

Participatory Budgeting in the City of Kwekwe (Zimbabwe)

A perspective on the Issues, Trends and Options

S Marumahoko

School of Postgraduate Studies
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

T C Chigwata

Dullah Omar Institute for Constitutional Law,
Governance and Human Rights
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

N T Nhede

School of Public Management and Administration
University of Pretoria, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Towards the end of 2017, as has been the case every year, the Kwekwe City Council produced a budget outlining its various activities for the 2018 financial year. The unveiling of the 2018 budget was, among other things, accompanied by disgruntlement, confrontation, street protests and dejection by the inhabitants of the City. At the centre of the problem, city inhabitants argued, was the failure of the City Council to proactively engage and involve them in the budget formulation and claims that previous budgets have failed to tackle poor service delivery. On the other hand, the City Council (comprising the administration and elected officials) rebutted these claims although there was general acceptance that the level of service delivery does not meet the expectations of the citizens of Kwekwe. The article, in the context of contributing to the debate on good governance, challenges the claim that the budgeting process in the City of Kwekwe is participatory.

Keywords: *good governance, budget formulation, service delivery, participatory budgeting*



INTRODUCTION

The City of Kwekwe Council is one of Zimbabwe's seven city councils. The Council administers the City of Kwekwe which is located in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. It has always prided itself as a paragon of participatory budgeting in Zimbabwe. Towards the end of every year, it has become a ritual that the Council engages the residents of the city in coming up with its annual budget (Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe 2006:19). Seemingly, two factors have influenced the adoption of participatory budgeting by the City of Kwekwe. One is the notion of good governance as a prerequisite for sustainable service delivery and the other is the increased citizens' demands that influence the notion of participation in local government affairs. The article submits that the implementation of participatory budgeting in the City of Kwekwe has not always been as robust, momentous and transformative as officially claimed. The article introduces the concept of participatory budgeting before analysing its application in the City of Kwekwe. Conclusive remarks are then given.

INTRODUCING PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

The concept of participatory budgeting has been defined in many ways. Shah (2007:21) defines participatory budgeting as a 'decision-making process through which citizens negotiate and deliberate over the distribution of public resources' in local government. As defined by Wampler (2000:3), participatory budgeting is a process that improves the quality of democracy by supporting open citizen participation and debates on budgetary allocations, thus strengthening people's knowledge of civic affairs. Avritzer (2000:9) defines participatory budgeting as a 'process of civic deliberation on the allocation of budget resources'. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT 2008:2) defines participatory budgeting as 'a process through which the population decides or contributes to decisions made on the destination of all or part of the available public resources'. It can be deduced from these various definitions that participatory budgeting relates to the direct citizen involvement in the determination of expenditure priorities at the local level.

Participatory budgeting programs can be generally classified into two categories. The first category focusses on specific service delivery projects (also called specific public works projects). These may include the construction of road networks, schools, clinics, recreational facilities and so on. The second category focuses on the democratisation of policy making within local government and the ordinary people participate in municipal administration through setting broad priorities for the public spending agenda, among

other contributions (Wampler 2012:37, 38). Participatory budgeting commenced in the municipality of Porto Alegre, the capital of Brazil's southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul, in 1989 (Leduka 2009:4). It was the brainchild of the Workers' Party, a political party that won, in 1988 the mayorship of the Porto Alegre and had campaigned on a platform to reverse the practice of spending more resources in the affluent suburbs of the city while neglecting the poorer neighbourhoods. The political party also sought to involve ordinary people, especially previously marginalised segments of the population including women and the poor in the budgetary process and most importantly, in coming up with spending policies. The Workers' Party, upon winning the mayor's office, realised it had inherited a bankrupt municipality and to overcome this constraint, it experimented with many models of improving revenue and democratising spending policies (Goldfrank 2012:99).

Importantly, the Workers' Party, breaking with a past in which budgetary issues were among other things characterised by bureaucracy, clientelism, and corruption, provided for ordinary people, as part of reorienting spending priorities, to have a direct role in government activities and budget decisions (Matovu 2007:7). Through the Citizens' Forums or Commissions, ordinary people were given the platform to shape service delivery priorities (Wampler 2012:22). The priorities were then examined and refined by the Participatory Budget Council consolidated into a proposed budget which was submitted to the Camara de Vereadores (City Council) for consideration of adoption.

The City of Porto Alegre committed human and financial resources to ensure that participatory budgeting succeeded. Since it began implementing participatory budgeting, the City has recorded progress in the service delivery areas of, social services, education, health, basic sanitation and water, housing and street paving (Matovu 2007:7). The City's version of participatory budgeting, has since been reproduced with variations and was endorsed by the United Nations in 2000 as 'one of 42 best practices in urban governance' (Goldfrank 2012:93). Since then, thousands of cities around the world have adopted participatory budgeting.

Wampler (2012:21) argues that participatory budgeting reduces social exclusion, clientelism and corruption by placing historically marginalised people at the centre of public deliberation of important policy issues. It may diminish local government inefficiencies, promotes transparency and through a sequence of institutional rules, create opportunities for ordinary people to not only engage in policy debates but to decide, within a local government jurisdiction, "how and where resources should be spent." He further states that participatory budgeting thrive when there are four conditions in place: a budget to fund service delivery projects selected and advocated by inhabitants, a conducive and



supportive political environment (and insulation of participatory budgeting from attacks by national government), a reformist civil society prepared to engage in rigorous policy debates and proactive and robust mayoral support (Wampler 2012:24).

According to Moynihan (2012:55) participatory budgeting is crucial for purposes of refining the accountability and performance of local government that is “outdated, unrepresentative, and underperforming”. In this regard, four arguments are argued to underpin the emergence of participatory budgeting: the need for participative engagement at the policy formulation and implementation levels, cynicism of bureaucratic procedures of governance, idealisation of democracy and the need for more transparent, open and participatory decision-making (Moynihan 2012:56). Underlying the need for participatory budgeting are greater demands for ordinary people to involve themselves in public issues in the context of liberal democracy, disenchantment with formal institutions such as government, distrust of political formations and a weakening of the compassionate perspective of authority.

According to Goldfrank (2012:99) there are many factors critical to the success of participatory budgeting. These include sufficient resources (especially revenue to support investment in service delivery), a civil society disposed to engage robustly in municipal affairs, the presence of technically sound human resources in the local government administration, statutes promoting public involvement in municipal decisions, political will and a commitment to fiscal and political decentralisation. Goldfrank (2012:99) also underscores the importance of the mayoral role in coordinating and directing the budgetary process, a set-up, which he argues, promotes, nurtures and encourages debate and engagement in budget decisions. The generous allocation of decision-making powers, accessibility of rules and protocols governing the allocation of resources for service delivery and the existence of laws that foil the manipulation of participatory budgeting by politicians are also important.

Folscher (2012:127) lists a number of benefits associated with participatory budgeting at the local level. Participatory budgeting in the allocation and use of public funds may improve the effectiveness of local government. It can improve the suitability of service delivery interventions to the preferences and wishes of the inhabitants they are envisioned to assist. Participatory budgeting has the potential to enhance public policy formulation and implementation as well as to accord the poor and marginalised a voice over local government policy decision making. The Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (2016:1–3) states that participatory budgeting can improve accountability, transparency and the quality of democracy. Further, participatory budgeting may enable ordinary people to acquire treasured skills for classifying, examining and ranking developmental local government issues. It can also enhance the opportunities for residents and locally elected officials to share decision-making powers.

Goldfrank (2012:99) argues that, through collaborative work with intended beneficiaries, participatory budgeting can enhance a sense of trust and mutual understanding to develop, and for local officials to appreciate the relevance of existing service delivery interventions and the conditions under which sustainable service delivery can be realised. By working together, different stakeholder groups can develop mutual understanding and trust among themselves and can learn how to collaborate on any follow-up activities and any future joint initiatives. Thus, participatory budgeting facilitates for service delivery needs to be shaped by the beneficiaries and to be determined by the actual needs of the people (McCracken (2004:2).

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN THE CITY OF KWEKWE

In the City of Kwekwe Council, the process of budgeting begins with the treasurer presenting budget guidelines which are presented to departmental heads budget guidelines meeting (Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe 2006:29). Each department then prepares its bid for the coming year. The departmental heads of the council then consolidate the bids into a document containing the proposals for all departments. The proposals are then presented to the *Ad Hoc* Budget Committee where the proposals are reviewed before they are presented to the wards for discussion by the residents of the city. The next stage is a plenary session at council chambers where each ward represented brings forward its ward input into the budget. The *Ad Hoc Budget* Committee then presents the proposed budget to the special finance committee composed of all councillors. Following this, the proposed budget is presented to council for endorsement. Upon its approval, the budget, accompanied by a certificate signed by the mayor confirming city dwellers were consulted during the budget making process, is forwarded to the minister responsible for local government for the approval of the tariffs in the budget as required by section 288 of the Urban Councils Act (chapter 29:15), which regulates the activities of city councils.

As can be observed from the above description of the budgeting making process in the City of Kwekwe, the orientation of the structures of council are far from being configured to facilitate participatory processes. The organogram, bureaucratic culture, administrative structures and human resources skills of the local bureaucrats, remain ideal for top-down decision-making. Decision-making is, in the traditional sense, vertical and is based on linear processes that are inimical to participatory budgeting, the devolution of power and shared decision-making (Thomas 2013:5). The fact that the bids are presented to the wards for discussion would suggest that participatory budgeting in the City of Kwekwe is tokenistic and at most meant to hoodwink unsuspecting city residents into endorsing a



budget that has already been crafted to reflect rationality and narrow sectional interests in the eyes of the local bureaucracy.

To appreciate the structural deficiencies of the model of participatory budgeting used in the City of Kwekwe, it is worthwhile that we compare it briefly with the model of participatory budgeting implemented in the municipality of Porto Alegre. Participatory budgeting in the City of Porto Alegre is bottom-up in its orientation and the institutional arrangements are better placed to link budgeting, policy making and citizen participation. Ordinary citizens, especially historically excluded people are located at the centre of budget decisions in the system. Decision-making authority is transferred to citizens, away from the technocrats and councillors. In this regard the inhabitants of the city, through Citizens' Forums or Commissions, participate meaningfully in coming up with the priorities of the city's service delivery budget (Wampler 2012:22). The list of priorities is submitted to the Participatory Budget Council composed of elected delegates. The Budget Council, influence and examine the entire budget before it is submitted to the Camara de Vereadores (City Council) for consideration.

In the City of Kwekwe, on the other hand, the implementation of the budgetary process is top-down. Decisions about what is incorporated in the budget is the responsibility of the councillors and bureaucrats. The existence of an *Ad Hoc* Budget Committee would suggest inclusive and participatory budgeting. The reality is somewhat different. Given the politicisation of participatory budgeting in Zimbabwe, the representatives of civil society tend to be proxies of the political party with most councillors in an urban local authority and the same applies to Ad Hoc Budget Committee of the City of Kwekwe. Viewed this way, the Budget Committee does not offer any guarantees that the wishes of ordinary people will filter into the final budget (Sibanda 2005:3). Because of politicisation and political patronage, the Budget Committee becomes an appendage of the Finance Committee to which it recommends a budget proposal. As if this drawback is not enough, the budget proposals are finalised through the Finance Committee and Full Council, both of which are traditional council committees historically chastised for not tapping into the needs of the ordinary people but those of the local bureaucracy and councillors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article uses primary and secondary research methods to assess participatory budgeting in the City of Kwekwe. The article, using the survey methodology, draws on the experiences and perceptions of the city dwellers on the implementation of participatory budgeting. In this regard, 100 questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data

and insight into the participation of the City's inhabitants in the creation of council's 2018 budget. The random sampling method was used to target those who participated in the study. Half of the respondents were female and the other half male. In addition, the article draws on literature in books, journal articles, and other publications in assessing the model of participatory budgeting implemented in the City of Kwekwe. The following is a catalogue of the city dwellers' perceptions and experiences.

PARTICIPATION

Definitional certainty and knowledge of the existence of policy is a good starting point in assessing ordinary people's perceptions of participatory budgeting. Only 44% of the respondents said they understood what participatory budgeting meant. The majority of those who said they could define the concept had diplomas and university degrees and resided in the affluent suburbs in the cities. The majority of the respondents (about 56%) indicated that they did not understand what the concept meant reside in the poor suburbs of the cities in the study. Clearly, the concept participatory budgeting remains idealistic for the majority and efforts meant to involve the poor in budgeting are moving at a snail's speed and might take much longer than anticipated to be realised. The glaring gaps in the appreciation of the concept between those living in the affluent and poverty-stricken suburbs of the city seems to affirm that ordinary citizens have remained, as was the case before the introduction of the concept, on the margins of mundane efforts meant to make urban local government more participatory.

The respondents classified their involvement in local government as either consultation or participation. Consultation was defined as the process of inquiring from the people what they thought about issues contained in a budget already drawn up by councillors and the heads of the departments of the council. Participation was defined as the process by which the respondents, working alongside council staff, drew up the service delivery budget. About 60% of the sample in the survey classified their involvement as consultation and not participation. Among the local bureaucrats, there was a tendency to conflate consultation with participation, even though the former was passive and the latter active. This observation ties in with the finding that participatory budgeting in Zimbabwe is weak contrary to the assertions made by most urban local government officials (Bland 2010:4).

Simplification and idealisation of communities is an issue for which participatory budgeting has borne the brunt of criticism. The inhabitants of cities have varied service delivery demands. By sharing identical geography and socio-economic considerations, one



cannot conclude, as participatory budgeting does, that the inhabitants of council wards have similar service delivery demands. Different stakeholders will have different, and sometimes conflicting, values and interests and it will be impossible to satisfy all the needs expressed. Rather than seeking an artificial or forced consensus, it is important to strengthen the capacity of weaker groups to articulate their needs and concerns. It is argued that by assuming identical needs, participatory budgeting adopts a less pragmatic approach to the allocation, in the budget of resources for which there is stiff competition by inhabitants with varying needs to access.

An additional problem is that city dwellers do not participate in the entire budget process. Rather, their participation is confined to planning expenditure of specific short-term service delivery projects, which is a tiny segment of the total budget. Calls by inhabitants for the City to disclose the salaries of local bureaucrats which have consistently chewed well over seventy percent of the overall budget have fallen on deaf ears. Salaries are an aspect of the overall expenditure shrouded in secrecy and calls by elected officials and national government for transparency are disregarded (Coutinho 2010:83). The exclusion of the inhabitants of the City is a narrative also witnessed in the revenue planning or the setting of rates and tariffs. The views of ordinary people in revenue planning take the form of recommendations and even then, there is no guarantee that they will be incorporated in the final budget. Expenditure and revenue planning continue, to be dominated by the local bureaucrats, undermining the concept of participatory budgeting.

The other challenge is that the Urban Councils Act is silent on the issue of participatory budgeting. The Act is not alignment with section 264(2) of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe which guarantees 'the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development'. Such a right, arguably, include the right to directly and indirectly shape the determination of local expenditure priorities. Another challenge is that citizens often lack an understanding and awareness of policy-making and budgetary processes. As a result, they are often unable to make use of structures and procedures feeding into the budget formulation process. It has also been argued that people with low education levels are inclined to participate less (Goldfrank 2012:99). The reasons for this include: people mistrust in the meaningfulness of the institutions and processes for participatory budgeting, inability to access information critical to decision-making, an unclear regulatory basis for public engagement in budgeting, the poor linkage between planning, budgeting and implementation, and failure to comprehend cumbersome municipal procedures, among others (Folscher 2012:152). Consequently, elite capture of participatory budgeting conjures uncertainty, and the culture of local government officials dominating budgeting is not challenged but reinforced (Folscher 2012:184).

PARALLEL STRUCTURES

Nearly 60% of the respondents indicated that participatory budgeting created a parallel structure. The creation of a parallel structure sidesteps existing planning systems and alienates formal and existing planning mechanisms associated with the development of local government in Zimbabwe, including the role of councillors as elected officials. The inclusion of ordinary citizens previously marginalised is based on the terms and parameters set by prevailing constructions of development assistance. Further, although participatory budgeting is associated with neoliberal agendas, it scarcely addresses issues of personal, intersubjective and structural power (Cornwall 2003:1326). The other problem is that city inhabitants are, in predetermined circumstances and policy goals, enlisted in the name of social transformation, to support pre-shaped expenditure policy agendas. The assertion to all-inclusiveness shakes in the face of the question about who participates, decides and benefits from the budget process.

As participation in the budgetary process is optional and not compulsory, it is an initiative that tends not to be broadly representative of the population, and its claim to meaningful dialogue that transforms fundamentally the allocation of resources in a budget is contested. The engagement of the people is one side of the equation and the other side often forgotten is the willingness on the side of local governments to provide information and to engage proactively and in good faith in participatory budgeting. An acceptance of a new culture characterised by openness, collaboration, shared approaches, and the willingness on the part of the local government to experiment and embrace bottom-up approach is crucial to the success of any participatory budgeting initiative. Without these and other conditions in place, “participatory budgeting programs have a moderate capacity to challenge social and political exclusion while promoting social justice” (Shall 2012:216–219).

The needs of the wards are diverse, each facing a unique context in terms of settlement patterns, service needs, revenue access, and capacities (Shall 2012:191). By emphasising consensus, the institutions created as part of participatory budgeting do not only mask dissent, they also silence dissent. This way, they exacerbate existing forms of exclusion (Cornwall 2003:1329). The same projects that appear transformative can turn out to be supportive of the status quo. This way, it is often argued, participatory budgeting is tokenistic rather than supportive of transformatory practices. Many participatory budgeting programs claim that participants make decisions on the entire budget, but there is little evidence that participants make meaningful decisions outside of discretionary funding (Wampler 2012:35). The other criticism is that participatory budgeting comes out as a fine sounding initiative that asserts robust participative engagement without necessarily



providing proof. Claims of full participation often point to the powerful in society shaping budgetary decisions (Cornwall 2003:1325).

IS THERE POLITICAL WILL AND A SHIFT IN POWER RELATIONS?

Only 45% of the respondents indicated the presence of political will to implement participatory budgeting. The other respondents (about 55%) lamented a lack of political will when it came to the decentralisation of financial decisions. Interestingly, when it came to participatory budgeting, national politicians like parliamentarians and senators are perceived as having less political will when compared with local politicians such as councillors. Only 60% of the respondents indicated accountability had improved since the introduction of participatory budgeting. The remainder (40%) indicated a slight improvement in accountability. On the question of whether transparency had improved following the introduction of participatory budgeting, 65% indicated they were satisfied. The remainder (35%) expressed dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction emanated from the fact that the community meetings on participatory budgeting were often not extensively publicised and budget review meetings were often not held at all.

According to Wampler (2012:46), the absence of political will or a strong commitment to participatory budgeting by local government leaders, especially mayors, makes it difficult, if not impossible for participatory budgeting to come to fruition. The fear of the loss of influence and power in the local affairs is a chief reason behind politicians at both the national and local levels not proactively supporting participatory budgeting. The other reason, it can be argued, is that the City Council lacks a reformist tinge and that it was not upbeat about full adoption of the tenets of good participatory budgeting drawn from the City of Porto Alegre.

Another challenge is that participatory budgeting is politicised. Ruling party supporters are more inclined to attend meetings that are chaired by a councillor they elected, and boycott meetings called by councillors brought to office on the ticket of the opposition. The prevalence of political intolerance, polarisation, and an undemocratic environment has undermined the prospects for full implementation of participatory budgeting in the City and in other urban settings (Poverty Reduction Forum Trust 2016:4). The local bureaucrats and councillors are seemingly unwilling to delegate authority and create the necessary conditions and environment in which participatory budgeting would thrive. Whereas in the City of Porto Alegre the Mayor was a political reformist willing to experiment with new institutions, the same cannot be said of the mayor of the City of Kwekwe.

A few factors explain the weak position of the mayor in the implementation and realisation of participatory budgeting in the City of Kwekwe. As is the case with all the mayors of urban councils elsewhere in Zimbabwe, the mayor of Kwekwe is not, statutorily endowed with any significant powers. The mayor is the ceremonial head of council whose responsibilities include receiving and entertaining delegates visiting council, representing council in forums, and chairing full council meetings. The mayor is not assigned any executive powers and hardly wields any authority and influence over the local bureaucrats as the political head of council. The mayor is a first among councillors and assumes office, not based on mayoral elections but is appointed in the council chambers. The Local Government Amendment of 2008 abolished the position of executive mayor and restored ceremonial mayors. It can be argued that the abolishment of executive mayors might have been motivated by the objective to weaken the opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), rather than to improve local government. MDC run councils dominated urban local government while the ruling party was relegated to rural areas.

In this set up, participatory budgeting hardly represents a fundamental shift in power relations from the bureaucracy to the local communities. The bureaucracy is not a passive facilitator since it is the one that frames the draft budget presented to the people for consideration. Through choosing the items in the budget and organising the consultation, the bureaucracy controls both the process and content. Consequently, participatory budgeting is not seen as facilitating transformation. Rather, participatory budgeting is seen as protecting the domination of the bureaucracy over the inhabitants of the city in the budgeting process. In fact, ethical considerations beckon as inhabitants are cast in the passive role of collaborators who are invited, at the whims and caprices of the bureaucracy when budgeting is almost nearing completion.

In the case of the City of Kwekwe Council, the inhabitants of the city are not invited to contribute in deciding the items that need to be incorporated in the budget. Rather, they are invited to respond to a draft budget that is already framed by the local bureaucracy working alongside council. In this arrangement, the inhabitants of the City are not, in all purposes and reality engaged in participatory budgeting. On the contrary, it would appear, the way the budgeting process is organised forces them to respond and dignify the City Council's perception of an ideal budget. With very little leverage over the document submitted to them, the best inhabitants can do is rubber stamp the budget. In this situation, the local bureaucracy maintains a vice grip not only on the budget process but its contents as well. The balance of power, responsibility and influence, consequently, remains with the local bureaucracy. Far from transforming the budget process, participatory engagement exacerbates structural exclusion and entrenches the status quo.



ASYMMETRIES AND DISPARITIES IN SERVICE DELIVERY

Nearly 60% of the respondents indicated that budgets were not yet as responsive as the city dwellers wished. It was noted that there was less funding, among other services, towards water supply, sewerage and street lighting. The budgets continued to reflect the preferences of the elite and that city dwellers played a limited role in the distribution of public resources in the city council. A scrutiny of the responses suggest that local government officials enjoy keeping budgetary power to themselves and that collaborative decision-making does not still occur in practice. As argued by Arnstein (1969:217), this remains one of the striking failures of participatory budgeting.

A cross examination of the budgets over a five-year period failed to establish a consistent pattern in which more resources were now being channelled towards improving service delivery in the areas of refuse collection and removal, replacing burst water and sewer pipes, repairing pot-holed roads and making water supply reach all the residents of the cities. Expenditure priorities were tilted towards salary obligations in defiance of the stipulation by national government that seventy percent of the budget goes towards investment in service delivery. Nearly 80% of the budget for the City goes towards recurrent expenditure and this has gone on for a long time. The City is not alone in this transgression. A study by Bland (2010:5) found that between 28 and 60% of the budgets of urban local authorities in Zimbabwe are consumed by salary payments.

A distortion of priorities also manifests in the way funds spared from the ever-ballooning recurrent expenditure is used. An analysis of the budgets over the past five years found that the City's budget is far from being redistributive. As in the period before introduction of participatory budgeting, investment in infrastructure continues to favour affluent residential areas. Low-income suburbs with high poverty rates and low levels of infrastructure in the City continue to receive less spending per capita than affluent suburbs, creating asymmetries. The argument is that only by increasing the investment of resources in lower-income suburbs can the City's participatory budgeting initiative be said to be promoting social justice (Wampler 2012:36).

FINANCIAL FLEXIBILITY AND AUTONOMY

Most of the respondents (about 70%) indicated that the City Council needs to incorporate city dwellers even when it does not have enough independent financial resources. That way, it was argued, the City would plan effectively for the scarce resources at its

disposal. It is a fact that the ability of the City of Kwekwe Council to implement a budget based on participatory budgeting is not unlimited. The City, like other local authorities enjoys relative financial autonomy that is guaranteed in the 2013 Constitution. It does not enjoy absolute budgetary and revenue powers. National government through the ministry responsible for local government wield significant influence on the framing of the budgets of subnational entities.

Through policy guidelines, the ministry controls the environment in which the budgets are framed. It, for example, sets the threshold for capital and recurrent expenditure. It is a legal and policy requirement that the ministry approves the budgets before local governments can start collecting revenue (Zinyama 2014:33). The responsible minister, contrary to the suggestions of city dwellers, is legally authorised to reject the budget submitted to him or her for approval, regardless of whether it was the result of participatory budgeting or not. Most importantly, the minister is statutorily empowered to consider for approval, reject or direct council to amend the tariff for the suburbs where most of the dwellers are classified as low income (local government areas), among other considerations (Shall 2012:191).

In approving, rejecting or instructing a local authority to review its rates in the low-income suburbs, the minister depends on the wisdom of his or her own assessment and is not guided by the outcomes of participatory budgeting (Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe 2006:15). The minister, through exercising governmental powers is also able to encroach on the expenditure priorities ordered and agreed between city dwellers and council, minimising the impact of participatory budgeting. Other ways by which the minister controls the expenditure powers of local authorities is through demanding monthly reports, minutes of committee meetings of council, monitoring and evaluation visits, rescinding council resolutions, dispatching ministerial auditors, and assuming the expenditure powers of local governments. All these measures diminish the impact of participatory budgeting.

Local fiscal realities are also an important equation in the realisation of participatory budgeting. The argument is that efforts by city dwellers to influence expenditure priorities ought to conform to the financial constraints placed on the city council by inadequate revenue inflows. The danger is always lurking that uninformed residents, through participation influence budgets that demand to spend more resources than council can raise or than are available (Wampler 2012:39). Given the lack of fiscal capacity bedeviling local government in Zimbabwe and this has been going on for many years, there is need to manage the expectations of residents which are usually high and unrealistic. It is not unusual for residents to plan and demand prioritisation that is beyond the capacity of local government.

Even when a priority list has been drawn up and agreed on, the local bureaucracy (and not the city dwellers) still wield influence in how the budget is implemented. The point is that the local bureaucracy is endowed with considerable discretion in the apportionment and allocation of scarce financial resources. While councillors specify the general goals in the budget, administratively, it is the duty of the local bureaucrats to assign and allocate resources to achieve those policy objectives (Moyhinan 2012:72). In the face of a local bureaucracy that is hostile to administrative reforms, participatory budgeting initiatives are used, not to allocate scarce resources transparently and efficiently but as an educational tool. According to Wampler (2012:47), there are many ways through which the local bureaucrats and elected councillors can undermine participatory budgeting to achieve their own goals. These include non-disclosure of crucial information, developing cold feet over the implementation of service delivery projects in the budget, and undermining citizen oversight committees (Wampler 2012:47).

Like any other local authorities, the City of Kwekwe Council has been experiencing poor revenue collection since 2000 when the economic environment deteriorated (Samukange 2014:1). Owing to, among other explanations, excessive regulation of the local government environment, interference by national government, poor macro-economic fundamentals and stunted administrative reforms, the City has perennially struggled to fund service delivery projects. That the City Council is cash strapped and the fact that it lacks financial stability is reflected in the poor road network, declining health care facilities, poor water and sanitation facilities and the outbreak of frequent water borne diseases among other indicators. In the absence of financial stability, the likelihood that people historically excluded from influencing redistributive spending in communities with poor infrastructure diminishes. With the City lacking the resources needed to implement the service delivery projects selected by ordinary people, participatory budgeting, “shifts from the selection of specific public works projects to a more general discussion of debt, taxes, and the efficient use of limited resources” (Wampler 2012:25).

CONCLUSION

The model of budgeting implemented in the City of Kwekwe hardly counts as participatory. It is top-down in its orientation, allows for the domination of budgeting by the local bureaucrats and elected councillors, especially the former. The lack of political will, the absence of institutional framework guiding its implementation, and the absence of a mechanism for city dwellers to make city officials accountable have all rendered the concept of participatory budgeting in the City of Kwekwe tokenistic rather than transformatory. The disconnect between the concept of budgeting, people’s involvement and how budgets address service

delivery demands, the absence of a culture of promoting devolution, the limited scope of participation, legislative constraints, a lack of transparency and trust, a breakdown in communication, insufficient resources, and political differences have also impacted adversely on participatory budgeting. The Council of the City of Kwekwe needs to revisit its model of budgeting so that it becomes truly participatory by placing ordinary people at the centre of the formulation of the annual budget. Currently, the model in use does not represent a break with a past in which the heads of council departments and councillors dominated budgeting and city dwellers merely watched from the terraces. No wonder, most budgets produced by the City Council over the past few years have failed to respond to the needs and preferences of the citizens of the City of Kwekwe.

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