

The 2021 National Budget: Why Should It Matter?

16 October 2020

Introduction

It is that time of the year once again when the Parliament of Zimbabwe conducts the national budget consultations in selected parts of the country to gather people's views and aspirations on the National Budget. Within a month, the budget will be presented before the House of Assembly by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, and this would be followed by the approval by parliament paving way for its implementation, starting January 2021. Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI Z) through its community structures, has been taking part in the budget consultative meetings. Citizens, the youth in particular have been asking why the national budget receives more attention compared to other policy documents? Is it a legal requirement for parliament to conduct the national budget consultations? Why are these national budget consultations important in the attainment of sustainable development goals? To what extent are these consultations informing the national budget? Does the government undertake monitoring and evaluation of its national budgets? To what extent does the national budget promote the quality of peoples social and economic rights? It is against this backdrop that this week's Weekend Digest provides an overview to these questions to ensure inclusivity and participation in national budget processes in Zimbabwe.

The National Budget is a process and not a once off event

The [Commonwealth Education Fund \(CEF\)](#) defines a public/national budget as an instrument through which governments raise and allocate the financial resources of the state for the delivery of public services. Amid competing demands, it is built on the basis of the scarcity of resources which require the state to prioritize those resources through a process of lobbying and negotiation. It is through the national budget that the citizens, government, private sector, financial institutions, and other economic agencies interact in pursuit of national objectives, goals and sometimes visions. It is therefore an important process upon which the country promotes transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. It creates a platform for citizens to express their needs and aspirations either directly or indirectly through their representatives in parliament. The public budget should guarantee the realisation of the varying needs and aspirations of citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable, including women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly. Apart from fulfilling the human rights of these vulnerable groups, the national budget is also used in the realization of a country's development aspirations. In the

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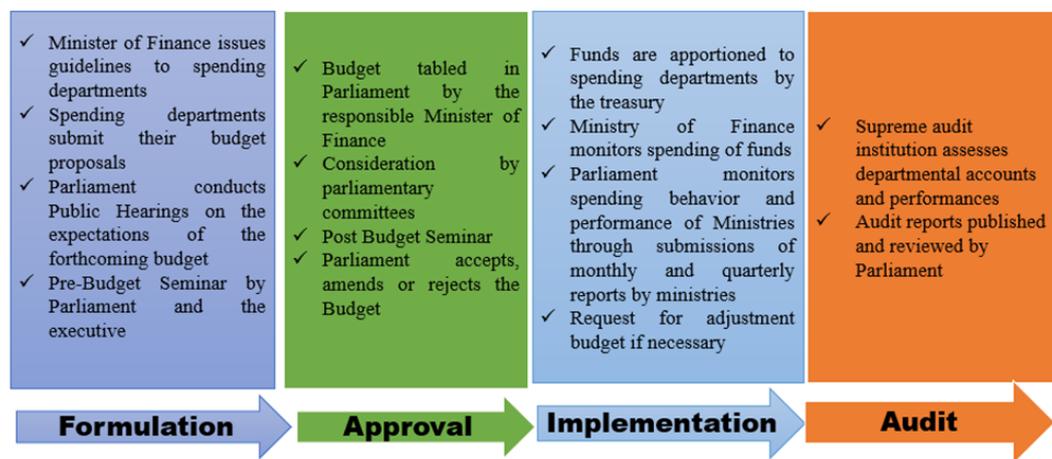
case of Zimbabwe, the 2021 National Budget becomes the maiden fiscal policy for the implementation of the five-year National Development Strategy (NDSI) (2021-2025) and the country's Vision 2030. By virtue of delegating the power of collection, allocation, and utilization of public resources to politicians and elected representatives, the national budget empowers citizens to hold these duty bearers to account. The efficiency and effectiveness of public budgets, therefore, depends on the involvement of citizens across the entire budget process from formulation, approval, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and audit.

Understanding the National Budget Process in Zimbabwe

Whilst the Constitution of Zimbabwe (No. 20) Act 2013 as read with the Public Finance Management Act sets the foundation for the national budget process, [Statutory Instrument \(SI\) 135 of 2019](#) explicitly outlines the national budget process to include formulation, approval, implementation and audit.

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The Budget Process in Zimbabwe



Source: Parliament of Zimbabwe

The involvement of citizens in the national budget process is derived from section 141 of the constitution which mandates the Parliament of Zimbabwe to a) facilitate public involvement in its legislative and other processes and in the processes of its committees; b) ensure that interested parties are consulted about Bills being considered by Parliament, unless such consultation is inappropriate or impracticable. Citizen engagement in the national budget processes ideally guarantees the advancement of their social, economic, political, environmental, and cultural rights. However, in the case of Zimbabwe, citizen involvement is more prominent during the formulation stage where parliament undertakes budget consultations. Once this stage is over, citizens seldom participate in the successive processes. It is therefore in the best interest of national development that citizens leverage on all the available platforms across the national budget cycle to contribute to sustainable development. For instance, citizens can leverage on section 149 of the constitution to petition parliament at any stage of the budget process to ensure redress that involve enactment, amendment, or repeal of legislation. TI Z therefore encourages citizens to assert their voices across the entire budget process.

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Citizen engagement and the attainment of Sustainable Development

Citizen engagement is one of the key principles of democratic governance. The United Nations also recognizes the importance of popular participation in the attainment of sustainable development. This is embedded in the “Leave No One Behind” mantra which informs the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The national budget is one of the key instruments which governments use to gravitate towards the attainment of SDGs. In this regard, citizens must be involved across the budget process to ensure popular support and ownership of all the developmental programmes and projects. Participation, therefore, reduces the risk of public resistance and non-compliance. Furthermore, where citizens are involved, the national budget meets the specific needs and aspirations of the people it is meant to serve. When citizens are involved, the government is bound to fulfill its obligation to account to its citizens and promote, protect, and fulfil human rights. As the government pursues the NDSI and the ultimate Vision 2030, the role of citizens should be overemphasized.

Budget Consultative Meetings: Genuine or Cosmetic?

Citizens are rarely provided with an opportunity to contribute to national development processes despite section 13 (2) of the constitution which provides for the involvement of citizens in the formulation and implementation of development programmes and projects that affect them. Where such platforms are made available to them, citizens embrace such opportunities with passion and anticipation. Despite the importance attached to the budget consultations, such processes are always limited to a few geographical regions, making it difficult for citizens to participate in their numbers. This has been worsened by the outbreak of the COVID-19 which compelled the parliament to conduct the consultations within the World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines and national regulations. The 2021 national budget consultations, for instance, were limited to only 23 centers across the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe. It is also important to note that, the uptake of citizen’s needs, and aspirations are as important as the consultations themselves. More often, citizens feel that the budget consultations are only used to fulfil the legal requirement. This was the case in the 2019 National Budget when the government unilaterally decided to implement austerity for prosperity measures in which there were major revenue cuts across public services and an introduction of revenue collection measures. The government in return faced resistance from citizens. Resultantly, the 2019 National Budget has commonly been known for causing humanitarian and economic crises which saw extreme poverty rising from 29% in 2018 to 34% in 2019 ([World Bank, 2020](#)). The 2019 experience should therefore act as a reminder for government to incorporate citizens views and aspirations towards a people driven agenda.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Citizen participation in national developmental policies such as the national budget has attracted considerable attention in the modern-day governance discourse. This should not be taken in abstract but rather cascade to all national

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programmes including the national budget processes. Citizen engagement pays tribute to both the government and citizens. Where citizens are involved, their needs and aspirations are guaranteed in both the fiscal framework and the underlying implementation policies. On the other hand, the government reduces the social and economic costs associated with public resistance and mistrust. Moving forward, TI Z makes the following recommendations;

- i) The Ministry of Finance should allocate adequate resources towards the national budget consultation processes to ensure inclusion and a people driven development.
- ii) The Ministry of Finance should increase the uptake of citizen's submissions into the final budget and where possible provide reasons for not adopting certain submissions. This will go a long way in boosting confidence in the budget consultative meetings and the entire budget process, and address citizen apathy.
- iii) The government must expedite the implementation of devolution provided for in chapter 14 of the constitution to enable the decentralization of the budget consultative processes and ensure a wider reach.
- iv) Citizens must be actively involved across the national budget processes from policy formulation to monitoring and evaluation. Citizen involvement will enhance social accountability and responsiveness to people's needs and aspirations.

Look out for next week's Weekend Digest where Transparency International Zimbabwe will unpack the Budget Strategy Paper availed by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development on 16 October 2020.

Recommendations

About Transparency International Zimbabwe

Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI Z) is a non-profit, non-partisan, systems-oriented local chapter of the international movement against corruption (Transparency International). The organisation was established in Zimbabwe in 1996 and exists to fight corruption and promote transparency, accountability, and integrity at all levels and across all sectors of society. TI Z currently operates from three regions in Zimbabwe, that is, Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare. However, its community presence reaches to more than ten districts across the country as a result of its vibrant community structures made up of ordinary men and women who have a passion to see Zimbabwe as a corrupt-free country (Accountability Monitoring Committees). TI Z uses a four-unit approach in carrying out its work:

Policy, Legislation, and Institutional Monitoring (PLIM) - engages policy makers and other relevant anti-corruption stakeholders in both the public and private sector. It lobbies and advocates for the development and implementation of effective national anti-corruption strategies to combat corruption in Zimbabwe.

Research and Communications (R&C) - produces knowledge that advances knowledge in the area of anti-corruption and good governance in Zimbabwe, for example the Annual State of Corruption in Zimbabwe Series and periodic researches that respond to key issues such as the 2019 Study on Corruption in the distribution and management of Humanitarian Aid (the case of cyclone idai and cholera outbreak)

Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) - provides free legal aid services to victims and witnesses of corruption and seeks to empower citizens to demand accountability and transparency from public and private institutions.

Community Mobilization and Advocacy (CMA) - targets ordinary citizens with the aim of ensuring maximum participation and involvement of citizens in the fight against corruption.

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