



PO Box 1560, Parklands, 2121 • Tel +2711 788 1278 • Fax +2711 788 1289  
[mmpinfo@mediamonitoring.org.za](mailto:mmpinfo@mediamonitoring.org.za) • <http://www.mediamonitoring.org.za>  
Monitoring the media since 1993

## Media and the reporting of the budget speech

In this update:

- General budget coverage
- Social issues in the budget
- Commendable performances

The budget speech attracts much media attention every year. This year was no different. When reporting on the budget speech, we expect from the media to 'translate' the implications for their readers. In this respect the reports on the speech were not entirely successful.

The budget is complicated; those without financial acumen will struggle to understand the implications. Yet the budget affects everyone. For this reason, different media have different responsibilities in translating the budget speech for their particular target market. This puts different onus on different media, as various audiences place importance on different facets of the budget speech. With this in mind, the Media Monitoring project examined whether different media met their readers needs.

### ***General budget coverage***

In general, there was great emphasis placed on the budget, with most newspaper editorials featuring it. Most newspapers bore at least one picture of Trevor Manuel. All newspapers made some attempt to breakdown the budget. In this regard, most they made use of pictures, fact boxes and bullet points. However, in terms of content very few media explained the budget to the understanding of their readers, tending to concentrate on the obvious changes such as sin tax, pensions and grants. These are issues which can be expected to come up every year. The television news (e-tv and SABC 3) at 7 'o clock featured experts to discuss issues linked with the budget.

The world cup as a budget issue was prominently covered, with most newspapers carrying reports on the world cup. However, as with most world cup coverage, there was very little analysis on expenditure. This includes how recent reports showed the world cup committee running billions over budget and how apparently



they are now in budget. This seems contradictory, and could have been followed up with the budget coverage.

The business newspapers and sections of newspapers did particularly well in covering the budget extensively in such a way that their market will understand. Their task, in one way, is easier than other newspapers in that less translation is required, as they serve a niche market. The Business Day, business report, Moneyweb, Sunday Times Budget Special and the Sake Begroting 2007 (supplement for Beeld, Die Burger, and Volksblad) are commended for accessing a diverse range of experts and meeting the needs of their market. News bulletins on SABC 3 and etv and business programmes on radio, were also comprehensive for business.

It seems that this reflects an assumption on the part of media that the budget is only interest for those in business, the educated, and those with an interest in government policies. Although these people are undoubtedly interested in the government budget, they are not the most affected by it. Everyone is affected by the budget, but the most affected by the budget are those who depend partly or wholly on government grants, those who earn low income, who are radically affected by a change in tax or social grants.

In this regard, tabloids have a greater responsibility to cover the budget in such a way that it is understandable and needs their audience's needs. The people who need the information the most were given very little. For instance, in Daily Sun, whose target audience of LSM 5 to 7 would have been a place to cover this side of the budget. They failed their readers however, but only using a short summary of the budget in their front page article 'Trevor: Save, don't spend' (22 February 2007). This article was sourced from a news agency. This story was paired with a 'budget busting' dress which is valued at R1 million. The readers of Daily Sun are the beneficiaries of state services and should be informed how the money is being spent. This signifies an appalling failure by the tabloid media to fulfil their basic role of informing, educating and entertaining readers.

The Sowetan, in contrast, attempted to give the budget a spin from the poor's point of view with an article entitled 'Poor to gain from Budget' (22 February 2007, p24). The article broke down what the impact for the poor would be. The budget was broken down with easy to understand pictures. The Editorial also praised the pro-poor elements to the budget, with an editorial entitled 'Budget puts the people first' 22 February 2007, p16. The Beeld also included an article about the crackdown social grant on corruption making more available for social grants, entitled "Korrupsiestryd hupstoot vir dié toelaes" - Fight against corruption helps poor (22 February 2007, p4).

The Sunday Times Budget Special also covered the issue of poverty in an article entitled "Manuel can't solve all ills" (25 February 2007, p7), which looked at the progress made towards meeting social development goals. However, it does not look at it from a poor person's point of view, as to whether social grants are enough. There is a remark that service delivery is a problem, despite all the money set aside for it. A similar point was made in the Mail & Guardian, 'There's too much

money' Budget 2007 supplement 23 February 2007, p1. The Sunday Independent, in contrast praised the compulsory pension scheme for potential good it will do the poor in an article entitled 'The poor will look back and thank Trevor' (Sunday Independent, p8).

## ***Social issues in the budget***

Social development issues are the key part of the budget. They reflect the government's attempts to put the constitution into action. The South African constitution guarantees all who live in the country the right to clean running water, sanitation, food, security and health care. These rights should be backed with budgetary concessions. In this regard, the South African NGO coalition (SANGOCO) had a 'People's Budget' campaign to see these rights operationalised in the budget<sup>1</sup>. Media has a role to play in seeing whether government is meeting its constitutional requirements. The analysis looked at whether key human rights areas were covered in the budget. The chosen areas were poverty, discussed above, children, housing, gender and HIV/AIDS.

A key failure by media, was the lack of a child's perspective on the budget. This is despite the various ways that the budget affects children, in terms of their schooling, transport and child's grant. In failing to mention how the budget affects children, 20% of the population was excluded from the analysis. This is despite concessions made for the benefit of children, with the biggest proportion of the budget going to education and the R10 increase in the child grant. It would have been good to see some analysis in terms of whether a R10 raise in the child grant is appropriate given inflationary pressures. The only exceptions were the Sowetan and Mail & Guardian. A small mention in the Sowetan Editorial which praised the small increase as it could make a big difference (22 February 2007, p16). The Mail & Guardian interviewed a mother on four on how it would affect her family. The article, called "R10 more won't stop Crossmoor residents from feeling the crunch" was in the Budget 2007 supplement 23 February 2007, p5. This article also discussed the inadequacy of the disability grant.

The high costs and lack of housing was discussed in the above Mail & Guardian article and in another on the same page entitled "Still living in a 'hok". The swatter camp dweller interviewed was frustrated by the lack of delivery around housing. Land restitution is also covered on page 10 of the supplement.

In addition, there was a lack gendered analysis of the budget by any of the mediums monitored. This, although not surprisingly absent, may have been included with a discussion on how the budget will affect the sexual offences bill. In addition, it would seem that the money allocated to education and skills have definite gender implications. A discussion of this nature would have reflected the experience of more than 50% of the South African population and the most commonly poor. The exception was issue of domestic violence and its connection with alcohol abuse.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.sangoco.org.za](http://www.sangoco.org.za)

This was covered in 'Boozy Brainwave' in the Mail & Guardian Budget 2007 supplement 23 February 2007, p15.

HIV and AIDS also escaped comment from most media, with little analysis on what the health budget would mean. The Star (22 February 2007, p4) was an exception with an article entitled 'Higher allocation for HIV+ people derided'. This article attempted to discuss an issue raised in the budget with the people that it affects – those people living with HIV. The article sourced the Treatment Action Campaign, the South African HIV Clinicians Society and a CEO of Johannesburg General Hospital. The article argues that funding provided for in the budget, although an improvement will mean the death of thousands of South Africans because they will have no access to antiretroviral drugs. The Mail & Guardian noted a lack of confidence in the Health Department's ability to spend money allocated to it, this argument was in 'A red cross for budget' Mail & Guardian Budget 2007 supplement 23 February 2007, p8.

### ***Commendable performances***

The good performance of the Mail & Guardian in extrapolating the implications of the budget for various South Africans is commendable. It is possibly easier to collect such in-depth content for a weekly, rather than a daily newspaper. However, The Star's article on HIV/AIDS shows that it is not impossible for dailies to cover social issues well. It could be argued that the good performance of the part of The Star and the Mail & Guardian on social issues is not as critically important as they are aimed at a middle class audience. The Sowetan is therefore highly commended for their coverage of the budget, in explaining it to those who are affected the most. The Daily Sun could learn a lot from the Sowetan's example.

---- By Sandra Roberts

*Comments, queries, suggestions?*

Contact Sandra Roberts on 084 9000 344, Nonceba Mtwana on 082 968 5913 or the MMP on (011) 788 1278. For more information go to [www.mediamonitoring.org.za](http://www.mediamonitoring.org.za)