CHIPINGE RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

A CASE STUDY OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN PRACTICE:

PARTICIPATORY BUDGET CONSULTATION PROCESS IN CHIPINGE DISTRICT (2010-2012)

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CIVIC FORUM ON HOUSING

ASSOCIATION OF RURAL DISTRICT COUNCILS

CCDS Centre for Community Development Solutions

1. SUMMARY

The case study explores the impact of participatory budgeting in Chipinge Rural District Council since 2010.

2. BACKGROUND

The Rural District Councils Act Chapter 29:13 for instance, makes it mandatory for a Local Authority to consult the inhabitants of council areas when coming up with annual development plans and budgets through relevant wards and neighbourhood structures. Generally our Chipinge RDC has consistently abided by this requirement, but the consultations are not as elaborate and inclusive as is desirable. It has been our wish as a council to one day be able to consult widely and involve the citizens and stakeholders in the budgeting process. The years back to 2010, Council budgetary process was mainly done by the executive and policy makers without much contribution from the society and rate payers. This created many problems as such as follows:

- Ratepayers were not aware of their functions and contribution to Council operations and budget.
- Ratepayers were in doubt as of the use to which the funds collected from them will be put to.
- Stakeholders doubted whether it was legal or not that Council levied rates on them.
- Ratepayers planned organized rate payments boycotts as a way of resisting to pay the rates.
- Revenue collection and inflows were on the lower side with low rates of budget performance
- Enforcement of budget was marred by political factors and the local authority was disempowered to do this.

All this generally led to low financing of council budget commitments resulting in low capitalization and compromised service delivery.

3. RESPONSE

Following this realization, the Chipinge RDC saw the need to invest in the Participatory Budgeting Consultation process to ensure that citizens participated in the budgeting process and could claim ownership of the budget. Also, the process would be inclusive of all socio-economic groups in the district to ensure more responsive engagement with citizens towards meeting their needs and priorities in a more integrated and holistic manner. To this end, Chipinge was fortunate to be one of the four rural district councils targeted under the Strengthening Local Governance and Citizen Participation in Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe project (LGCPP). The other three participating districts are Nyaminyami, Tsholotsho and Mutoko and the project is being implemented by the Civic Forum on Housing (CFH) in partnership with the Association of Rural District Councils (ARDC) and Centre for Community Development Solutions (CCDS).

The five year project is funded by the European Union. The overall objective of the project is to promote democratic, effective, transparent and accountable local governance in Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe. The specific objective is to strengthen the capacity of elected councillors, council officials, traditional and other local leaders to internalize democratic values and principles so as to increase their responsiveness to community and stakeholder concerns and inputs in their facilitation and management of local development processes.

Under Result 3 of the project **(Capacity of RDCs to respond to the needs and priorities of communities and local civic organizations strengthened)**, one of the key activities is to *conduct training and demonstration workshops in participatory budgeting* as a way of providing a key platform for local communities and stakeholders to participate in the budgeting process. This will ensure that their needs and priorities are captured thereby influencing the budgeting process and its outcomes. The introductory phase of the participatory budgeting process in Chipinge included submitting an action plan to the Civic Forum on Housing proposing to implement the participatory budgeting process in the district. The Civic Forum on Housing in turn provided technical support to the District Action Team and trained the members in the principles of participatory budgeting in September 2010. After the training, the DAT was ready to kick start the roll out of the process in 120 centres/Primary Schools in the district.

The Council held a special meeting on 21 September 2010, which was aimed at briefing councilors and stakeholders on participatory budgeting and sharing the current situation. The following activities and steps were planned and implemented before the consultation exercise:

- Councilors selected a ward facilitator within a primary school catchment area.
- Councilors and ward facilitators carried out preliminary 2011 budget consultation which involved listing of ward projects or plans.
- The district training team trained ward facilitators at designated centers in the district.
- Council committees sat and considered ward plans and synchronized them into the budget 2011 to the extent possible.
- The Finance department with chairmen of committees sat and consolidated the plans into the draft 2011 Council budget.
- An all stakeholder's conference was held involving councilors, MPs, Chiefs, Political parties, Farmers and business association representatives with a view to share the draft budget, clear the misconceptions and share the ownership of the budget and budget process.

From 08 to 22 October 2010, we conducted an extensive district wide consultation exercise in one hundred and twenty centers in the district facilitated by 8 DAT members with the assistance of the ward facilitators. A record high of 8 201 citizens attended the ward consultation workshops as a result of the good mobilization skills of trained ward facilitators. A report back was done after which the executive consolidated the findings and presented them to council for approval in November. Subsequently ward meetings were conducted by councilors and wards facilitators to give feedback to the ratepayers on the finalized budget and the implementation time table.

This process has continued to be repeated in 2011 and 2012 budget preparation season as the council has since institutionalized the process and has managed to raise funds to conduct the process annually.

Some of the participants attending a budget consultation meeting in 2011 held at one of the primary schools

CHALLENGES

The challenges faced during the implementation of the participatory budgeting process over the years include the following:

- Misinterpretation of the process by politicians who were not keen to appreciate the concept as a development activity.
- Inadequacy of transport and financial resources to cover the 120 centers. The participatory budgeting process in resource consuming in terms of time, human and financial resource hence the need for prior fundraising and preparations well in advance of the budgeting season.
- Divergence of conflicting views from stakeholders during the initial stages is time consuming before a common consensus is reached and agreed upon.

IMPACT

As a district, in 2010 we experienced the smoothest budget passage by citizens compared to previous years as a result of the participatory budgeting process that we used. The consultation exercise of 2010 resulted in the following positive impacts:

- Improved communication between council and ratepayers since citizens were able to participate in needs identification and prioritization processes
- Record turnout of citizens who attended the consultation meetings
- Enhanced revenue collection and compliance by the ratepayers especially the business and household communities.
- Better budget performance as revenue inflow rose from the previous year rate of 58% to 76,5%.
- Reduction in debtors balance sheet figure as more ratepayers came forward to honour their outstanding debts.
- Change in attitude by residents and ratepayers that resulted in them assisting or participating in service delivery activities like roads grading and maintenance.
- As a council we initiated and adopted a policy change and introduced a 30% cash plough back incentive per each ward in relation to the total amount collected from each ward to implement ward development projects.

After the 2010 district wide consultation exercise, the 2011 and 2012 exercises also followed the same modus operandi. During these years the rates and levies remained stable as council understood the plight of stakeholders and the need to balance the competing needs. Each year the district has managed to submit its budget to the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Planning on time. For the first time in many years, Chipinge RDC only received one objection from stakeholders to its 2011 budget which was later rectified, showing an example of positive feedback by both communities and stakeholders. The single objection was raised by ZINWA whom as a council had overlooked to invite as an important stakeholder to the All Stakeholders meeting to discuss and share the draft proposed 2011 budget.

A representative of the business sector making a contribution during a budget All Stakeholder meeting in 2010.

CONCLUSION

As a district we have learnt and experienced that only consultative budget preparation can result in enhanced budget performance and good governance as far as local governance administration is concerned. Unless people's priorities and needs are captured and addressed in the budget, there will be little incentive for people to participate in the local development planning processes and resultantly pay their rates to council. Engagement of citizens is critical in raising the much needed revenue for service delivery and improved livelihoods of communities.