

THE NATIONAL BUDGET SPEECH AND YOUTH ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION.

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South Africa's National Budget Speech is more than a government announcement; it is the most important economic statement that shapes our lives. It decides where money goes - to education, health, infrastructure, and job creation. For us as students, understanding the Budget is understanding our future.

This is why the objectives of this competition are so important, because they aim **to grow economic excellence in South Africa.**

Firstly, the competition seeks to achieve this by **promoting the principles of sustainable economic development.** The recent Budget Speeches have taught us that growth cannot be short-term. We cannot borrow to consume without building. Sustainable development means investing in renewable energy to end load shedding, fixing rail and ports in Vanderbijlpark and other industrial hubs, and supporting industries that create long-term jobs, not just temporary relief. A budget that prioritises maintenance, infrastructure, and skills development is a budget that thinks of 2030, not just 2026.

Secondly, the competition aims at **developing future leaders in the field of economics by empowering university students from all racial backgrounds.** This is transformation in action. Economics cannot be taught only in boardrooms; it must be shaped by students from Vaal University of Technology, from Limpopo to Cape Town, from all backgrounds. When students from historically disadvantaged institutions like VUT are given a platform to analyse the budget, we build an inclusive economy. I, as a student from Vanderbijlpark, willing to relocate locally and internationally for opportunity, represent that new generation of leaders who understand both technical work and economic reality.

Thirdly, the objective is **making young South Africans excited about economics as a subject and career path.** Many young people see economics as boring graphs. But economics is about our daily lives - why data is expensive, why unemployment is at 32%, why R6500 is not enough to live in Johannesburg. When we make the Budget Speech a national conversation, when we turn it into a competition, young people start to see economics as a tool to solve their own problems. That excitement is what will produce the next finance ministers, entrepreneurs, and SHEQ managers who understand cost and value.

Fourthly, it is about **providing students with an opportunity to establish contact with key players in the financial world.** A student essay should not end in a classroom. This competition bridges the gap between Vanderbijlpark and Pretoria, between the lecture hall and National Treasury, SARB, and private sector leaders. For students like us, networking with these key players opens doors for internships, mentorship, and jobs that we would never access alone.

Finally, the competition aims at **making the competition part of the National Budget institution.** This is visionary. It means the Budget should not be a once-a-year speech, but a continuous national dialogue where students contribute. If student voices become part of the institution, the Budget becomes more democratic, more youthful, and more relevant.

In conclusion, these five objectives are connected. Sustainable development needs future leaders, future leaders need to be excited, excited youth need contact with leaders, and all of this must become institutionalised. The Budget Speech provides the numbers, but competitions like this provide the meaning.