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Participatory Budgeting in Africa

The Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa (MDP-ESA) holds a Regional Workshop for African mayors and local government practitioners on “Citizen Engagement in Participatory Budgeting in Africa” Harare, Zimbabwe

More than forty African mayors, councilors, traditional leaders, government officials, directors of local authorities, city treasurers, planners, academics, and resource persons from civic organizations, private sector, and partners in decentralized governance will converge at a three-day Regional Workshop at St. Lucia Park Conference Centre in Harare, Zimbabwe to explore practical ways engaging citizens in local budget formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The gathering under the theme “Citizen Engagement in Participatory Budgeting in Africa” will be held from 6 to 8 March 2007 and will be hosted by the Harare-based Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa (MDP-ESA) with financial support from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). The focus will be on the potential of participatory budgeting in realizing good governance and deepening local democracy.

Participatory Budgeting is rapidly gaining attention from governments, civil society, and international development agencies as an innovative platform for strengthening citizens’ voice in budget planning and delivery of public goods and services. From an experimental innovation in Brazil, participatory budgeting is now being practiced in most parts of Latin America as well as Europe, and is spreading to countries in Africa and Asia. Lessons learnt from more than twenty countries have shown that participatory budgeting is not only an effective mechanism to improve targeting of public resources to the poor, but also a new agenda in decentralization and social accountability.

This process is being reinforced by new commitments to good governance on the continent, for example the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) through the “African Peer Review Mechanism” (APRM). Through the APRM, NEPAD governments undergo evaluations by their peers on standards of democratic governance, transparency and accountability. The aim is to reform their political and economic systems and achieve development effectiveness, among other things through decentralization and empowerment of local governments.
The recent Conference of Ministers of Local Government in Africa held in Maseru, Lesotho under the aegis of MDP-ESA, UNDESA, and UNCDF acknowledged the important role of participatory budgeting in supporting decentralization reforms in Africa. According to the Conference proceedings, “decentralized governance provides structural arrangements, avenues and opportunities for the citizens to effectively participate in planning, budgeting for, and implementing the delivery of services at local level”. Moreover, “Participation of the citizens in problem analysis, priority setting, planning, and decisions concerning allocation and utilization of resources including funds (budgeting) constitutes a critical pillar for successful decentralized governance for poverty reduction”.

The former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has been quoted as saying “Better governance means greater participation coupled with accountability.” His Road Map for implementing the UN Millennium Declaration singles out citizen involvement as one of the main strategies. Improving the delivery of services at local level is deemed essential for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This workshop is one of the series of activities organised by MDP-ESA as a strategy to breath life into decentralisation and to promote accountable public administration at local levels. This is possibly the single most pertinent gathering for mayors and local government practitioners to share experiences on participatory governance and to closely examine the potential of participatory budgeting in fostering social accountability in local public administration. Citizens have often been ignored or deliberately excluded by local leaders in decision making processes which are often dominated by vocal elites. This workshop therefore, will serve as a catalyst in mobilising knowledge and garnering reflections and experiences on ways of engaging citizens in participatory budgeting. Attention will be given to the potential improvements in decentralised governance and public administration.

The workshop’s specific objectives are:

- To highlight the importance of civic engagement in sub national budgeting as one of the key Social Accountability tool;
- To identify the key constraints and challenges associated with civic engagement in sub national budgeting in Africa;
- To review the necessary capacity building needs in both participatory governance and budgeting in Africa; and
- To come up with an action plan and a few selected municipalities for piloting participatory budgeting.

Substantively, the workshop will be supported through five interventions:

- Local officials responsible for implementing participatory budgeting will share their experiences
- A panel of mayors will share their personal experiences in applying participatory budgeting;
- Experts in participatory budgeting from Africa and Latin America will share the various practices in participatory budgeting and review key issues influencing the application and institutionalisation of participatory budgeting in Africa.
- A field visit to Ruwa Local Authority in the suburbs of Harare to acquaint participants with the linkages between governance and management of public services on the one hand and participatory budgeting on the other
- Break-out sessions which will provide an opportunity to solicit specific information from mayors and experts on how to lay the groundwork for making participatory budgeting an integral part of local government finance as well as a campaign tool for efficient and effective public administration and local development in Africa.

The participants will agree on a joint communiqué with recommendations for the way forward.

Strengthening **Citizen Engagement in Participatory Budgeting in Africa** is a project jointly funded by the World Bank and UN-HABITAT and is managed by the Municipal Development Partnership for Eastern and Southern Africa in collaboration with Associations of Local Government in the region.

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