what governments (at both a national and local level) are doing to promote the rights and well-being of children. Information on the spending on children needs to be considered alongside government policies, strategies and information on the outcomes of these policies for children and young people.

The way in which budgets are currently constructed in Wales and indeed across the UK makes it very difficult to identify what is actually spent on children and also on particular groups of vulnerable or disadvantaged children. More transparency is needed to ensure that civil society can be aware of the budget allocations for children and how they are changing over time and whether this money is reaching the intended beneficiaries of particular policies or initiatives.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have made it clear that compliance with the UN Convention requires State parties to analyse public expenditure on children and determine that in line with Article 4 of the Convention they are spending the 'maximum available resources' to fulfil children's rights. The Committee made recommendations to this effect in their periodic examination of the UK State party in 2002 and 2008 and the Committee's General Comment No. 5 (on the Convention's General Implementation Measures) sets out more detail on what is required in terms of budget analysis and how this activity complements the routine collation by the State party of children's rights indicators.

Transparency in public spending assists governments to ensure that they are effectively using the 'maximum extent of available resources' to fulfil children's rights and spending an appropriate proportion of their budgets to this end and it assists civil society (including children and young people) to hold governments to account.

As well as the routine production of children's budgets which set out what governments are spending on children, governments should ensure that children and young people are enabled to participate in budget setting and monitoring the most effective use of public expenditure in line with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **Children's budgets in Wales?**

Save the Children has had a number of discussions with successive Assembly Governments over the last four years. In 2002 we commissioned an economist from the London School of Economics to undertake an analysis of public expenditure on children with a view to discerning the impact of devolution on the spending profile. A copy of this

report is in the Members Library. We presented this report to the then Minister for Children, Jane Hutt and had a positive discussion about the need for more transparency on spending on children. We are aware that efforts have been made by the Assembly Government over the intervening period to determine what proportion of their budget is spent on children. Reporting to the UN Committee in 2007, the Welsh Assembly Government included a crude analysis of the proportion of its budget spent on children (the only nation in the UK to do so) and reported that it planned to do further work to enable a more sophisticated analysis to come forward. Save the Children is also aware that the Assembly Government has previously supported some work on gender budgeting in Wales.

Save the Children has previously sought funding to undertake some participatory budgeting work involving children and young people in examining budget allocations in the local authority - led Children and Young People's Partnerships. Save the Children is currently working with the UNCRC Monitoring Group in Wales to produce a toolkit for the local Partnerships to assist them in implementing the UNCRC. This toolkit will include briefings to assist Partnerships and their member agencies to produce children's budgets.

Save the Children were commissioned to undertake an analysis of spending on children in Scotland in 2006 and that report is available. We also undertook an analysis of spending on poor children in England in 2004 which revealed that money allocated to schools in disadvantaged areas was not always reaching the target schools or pupils because of a 'flattening out' process along the way. Action was subsequently taken by the DfES in England to address this issue. A copy of this report is also available. We understand the Children's Commissioner's Office in Northern Ireland has also undertaken some analysis of public expenditure of children.

More recently Save the Children has commissioned an analysis of budgets across Wales, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland to assess the extent of pro-poor spending on children at a national level (UK and countries), making comparisons where appropriate between countries of the UK and examining changes since 1997. The study is focusing on key sectors including early years, education, social security and social care. The report is expected to be completed in February 2009. Save the Children believes it is important for government to monitor the extent to which public expenditure is pro-poor given the high priority afforded to tackling child poverty and for government to be assured that money targeted on children living in poverty actually reaches them and is of benefit in terms of lifting them out of poverty, fulfilling children's economic, social and cultural rights and improving child outcomes.

### **Issues for the Committee to focus on**

Save the Children recommends that the Committee adopt a children's rights approach and focus its inquiry on the following issues:

- The establishment of children's budgets at a national and local government level as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to deliver transparency and accountability around public spending on children. Only then will government and civil society be able to monitor whether public expenditure is to the 'maximum extent of available resources' in order to fulfil children's economic, social and cultural rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Understanding the extent to which public expenditure is 'pro-poor' in terms of both allocation and actual spend and whether budget allocations reflect the high priority of tackling child poverty in Wales.
- The extent to which children and young people are enabled to participate in budget setting and allocation decisions at both a national and local level (in line with Article 12 of the UN Convention)

### **Resources/Expertise**

Save the Children would be pleased to support the Committee's inquiry with reference to the work aforementioned and our international experience of children's budgeting. Save the Children Sweden is particularly active in this area and has produced a number of relevant publications (<http://www.savethechildren.se>). A world leader on children's budgets is the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) – (<http://www.idasa.org.za>). Examples of children's budgets and other budget analysis around the world are attached in Appendix 1.

Save the Children  
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## Appendix 1: Examples of Budget Analysis Work to Advance Children's Rights

### India:

NGOs co-operated to produce an analysis of government spending on children by sector (health, education, social welfare etc.) as part of the 'alternative' report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. This was well received by the UN Committee in 2003 when they examined India's state report. Subsequently the government of India have employed additional staff to produce routine children's budgets at a national and state (i.e. province) level.

### Brazil:

This was the most exciting example. A number of NGOs collaborated and worked with over 50 young people on a year-long project in Fortaleza, Brazil (a city of 2 million inhabitants). In Brazil, citizens vote on municipal budgets. The children were involved in a number of workshops where they were trained in understanding the city's draft budget. Theatre, drama, art etc. were used. The programme involved children going out to all areas of the city to find out about the circumstances of children and young people, the service provided and the strengths and gaps in these services. The children then ran workshops with other children in local communities – consulting on the city government's proposed budget allocations and the children's own priorities for government spending.

The original 50 children working on the project then came back together and determined a set of 33 alternative proposals for the city government's budgets. The children made representation to the elected members of the city government and attended the budget debate. The city government accepted 3 of the children's demands and made these changes to their budget.

Two young people from the project ran a workshop at the IDASA/SCF conference I attended. They were extremely positive about their involvement in the project and the outcomes (they were well pleased that 3 of their proposals were taken up!). The workshops had been fun, interesting and informative and encouraged them to be more involved in their community. I enclose a DVD that the young people showed us of the project (in Portuguese with English subtitles) which really illustrates the positive impact of the project and the spin offs in terms of young people's increased skills and positive citizenship.

### South Africa:

The children's budget unit of IDASA (the NGO who hosted the conference) are the leading experts on budget analysis to advance children's rights. They regularly analyse government spending on children at a national and provincial level in South Africa and link this back to the country's Constitution. They also undertake cost/benefit analysis of policy directions. For example we had a lecture at the conference on the costing of a new South African policy to divert juveniles from custody (an analysis commissioned by the government). The analysis was extremely thorough – illustrating costs saved by spending x less on sending minors to prison against the additional costs of employing x more probation officers.

### England:

Further to 'A Child's Portion: Public Expenditure on Children in Wales' the England Programme of Save the Children commissioned Tom Sefton to undertake an analysis of government spending on poor children in England. This report concluded that amongst other things that more was being spent on poor children in England but queried whether

money given to schools in disadvantaged areas was reaching children living in low income households. This issue was subsequently picked up by the Work and Pensions Committee Inquiry into Child Poverty and is to be further explored by the UK government.

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