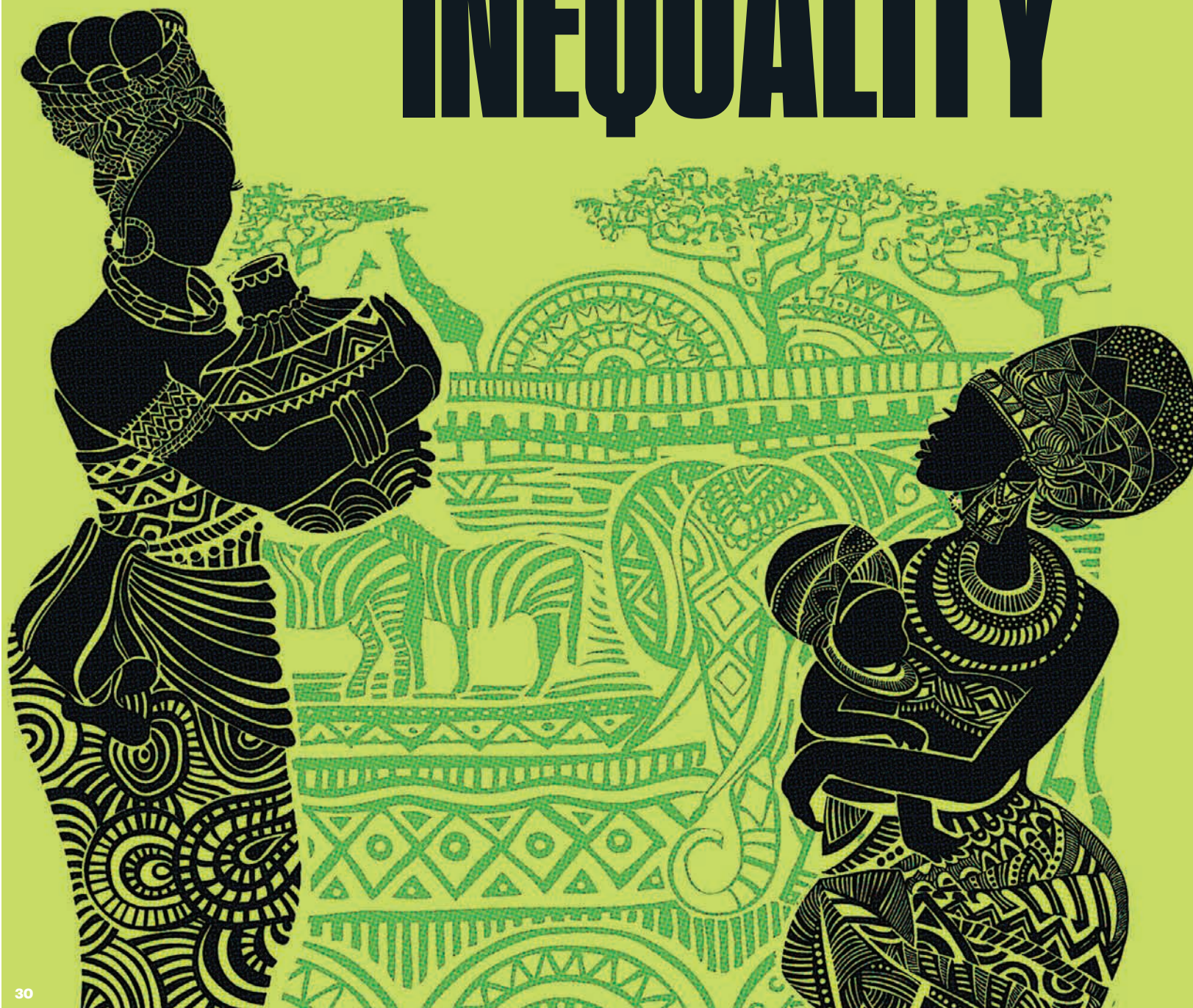


South Africa's post-apartheid constitution is arguably one of the best in the world, but public money is still not used as well as it could be to improve the lives of women and girls

SHADOWS OF INEQUALITY



By Miriam Manak

Next year will mark the 25th anniversary of South Africa's first ever democratic elections, which allowed everyone aged 18 and older to vote. This historic event saw Nelson Mandela supplant FW de Klerk as the nation's leader and marked the start of South Africa's journey towards racial and gender equality.

The apartheid regime had affected the social, political and economic positions of all South Africans of colour, but women and notably black women faced particular struggles. A 1978 survey reviewing the pay of female workers showed that white female factory workers were paid a third of what their white male counterparts received. This pay gap was in line with official South African Wage Board policy, which stipulated that white women didn't need to earn more because it was assumed they were supported by their fathers and husbands.

Black female workers, however, were much worse off. Not only did they receive even lower wages than white women, they also had no pension or provident fund, faced redundancy if they fell pregnant and weren't allowed to take lunch breaks.

Over and above this, sexist and patriarchal laws that limited women's basic human rights and liberties hit black women in particular. Just last year, a judge ruled as unconstitutional an obscure legal remnant of the apartheid era that stopped women gaining the title deeds to their own properties.

The post-apartheid constitution, adopted in 1996, was the starting point for a new, more equal South Africa. The constitution is arguably one of the best in the world in terms of the importance it places on human rights. Chapter 9 of the constitution guarantees equality before the law and freedom from discrimination based on race, sex, gender, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, culture and birth.

Alongside this legal framework, South Africa has over time brought in several other institutions to improve

gender equality, including a Department of Women, which sits under the presidency, and the Commission for Gender Equality. As one of the Chapter 9 institutions – independent bodies tasked with strengthening constitutional democracy – this organisation's aim is to advance, promote and protect gender equality through research, policy development, legislative initiatives, monitoring and litigation.

Then there is the budget. According to Dean Peacock, co-founder and co-executive director of human and gender rights group Sonke Gender Justice, South Africa has been successful in using public funds to improve to some degree the socioeconomic position of women and girls. A key achievement is the social welfare system, he says, which pays out 17 million grants per month to 14 million people. These include child support grants (12.1 million recipients, approximately £19 per child), older person's grants (3 million recipients, £81 per person), and foster child grants (480,000 recipients, £46 per child). Social welfare expenditures amount to £7.6bn for the current financial year.

These grants are making a huge difference for women, Peacock says. "The primary beneficiaries of children's grants, foster child grants and pension grants are, after all, women," he explains. "That is significant. It is one of the largest social welfare systems in the world."

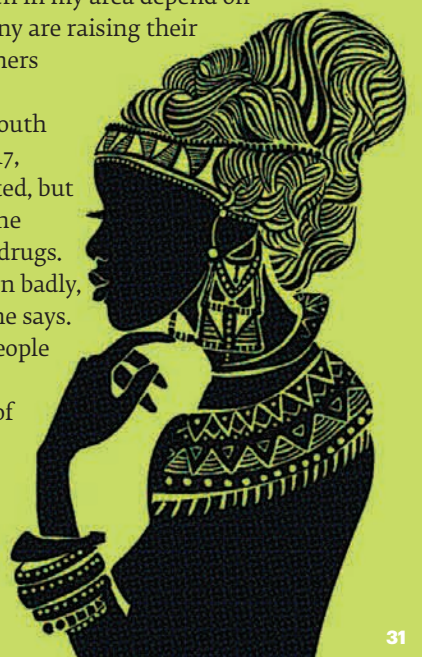
Bhabha Mbali from Philippi East, a township outside Cape Town, agrees. "Without my child support grants, life would be much more difficult," says the 43-year-old mother of two.

"It is not a lot of money, but it helps me pay for a bus ticket for my eldest daughter, so she can go to school safely, and for diapers for my youngest. This allows me to buy more food. Many women in my area depend on child support grants, as many are raising their children alone after the fathers ran away."

Peacock also highlights South Africa's HIV problem. In 2017, 7 million people were infected, but many are being helped by the provision of anti-retroviral drugs.

"HIV affects young women badly, much more so than men," he says. "We have about 4 million people on treatment, which is a significant factor in terms of gender equality."

One big area where the budget is lacking is gender-based violence ▶





Food for thought: authorities aren't prioritising women when they set budgets, says gender equality specialist Shirley Zinn

and sexual crime. According to the most recent Victims of Crime Survey, 250 out of every 100,000 South African women were victims of sexual offences in 2016-17. That is four times the rate seen in England and Wales. In 2016-17, the police in South Africa recorded 49,660 cases of sexual violence, including rape. While this is down on the year before (when there were 51,895 cases), activists say this is no proof of progress. It is estimated that 90% of all rapes are not reported to the police, and arrests are made in less than 50% of reported cases.

Gender-based crimes, such as homicides and domestic violence, show a similar trend. A recent crime statistics report, released by the South African Police Service in August, shows that the number of women murdered increased by 11% between April 2017 and March 2018. In addition, women account for 41% of all recorded cases of common and physical assault cases. Since last year, the number of women who fell victim to common and physical assault increased by 3.9% and 2.5% respectively.

"Despite the frequency and severity [of gender-based violence], there is no National Strategic Plan against it, like we have with HIV," says Peacock. "Here, activists won a long battle... for a National HIV Strategic Plan, which the Treasury is funding.

Despite the frequency and severity of gender-based violence, there is no National Strategic Plan against it, like we have with HIV

Dean Peacock, Sonke Gender Justice

"We don't have anything vaguely like that [for gender-based violence]. Leaders are speaking about it, but a comprehensive, full-spectrum intervention plan with a budget behind it doesn't exist."

Javu Baloyi, a spokesperson for the Commission for Gender Equality, agrees. He notes that lack of action in this area goes against the government's national policy framework on gender equality. "It calls on

all departments to create positions of Gender Focal Points in each department at the level of director or upwards, and to provide the necessary resources to make sure that departments address issues of gender transformation," he explains.

"This is not happening. Serious budget allocations need to be set aside for gender-based violence and other atrocities. South Africa is, for instance, in dire need of specialised courts to address the issue. These need to be resourced both in terms of finance and human resources."

Shirley Zinn, a gender equality specialist who has worked in the public and private sectors, maintains that public money in South Africa is not used as well as it could be to improve the lives of women and girls.

"The authorities aren't giving it enough priority," she says. "It is all well and good to have a women's ministry in the presidency, but you are only giving them £10.5m (R208m) to produce various programmes that look at the wellbeing, education and health of women and girls. You are not doing enough."

Progress on tackling gender-based and sexual violence is hindered by the chaotic way in which funds are allocated. Money allocated to the relevant departments is often disbursed haphazardly and without proper planning. "As a result, it is often used

for something else," says Lisa Vetten, who has tackled violence against women for over two decades as a counsellor, paralegal, trainer and researcher.

Zinn agrees. She stresses that South Africa needs a structured gender equality action plan that permeates all departmental budgets, plus a better system of checks and balances to ensure funds for gender equality programmes have the desired effects.

"Every department needs to own its gender equality programmes and be held accountable," she says.

"These programmes need to be monitored, evaluated, and measured against their targets at all times."

As well as adequate government funding to fight gender-based violence, more structural support is needed to help girls stay in school through the provision of free sanitary wear, advocates say.

"For years, activists have urged the government to do away with taxes on tampons and pads, and provide these items for free to vulnerable women and girls," Baloyi says, adding that millions of girls miss several days of schooling each month during their menstrual cycles. "They simply don't have access to sanitary products," he says, noting that poverty is the main issue.

In South Africa, 55% of households – 30.5 million people – are living under the poverty line of R992, or £51 per month. Data from gender activists shows women spend between R300 and R600 on their periods every year.

"Condoms are given for free, but sex is a choice. Menstruation is not a choice and affects over half of the country's population. Therefore, the government should provide free sanitary products, particularly for school girls from poor communities," Baloyi says.

"The Gender Equality Commission believes in having a budget dedicated to this. This will help restore the dignity of the girl child. This is where gender budgeting should begin." ●

Millions of girls miss several days of schooling each month during their menstrual cycle because they don't have access to sanitary products



GETTY / ALAMY

What is gender budgeting?

In a broad sense, gender-responsive budgeting brings consideration of gender issues into the heart of fiscal policy from the start to the very end of the budgetary process, **writes Simone Rensch**. While this might involve the adoption of specific policies related to sex equality, it can also mean making gender a mainstream part of public financial management.

Analysing the various consequences of spending allocations and sources of revenue, such as taxes on secondary earners in a household, helps budget-setters better understand the effects of their decisions.

Civil society groups, such as the Women's Budget Group in the UK, conduct gender budget analyses after major fiscal announcements. However, advocates of gender budgeting say governments should do a gender analysis when deciding where to allocate public funds to better understand the impact of policies on men and women.

Canada did its first gender analysis for its 2017 budget. It set out a number of investment strategies to help prevent and address gender-based violence, such as increased funding for shelters and transition housing and a new national hotline to combat human trafficking.

It also included more investment in childcare to get women into work, education and training as well as initiatives such as flexible hours to help caregivers balance work and family responsibilities.