

Participation and Accountability for Sustainable Development

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Outline of presentation

- Re-orientation of Idasa: implications for our approach
- Participation challenges in South Africa
- Participation challenges in the rest of Africa
- Unlocking participation challenges
- Three case studies
- Concluding remarks

Re-orientation of Idasa: implications for our approach

- Idasa has been re-defined as an African/continental NGO.
- South Africa now only one of the African countries we work in, but RSA experiences vital for rest of the continent.
- This re-orientation has had implications for existing programmes and how we continue to organise ourselves within the organisation.
- The Budget Information Service (BIS) programme dealt with issues such as
 - Sectoral budget analysis and special interest groups such as women and children;
 - Budget process and institutional reform research, which included the role of Parliament and civil society in participating in the national and provincial budget process;
 - Applied budget analysis training for NGOs in RSA and the rest of the continent

Re-orientation of Idasa: implications for our approach (continued)

- Another programme, “The Right to Know” (RTK), interrogated issues about access to information and administrative justice, party political funding etc.
- These two programmes, namely BIS and RTK have been consolidated into one programme called the Economic Governance Programme (EGP).
- Our explicit aim with this programme is to put the politics back into economic governance and accountability issues so as to enhance the voice of critical actors in the democratic project on the continent.
- Our presentation today thus draws from the research, advocacy campaigns and the vast experiences amassed in these two Idasa programmes.

Participation challenges in South Africa: Parliament

- Lack of conferred powers to amend the budget is key, but realisation that
 - Parliament needs to re-invent and re-organise itself in anticipation of amendment powers.
 - Without such efforts, the granting of amendment powers will make little difference to the present status quo.
- Despite massive strides in the budget reform process, the present legislative budget process does not allow sufficient time for budget scrutiny, i.e., budget committee seven days to hold hearings and present report to the House
- Parliamentary committees are under-resourced and struggle to access high quality independent analyses on the executive's budget.
- Too much of the so-called budget debate happens on the floor of the House instead of in committees, thus limiting public participation.

Participation challenges in South Africa: Parliament (continued)

- Scope for participation further dented by the tabling of the Division of Revenue Bill with the national budget, but remember 2001...?
- Following from the above, the role of the NCOP in the legislative budget process still under-utilised, especially since the Division of Revenue Bill is not a money bill.
- There is a definite need to give the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) greater legal clarity to allow it to operate on the same level as the budget bill and the Division of Revenue Bill.
- The present MTEF is not yet fully explored as a viable point of entry for the legislatures and the public.

Participation challenges in South Africa: Civil society

- The budget reform process has arguably delivered some of the best budget and supporting documentation in the world-this quality competes and exceeds almost all of the major first world countries.
- Despite this glut of informational (and thus participation) opportunities, civil society has not fully utilised these new resources consistently enough (remember 2001?).
- There is also a tendency for civil society to focus too much on the big picture and not more fully engage the finer details of the budget-issues about the efficiency and effectiveness of the budget.
- Provincial legislatures, without exception, hardly organise and receive feedback/input from locals in the provinces.
- Lack of capacity has played a big part and this is where we have focused much of our energies in building capacity etc.

Participation challenges in the rest of Africa

- Lack of Parliamentary involvement in setting strategic priorities.
- Rubber-stamp approval-capacity and political constraints.
- Meaningless budgets-actual spending differs from approved budget.
- Ineffective audit and accountability-quality of audits and legislative capacity.
- Lack of transparency-hinders oversight through the budget process.
- Political expediency-willingness of countries to supply donors with relevant service delivery information, but refusal to do so for ordinary public on supposed grounds of “capacity”.

Unlocking participation challenges

- In South Africa, Parliament and the Executive **must do a deal** on amendment powers
 - Parliament's capacity issues must not be used as an excuse for the deferral of this important legislation.
 - Legislation needs to spell out the amendment powers of Parliament (unrestricted, restricted, balanced budget)
 - Legislation also needs to be clear on the fiscal management style/role of Parliament (USA, UK, Swedish model etc?).
 - Legislation needs to be clear on how the benefits of an empowered Parliament serve important democratic objectives.
 - It should also be clear about how risks to the government's fiscal position ought to be managed, thus preventing the two arms of government from developing in completely different directions.

Unlocking participation challenges (continued)

- Parliament needs to re-organise itself so that
 - It has a committee structure that facilitates the co-ordination of amendment proposals.
 - Interacts more dynamically with departments, especially senior bureaucrats to obtain the best possible service delivery and implementation information.
 - Adopts far more of a medium-term focus in its engagement with budgets.
 - Beg, steal and kill to get more resources into committees.
 - Given the failure of corporatist institutions in the post-1994 period to develop consensus on key social and economic issues, Parliament needs to re-invent itself as **the assembly** where national issues such as HIV/AIDS, poverty reduction, and socio-economic rights are debated.
- Civil society should more fully utilise
 - Parliamentary processes to get their advocacy messages across-this implies civil society's support for amendment powers legislation.
 - More aggressively existing legal provisions vis-à-vis the right and access to information.
 - Begin to view engagement with the budget as part of its core responsibilities and not just engage in "policy talks."

Unlocking participation challenges (continued)

- Civil society should more fully utilise
 - Existing socio-economic rights provisions in the Constitution and test these rights in South African courts.
 - The above is a direct form of participation in the budget process, although this modality of participation eschews the Parliamentary route.
 - However, Parliament is still required to deal with the consequences and fallouts of such legal challenges, thus reinforcing its role as the premier assembly of the South African people.
- The key lesson from the RSA is
 - that transparency is a prerequisite for participation, but not enough in itself to assure participation.
 - It's vital therefore that key institutional, legislative and capacity deficits be removed to solidify the link between transparency and participation.

Case study I: Oil revenues in Chad

- By 2001, Chadian civil society groupings started mobilising around the issue whether government has political will to use oil revenues for poverty alleviation and community development.
- GRAMPTC started work on oil revenue transparency and monitoring- it initiated the Oil Revenues Management Watch (OGRP) to cultivate citizens' interests in the use of national resources.
- GRAMPTC collects, analyses and disseminates information on public expenditure in general and oil revenues in particular.
- This key partner monitors information such as
 - the crude oil quantity produced and sold;
 - transfers made to the Chadian City Bank's account;
 - the allocation of funds to the priority sectors and their uses.

Case study I: Oil revenues in Chad (continued)

- This key partner also contributes to
 - The setting-up of oil-related PRSP through which oil revenues and other resources are managed;
 - The monitoring of the socio-economic, legal and environmental aspects of oil projects;
 - Information to international partners/organisations about the overall state of transparency in oil revenue management in Chad.
- The Idasa brief was to
 - Train coalition members in budget analysis, budget monitoring, and budget advocacy.
 - This was to be done using the Chad national budget, the IMF documents/writings on Chad and the Chadian PRSP.
- After the first round of training, we agreed that further work was required and organised an exchange programme in 2005 where one-on-one mentoring was done.

Case study I: Oil revenues in Chad (continued)

- Although one should never claim a one-to-one correspondence between our involvement and subsequent outcomes, we can report that
 - Oil revenues have been integrated into the national budget.
 - There appears to be a far more equitable transfer of oil revenues across the regions.
 - In terms of the overall poverty reduction strategy paper process, our observation with our Chadian partners is that there is a fair allocation of national resources to priority sectors.
 - The net result of these actions is that economic governance issues are receiving increasing priority and citizen participation not only helped moved the country forward, but became more focused.
- In these complex environments, it is critical to trust your country partners and rid yourself of South African “we know how to do it best” attitudes.

Case study II: Advancing child's rights through the budget in South Africa

- The Children's Budget Unit (CBU) of Idasa was established in 1995 with the objective to
 - Conduct research and build capacity;
 - Disseminate information on the government's budgeting for children and how it advances their constitutional rights.
- A strong focus of the CBU research was the accessibility and effectiveness of the child support programme.
- Through research done in 2001, the CBU was able to establish the following with regards to the child support grant
 - there was a lack of administrative capacity in provincial governments, which hindered access to the programme;
 - funds allocated to the programme did not grow in real terms, which generally implied under-prioritisation of this programme.

Case study II: Advancing child's rights through the budget in South Africa (continued)

- One of the strong recommendations concerned raising the age-limit for qualification for the support grant from 6 to 14.
- Other recommendations included that government improve data on the grant, maintain real value in the budget, and allocate resources to improving the distribution of the grant in rural areas.
- Study widely discussed at provincial workshops with civil society groups and provincial legislatures.
- The study led to the building of alliances with organisations such as
 - People Participating in Poverty Reduction Project and the National Committee for the Management of Child Abuse and Neglect;
 - the Child Justice Alliance, the Community Law Center and the Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security (ACCESS).

Case study II: Advancing child's rights through the budget in South Africa (continued)

- ACCESS mobilized around this issue and delivered a petition to the Minister of Social Development requesting for the extension of the grant to the age of 18 years.
- While one remains cautious about a simple (policy) cause and effect situation, the government increased real resources to the child support grant in 2003/04 and also raised the age-limit to 14.
- One of the key participation lessons here was that successful participation involves access to relevant research as well as a critical mass of people promoting a specific expenditure agenda.
- Successful participation also benefited from a fecund policy and political environment (Taylor Commission and agitation for the Basic Income Grant).
- Finally, alliances are painstakingly built and sometimes involves compromise and trade-offs internally before a joint public position is tabled.

Case study III: The right to basic education (Malawi)

- The Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education (CSQBE) was founded in 2000 with the objective of achieving measurable change in the quality of basic education by 2005.
- Key to this activities of this role player was the promotion of free universal basic education and reduction in adult illiteracy.
- Primary survey research was the main methodology and the results from this to be used to advocate and lobby politicians in government and Parliament.
- Although first survey was carried out and results disseminated, government scathing about the sampling frame and dismissed results out of hand.
- The survey covered basic public expenditure tracking issues (leakage and timeliness of payments/transfers) as well as a comprehensive inventory of learner support materials.

Case study III: The right to basic education (Malawi)-continued

- The second survey was done with the support of the central statistical agency in Malawi and the results of that report were seen as more credible.
- The CSQBE identified two gaps, namely
 - statistical data analysis skills and applied budget analysis.
 - Through donor funding, a technical mentor from Idasa was appointed and work started in earnest in 2005.
- Some of the advocacy successes of the coalition are
 - Increasing the allocations for the learner support materials budget from MK 300 million to MK429 million in 2003/04.
 - Securing a number of private meetings with the education and finance minister.
 - Massive newspaper coverage of their main findings.
 - A full-day engagement with the education portfolio committee in Parliament.

Case study III: The right to basic education (Malawi)-continued

- In this situation, we have not enabled their vast participation successes but our approach is to ensure that such gains are sustainable so that
 - Their research becomes more sophisticated and yet remains accessible;
 - With regards to the latter, we sent one of our media specialists to help them to develop a coherent advocacy and dissemination brand;
 - They can use the results of the survey analysis to question the assumptions of the existing budget allocations for basic quality education.
- One of the real problems still is to simplify their budgets because they still follow a line item approach, thus making it hard to pull together the heart of the assumptions that drive education spending.
- For us, the key participation lesson seems to be that nothing can replace inter-personal relationships and attention to institutional branding in the media: this after all landed them an audience with the finance and education ministers.

Concluding remarks

- Supporting participation in the government's budget process is an important organising principle, but
 - What do you do in conflict situations in which we increasingly work (blood on the floor issue)?
 - Also, how do you ensure that your work/intervention is not manipulated to serve partisan political interests?
- In many African countries, donor aid and cash budgets render the notion of public participation problematic and accountability becomes doubly complicated.
- An abiding challenge remains to move from “participation” to “meaningful participation” and to reliably and validly measure the latter.
- This lands us into the terrain of policy outcomes and the notion of sustainability-we have come full circle, thank you.