

Citizen Engagement in Governance: A Study of Participatory Budgeting in India

Dr. T. Geethasree

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science,
Government Degree College for Women, Sangareddy, Telangana

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Abstract

Citizen engagement in governance means that people and communities are actively involved in the public sector's decision-making, implementation, and monitoring processes to make things more open, accountable, and efficient. There are several ways to do it, such as town hall meetings, advisory groups, public consultations, and online forums. It helps build trust, openness, and new ideas. When citizens get involved, democracy is stronger, policies work better, and the government is better able to meet the demands of its people.

This research looks into how participatory budgeting (PB) affects the involvement of citizens in Indian government. It focuses on how PB is used and what effects it has in Kerala, comparing it to how little it is used in other parts of the country. It looks at accountability using the World Bank's principal-agent model and discovers that PB improves openness and fiscal responsibility, but its success and long-term viability rely on many factors and local conditions. The study also points out problems like complicated budget documents and a lack of legal frameworks for citizen participation. It suggests digital platforms and campaigns like "My City My Budget" as ways to get more people involved and close the gap between good ideas and actual action.

1. Introduction

The participation of citizens in government is necessary for the survival of democracies. Because it is founded on values, citizen governance must be interpreted within the framework of civil society organizations, and leaders must evaluate their own political situation and the changes they want to see. The idea of governing by the people is still in its infancy, and for it to endure, governments at all levels must become accustomed to operating in new ways and within a novel culture. It will be necessary to take down the barriers that have separated the bureaucracies of the government from those of the people in order to accomplish this.

The active participation of individuals in the decision-making processes and activities of their government, which is referred to as citizen engagement in governance, is a means of ensuring that the policies and services provided are responsive to their demands. This connection is characterized by a reciprocal dynamic that involves activities that extend beyond voting, including the provision of feedback, attendance at public meetings, and the utilization of internet platforms to keep government officials responsible and to establish trust. Effective government that is transparent, responsible, and efficient is the result of effective public participation.

Democracy has evolved into a "delegative" system throughout the years. Individuals have entrusted governance to elected representatives and bureaucrats. The citizen is absent from governance. Democracy has evolved to be more representational than participatory. Citizen engagement in government is most evident during electoral

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processes. Between elections, there are few institutional avenues for citizen engagement in governance matters. The significance of several institutions, including the media, is paramount.

The responsibilities of both citizens and governance are seeing significant transformation in the 21st century. The government is perceived primarily as a shareholder rather than a regulator, financier, or service provider. Citizen governance should be viewed as transcending new public management. This signifies a pivotal transformation in the reform process, wherein the significance of state apparatuses for the advancement and sustainability of sustainable societies is being diminished, while a heightened focus on "governance" is assuming the major role previously occupied by "government." The new vision is to advance public policy via the collaborative efforts of public authorities and citizens in unison. The redefinition of the citizen is critically significant to public administrative practice today.

2. Participatory Budget (PB)

In participatory budgeting, members of the public have a say in how a certain amount of public money is spent. Public budgeting (PB) gives people a voice by letting them decide which initiatives should get funding, what the community values most, and how to implement those objectives, rather than leaving it all up to elected officials and bureaucrats. The basic idea is that when people get involved, it makes them feel like they have a stake in the outcome and makes them more likely to hold themselves to account, which in turn makes public resources run more smoothly and fairly. Participatory budgeting has been a popular policy instrument in various political and cultural situations due to its twin purpose of allocating resources and empowering citizens.

Porto Alegre, Brazil is the place where participatory budgeting originated. In the late 1980s, a series of experiments were conducted there that lay the framework for what would eventually become a worldwide phenomenon. A segment of the budget was set aside by the municipal administration in the city of Porto Alegre to be determined via the active participation of the citizens, a procedure that not only made budgetary decision-making more democratic but also bolstered the legitimacy of the local government. Throughout the course of time, the model has been modified to accommodate a wide range of different situations. These include, but are not limited to, the developed democracies of North America and Europe, as well as the growing economies found in Asia and Africa. Each and every one of these adaptations is a reflection of the political, social, and cultural dynamics that are unique to the specific location in question.

The examination of participatory budgeting is especially pertinent to the audience of Local Development & Society as it tackles fundamental concerns of the journal, including civic engagement, empowerment, health and wellbeing, livelihoods, self-governance, capacity enhancement, community organization, local democracy, sustainability, social capital, and local economic advancement. This special issue illustrates that effective implementation of participatory budgeting can enhance good governance by fostering accountability, transparency, openness, public engagement, equity, a deliberative culture, and the empowerment and wellbeing of marginalized and underserved communities. This can mitigate problems, foster public acceptance of budgeting decisions, and enhance mutual trust between local government and citizens, as well as among inhabitants themselves. Research indicates that participatory budgeting has significant potential to cultivate more involved and compassionate individuals, enhance democratic processes, and improve overall quality of life.

The fact that PB is a legally enforceable decision-making process over actual resources rather than an information session, consultation, or budget modeling tool sets it apart from other public engagement tools employed by local governments. Additionally, it differs from other binding methods such as recalls, plebiscites, and referenda in that it is a continual, cyclical process that involves community debates rather than a one-time ballot exercise. Participatory budgeting procedures are frequently created to include locals who are generally excluded from more conventional forms of public involvement, such as youth, non-citizens, and low-income groups. Occasionally, a particular procedure is created with these groups in mind, such as participatory budgeting for migrant workers in Taiwan or youth participatory budgeting (Medellin, Boston, Rosario, Cluj, etc.). PB has helped shift financial priorities in several places such that individuals who lack access to infrastructure and services are given priority.

2.1 Major Features of the Study

- **Methodology:** The study uses a comparative approach, analyzing Kerala's institutionalized PB system against other regions in India where PB has not flourished. It also draws on the World Bank's principal-agent model for accountability.
- **Implementation in India:** Kerala is highlighted as a rare success story, having implemented PB statewide since 1996 and integrated it into local government functions. Outside of Kerala, PB has seen limited adoption and has not become an established practice.
- **Impact on governance:** PB is shown to improve government transparency and accountability by making budget allocations reflect community needs more accurately. The study suggests that digitally-enabled platforms can overcome challenges of low participation, leading to better engagement and positive socio-economic impacts. The research indicates that PB can foster greater financial discipline and reduce risks of corruption.
- **Challenges:** Budget documents are often complex and inaccessible to the average citizen. Many municipal laws lack provisions for citizen participation in the budget process.
- **Solutions: Digitization:** Using multi-channel, digitally-enabled platforms to engage more citizens. Emulating successful campaigns like the "MyCity MyBudget" initiative, which crowdsources inputs on civic issues from citizens and incorporates them into the budget. Amending municipal laws to provide for greater citizen participation in budgeting and tenders.

3. Participatory Budgeting in India

Participatory budgeting is a procedure that is used in India to encourage the participation of citizens in the distribution of budgetary funds. It is meant to boost openness, accountability, and the quality of public service delivery. Despite the fact that its implementation is faced with difficulties such as opposition from bureaucrats, elite capture, and a lack of civic education, it does contain the potential for improved results, especially when it comes to underprivileged communities. Kerala, however, is a significant exception to this trend since it has been successful in implementing participatory budgeting throughout all of its local governments. Implementation has been uneven in other areas, frequently as a result of the absence of official processes, information asymmetry, and involvement that is more symbolic than substantive.

3.1 The Promise of Participatory Budgeting in India

- **Increased transparency and accountability:** Engaging individuals enhances transparency in decision-making and increases accountability among authorities, so diminishing corruption concerns and fostering better public confidence.
- **Improved service delivery:** It is possible to guarantee that the services that are provided as a consequence of this will be more closely linked with the requirements of the community, as well as the particular requirements of the impoverished and those who are on the fringes of society, by including the general public in the planning and assessment of public services.
- **Democratic empowerment:** It offers a forum for individuals to express their perspectives on policy and budget goals, shaping both the identification of issues and the formulation of potential solutions.

3.2 Challenges and Barriers to Implementation

- **Lack of formal mechanisms:** In spite of the fact that there are rules that support decentralization, the budget process in the majority of states continues to be an opaque and bureaucratic exercise that does not provide any official avenues for participation from the general public.

- **Information asymmetry:** The intricate terminology of budget documents hinders public comprehension and even that of lawmakers, so restricting their capacity for critical engagement.
- **Structural and procedural barriers:** According to research that was conducted recently, community leaders have observed that, in many cases, participation mechanisms are restricted by structural concerns. For example, these mechanisms are frequently symbolic rather than having a deeper significance.
- **Elite capture:** The process's ability to benefit the general public is jeopardized if it falls into the hands of more powerful or organized interests.
- **Bureaucratic resistance and political reluctance:** Widespread acceptance and efficacy may be impeded by opposition from bureaucratic institutions as well as a lack of persistent political support.

4. Kerala as a Case Study

In 1996, the state of Kerala was a pioneer in India by implementing participatory budgeting across all its local governments, from villages to districts, a move described as a "big bang" approach. Unlike other parts of India where the practice has not flourished, Kerala has managed to institutionalize the process, making it resilient to changes in ruling parties. The People's Planning Campaign (PPC) is an example of a state-wide decentralized planning initiative that was launched in the Indian state of Kerala in 1996. It is also known as the state's participatory budgeting process. The PPC empowered local governments to plan and implement projects. This meant distributing roughly 40% of the state budget to local governments and establishing a system in which the public could participate in governance through block-level planning and village assemblies known as gram sabhas. The PPC has earned a reputation for its successful incorporation of public input into the process of budget formulation, which has resulted in the production of development results that are more responsive and fairer.

In India, participatory budgeting (PB) is a method of budgeting that incorporates the direct involvement of residents in the process of making budgets and allocating resources at the local level. This concept was partially influenced by the 74th Constitutional Amendment. Important examples include the People's Campaign for the Ninth Plan, which was implemented in the state of Kerala and was a previous, more radical experiment, as well as Pune, which has been running a program at the ward level for a considerable amount of time. Citizens are able to provide their opinions on projects such as the construction of roads, the provision of water, and the distribution of power through these programs, which are intended to enhance fairness, accountability, and community ownership.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, although participatory budgeting may not solve all problems related to weaknesses in democratic processes, it provides a viable route to increased public participation and the promotion of more responsive, responsible governance. It should be seen as an essential element of the more comprehensive attempts to breathe new life into democracy in the twenty-first century by both policymakers and academics. The examination of its long-term effects, the refinement of its implementation tactics, and the investigation of its potential integration with other democratic advances should all be the focus of future study. Even though each and every year Despite the fact that the budgets for both the state and the union governments appear to be rather promising, it is difficult for them to obtain confirmation that these programs and monies are producing the desired results for the citizens. In this sense, participatory budgeting can be of use. Nevertheless, in order to effectively incorporate the requirements of equality law into participatory budgeting (PB) procedures, an institutional commitment and analysis is required that can only be accomplished through a transformational approach.

Participation is fundamental to democracy, and individuals' involvement in public policy is increasingly regarded as a method to enhance government transparency and accountability. In the last 25 years, participatory institutions have expanded in more than 40 nations across all regions and have garnered substantial support. The implementation of participatory budgeting has heightened expectations that increased involvement from ordinary citizens, NGOs, and other civil society organizations in financial allocation and revenue generation can yield

improved social and economic results for all, especially for marginalized populations. Participatory budgeting denotes the active engagement of individuals in the processes of budget prioritization and administration. This method posits that individuals, civil society, and pertinent governmental and legislative bodies engage in deliberation and negotiation over the allocation of public resources. Unlike the techno-bureaucratic administration, which is constrained in its capacity to attain fair development, participatory budgeting possesses the potential to enhance equality in policy selection and yield superior policy outcomes.

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