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PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Rank Social Protection High Among 2009 National Budget Priorities

The Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) urges government to rank the Social Protection Sector high among its priorities in the 2009 National Budget. This will be a direct strategy to mitigate the negative effects of the prevailing global financial crunch on the poor. Government must therefore allocate more resources in critical areas such as the Food Security Pack, women development and the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC).

This will signify a strong commitment to achieving the goal meant “to contribute to the security of all vulnerable Zambians by ensuring that incapacitated and low capacity households have sufficient livelihood security to meet basic needs, and are protected from the worst impacts of risks and shocks” as stipulated in the social protection chapter of the Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP).

While noting Government’s commitment to complete payment of pension arrears, which accounted for K435.9 billion of the K577.7 billion allocated to the social protection sector in the 2008 budget, CSPR felt that this was at the expense of other programmes as the amount allocated towards payment of pension arrears represented over 75 percent of the total sector allocation.

On the other hand, while the Food Security Pack (FSP) has registered an increase in the number of beneficiaries over the years, from 9,000 beneficiaries in 2005 to 22, 527 in 2007, these figures are still disappointingly low considering that the target for this programme is to have coverage of 200,000 beneficiaries a year.

In addition, the total number of households accessing benefits through the Social Cash Transfer Scheme in 2006 was 2,905. In 2007 this number had increased to 7,476 but nonetheless fell short of the targeted number of 28,000 beneficiaries.

CSPR therefore strongly recommends that more attention should be paid to these areas for effective achievement of the set goals. Serious consideration should be given to improving the levels of funding to match the targeted number of beneficiaries. In addition, funding should be more reliable and predictable.

Though the interventions to redress the plight of the street children have improved, CSPR feels that for the street children's programmes to be more effective, government should design more effective and sustainable programmes that help to reduce the number of street children.

To avoid blotting the Sector allocation with the unavoidable pension payments, CSPR recommends that the most effective way for Government to deal with its obligations is through a long-term strategy to pay pensioners at the time of separation. This will ensure that they get their dues while purchasing power is still strong. This strategy will also reduce government's burden on making huge fiscal payments towards pensioners.

Considering the long term support needed to administer and scale up the Social Cash Transfer Scheme, CSPR recommends that government puts in place a system for continuous and ongoing support to the districts to enhance their capacities in running and implementing the scheme.

As CSPR, we firmly believe that by implementing such programs that have a direct impact on empowering the poor, Zambia will be sure on track to ensure that all of its people enjoy all basic needs and thus achieve a poverty free Zambia.

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