

Budget Transparency for Child Nutrition

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In order to track whether we are making progress in reducing child mortality, citizens and child rights monitors need access to information from their governments. This study set out to establish the degree of budget transparency in five African countries in relation to one critical issue: child nutrition. The aim was to identify important transparency gaps, so that we as civil society can advocate more precisely for the budget information we need to keep effective oversight.

-BTCN Report Published April 2013

Background

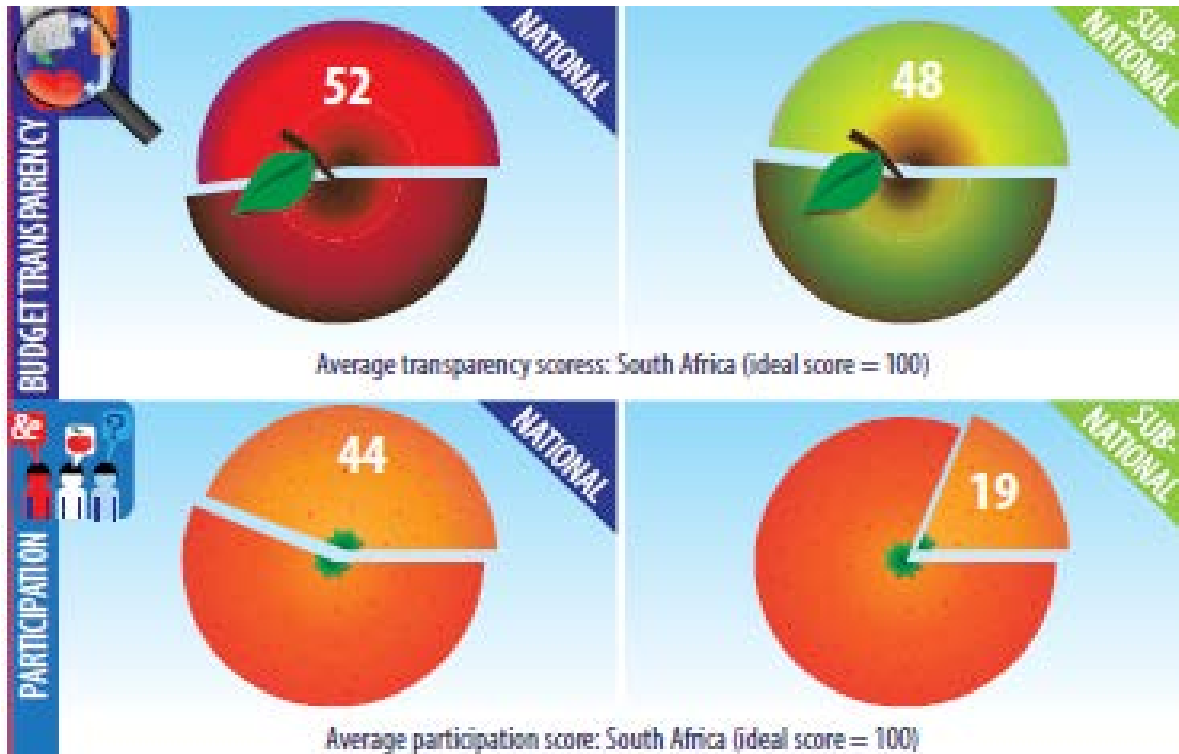
- Piloted in 2012 by Accountability and Transparency for Human Rights Foundation (AT4HR)
- Jointly supported by AT4HR, IBP and Save the Children
- Five African countries: Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda and *South Africa*
- PSAM: lead researcher for South Africa

Methodology

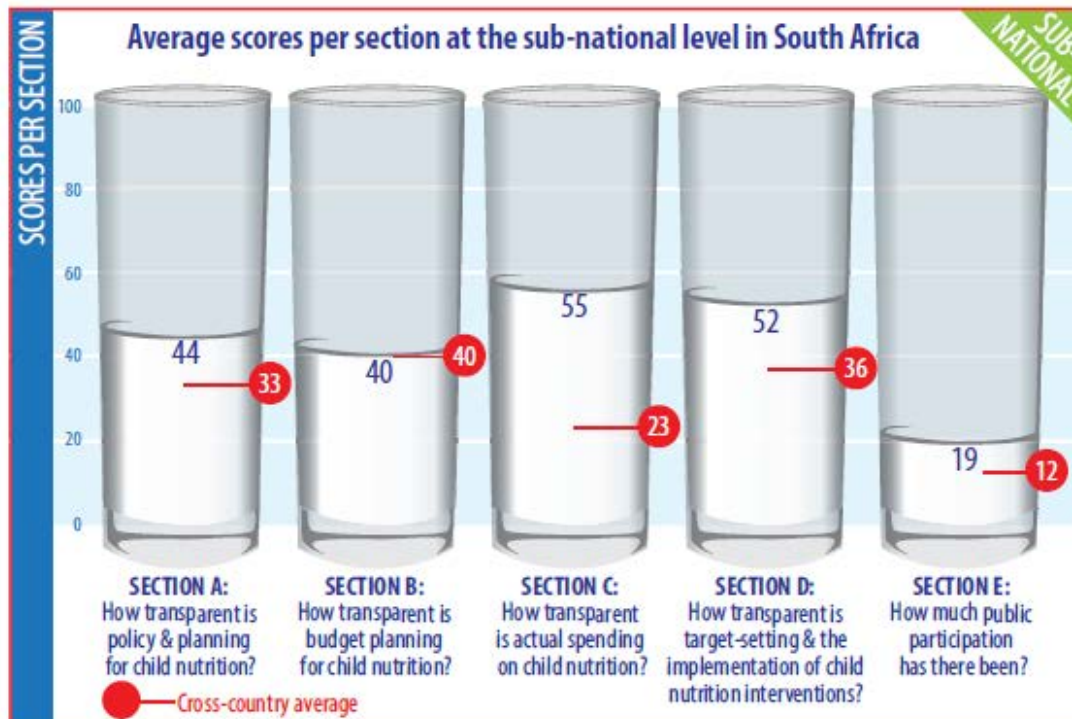
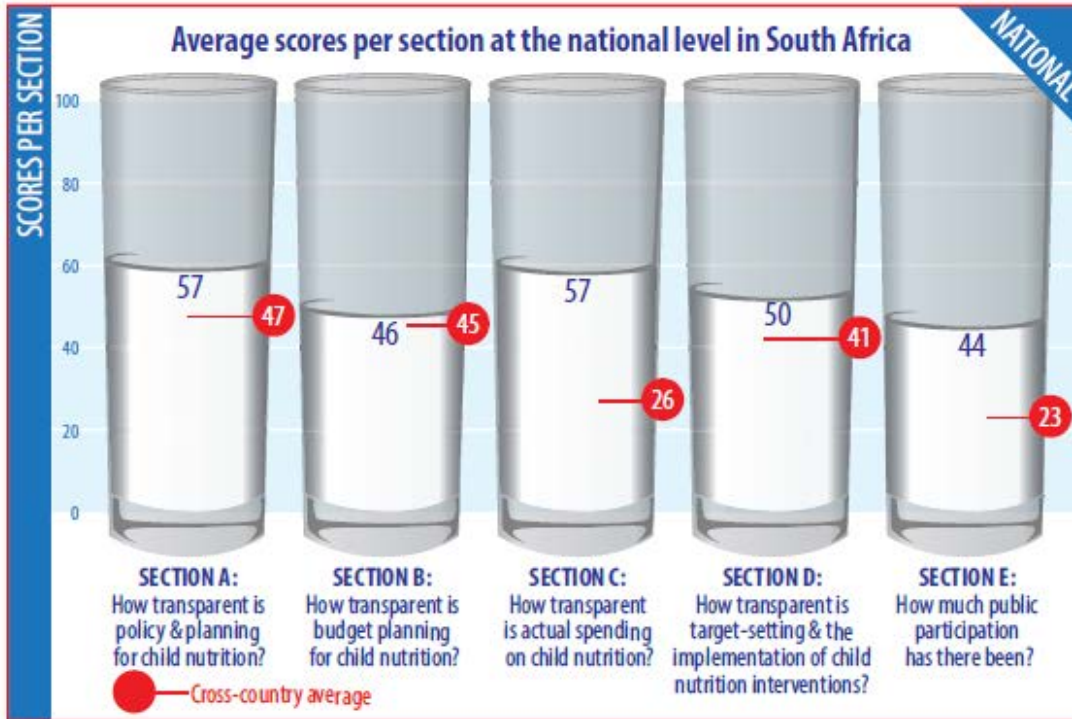
- Budget Transparency questionnaire designed
- Key focus; availability of core public expenditure information pertaining to child nutrition interventions
- In South Africa (Eastern Cape, Free State and Western Cape);
 - School Nutrition Programme (SNP)
 - Breastfeeding
 - Vitamin A Supplementation
 - Early Childhood Development (ECD)
 - Child Support Grant (CSG)
- Definition of 'budget transparency'; *the availability of information necessary for monitoring government programmes and service delivery*

Results: South Africa

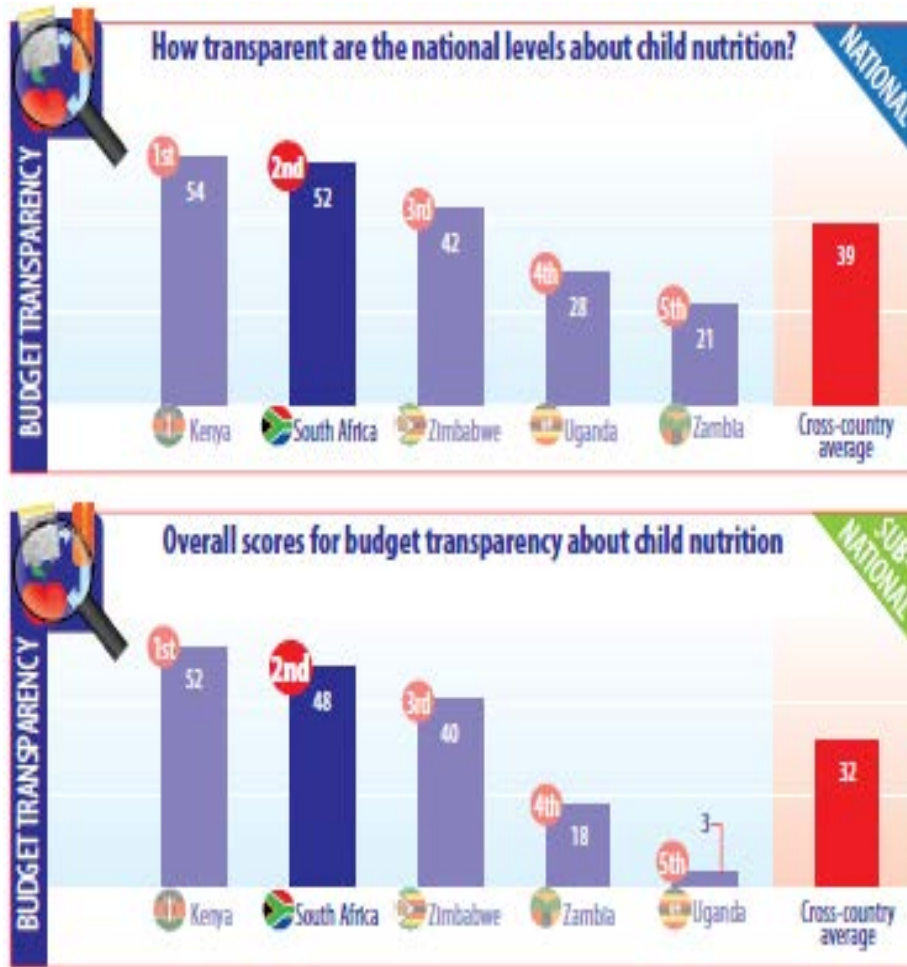
1) Overall Budget Transparency and Public Participation in Budget Process



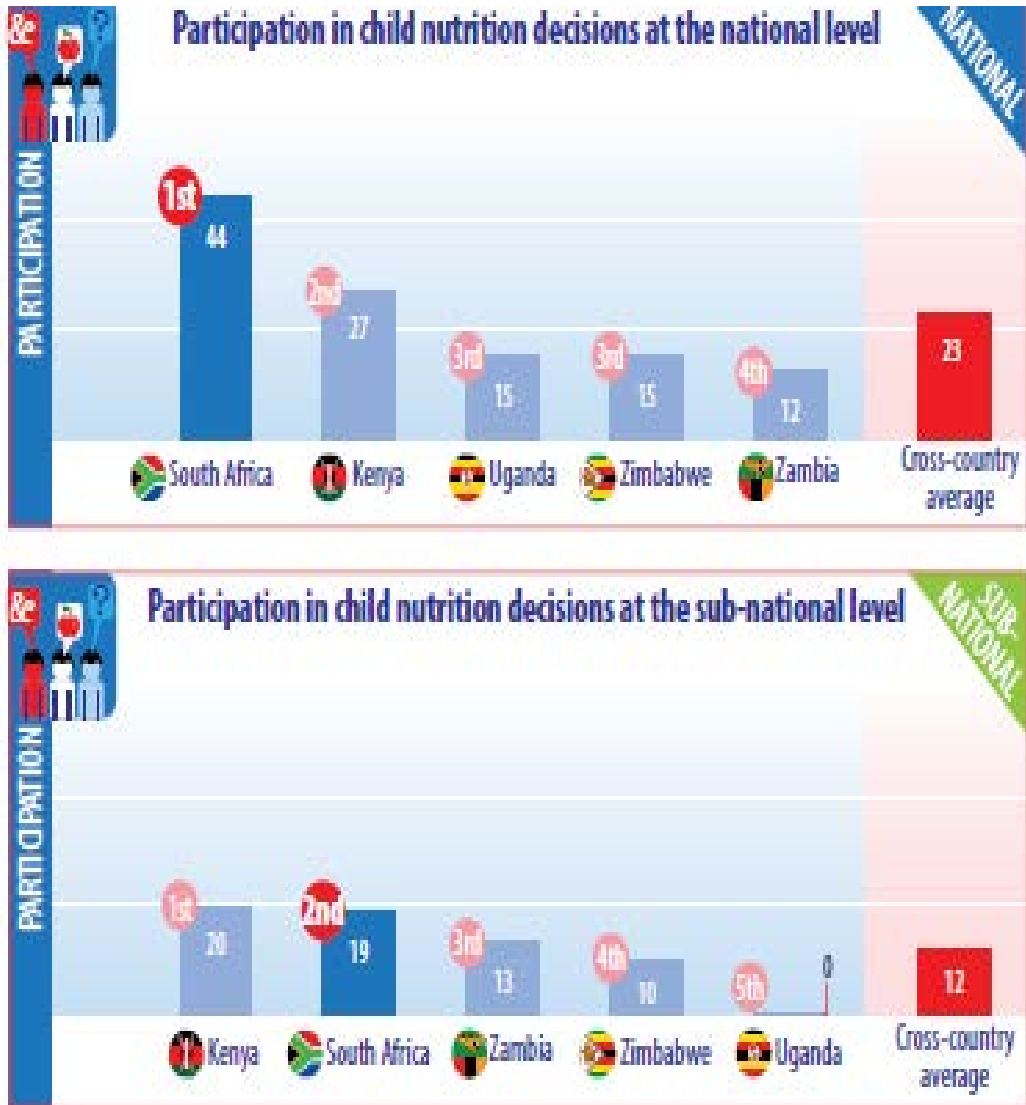
2) Policy, planning, expenditure and participation



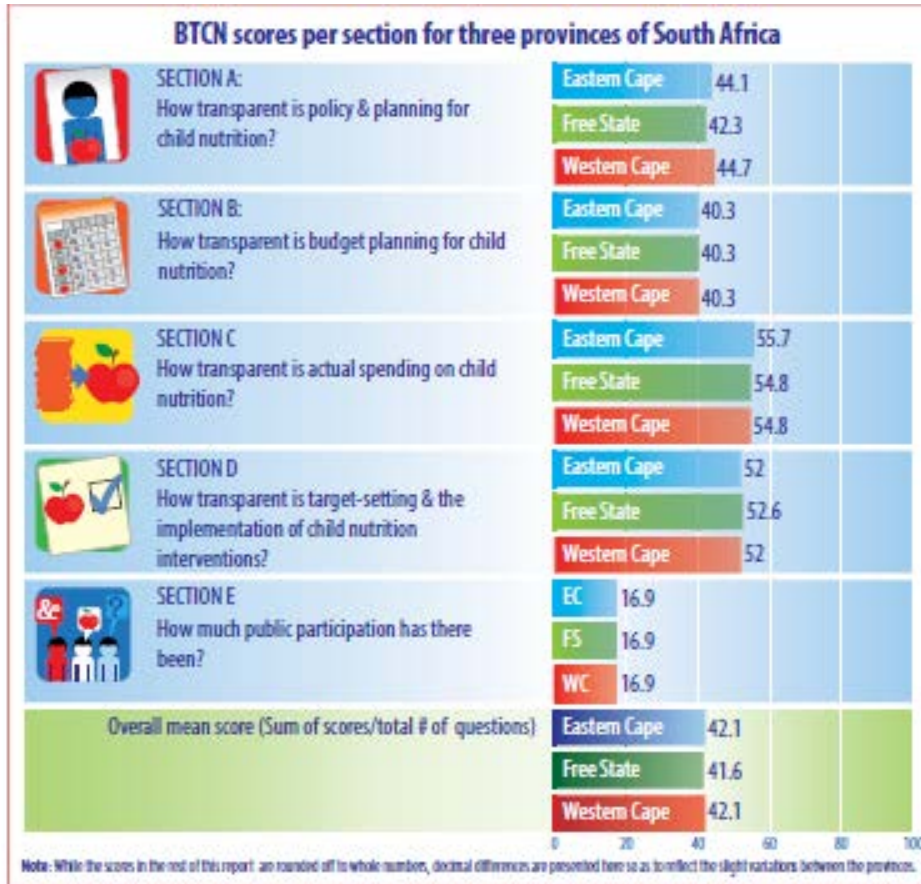
3) Budget Transparency: National and Sub National: Comparison with other African countries



4) Participation in Child Nutrition Decisions: National and Sub National



5) Provincial Scores: Budget Transparency for Child Nutrition



6) The Good News!

South Africa's laws ensure that citizens (including children) have the right to access budget information without restriction.

A fair amount of information is available in the public domain that explains why the government's child nutrition interventions are designed the way they are. This includes information explaining how the interventions are informed by policies, child rights obligations and evidence about the scale of child malnutrition in the country and considerations about co-ordinated planning. By implication, it should be reasonably possible for child rights monitors and interested citizens to be able to gauge whether the interventions are sound in conception.

Budget documents provide extensive details on the sources of revenue that will be used to finance child nutrition interventions.

It is possible in South Africa for the public to access some actual expenditure information on child nutrition – though there is still considerable room for improvement in this regard. Here the study recorded varied findings, with actual expenditure on some interventions being more transparent than others. However, there were examples of fairly detailed actual expenditure information being available for at least some of the interventions, in some cases for more than one year and more regularly than on a yearly basis. In the case of two interventions, budget documents also presented comparisons between planned and actual expenditures.

The time lapse between actual spending on child nutrition interventions and the release of audit reports was found to be reasonable. South Africa was the only country in the study that could provide access to audited expenditure information less than two years after spending took place.

The performance indicators set in place by the government to monitor its child nutrition interventions are in most instances well enough designed to enable the government itself (and civil society actors) to track whether service delivery targets have been met. (Interestingly, this was one of the few findings where the scores differed considerably across the three provinces).


7) The Not-so good News

Current information about government's policy and planning for child nutrition gives hardly any consideration of the obstacles children may encounter when they try to access planned interventions. Furthermore, the performance targets for monitoring the implementation of the interventions make very little reference to overcoming obstacles in children's access.

Unless transparency around planned spending on child nutrition interventions can be improved at both the national and sub-national levels, it remains simply impossible to monitor whether allocations to advance child nutrition are sufficient and whether they are distributed in an equitable way.

It is not possible to identify and adequately track the government's planned expenditures on some of the child nutrition interventions included in the study. For example, the Promotion of Early Breastfeeding and Vitamin A Supplementation are delivered as part of a package of primary health interventions and form part of sub-programs within larger health budgets. It is understandably difficult to provide accurate estimates of planned spending related to them. However, some projections and assumptions must have informed the planned expenditures, and these were not explained in budget documents. Important details were also found to be lacking. The chart on the right sets out the scores recorded for Section B of the questionnaire in South Africa, most of which were below 50.

8) ...Study Recommendations



SOUTH AFRICA

Recommendations for Action

The findings of this study suggest that budget transparency around child nutrition in South Africa can be enhanced in the following important ways:

POLICY & CO-ORDINATION

- Access to evidence on the geographical distribution of child malnutrition in South Africa – and clarity on whether such evidence has informed the design of the government's interventions.
- If the government is considering obstacles children might face in accessing nutrition interventions – and monitoring whether these obstacles are being overcome – this needs to be more transparent in its documents.

BUDGET PLANNING

- More detailed information on the government's planned expenditures for child nutrition at the national and sub-national levels, including narrative information to accompany budget data.

BUDGET PLANNING + ACTUAL SPENDING

- Greater disaggregation of expenditure data relating to child nutrition in the health sector so that specific interventions – for example Vitamin A supplementation – can be identified and tracked.
- Clearer separation and transparency in budgets related to the various programs and aspects of early childhood development. (As more than one sector and level of government is involved in delivering this intervention, a lack of clarity can easily compromise overall accountability).



ACTUAL SPENDING

- Comparisons and explanations, in year-end reports, of the differences between planned and actual expenditure on child nutrition interventions.

IMPLEMENTATION

- The need for more detailed and timely service delivery information showing whether and how service delivery targets have or have not been met.
- Budget documents should provide comparisons between estimated beneficiaries of child nutrition interventions and actual outcomes.

PARTICIPATION

- More and better public participation (of children, their care-givers and civil society in general) in government's decision-making about key interventions that aim to realise children's rights.
- The government should publish summaries of its budgets (especially those most relevant to children) in a format that children would find easy to read.