

Overview of the Key Factors Underlying Policy Reforms in Africa to Strengthen Budget Transparency, Voice and Independent Oversight

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*“One thing underlies all the difficulties caused by the interactions of Africa’s history over the past 40 years. It is the **weakness of governance** and the **absence of an effective state**. By weak governance we mean the inability of government and the public services to create the right economic, social and legal framework which will encourage economic growth and allow poor people to participate in it.”* (Report of the Commission for Africa: Our Common Interest, March 2005)

1. The Scenario of the Reforms in Africa

1.1 Democracy and Decentralization

The transparency, participation and the Budget independent control are aspects that occur in democratic States. That is why, for effects of framing the theme, I would like to initiate the presentation by discussing the aspects of democracy and decentralization in Africa, without therefore, pretend to exhausting them. The comprehension of the African democracy allows understanding the outlines and the actual challenges of the political reforms that promote a transparency and inclusive participation in the processes of decision-making.

The voice, the participation in the process of decision making and the power decentralization are some of the basic principles of reference of good governance advocated by the African continent. Democracy reflects the participation and the voice of the people in the process of decision-making whilst the decentralization is referred more to the transparency or devolution of power, as well as the participation and the people’s engagement in the processes of development of their communities (Mekolo and Resta, 2005:43-44).

The idea of democracy in Africa becomes more evident in mid 80s. At this stage, starts, in most African countries, the State Reform Programmes that was intended to less interfering in the economy, in a way, as a form of reducing the public expense that was becoming unsustainable. In the Western vision, it was important that the State could dedicate itself more to its typical functions, passing from producer to purveyor of principal goods and public services. Actually, the re-dimension of the African States that held monopolies of huge companies, employing the majority of the citizens, experiencing in this regard high rates of unemployment in the countries and with enormous social

repercussions as per understood by the citizens as the State dismissal to its role of granting social well being.

A second wave of reforms tries to bring together the governing to the governed. The nationals start to vote the governing and the representatives in the processes of decision-making and public issues management. However, innumerable experiences have shown that the representative democracy is not sufficient for the African condition where the cultural linguistic diversities are extreme comparing to the rest of the world. While the representative democracy is feasible at national level, it is not at local level. Lack of representative democracy worsens the forgetfulness of “*difference*” as a democratic value. Seems to be true that at local level the differences are more tolerated and respected comparing to the global level, what could show the evidence the idea that the participative democracy strengthens the representative democracy. This is an aspect that should be respected and encourage the African democratization.

However, there is a false apprehension for the direct or participatory democracy assuming it as a power division, thus confining the involvement and deep inclusion of the citizen in the processes of political decision-making. The participation does not necessary mean a power sharing, although does not exclude it. The challenge is in passing the fear and the false apprehension to a clear and courage of understanding that it is in the measure of this participation that consist and remains the citizenship, that the participation in power is a right and must of all citizens.

Other reality that visualize the reform policies in Africa is characterized by high levels of illiteracy and political participation of women well reduced by historical justificatory. Actually, it is difficult to conceive a true democratization process, involving people in actions of decision-making in countries with high rates illiteracy, since the citizenship and the illiteracy can mutually exclude itself. Furthermore, it is known, in a high mode that in Africa the women participation in the political life has been facing barriers and taboos of cultural character still to be won.

1.2 The Participation in the African Governance

The instruments of governance of the African continent join initiatives that guarantee the participation of their communities in the process of decision-making. The African Union aims at, among other objectives, the promotion of principals and democratic institutions, popular participation and good governance.

The new Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) that represents the highest consensus example of the African countries on good governance, focus its actions in six areas of intervention, namely: (i) Participation of the citizens in the decision-making and public management; (ii) e-government and management of knowledge; (iii) Ethic and anti-corruption; (iv) Development of human potential within the public sector; (v) Budgetary, Financial management and accountability; and (vi) Innovation/reengineering in supplying of public services.

This finding allows affirming that Africa has an agenda to promote the participation, the voice and the independent control of their government's actions. At the local level, Africa has been allied to the world municipal movement and its is at the perspective of developing concerted actions that established in May 2005, in Tshwane the Cities and United Local Governments of Africa (CGLUA). This is the African agenda to be implemented? If yes, how?

CGLUA, recognized as the united voice and legitimate of the African continent, is an organization that aims to promote the local government actions and its respective associations, representing them in various areas, better off the local governance and contributing in services through lobbies and advocacy as to encounter appropriated policies aiming to capacitate the governments and the local institutions in the realization of its mandate. One of the important aspects to highlight is the fact of, given the proximity of the local governments to the nationals; this organization is fighting for the realization of the African agenda. For the effect, has a corporative strategy drawn e recently, in Dakar, approved its Program of Decentralized Development, Advocacy and Governance in Africa (GADDEPA that is a pragmatic expression of all CGLUA strategy.

2. Challenges associated to the Reform Policies for Budgetary Transparency, Voice and Independent Control

2.1 Associated to Participation: Transparency, Voice and Independent Supervision

The movements of democratization that initiated in Africa in 80s have differentiated rounds and bring diverse results and experiences. Despite the African countries sharing common agendas, there are experiences and problems that distinguish them in terms of democratic practices. Its common agenda regarding the democracy, gives priority to construction (or reconstruction) of democratic institutions.

Today, most of the African countries observe regular elections, free and transparent with exception of some specific cases. However, even the elections being regular, free, just and transparent, Africa faces the problem of low participation and abstinences in the electoral proceedings. For example in three electoral cycles the group of the Southern countries presented the electoral participation of 76%, 79% and 75%, respectively. Certainly that it is difficult to affirm if it is structural abstention, this is, systematic and essentially represented by the same social groups or by an abstention essentially intermittent resulting from the way how the voters face the "enjeux" was the particular election (Brito, 2007).

There are studies that evaluate the results of the Democratization. Some of these studies give an optimistic reading of the democratization, seeing it as capable of "reinvent the Government" and bringing it closer to the community by the conciliation of collective and individual pleas, despite increasing the local governance. Regarding the community participation, quite a number of African governments are involved in the development of

those mechanisms, that goes from the creation of commentary councils up to the one called Participatory Budget, understood as an example of an instrument of promotion of good governance.

However, observation of details supplied by the study *Governance Process in Africa: challenges and trends* (Mekolo; Resta, 2005:34) place the supplies of the civil society at the sixth position, from the point of view of distribution of resources. According to this study the three principal areas are (a) socio-economic management (27.2% of the total resources), (b) public administration (22,8%) and (c) decentralization (16,4%).

Resources for public administration – second area most funded by the governance resources – are redistributed in: assistance to the ministries, more to the regional administration (8,2%); formulation, policy coordination and strategy (4,5%); capacitating civil servants (4,4%); accountability and participation strengthening (1,1%) technology of information (0,7%); and other components (0,9%). This area is elected as priority by the twenty-two out of twenty eight studied countries. The resources of the decentralized area (6,9% from total of resources) are divided among : institutional capacity for the decentralization (11%); policies formulation, legislation (1,4%); cooperation and coordination among local authorities (1%); information dissemination and documentation (1%) and others (2,5%). Decentralization was identified as the first priority area of the seven out of the twenty eight analyzed countries. Curiously, a priority is elected in only ten countries, namely: Mauritius, Senegal, Ghana, Cameroon, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Swaziland.

Table 1: Allocation of resources by area of focus of governance

Governance concentration area	Budget Allocation (%)
1 Civil Society empowerment	6,9
2 Communication, press and media	0,8
3 Decentralization	16,4
4 Democracy and electoral system	1,5
5 Leadership Building	1,5
6 Parliamentary system	1,5
7 Peace and stability	12,6
8 Public administration	22,8
9 Rule of Law and human rights	8,8
10 Socio-economic management	27,2

Source: Mekolo and Resta (2005:33)

Meanwhile, consensus exist that despite the problems, tensions and results not foreseen, coming from the participative processes, the experience has been constituted in form of access of the citizen on the local decision process. This access, however, is induced and coordinated by the governments. Three questions of participation are here raised. The first one is the question of implementation, that is, even when the Governments implement participative mechanisms turned to integrate the groups less powerful in the decision process, the most powerful have the power to stop that participation. The second question of inequality: even when space is created as to all participate, the socio-economic inequalities tend to create obstacles to the participation of certain social groups. The third question of the Cooptation: even if the spaces of participation are genuinely representative, the imbalance between the Government and the participants, regarding the control of information and resources, the participation is manipulated by the members of the Government (Souza, 2002).

Despites these visions, the evaluation of the African participation experiences, confer a correct route, especially regarding its objectives. However, the “correct route” of the participation varies according to the contribution that each one gives to the participation. This, because participation means different things to different people or groups. For some, participation is a form of increasing the efficiency of the governments; for others,

it implicates the increasing of social justice, or, the access of people and historical groups excluded in the process of decision. Others advocate that the participation is a mere rhetoric of politicians and governing. As it can be deduced from African report of common interest (Commission for Africa, 2005), the participation aims at giving access to the poor people and excluded from the process of decision-making or governance.

It seems to be clear that in the African acceptance, the participation means voice in the process of decision-making. But it is important to bring to our discussion the issue of difference between having voice in the process of decision-making and the authority of making decisions. For others, participation means voice in the process of decision-making and not authority to make decision. For them the voice of the local citizens, particularly of the poor ones, can be increased by reforms in the national sphere that allow to those segments higher freedom to adhere to the Non Governmental Organizations, syndicates or other institutions, as to better understand and influence decisions that affects them. As this way understood, participation is a form of transporting the disorganized in members of a civil society that can influence (but not decide) issues that affect them directly. That vision gives emphasis to the short term results and proposals of facing specific problems, in place of long term transformations and of structural nature. On the other hand, that vision demonstrates caution toward the limits of popular participation in the context of the representative democracy. This should not be the vision that guides the participatory budget that we have discussed in the African context. Participation should mean giving power to the poorest as to them: (i) get conscience of inequalities and injustices (growth of political conscience); and (ii) reform the political and social systems through collective action.

As result of these rival “visions” on the role of the participation a question rises: It is possible to adopt a participatory budget in all African countries? Even in a less ambitious vision of the first conception of the participation, the answer is not easy. There are empiric and theoretical constraints that can block the adoption of indiscriminate of the participatory budget. These constraints can be summarized in forms of open questions: (i) why the elected representatives would want to divide the power, even in a consulting form only? (ii) The incentives would have rational individuals wanting to participate, in a continent characteristically labeled by clientele and that registers historical deficits of civic engagement? (iii) African countries have sufficient resources to fulfill what the people decide? (iv) how to avoid manipulation, corruption and clientele in the countries where the population has little education, not used having active role in the government fiscal and where the majority are poor that whole efforts and time has to be canalized for its own survival? (v) As governments that brings the participation can convince the people to dedicate themselves to collective problems instead of fighting for their immediate needs, inclusive because of lots of those programmes are abolished when a new political group assumes the government? How to conciliate the practice of participatory policies turned to the auto-government with the formal institutions of the representative democracy, especially with the legislative?

Most of the experiences of participatory budget or simply the participation today existent in the continent seems not responding to these questions. Stimulated by national programmes or for international funding that allows the liberation of resources, creation and adoption of that process, lots of African countries have to institute the participation for the performance of their basic functions. The majority seems to be reproducing only what the regulation demands, eliminating, therefore, the basic premises of participation: credibility, confidence, transparency, accountability, empowerment, etc. Today we know that in some countries there are accusations of suspected corruption in the use of the resources, especially in the countries more poor and in important sectors and that demand more resources, as education and health.

2.2 Associated to Reform Policies

Various studies on reforms in Africa realized by various organizations and individuals come to almost the same conclusions on the challenges of governance of the continent. The biggest challenge of the African continent passes through coordination and harmonization of the actions of governing to respond to the principals agreed and the common interest of the countries. The lack of coordination of the actions occurs also within the countries among the development actors: state, private sector institutions, civil society, nationals and agencies of development assistance.

Mekolo and Resta, that analyzed the challenges of governing in Africa according to the ten areas defined by *African Governance Inventory*¹, reaches to the same conclusions that we reached from the reading of various African experiences. However, more challenges can be identified, especially at the local governing level, as indicated below:

a) Increase Decentralization

The process of decentralization in Africa is conditioned by various factors: (i) weakness of the central governments, of transferring capacities to the local administrations or helping these to create their own capacities; (ii) low engagement of local communities in the electoral and political processes; (iii) low level of accountability of the local government institutions; and (iv) insufficiency and clientele in the provision of local public services.

¹The ten areas of governing, according to AGI are: (i) empowerment of the civil society; (ii) communication and media; (iii) decentralization; (iv) democracy and electoral system; (v) capacitating

leadership; (vi) parliamentary systems; (vii) peace and stability; (viii) public administration; (xi) state of rights and human rights; and (x) socio-economic management.

To revert this situation the illustrative title, the Conselho Municipal de Maputo has been developing a process of democracy through open Presidencies and accountability with the population. It is a quit interesting exercise that allows the citizens, in a direct and open way, to expose their problems and put their opinion forward concerning the governing, in the perspective of improving their standard and quality of life.

On the other hand, as shown by some studies of cooperation institutions, as World Bank, the rhythm of implementation of the decentralization it varies a lot between the countries, some improving fast in the administrative decentralization and others in political. A study realized in thirty countries in 2004, by the World Bank, indicated that 27% of the countries presented an acceptable index of administrative decentralization and only 7% had significantly gone far in the political decentralization. The fiscal decentralization, for all the cases is still a problem that demands especial attention – only 3% of the countries studied its local governments have the competency to decide or control about 5% of the public resources.

(b) Strengthen capacities of Public Administration

The sustainability of the reforms in course in the continent goes through a public administration with capable human resources and motivated. The challenges of the African countries is to manage to retain their cadres through incentives that includes capacitating as to (i) improve the quality of service; (ii) increase accountability, and (iii) reduce corruption. An additional aspect in the reinforcement of African political administration is the promotion of contributions of the traditional governing ways through community leaders.

(c) Strengthen the civil society

A good governing does not depend only from the quality of the government but, mainly, from quantity of civil society. The result of the policy reforms in Africa depend of a strong and proactive society and, for that's why, it is necessary that the African countries reinforce the mechanisms that allows the freedom of community involvement in the processes of development of their countries, through participation in the process of policy decision making that affects their lives. The participation, demands also for a better credibility, accountability and efficiency of the civil society organizations.

(d) Globalization at local level

Shah (2006) goes there saying that the globalization and the information revolution forces a re-examination not only of the papers and relationship between different spheres and the government beings, as well as the relations between the States and the citizens. The government local sphere will exercise the leadership (a catalytic role) in the perspectives that glimpses for the participation. This is, according to the author, a centered

decentralization on the citizen, having three basic principles: responsible, responsive and accountable. It is required that the local government be the primary agent of the central government action and from it to be defined the attributions of the superior spheres or the local government must be too independent or with authority as the central government as to have flexibility and responsibility as to prioritize the defined actions by the local communities and to realize with low costs of possible transaction.

c) Mobilize resources for the local governments

Africa faces budget deficit problems. On the other hand, weak mobilization of the resources by the local governments has specific causes. According to Mosha (2004), the principal of local finances in Africa is the gap between the resources and the needs allied to systems of inadequate funding. The local governments of the African countries have very little power of tribute what does not allow to collect levels of local income that can help to cover their expenses. The sources of the most important resources – taxes on income and taxes of transactions – are controlled by the central governments whilst the local governments depend on patrimony taxes. In these conditions, the local governments are dependent from the central governments, which system of definition and affectation is also inadequate.

The second aspect is the weakness in the finance management, either at generating level, as at management level. Experiences show that local government with difficulties in updating their immovable records and of reevaluation of properties for tribute effects, essentially due to lack of qualified human resources.

d) The role of external assistance and of public private strategic partners

The sustainable development of Africa does not depend only from an active society but also from development partners, namely from donators/creditor and from the private sector. It is from these two last actors that today are coming the major part of resources of the African countries for funding the actions of the participatory budget.

The provision of public services by the governments can become more viable through strategic partners between the public and private sector (that is, the public-private partners), particularly in the areas of water supply and sanity which impact can result in the improvement of the life conditions of lots of co citizens.

For the African continent, where the majority of the countries depend on external assistance, the role of the donators assumes the position of importance in the evaluation of social projects identified by the communities in a participative process. Thus, the participative budget in Africa is also conditioned by the mobilization of the resources by the donators or development partners within the agreements that are established. However, it is important to indicate here two aspects that have been creating constraints in the relations between Africa and the donator: first the fact of the bigger part of the resources arriving to the governments already with defined purpose (stamped resources). How it can be put for the communities' discussion resources with pre-defined destination

by the funding agent? If the pre-destination of resources is already a priority, how it can be conciliated with the priorities expressed by the communities in participatory budget? Second, the complexity of the procedures for use of the donor's resources. The use of the external assistance resources is extremely bureaucratic making the learning/adaptation process of the technicians of public administration and of disbursement long and slow. A third aspect is conditioned help to which does not allow to develop local capacities. Long disbursement processes, complex and slow can be perverse and discouraging the initiatives of African participatory budget that are flowering.

e) Improving the Leadership

The process of reform policies in course in the African countries demands a good leadership. A fragile leadership can not produce the desired results. Huge challenges are faced to construct adequate capacities for the development of the policies, management of information and resources, improve the supply of public services and manage the complexities of the environment of quick changes.

2.3 Policy Innovations in Africa to Strength Budget Transparency, Voice and Independent Oversight

Mozambique is implementing some innovative experiences, in the national context, that deserves stress in the discussion theme. I will mention only two. The first one is of observation of implementation of Action Plan for Reduction of Absolute Poverty (PARPA) and the second is the community participation in the health sector for improvement of familiar health.

Experience 1: The observatory of poverty was created with the intention of constituting a dialogue platform between the Government of Mozambique and the civil society as in instrument of perfection of governing. The observatory of poverty is represented in the country all 11 provinces and in each of them the civil society, constituted by twenty organizations – G20 – meets with the respective local governments to discuss aspects of governing.

The base of fellowship and supervision of the Government actions is the Action Plan for Reduction of Absolute Poverty (PARPA) which elaboration the civil society performed a principal role. Annually, the panel of observation of provincial poverties discusses the PARPA implementation in each of the districts and after the annual provincial report in poverty is elaborated. After a national forum of the civil society, the annual report of poverty is produced and presented and discussed with the Government. In the national panel of poverty observation, the government presents its poverty boarding, the obtained results and the impact of the programmes. The civil society, in its turn, presents its obtained results from the discussions with the communities, in each the priority area of PARPA. The civil society can recommend the forms of government actuation in each of intervention area as well as to propose aims that they think deserves better attention from the Government.

Experience 2: During the last days, the health Sector in Mozambique has been giving incentives in the engagement of the communities in the developed actions at the level of the base as to improve the health conditions and of development, with strengthening of its capacity for the identification, analyses of the problems and decision-making, management and implementation of plans of action. These strategies aim at active participation of individuals and of the communities in improvement of the sanitary practices for health promotion of the families and improvement of access to the first health care. The community involvement strategies include: (i) promote partners among actors of the community development ; (ii) to train the health and NGOs in participatory methodologies and interpersonal communication and counseling; (iii) follow the activities of community involvement at all levels; (iv) mobilize the resources for implementation of this strategy of community involvement; (v) mobilize community involvement; (vi) elaboration of curriculum, programmes and manuals for training of health community agents.

Major part of the country this community involvement was initiated with the creation of Community Council, constituted in the communities by formal and informal leaders, of sex, where issues concerning health and the problems of health of the families are discussed and a plan of action concrete is elaborated as to solve the identified problems. These councils are also the managers of small programmes of sale as mosquito nets and the use of the existent sanitary resources in the community: Bicycles and ambulances, used for transportation of the pregnant women and other patients. These councils assists also in construction of waiting houses, where pregnant women wait to deliver their babies.

3. Participatory Budget in the Promotion of Transparency and Accountability of the Local Governments

Naturally, what determine the behavior of the actors in the participatory process are the interests and capacities of each of them to interfere and act. The incentives, for example, interface with interests of certain actors, giving them incentive to behave in a determinate way. On the other hand, the weak capacity limits the response level that the actors can give to the incentives or the possibilities to deal with the difficulties.

The majority local Governments have been trying to introduce mechanisms of incentive to the community participation in the decision making process of the local public policies. Seems that there is a consensus that the participatory policies are a virtuous objective for the countries recently democratized. That consensus is so strong that has the extremes of political spectrum: of conservers at the left; of multilateral organizations of funding more compromised with the distribution of rent until those who present better practices. Thus, participation transformed itself in magic word of all local government project. (The World Bank, 2007).

There are various alternatives that are brought as incentives of the participatory budget actors, since the reduction of clientele, empowerment of the poor and disorganized, concession of voice to the ones who do not have, even the alternative of political will and increasing of accountability. Truly, experiences inside and outside Africa, specially in Latin America, demonstrate that one of the successes of the participatory budget is in fulfillment of the constitutive values of the participation: credibility, confidence, transparency, accountability, empowerment of common citizens, solidarity, reduction of clienteles and patrimonial (Sousa, 2002; The World Bank, 2007).

It is important to understand and learn the examples already existing even in Africa, that through the participatory budget, the poor and those without a voice begun to have influence over the decision making process in allocation of a percentage of local public recourses. This opportunity redirects the resources to the areas that historically were always excluded from the government actions. In this exercise, the executive in bringing the increasing of coalition of its government and of re-election have the participatory budget as instrument of mediation.

A last question is the relation between the participatory budget and the local legislative. This issue is in the middle of the current debate on functioning of the representative system in democratic countries, heterogeneous and that follows participatory policies. With policies like the participatory budget the members of the legislative are requested to share its prerogatives of deciding on what lots of people look as its principal role, that is, the allocation of public resources, not only with the executive but also with the social movement organized around the participatory budget. Beside that, with the participatory budget, the legislators and the local elite that represent themselves loose the monopoly of the representation of the local interests and its role of one of the principal actors in the sensible and full of conflicts decision on allocation of scarce public resources. I should be added that the institution of a policy as the participatory budget generates theoretic and practical problems that affect the functioning of the formal system of interest's representation, base of the western democracies.

Thus, as to the participatory budget to increase the accountability of the executive and of the local legislatives it is essential:

- a. Increase the exercise of the “voice” as a way to increase or enlarge the exercise of the rights of citizenship. Rights modeled in the Constitution without being exercised have no sense, therefore having to be exercised and the majority of the people, specially the poor and women, must be encouraged and given incentives to exercise its rights of citizenship. The voice of the local citizens, especially of the poor, can be increased by reforms in the national sphere that allow those segments higher freedom as to adhere to non Governmental organizations, syndicates or other institutions, as to better understand and influence decision that affect them;
- b. Establish the legal board and of regulation for the participation of the communities and access to information. These will allow the political and social rights of the citizens to participate in the democratic processes, right to association, of expression of opinion and of access of public information of the executive and local legislatives;
- c. To create spaces and mechanisms for the citizens to access the information that is essential for their engagement in the monitoring and control of action of their governments; and
- d. To turn the functional judiciary institutions, independent and impartial that makes possible the pre-visibility in the application of the laws and adequate canalization of the citizens demands.

The 2007 Global Integrity report of 2007 indicates that the African countries tend to cooperate with the organizations of civil society in issues connected to the supply of public services, as for example, health and education comparing to transparency and accountability.

From the six analyzed countries² the scenario is as follows:

- a) Kenya presented itself with most robust and active civil society according to the questions in which includes itself. Even with that civil society, Kenya shows itself as the most interested in cooperating in the aspects of public service provision then the necessary focusing in aspects of government accountability. Namibia and Mozambique presented themselves as more encouraged in debates surrounding the well being of their people through discussion of agricultural, education and commerce policies in place of integrity and transparency. In Tanzania cooperation between the government and civil society organizations is weak. Government tends to involve civil society Organizations when convenient.
- b) Uganda showed contrary tendency, cooperating more with the civil society organizations for issues of accountability at a high level of governing comparing to the rendering of public services. This can be the result of the Uganda recent success performance of encouraging foreign investment and external assistance showing will of discussing issues of transparency and accountability.

Whilst variations from country to country are observed , the tendency in general is of that the African governments and the civil society organizations tend to cooperate and engaging in an effective dialogue regarding supply of public services comparing to the aspects regarding the governing reform.

² The analyzed African countries were, Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia and Mozambique.

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