



Participatory Budget

This article is based on [“The citizen’s budget”](#) which was published in The Indian Express on 03/03/2021. It talks about the idea of the Participatory Budget in India.

In every government system, allocating budgets is the first step towards getting any piece of work done. Union and various state governments pass their budget every year, but the budgets that matter most to us are city budgets or municipal budgets.

In fact, most of the allocations for cities in the Union and state budgets find their way into municipal budgets, as municipalities implement most of their schemes.

Further, all across the world, there seems to be evidence to suggest that when there is citizen participation in budgeting and closer engagement of citizens in the monitoring of civic works, there are better outcomes and fewer leakages.

Given this, there is a need to strengthen the mechanism of participatory budgeting in India.

What is Participatory Budgeting?

- “Participatory Budgeting” is a concept that was pioneered in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in the mid-1980s. It is now practiced in one form or other in thousands of cities around the world.
- It ensures that the diverse needs and experiences of local communities are understood and a range of voices is heard in local decision-making is essential in this process.
- Participatory budgeting (PB) has significant potential to transform the relationships between local communities and the public institutions that serve them.
- In India, participatory budgeting in cities was pioneered by Janaagraha in Bengaluru in 2001 but took firmer roots in Pune, which drew inspiration from the Bengaluru experience and had a more committed leadership.
- Presently, a staggering 4,500+ municipalities in which over 300 million people live present their budgets every year during the budget season.

Benefits of Participatory Budgeting

- **Voice in Civic Governance:** It makes citizens feel like they have a voice in civic governance and thereby builds trust.
 - Children, women, senior citizens, the differently-abled, and several interest groups would be able to make a case for their causes and aspirations and have them fulfilled.
 - It facilitates a targeted, hyperlocal focus on budgeting and problem-solving.
- **Community Ownership:** This would foster far greater ownership in communities for civic assets and amenities, thereby resulting in better maintenance and upkeep.
 - At the local level, it is a win-win for communities, elected councilors, and the city administration.
 - It addresses inefficiencies arising from misplaced prioritization of civic works relative to citizen needs.

- **Facilitating Equity:** Actively engaging with communities to advance equality and eliminate inequalities is integral to participatory decision-making and the allocation of public resources.
 - Finally, it improves accountability for civic works at the last mile (as citizens would monitor budget execution).
- **Increasing Trust Between Government & People:** Citizens could work with ward-level engineers to use these funds to get their urban commons (street lights fixed, make their footpaths walkable, spruce up their parks, create a new childcare center or public toilet in an urban poor settlement) fixed.
 - This would change the lives of the people and build trust between citizens and governments.

Way Forward

- **Need For Greater Degrees of Citizen Engagement:** Budget documents themselves are not easy to read and understand for an average citizen. At present, most municipal laws don't provide for citizen participation in budgets or transparency in civic works and tenders.
 - Thus, there is a need for greater degrees of citizen engagement and media engagement on these budgets for them to become instruments of real change at a street, neighborhood, and ward level.
 - It can be an enabler of grassroots democracy in cities and tangible change for communities particularly children, women, and the urban poor.
- **Emulating MyCity MyBudget Campaign:** The campaign was first launched in 2015, and is gathering traction in Bengaluru, Mangaluru and Visakhapatnam, as a collaborative effort between respective city corporations, neighborhood communities and Janaagraha.
 - Across these cities over 85,000 budget inputs have been crowdsourced from over 80,000 citizens on a wide range of civic issues such as "yellow spots" (public urination spots), public toilets, footpaths, garbage dumps, roads, and drains.
 - These inputs will be reviewed and incorporated into the city budget.

Conclusion

Though every year Union and state governments' budgets look very promising, they have a hard time gaining assurance that these schemes and funds result in intended citizen outcomes. Participatory budgeting can help in this regard.

However, the institutional engagement and analysis needed to effectively integrate the requirements of equality legislation into participatory budgeting (PB) processes requires a transformational approach.

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Communities and media in cities need to engage more deeply with municipal budgets. Discuss.

This editorial is based on ["Cold comfort: On Pak continues to be in FATF"](#) published in The Hindu on March 2nd, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.

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