No time for budget games

24 FEBRUARY 2021: ASIVIKELANE 14 reports that water, sanitation and refuse removal services in informal settlements have deteriorated all over the country in the last few months, with not a single green traffic light for metro service delivery. As national COVID-19 relief funding to metros has run out and metros’ own revenues have declined, they have started reducing services to informal settlements. Contracts for filling water tanks have been allowed to expire, the regularity of toilet cleaning has decreased and maintenance teams have been reduced in size.

Today Minister Mboweni tables the national budget, and metros and local municipalities will table their budgets by the end of March. There can be no doubt that metros need further national support to resume budgets by the end of March. There can be no doubt that metros need further national support to resume.

What metros can do to improve informal settlement services without breaking the bank:

- Increase and ring-fence funding in the overall maintenance budget for repairing informal settlement taps and toilets.
- Increase and ring-fence the informal settlement share of refuse removal budgets.
- Shift funding from large upgrading projects to large-scale incremental basic services provision.
- Publish more detailed spending plans and service norms for informal settlements to enable the public and oversight actors to participate meaningfully in the local government budget process.

COMMUNAL TAPS AND TOILETS IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS Aweit unrepair of broken taps and toilets. Residents report that it takes a month or longer for government to fix broken taps and toilets. One resident’s comment summarises an all-too-common experience: “They take more than 3-6 months to fix or never fix it at all. Sometimes the community members fix problems themselves.”

High-cost upgrading projects Incremental basic services