

Assessing Participatory Budgeting in an Executive Dominated State: The Case of Botswana

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Abstract: Botswana has been hailed as a shining example of democracy in multiple fora across the globe. This made the country one of the limited examples of countries with good governance practices in a continent commonly associated with autocratic and authoritarian regimes characterised by inter alia, intra and interstate conflicts. A close inspection of some of the administrative processes of the state supports this narrative but on the contrary, the executive has been labelled dominant over other arms of the government. The significance of public finance and budgeting processes places the same as one of the most critical elements to establishing the extent of democracy and participation in a nation state. This is largely borrowed from the roots of participatory budgeting in Porto Allergre, Brazil and has since been incorporated as one of the key aspects of democratic governance. Against this background, this paper assesses the inclusiveness and participation levels of the citizenry in Botswana. The study uses desk research and draws information from published materials such as books, journals, newspapers and at the same time relying on official government documents and other secondary sources of information. In line with democratic principles and performance as well as people-oriented budgeting, this article also establishes how Botswana fares in incorporating these into its budget cycle on the basis of the dominance of the executive. The paper confirms that the government of Botswana is largely dominated by the executive and that is the case in administrative and political processes such as the budgetary process. The paper nonetheless, points out a number of the initiatives, some old and some new, developed to ensure that the budgetary process is inclusive of other actors like citizens. In conclusion, a number of weak links such as the executive having to exclude other actors from the budgetary process are identified and recommendations to the same are provided for purposes of advising public policy.

Keywords: Botswana, Democracy, Executive, Participatory budgeting, State

1. Introduction

Democracy has over the years become an unrivalled form of government across the world. Many countries have adopted the ancient Greek form of government on the basis that citizens should directly or indirectly be involved in decision making that affects their countries. Demographic factors have rendered the traditional democracy as practiced in ancient Athens impossible and as such, many have moved to representative democracy (Ober, 2008). Following on John Locke and Baron Montesquieu, the principle of separation of powers has accompanied representative democracy and to allow for checks and balances, government is largely made up of three arms being the Executive, Legislature and the Judiciary (Persson *et al.*, 1992; Scalia, 1983). These three arms take up different roles in governance and policy matters at different

levels. Theoretically, no arm should be superior to another but the practical reality has shown otherwise (Ville, 2012). This is the scenario in even the most important of policy aspects such as budgeting and public financial management. In Botswana, the constitution establishes and empowers these three arms of government but different scholars over the years have illustrated that the executive can be imposing on the other arms using its constitutional powers. This is true even in the budgetary process of Botswana especially when its relationship with the legislature is considered.

Anchored on the principle of participatory budgeting which prescribes a people's voice in the budgetary process at any level, this article seeks to explore how this applies to Botswana where the Executive is constitutionally imposing even over the people representatives. The article presents a background

on participatory budgeting and then presents the different arms of government showing at the same time, the dominance of the executive over the other arms of government particularly the legislature. The article moves to further illustrate the dominance in the budgetary process and later moves to show efforts in place to counter this executive dominance in Botswana's public finance space. Before concluding, the article provides recommendations on how Botswana can better incorporate elements of participatory budgeting and reduce executive dominance.

2. Understanding Participatory Budgeting

One of the key factors used to judge the performance of a government is its ability to provide public goods and services to its people and at the same time bringing about development. This places budgeting as one of the pillars of a government as the latter has to go through the process of sourcing revenue, allocation of the revenue, and tracking the expenditure to ensure the most is achieved in the form of economic and social development. The concept of participatory budgeting can be traced back to a small town of Porto Alegre in Brazil. In this initial mode, all citizens through different platforms gather and make decisions on the use of public funds (Scheider & Goldfrank, 2001). This directly means citizens are involved in the budgetary process. Citizen participation here implies the active role played by the citizens either directly or indirectly in the budgetary process (Holdar & Zakarchencho, 2002; Molokwane & Tshombe, 2018:196; Coelho, Pozzoni & Cifuentes, 2005:182; Wampler, 2004:80). Citizens can through different platforms be engaged in the budget process and the main focus here is with the formulation stages as it is through such an initiative that the financial statements and plans of government emerge as being representative of the needs of the majority of the citizens. Although the voice of the citizens can at times be heard through their elected political representative, the main focus here would be direct contact by the citizens themselves with the officials tasked with the draft and implementation of the financial documents of the country.

3. The Botswana Budgetary Process

The budget process in Botswana is led by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MFED)

(formerly Ministry of Finance and Development Planning). This Ministry was established in 1966 as the Ministry of Finance with the Ministry of Development introduced a year later but the two were combined in 1970 to make the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (BOPA, 2016). The Botswana budget system like in many other countries is a product of different stakeholders who play different roles in this process. The Executive through the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning formulates all the budget documents that include the National Development Plans, the annual budget presented to the legislature just before the end of the government financial year, as well as the many other financial policy documents that include timely budget reviews and others (Botlhale, 2013; Kaboyakgosi, 2000). The MFED is responsible for both the Recurrent and Developmental budget and to ensure that these are adequately addressed, the Ministry has the Division of Budget Administration that has the development and recurrent units.

The Budget speech which is arguably the most important financial statement is delivered by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development and this happens before the end of the government financial year which runs from the 1st of April to the 31st March the following year. The draft budget is presented to members of parliament who have the final say on whether the proposed estimations can be passed into official policy. After debating the proposed estimations, the members of the legislature have to approve or reject the estimations and in the case of the former, the MFED now can make available the funds to all Ministries which translate into implementation. In the case of request for additional funding by ministries, the procedure is still the same as such a proposal has to be debated and approved by parliament and only after that can the ministry make available the additional requested funds (Kaboyakgosi, 2011; Republic of Botswana, 2018). It is also important to note at the same time the role that the local government plays in the budget process and all this should be done in consideration of the fact that Botswana operates under a single tier government system that gives most powers to the central government at the expense of the local authorities and this includes financial powers. The local authorities prepare their budget proposals under the supervision of the Ministry of Local Government and a combined proposal for all the local government organs is

presented to parliament as a single package. The oversight ministry will thereafter disburse these funds to the council authorities with consideration of the funds they have requested as well as what the central government was able to make available (Republic of Botswana, 2018; Kaboyakgosi, 2011). In brief, it is therefore worth noting that the budget process of Botswana is an all-inclusive process that is however dominated by the executive leaving very little roles to the other actors involved in this process.

4. Method and Materials

This study adopted a descriptive approach in exploring the case of Botswana and to find out how democratic Botswana which at the same time has an executive that is dominant over the other arms of government is incorporating participation in its budgetary process. The study draws information from published materials such as books journals, newspapers and at the same time relying on official government documents and other secondary sources of information. This desk research method allows the author to understand both the legal and policy posture of Botswana in its budgetary process and at the same time exploring the roles played by different actors at every stage of the budgetary process.

5. The Executive as the Dominant Actor in the Botswana Budgetary Process

The budget process ideally has multiple actors that play different roles at different stages. The process becomes problematic when one of actors takes the dominant role at the expense of the others. The doctrine of separation of powers is largely weak in practical terms as the powers that the executive arm makes is a controlling figure over the other arms of government. Constitutionally, the Executive led by the President has powers that they could easily use to override the decisions of the other houses and this therefore gives them the edge in many areas of public policy (Dingake, 2009). The President has powers through the constitution (section 47-56) of dissolving parliament, appointing members of cabinet from the parliament (a possible tool to gather the legislatures loyalty), the prerogative of mercy that he can use to pardon those convicted by the courts and the sole powers to repeal bills passed by parliament.

The executive arm of government in Botswana's budgetary process is led by the MFED. The Ministry is responsible entirely for the drafting of the country's most critical financial documents in the form of the annual budget and the National Development Plans (Kaboyakgosi, 2000). With regard to the annual national budget it is an almost an undisclosed affair as both the recurrent and development are compiled by this Ministry who can decide to halt certain projects or even to reduce the recurrent budget if they feel they have enough reasons to. This therefore raises two important questions which are "what are the roles of the other arms of government especially the legislature? Secondly, where is the citizen participation"?

The answer the first question, the budget process at draft level is a closed process and very little information is communicated to either the citizens or even members of parliament who do not sit in cabinet. The document is only availed to the citizens and legislature after most of it has been decided upon and they can be little that these actors can do to change what has been agreed by the executive and the experts being the bureaucracies. Regarding the input of citizens, there is no direct contact with the citizens to specifically discuss budgeting matters therefore it is only through the elected officials that they can have an input into the process. The executive in Botswana therefore attracts the label 'Big brother' because of the dominance it has over the other actors in the budgetary process. This is supported by it excluding the other actors as well as keeping the budgeting process a closed affair which effectively translates into lack of transparency thus making accountability difficult.

5.1 The Rubber-Stamping Parliament?

Given the foregoing the legislature plays the most minimal of roles in the budget process at formulation stages and the attention now shifts to the adoption stage. The legislature is important here because not only is it a citizen's representative body but it is again a check and balances organ hence the concept of accountability resurfaces again. After the budget estimations are finalized by the executive, a date is set before the end of the financial year (usually in the 1st week of February) where the estimations are presented to members of parliament by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development. Parliament is thereafter expected to make deliberations on this proposal and at the end

of it all vote to adopt, or refer back for adjustments (Kaboyakgosi, 2000). Two issues arise with the roles of the parliament of Botswana in this whole process.

Firstly, representative democracy prescribes that the elected politicians keep in touch with their electorates especially when they are to make deliberations on a critical statement like the budget. However, to squash this whole concept of citizen participation, the parliamentarians are only given 48 hours after the presentation to start their deliberations at the end of which they are expected to vote on the document. The problem here is with the fact that there is no time to consult with the citizens to take their opinions hence the deliberations of individual MP's is most likely not to be the people's voice.

Secondly, parliament is an accountability mechanism hence the expectation is that it will hold the executive to task on their proposal. In Botswana however, the dominance of the ruling party in parliament coupled with the fact that members of the executive doubles also as MP's have relegated the role of parliament to that of rubber stamping the budget without even the need for alteration. In the United States of America in 2013, the government almost went into a blackout due to the standoff between Congress and the Executive on the proposed budget estimations (Weisman, 2013) but the same cannot be said of Botswana as in the history of the country, never has there been a case of a budget proposal rejected or sent back to for alteration. This therefore shows a weakened parliament that is working against accountability and the expression of the voice of the people.

5.2 A Weakened and Apathetic Civil Society

The civil society can be present in the budget process for the purposes of representing the citizens as well as holding the government accountable. The weak civil society is evident in Botswana and many other African countries have therefore meant that pressure groups, trade unions and others are either absent or incapacitated to take to task the government on budget issues that may include distribution of funds or even the misuse of such funds (Holm *et al.*, 1996; Sebudubudu & Mogalakwe, 2006). Beside their incapacity, there is very little room given to members of the civil society at any stage of the budgetary process and most come in contact with the proposals at the annual budget

speech presentation by the Minister. This therefore makes their role even more complicated and further weakens their role in the budgetary process.

5.3 The Unavailability of Information Accessibility Law

An informed citizenry is facilitated by the availability of information and in this particular case this speaks largely to information on the budgetary process. The benefit here is that a transparent budget process that makes available all relevant information to the citizens will allow for their active participation as well as to be able to take the government to task on its use of public fund. In Botswana, there is still no legislation that compels the public sector to make available information on any of its works and this is therefore a drawback in the fight for transparency and accountability (Molefhe & Botlhale, 2013). The absence of the freedom of Information bill gives the executive and the bureaucracy the right to limit the information they provide to civil society members especially the media and therefore further limiting their role in the budgetary process in the country.

5.4 The Powerless Public Accounts Committee

One of the duties bestowed upon parliament in a democracy is to bring to the table all those entrusted with spending government funds and have them account for every pula that was allocated to them. This function in Botswana is the sole duty of the Public Accounts Committee that comprises sitting members of parliament. This committee has recently been fashionable in Botswana under the leadership of opposition stalwarts as it was able to expose cases of mismanagement of public funds that were allocated to government organs in the annual budget. Despite the success of this committee in performing its oversight function and ensuring accountability, the problem still lies with the 'what then' as after all its investigations its reports have to go through the executive which will act swiftly to protect some of its own by shelving these reports.

5.5 Centralisation and the Problem of Reaching to the People

The governance structure in Botswana gives the powers to the central government and this includes that of the purse (Mogalakwe, 1997; Otlhogile, 1998). The fact that the local authorities have little power to raise their own funds (Republic of Botswana, 2012)

and depend on the central government for most of their finances have negative consequences on citizen participation. This is so because citizen participation in the budget process is usually anchored by the local government as its closeness to the people allows it to easily take on board the contributions of the citizens hence participation. In Botswana, local authorities are not constitutionally established and their existence relies heavily upon the central government and as such there is little initiative to engage the citizens on what is to be the budget hence a blow to citizen participation. The budget problems of Botswana with regard citizen participation, it comes out clear that the executive is the most dominant of the actors and as it at most times escape without accountability of what it made of public funds and at the same time the citizen is inferred from actively participating in the budget process due to variety of factors that have been pointed out. The budget process of Botswana again emerges as a closed chapter to most of the actors hence the cry for its lack of transparency. This however does not position Botswana as the worst in these aspects but most definitely shows that there is a lot of room for improvement

6. The Way Forward: Limiting the Dominance of the Executive and Empowering Other Actors Budgetary Process

6.1 The Adoption and Implementation of the Information Act

(Phirinyane, 2009) notes that in Botswana, "though there are no laws that prohibit the public from assessing government information, there is no legislation that protects this right at the same time." This leaves the right to disperse budget information at the discretion of public officials. In pursuit of democratic principles that include transparency and accountability as well as citizen involvement, the asses of information to all actors especially the citizens, is of paramount significance. The government of Botswana however still struggles with transparency should make formulation of legislation that will make it compulsory for the government to provide budget information at all times, a priority.

In Botswana, the citizens and the legislature are mostly left out at the draft phase of budgeting as the executive keeps the proposed estimates to itself hence in such a case the constant publishing of

budgeting information will take on board the other actors especially the legislature. The availability of information will also go a long way in fighting the apathy that is displayed by the citizens towards the budget process. A now informed citizenry will be able to meaningfully contribute even at formulation stages and this power of information can also be extended to accountability as the executive can be taken to task on how it plans to use public funds.

6.2 Empowering the Legislators and the Public Accounts Committee

The paper has already shown the importance of the legislature as both a representative body that brings the voice of the people into the budgeting process as well as is relevance in bringing about transparency and accountability. In the regard that the legislators in Botswana have been reduced to spectators in the budget process, it is therefore empirical to bring about changes that will empower the legislature and allow it to perform its oversight and representative functions in the budget process to the core. To bring about such an improvement, it is the law formulation role of parliament that can be used to change the playing ground and ensure an increased role for the legislators as well as empower the Public Accounts Committee to being able to go beyond its role today of just divulging misuse of public funds but take no action whatsoever (Mosikare, 2014). If the legislation guiding the Public Accounts Committee is to be reviewed, there is a need to bring on board the legislature at formulation stages as they are best positioned to speak for the needs of the citizen which will ensure an increased role for the citizens. The PAC can also be given powers to take action against those that it has found to have gone against the proposed use of public funds during the implementation face.

6.3 Improving the Role of the Budget Pitso

During the course of the year 2010, the government introduced a new concept of Pitso's as a way of ensuring that the different stakeholders in governance can bring their contributions on board (Bothale, 2013; Bothale, 2011:29,30; Keoreng, 2011). The MFED has its own initiative of this kind that has been labelled the 'Budget Pitso'. The paper notes the relevance and importance of this initiative but it argues that they can still be used beyond its purposes today so that it becomes not just a review process but rather a precursor in the formulation of the budget process in Botswana. Public policies in

Africa including Botswana are notorious for being a creation of the executive and only to be presented to the other stakeholders that includes the citizens for the simple purpose of legitimizing them. The argument here is that the Pitso's should be legally recognized as a precursor to the draft phase of the budget process. This suggest that, the executive should be held accountable if that which was agreed or proposed in the Pitso's is absent in what becomes the final financial documents. This would allow for the contributions of the citizens and many other stakeholders which is a positive step for transparency and citizen participation.

6.4 Decentralisation and the Empowerment of Local Authorities

The most political and possibly constitutional of the recommendations that this paper provides for the purposes of ensuring citizen participation and to a less extent transparency and accountability is the financial empowerment of the local government that is possible through improved efforts for decentralization. The awarding of more financial powers to the local government that will allow it to raise and spend its finances is a better model to ensure citizen participation mostly. Borrowing from the Porte Allegre model of citizen participation was highly effective (Novy & Leubolt, 2005; Albers, 2000). It is through the use of local authorities that their closeness to the communities can be tapped to ensure an increased role of the citizens in the budgetary process. In the Botswana case, the powers starved local government that relies upon the funding of the central government has the most minimal of financial powers hence it is very difficult for them to engage the communities on what is to become of their spending. This therefore leaves the option of increasing the financial powers of the local government and their role in the budget process as the only viable option to ensure increased levels of citizen participation.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Botswana has been hailed in many instances as the shining example of democracy in the African continent. This description is largely drawn from the traditional principles of democracy without much consideration of the relationship between the different arms of government. This can be explored in different areas of public policy including public finance and budgeting. This study confirms that the

government of Botswana is largely dominated by the executive and that is the case in administrative and political processes such as the budgetary process. The study nonetheless, points out a number of the initiatives, some old and some new, developed to ensure that the budgetary process is inclusive of other actors like citizens. In conclusion, a number of weak links such as the executive having to exclude other actors from the budgetary process are identified. Recommendations to the same are provided for purposes of advising public policy.

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