

## Promoting Civil Society Participation across Budget Cycle at County Government Levels in Kenya

### INTRODUCTION

Improving the responsiveness, accountability, and transparency of governance is important in achieving social and economic development. The increased attention to good governance has led to a greater focus on the way in which government budgets are developed, executed, and monitored.

Promoting civil society participation across budget making cycle directly contribute to improved governance outcomes by opening up government budget, the most important government planning and management tool to public participation and oversight. The processes create opportunities for citizens to understand and relate to the budget as an instrument for monitoring and influencing performance and service delivery by the government.

### TARGETS

The project engaged government officials, legislators, and civil society representatives in three Counties, Nyeri, Kilifi and Elgeyo Marakwet over a period of 24 months to participate in budget making process across the budget cycle. The target audience for the project were CSOs, Health Facility Committees, Sub County/ County Health Management Committees (S/CHMTs), County Government Executive Members, Members of County Assembly (MCAs), business people, religious leaders, people with disability, people living with diseases, women and youths. To improve on advocacy and coordination, CSOs formed themselves into budget coalitions that coordinated engagements across the budget cycle.

### KEY RESULTS

1. Increased CSOs members' ownership of the developed coalitions. Coalition members went beyond the project activities to develop coalition

documents including (constitution, charter and identity). They organised themselves to frequently meet and discuss coalition advocacy initiatives.

2. Increased awareness on public sector budget making processes among the targeted CSOs. There was an increase in the number of community members / CSOs/ citizens proactively engaging in the budget making processes as indicated by the increase in the number of CSOs in the budget coalitions and the attendance to pre and post budget meetings, enquiries and suggestions made.
3. Enhanced capacity by CSO coalitions in engaging the county government on the budget. The CSO coalitions have identified the need to frequently analyse and critique budget documents before engaging in any public participation forum so as to meaningfully participate in the public forums organised and provide credible input.

4. Increased access and utilization of budget information. This is indicated by the increased number of people and CSOs referring to budget documents when engaging in budget discussions, enquiring on status of projects listed in budget, showing concern on absorption rate of the approved budget by the county government.
5. Enhanced capacity of CSO coalition members to develop clear and precise budget proposals that are straight to the point and easily understood by the county assembly and executive. A case in point is in Kilifi County where the coalition used to develop a 32-page proposal has now graduated to developing a 3 page proposal that is spot on the issues.
6. Increased participation and engagements in budget forums. The Coalitions submitted proposals that included recommendations for inclusion in 2018/2019 budget, the County Revenue Administration (Amendment) Bill, 2018, the County Finance Bill, 2018, the recommendations to the ADP 2019/2020, and the recommendations to the CBROP 2017/18.
7. Increased number of CSOs recommendations being included in the budget. Out of the 27 proposals that were submitted in the 3 counties, 11 of the proposals made it to the approved budgets for 2018/19 these included 7 proposals in Nyeri County and 4 proposals in Elgeyo Marakwet.
8. Strengthened relationship between coalition members and county government officials; County officials approached coalition members for reports for proof of their engagements with the public. For example, Nyeri County Finance and Economic Planning office presented evidence of their public private engagements to World Bank under the Kenya Devolution Support Program (KDSP) and other development partners. They on several occasions approached the Nyeri County Budget Coalition for their reports as evidence for engagements.
9. Efficient Allocation of Resources. Citizens and CSOs coalitions exerted pressure on the government to factor in community priorities in the budget. For example, there were budget line for Community Health Workers in Nyeri County budget but this was successfully advocated for by citizens. There were other 9 priority areas that were considered. An indication that the government was listening.
10. Demonstration of accountability by Nyeri County government. The County made budget information including expenditures in health department development projects public and allowed scrutiny of each project documents and physical verification. Based on information provided, citizens gave the government score card on each project.

## LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Awareness creation and information dissemination

- Though targeted County governments had put in place communication plans to create awareness and disseminate information to the public on public participation in budget making process, most of the strategies used only reached a few. Advertising information through channels such as the social media, government website, television, newspapers only reached technologically sound citizens especially those in urban areas.
- Despite existence of County Government Websites, the public were often directed to county websites for information but in reality no information were posted on time or the website were down.
- The limited period within which notices for public hearings forums were given was also a contributor of low levels of awareness. Often, citizens were not able to access budget information on time to enable them interrogate the documents to effectively take part in discussions.
- Proper channels for communicating the budget information are of necessity in facilitating active citizen participation. Such information should be communicated through channels that reach majority of the County citizens. For example, the vernacular radio stations, public notice boards, announcements in public gathering including in religious functions were identified as some of the effective channels for passing information.

## **Levels of public participation**

- Attendance of public CIDP, ADP and budget hearing forums were below par. In Nyeri County a public hearing forum expecting representation from the whole county attracted only a handful, less than 50 participants.
- Public participation by citizens entailed giving out a 'wish list' of the projects. Discussions were of low quality and often rushed by the organizers. These were attributed to low levels of awareness and lack of adequate capacity to engage in budget making cycle. Hence majority of citizens were not satisfied with the level of participation organised by their county governments. Several cases were filed by citizens against county governments for failure to engage the citizenry in budgeting.
- The need to create awareness through massive public awareness through acceptable channels and capacity building through training to enable them to be more vigorous in giving valuable opinions that can be considered during decision making emerged as key priority.
- Counties ought to treat their residents as equal partners in policy and decision making by holding public forums at most convenient time, places and with adequate notice in order to reach out to more citizens, especially the poor.
- The middle class and elites rarely participated in public hearing meetings despite their high levels of knowledge. Each county government should consider establishing more innovative strategies that can enable middle and elite to participate in budget forums. For example, use of ICT platforms.

## **Sectors are crucial targets if any impact is to be felt in the budget process.**

The CSOs' sectorial and departmental engagements were not strong hence most of the recommendations made were not in tune with the sectoral or departmental priorities and policies. The need to develop sectoral working teams among CSOs in each county that can engage with respective county departments was identified. This was crucial in shifting

budget advocacy initiatives to focus on specific issues/ sectors such as water and sanitation, mental health and waste disposal among others. This was crucial for ensuring CSOs had meaningful engagements informed by respective policy documents.

## **CSOs need for enhanced capacity**

Effective public participation in budgeting process requires citizen's capacity must go beyond awareness levels to knowledge and skills on how to engage with government officials and other stakeholders. Lack of knowhow on budget issues hinders the ability of citizens to effectively participate, indeed their participation were reduced to merely giving 'wish lists'. CSOs whose capacity was enhanced demonstrated real change as they were able to comprehend the process and make suggestions that found their way into the approved budget. An indication that enhanced capacity CSOs and citizens can make a difference.

## **Citizens' representation by CSOs**

CSOs were instrumental in representing citizen's views and exerting pressure to the County governments to prioritize community issues. Several, budgetary issues would not have found their way into the approved budget if there was no sufficient pressure from civil society coalitions.

## **CSOs mobilizing citizens to participate**

CSOs played a key role in creating awareness about the budget, budget making process and opportunities for citizen's engagements. They further built the capacity of local residents to participate as the county governments neither sensitized nor allocated any funds for capacity enhancements even for their own officers. These tasks according to County government plans are expected to be performed by CSOs, private sector and other stakeholders as part of the public private partnership initiatives. To successfully institutionalize budget making processes, sustained support (financial and technical) to CSOs should be provided.

## **Government resistance**

Despite existence of clear legal frameworks on public participation in decision making processes, some government officials continued to withhold budget information from the public, especially the information on project implementation oversight. Information that could support oversight role such as procurement processes and actual expenditures were treated with a lot of caution. This was attributed to government bureaucracy and respective authorization processes, which took unnecessarily long or were completely ignored. A culture that encourages free and easy access to information should be encouraged without necessarily invoking or using the right to information clauses in Constitution and other legislations thereby causing further delays and bad blood between government officers and CSOs, in the end negating public private

relationships. The county ought to establish proper channels to disseminate user friendly information on budgets including use of the ICT platforms that easily accessible to most of the citizens.

## **Failure to adhere to legal requirements**

To aid in planning and budget making processes, the law provided for establishment of County Budget and Economic Forum (CBEF). Some have established the Forum but it had not been operationalized. For example, though existence in paper, this had not been operationalized in Nyeri, Elgeyo Marakwet or Kilifi Counties. These gave room to ad hoc engagement for the stakeholders. More pressure should be exerted to ensure counties adhere to legal provisions on public participation in order to tame stage managed processes that the public are taken through.