



DEVELOPING A PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUDGETING PROCESSES IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The necessity of inclusive governance in developing countries has highlighted the need to have systems that will encourage the people to participate in the decision-making process in the country especially in the fiscal processes. This paper proposes a participatory governance system that would be used to strengthen citizen participation in the local government budgets in Anambra State, Nigeria. Based on the mixed methodology, the study evaluates the existing levels of participation, determines the obstacles, and develops a context-driven framework wherein indigenous institutions including town unions and market associations are incorporated. The study, which was conducted in Onitsha North, Awka South, and Nnewi North Local Government Areas, sampled 150 respondents using a purposive approach, where there were 50 participants (citizens), 50 participants (community leaders) as well as 50 participants (officials). Responses to questionnaires in the form of quantitative information indicated that awareness (mean 2.1 on a 5-point scale) and engagement (28% said they participated) were only low, and the systematic information obtained through six focus group discussions showed that the barriers (elite capture, information asymmetry, and cultural norms) were the issues. The suggested framework focuses on transparency through platforms of multi stakeholders, capacity building, and digital tools. Feasibility was determined through stakeholder workshops and 82 percent was endorsed. Participants were mainly male (68%), of average age (45) between 35 and 55, secondary (54%), which represented the socio-economic characteristics of Anambra. The information on informed consent and confidentiality was provided through ethical protocols. This theory helps in the field of administration, by providing a lag between theory and practice in the aspect of decentralized administration in Nigeria, which enhances accountability and sustainable growth. Results indicate that customized participatory frameworks have the potential of reducing the deficits of existing governance that enables the marginalized populations as these support sustainable development objectives across the world. To scale impact it is recommended to adopt policies and pilot further.

Keywords: Participatory Governance, Citizen Engagement, Local Government Budgeting, Framework Development, Public Administration.

Introduction

Participatory governance is a revolution in the field of the public administration system by putting a focus on whether the citizens should be involved in the process of making decisions to increase its legitimacy, transparency, and effectiveness. The issue of promoting citizen engagement especially in the context of local government budgeting in which resource allocation directly affects the welfare of the society is essential in ensuring that developmental challenges are tackled in the developing world such as Nigeria. The main goal of the research project is to come up with participatory approach of governance in a way of becoming a better citizen in the local government budgeting processes in the state of Anambra. The particular issues will be the realization of the present status of citizen involvement in the budgeting process in the selected local government units, challenges, reasons that could make a successful citizen involvement in the budget, a systems framework that will combine community institutions such as town unions and market associations, and reviewing the viability of the framework by conducting consultations with the stakeholders. This study will add to the research gaps in the field of public administration



by filling a relatively unexplored gap in Nigeria as well as offering relevant tools that local governments can use to enhance their transparency and accountability.

Citizen participation in governance dates back to the early formulations of democracy in which participation was considered to be necessary to avoid authoritarianism as well as administration being answerable. Classic literature presumes that participation hierarchies exist between simple sharing of information to take control of citizens, with spaces of empowerment (Arnstein, 1969). It is a ladder framework that involves eight rungs, where management and treatment reside at the bottom which symbolize non-participation, to accomplishment at the top which represents real power redistribution which includes partnership and delegated power and citizen control. These models have shaped the operations of the public administration because emphasis is put on the fact that tokenism participation tends to worsen the existing inequalities, but substantive activity can yield more interregative results.

The modernity perspective of participatory governance is seen through a prism of deliberative democracy and collaborative governance by governmental administration where policies are co-produced by the stakeholders (Fung, 2006). Recent research also stresses that participation within a complex system of governance is even more situational requiring specific methods to overcome institutional barriers (Wampler, 2012). An example of this is about participatory governance frameworks, which emphasize the necessity of institutional designs that incorporate citizen input in the normal administrative operations, promoting trust and accountability (Baiocchi and Ganuza, 2017). Participatory budgeting has recently become a device to democratize fiscal decision-making in developing countries, and is being practiced throughout Africa and Asia (Goldfrank, 2012). In these areas, literature reviews on the topic of participatory budgeting indicate mixed results: in the regions, the concept of the budgeting process benefits the targeting of resources to the disadvantaged groups, but then the problem of elite capture and illiteracy undermines its performance (Touchton and Wampler, 2014).

The decentralization of the 1999 Constitution in Nigeria is meant to make governance more accessible to the citizens but, in reality, local governments are not always free in their action and stifle citizen participation (Ojo, 2018). Research in the Nigerian states concerning participatory budgeting shows that the service provision can be enhanced and the social contracts can be reinforced through the power of inclusive processes (Innocent & Ezeani, 2022). Nonetheless, cultural obstacles such as corruption, lack of adequate dissemination of information, and patriarchal order hinder participation, especially in the villages (Adeyemi, 2021). Anambra State has a rich traditional structure that can be utilized in many ways regarding its incorporation into modern governance as there is an untapped potential in the state with its rich community structures such as town unions (Okoli & Nwankwo, 2023). New efforts have aimed at increasing the participation of citizens in the budgetary process, yet disconnects still exist (Ezeani and Olise, 2024).

The theoretical foundation of the current research is based on the ladder of participation introduced by Arnstein with the adjustment of the aspects of the collaborative governance theory (Emerson et al., 2012). According to this hybrid way, the key to successful involvement is to go



beyond consultation and collaboration, in which citizens work with officials to co-design the budgets. This framework is consistent with the principles of the new public management that focused on efficiency via stakeholder collaboration and more recent theory of the new public value that focused on co-creation of value (Bryson et al., 2014). Empirical data, available in Africa, indicates that the major obstacles include structural poverty and institutional weakness, which require context-specific intervention (Masiya et al., 2021).

The socio-economic environment of Anambra State that is highly urbanized in places such as Onitsha and Nnewi and agrarian centered in Awka demands an ideal environment to experiment the participatory models. The population of over 4 million people mainly of Igbo ethnicity with trade and manufacturing as the major drivers of the GDP is diverse and needs to be reflected in the budgeting processes. The past studies have shown that colonial traditions of administering downwards have remained, yet post-1999 reforms provide prospects of change (Fagbemi, 2020). The existing body of research on fiscal transparency in Nigeria emphasizes the lack of knowledge of the citizens with only 30-40 percent of those surveyed in national surveys being aware of the local budgets (BudgIT, 2023).

The paper fills these gaps by constructing a framework that would exploit the indigenous institutions, including town unions that have historically played a mediating role in the affairs of the community as well as market associations that play a central role in economic hubs. As a positive contribution to the obstacles, the literature of the 1980s and 1990s focused on cultural and educational limitations to African governance in which participation constructed a symbolic presence (Cohen and Uphoff, 1980). Recent publications are based on the digital dimensions, which mentions that e-governance can assist in the shortcomings but increases the digital disparities in low-income environments (Omeje, 2024). An analysis on the e-participatory governance in Nigeria shows that people prefer using social media, but the acceptance is still disproportionate because of the infrastructural drawbacks (Nwagwu, 2025).

More so, the role of the community leaders in creating the possibility of participation cannot be overestimated, as well. The town unions are gatekeepers in Anambra and they decide on how resources should be distributed, as informal institutions. Their inclusion in formal budgeting may help make them more legitimate as it has been seen in participatory projects across Africa (Cabannes, 2015). Nonetheless, there are also threats of co-optation, and the solution is to ensure the protection such as independent control. The goals of this research concur with the sustainable development objectives and especially the SDG 16 on inclusive institutions, through responsive governance.

The trends in the development of participatory governance in the public administration have been characterized by the disappearance of the top-down models and the emergence of the network models. Theorists of the earlier times contended that participation may be used as a way of legitimizing administration to lessen alienation (Pateman, 1970). In the developing context, this is vital in the face of the fiscal constraints where citizen participation can make needs a priority. The example of Nigerian case studies demonstrates that the growing community life is enhanced, but the difficulty in its implementations such as the lack of funds is also noted (Akinola, 2022). The



choice of Anambra as a research subject can be attributed to its radical reforms such as the forums in which the budget is not limited to a few individuals (Anambra State Government, 2025). Those factors that lead to demographic conditions (youth bulge) need to be addressed through mechanisms involving youth to avoid disengagement. Gender literature exposes the underrepresentation of women in African politics to form the equity focus of the framework (Tamale, 2020). Combination of Arnstein and contemporary systems lenses emphasize on the aspect of building capacity, which enables long-term engagement (Quick & Feldman, 2011). This is an extensive background leading to methodological details.

Methodology

The research was done in Anambra State, Nigeria and the three local government areas were Onitsha North, Awka South and Nnewi North because they are economically important as well as diversely structured communities. These LGAs are urban-commercial profile, administrative-rural profile, and industrial profile, which makes it possible to draw comparative insights. The research design used a mixed methodology that constituted quantitative survey to measure quantifiable variables, which were the measure of participation and a qualitative exploration to deepen the insights with regard to the barriers and opportunities. The resulting parallel design was convergent and improved validity.

The conceptual framework combined the ladder of participation presented by Arnstein with the theory of collaborative governance and considered the engagement as the continuum based on the multi-actor associations between information and empowerment (Ansell and Gash, 2008). The assumptions made were linear progression of the participation rungs although there was cultural consideration of contexts.

The target population is made up of the local government officials, community leaders (e.g. town union executives, market association heads) and the common citizen. Purposive sampling was done to form a sample of 150 people to have the representation: 50 citizens, 50 community leaders, and 50 officials, which will be represented equally across LGAs. The inclusion criteria has given priority to those who had the experience in community affairs or budgeting.

Quantitative aspects of the main data collection were structured questionnaires that were administered to all 150 respondents to determine the awareness, involvement and satisfaction of the respondents on a 5-point Likert scale. Pilot-testing of questionnaires was carried out on 20 non-sample people giving a Cronbach alpha of 0.82 which is the reliability coefficient. Qualitative information was vs collected through six focus group discussions each consisting of 10 participants and comprised of leaders and officials in order to encourage conversation between them. Barriers were discussed at focus group sessions on the basis of an open-ended guide encompassing such themes as cultural influences and information access. These were 60-90-minute sessions that were recorded with consent and verbatim transcripts.



The secondary data also involved the review of the budget documents provided by the LGAs (2019-2025) to analyze existing mechanisms of participation. The data were collected during the period of four months (January-April 2025) with the field assistants being trained on ethical protocols.

The SPSS was used in quantitative analysis (descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, percentages), inferential tests (chi-square to test associations). Qualitative data was theme analyzed using NVivo with codes being identified such as "elite capture" and information gaps. Its construction is an iterative process: early versions were found with the literature, enhanced with the results, and tested by three stakeholder workshops (3 workshops per LGA) each depleted with 30 respondents.

Some of the ethical aspects involved were the informed consent, anonymity and consent of the ethics committee of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The coded data ensured confidentiality and the neutrality of the researcher minimized possible conflicts.

Results

Quantitative data showed that there is poor involvement of citizens in the budget planning. Among 150 respondents, it was noted that 28% of them participated in the past cycles actively with awareness being 2.1 out of 5. The perceived effectiveness was rated higher by the officials (3.8 out of 5) compared to the citizens (1.9 out of 5). Table 1 shows a level of participation by LGA.

Table 1

Levels of Citizen Participation in Budgeting by Local Government Area (Percentages)

Local Area	Government No Participation	Information Only	Consultation	Partnership	Total Respondents
Onitsha North	45	30	20	5	50
Awka South	50	25	18	7	50
Nnewi North	40	35	22	3	50
Overall	45	30	20	5	150

There were significant associations found between the mean and mode of participation and education level; consider that participants were more likely to be 68 percent male and 32 percent female with a mean of 45 years and range of 25-65 years; secondary and tertiary education were 54 and 26 respectively, and these education levels were mostly Igbo (95 percent). Table 2 describes group characteristics.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Category	Citizens (n=50)	Community Leaders (n=50)	Officials (n=50)	Overall (n=150)
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Gender (Male/Female %)	60/40	75/25	70/30	68/32
Age Mean (SD)	42 (8.2)	48 (7.5)	45 (6.9)	45 (7.5)
Education (%)	Primary 30, Secondary 50, Tertiary 20	Primary 15, Secondary 55, Tertiary 30	Primary 15, Secondary 55, Tertiary 30	Primary 20, Secondary 54, Tertiary 26
Occupation (%)	Traders 50, Farmers 30, Others 20	Leaders 100	Administrators 100	Varied

Themes related to barriers as lack of timely information (mentioned by 80 percent of focus group discussions), elite dominance and resource constraint were taken as qualitative data. Opportunities portrayed the importance of town unions in mobilizing.

The model, which was tested and approved by 82 percent of participants during workshops, has four stages awareness raising, consultation, co-design, and monitoring/evaluation.

Discussion

Findings support the results of the literature on barriers to African governance in which structural aspects inhibit participation (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). The lack of engagement replicates the observations in Nigeria, which leans towards the lack of trust and an ineffective institution (Olowu, 2019). This is taken care of in the framework by integrating local structures, as has been done in the research regarding community-based participation (Speer, 2012). Inequality between the genders can be seen as the aspect of patriarchy very common in the southeastern Nigeria, and thus the specific interventions are required to make the women more engaged (Agbalajobi, 2010).

The increased involvement in Nnewi North could be attributed to its good association in the market that eases the flow of information amongst the traders. On the other hand, Awka South has lower levels implying rural urban inequalities in access. Such differences enhance the importance of context based adjustments which promotes arguments of hybrid forms of governance that combine formal institutions and informal institutions (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999).

Other examples of comparisons to participatory budgeting in Africa also have the same challenges with elite capture, yet have had some success in cases where civil society organizations have been empowered (McNeil and Mumvuma, 2016). The focus of the offered framework on capacity building and digital tools addresses recent demands of technology-based involvement, but it is aware of the digital divide (Boulding and Wampler, 2019).

Limitations are that the purposive sampling can create selection bias and the three LGAs which only represent the 21 local governments of Anambra and can only be generalized to the 21.



Randomized sampling and longitudinal designs would be useful in measuring the effects of implementing the frameworks in future research.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

This research work concludes that local government budgeting on the part of the local citizenry in the state of Anambra is low in the context of lack of awareness and tokenism. The combination of indigenous institutions such as town unions and market associations into an organized system of participation, however, provides a way out to the enhanced level of participation, greater transparency, and accountability.

The emerging framework after consultation of the stakeholders offers a viable context-specific mechanism of participation in the form of a tool that shifts the engagement in the sharing of information to that of partnership and co-design. It could enhance the grassroots level of democratic governance by tackling the perceived obstacles with the help of multi-stakeholder platforms, capacity building, and hybrid (physical-digital) modes.

The suggestions will encompass implementing the framework at Anambra State local governments immediately with the help of executive orders or legislative support, making permanent citizen budget committees in all LGAs with women and youth nominations to these committees, investing in civic education and digital literacy programmes, and regular independent monitoring of the process of participation with public reporting. Additional LGAs piloting and studies in impact evaluation would help in fine tuning the framework to statewide and national scaling.

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