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The role of civic participation in the South African budgeting process

Abstract

This research contextualizes public participation and participatory budgeting frameworks from a decentralized perspective. It provides an international perspective on public participation initiatives in the budgeting environment by analyzing selected indices and assessments in developed economies (the United Kingdom and New Zealand) and developing economies (Kenya and Tanzania) to determine the participatory framework in relation to the South African budgeting environment. From a budgeting perspective, focused public participation seems sensible. As a government's primary economic policy tool, the budget has a twofold purpose: translating planned policy objectives and political commitments into reality based on the state of existing revenue and structuring income sources to raise additional revenue accordingly. The collection and distribution of funds to meet public needs remain a strategic responsibility of any government. This, however, can only succeed within the context of a proper policy framework that allows for credible policy choices and good governance. Good governance and budget transparency essentially sanction this, while public participation in a government's budgeting framework fundamentally underscores good governance.

Keywords: inventory stock control, processes, purpose, principles, people, e-procurement.

JEL Classification: E5, H2

Introduction

Participatory budgeting is not a new phenomenon and, with democracy emphasizing the involvement of the broader citizenry, has become an international trend shaping communal policies in the global environment. Developments in this regard have brought about a variety of public participation mechanisms to secure and maintain a steady involvement to warrant development within a framework of democratic accountability. Participatory budgeting, as with many experiences reflecting the potential of rhetoric, referred to by Khawe (2012, p. 166), has become a slogan encompassing a return to direct democracy through grassroots involvement in the budgeting process. Sintomer, Herzberg, Röcke and Allegretti (2012) observe that its success resonates in many countries, both in terms of public participation in local government budget processes and the subsequent changes in community literacy levels resulting from involvement wherever initiatives in this regard have been implemented. Developing economies such as South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania have benefited from participatory initiatives spearheaded by communities directly involved in development projects. Nevertheless, discernible differences in procedural methodologies exist between these countries and although these differences often equate to environmental arrangements within a specific communal setting, Chavez (2008) argues that direct participation in participatory processes frequently gets diluted, resulting in communities sometimes not being able to access and spend funds on projects deemed important to them.

1. Rationale for the research

The concept of public participation in all spheres of government is embedded in various legislative and regulatory policies to promote an environment of trust and to build a culture in which policy development and implementation can be internalized through an active citizenry. In South Africa there is an extended focus on policy participation in the local sphere of government where Sections 23(1) and 27(1) of the *Municipal Finance Management Act*, 2003 (56 of 2003) require that planning related to the budgeting process must be aligned to a strategic developmental initiative. Municipal Integrated Development Plans are subsequently developed and have to comply with this statutory requirement to promote and enhance developmental local government. This process is also molded on the 3-E model of value for money, noted by Jackson (2012) and measured according to Woodhouse's (1997, p. 47) description as effectiveness, economy and efficiency – three unambiguous concepts emphasized in Section 195(b) of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996. While this contextual classification emphasizes the idea of democracy, decentralization, budget openness and transparency and public participation, effective public engagement remains negligible because of inhibiting factors such as access to meeting venues, interest group identification, communication and even the recognition of developmental suggestions.

The uptake of participatory budgeting initiatives depends on the formulation of participatory policies that, according to Tanaka (2007, p. 141), is often limited to periodic elections. Pauw, Woods, Van der Linde, Fourie and Visser (2009, p. 71) also argue that, even though a number of strategic structures have been incorporated into budget policy and deci-

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sion-making processes, civil society is not formally recognized as an important external stakeholder. Nevertheless, while the idea of public participation has already been implemented with various degrees of success in some municipalities as part of what South African Cities Network (2013, p. 68) refers to as the “caring city concept” of *Ubuntu*, active public participation in the budgeting environment remains in its infancy. Often, budget preparation remains reserved and shrouded in bureaucratic secrecy as the exclusive prerogative of the executive.

An analysis of public participatory initiatives in Anglophone countries (emphasizing systems and processes in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania) in which participation in budgeting processes is central to good governance provides a comparative environment regarding public participation in budgeting processes. Africa’s colonial history is diverse with at least eight mostly European countries having had a significant presence and influence over territories by the early 1900s. Stein (2000, p. 6) notes that the impact of these colonial regimes differed noticeably, particularly *vis-à-vis* administrative processes, economic objectives and financial systems – three policy focus areas underscoring separate developmental trajectories and notable legacy systems shaping contemporary government. Therefore, the historical relationship between South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania as former British colonies provides the context for international comparison for this research, even though their developmental trajectories differ. These trajectories, when argued from a path dependence theory perspective, depict specific political directions within the democratization imperative, most noticeably the concept of independence through decentralization.

A supplementary motivation for selecting these countries relates to Heller’s (2001, p. 138) postulation of dynamic developmentalism within an optimist-conflict framework. In this regard, Mullins (1987), Brown (1990) and Walker (1991) (in Kellow & Niemeyer, 1999, p. 206) and Brueckner, Durey Pforr and Mayes (2014, p. 318) describe developmentalism as an interventionist strategy, albeit conservative and structured, to achieve predefined developmental objectives. Heller (2001) describes the optimist-conflict model as a consensus model in the decentralization debate of new developmentalism. In essence, this model recognizes that all transformative processes deal with a mixture of interactions as structural, procedural or functional undercurrents. Conversely, Heller (2001, p. 138) notes that this model recognizes the inherent potential of interaction between “representation and participa-

tion, public goods and local preferences, and between technocracy and democracy”.

2. Literature review

Participation has become a significant concept in developmental initiatives with governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) increasingly insisting upon participatory approaches to achieve common objectives. While public participation processes vary in form and degree throughout the world, the aim of participation remains the incorporation of stakeholders in the decision-making process. The process of community consultation, participation and empowerment, as noted by the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) (2007, p. 56), is sometimes inundated with conceptual and practical challenges, albeit in view of the changing relationship between citizens and governing institutions where each fulfil a particular role in relation to the achievement of statutory objectives. The DPLG (2005, p. 1) also upholds that, within the South African context, public participation has been defined in ways to either shape local capacity and self-reliance or to maintain and justify the execution of State influence and power. Participation can therefore be conceptualized as a process through which various stakeholders influence and share control within the policy process, from conceptualization through resource allocation to the access of goods and services especially in relation to the budgeting construct.

Budgeting is an important mechanism for financial planning and management and, as a cyclical decision-making process, it allows for the achievement of organizational priorities and objectives through limited fiscal resources. The correct application of budgeting can contribute significantly to greater efficiency, effectiveness and accountability within any organization if a level of synergy exists between the policy direction and the fiscal framework. Being part of the control environment relating to the efficient, effective and economic utilization of resources, budgets are also an indistinguishable part of the broader planning and policy environment. Furthermore, Smith (1944, p. 181) argues that a budget’s importance in a democratic setting should be aligned to both the legislative and executive management environments and emphasizes publicity, amongst others, as a core principle of any budget. In essence, publicity requires budget openness and transparency during all the stages of the budgeting process, which include executive recommendation, legislative consideration and budget execution.

As an integral part of the government’s administrative process with a range of actors responsible for

executing policies to achieve predetermined objectives, public budgeting is set within a structured system of powers (legislative, executive and judicial) and control measures. When considering the need for good governance, citizens are often involved through accountability mechanisms such as budget reviews. Here, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2002, p. 3) affirms the importance of scrutinizing governance methodologies, institutional capacity, policy-making, administrative procedures and technological initiatives, particularly in relation to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. In this regard, the human resource management function plays an important role as it encompasses the selection, appointment and management of individuals throughout the process. The appointment of capable and qualified community representatives and local government administrators is critical towards the achievement of predetermined participatory budgeting outcomes. However, while significant effort is placed on an organization's human resource division to communicate budget-related concerns, the danger of established external elite groups, capable of sustaining their own human resource management processes, cannot be negated. In critiquing these elites, Masser (2013) argues that participatory offerings might enable these groups to gain disproportionate influence within the participatory process since they are often well-organized and financially sustainable.

Public engagement in the financial matters of government in particular, entails the internalization of participatory budgeting and related processes. Fair Share (in UN-HABITAT & MDP, 2008, p. 3) defines participatory budgeting as "a process whereby communities work together with elected and unelected officials to develop policies and budgets for the community". According to Ampler (2012, p. 3) active public participation extends the possibility of political renewal through debate as it provides citizens, rather than politicians, with authoritative power. Furthermore, He (in Ahenkan, Bawole & Domfeh, 2013, p. 55) maintains that the process itself can be considered a mechanism for "administrative incorporation, expanding participation and narrowing contestation".

3. Research aim, approach and methodology

The purpose of this research is to explore the role of civic participation in the South African budgeting process. Its significance not only aims to contribute theoretically and empirically to the contextualization of participatory budgeting, but also to contextualize the role and function of civil society in the intricacies of policy formulation within the budgeting environment. Against this background, two

viewpoints strengthen this argument, namely (1) Venter and Landsberg's (2007, p. 81) assessment that many citizens do not immediately comprehend the functions of government and (2) the Congress of South African Trade Unions' view that Section 17 of the *Green Paper on National Strategic Planning*, 2009 does not address the creation of dedicated participatory structures within civil society, but rather focuses on *ad hoc* participatory arrangements (Govender, 2009).

Mixed - methods research formed the foundational construct for this pragmatic analysis through the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. This approach presented a framework for analysis to understand the role of civil society in the budgeting process. The **qualitative** framework focused on a comparative assessment of participatory approaches between developed economies (the United Kingdom and New Zealand) and developing economies (South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania). The **quantitative** sphere addressed indicators derived from four existing indices: the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), an annual statistical index by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the *Democracy Index*, 2014 published by the Economic Intelligence Unit, the *Open Budget Survey*, 2015, compiled by the International Budget Partnership (IBP) and the *Decentralization Index*, 2012 developed by Ivanyna and Shah (2012). However, the quantitative assessment only focused on comparable data between developing economies because of data accessibility and ease of quantification. From these datasets, four unique indicators emerged: *Participation*, *Democracy*, *Budget Openness and Transparency*, and *Decentralization*. Thus, the equalization of these datasets provided an inclusive representation of public participation and openness across the selected countries. This comparative analysis allowed for the delineation of indicators across a wider spectrum to understand the interactive relationship between the citizenry and government institutions responsible for budget policy.

4. Public engagement in the budgeting process

The growth and evolution of the participatory budgeting phenomenon cannot be understated. Smith (2004, p. 4) notes that democratization, decentralization and good governance effectively influenced the worldwide adoption, implementation and escalation of participatory budgeting. A noticeable phenomenon in Europe, in particular, is the diverse applications and interpretations of participatory budgeting, ranging from networking activities to the incorporation of the private sector in service delivery initiatives. The United Kingdom has an open and transparent system of government that provides financial information to its citizenry. Section 155 of

the *Code for Fiscal Stability*, 1998 of the *Finance Act*, 1998 (c. 36) governs the management of public finances. However, participatory budgeting in the United Kingdom differs from the rest of Europe and, as indicated by Involve (in Best, Augustyn & Lambermont, 2011, p. 80), consists of progressive tools to enhance participatory democracy. Of these, consensus conferences, citizens' panels and citizens' juries have proven invaluable and, with the publication of the discussion paper *A National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement* in 2008, participatory budgeting received specific attention. Best, Augustyn and Lambermont (2011, p. 81) also assert that the idea and practice of participatory budgeting "has mainly taken the form of the management of community funds at local and city level [including] public/private arrangements".

In Oceania, participatory budgeting is incorporated into a variety of government reform initiatives focusing on the harnessing of modern technology. Local authorities in New Zealand are legally obliged to consult their communities as part of community planning processes when presenting their Long-Term Community and Council Plans. The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (2012, p. 144) discloses that the *Local Government Act*, 2002 (84 of 2002) created a broad framework to incorporate community views in the decision-making process, while simultaneously structuring consultation regulations relating to development and annual plans tabled by local councils. A prominent form of public participation in New Zealand is Citizens' Panels and is described by Public Voice (2014, p. 3) as "a group of people selected from the community, with whom a council regularly consults on a range of issues". Participants are recruited through mixed random sampling techniques and reflect the demographic and geographic variables characteristic of that particular community.

The African participatory budgeting phenomenon developed mainly through poverty reduction strategies and demands by international donor organizations and aid agencies, with Oakley and Clegg (1998, p. 1) referring to participation and participatory development as the "cornerstones of development strategies proposed by many international and bilateral development agencies and NGOs".

The *Constitution of Kenya*, 2010 declares a new era of public participation, with the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa and Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2013, p. x) referring to "the unequivocal right of people to participate in and [oversee] the government" as a constitutional imperative. The *Public Finance Management Act*, 2012 (18 of 2012) also makes provision for the incorporation of public participation into different

financial management processes. Nevertheless, participation is, to some extent, limited to capital projects with no opportunity to provide input once the consolidated budget is produced.

Article 8(d) of the *Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania*, 1977, referring to the idea that "the people shall participate in the affairs of their Government in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution" encapsulates the broad concept of public participation in Tanzania. Both the *Local Government Urban Authorities Act*, 1982 (8 of 1982) and the *Local Government District Authorities Act*, 1982 (7 of 1982) provide for councils to organize public hearings and thus require institutionalized cooperation with civil society, particularly in promoting and ensuring democratic participation in and control of decision-making. Consultation, therefore, remains paramount and local government authorities are required to consult with local communities as part of their planning process.

Legislative and regulatory frameworks in South Africa emphasize the importance of good governance and the necessity for public participation. While Atlee (2008) provides a list of public participation principles such as inclusiveness, empowerment, engagement, knowledge management, quality dialogue and continuous engagement, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) (2013, p. 1) maintains that the philosophy in the South African environment is rights-based, with consultation being perceived as a prerequisite in all cases where public authorities' decisions might have the potential to affect stakeholders. Furthermore, a municipality is obligated to consider the common interests and concerns of the community when drafting bye-laws, policy and program implementation and then to communicate its activities and outcomes clearly to the community (SALGA, 2013, p. 1).

While the influence of the participatory budgeting philosophy in democratic societies such as South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania remains invaluable despite the fact that Kenya and Tanzania experience intermittent internal instability often exacerbated by regional conflict, the core democratic philosophy is maintained as a collective responsibility to advance development. Participatory budgeting, therefore, primarily revolves around the enhancement of the democratic imperative which includes the understanding of civil society's role in the decentralization process to determine the *when* and *how* of involvement in the broader process of decision-making and aims to bring government closer to the people notwithstanding civil and political differences. A critical component of the participatory budgeting philosophy also relates to the concept and application of stakeholder theory that, according to Motl-

habane (2015, p. 49), contextualizes the involvement of individuals or groups in joint ventures to optimize common objectives or concerns to ensure prosperity. Therefore, the selection of suitable stakeholders must be emphasized to secure effective participation.

5. Participatory governance and indices analysis

Various forms and contexts, often overlapping to some degree, describe participatory budgeting. An important consideration is the fact that public participation in budgeting processes stems from the need to contribute to good governance through accountability. Governance, on the other side, needs to be measured to ascertain directional shifts or policy changes to fulfil a government's objectives. Conversely, measurement takes place through different indicators as part of index assessment. The assimilation of indices can be useful in the administrative and management environments, especially when combined to emphasize developments or scenarios in defined fields of interest. Civil society, in particular, benefits from the knowledge derived from index outcomes, thereby holding their governments accountable to change or compelling them to adapt to the existing environmental influences.

5.1. Ibrahim index of African Governance. The IIAG quantitatively measures the quality of governance in African countries through a specific set of governance indicators from diverse sources. A breakdown of these indicators measures the sub-dimensions of governance to provide a composite analysis. According to the IIAG (2014a), the measurement of the governance premise (the primary focus of the IIAG), is prepared through a specific contextualization of the concept itself before the application of selected variables to operationalize the measuring activity. The IIAG (2014a) stipulates that governance concerns "the provision of the political, social and economic public goods and services that a citizen has the right to expect from his or her [government], and that a [government] has the responsibility to deliver to its citizens". This research analyzed data presented between 2009 and 2013 to form part of the broader comparative analysis.

5.2. Democracy index, 2014. Democracy and participatory budgeting share a common link: the involvement of the broader citizenry in decision-making processes, regardless of the methodological foundation. Kekic (2007, p. 2) notes that the *Democracy Index, 2014* measures the state of democracy in 165 independent states and two territories and is based on five interrelated categories: the functioning of government, political participation, political culture, civil liberties and the overall electoral process. Democracy is an important indicator

for budget transparency and accountability since it provides an indication of a government's commitment towards the provision of important budget-related information by amalgamating social, political, economic and environmental influences into a framework from which assessments can be made. Participatory budgeting, as part of the participatory democracy arsenal, essentially represents a pure form of democracy where citizens have an actual say in the distribution of resources to their own and future generations' benefit. As a critical component of any democracy, participation or the lack thereof in arranged processes such as elections or community meetings, are dependent on the predominant democratic culture and associated freedoms assigned to independent institutions.

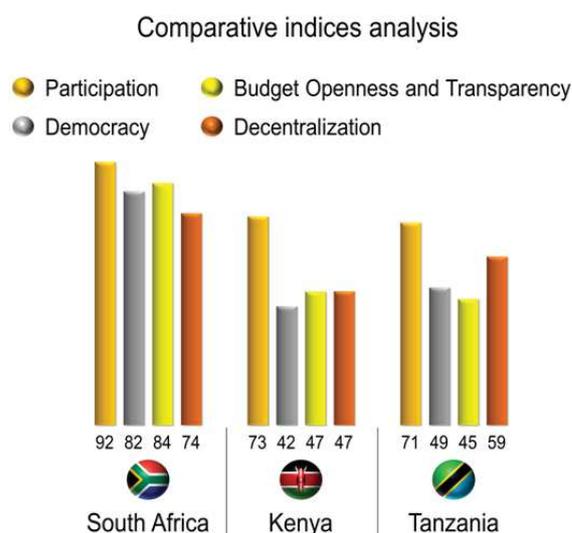
5.3. Open budget survey, 2015. The Open budget survey assesses the public availability, comprehensiveness, usefulness and timeliness of strategic budget documents. According to the IBP (2015), the *Open Budget Survey, 2015*, covers 140 questions of which 87 emphasize specific aspects of transparency, while 22 address eight key budget documents (the pre-budget statement, the budget proposal, the enacted budget, the citizens' budget, in-year reports, the mid-year review, the year-end report and audit reports) based on international best practices as strategic instruments within the budget cycle. Budget openness and transparency is regarded as a mechanism to achieve accountability. However, processes and mechanisms to achieve accountability differ over time, particularly when incorporating changing administrative practices. Based on data obtained from the *Open Budget Survey, 2015*, marked changes in the *Budget Openness and Transparency* category can be observed between South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania.

5.4. Decentralization index, 2012. The *Decentralization Index, 2012*, developed by Ivanyna and Shah (2012) presents the degree of decentralization within the selected countries. This index identifies five core elements to provide a unique data set on local governance and covers the political, fiscal and administrative dimensions of 182 countries. The *Local Government Empowerment* indicator serves as a contextual reference in this regard. According to Ivanyna and Shah (2012, p. 4), "a government is closer to its people if it encompasses a small geographical area and population and it enjoys home rule and cannot be arbitrarily dismissed by higher level governments". A conceptual understanding of government closeness, more appropriately referred to as decentralization, therefore requires an understanding of the structure, size and significance of local government within a defined legislative and regulatory framework. The decentralization con-

struct combined the outcomes of three important indicators: fiscal decentralization, political decentralization and administrative decentralization.

6. Public participation and budget openness: comparing indices

Statistical evaluation is an integral part of comparative investigation. However, comparing imbalanced datasets such as the IIAG, the *Democracy Index*, 2014, the *Open Budget Survey*, 2015 and the *Decentralization Index*, 2012 often presents the problem where classes (indicators) differ due to varying methodological and presentation practices. Nevertheless, reconstructing the datasets into a single, self-explanatory dataset (see Figure 1), involved the equalization of the original data, then converting it to percentages based on the original dataset interpretation where after the new indicators were combined as a comparative dataset indicated in Table 1.



Source: Own deduction from IIAG (2014b); EIU (2014); IBP (2015) and Ivanyna and Shah (2012).

Fig. 1. Comparative analysis: South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania

Table 1. Equalized indicators

| Indicator | Country | Number of countries (n) | Rank (r) out of n | Equalized score converted to % | |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----|
| Indicator 1: Participation | South Africa | 52 | 4 | 48 | 92% |
| | Kenya | | 14 | 38 | 73% |
| | Tanzania | | 15 | 37 | 71% |
| Indicator 2: Democracy | South Africa | 167 | 30 | 137 | 82% |
| | Kenya | | 97 | 70 | 42% |
| | Tanzania | | 86 | 81 | 49% |
| Indicator 3: Budget openness and transparency | South Africa | 102 | 86 | 86 | 84% |
| | Kenya | | 48 | 48 | 47% |
| | Tanzania | | 46 | 46 | 45% |
| Indicator 4: Decentralization | South Africa | 182 | 47 | 135 | 74% |
| | Kenya | | 96 | 86 | 47% |
| | Tanzania | | 74 | 108 | 59% |

Source: Own deduction from IIAG (2014b), EIU (2014), IBP (2015) and Ivanyna and Shah (2012).

While the qualitative framework addressed participatory methodologies in the United Kingdom and New Zealand as developed economies, the quantitative framework only focused on available comparable data between South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania as developing economies. From these datasets, four unique indicators emerged: *Participation*, *Democracy*, *Budget Openness and Transparency*, and *Decentralization*. Thus, the equalization of these datasets provided an inclusive representation of public participation and openness across the selected countries.

Public participation, the concept of democracy, the need for transparency and budget openness and decentralization remain keystone concepts within any participatory framework. With a mean score of 83 across all indicators, South Africa outranks Kenya

(52) and Tanzania (56) as part of the participatory construct of engagement in this regard. Although resolute constitutional imperatives play an important role to some degree, socio-economic and political vibrancy contribute significantly in this regard, especially when analyzing the predominant developmental agenda as part of Heller’s (2001) optimist-conflict framework and Ibrahim’s (2011, p. 701) reflection that urbanized decision-making, in particular, requires dynamism and vibrancy. Nevertheless, Clarke (in Ibrahim, 2011, p. 701) notes that urban management, in many cases, have failed to succeed due to a myriad of inhibiting factors linked to rapid urbanization without optimally integrating service delivery plans or infrastructure allocations.

Budget openness and transparency also emphasize the importance of accountability and good gover-

nance. South Africa's ranking emphasizes civil society's interest in publishing information of this kind with Robinson (2006, p. 3) arguing that developments around participatory budgeting in Brazil during the 1990s attributed to the overall interest in open budgets, effectively prompting a new political momentum to strengthen democratic principles. However, budget transparency and openness alone do not guarantee effective public participation in budget matters. Despite the fact that access to information is paramount within the decision-making framework, the need for civil society to comprehend, process and act on it is often problematic. In comparable developing economies such as Kenya and Tanzania, low education levels, access to technology and the lack of support structures often inhibit actionable outcomes at grassroots level. Here, Pitan (2015, p. 28) emphasizes the focused application of generic skills in several critical sectors of society. Although Pitan (2015) focuses on the Nigerian model, skills relating to communication, decision-making and problem-solving will undeniably strengthen community participatory initiatives, especially within the budgeting environment. The type and quality of information being published also matters. Although strategic information regarding the state of any government's financial affairs is invaluable, most citizens only require actionable information pertaining to their immediate environment to enable them to take decisions accordingly.

Kenya is ranked 48th regarding budget openness and transparency. This score deviates marginally from the *Open Budget Survey*, 2012 assessment and indicates that the government provides the citizenry with some budget and financial information. The IBP (2015) assessment also ranks Tanzania 46th – a decline of one rank compared to the *Open Budget Survey*, 2012. As with Kenya, this score is marginally higher than the average of 45 for all the countries. Furthermore, this score indicates that limited information on the national government's budget and fiscal activities is provided to the public, making it difficult for citizens to hold the government accountable in terms of government spending and project development.

South Africa is ranked 86th according to the IBP (2015) assessment and is amongst the top performing countries globally, significantly higher than the average score of 45 for the 102 countries surveyed. This score reflects open access to budget-related information and documents that serve as accountability tools for the management of public money. It is therefore evident that maintaining a good financial system will yield positive results, underscoring Fourie's (2007, p. 742) argument of maintaining internal control structures to manage interrelation-

ships between all role-players in the system. However, based on the data presented in the *Open Budget Survey*, 2012, the country's position dropped four ranks.

Conclusion

Public participation inherently enhances the quality of democracy, albeit to strengthen or test existing systems. The success of any participatory endeavor depends on the nature of the relationship between political office-bearers, appointed officials and the broader citizenry. While most participatory models in Africa essentially conform to frameworks that evolved from external donor agencies, the overall political context and frameworks determining access to influence policy frameworks continue to shape budgeting systems, inadvertently determining the developmental curve of any particular country.

In this regard, the political and local government organizations of Kenya and Tanzania, in particular, do not vary significantly, primarily due to historical influences. South Africa, in particular, owes its participatory trajectory to several waves of democratization where communities essentially established mechanisms to accomplish political transformation, ultimately culminating into the establishment of a participatory ideology as a pillar of democracy, albeit conceptualized through various lenses of the democratic imperative. Furthermore, the nature and extent of budget-related inputs originating from the broader citizenry vary significantly since many citizens are not familiar with corporate financial matters and administrative processes. Decisions relating to capital expenditure projects, for instance, might require significant public participation, particularly where these are likely to affect the community as a whole. Often, focused participation relates to the achievement of immediate results, with many programs centering on poverty alleviation.

Measuring the extent of public engagement in the political and budgeting context, therefore, requires the application of specific tools and techniques. In this regard, indices analysis focused on different segments of governance with democracy, participation, decentralization and budget openness and transparency being the primary areas of focus. An important consideration throughout was the requirement for public participation to advance accountability.

When public engagement is limited or curtailed, the implementation of government policies frequently face resistance and fail to achieve desired objectives. Direct citizenship, through participatory budgeting in particular, inculcates improved decision-making and facilitates social interaction and uptake of democratic values and principles. However, the

questions of what is considered adequate participation and how all the stakeholders can be accommodated equally to participate optimally in the budgeting processes are often raised. Conversely, it is important to clarify and contextualize the stakeholder model at the onset of any participatory process, since this will determine not only the roles and responsibilities of all actors involved, but also the

direction and eventual outcomes envisaged through the participatory process. Therefore, by effectively engaging the public in budget matters, government not only creates an environment for knowledge generation, particularly when incorporating specialized public knowledge, but also an opportunity to improve the quality and effectiveness of government spending.

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