

# Adoption of Participatory Budgeting as An Instrument of Participatory Approach to Economic Development in Adamawa State: A Policy Transfer Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Government budgeting is the process of allocation of resources and managing taxpayers' funds. It includes setting priorities, estimating government revenue, determining projects to spend on and monitoring the use of funds for the benefit of the citizenry. Citizens and other stakeholders' participation in the budgeting process is considered to be one of the key requirements for successful budgeting across different tiers and levels of government in Nigeria. This study examines the innovative democratic tools (participatory budgeting) introduced by the Adamawa State government to improve the socio-economic well-being of the citizens across the state. The key areas of investigations in this study are participatory budgeting and town hall meetings organized by the state government within the period of study (2019-2023). The study adopts the use of qualitative research methods for data collection and analysis. Findings from the study reveals that citizens in Adamawa State have access to budget information to make inputs and observations on the projects to be captured in the budget that could improve their socio-economic well-being. The study concludes that participatory approach to budgeting is the most suitable approach to budgeting in the Adamawa State. Thus, the government adopted a Representative Participatory Approach that involves indirect participation, where appointed and elected representatives of existing organizations advocate on behalf of their members and engage with the State Government. In this scenario, participation is mediated by delegates. Thus, the study recommends the adoption of a participatory approach to budgeting across all tiers of government in Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the restoration of democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999, efforts towards implementing participatory governance have consistently faced resistance from the ruling elites, who perceived it as a threat to their collective interests (Sulaimon and Sagie, 2015). Consequently, opportunities for citizens' engagement in governance have remained restricted, particularly concerning budgetary matters. In Nigeria, budgeting is predominantly viewed as the exclusive domain of the executive branch of government, particularly in terms of preparation and execution, while the legislature's involvement is primarily confined to the approval and auditing phases. The only avenue available for citizens' involvement is during the approval phase, through public hearings at the National Assembly in Nigeria. This medium is not enough given that Nigeria is a heterogenous democracy with different interest groups whose voices need to be heard and problems to be attended to by the government in the political system (Sulaimon and Sagie, 2015).

One of the ways of achieving good governance in the political systems is through participatory budgeting. Participatory budgeting is a model of budgeting that gives the necessary time and opportunity for non-governmental actors including ordinary citizens to be involved in the origination and award of projects and their public finances (Sintomer *et al.*, 2008, 2013b). It gives opportunity for the ordinary people to be involved in the decisions leading to the citing of projects and spending of government revenues in the political system. In this approach to budgeting, citizens' and other stakeholders' participation is seen as one of the basic requirements for successful budgeting and its implementation for the delivery of goods and services. In many

countries across the global south, citizens' participation is continuously needed in the framework of both national and international development programs and is the consequence of various bottom-up initiatives of international donors. This has led to a global transfer of participatory processes such as citizen juries, deliberative polls, town hall meetings, neighborhood funding of projects, and community development projects (Smith, 2009). The global spread of participatory mechanisms for budgeting, despite their highly variable influence and advantages, and the parallel spread of non-democratic dynamics (Stone, 2004), is still in its infancy across Nigeria and has been ignored by researchers in the country. This has created a gap in the extant literature that needs to be bridged. Participatory budgeting programs are forerunners in this respect, which is the reason why they constitute the starting point of this research.

## Problem Statement

In Nigeria, the extant literature on budgeting suggests that the budget preparation process lacks transparency and citizens' involvement, particularly at the lower-level tiers of government. Despite numerous Acts and Policies that promote decentralization and devolution of powers in governance, the budgeting process across many States of the federation and Local Government Councils remains not only bureaucratic but also undemocratic (Sulaimon and Sagie, 2015). This is enhanced by the complexity of budget documents, coupled with their esoteric language and presentation style which affects people's understanding of their true content and significance (Adigun, 2021; Ataide & Tom, 2022). Consequently, this affects citizens' participation in the budgeting process and may lead to bad budgeting as is the case in many States of the Federation. Bad budgeting can result to both negative short and long-term financial impacts and difficulties in reaching national and state developmental goals.

Arguably, the non-adoption of this global best practice approach to budgeting may be partly responsible for abandoned projects across many States in Nigeria. This is because the government may be unable to correctly allocate resources to the local governments, wards and communities where they are desperately needed and where they are not and may not necessarily know the difference until it is too late and that may lead to projects being abandoned. In some instances, too many projects can be seen cited in Central and Northern Senatorial Districts at the expense of the Southern Senatorial District. Similarly, projects are allocated to communities that do not necessarily need them at the expense of the communities that need those projects the most. In addition, no academic work has directly addressed the subject matter in the study area. Thus, a study on participatory budgeting in Adamawa State is topical and timely.

## Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting allows for major policy changes and projects allocations to the areas of need and also increases budgeting transparency and citizens' participation in governance in a political system. Although the budget is one of the requirements for using tax payers' money, not many governments encourage citizens' participation in budgeting process for projects to be cited where they are mostly required by the people. According to Creighton (2014: 1 cited in Sulaimon, et al 2015), participatory budgeting is described as a transparent process whereby individuals and groups within the political system have the opportunity to share perspectives and impact decision-making in government. It represents a democratic approach that involves people in deliberation and search for where projects are to be cited, and actively contributing to the development and management of services that directly impact their lives, particularly at the lower levels of government.

A budget serves as the primary tool of fiscal policy aimed at fostering stable growth, sustainable development, and prosperity within the economy in the political system. It constitutes a detailed plan that shows where and how the government intends to generate and expend public funds. It gives detailed information about government policies, goals, programs, and strategies supported by projected revenue and expenditure forecasts (Ugoh & Ukpere, 2009 cited in Emeka, 2017).

Emeka (2017) argues that participatory budgeting represents a mode of community involvement in democratic governance, facilitating the redistribution of resources to benefit marginalized social segments through participatory democracy. It serves as a mechanism to lessen the overarching influence of the state on civil

society by redistributing resources and determining investment priorities across the state. Umo (2014: 178-184 cited in Sulaimon & Sagie 2015) contends that a participatory approach to budgeting crafted by a democratic accountant will facilitate effectiveness in service delivery. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that, in most instances, the participatory approach to budget preparation yields better results and outcomes in terms of government effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of public goods and services. Essentially, participatory budgeting serves as a mechanism that enhances transparency and efficiency in government, particularly in the use of public funds to deliver public goods and services.

Participatory budgeting is a process whereby citizens, either individually or through civic society, cultural, and professional organizations, have the opportunity to voluntarily and consistently engage or influence decision-making regarding a portion of the public budget through a series of scheduled meetings with their representatives in government. Budget plays an important role in economic development and progress across political systems. It influences governments' ability to achieve societal objectives and satisfy the demands and aspirations of the people. It also serves as a mechanism for implementing social, political, and economic policies and priorities that significantly affect the population. Essentially, a budget represents a plan, and as such, its success relies heavily on the availability of accurate information, thorough data analysis, and reliable projections (Sulaimon & Sagie, 2015; Emeka, 2017). A well-executed budget must emerge from a process grounded in robust and high-quality information, meticulous impact assessments, and a responsive feedback mechanism aimed at internalizing lessons from previous budget cycles. Participatory budgeting is a democratic process that enables citizens to engage with the government by actively participating in decision-making regarding fiscal planning priorities from their perspective as voters in a democratic setting (Ekong & Onye, 2012).

In Africa, participatory budgeting is gaining momentum among governments, civil society, and international development agencies as a dynamic platform that enhances citizens' voices to be heard not only in the budgetary process but also in the delivery of public goods and services. It is increasingly recognized that participatory budgeting not only helps African countries like Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana better channel public resources to impoverished communities and people but also serves as a new mechanism to support decentralization and social accountability in a political system.

### **Dimensions of Participatory Budgeting**

The extant literature identifies three major forms of public participation that complement each other within the participatory budgeting process across many political systems: direct participation, representative participation, and a mixed system approach (Un-Habitat, 2008).

1. **Direct Participation:** This entails citizens engaging directly and voluntarily in the process without the need for organizational membership. In this model, decisions are made by mobilized citizens, regardless of whether they are organized into groups or not. This form of participation is mostly common in advanced democracies like the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, among others.
2. **Representative Participation:** This involves indirect participation, where appointed and elected representatives of registered organizations advocate on behalf of their members and engage with local authorities for the allocation of certain resources and citing of projects in certain location. In this scenario, participation is mediated by delegates. This practice is common in relatively young democracies in Africa like Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Kenya etc.
3. **Mixed System:** This approach centers on neighborhood, ward, and village-level participation through the establishment of ward and village development committees that represent the people in the budgeting process. This form of participation aims to widen budgetary discussions to encompass all citizens within the community and is also a common practice in Africa.

### **Participatory Approach to Economic Development**

Dennis (2017) thinks that, developing nations are blessed with abundant resources but are faced with the enormous task of ensuring that the benefits of those resources reach the impoverished communities and people

across the continent. However, for the benefits of resources of Africa to reach the target population, there is a need for equity in the distribution of national wealth among the citizenry for economic development. This has not been the case in many developing countries across Africa where many people still live in abject poverty, disease, lack of access to quality education, food and insecurity among other indicators of development and underdevelopment. Many Africa countries are good global examples of countries with huge domestic and external debts, and mismanagement of opportunities, human, material, and physical resources. Saleh (2021) asserts that Economic Development (ED) involves both qualitative and quantitative improvements in the lives of the people which also means advancements in human capital, health, safety, literacy, and infrastructure. However, such progress is significantly impeded by a lack of people participation in decisions that lead to the citing of projects and allocation of resources for their executions for economic development in many political systems across Africa (Karyeija, 2012). Other challenges include: security threats such as terrorism, insurgency, banditry, and cyber warfare. Nigeria like many other African countries is faced with the challenges of violent terrorism, especially from groups like Boko Haram. To address these threats, the Nigerian government has implemented various measures, including kinetic and non-kinetic as well as strategic communications to undermine support for terrorist activities in the country.

Economic development also denotes the attainment of consistent growth in income per capita, allowing a nation to expand its output at a pace exceeding its population growth (as defined by Todaro and Smith 2014 cited in Saleh, 2021). It also means development that goes beyond mere increases in real per capita income. It encompasses qualitative and quantitative enhancements in the political, social, and economic conditions of the people as well as equity in income distribution among all groups of people in the society. This suggests that if the traditional production function expands due to the growth of variable inputs, development can be achieved. Specifically, the participatory approach to development entails not only the growth of per capita income but also citizens participation in the process that leads to fair distribution of wealth, the origins of growth, and the advancement of infrastructure as well as administrative and political institutions in the political system. Therefore, development is a far-reaching concept that extends beyond mere economic growth in a political system (Ekong & Onye, 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework: Policy Transfer**

The main-stream literature on policy transfer by Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) defines policy transfer as “...a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, etc. in one time and /or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, and institutions in another time and/or place” (1996, p.344). In Nigeria as in many less developed countries across Africa, the sources of solutions to the problems of budgeting, economic development, and the delivery of public goods and services have been outside the continent. Countries in the global north have been the sources of transfer of public sector reform strategies to improve service delivery in Nigeria.

The extant literature suggests that between the 1980s and 2024, governments and donors in developed countries placed high priorities on policy transfer to domestic policy-making in Nigeria as in many African countries (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, 1996; Evans, 2004; and Heeks, 2002). Though, the reforms were inspired by the ideas of New Public Management (NPM) and e-government, other reforms that include participatory budgeting and a participatory approach to economic development were encouraged in Nigeria. Similarly, the privatization of public enterprises, deregulation, downsizing, devaluation of local currencies etc. in a search for increased efficiency, economy, and effectiveness in the delivery of public services were also implemented in Nigeria. Therefore, participatory budgeting and participatory approach to development were considered by policy actors to be a key tool to deliver on the targets of increasing efficiency, productivity, and accountability across different lower tiers of governments in Nigeria.

However, the transfers of those reform ideas from the donor countries in the global north to Nigeria are in most cases not voluntary, they are conditional and coercive. They were motivated by pressures from economic and political crises, donor imposition, domestic demands for change, and the desire to emulate Western countries in public sector reform implementation. Previous studies (see Tambulasi, 2011 & Tetey, 2001, Benson, 2019) have revealed that there are limits to how far the transfer of Western ideas can be successfully implemented in Nigeria even when donors' conditions are used to enforce the transfer of those foreign ideas. This is mostly due

to the variations in the availability of basic infrastructures, institutions and the political will and commitments to implement reform ideas transfer from the global north and the global south. Arguably, this explains why despite the transfer of NPM reform ideas and the adoption of a participatory approach to budgeting in some countries in Africa, they remain interesting propositions that are mostly not implemented, or at best poorly executed (Evans, 2004 and Stones, 2004). Thus, many public sector reforms have failed to deliver on the original targets of their transfer from the originating country in the global north to Nigeria. This study is designed to research the origin of the transfer of the ideas of participatory budgeting to Nigeria, the policy actors involved, and the reasons for their adoption.

## METHODOLOGY

A case study research design is adopted in this study. The theoretical assumptions about the participatory approach to development and budgeting as well as policy transfer and their relevance on to objectives of this study justified the choice of case study research design in this work. A case study research design enables the researcher to gain insight into the world of several groups of stakeholders, discover the world as seen by research participants in the political system, and try to explain why they see it that way (Yin, 2009). The strength of case study research design lies in its ability to deal with a variety of evidences such as documents, and interviews with vested interests. This design also "...benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (Yin, 2013:17). It is an in-depth investigation from multiple sources and perspectives of research participants that provides an in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon under investigations which in this case are participatory budgeting, policy transfer, and participatory development.

Two different qualitative methods of data collection were used to generate the necessary data for this paper. The use of different qualitative methods of data collection is also for triangulation purposes. Triangulation is important to ensure the reliability, and validity of the data due to subjectivity and limitations that may be associated with the use of only one tool of data collection (Yin, 2013 & Thomas, 2015). The qualitative methods of data collection used in this study are interviews with different categories of the research subjects, and documentary sources. A total of 8 interviews were conducted. The research subjects interviewed are 3 Local Government Employees, 3 staff of Ministry of Finance and Budget, and 2 representatives of Non-State Actors who do not want the name of their organizations mentioned. The documentary sources include government and the donors' publications on participatory budgeting and development in Nigeria in general and Adamawa State in particular. Content analysis was used to analyze the data that was collected from both primary and secondary sources.

### Objectives of the Study

The following objectives will be used as a guide to this study:

- i. Examine the types of Participatory Budgeting implemented in Adamawa State
- ii. Identify the origin, the actors involved and the modalities used in the transfer
- iii. Examine the factors responsible for the transfer and adoption of participatory budgeting in Adamawa State

### Research Questions

- i. What are the different approaches of Participatory Budgeting adopted in Adamawa State?
- ii. What is the origin of the transfer? Who are the actors involved and the modalities used in the transfer?
- iii. What are the factors responsible for the transfer and adoption of participatory budgeting in Adamawa State?

### The Empirical Case Study: Adamawa State

Adamawa is one of the 36 States that constitute the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The State is situated in North Eastern part of the country and has an estimated population of 4,902,100 (National Population Commission, 2024). Young people represent 46% of the total population of the State. The state's geographical area covers

36,917.0 square kilometers (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). These statistics are significant as they offer crucial insights into both the size of the population and the state's geographical expanse. This data is indispensable for various purposes such as governance, resource allocation in budgeting, and the formulation of public policy as well as strategies for economic development.

## FINDINGS

This section presents a discussion of findings from the empirical case on the study's research questions.

### a. Types of participatory budgeting adopted in Adamawa State

**Direct Participation:** This entails citizens engaging directly and voluntarily in the process without the need for organizational membership. In this model, decisions are made by mobilized citizens, regardless of whether they are organized into groups or not. Invitations are usually sent out by government for members of the public to attend budget public hearing and anybody is free to attend such important aspects of the budgeting process. Although, this form of participatory budgeting is mostly common in advanced democracies, it is also practiced in Adamawa State. It is in this regards that one of the interviewees reported that '...our government for the past 4 years has been sending invitation to the members of the public to attend public hearing on budget' (Policy Expert 1, 2024).

**Representative Participation:** This involves indirect participation, where appointed and elected representatives of registered members of organizations advocate on behalf of their members and engage with local authorities for the allocation of certain resources and citing of projects in certain locations. One such claims is that '...you know politicians in this State are always lobbying for projects to be allocated to their constituency' (Policy Expert 2, 2024). Similarly, another research subject claimed that '...this is democracy, and in democracy, you must lobby to attract resources and projects your area' (Policy Expert 6, 2024). In this scenario, participation is mediated by delegates and this type of participatory budgeting is also adopted and practice in Adamawa State as observed by some of the research subjects.

### b. The origin of participatory budgeting to Adamawa State

Through the study of one empirical case, this paper reveals that participatory budgeting originated from European countries and Brazil to Nigeria. This is not surprising given that many of the so-called solutions to the challenges of service delivery originated outside the African continent (Tambulasi, 2011). These include: liberal democracy, NPM, e-government among others. This is in line with the policy transfer framework developed by Dolowitz and Marsh that the international arena is the common source of policy transfer among nation-states (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Evans, 2004; Rose, 1993). Governments can transfer from either the national or the subnational levels but the empirical data from previous studies (see Tambulasi, 2011 & Benson, 2019) suggest that the international arena is the source of the ideas of participatory budgeting and participatory approach to economic development implemented in Adamawa State. It is therefore safe to conclude that participatory budgeting has already arrived in Adamawa State, though it is essentially an imported concept based on imported designs. This is so because before the transfer of the ideas of participatory budgeting, local policy actors in the State travelled to the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, India, Brazil and the United States of America (USA) before adopting this approach to budgeting in the State.

### c. The actors involved in the transfer

Many of the research subjects in this study have identified domestic policy actors and the international donors as the agents of the transfer of the ideas of participatory budgeting and development to Adamawa State. These domestic actors involved in the transfer are some senior civil servants in the State Civil Service, political office holders, local policy experts and international donors. The finding of this study reveals that the donors involved in the transfer include: the European Union, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. One such claim by the research subject is that '... the World Bank and other international donors recommended this approach to budgeting to us' (Policy Expert 5, 2024). This finding agrees with the original literature of policy

transfer by Dolowitz and Marsh where they identified international organizations and donor agencies as agents of policy transfer across political systems (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Gualini, 2004).

#### **d. The modalities used for the transfer**

There were different opinions on the modalities used by both domestic policy actors and the international donors for the transfer of the ideas of participatory budgeting and development to the State among research subjects. However, a common view amongst those opinions was identified. The majority of the participants that include: Local Government Employees, career and non-career officials of Adamawa State Ministry of Finance and Budget remarked that conference, workshops were the modalities used by policy actors to transfer the ideas of participatory budgeting to the State. One such claim is that ‘...when we attend conferences and workshops overseas, we learn new ways of doing things and we try to domesticate those ideas’ (Policy Expert 3, 2024). Other modalities identified by the research subjects are financial support to the State, case study visits to countries that adopt a participatory approach to budgeting among others. When government officials attend conferences and formal academic training overseas, they usually write report on their return. They make some policy recommendations to the government to implement in line with what they have learnt, and of course based on donors’ policy prescriptions in some cases. Due to the State dependence on the global north for financial aid, loans, and technology transfer, conditions were used to enforce the transfer of global best practices to the State. This is in line with Dolowitz and Marsh framework of conditional policy transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Evans, 2004). Even though, Adamawa State government officials described it as a voluntary policy transfer of ideas of participatory budgeting from Europe and America, data suggests that it could be a case of conditional rather than voluntary policy transfer.

#### **e. The causes of the transfer**

Although nation states strive for more efficient and better ways of delivery public services, findings from this study revealed that international pressure and local desire to emulate western reforms for economic development have been the major drivers for the adoption of participatory budgeting in Adamawa State. Pressure from the international community often leads to policy transfer and public sector reforms especially from the global north to Africa. The international arena is a field that serves as a source of policy transfer and home that accommodate donors that influence policy transfer across Africa. One of the research subjects remarked that ‘...we make policy recommendations to less develop countries in need of our expertise and our recommendations represent best global practice’ (Policy Expert 8, 2024).

The participants in this study belief that the actual pressure that led to the transfer of participatory budgeting ideas to Adamawa State came from the international community through donor agencies. They argued that the use of conditions for financial assistance by the World Bank, the European Union etc. were the major causes for the transfer of these foreign ideas to the State. The desire by local policy actors to emulate Western reform was found to be another factor responsible for the transfer and adoption of participatory budgeting ideas to Adamawa. This is the case because the more donor dependent a nation is, the less likely it is to set its own agenda behind which donor efforts can be aligned. Is in this regards that another research participants remarked that ‘...donor agencies took advantage of local policy actors’ appetite for not only foreign goods but also foreign ideas to dictate the agenda for public sector reforms in Adamawa State’ (Policy Expert 5, 2024). Poverty has robbed local policy actors of their self-confidence, and self-esteem. It has made them to allow donors to dictate policy prescriptions to them even when those donors lack the sufficient knowledge of the local environment of Adamawa State.

## **CONCLUSION**

A budget is a statement of estimated revenue and expenditures of government for a fiscal year that offers a significant insight into the priorities of a state. The budgeting process in most cases is not strictly governed by rigid legal frameworks and rules; instead, it is a flexible process influenced by many written regulations as well as unwritten traditions, approaches, and methods developed over time. Moreover, budgets are significantly affected by political decisions that directly affect the distribution of income, wealth, and power in a political system. Participatory budgeting encourages citizens’ participation in governance and empowers

community members to directly influence how public budget funds are allocated within participating government entities. Participatory budgeting is a global best practice of budgeting that allows community members to propose and vote on various projects of their interest such as: schools, parks, libraries, public housing, and other communal spaces and resources for their execution.

Participatory budgeting adopted in Adamawa State originated mainly from European Countries in the global North and Brazil in South America. Domestic as well as international policy actors were involved in the transfer of participatory budgeting ideas to Adamawa State. International pressure and local desire to emulate Western reforms were among the major drivers for the transfer and adoption of participatory budgeting to Adamawa.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

- a. The adoption of a participatory approach to budgeting across all tiers of government in Nigeria. This is necessary given the fact that participatory budgeting is a global best practice of budgeting that allows community members to propose and vote on various projects of their interest such as: schools, parks, libraries, public housing, and other communal spaces and resources for their execution.
- b. Local contextual factors should be considered by international donor agencies before enforcing policy transfer in Nigeria.

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