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FROM PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING TO GENDER BUDGETING

A CASE OF MUTOKO RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL – ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

After experiencing acute budgetary constraints in the years leading to 2005, Mutoko Rural District Council, a sub national government in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland East province sought to mitigate these shocks by becoming one of the pioneers of Participatory Budgeting (PB) under the sponsorship of Municipal Development Partnership (MDP). The approach was met by a lot of success in the years stretching from 2005 to 2011 when negative gains of this approach begun to set in. In proactively meeting the new discourse, management had to seek new ways of re-invigorating their budgetary performance; hence the adoption of Gender Based Budgeting (GBB) under funding from Zimbabwe Women Resources Centre and network (ZWRCN). To this end the paper sought to case study these developments and interrogates the benefits, causes and reasoning of this paradigm shift.

Keywords: Participatory Budgeting, Gender Budgeting, Social Contract, Budgetary performance, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, Mutoko Rural District Council, a sub national government in Mashonaland East Province, was chosen in cluster of six local authorities in Zimbabwe to be pilot projects for participatory budgeting under funding from Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa. The initiative included City of Gweru, City of Masvingo, Municipality of Gwanda, Chipinge Rural District Council and Chipinge Town.

However despite having registered significant gains from their participating and embracing of Participatory Budgeting, Mutoko Rural District Council in 2011 courted Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) in changing its budgetary model to Gender

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Based Budgeting. To this end, this paper aims at exploring the reasons behind the change of business approach by the said sub national government.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Participatory budgeting was first developed in Brazil in 1989, with the sole purpose of enhancing democratic deliberation and decision-making as an innovative mechanism which aims to involve citizens in the decision making process of public budgeting. It is therefore a democratic process in which the community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It enables rate-payers to work with sub national government in crafting and arriving at budget decisions that affect their lives.

Many scholars and organizations have proffered different and varied definitions of participatory budgeting. The UN-HABITAT, also coined its own definition, defining participatory budgeting as "….. an innovative mechanism that promotes the engagement of local government, private sector and civil society alike in the allocation of municipal resources. It is an inclusive process designed to stimulate participation of, and dialogue between, the different actors of society".

Though each experience is dissimilar, a good number follow a similar basic process that include but is not limited to residents brainstorm spending ideas, volunteer budget delegates develop proposals based on these ideas, residents vote on proposals, and the sub national government implements the agreed projects in line with a set and agreed criterion.

Participatory Budgeting by and large involves several basic steps:

1. Community members identify spending priorities and select budget delegates
2. Budget delegates develop specific spending proposals, with help from experts
3. Community members vote on which proposals to fund
4. The city or institution implements the top proposals

Reasons for Participatory Budgeting

Making submissions to Africa Good Governance Programme on the Radio Waves, a Municipal Radio Learning Programme, Mr P.S.Sigauke, Chief Executive Officer of Mutoko Rural District Council said that Participatory Budgeting in Mutoko was triggered by continuous budget deficits caused by resistance and demonstrations by stakeholders each time council proposed or tried to raise tariffs and charges to sustainable levels in line with economic dictates. The community argued that they did not see any justification for increases as the council was failing to provide any quality services to justify the intended hike in levies. The confrontational relationship forced Mutoko Rural District Council to alter the approach they were using in doing business. This

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resulted in the embracing of The Participatory Budgeting model as a way of bridging the gap between council and its stakeholders. Council resolved to take this new approach to its annual budgeting process thereby engaging the community in the process.

Other authors have cited reasons for embracing Participatory Budgeting as real and perceived corruption, consequentially resulting in poor decisions and investments accompanied by diminishing resources and decaying infrastructure. This has generated major mistrust between public officials and their citizens. This trend has propelled greater demand by civic organizations to be included in identifying needs, setting priorities, and determining resource allocation.

Benefits of Participatory Budgeting

Mutoko Rural District Council has benefited immensely from its participation and embracing of the participatory budgeting model. Community mobilization and involvement in the budgetary process has managed to harness appreciation of the public on what the sub national government stands for and how it functions. This led to a positive impact on the local authority's revenue inflows. The major undoing of the former budgeting system was that the public perceived it as something that was being imposed on them by the councilors and the appointed officials. This divergence of opinion between the sub national government and the community of Mutoko emanated from lack of information on both sides in as far as wishes, perception and dreams of the both sides was concerned. The community divorced itself from the wishes and aspiration of their sub national government resulting in an antagonistic relation between two most important constituencies of the sub national government system. These two constituencies were pulling in two directly opposite direction even though they wanted to achieve the same goal of community emancipation through quality service delivery.

The advent of participatory budgeting cultivated a sense of community ownership of the whole process and appreciation of problems and challenges faced by the local authority. This ownership was achieved by opening the budgetary process to the public through participation and enhancement of information dissemination channels. The sub national government's change in stance opened up the doors in which the community was allowed to participate and contribute to the development of their own area. The local authority was also able to communicate to their stakeholders on issues that concerned them. The frost relationship was therefore thawed and diffused. An antagonistic relationship was then replaced with one that bordered on trust, cooperation and appreciation.

To cement this new found relationship, Mutoko Rural District Council went a step further by identifying and grouping all its stakeholders in addition to the community/ residents. What

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came out of this exercise was the identification and categorization of stakeholders into the following groups for cooperation and engagement; vendors, SMEs, civic organizations, business community, government ministries, and faith based organizations, non-governmental organizations and elder's forum. All these were engaged with a view of coming up with a binding social contract.

Social Contract

The social contract theory was posited by Thomas Hobbs, an English philosopher in his book *Laviathan* published in 1651. He put forward the argument that in a Social contract individuals consent, either explicitly or tacitly, to surrender some of their freedoms and submit to some form of authority (or to the decision of a majority), in exchange for the fortification of their rights.

In the same vein, in 2006 Mutoko Rural District Council and its stakeholders reduced their social contract in black and white at The Pumpkin Hotel in Mudzi binding the parties to each other. In the document the stakeholders promised to willingly abide by the rules and regulations of Mutoko Rural District Council in return for a seat and voice in the policy formulation by the sub national government. Council on its part co-opted these stakeholders to sit in various policy formulating committees, thus each stakeholder was co-opted in to a committee that have a direct policy impact on them. For instance the resident association now sits in the committee that deals with housing policy formulation while the civic organizations sit in the committee that deals with social services issues.

To this end, besides participating at the budget formulation stage, stakeholders are also involved in the monitoring of the budgetary implementation. The social contract also provides for participation in the policy adoption by the full council as they are invited to such fora. Although they do not vote during a full council meeting (Rural District Councils Act 1996), they are allowed to make contributions that the house considers in passing and adoption of policies.

Participatory budgeting, to this end resulted in the formulation of a social contract, under which both the sub national government and its stakeholders have certain obligations that they should abide by for the smooth implementation of their joint mandate of service delivery. The model ensured that the local authority moved over from a *Council Budget* to a *People's Budget*.

Shortcomings of Participatory Budgeting

A World Bank paper, in reviewing the experiences in Brazil and Porto Alegre observed that lack of representation of the extremely poor people in participatory budgeting have been one of its major shortcomings. This therefore means meaningful participation of the very poor, vulnerable groups and the youths presents a challenge to this model of governance. The other challenge

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as presented in the document was noted as the inability by participatory budgeting to overcome existing clientelism. The paper also noted that particular groups are less likely to participate once the key reasons for their participation have been met. Last but not least, the paper also noted that the slow progress of public works can frustrate participants and lead to passive withdrawal or complete withdrawal from the union.

As noted by the above paper, Mutoko Rural District Council, despite scoring a lot of gains in its first years, the years leading to 2011 seem to confirm the above school of thought as posited by the World Bank paper on participatory budgeting in Brazil and Porto Alegre. Numbers and the zeal to participate by stakeholders in the period to 2011 seemed to have taken a slight knock from the earlier years when participatory budgeting was first introduced. This together with a serious economic meltdown, exacerbated by high inflation meant that council had to rethink its approach, hence the adoption of gender budgeting model in 2011.

GENDER BUDGETING

International Development Research Centre defines Gender Budgeting as “Gender budget initiatives which analyze how governments raise and spend public money, with the aim of securing gender equality in decision-making about public resource allocation; and gender equality in the distribution of the impact of government budgets, both in their benefits and in their burdens. The impact of government budgets on the most disadvantaged groups such as women is a focus of special attention.”(IDRC, 2001)

To counter the shortcomings of Participatory Budgeting, Mutoko Rural District Council has had to turn to Gender Budgeting. The local authority with help from Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) sought to remodel the process of conceiving, planning, approving, executing, monitoring, analyzing and auditing budgets in a gender-sensitive way. Although participatory budgeting is pretty the backbone of its budgetary system, the new model now encompass the analysis of actual expenditure and revenue with the view of comparing its impact on various gender players (women, girls, men, boys and vulnerable groups) that affect and are affected by its budgets.

This extension of participatory budgeting has helped the sub national government by using disaggregated data on how policies need to be made, adjusted and reprioritized. Gender Based Budgeting provides tools for effective policy implementation where one can check if the allocations are in line with policy commitments and assessing whether they are having the desired impact.

To this end, Mutoko Rural District Council is not using gender budgeting as a replacement model to participatory budgeting but rather as an extension of the same. Gender

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budgeting can therefore be viewed as a tool that the sub national government is using to come up with an effective pro-people budget. Disaggregating data has helped the local authority to reach all gender players by removing gender blind budgeting.

Advantages of Gender Budgeting

Gender budgeting has helped Mutoko Rural District Council in a range of ways that somewhat go beyond an effectual contribution to gender equality. Some of the advantages of gender budgeting can be posited as:

- Creation of superior transparency regarding the criteria that form the foundation for budget related political decisions.
- Facilitation of greater accuracy and sustainability because available funds are more accurately tailored to the bona fide needs of the dissimilar social groups.
- Gender Budgeting is a modus operandi that makes discriminating implications of financially useful decisions visible and that enables a gender-equitable reformation of resource-related decisions.
- It also presents an alternative to put gender-equality-related goals into practice, including in times of better budgetary precincts.

CONCLUSION

Participatory budgeting and gender budgeting should therefore not be treated as competing models but rather as complementing models of coming up with a sub national budget that can be identified with all and sundry. Gender Based Budgeting enables the disaggregation of the population into various gender groups with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of an outreach programme, which is the cornerstone of participatory budgeting. Furthermore, Gender Based Budgeting ensures that all voices in the community are listened to when crafting functional people's budgets.

WAY FORWARD

It is my submission that further research and energy should be expended in finding ways of making such budgetary models remains self sustenance long after development partners have pulled out. To this end a research study can be instituted to find out why participatory budgeting stagnated after the withdrawal of Municipal Development Partnership (MDP) with a view to cement the gains of work that has been done under both participatory budgeting and gender budgeting. Zimbabwe Women and Resource Centre (ZWRCN) should therefore endeavor to en-

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calculate self renewal and sustenance in the gender budgeting program before they can roll it out to the width and breadth of the country.

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