

## **“THEORY OR PRACTICE?” CHILD PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC BUDGETING PROCESSES IN CITY COUNCILS. A CASE OF KADOMA CITY COUNCIL**

**By Jonathan Mrewa**

### **ABSTRACT**

Child participation in public budgeting processes is key in meeting children’s rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child. The process has sometimes being viewed as more theoretical rather than practical. The study was influenced by Hart’s ladder of participation to explore the participation by children in budgeting processes in Kadoma City Council, Zimbabwe. The The child’s right to participation in public budgeting processes is an understudied area in Zimbabwe. This study also sought to examine the current practices of children’s participation in public budgeting and critically assess the nature of these existing practices so as to establish the form of children’s participation, the point at which children are involved and their level of participation as well as the limitations of this participation. The study interrogates the notion of child participation through the prism of Junior Councilors( JCs) in the City of Kadoma’s budget consultation meetings. The study was conducted using qualitative research methods, and the case study design was used. Data collection was done through semi structured interviews with key informants, focus group discussion, observations as well as a review of literature and policy documents. The data was analysed using qualitative thematic content analysis method. The empirical data suggest that Junior Councilors in the City of Kadoma have little understanding of the budget, the budget processes and documents they are given to analyse and add input. Without any prior training on budgeting, the Junior Councilors are incapacitated and therefore not in a position to interrogate the budget or make any meaningful input to it. The research also revealed that the timing of the community budget consultation meetings at a time when children are at school, coupled domination of males at the meetings makes it almost very difficult for other groups including children to participate or make any contribution at these meetings. The study finds that the notion of child participation in

budgeting processes in Kadoma City Council is mere rhetoric. It is characterized by manipulation of children by council authorities, while the Junior Council is more of a decorative structure for the city. The study concludes that children's right to participation in public budgeting processes is not being realized in Kadoma City Council. As a result, the study challenges the government at local and national level to come up with enabling policies that enhance child participation in general and in public budgeting in particular. The study recommends that local and national government should demonstrate political commitment to child rights through implementing relevant policies and nurturing practices that fulfil children's right to participation in public budgeting processes.

### ***Key Words***

*Children, Participation, budget, rights*

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

There has been growing interest in the subject of child participation evidenced by a number of researches (Thomas, 2007 and 2010; Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2010; Kellett, 2009; Cornwall, 2008; Rampal, 2008 and Save the Children, 2010). Subsequently, participation can refer to taking part in an activity, as well as taking part in decision making (Thomas, 2011). In the context of the child rights, child participation refers to the right of the child to freely express their views, and the views being taken seriously (Lansdown, 2011).

The rights of children to participate is enshrined in various conventions that stipulates that children have the right and are entitled to participate directly at an individual level or indirectly through a representative or appropriate body (UNCRC, 1989, African Charter on the Rights of Children, 1991). Thus, child participation has different meanings and connotations across cultures because the understandings about children are varied across cultures, and the purpose of children's participation also differs (Rampal, 2008). However, listening to children is not sufficient, there is need to seriously consider their views when making decisions that affect children's lives (Lansdown, 2010). A number of scholars have advanced several theories on children's participation (Hart 1992; Thoburn et al. 1995; Treseder 1997; Lardner 2001; Shier 2001, Jans and De Backer 2002; Driskell, 2002).

Child participation can be examined in different spheres and in particular participation in public budgeting at local or national level is key. As such, participation of children in public foras has been key in scholarly work. Thus, some of these scholars have focused on budget allocations and budget analysis. Others have written about public budgeting with a special

focus on child rights, that is, child friendly budgeting, tracking budgeting for children and budget analysis (Pantin et al, 2010; Muchabaiwa, 2010; Thukral and Shastri, 2010). A child friendly budget is one that makes specific allocations for programmes that specifically benefit children (UNICEF, 2012, Save the Children, 2010).

There is a relationship between public budgeting and implementation of children's rights. This arises from the fact that delivery of services for children requires resourcing. Article 4 of the UNCRC calls on states to avail resources for the implementation of child rights (United Nations, 1989). Zimbabwe is a signatory to the UNCRC. Section 81 (1) (a) of the Zimbabwean constitution provides for every child, the right to be heard (Parliament, 2013).

Studies carried out in Zimbabwe on children and public budgeting tend to focus on the analysis of budget allocations and disbursements, analysis of budget expenditure and trends over a specific period. There is no comprehensive study in Zimbabwe that critically examines child participation platforms and practices in budgeting processes. A clear understanding of the problem is essential to bridge the knowledge gap on the participation of children in public budgeting. This study is unique as it has attempted to address these gaps as well as promoting meaningful child participation throughout all the public budgeting processes in Zimbabwe.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite the commitment to fulfil the rights of the child and to provide resources for their realisation, children's participation in public budgeting processes is not being observed. There is no body of evidence on the ground to show that child participation is taking place at national and municipal budgeting levels or the nature of the participation where it exists. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are no clear platforms available for children to participate in the public budgeting cycle. In light of the foregoing, this study used the example of Kadoma City Council to analyse the underlining factors around the participation of children in public budgeting forums.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the available platforms for child participation in public budgeting processes in Kadoma City Council?
2. What are the current practices of child participation in public budgeting processes in Kadoma City Council?
3. What is the nature of child participation in public budgeting processes in Kadoma City Council?

4. What is the extent of child participation practices in public budgeting processes in Kadoma City Council?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework guiding this study is the Ladder of Children's Participation model, expounded by Roger Hart. Hart (1992) stated, "... the confidence and competence to be involved must be gradually acquired through practice. It is for this reason that there should be gradually increasing opportunities for children to participate in any aspiring democracy" (Hart, 1994, p.4). Given this evidence, it is imperative that children take part in forums relating to their lives, including local or national level budgeting processes. The assertion by Hart indicates that child participation does not require one to first reach a certain targeted age, but participation has to be commenced at an early age, thereby offering more opportunities for the child to practice participation as the child develops. Thus, child participation according to Hart (1992), is a gradual process that needs to be practiced from an early age all the way to adulthood (p. 4). There is need for deliberate creation of platforms, forums and opportunities for children to speak out and practice participation in their communities and countries (Hart, 1992, p. 4). One such platform is the public budgeting processes in Zimbabwe.

Hart (1992) notes that most child participation initiatives are "...often exploitative or frivolous..." (p.4). This assertion seems correct when considering the bottom three rungs (Manipulation, Decoration and Tokenism) that Hart regards as non-participation. Manipulation emphasizes situations where adults instruct children to say or do certain actions, without the children having full understanding of their actions or reasons for doing these actions. It can be argued that if the children have no understanding of the reason why they are doing a particular action, then this is not child participation but mere manipulation. To illustrate manipulation, Hart (1992) gives the example of pre-school children who are made to carry placards with political messages, yet the children do not understand what the inscribed messages mean, or the reason for their actions (p. 9).

Decoration is another form of non- participation, which refers to situations when children are present to perform songs or dance at an event that they have no idea about and have had no say in the organizing of the occasion (Hart, 1992, p. 9). In some instances, the children are lured by the prospects of getting refreshments, and getting entertained rather than the cause (p. 9). It is important to note that in this instance, children have very limited capacities in the event or project, and their views or thoughts are neither required nor considered.

Tokenism is another degree of non-participation reflected on the Ladder. Hart (1992) argues that tokenism describes those instances whereby children are allowed to speak, but have little or no choice about the subject matter or how best to communicate it, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions (p. 9). Thus it may be argued that despite being present at a function, budget consultation meeting or project, the child or children do not understand their role and what they say is more like reading someone else's script.

In order to learn these responsibilities, children need to engage in collaborative activities with other persons including those who are older and more experienced than themselves (Hart, 1992, p.5). In the context of budgeting, this view implies that children for example the JCs should be supported through working with experienced adults such as the SCs in the budget making process. This approach helps children to learn from adults' experience, is critical for their understanding of the process and helps build children's confidence to meaningfully participate in budgeting.

Children need access to appropriate information, encouragement and support in order to articulate their views (Lansdown 2010, p 12). It is clear that access to information that children can easily understand is critical for them to enjoy their right to participation. It may be argued that child participation in budgeting whereby children are not adequately informed, have no full understanding of the budget and hence cannot contribute, reflects non-participation. Non participation by children is reflected in the three bottom rungs which are manipulation, decoration and tokenism (Hart, 1992, p.9).

Inclusiveness in participation is among the key success factors that need to be in place for any budget to be participatory (Manduna, Zinyama, & Nhema, 2015, p.38). In relation to council budgeting, this implies that all interested groups including children should be genuinely involved across all budgeting processes. Hart (1992) concurs, and reveals that some perceived child participation activities are in essence non-participation and do not address the needs and interests of children (p.9). It can be inferred that the mere presence of the JC structure within a local authority, does not translate into genuine child participation in budgeting processes.

Hart (1992) describes manipulation as a situation where children are consulted but given no feedback at all (p.9). It is clear therefore that all instances where SCs consult JCs to list their budget priorities, then go on to discuss the children's input without involving children or providing feedback on the decisions made are manipulation.

## CONCISE LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***ZIMBABWE CONTEXT AND CONTENT OF CHILD PARTICIPATION IN BUDGETING***

Zimbabwe is a signatory to the UNCRC and ACRWC, which provide for the right to participation in all matters that concern the child. The child's right to participation is enshrined in Section 81 (1) (a) of the Zimbabwean Constitution, which states that every child under the age of 18 years, has the right to be heard (Commission, 2013, para. a). It is against this background, it is worth noting that Zimbabwe has a legal and policy framework that promotes child participation. Despite these commitments Zimbabwe went for years with the budget formulation, implementation and analysis being the preserve of government technocrats under the leadership of the Ministry of Finance (Muchabaiwa, 2010). In 2002, the government of Zimbabwe introduced parliamentary portfolio committees, which regularly conducted public hearings to elicit written and oral submissions and evidence from citizens and civil society to inform budgeting and other government programmes (p. 112).

Consultative workshops and studies by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) on the situation of women and children revealed that the national budget was not responsive to the needs of women and children, leading to the establishment of the Child Friendly National Budget Initiative (CFNBI) as well as the Gender Responsive Budgeting Project (Muchabaiwa, 2010, p.113). It is important to note that the reforms at parliament contributed to making the budget processes in Zimbabwe more participatory and transparent.

#### ***Why child participation is in public budgeting***

According to the Child Rights Network of Southern Africa (CRNSA) *2016- 2020 investment in Children Advocacy Strategy for Southern Africa*, true investment in children places premium on hearing the voices of the children in structuring the local and national budgets. The African Child Policy Forum states that children's rights and well-being are intrinsically linked with public budgets (Forum, 2010, p. 1). As such, it is imperative that children be provided with platforms for them to articulate their views during all budgeting processes, for it to be pro-children.

One of the biggest barriers to realizing the rights of these children is the lack of sufficient allocation and efficient use of public resources (Save the Children, 2013, p1). Article 4 of the UNCRC requires countries that are signatories to the UNCRC to 'undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures', including resource allocation to realize child rights (United Nations, 1989). Consequently, it is clear that the participation of children in

budgeting processes helps in ensuring that programmes and budgets address the needs of children. It helps children to be able to hold governments accountable for delivery of services and fulfillment of their rights.

Despite children knowing their own situation best, they are often excluded in the debates and decisions on allocation of public resources and often have limited opportunities to participate in the different stages of the budget cycle (Save the Children, 2013, p.4). As such, involving children in the budget process, can assist governments to design more accurate and relevant interventions for children. In preparation for the 2011/2012 national budget, 25000 Junior Councilors from Tanzania presented their budget priorities to nine councils. Their participation helped in increasing the budgetary allocations to programmes, thus helping 455 000 children to benefit from school feeding programmes, while other children were enabled to attend secondary school and more teachers were recruited (Save the Children, 2013, p.2). The foregoing demonstrates that children's participation in budgeting helps c to make budgets more relevant to the needs of children.

Public funds are effectively and equitably managed if the budget system is transparent, participatory and allows for public engagement and scrutiny (Save the Children, 2013). Save the Children and NANGO state that children should participate in budgeting processes because it is their right. The thinking is that such participation influences local and national priorities and expenditure patterns in a manner that does not exclude children's issues and ensures that budgets address the aspirations of children, and improves use of national resources (UNICEF, NANGO, Save the Children, n.d, p. 27). In other words, child participation in budgeting helps to improve public accountability and is a fulfillment of child rights.

Children's participation in budgeting is an effective instrument to ensure that budgets address the needs of children (The African Child Policy Forum, 2010, p. 2). The public including children can participate during the budgeting process in many ways, which include sharing and disseminating information on the budget, organising discussion forums and establishing mechanisms for joint decision-making (p. 2). Children can also participate in budgeting at their own level, and this requires support and commitment from the adults.

In its General Comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights (art. 4) provides that state parties should regularly hear children's views on budget decisions that affect them. The UNCRC committee also calls on authorities to consider the needs of children from infant stage, early child hood development, at primary school, during their teenage years during all stages of budgeting and thereafter allocate the resources

according to the different developmental stages of children. This approach would help to address the needs of children such as toddlers, who may not be able to articulate their interests or be represented in the junior council.

### ***Challenges faced in child participation***

The barriers to participation are usually greater for children (Lansdown, 2010, p.14). In most cultures children, especially girls are not expected to express their views, but to remain silent in the midst of adults (p. 14). Children are not encouraged to express their views in a number of settings that include at home, school and at community gatherings (p.14). Lansdown also states that, while there may be ad hoc opportunities to set up meetings with government authorities, so as to give children a voice, these processes do not yield any results that effectively bring change to the status of children or provide mechanism for children to submit complaints on the violations of their rights (p. 15). The assertion by Lansdown (2010) seems plausible in the context of both national and municipal budgeting processes, as these institutions do not have adequate established systems and mechanisms for child participation during budgeting. Most adults in these institutions have no idea how to go about implementing child participation, and do not view child participation as a right.

Certain groups of children that include the young ages and children living with disabilities are normally denied the opportunity to express their views freely (Lansdown, 2010, p.12). The African Child Policy Forum (2010) points out that ensuring child participation as well as producing child-friendly budgets requires time, commitment and resources (p.1). It can therefore be argued that there is need for countries and municipalities to investment in child participation initiatives, especially in relation to budgeting. This could be through hiring technical experts, training, setting aside resources as well as putting in place the legal frameworks.

Despite knowing their own situation best, children often remain invisible in the debates and decisions on allocation of public resources and have limited opportunities to participate in the different stages of the budget cycle (Save the Children, 2013, p.4). In instances where child participation structures have been set up, such as junior parliament and Junior Councils, they remain obscure in the deliberations and critical decision making and do not always get involved across all the stages of budgeting (p. 4). The use of highly technical language in the deliberations and lack of simplified and child friendly materials on the budget is a major challenge to child participation in budgeting.



One of the challenges to the realisation of children's right to participation is the presumption of children's incapacities (Lansdown, 2010, p.15). This is reflected by adults who underestimate children's capacities or fail to appreciate the value of children's input, on the basis that the input is not expressed in an adult manner (- p. 15). This protectionist view ultimately results in a reduction in opportunities available for children to develop their capacities, thereby leading to the exclusion of children from participating in decision making. This is worsened by the absence of legal frameworks, policy and practices that give sufficient consideration of the need to recognise and respect children's capacities (p. 16).

### ***What can be done to improve child participation in public budgeting***

Meaningful realisation of children's participation rights requires the provision of legislative, policy and practical provisions, which establish children's entitlements and provisions to hold the government accountable for the realisation of children's rights (Lansdown, 2010, p. 14). This includes legal entitlements, the provision of information that is child friendly sensitisation and awareness raising of adults on the child rights so that they are able to support child participation efforts (p. 14). These combined efforts help to ensure that children and their representatives participate in the budget processes in a manner that is child friendly, and addresses their interests.

Having indicators to measure children's participation is imperative for evaluation of progress on the engagement of children in decisions that affect them (Lansdown, 2010, p. 20). There is need to measure the extent, quality and impact of the actual participation of children ( p. 20). In the absence of these, it is not possible to note what participation activities are being done and if they are impacting on children's lives (p. 20). Lansdown (2010) emphasises the need for children to participate in any process to monitor and evaluate their participation, either through consultative, collaborative or child led participation (p.20). It is in the best interest of the children, for them to participate in processes to assess their level of participation in budgeting processes.

Parliamentarians and local authorities can facilitate children's participation and input into the budget process and bring children's perspectives in a number of ways. These include producing a child-friendly budget that is intelligible to children; gathering relevant data in the context of budget discussions; meeting with children's organizations/representatives; requesting written and/or oral submissions from children and children's participation in budgetary processes (UNICEF, NANGO, Save the Children, n.d., p. 60). Children can be supported by governments as well as civic society to participate in budgeting. as such, the

budgeting processes need to be child friendly and contextually relevant to the situation of children.

## **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH**

The research is based on qualitative research provides an opportunity for the researcher to access documents, events and perceptions through the eyes of the people under study, as the people are able to interpret their own worldview (Bryman, 2012, p. 399). The key characteristics defining qualitative research include collecting data within the natural setting, use of the researcher as key instrument, using multiple sources of data, inductive and deductive data analysis, learning from the research participants' meanings, use of the emergent design, reflexivity as well as providing a holistic account (Creswell, 2014, p. 234)

The researcher used a case study design that entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case (Bryman, 2012, p. 66). Yin (1994) defines a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1994, p. 13). The case study enquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation, relies on multiple sources of evidence, and the collected data needs to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin, 1994, p. 13). The distinctive nature of case studies thus enables the research to be conducted within its real life context. The use of the case study design in this study on interrogating child participation in budgeting processes, enabled the researcher to have a close and in-depth examination of child participation practices across the budgeting processes carried out within the specific context of Kadoma City. It allowed for a close scrutiny of child participation practices during the city's budgeting cycle as well as interpretation of emerging data, based on the experiences and views of children, councilors, staff members within in Kadoma City. The design also enabled the researcher to get the views of representatives of CSOs specialising in child participation in budgeting processes at local or national level, and have either been partners with or are currently partnering with the City of Kadoma on child participation in budgeting.

The use of qualitative research methods allowed the researcher to access documents from Kadoma City Council, including the actual draft budget for 2019. Qualitative research enabled the researcher to gain insights into past and present events such as the city's budget consultation meetings at ward level and with the Junior Councils(JC), to hear the staff and Senior Councilors' interpretation of the budget consultations throughout the budget cycle. Use of open-ended questions enabled the researcher to gather data about the research

participants' actual experiences, hear their testimonies about the processes involved and how they were conducted.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations as well as continuously reviewing existing literature and policy documents on child participation and public budgeting as instruments for data collection. Notable among these were the Urban Councils Act, Chapter [29:15] of 1996, draft budget documents, adverts and notices for the city's budget consultation meeting. The researcher used multiple sources of data. These include conducting interviews with a number of participants, observing the preparations for a ward level budget consultation meeting, attending and observing a budget consultation meeting for JCs and using secondary data. The researcher observed, read and reviewed data from various sources, to understand and classify it into emerging themes.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of data involved the use of content analysis techniques where data generated from the study was transcribed and analysed using the the six thematic phases( Braun & Clarke,2006). The six phases include data familiarisation, generation of codes, establishment of themes, reviewing themes as well as defining the themes. In addition, the process involved the final production of the paper.

### **KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### ***Consultations during the budget processes: limited consultation of children***

The fact that the Junior Councilors(JC) said they had never been consulted by council staff and Senior Councilors(SC) about the budget throughout their eleven months in office from January to mid-November 2018, is an indication that the City of Kadoma does not prioritise the participation of children in budgeting processes. The deafening silence shows that the city offered no room for child participation during budget approval, execution and review stages that took place during the course of the year 2018.

*One participant said "Since the beginning of our term of office, we have never met the SCs. We have never met them. But perhaps this year because they (referring to a Finance department staff member) have come and shown us the rough draft that they have. I think this was an indirect consultation even though they didn't say it out. They also asked what we think of the budget, so it shows they are consulting us."*

Participation by children during these stages would have provided an opportunity to hold the city authorities to account for the money they allocated to certain activities or children's services and state if it was disbursed and used effectively. This would also have allowed the JC the opportunity to get an explanation for the reduction in the 2018 Junior Council budget from \$5000 to \$3000 without consultation or explanation.

The Kadoma City mid-year budget review document that was produced around mid-year was only shared with the JCs during the JC budget consultation meeting, which took place in November 2018, approximately five months after the mid-year review. Considering that the JCs were already in office around mid-year, Kadoma City authorities should have informed and consulted the JCs during the budget review exercise. This would have brought out the voice of children to the review exercise. The city should have distributed copies of the mid-year review report to JCs at the time it was produced.

*Another participant said "No. we never discussed about budget. No, the budget just started like a month ago (pause), two months ago. We really don't know like when it started. We normally do not discuss about the budget"*

The City of Kadoma established the JC in 2002 to ensure representation of children in local governance processes, as well as promoting child participation. However, the practice by the city authorities deliberately hinders and excludes the JCs from participating in some stages of budgeting. Possible explanations for the exclusion of children from participating in some budgeting processes is that the city authorities are not willing or lack the political will to fully embrace child participation. None participation can be collaborated by Hart(1992)who argues that the bottom three steps on the ladder, which are manipulation, decoration and tokenism, represent non-participation, while the fourth to the eighth step which are; assigned but informed, consulted and informed, adult initiated, shared decisions with children, child initiated and directed and child initiated, shared decisions with adult represent varying degrees of genuine child participation and encompass children influencing decision making (Hart, 1992, p. 8). Consequently, child participation is sometimes implemented when it is convenient for adults. As an example, for Kadoma City Council, JC's participation in budgeting processes in Kadoma is therefore at the discretion and mercy of the city authorities.

The reasons for SCs lack of consultations with children on the budget could be that the SCs have their community budget consultation meetings during the day when the children are at school, they do not value children's input, or have no idea how to go about it. It is also

possible that some SC have limited understanding of child rights, such that they do not know the importance of child participation. It may be argued that this is an indication that the SCs do not believe children can make meaningful contributions to budget processes and decision making, thus deliberately shunned meeting the JC. This can also be an indication that the SC's intention for establishing the JC in Kadoma, was not sincere, but a mere decorative act meant to give the impression that Kadoma City fully promotes and embraces child rights. On the contrary, their budgeting practice however did not indicate that they embrace child participation. This can be corroborated by literature review that states that beyond the lack of recognition of children's right to be heard is a lack of understanding that children have the capacities to contribute to decision making. Too often, adults underestimate children's capacities or fail to appreciate the value of their perspectives... (Lansdown, 2010:15)

### ***Adult Dominance at community budget consultation***

The issue of adults dominating the ward and community budget consultation meetings was raised by a number of respondents during this study. Adult dominance at meetings is a barrier to child participation, as it leaves no room for children to make contribution, express views, and be listened to. In a meeting environment that is adult dominated, the likelihood that children's contributions will not be given due weight and consideration is very high. Efforts should be made to accommodate all ages at such meetings, as residents have different needs depending on age. This seems to be one of the reasons why all the children from the four schools in Kadoma who participated in the FGDs said they did not attend the community budget consultation meetings. The adult dominance also extended to sharing information about meetings and invitations to attend community budget meetings.

Study respondents concurred that children hardly spoke or made any contributions at these budget meetings and that adults led the meetings, made the contributions, debated and concluded, while the few children who attended these meetings were reduced to mere spectators, and rarely expressed themselves.

The expressions used by respondents that described the severity of this adult dominance at the meetings and its impact on children include; *“they are crowded out; it is a blessing for one to actually talk at public places; they hardly come up with their voices and space is limited for children. Other statements included; naturally the child is supposed to be quiet; the children don't usually speak in mixed hearings with adults, they are quiet; politicians dominate, they do not want to open room for children; and it is uncommon for children to come up with suggestions or talk”*. These statements indicate that this platform is not child

friendly at all. The prevailing atmosphere at these meetings induces fear among children, shuts them out and virtually takes away their voices. The dominance by adults at the community budget meetings confirms the argument by Sloth- Nielson (2012) that the participation of children has historically been extremely limited in most traditional cultures across Africa (p. 11). Sloth-Nielson (2012) states that the principle of child participation contradicts traditional conceptions of children in African contexts, which are grounded in children's respect for elders, which presupposes a hierarchical societal structure where children are viewed as having insufficient societal status to express useful opinions or views (p.11).

The study findings indicate that platforms that are characterised by unequal power relations hinder children's participation. It can also be inferred that combined forums which bring together children and adults such as politicians are to a large extent intimidating for children and inhibit the child's right to freely express himself or herself, as provided for in Article 12 of the UNCRC. In addition, this practise contradicts paragraph 52 of the UNCRC's General Comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights, which states that states parties should regularly hear children's views on budget decisions that affect them, through mechanisms for the meaningful participation of children at the national and subnational levels. Participants in those mechanisms should be able to contribute freely and without fear of repression or ridicule and States parties should provide feedback to those who participated... (United Nations, 2016).

### ***Junior Council Budget: You are told this is how much you are going to get***

It is commendable that the City of Kadoma is one of the 38 local authorities in Zimbabwe that had established the Junior Council Structure as of 2018, and went further to allocate money in its annual budget for the JC. This shows some concern for children's issues and willingness to embrace child participation in the city's local governance systems. As an example, in 2019, an allocation of \$5000 to the JC to support its activities was done and it is a good practice and other local authorities should learn from Kadoma's example.

The researcher however observed that whenever the question about the available platforms and practise for child participation in budgeting was brought up, most council staff and councilors were quick to state that they allocate money for the JC activities in their annual budget. This is a good practice yes, and the amount is critical for the operations of the JC. However, the mere allocation of money for the JC in the budget is in itself not child participation in budgeting processes. Therefore, the City of Kadoma authorities and

Councilors need to go beyond the mere allocation of money for JC to actual implementation of child participation in budgeting processes, and this can include other children as well who are not necessarily JCs.

The exposé by JCs about the unexplained reduction in the JC 2018 budget from \$5000 to \$3000, is an indication that the JC has no voice in terms of how their budget is used. The JC are not consulted and do not participate in decisions pertaining to their own budget. This to a large extent indicates lack of transparency, lack of accountability and failure by Kadoma authorities to embrace child participation in budgeting.

Most local authorities have been facing financial challenges owing to unpaid rates. On this basis, perhaps the decision to cut the JC's budget may have been due to limited revenue generation, considering that the City of Kadoma's budget is initially approved based on projected revenue that is likely to be raised through tariffs, parking fees and other sources of income during the year. So when less money is collected, the budget cuts are inevitable. However, if the city is committed to child participation, there is need to talk to the JCs and involve them in the decision making, pertaining to their budget. Making decisions without input of children public processes is contrary to the views of .....who states that “ if children are given responsibility, they will gradually become empowered as decision-makers. Allowing children to make decisions and to share in the consequences helps their growth and experience in influencing or directing project activities or community action. It is crucial for the growth and well-being of children that they learn how to respond actively to issues affecting their lives, both on their own and with other children”(Malone,2020).

### ***Budget approval stage: No Children! That's members only***

Kadoma City's budgeting processes have no room for child participation, during the three stages of the budget cycle where most decisions are made, namely approval, implementation and review. The JC does not partake in these crucial decision making platforms during the budgeting processes. The only people who participate in the decision making stages of the budget are the SCs and city management, while children are totally left out.

The exclusion of children reduces the JC structure to mere decoration, meant to give the impression that City of Kadoma fully embraces child participation, when the reality is that the children do not participate in forums where decisions about Kadoma council budget are made. This practise in Kadoma City confirms the argument by Save the Children that children often remain invisible in the debates and decisions on allocation of public resources

and have limited opportunities to participate in the different stages of the budget cycle (Save the Children, 2013, p.4). Even in where some child participation structures have been set up, such as junior parliament and junior councils, they remain obscure in the deliberations and critical decision making and do not always get involved across all the stages of budgeting (p.4). At the same time, it contradicts the Zimbabwe Constitutional, section 264 provision that upholds that local authorities should give powers of local governance to the people and enhance their participation in the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions that affect them. (Parliament, 2013, p.103)

### ***Timing of the budget consultations and council meetings***

The study findings indicated that the Kadoma budget meeting times always clashed with the children's school timetable. They all occurred at the same time, making it practically impossible for a child to attend both. The 2018 Kadoma City's budget formulation was delayed and this resulted in the public budget consultations being conducted from October to mid-November. The JC's budget consultation meeting was also conducted in November as well. In terms of practice, the budget consultation in Kadoma processes is conducted around the months of September to November each year. This time also happens to be the same time that school examinations and end of year tests are conducted throughout the country. This clash between budgeting processes and examination times limits school children's participation in the budget consultation meetings, especially if they are at community level. However, if these budget meetings are held during weekends and widely publicised, then the possibility of children participating becomes high.

Ward or community level budget consultations in Kadoma City take place anytime during the day from as early as 10am. These times again conflict with the time when most children will be at school. So to a large extent these times are not child friendly and children are excluded by default.

### ***Decision making: We run the show***

Throughout the study it was apparent that children and the JC members were not allowed to participate in any of Kadoma City's budget processes where decisions were being made. Their participation was limited to consultations during budget formulation. The crucial meetings to approve the budget and allocate resources were only open to SCs and Council management. In addition, JCs were restricted from participating in the full council meetings,



where decisions are made. When assessed using the Ladder of Children's participation, the scenario in Kadoma reveals that no child participation is taking place throughout the public budgeting processes.

Much as the Kadoma budget is an adult-led activity, the children have no understanding of the purpose of the consultations, while some children are not even aware that there are consultations. All children in Kadoma did not seem to know about the city's budget making process and had no role to play in the processes. The fifth step on Hart's ladder refers to "Consulted and informed". In the case of Kadoma City, the children at all four schools indicated that they were not being consulted both at school and in the community. The JCs budget consultation meeting, turned out to be a formality, as they had no understanding of budget processes, and were not given simplified materials that they could understand. Consequently, this is contrary to the UNCRC that stipulates in its General Comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights (art. 4) provides that state parties should regularly hear children's views on budget decisions that affect them. The UNCRC committee also calls on authorities to consider the needs of children from infant stage, early childhood development, at primary school, during their teenage years during all stages of budgeting and thereafter allocate the resources according to the different developmental stages of children.

### ***Level of inclusiveness***

Kadoma City's budgeting processes are not inclusive of all groups of children. Child participation in budgeting processes is enjoyed only by the JCs. This is despite the fact that not all children have access to the JC, not all schools have JCs, not all children are in school and there was not a single child with disability in the Kadoma JC. As such the views of children with disability and their interests were not represented at council. In addition, the location of the Council Chamber where JC meetings are held, on the first floor yet there was no elevator. This limits children with physical disabilities from accessing the Council Chambers to attend meetings, in the event that they are selected as JCs.

At the time of the study, there was no plan in place to seek the views of children who were not in school so that their views can be incorporated into the city's budgeting processes. Children who were in primary school and those children living with disability were totally excluded from the budgeting processes in the city. This situation shows that not all groups of children have the opportunity to participate in the city's budgeting process. This exclusion of many groups of children from both the JC and consultations during budgeting processes is in

violation of the UNCRC principle of non- discrimination. Thus, Save the Children and HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, (2010) states that children from disadvantaged and poor communities, such as indigenous groups, or children at risk such as street children, children of prostitutes, physically or mentally challenged, require special attention (p. 33). The assertion seems plausible as the practice of child participation in budgeting processes is often a preserve of the child representatives such as Junior Parliamentarians and JCs, and less of the individual child who does not hold any position. In addition, the participation of children with special needs, such as the disabled, the deaf and blind as well as that of children in remote and marginalised rural areas is not evident.

### ***Child participation practices during budgeting***

The study revealed that both the JC and SCs were not consulting other children in the city on budget issues. The JC consultation meetings were being done without the JC having been given time and materials to allow them to engage with children at their schools to hear their views first. The implication is that the views of all other children in the City are not sought and not brought to the attention of the City Council for consideration across all the budgeting processes. The fact that both the JC, SC and city staff members disregarded the views of other children in budgeting processes, confirms the assertion by Save the Children (2013) that asserts that children have limited opportunities to participate in the different stages of the budget cycle. Yet, children know their own situation best (Save the Children, 2013:4)

### ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

The promotion and fulfillment of the child's right to participation in public budgeting processes requires a multi sectoral approach. The City of Kadoma alone cannot tackle it. The researcher therefore recommends that:

- The national Government should design a policy framework that provides for child participation across all public budgeting processes in local authorities. This will help in providing guidance and a uniform approach to all local authorities in their implementation of child participation initiatives in public budgeting. Funding for this policy design could be through local authorities pulling their resources together or possibly seeking partnerships with organisations in the child rights sector.
- The Ministry of Local Government and the MoPSE should provide national guidelines for the selection and operations of Junior Councils. This is critical in ensuring uniformity, non-discrimination, and effective child participation in the selection of JCs and other local governance processes. The guidelines should among

other things, articulate the mandate of Junior Councilors, roles of their school authorities, chaperones and school based patrons in supporting children to fully execute their duties and consultations among other school children. The guidelines should clarify ways to enhance collaboration among government ministries as well as other stakeholders for the benefit of children.

- The City of Kadoma should plan and embark on a bi-annual public education and awareness campaign to promote general understanding among children and residents about municipal budgets, budgeting processes, periods and clarifying the roles of citizens including children. Such a process is critical for accountability and raising awareness among children and residents on the public budgeting processes, stages and importance of their participation in these processes. It will also help in improving public and child participation in the municipal budgeting processes. The campaign should target all schools and as many communities as possible. Funding for these campaigns should be sources from council revenues inflows.
- The City of Kadoma should embark on a stakeholder mapping exercise to establish the various groups of children within its locality, so as to ensure inclusive consultations and participation of children in its budget processes. This is critical in ensuring that the views of many children including Orphans and Vulnerable Children are taken into consideration during budgeting. The City can work with the Junior Councilors, school authorities and existing community structures like Child Protection Committees to ensure no child is left behind. This exercise may be done using council resources.

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