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**A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO NATIONAL BUDGETING:
SOME KEY PRINCIPLES AND LESSONS**

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

1. Full participation by all citizens in socio-economic and political policy-making and in institutions and mechanisms that link human and financial resources and government is considered key to building and sustaining democracies, reducing conflict, and achieving human development and social equity. People's participation in policy-making leads to greater accountability, openness and transparency and builds up social reciprocities characterized by equity, inter-group tolerance, as well as inclusive, responsible and active citizenship—all hallmarks of good governance.

2. Generally, donors, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) are increasingly adopting participatory approaches in assessing needs, implementing programmes and evaluating government policy impacts on development. As an alternative to top-down approaches, beneficiaries' inputs at large offer an opportunity to get firsthand analyses of their priorities, constraints and opportunities. Participation in decision-making also provides concrete information on risk and vulnerability that is absent from much of the data on which policymaking is based.

3. Increasingly, many countries have pursued new mechanisms to promote more direct citizen engagement in the process of governance, ranging from the creation of decentralized institutions to a wide variety of participatory and consultative processes in national and global policy deliberations. Major initiatives such as the enhanced highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have provided opportunities for partnerships that encourage greater stakeholder involvement in defining poverty reduction goals. Moreover, the ongoing debate on the need to engage stakeholders, in decision-making processes has naturally raised the need to mainstream gender¹ in economic policies and planning tools, contributing to a new emphasis on strengthening an understanding of macroeconomics from a gender perspective and promoting women's participation in economic policy and decision-making (UNIFEM 2004).

4. Participatory approaches are being applied in various spheres for the allocation of resources in general, and for the management of common property resources in particular. Indeed, people cooperate and follow the rules set down by the community only if they are part of them and the resources to be managed satisfy their needs (Chopra 1996).

5. As an entry point for participation, the national budget is the single most important government policy document, reflecting its vision of sustainable development and more broadly the values of the society. Overall it is a declaration of the government's fiscal, financial and economic objectives and priorities. It performs several central economic and social functions: it allocates resources, provides basic social services, ameliorates income and wealth disparities, stabilizes prices, and generates economic growth and employment.

¹ Social relations between men and women define 'gender', taking into account different burdens borne and advantages enjoyed by women and men and try to balance these.

6. Thus, greater participation in pro-poor decisions requires that governments move away from traditional centrally managed, closed budgetary processes or poverty reduction frameworks, which may concentrate on fiscal restraint, toward more equitable policy choices and ways to effectively raise resources and use them in a transparent manner. Participatory budgeting processes help promote effective use of public resources, deter corrupt practices and achieve more sustainable outcomes.

1.2 Scope and objectives

7. The main objective of this paper is to identify elements of popular participation in the process of formulation, implementation and assessment of public policies at national and local levels, with particular emphasis on the national budgeting process. This brief review does not attempt to exhaust the topic of participatory budgeting, but instead aims at reinvigorating debates on ways to enhance participation in budgeting, particularly by the poor.

8. This paper adopts a broad definition of community-based organizations (CBOs) that includes non-profit NGOs and private sector lobby groups. However, since the formal private sector tends to be powerful and vocal and because governments tend to take this interest group's views on board in the budget formulation processes, the emphasis of this paper is on CSOs representing the poor. Ultimately the goal of these groups is to advocate policies that enhance public transparency, strengthen checks and balances on government and improve efficiency in public service delivery. Such a goal can be achieved if both actors, i.e. the traditional actors (the State and its organs) and newer social actors (i.e. national, regional and global CSOs representing poor women, rural communities, the disabled, and other marginalized interest groups) play their roles effectively.

9. It is expected that in moving from goals to action, both the State and CSOs in partnership will need to design an MDG-based poverty strategy with a strong governance plan aimed at promoting transparency and the rule of law, decentralized public administration, public investment programmes, human rights and systems for monitoring and evaluating progress. The national budgeting process provides opportunities for countries to translate policies related to health and education challenges, both rural and urban productivity and sustainability, and commitments to women and ethnic minorities into actionable programmes.

10. This paper emphasizes the need for the adoption of inclusive and broad-based participatory approaches to national budgeting processes in ways that encourages ownership and influence the budgeting process through information sharing, dialogue, consultation, collaboration in implementing programmes and participating in monitoring and evaluation. To this end, section 2 explores the principles of participatory budgeting, and section 3 draws some lessons from these principles and concludes the paper.

11. It is expected that this paper, and subsequent debates, will contribute to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) objectives and the MDGs whose primary focus is, *inter alia*, on economic development, poverty eradication, and good governance through accountability and transparency.

SECTION 2: A REVIEW OF PRINCIPLES ON PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

2.1 Conceptual framework

12. Capable, democratic States remain critical to overcoming Africa's development challenges, especially with respect to meeting the MDGs. A key factor to the creation of a capable State is how it leverages knowledge and practices from non-state actors to expand the government's capacity to promote and deliver sustainable development. The evidence from studies shows that a State can address its capacity gaps by engaging with non-state actors.

13. The rationale for participatory approaches to national budgets stems from the vested interests of different stakeholders (provincial, district, municipal and local governments, the business community, NGOs and citizens at large) in cooperating or building consensus on the development priorities of their societies. Therefore these methods present a challenge in terms of rethinking the roles, functions and jurisdiction of the different actors.

14. However, what is meant by participation, while essentially positive in meaning, has often been vague. Even when the concept of participation is precise, it frequently differs with respect to setting the goals, processes, actors, effects and the value of participation itself (Crocker 2003). According to Whaites (2002), participation is a process, not an event, by which stakeholders' influence and share control over priority setting, policymaking, resource allocations, and/or programme implementation. It may also be defined according to the stage of involvement in the decision-making process. An all-encompassing characterization of participation would be a combination of such approaches as methods and behaviors that enable people to express and analyze the realities of their lives and conditions, to plan themselves what action to take, and to monitor and evaluate the results (IDS 1996).

2.2 Types of participation in budgeting

15. While there is no one model of participatory budgeting that is applicable to all communities as discerned above, nevertheless there are some guideposts. The types of participatory interactions that may occur during the formulation and implementation of a national budget are categorized in the following paragraphs (IDS 2000).

- **Consultation.** This applies to development of analysis and strategies. The boundaries between joint formulation and consultation in these processes are "fuzzy" rather than absolute. It implies no commitments to incorporate conflicting views and perspectives into the final document.
- **Information sharing.** This applies at all points of the budgeting process and implies a broader process than disseminating the headlines of policy formulation. Enhancing public understanding of policy and budget formulation processes is critical to this.
- **Joint formulation.** This applies to the formulation and development of analysis and strategies. Within this category, different actors have different levels of centrality and control.
- **Formal approval.** This implies a low level of creative input in the formulation and development of a national budget, but a high level of authority.

- **Shared responsibility.** This applies to the implementation phase of the budget, where roles, rights and responsibilities are complex, multi-faceted and may be subject to continual negotiations.

2.3 Actors and institutions in participatory budgeting

16. Participatory approaches to national budgeting require the coordination and cooperation of the State, and civil society, within the context of the international financial markets and multilateral organizations, through efficient and effective mechanisms and institutions. Coordination and cooperation widen the vision, provide opportunities to reflect on certain issues and bring greater focus on them, while creating an environment for partnership in the formulation of the budget.

17. **The State.** The State creates the enabling environment for citizen voice and, to a great extent, determines the effectiveness of participation by virtue of the rights and access it extends to citizens. In most countries, however, national budget preparation, execution and evaluation are mainly the responsibility of national or sub-national governments. An effective broad-based participation requires mobilization of the citizenry by the State. The desire to make national budget more participatory and transparent is part of a larger agenda to:

- Democratize the formulation of macroeconomic policy frameworks;
- Build up the capacity and knowledge base of the citizenry on issues related to budgets;
- Create a broad-based social dialogue around equity issues; and
- Institutionalize regular access for certain social groups in decision-making.

18. In addition, representative institutions such as parliaments or district assemblies also have a role in the budgetary processes through parliamentary debates and their votes on budget. However, sometimes the role of such representative institutions can be limited because of the type of governance framework of a country. Recent efforts towards devolution and fiscal decentralization mark a change towards the possibility of more broad-based participation in the budget-making processes.

19. **Private sector.** The relationship between the private sector and budgeting processes, although well-studied, remains a complex one. On the one hand, in many countries the private sector is the main contributor to the fiscus through various types of taxes. A less robust private sector activity has meant a smaller resource envelope for States to carry out their duties. On the other hand, for ill or good the budgeting policies impact the private sector in major ways that include through tax measures and other macroeconomic policy choices. For example, a government decision to continuously run huge budget deficits inevitably leads to rising interest rates, inflation and generate macroeconomic instability – phenomena that adversely affect private sector. This mutual dependability means that the private sector has always been a direct or an indirect government ally in budget formulation exercises. Indeed, governments have long been more sensitive to private sector concerns relating to fiscal policy than those of other constituencies.

20. With the increasing role of the private sector in the development process, its participation in the national budgeting process has assumed an additional dimension. From this new angle, its participation stems from two fronts. First, as a development partner it is

involved in accelerating economic growth. To succeed in this role, the private sector needs an enabling environment for its own growth. In this regard, a government can use budget allocations to, *inter alia*, provide infrastructure and upgrade human resources through education and training.

21. Second, the private sector has become an agent in the budget expenditure chain through government procurement systems. In this case, the private sector has a vested interest in a participatory, accountable and transparent budgeting process – whose spin-off is effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of public services. Transparent budget processes has also enabled the private sector to carry out an analysis of budgets and thus helped close capacity gaps within governments in this area. In brief, the private sector's analytical role in the budgeting process has included:

- Budget analysis to monitor and establish the impact of the budget on the activities of the private sector;
- A review of the tax system, especially with respect to consumption tax and import tariffs, in order to facilitate private sector production planning and investment; and
- Mobilization of the qualitative involvement and input of the private sector.

22. **Civil society organizations.** Ordinary citizens, NGOs and CBOs have a right to know and determine how public revenues are collected and spent. However, in many countries, budgetary policy debates occur within relative exclusivity, leaving the majority of ordinary citizens without a direct or sometimes even a representative voice. Thus, participation in decisions regarding budget allocation, spending patterns, and public service delivery is a key entry point for civil society and donor engagement in choosing public actions. In many cases the involvement of citizen's movements around budget formulation and analysis are made within a larger political and social movements, coalitions, and processes.

23. The media's involvement in covering national budgeting processes and potential corruption also results in important avenues for citizen access to information. Although many reporters cannot make an informed analysis of budgetary policies, the media can be an effective ally in sparking debate among the general public and eliciting responses from the government.

24. The implementation of participatory budgeting processes goes beyond the capacities of various actors and institutions and the necessary duties outlined in Box 1; it requires a supportive and conducive legal and policy environment. The process demands responsibility from all concerned, capitalizing on what each party can contribute to complement others.

25. **International financial institutions and donors.** Actors in the budget-making processes often include international actors as a result of both the revenues and the expenditures being influenced by linkages of economies to others through capital and trade flows, debt and official development assistance (ODA). Furthermore, through loan conditionalities, multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), can have more influence than governments about the way that budgets are formulated. This is the case with highly indebted poor countries (HIPC).

26. External actors are not homogenous in their approaches to development or the ways in which they make external resources available. While some have focused on financial criteria for making external resources available, others have viewed their role as partners with

governments and CSOs, supporting the reprioritization of expenditures towards socially equitable budgeting. They are clearly engaging with a much wider variety of stakeholder groups and the nature of engagement is also changing to the policy dimensions. The 20/20 initiative on shared responsibility among the governments in developing and developed countries, multilateral and NGOs adopted at the 1995 World Summit on Social Development is an example of such an international partnership.²

² In 1994, five UN agencies, namely, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Educational, scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), proposed the 20/20 Initiative as a means of accelerating the mobilization of adequate financial resources from domestic and external sources to meet human development needs, by agreeing with partners on a mutual commitment to allocate, on average, 20 percent of ODA and 20 percent of the national budget, respectively, to basic social programmes.

Box 1. Budget Preparation and Implementation: The Role of National Players

The role of the Cabinet

- Choosing objectives;
- Ranking goals and desired outcomes for the medium term;
- Selecting short-term goals;
- Revising the medium-term goals annually;
- Publicizing and championing the delivery agenda;
- Monitoring and managing the socio-political implications of service-delivery flows; and
- Exercising political oversight of departmental management with respect to ‘output’ delivery.

The role of the Departments/Ministries

- Formulation of programmes, sub-programmes, activities, and definition of outputs;
- Estimation of costing and budget preparation;
- Inter-departmental coordination;
- Ensuring delivery efficiency;
- Setting of performance measures and performance indicators;
- Monitoring and evaluation of service delivery; and
- Publication and communication of service-delivery data.

The role of the Legislature/Parliament

In a parliamentary democracy, the parliament is the ultimate custodian of the public purse. It exercises influence at two levels:

- Resource-allocation phase: Parliament ratifies and legislates the pattern of public-resource allocation. Second, it is a conduit for public participation in policy-making. NGOs, CBOs, and civil society at large influence policy processes via the legislature; and
- Monitoring phase: the auditor general’s office is the mechanism for effecting Parliament’s oversight role. The Parliament sub-committee on finance is the main institution for effecting the legislature’s oversight function.

The role of the Auditor-General

- Adequacy of an internal control system;
- Compliance with statutory, regulatory, or contractual requirements;
- Economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in resource use (value for money auditing); and
- Environmental practices.

The role of civil society

- Serves as key agent of deepening democracy and promoting socio-political accountability for fiscal-resource allocation;
- Provides mechanisms for public participation in policy-making processes;
- Access to and monitoring of budgetary and service-delivery performance. To this end, the provision of accessible, accurate, and timely information is the most critical catalyst for public participation;
- Detailed and accessible data on ‘planned’ and ‘actual’ service delivery enables an assessment of budgetary implications and what actions to take; and
- Promotes good governance and achieving value for money in service delivery.

Source: Abedian and Biggs 1998.

2.4 Prerequisites for effective inclusive budgeting processes

27. There are several options for participation that lead to more inclusive and equitable processes for formulating, implementing and monitoring the national budget. Over time, those with the following characteristics have been found to lead to effective participation:

- A *democratic* political dispensation;
- *Demystification of budgets* through simple summaries and presentations that can be understood by non-technical ordinary citizens;
- *Public information* strategies through national, regional or local workshops, focus groups and interviews, sector working groups, etc;
- *Transparency* of participation and its outcomes at national and local government levels that could build trust, ownership, and support among all stakeholders;
- A participatory process built as much as possible on *existing governance and political systems* so that it can easily be institutionalized and sustained over time; and
- A *parliament* that is able to influence the drafting of the budget more proactively and make sure that the balance of appropriations is inclusive (i.e., horizontally correct between the various sectors and groups of the population and vertically correct between the various levels of government: national, provincial and local).

2.5 Stages of participation

28. Several levels of participation in budgeting processes can be aggregated into three main stages discussed below (Crocker 2003).³ They point to a range of lessons regarding the *timing* of interventions to influence the budget.

29. **Participation at the budget formulation stage.** The most effective time to influence the budget is during the policy formulation stage, when policies are translated into programmes, prioritization takes place, and indicative resource figures established. Parliament is critical at this stage and Members should seek ways to engage with their constituencies to define priorities and needs of the community. And CSOs can undertake impact analyses of previous budgets and distribute them to Members of Parliament (MPs). Furthermore, the media should expose relevant issues before the budget is released to create public awareness; and spotlight the budget immediately upon release in order to provoke timely analysis.

30. **Participation at the budget implementation stage.** This stage provides the linkages between the formulation of a government's policy agenda and the budget to ensure that it is fully affordable and representative within a general programme expenditure framework. Effective parliaments are critical at this stage because they can push for government financial accountability through their oversight of the reading and adoption of the budgets. As representatives of the people and to

³ According to Crocker (2003) citizen participation takes the form that includes voting for candidates, legislative initiatives, and referenda on office holders; communication with elected representatives; expression of opinion in public hearings, focus groups, and public opinion polling, lobbying, protests, the media, publications, and public events.

effectively partake in the budget debates, MPs should have disaggregated budgets to enable them to access relevant information, including ability to assess potential impact of the budget to the most vulnerable groups of society. This is the stage also where government and civil society cooperate in public service delivery as highlighted in previous sections.

31. **Participation at monitoring and evaluation stage.** As institutions become more inclusive in the ‘front-end’ of project development – that is, in promoting participation in appraisal and implementation – then questions of ‘who measures’ results and ‘who defines’ success become critical (Estrella and Gaventa 1998). Participation in monitoring and evaluation is diverse and used in different contexts and involves a myriad of stakeholders – NGOs, donors, research institutions, government, people’s organizations and communities, depending on the sector (i.e. agriculture, health, enterprises/livelihoods or public services). Facilitators of this process could be MPs as part of their constituency work or government officials.

32. Expenditure monitoring and tracking systems are a particular institutional framework used in tracing the flow of resources through the various layers of government bureaucracy and providing local communities with information about funds allocated to particular services in their area. This process aims at, first, ensuring that the government spends public monies according to budget allocations and, second, tracking how the monies spent are being used and whether they reach their intended destination (Robb 2000). This is gaining popularity and already adopted in a number of countries including Chad, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda.

33. The tasks carried out as part of a participatory monitoring and evaluation process, *inter alia*, are:

- Assessing the budget impact on poverty and conducting a social impact analysis, tasks carried out by grassroots organizations, NGOs and funding agencies;
- Enhancing organizational strengthening and institutional learning to enable people to keep track of their progress by identifying and solving problems themselves and by building on and expanding areas of activity where success is recognized; and
- Holding governments accountable (by local citizens/CSOs) and assessing the extent to which budget interventions meet the needs of interest groups (e.g. The Children’s Budget addresses the needs of children in South Africa; see Table 2).

Table 1: Cases Illustrating Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Experiences

Features Case Study	Country /Region	Sector	Primary Functions/Purposes	Key Actors/Participants	Tools/Methods Used
Family Life Training Programme	Kenya	Health/ Nutrition Childcare	Stakeholder perspective	External evaluation team; Provincial and divisional govt. authorities; Project Management Staff; Community organizations and villagers	-Timeliness/trends -Venn diagrams; -Key informant interviews -Focus group discussions -Ranking Card sorting exercises
Northern Regional Rural Integrated Programme (NORRIP)	Ghana	Rural development (water supply & sanitation improvement)	Impact assessment	External evaluation team; CIDA: govt. line agencies; NORRIP staff; Village leaders and residents	-Household quantitative surveys -Focus group discussions/village meetings/workshop -Village Development Capacity Index tool
Agency for Cooperation in Research and Development (ACORD)'s auto-evaluation	Mali	Agriculture/ natural resource management	Organizational/ institutional learning Impact assessment	ACORD project staff; Local agro-pastoralists & other community members. At the end of the 3-year programme will also involve external evaluators, State local development committees	-Village meetings & workshops -Individual group & activity files -Animation techniques
Siavonga Agricultural Development Project (SADP)	Zambia	Agriculture	Programme management & planning	Field extensionists; Village extension groups; Local farmers	-Farmers' own records -Recording sheets & booklets -Extension agents' work diaries -Extension preference ranking
World Bank programmes	Global	Multi-sectoral	Public accountability	World Bank staff; Governments; NGO Working Group (from Africa, Asia, Latin America); Communities	-Workshops on participatory monitoring -Regional meetings; -Global participation conference; -Data should reflect qualitative & quantitative aspects of participants

Source: Estrella and Gaventa 1998.

2.6 Institutionalizing participatory processes

34. Government's facilitation of stakeholder involvement is a demonstration of commitment to institutionalize participation in national budgeting. In addition to governance and political structures that extend from the local government to national parliaments, a number of governments have created an enabling environment for the establishment and operation of civil society structures such as NGOs, trade unions, cooperatives and interest groups at the local, district, provincial, regional, national, subregional and even international levels. However, the extent of participation by CSOs in the discussion and debate about national development strategies and plans, including the national budget, varies considerably across countries.

35. Carrying out an effective participatory process that actually achieves the principles of increasing information sharing, transparency, and accountability requires adequate planning and sufficient time to implement the processes. Some governments argue that because they are democratically elected, they do not need to institute participatory processes for economic and social development policy formulation. However, by sharing information about national-level policymaking before the policies are finalized, before the budgets are formulated and before public action choices have been made, governments' decision-making processes become more transparent. Traditional democratic processes usually only allow citizens to make one input in four or five years (during the elections). Participatory processes however allow citizens to actively participate in the governance of their country and their resources between election cycles, on a more regular basis. This not only empowers the public but also increases the overall ownership for development policies, thereby increasing their sustainability.

36. Government's commitment should include, among others, creating an enabling legal and policy environment for participation, especially to ensure the equitable distribution of natural resources. In the prevailing situations, within the political process, where needs and priorities compete for scarce resources, establishing dialogue between the legislature, executive branches and the society at large is a fundamental sound state budgeting practice, especially for conflict prevention (Box 2).

Box 2: Address at the 41st Annual Dinner of the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, 20th December 2002

“I would like to see a situation where in the budgeting process, for example, there is a strong consultative and collaborative effort with the Chamber of Commerce, in addition to the contribution of civil society. The merits of such a consultative and collaborative efforts in preparing the national budget are enormous: firstly, it provides a medium whereby all stakeholders would participate in the processes of identifying national resources as well as in the allocation of these resources among government programmes. Second, and more importantly, it creates mutual understanding and trust. Once that understanding is achieved the process of legislative debate and the subsequent approval is greatly facilitated. That process also reduces the massive resource leakage in the budget implementation process; in other words, corruption! The public would then be aware of the mechanisms of the resources allocation process. And thirdly, the consultative and collaborative process leads to consistency, transparency and confidence in the management of the economy. Stakeholders would be fully aware of not only the quantum of resources allocated for programmes but also the service delivery mechanisms.”

-- His Excellency Alhaji. Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the President of Sierra Leone

37. South Africa also represents a good example of a country that has institutionalized participation in its budgeting process. The first step in this direction was to make transparency in budgeting and financial management entrenched in the South African Constitution. Another important action was the initiative by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) to provide timely information on the budget and analysis of the impact on low-income people to CSOs to enhance their participation in the budget process through its Budget Information Services (BIS). In order to target marginalized groups, BIS works with CSOs already engaged in public policy and those who work directly with poor communities. Recently, the National Finance Minister of South Africa, Mr. Trevor Manuel in his 2004 statement unveiling the Medium-Term Budget Policy, advocated that the budget process not remain peripheral to the lives of the poor majority of South Africans who, after all, give democracy meaning. He insisted on a shift to a truly participatory budgeting in which citizens have the right to define the content of the budget.

38. Other examples of practical and effective participatory budgeting exist in other countries as well. For instance, in Uganda, citizen’s participation in the planning process is also guaranteed by the Constitution. Though no formal mechanism is in place for consulting with the public on the national budget, the Budget Reference Group set up by the Ministry of Finance and Planning and Economic Development in 2000 aims to demystify the budgetary process and involve the public in PRSP formulation. Recently, by forging strong and sustainable alliances with civil society, the government of Uganda has strengthened CSO involvement in some of the country’s major policy processes. However, these efforts need to be consolidating by building the capacities of civil society and strengthening viable coalition to enhance the quality of participation.

39. The budget work of civil society varies in nature and scope and their participation aims at addressing different budgetary concerns. Table 2 is an illustrative view of the nature

and scope of participatory budgeting in selected countries within and outside of the Africa region.

Table 2. Cases Illustrating Participatory Budgeting with a Focus on Budget Formulation and Review

Country	Main features of participation	Key Actors
Brazil	Participatory budget processes initiated by government particularly the participatory municipal budget of Porto Alegre.	Government
Canada	- The Government of Canada in its review of 2003 budget measures for persons with disabilities responded to recommendations in the report from the Standing Committees on Human Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. - The Alternative Federal Budget (AFB) is an alternative budget through a participatory process, which is then presented to government.	Legislatures The Canadian Center on Policy Alternatives and CHOICES--CSOs
India	Undertake budget analysis with pro-poor emphasis. Studies focus on the pattern of spending and challenges the anti-poor actions of the government as expressed by its financial allocation. Provide training programmes to help other organizations develop the interest and capacity for budget analysis.	Development Initiative for Social and Human Action (DISHA)--CSO
Kenya	The Budget Information programme through its work assists members of Parliament with analysis of the budget in preparation for the debate.	Institute of Economic Affairs--CSO
Malawi	Civil society groups worked with the Parliamentary Budget and Finance Committee to identify key Priority Poverty Expenditures (PPEs) in the 2001-2002 budgets and lobbied for the government commitment to these areas.	CSOs and Parliamentary Budget Committee
Mexico	Building organizational capacity and networks to enhance public debates about the budget through training and budget education.	El Centro de Investigacion y Docencia Economicas (CIDE)--CSO
South Africa	The Children's Budget project is a sub-project of the Budget Information Service (BIS). Through analysis, it investigates the link between government policy commitments to children and budget allocations.	Idasa--CSO
Tanzania	The Gender Budget Initiative work towards influencing budgeting processes and allocation in relation to objectives of gender equality. It has a strong capacity building and research focus to increase lobby and advocacy for mainstreaming gender in national planning and budgeting processes.	CSOs
Uganda	Participatory budget analysis for supporting the preparation of evidence-based PRSs and national budgets.	Government and CSOs

Source: Culled from various sources including the International Budget Project 2000

40. Recent trends towards devolution and fiscal decentralization reflect a political evolution toward more democratic processes and provide a framework for institutionalizing participation, especially targeted to rural communities and the grassroots. In addition, the trend is being supported by many donor agencies. Decentralization encompasses three related processes of devolution, delegation and deconcentration (Meloche, et al, 2004).⁴

⁴ "Devolution" is a process by which a central government transfers some authority to subnational governments, including the ability to raise taxes and formulate expenditure budgets. "Delegation" is a process by which a central government transfers a responsibility to subnational governments, remaining responsible for the service

41. In environments with weak traditions of popular participation, decentralization is perceived to be an important first step in creating regular, predictable opportunities for citizen–State interaction. Decentralization is advised for the sake of promoting participation, facilitating accessible and responsive governance, engendering better service delivery, and permitting more effective poverty reduction. There are sufficient reasons to believe that service delivery by local authorities and their community-level partners can be more flexible and responsive to the local needs and conditions than delivery by central government. However, one important aspect of decentralization concerns the degree to which there is effective coordination of service delivery programmes and resources among all stakeholders (local governments, central government, civil society and the private sector) at community, national, regional and international levels.

42. Decentralization of budgetary powers to the municipal or village levels has been used and proven to be effective in many countries, including India and Brazil. However, while offering opportunities for redistribution and more direct accountability, decentralization *per se* does not necessarily involve changes towards pro-poor investment planning, spending decisions or taxation. In fact, decentralization of budgetary decisions without a process of mobilization of poor people and their participation in budgetary decisions may actually help reinforce the power of local elites.

43. To guard against this possibility, political decentralization would strengthen participation if certain conditions were in place. These include:

- Sufficient powers to exercise substantial influence within the political system and over significant development activities;
- Sufficient financial resources to accomplish important tasks;
- Adequate administrative capacity to accomplish those tasks; and
- Reliable accountability mechanisms – to ensure both the accountability of elected politicians to citizens, and the accountability of bureaucrats to elected politicians.

44. These conditions by themselves do not ensure participation by the poor or those who represent them. For more inclusiveness:

- Community groups could hold elected officials accountable, inducing them to serve the immediate needs of the poor;
- Central government may provide incentives to local government to support investments and services for the poor segment; and
- Pro-poor interests could be taken care of in other ways that include: (i) active participation in formal local government bodies (normally council assemblies), something that would require active campaigning in local government elections, (ii) quotas for underprivileged groups, and (iii) by way of sympathetic elites, often members of pro-poor CBOs and NGOs.

and keeping the authority to revoke this transfer at any time. While “deconcentration” is where the central government gives responsibilities for certain services to regional branch offices. In this case, central government does not require any participation of subnational government. Each process involves a different level of fiscal autonomy.

45. Other shortcomings of fiscal decentralization⁵ are usually overcome through clear guidelines from central government, well articulated nationally shared development objectives, clear regulatory or legislative measures and strong capacity-building interventions.

SECTION 3: EXPERIENCES WITH STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION: FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

“ Need to engage fully with our people. Do more listening than talking. The attack on poverty requires that we set money aside: -the PRSP provides us opportunities to talk to our people and for them to participate in defining their needs and the associated resources required to meet these needs. You want to manage the economy like you manage a corporation. They consult with their Boards and shareholders.”

Mr. Hage G. Geingob
Former Prime Minister
Republic of Namibia

3.1. Key findings

46. A participatory approach to national budgeting demonstrates the potential for democratizing decision-making processes and transforming economic frameworks and policies into instruments of people-centered development. The above statement and previous sections showed that this approach contributes to the economic and political empowerment of the poor people and women but it must be underpinned by, *inter alia*, the following ingredients:

- **New economic policy and governance framework.** People-centered budgeting experiences reflect civil society and government efforts to bring about new economic policy and governance frameworks.
- **Alliance formation and social dialogue.** Even when initiated by governments, people-centered budgeting experiences often take place in the context of larger social movements around poverty or gender equality concerns. Their effectiveness depends on the possibilities for forging alliances across groups organized around different issues, such as groups fighting poverty, gender and other types of social inequalities or groups fighting for transparency and accountability in general. In many instances, budget initiatives have sparked a process of social dialogue necessary for the reconciliation of competing and sometimes conflicting demands made by different social groups. People-centered budgeting experiences have raised the general awareness of the public on the larger issues of poverty and gender-equity both at national and international levels.
- **Ownership.** Ownership by civil society organizations and ordinary citizens is crucial for the sustainability of participatory budgeting exercises. A number of initiatives have solicited broad-based participation from citizens and citizens' groups and they have made efforts towards or succeeded in engaging governments

⁵ These include conflicts with distributional and macroeconomic management objectives, varying regional/provincial capacity constraints and regional disparities in the distribution of productive resources and incomes due to political or historical reasons.

at the local level. At the national level, finance ministries have been a particularly important target group for engagement.

- **A democratic space.** People-centered budgeting experiments require the existence of democratic spaces in a society; participatory initiatives themselves are acts of enlarging those spaces towards further democratization not only of political rights, but also in terms of economic rights such as the rights of citizens to have universal access to education or health services.
- **Analytical tools, information and data.** People-centered budgeting exercises require the use of analytical tools, information and data in innovative ways that are accessible to people without technical expertise in budgets.
- **Gender equality.** People-centered budgeting has helped raise the awareness of the public on gender inequality and poverty issues by sparking social dialogue on these social problems. They have demonstrated how public budgets can be made responsive to the needs of women and poor by incorporating their interest and voices into budgetary decisions.
- **Fighting corruption.** In many instances people-centered budgeting has led to more effective revenue collection and use and reduction in corruption by improving transparency and accountability in public finance.

47. Despite these encouraging trends, fundamental constraints limit the full potential for inclusive, transparent and participatory national budgeting. The strong hold on the budget process by the Executive and weak parliamentary oversight continue to dominate most country's budgetary processes. Although the budget formulation stage is the most time for civil society participation (i.e. when the public sees the budget), weaknesses in legislative processes limit the scope and opportunities for their intervention. However, the lack of a mechanism for the legislature to consult with its constituencies limits CSOs potential for influencing the budget.

48. Participatory budgeting still tends to attract only the more skilled and urban-based CSOs, and not the larger-scale involvement of the poor and marginalized groups such as the physically challenged. So far, the majority of opportunities are for cosmetic involvement; enhancing the opportunities for effective widespread participation requires resources being set aside to facilitate the process of inclusion. Furthermore, transparency and information flow continue to limit inclusive budgeting processes. The concern is not just about the quantity of available information but more so about its usefulness, timeliness and accessibility.

49. The competing nature of civil society comes with the risk of the consultation process getting entangled in extensive debate resulting in loss of focus on the key issues and even divert attention from the broader development needs.

3.2 The strategic roles for players in the participatory budgeting processes

50. The next logical question to pose is how players in the budgeting process can position or conduct themselves to fully benefit from people-centered budgeting experiences and

improve the well-being of the entire society. Certain political/policy and civil society traits that ensure participatory budget processes are addressed in the next sections.

3.2.1 The potential roles of States

51. **Political and policy roles.** Good examples of participatory budgeting processes point to the need for government to provide a political space to CSOs, and sometimes take positive steps to ensure their formation. The following are key behavioral traits that indicate governments' seriousness in encouraging citizen participation in the budgetary processes.

52. **Providing strong political support to citizen participation.** Broad-based participation requires mobilization of the *citizenry*. Furthermore, political support to a participatory approach to national budgeting reflects a larger goal of good political governance that entails predictable, open, and enlightened policy-making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos, a strong civil society participating in public affairs, and commitment to address fundamental development interests of the people, among others (ECA 2002). Encouraging citizen participation in budget processes and creating an environment conducive to that process through CSOs helps create and reinforce good political and economic governance.

53. **Entrenching budget transparency and accountability.** The adoption of the principles of participatory budgeting reflects governments' commitment to greater transparency and accountability in public finance management. Transparency and accountability are important not only in terms of ensuring that resources are channeled into socially equitable ends, but they are also important for the ability of the governments to raise revenues. Indeed, citizens are more likely to be willing to increase their tax contributions and external actors are more likely to provide financial support when governments become more transparent, accountable and use their resources effectively.

54. **Allowing for political and fiscal decentralization.** Good examples point to political will to entrench democracy through decentralization of fiscal powers. As a prerequisite for this process, governments should ensure that capacity issues are addressed and that the systems to ensure transparency and accountability are in place.

55. **Greater willingness to collaborate in public service delivery.** Leadership from government and active and effective involvement of CSOs are necessary to ensure effective implementation and sustainability of pro-poor budgets. Such dialogue ensures that a synergy occurs between the aims, expertise and capabilities of each side. Furthermore, public consultations on service delivery and policy priorities offers a way of opening up space and measuring public opinion over a wide range of service-related issues, from the quality of service delivery to policy priorities.

3.2.2 The potential roles of CSOs

56. **Advocacy and information analysis role.** Effective CSOs representing the citizenry tend to play the roles highlighted below.

57. **Promoting awareness and voice.** CSOs serve to improve the *knowledge and awareness* of all the participants in the budget process. To exercise their voice, citizens need awareness of their rights and chances to speak out about social realities and of their visions

and perspectives for development outcomes. It is this type of an awareness that creates conditions conducive to change and action, including uniting with others to express or act upon that voice in an organized fashion. Spreading awareness should also aim at improving the skills of government actors to enable them use a ‘poverty lens’ to link pro-poor issues to budgeting and macroeconomics.

58. Ensuring advocacy efforts influence planning and policy formulation proactively. Early involvement can maximize a CSO’s position in the budget debate by getting involved when the budget is at a preparatory stage, and increasingly before it is finalized so as to build momentum and generate proactive interest in the budget issues within civil society. For example, when government officials are proposing cuts to social spending, a CSO may object by publishing a report that makes a case for protecting social services in the budget. Advocacy work tends to assume the dimensions discussed below:

- Holding *public forums* before the budget is complete, so the Executive can take the views of the participants under consideration;
- Preparing a *budget guide* for MPs at the initial stage of the budget debate, in order to help inform the debate of the needs and concerns of the poor;
- Using the *media* both before the budget is released, in order to prime civil society on the upcoming issues, and immediately after its release, in order to provide timely analysis.
- Influencing the transformation processes introduced by the *multilateral organizations*. With a dominant position taken by these organizations in shaping poor countries’ budgets, challenging these organizations on economic frameworks like structural adjustment programmes and the PRSPs has become essential.

59. Carrying out research that enhances constructive engagement. Systematic and detailed research and analysis on the resource implications of various policy options play a critical role in informing and influencing policymakers. Indeed, effectively raising awareness, boosting capacity, lobbying and raising credibility of CSOs requires systematic, targeted and accessible research with recommendations to guide policymakers. Benefits of such research include:

- Ensuring governments’ *accountability to women and the poor*, and forcing them to fulfill commitments made at international conferences and in policy statements. For example, in gender-sensitive budgeting, an analysis has to be done of actual budgets to examine whether public expenditure is carried out in ways that promote or hinder gender equality with a view towards reprioritizing public resources towards gender-equitable patterns of revenue collection and resource use.
- Forming *partnerships* with governments in the delivery of public services – a partnership that could lead to the delivery of services and infrastructure in an equitable and efficient manner.
- Exposing lack of transparency or potential corruption, particularly where some budget items (e.g. defense or covert operations) are kept secret because they are of

‘strategic nature’. Through successful publicity campaigns, CSOs can help enhance *transparency and accountability* in public affairs.

- Offering the government *practical solutions* to the problems it faces and a clear plan for implementing them. Particularly in countries in which there is limited civil service capacity, taking the step from identifying problems to articulating solutions can be critical in influencing and guiding the actions of policy makers.

60. **Building strategic coalitions and effective networks.** Building strategic coalitions within the CSO community and with government can prove very effective in promoting the cause of the poor. The following are some of the ways that have proved successful:

- Some CSOs just starting out and working to develop their own expertise share their expanding knowledge base with those who would most benefit from it, including government officials. Moreover, they also benefit from open communication with others in the field, drawing on the work they had done and learning from their experiences.
- To enhance credibility and effectiveness, some CSOs cooperate with a broad spectrum of organizations whose constituencies would be affected by the budget decisions. Through meetings and information sessions, they work to increase awareness within the NGO community, establish a common agenda, and present a united voice to the government.
- Political credibility and broad-based ownership of research and analysis is also largely influenced by the extent of stakeholder involvement and successful consensus building. Moreover, institutional factors and constraints may necessitate the formation of a research and information partnership that draws on information, capacity, and expertise from government, universities, think tanks, and civil society.
- By partnering in research and capacity building, CSOs and governments can learn from each other and capitalize on each other’s strengths. Close cooperation also gives NGOs insights into the constraints of government, while alleviating some of the bureaucratic red tape that can often hinder certain projects.
- The personal contacts developed by some CSOs makes it possible for the organization to receive information in a timely manner and therefore produce analysis that could be used while the budget debates are actually occurring.

61. **Training for building capacity.** Training NGOs to engage in budget work is deemed important because of the role they can play in increasing government transparency and accountability to the electorate. In this regard:

- Some NGOs’ mandates are to provide training to other NGOs. As a result of such training, a group of people engaged in professional analysis and monitoring of budget has been formed, leading to *better budget policies* and reduced government malfeasance through rigorous public monitoring;

- Strengthening CSO capacity to engage in public policy and resource allocation debates provides *checks and balances* to ensure that government makes the right interventions in the most cost-effective manner. The political credibility of civil society is largely dependent on increased capacity to understand the issues and engage in public debate, and the ability to present government with policy critiques and alternatives proposals.
- Capacity building is a *slow process* that requires working with government and sharing information with other stakeholders. Over time, effective organizations have capitalized on the relations established with the government and civil society by moving to new areas in which the same issues were at stake.

62. **Ensuring internal integrity, legitimacy and non-partisanship.** Establishing and maintaining credibility are essential for a CSO to have an impact on the budget debate. This could be accomplished by:

- Ensuring that they are able to respond to questions from those with different views before taking a public position.
- Substituting party politics with clear, evidence-based arguments on budget policy. CSOs must take pains to serve all legislators regardless of party affiliation, refusing to ally the organization with partisan interests.
- Adhering to principles of good governance, including transparency and accountability in their financial affairs, good labor practices, democratic principles and others.
- Listening to the people by going out and gathering information about what they are really interested in, what they do or do not understand, and help them to better perform their duties (as voters, representatives of voters, public officials, etc.).

63. **Selecting and focusing on a niche area.** The wide range of tasks associated with the implementation of pro-poor budgeting approaches (training, coordination structures, implementation processes, research, monitoring, information sharing, etc.) requires a significant commitment of time, resources and expertise that may not necessarily be available. Thus, attempts to tackle all pro-poor issues, and bringing these to the attention of a government official or group of officials, especially without a sense of priority, may prove ineffectual. Successful CSOs strategically select one *high profile area* to capture the public interest and generate momentum and thus avoid *unnecessarily duplicating work* already being carried out by other organizations.

64. **Information access and communication roles:** Being aware of the budget context is important for making valuable contributions. For instance, resource allocation processes are based on political and economic factors that are specific to a nation or region. Research and advocacy strategies should be designed to mobilize resources within the given specific political and economic institutions, processes, and factors. Moreover, dealing with a complicated subject matter and people who may understand very little about it requires innovative ways to communicate such information such that it retains its intellectual rigor while being understandable to ordinary citizens. In this regard:

- For CSOs operating at local level, their budget analysis must take the *regional or national context* into account. Although there is a great deal to be gained from participating in budget analysis at the city level, for example, it is important to take into account the role and influence of regional or national budgets as well. Depending on the political context and tax structure, the interrelationship between the two budgets can be critical to understanding budget policies and the dynamic of the budget process.
- Effective CSOs produce information that is both *timely and useful*, and select their audience well. Longer, more in-depth reports as well as topical newsletters and short, easily digestible issue briefs should be sent to a broad spectrum of NGOs, legislators, ministry officials, and other key players, and reports widely publicized in the media. Electronic communications is increasingly becoming vital to inform interested parties about ‘hot issues’.
- The *means* of disseminating information are also important. Some CSOs employ a number of techniques to reach target audience, including meetings, information sessions, media interviews and testimonies at committee meetings, and a budget debate with government officials and the NGO community.
- For even better impact, some CSOs form a coalition to foster greater legitimacy for their position, and to make their *united voice* a lot louder.
- *Tailoring information to the need* enhances effectiveness. Many CSOs produce concise and clear budget guides, not only because of some MPs’ limited understanding of financial procedures and capacity to analyze budget proposals, but also because of the extremely short time-frame in which they can develop arguments in the budget debate.

65. **Monitoring and evaluation roles.** The extent to which external institutions audit the local government accounts and stakeholders and involvement of citizens in the control of the utilizations of funds can be facilitated by the establishment of local government public accounts committees, as is the case in Uganda (albeit at the incipient stage).

3.3 Recommendations and conclusions

3.3.1 Recommended areas for strengthening participatory budgeting

66. **Provide leadership, vision and commitment to participatory budgeting.** Leadership, vision and commitment at the political and policy levels are important for creating an enabling environment for establishing wider and more complex relationships involving all stakeholder groups. Leadership should be an expression of government’s intent towards greater openness, democracy and participation in the management of national development. Good leadership should promote national dialogue and discussion on people-centered budgeting and explore the opportunities provided by decentralization, whose significance must be based on how shifts in decision making are used to involve the grassroots and communities in the planning and disbursement of national resources. National Human Development Reports, which have become widespread in recent years, provide one venue for initiating discussion of budgets.

67. **Remove information constraints.** Budget discussions become sharper and more credible when based on sound analytical work and factual information. Access to quality information can add value to the budget process by deepening debate and improving policy choices. One major obstacle to the development of analytical policy tools, assessment of impacts and monitoring of policies is lack of appropriate data. Governments should give special attention to improving data collection in general and to gender- and poverty-disaggregated data in particular. To further conceptualize and explore the formulation of pro-poor policies, decision makers and others should assess the impacts of alternative expenditure allocations and revenue collection or taxation schemes on poverty and gender inequalities.

68. **Define the ground rules for participation.** On the political and policy side, advocacy work around budgets must be inclusive and encourage alliances and dialogue between groups organizing around gender, poverty and transparency and accountability issues. The legal and institutional frameworks for participation, the entry points and the different levels of participation should be clearly defined to eliminate any ambiguities. In some countries, participation in the budget is entrenched in the constitution; the value of such a provision should be evaluated. Governments should also address the socio-economic and political conditions under which civil society can be involved in and effectively influence the national budgeting process.

69. **Enhance capacities of all actors.** Capacities need to be strengthened through a mix of options, including forming coalitions to enable active participation. Providing services to enhance the capacity of all actors, especially the legislature and CSOs in the budget process, is crucial to guarantee effective participation. Build capacity of participants on budgetary issues through the development of popular materials on budgets, training workshops or 'budget schools' is valuable. 'Knowledge networking' – including via the Internet – is an element of such capacity building.

70. **Introduce participatory approaches to the revenue side of the budget.** Existing budget initiatives tend to emphasize the expenditure side. For both political and sound economic management reasons, participatory approaches should also be introduced to the revenue side of the budget. This should include examining closely the relationship of people-centered budgets to monetary policy to ensure overall macroeconomic stability and to avoid generating macroeconomic imbalances manifested in high inflation for example.

71. **The Legislature should take more interest and be more involved in the national budgeting process.** Parliamentary committees should undertake more in-depth studies of budget proposals and should include opposition or minority party members. Governments can make budgets more legislature-friendly by releasing them in segments so as to enable MPs to digest issues on which they are expected to vote.

3.3.2. Conclusions

72. The above are the broad principles, which govern participatory approaches to national budgeting. The trends have been generally in the area of consultation at the formulation stage, but some go beyond to include the implementation and monitoring phases. There are a great deal of incentives for adopting a participatory approach to national budgeting, including ensuring equitable distribution of scarce resources, limiting potential conflicts and generating a sense of ownership for programmes.

73. Finally, more work on deepening participatory processes should focus on factors to consider in a budgetary process that would ensure that the voice of stakeholders is accounted for. This should include:

- The kind of communication mechanisms, legal issues and administrative structures most effective in promoting popular participation in national budgeting;
- Factors that ensure effective participation of groups to effectively influence the national budgeting process;
- The ways in which civil society can best participate in public policy formulation and implementation (i.e. decentralization, national dialogue forums, local committees, etc.); and
- Guidelines for formulating participatory budgets.

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