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## **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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