

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN BUDGETARY PROCESSES IN NIGERIA: MYTH OR REALITY

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Abstract

Citizen participation in governance processes is critical for sustaining the development of any society. Citizen participation in budgetary processes is a system of promoting efficient and responsive government by having citizens input into resource allocation decisions. The paper noted that citizen-participation in governance is at its lowest in the nation. This paper is qualitative in nature, relying on secondary data, such as textbooks, journals, official documents etc. The paper is anchored on stakeholders' theory which argues that citizen participation is a pillar of democracy and is necessary for a sustainable democracy. As a result, it gives every individual opportunity to influence and change political, social, economic and public decisions and allows citizens to be an important part of the democratic decision-making in Nigeria. It observed that since the return of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, efforts at participatory governance have never received the full backing of the ruling class, because they see it as a threat to their collective interest. The paper examines the nature of budgetary process in Nigeria, and states that participatory budgeting could be an important tool that can be used to encourage active citizenship in the transformation and development of their community. It concludes that the quality of democracy depends on how far people can participate in and influence the governance process. Citizen participation is critical for democratic decision-making and ensuring transparency and accountability.

Keywords: Citizen participation, budgeting, participatory budgeting, democracy, governance

Introduction

Citizen participation in governance has come to be accepted as an expression of citizens' rights and the manifestation of citizen agency (Mahmud, 2004). In different parts of the world, new democratic experiments are transforming older forms of governance, creating political space for public engagement in governance (Cornwall, 2004). Citizen participation in the decisions is an imperative of contemporary society. Citizen participation in budgetary processes is a topic that has received attention for many decades.

Citizen participation in governance processes is critical for sustaining the development of any society. These actions ensure the voices of the people are heard, and that they are able to take part in decisions about the issues that affect them. Citizen participation is also critical in ensuring transparency and accountability in governance; key attributes of good governance, which remain critical to Nigeria's development (Voice to the People, 2018). Citizen participation in budgetary

processes otherwise described participatory budgeting according to Hong (2015) is a system of promoting efficient and responsive government by having citizens input into resource allocation decisions. This view is shared by Muhammadi, et al (2010) who asserts that public participation is based on the democratic system to protect the rights of individuals and the public interest. Public participation is seen as important elements of the democratic government. Citizen participation in governance has traditionally centered on activities that enhance greater public access to information about government activities, facilitate the rights of citizens to be 'consulted and heard' on matters which directly affect them, and ensure that all voices can be heard equally through fair systems of representative democracy (Aulich 2009).

The relevance of citizen participation in budgetary processes cannot be over-emphasized. For this reason, most governments in different parts world are constantly encouraging citizen in the implementation of government policies as this in the view of Geurtz and van (2010) facilitates and improve the workings of government, and quality of decision making (Mualuko, Mukasa& Judy, 2009). Citizen participation is a mechanism to guide governance. Citizen participation has been characterised as necessary to ensure a good relationship with the public, better service quality and policy implementation (Chowdhury&Aktaruzzaman, 2016). Citizens' participation can occur at various points of governance including policy making, budget formulation, legislative and planning processes.

No doubt, the Nigerian budgetary governance suffers monumental challenges which span the conception of the budget through to its implementation. One of the challenges with the budget process in Nigeria is the over bloated nature of the budget. Citizen participation is usually considered a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making (Ank, 2011). Citizen's participation in development programme seems to be heavily determined by the socio-economic factors in which they live. This participation in decision-making empowers everyone to ownership of development programme, projects and their sustainability. (Suleiman, 2018). Many of the problems and challenges facing democracies are most directly addressed through the budget process. Swedish philosopher, Sissela Bok, in 1982 stated thus, "I believe that a guarantee of public access to government information is indispensable in the long run for any democratic society, if officials make public only what they want citizens to know, then publicity becomes a sham and accountability meaningless."

It is no gainsaying the fact that budgeting has gone beyond being an annual ritual. It is today known to be very strategic in nature and all-encompassing as it is through it that government's scarce resources are allocated to programmes and services for governmental operations. However, the quality of decision resulting from the budget process and the level of its acceptance depend on the characteristics of the budget process that is in use (Adesopo, 2011). This brings the idea of citizen participation in budgetary processes. As observed by Ajagba, Gbervbie and Agbu (2019), the quality of citizen participation in governance, especially in budgetary processes depends on the level of political, social and economic empowerment of the citizenry as well as the information available to them. This paper examines the issue of citizen participation in budgetary processes and its implications on budgetary governance in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

One major plight of Nigeria, especially since independence, has been governance crisis that has resulted in the country's development problem. One striking issue today is the role of the citizen in governance in Nigeria. The situation has been that they are being denied access to public administrative system (Adesopo, 2011). Citizen-participation in governance is at its lowest in the nation. This clearly indicates that the Nigerian democratic system is quite porous, inefficient and susceptible to negative infiltrations. Therefore, it will not be out of place to declare that our overall democratic process in Nigeria requires some "step up". An assessment of the budgeting process in the public sector leaves much to be desired. The practice today is that a certain percentage is added to previous period's budget to arrive at current budget figures without reference to the environmental inhibitions being encountered or the realities of present-day situation. The budgets are centrally prepared and the result passed down the line for all and sundry to implement without questions of control, monitoring and evaluation. The outcome of such practice cannot be objective or realistic. Therefore, it cannot be relied upon to achieve any meaningful analysis or interpretation of the performance of the units involved.

Conceptual Review**Citizen Participation:**

The basic logic of citizen participation is that it is a process which provides individuals a veritable opportunity to influence public decisions and has long been a component of the democratic decision-making process. Citizen participation is usually considered a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making (Nweke, 2019). Citizens' participation is the process of empowerment of the deprived and marginalized. In the views of Yaro, Arshad and Salleh (2013), citizen participation is an activity that citizens involve or influence government public policy or public affairs through certain channels for participation. They explain citizen participation further as the implementation of democratic politics, maximum and achievements of citizenship. Andre, Martin, and Lanmafankpotin (2006) see citizen participation as a process in which ordinary people take part – whether on a voluntary or obligatory basis and whether acting alone or as part of a group – with the goal of influencing a decision involving significant choices that will affect their community. Cohen and Uphoff (1980) described participation as people's involvement in decision making processes, in implementing programmes, sharing in the benefits of development programmes and involvement in efforts to evaluate those programmes.

In the broader sense, citizen participation in democratic governance is seen as the process through which people take part in, and influence, public decisions that affect their lives. This includes direct and indirect ways for people; women, men, girls and boys; to exercise influence as individuals, as members of networks and associations, and through various political institutions. The idea of people's involvement in decision-making is fundamental to the successful implantation of policies in any society.

Participatory Budgeting

A budget is the principal instrument of fiscal policy used to encourage stable growth, sustainable development and prosperity in the economy. It is a comprehensive document that outlines what economic and non-economic activities a government wants to undertake with special focus on policies, objectives and strategies for accomplishments that are substantiated with revenue and expenditure projections (Ugoh&Ukpere, 2009). Sullivan and Sheffrin (2003) state that a budget is derived from the french word “Budgette” which means a leather bag or a wallet. It is a statement of the financial plan of the government. It shows the income and expenditure of the government during a financial year. Omolehinwa (1989) defined budget as a plan of dominant individuals in an organization expressed in monetary terms and subject to the constraints imposed by the participants and the environments indicating how the available resources may be utilized to achieve whatever the dominant individuals agreed to be on the organization’s priorities.

Budgeting as a concept of authorization explains the original purpose of budgeting as a financial plan to provide money for government institution. Consequent upon this, the government institution carries out their activities usually a year as expressed in quantitative terms ensuring effective and efficient mobilization of resources (Onaolapo&Olaoye, 2013).

There are divergent opinions regarding the definition of participatory budgeting. This is because procedures called participatory budgeting in some places would not get that label in others. Participatory budgeting was developed and invented in Porto Alegre, the capital city of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, dated back 1989. It was developed then in the citizens’ efforts to extend and deepen actual existing democracy because since the re-establishment of democracy in 1985 the country’s politics had remained dominated by traditional patronage practices, social exclusion, and corruption (Wampler, 2000). It later travelled not only across Latin America, but was also transferred to other parts of the world, especially North America, Europe and Asia. Although participatory budgeting was developed and invented in Porto Alegre, later it travelled not only across Latin America, but was also transferred to other parts of the world, especially North America, Europe and Asia (Bisong&Ogwumike, 2020).

Participatory budgeting is the process of democratic policy making in which government invites citizen inputs during the budgeting process and allows their influence in allocations of the budget for public expenditure (Zhang & Yang, 2009). It involves giving citizen some decision-making power in determining allocations within budget at the constituency and county level either through consultation with the public and/or shared decision making with the public on budget formulation (Norton & Elson 2002).

Participatory Budgeting allows citizens to be involved in deciding how a defined portion of public resources will be allocated. It attempts to ensure that public spending is consistent with citizens’ priorities. Participatory Budgeting is a process whereby citizens participate directly in the allocation of a defined public budget. Shah (2007) described participatory budgeting as representing a direct-democracy approach to budgeting that offers citizens at large an opportunity to learn about government operations and to deliberate, debate, and influence the allocation of public resources.

Similarly, Goldfrank (2007), see it as a process by which citizens, either as individuals or through civic associations, can voluntarily and regularly contribute to decision making over at least part of a public budget through an annual series of scheduled meetings with governmental authorities. Zhang and Yang (2009) see participatory budgeting as a process of democratic policy-making in which the government invites citizen inputs during the budget process and allow their influence in budget allocations.

Participatory budgeting is a form of community participation in democratic governance that has to do with the redistribution of resources in favour of the more vulnerable social groups by means of participatory democracy. It is a means of reducing the predominant nature of the state over the civil society, through the distribution of resources and the definition of investment priorities (Aragon & Sanchez, 2008). Under the participatory budgeting system, citizens have the right to say how part of the public resources should be spent. It is a complex process including the identification of needs, formulation of needs, discussions, and prioritizing some of these needs. Participatory budgeting programmes are implemented at the behest of governments, citizens, and non-state actors like Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to allow citizens to play a direct role in deciding how and where resources should be spent. (Bisong&Ogwumike, 2020).

Participatory budgeting allows citizens or residents to vote for specific public projects, which will then be implemented by governments, and which often include a value-based component emphasizing social justice (Wampler&Hartz-Karp, 2012). According to World Bank (2007), participatory budgeting in developing countries by underlining its merits to include; It promotes social justice. Neighborhoods or sub regions with lower levels of infrastructure and higher poverty rates receive more resources than better-off sub regions; It spurs administrative reforms. In participatory budgeting programs, considerable time and effort are dedicated to decentralizing the government. Officials are appointed to aid the administration of each district. The reorganization of local administrative processes facilitates contact between the government and the population; It fosters good governance and transparency; Participatory budgeting can provide government with information that improves allocative or technical efficiency. Public input may offer innovative solutions that would not have emerged from traditional modes of decision making. Participatory budgeting is seen as a means of improving democratic outcomes by directly involving and increasing the participation of normally marginalized populations, which is also expected to shift how public moneys are spent.

According to the above definitions, participatory budgeting is a process that is open to any citizen who wants to participate, combines direct and representative democracy, involves deliberation (not merely consultation), redistributes resources toward the poor, and is self-regulating, such that participants help define the rules governing the process, including the criteria by which resources are allocated.

Theoretical Review

This paper is anchored on stakeholders' theory. Though Stakeholder theory has a private sector dimension in its nature, it can be very helpful in order to explain the present situation in public sector. Since the public sphere has a reflexive nature, it should be possible to look at what is

happening in this discipline with the perspectives of the other disciplines interrelated. Since the stakeholder theory evaluates the stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the activities of an organization” (Freeman, 2010: 49), it is arguable that by means of stakeholder theory, the firms in private sector are at a point to take care not solely its own interests but they are required to take care for the interests of the actors in their environments since these actors keep the power to change the path of the any firms operating in the sector. The stakeholders of any firm operating in the private sector are in an interrelated and mutual relationship with the different actors in the environment. It is clear that without intervention of these actors in the decision making and implementation processes of the firms, the firms’ operations are not feasible at all.

Stakeholder theory makes it far easier to engage in self-dealing and defend it than if shareholder theory were the sole purpose. Stakeholder theory is primarily concerned with distribution of financial outputs (Marcoux, 2000). This view depicts stakeholder theory as primarily about who receives the resources of the organization, and poses a stark and inherent conflict between shareholders and other stakeholders in terms of who gets what.

Stakeholder theory is used in this paper as a critical-diagnostic tool to identify the points at which stakeholders are vulnerable to breakdowns in the spending process in the absence of moral constraints on the part of government spenders. For instance, stakeholders such as electorates, taxpayers or simply citizens are interested in what the government offers from spending taxpayers’ money (Ohiaeri, 2020).

In democracies, citizens are presumed to be important stakeholders in that they are able to participate either directly or indirectly through elected representatives in the formation, adoption and implementation of the laws and policies that affect them. Public participation thus is a fundamental part of the public–government relationship in democracies (Jacobs et al. 2009; Bryson et al. 2013).

The Nature of Citizen Participation in Nigeria

Nowadays, participation of the public in governance processes, especially on the local level, is seen as desirable and beneficial by both scholars and professionals. It is also widely accepted that citizens should be involved in the budgetary process. Participatory budgeting is not merely a theoretical concept but has been tested and implemented in many ways and forms.

Citizen participation constitutes an element inherent to democracy and to advanced democratic governance environments, and implies the intervention of citizens in government (Rangel, 2018). This citizen participation is the result of the level of development, multiple social interactions, changes in systems politicians, the production of networks at global, national and local scales, the emergence of international organizations, globalization, the new instruments of public policy control, and the formation of societies that increasingly become more critical and demanding of their rulers, among others (Castillo, 2017).

Citizen participation gives every individual opportunity to influence and change political, social, economic and public decisions and allows us to be an important part of the democratic decision-

making in Nigeria. By citizen participation the people become part of the governance structure and can through the strength of people power actually direct governance. Citizen participation does not end at voting for public officers but is an ongoing activity.

Citizen participation is a pillar of democracy and is necessary for a sustainable democracy. It means citizens performing their social responsibility of participation in governance as part of their civic duties. Citizen participation is both a duty and an honour. Nigeria is at crisis point, and our people are now ready for action through citizen participation.

An Overview of Budgetary Process in Nigeria

The budgeting process is a cycle of activities carried out before, during and after the budgeting period (Eme&Okeke, 2017). The rationality of the budgetary process and its political utility has been variously taken for granted in Nigeria over the years. This has been largely so because Nigeria is a place where unreasonable and sentimental extra-budgetary spending has become a way of life.

Budgetary process involves all centers, programmes and administrative units of an entity in the development of periodic budget. The process involves all the executive and legislative processes, that is, collection of estimates from the various government departments to the defense before the various committees of the legislatures and debates in the floor of the houses, the passage into law and the final implementation and monitoring. Budgeting process is the continuum of budget preparation, approval, execution, reporting, Audit and review (Johnson, 1999). This process revolves round the executive and legislative structures in a democratic system. Anyafo (2004) identifies the activities depicting the budgeting process of the federal government. Specifically, the process includes:

- i. Presidential articulation and communication of budget policy objectives.
- ii. Ministerial call circular further amplifies the president's budget policy guidelines in a call circular to the federal ministries, extra – ministerial departments and parastatals requesting the advance proposal for the forth coming fiscal year's budget.
- iii. Ministerial budget hearing and defence, and Draft estimates consolidations
- iv. Federal executive council review of draft estimates and approval of draft estimate.
- v. Presidential presentation of draft estimate before each house of national assembly not later than 60 days before the expiration of each financial in the form of an appropriation bill.
- vi. Legislative discussion of budget policy objectives, second reading at plenary and further considerations by Appropriation committee and sub-committees, legislative ministerial defence, national assembly harmonisation and approval of the appropriation bill.
- vii. Approved appropriation bill with presidential assent produces an appropriation act for implementation.

The budgeting process in Nigeria is split between the legislative and executive and involves planning, approval, implementation, and auditing. Most of these processes are not open, and active participation is not encouraged. Most access to information and civic participation occurs at the approval stage through public hearings in the House of Representatives and Senate.

Citizen and Budgetary Process

In many democratic societies, the role of citizens in the budget process has steadily widened over recent decades. One reason is the assumption that dialogue between administrators and citizens is a useful mechanism for increasing accountability in contested areas (Roberts, 2002). Participating in the budget process can train citizens to deliver their preferences to their governments (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). In the same context, Mikesell (2007) states that participatory budgeting helps to strengthen citizen's participatory potential; in turn, this strength may result in more responsive and effective government. In addition, Irvin and Stansbury (2004) argued that citizen participation can build strategic alliances between government and citizens.

Participation in budgetary processes, on which we focus in this paper, is one of the areas of public participation in governance. According to Ott and Bronić (2015), "public participation in government fiscal policy and budget processes refers to the variety of ways in which citizens, civil society organisations, businesses and other nonstate actors interact directly with public authorities on issues relating to government taxation and revenue collection, resource allocation, spending and the management of public assets and liabilities". Budget engagement specifically may increase accountability and transparency (Kim & Schachter, 2013).

The involvement of citizens in the budget process comes in various intensities ranging from the only formal and symbolic to tight cooperation between the authorities and various stakeholders, it is usually taken that there are three levels of participation – information disclosure, consultation and active participation of citizens (Enshassi & Kullab, 2014).

Budget Processes and Participatory Budgeting in Nigeria

Since the return of democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, efforts at participatory governance have never received the full backing of the ruling class, because they see it as a threat to their collective interest. It is through participatory practices that democratic traditions find genuine expression and allow for efficient and sustainable all-inclusive decision making and administration (Matovu, 2006). Participatory budgeting could be an important tool that can be used to encourage active citizenship, where people at the local level are directly involved in the transformation and development of their community (Langa & Jerome, 2004). Thus, opportunities for citizens' participation in governance in Nigeria have always been limited. One important aspect of governance where citizens have continuously been alienated is on budgetary issues. Budgeting in Nigeria is seen as an exclusive preserve of the executive arm of government, especially as it concerns budget preparation and implementation, with the legislature participating during the approval and audit stages. The only opportunity given to citizens to participate in the process is at the approval stage, during public hearings at the National Assembly (Iloh & Nwokedi, 2016).

Participatory budgeting gives citizens the opportunity to learn about government practices and to come together to deliberate, discuss, and substantively affect budget allocations. Participatory budgeting gives citizens opportunities to learn about government practices and to come together to

deliberate, discuss, and ultimately decide on budget allocations. Through participation, citizens become educated about budget processes and engaged in politics (Shah, 2007).

Participatory budgeting within the context of this paper refers to or is taken to mean a budgetary process that is predicated on the values of democratic process accompanying toleration of relevant constitutional inputs without bitterness or constitutional strangulation. It is a process devoid of legal sophistry and other politically motivated bumps or obstacles put in place to ostracize any of the organs of the government at any stage of the budgetary process (Akindele&Ayeni, 2013). It is also taken to mean a people-oriented process that takes into consideration the plights of the citizenry and, their consideration as the ultimate custodians of the nation's sovereignty and, to whom those in government are accountable from time to time.

Participatory budgeting creates opportunities for citizens to understand and relate to the budget as an instrument for influencing and monitoring service delivery and government performance, creating an environment where citizens can make demands both on how money is generated and how it is utilized. Folscher (2007) has argued that citizens' participation in the allocation and use of local public funds can enhance development outcomes, for several reasons. The first is that citizens have the best knowledge of their needs, their preferences, and local conditions. Their participation in budget decision making makes it more likely that available funds will be used to deliver the goods and services most needed. Participation, therefore, contributes to better public policy and better policy implementation. Second, citizens' participation in the budget process improves accountability. When citizens are engaged in planning, funding, delivering, and monitoring public goods and services, officials become more accountable for the choices they make on behalf of citizens, and as a result, corruption is less likely to occur and effectiveness and efficiency increase. Third and finally, participatory budgeting has the potential to improve the quality of democracy. This is because it is a form of direct democracy that allows for a more meaningful democratic relationship between citizens and government than that provided by representative democracy. Without this kind of participatory democracy and the pressure it exerts on the leadership, governments rarely fulfill the promises they make during campaigns, let alone implementing the budgets as they are on paper.

In Nigeria, one of the best ways to encourage citizens' participation in budgetary processes is to encourage the involvement of the civil society. While advancing the case for civil society participation in the budget process, Krafchik (2005) noted that in most countries, public budgeting has long been considered the exclusive preserve of the executive, and that it is only recently that the value of opening budget processes to non-governmental input has been considered desirable in some countries. There is no doubt that a nation like Nigeria or any nation at all, stands to benefit from the effective management of her public sector's fiscal stress through the process of participatory budgeting. Through effective and participatory management of her public sector's budgetary process, the Nigerian state will be able to meaningfully foster greater harmony among her political, economic and market choices and/or forces.

Conclusion

Citizen participation encompasses more than just participating in the electoral processes. Citizen participation is a means where the citizens participate in planning, budget monitoring, and the

general decision-making process that directly relates or affects their daily lives. Citizen's participation in Nigeria is a valuable element in strengthening its democratic political system. Citizen participation plays an important role in objecting to the misappropriation of public fund, reducing corruption, and improving public resource management (Eniayejuni&Evcan, 2015). Obviously, increased citizen's participation in governance remains one of the greatest importance in strengthening democracy and democratic institutions in Nigeria, as democracy without citizen's participation is unimaginable.

Citizen participation plays an important role in objecting to the misappropriation of public fund, reducing corruption, and improving public resource management. Citizen participation in the budget process is crucial for ensuring that decision-making in public finance is done in a democratic, transparent and politically accountable way. The government from time to time should follow strictly the rules and regulation guiding the preparation of budget in order to achieve the targeted objectives.

The quality of democracy depends on how far people can participate in and influence the governance process. Citizen participation is critical for democratic decision-making and ensuring transparency and accountability. The paper explores the imperative for citizen participation in budgetary processes and how it will facilitate effective budgetary governance in Nigeria.

Participatory budgeting is hinged on the idea that development should not be limited to a top-bottom approach. The failure of third world economies has been to relegate citizens to positions where their inputs are not considered. There is greater need for citizen involvement in the process of budget planning and implementation. The latter is even more critical considering limited impact which yearly budgets have on the welfare of the ordinary citizen. Participatory budgeting aims to bring the government closer to the people and improve the quality-of-service delivery, so that the rural people do not need to move to the city if basic amenities, such as health care facilities, good housing, education, transportation and communication, are provided for them through participatory budgeting in their locality (Sintomer, Herzberg &Rocke 2008).

Suggestions

The need for strategizing ways of enhancing and encouraging citizen participation in the budgetary processes cannot be overemphasized. To this end, this study therefore calls for government at all levels to have a rethink towards running an inclusive government.

The budgeting process needs to be strengthened due of the complexity in the society arising globalization. Globalization has made the world a global village, where governments interact with each other and are exposed to the actions of organisations within. There is need for the deployment of technology to facilitate inputs into the formulation of budgets as well as enable citizens monitor and evaluate some of the budgetary items in their communities and provide instant feedback. Achieving participatory budgeting within the complex milieu of the Nigerian society will require certain technological infrastructure.

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