

# OUR MONEY, OUR RIGHTS: PARTICIPATORY BUDGET MONITORING IN BURUNDI

This case study covers the work of Parole et Actions pour le Réveil des Consciences et l'Evolution des Mentalités (PARCEM) in Burundi. PARCEM has contributed in the implementation of a project aiming to the establishment of local committees for the Citizen Control of Public Action in several communes of Kayanza and Gitega provinces through its "Our Money, Our Rights" project. In fact, in the national decentralization policy, the power holders have an obligation to be accountable for their actions and be responsible for those at all levels (national & local). It is this requirement that is often called accountability. Thus, ordinary citizens and / or civil society organizations have the right to demand accountability from these power holders. It is this civic engagement that is often called Citizen Control of Public Action Program (CCPAP). The purpose of the CCPAP is to increase the effectiveness of local development through better delivery of public services as well as the citizen participation in the development of participatory budgeting. In all this, the voice of citizens becomes predominant as they are both beneficiaries and funders (tax payers).

This case study was a background briefing for Oxfam Novib's 2013 Annual Review, prepared in partnership with PARCEM, and describes the programme in Burundi. Although it is not a formal evaluation it does consider lessons learned by both Oxfam Novib and its partner organisations.

These Case Studies are shared in the form in which they were submitted, often written by partners whose first language is not English, and have not been edited since submission. We believe that the meaning is clear enough, and the authenticity of the reporting and the availability of Southern Voices on development makes their inclusion in the Oxfam iLibrary worthwhile for sharing with external readers.

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## Programme Partner: PARCEM



# AIM OF THE PROJECT

To contribute to increase the budget transparency including the participatory budget (budgeting process with the participation of citizens through civil society).

## CONTEXT

### Larger country context

The current project took place in a country context characterized by a couple of barriers preventing to improve the quality of life:

- Corruption and economic mismanagement at national level: corruption currently hitting the heart of the state and public administration which limits its performance and the release of donor support. Corruption encourages illicit enrichment of few people.
- Lack of a culture of accountability and citizen participation in the control of Public Action. This situation hinders the development and strengthens the impoverishment: e.g. since 2005, the country has never reached the growth rate of 7% accepted to trigger the fight against poverty in a country. As an illustration, the poverty rate was 67% before the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers I (PRSP I) and remained unchanged after the implementation of the PRSP I. Moreover, it is said that poverty is 'female' in Burundi because it affects more women than men due to their vulnerable situation.

However, there are also many opportunities that promote local governance and inclusive participation, like a strong legal basis for decentralization, the existence of a national gender policy, and national strategy for good governance and fight against corruption, quotas for women's participation in the government and in parliament as well as in the decentralized services of the government including the local governance structures, the existence of the municipality law creating accountability mechanisms and opportunities for citizen participation, holding regular municipal elections and the introduction of annual performance evaluation of municipalities.

For the invisible and hidden powers, there are a couple of factors influencing local governance in a negative way. There is a structure of society with a tradition of political manipulation of youth and a leadership tradition that involves a weak sense of citizenship, regardless of tax compliance (less fiscal civism), a culture of impunity, a practice of corruption and nepotism, and opaque mechanisms of decision making.

Opportunities in the informal / invisible structures are tangible improvement of the women status in society, e.g. female leadership is being little by little improved through access to speech for women in public spaces.

### Direct environment

The direct environment is characterized by the lack of budget transparency at national level for the development, implementation and monitoring of the national budget. In terms of development of the national budget, it has been advocated by PARCEM that civil society organizations should be informed of the budget law so that they can give their contributions (inputs) before being sent to Parliament for analyses and adoption and this has happened for the first time in Burundi during the development of the 2014 national budget.

PARCEM works in a limited environment of political pluralism where freedom of expression, assembly, association, public event becomes limited or less accepted. The environment in which PARCEM works is also embellished by the multiplicity of media that encourages broad dissemination of statements made by PARCEM. This allows for effective advocacy and civic education. For example, PARCEM is the focal point of a synergy of 23 civil society and governmental organizations working on "Governance and Decentralization." PARCEM collaborates with governmental institutions especially the different departments of the Ministry of Public Finance.

## Main actors in “Our Money, Our Rights Project” implementation

Other Civil society organizations including independent media organizations working in close relationship with PARCEM in the Implementation of the project “Our Money, Our Rights”

## Why did Oxfam Novib get involved?

Oxfam Novib get involved in this project of PARCEM in order to contribute towards its Aim 4 program “Right to be heard”. Oxfam Novib has supported the project of PARCEM in order to enable citizens of the six communes targeted by the project to participate effectively in the management of the public affairs in an environment where they have access to information, can express themselves freely and know their rights. And where they can contribute to reduce significantly cases of corruption and impunity with an active civil society that reminds the authorities to respect for human rights.

# METHODOLOGY

## Activities

Activities completed are as follows:

- a) Completion of two studies:
  - a study on tax transparency and degree of citizen participation in Burundi
  - a study on the diagnosis of the tax and economic justice in Burundi;
- b) Translation of the national budget in the local language Kirundi and broad dissemination amongst civil society and media organizations, for inputs before sharing with parliament?
- c) Animation of public conference on budget transparency
- d) Wide radio program broadcasted on national budget law;
- e) Holding several meetings with different authorities:
  - Ministry of Finance
  - Court of Auditors
  - National Assembly / parliament
  - Governors of provinces in which program activities on "Our money, our rights" have been we conducted.

## How was complementary with Oxfam Novib 's "The right to be heard" program?

It is complementary because the populations living into the communes where project activities have been conducted have access to budget information through the established local committees for the Citizen Control of Public Action while PARCEM continues to advocate for the participatory budgeting of the national budget. The national budget is financed by taxes paid by the population, the reason why they should be involved throughout the budgeting process at all levels.

## Theory of change

The local governance and the proper functioning of decentralization policy are promoted through establishment of local committees for the citizen control of public action including the citizen participation in the budgeting process in six communes of Gitega and Kayanza provinces that will advance community development (including better quality and availability of public services) in the targeted project area.

# RESULTS

## Outputs

- Six local committees for the citizen control of public action including the citizen participation in the budgeting process have been established in six communes of Gitega and Kayanza provinces;
- A dynamic of budget monitoring by citizens has been established at the national and local level;
- Several advocacy and lobbying activities to improve the budget monitoring by citizens have been conducted;
- A three day training of local committee members for the citizen control of public action has been conducted in each province of intervention namely Gitega and Kayanza. These members have been trained on the theme related to the budget and human rights. In total, sixty members from six committees have been trained, knowing that each committee has ten members.

## Outcomes

The results/changes achieved so far are as follows:

- Participants to these training sessions are becoming aware that the contribution of citizens to the national budget is very important;
- For the first time in the history of Burundi, the national budget law has been disseminated widely to civil society organizations and media organizations for their contributions (inputs) before it has been sent to the Parliament for analyses and adoption;

## Impact

The impact on the lives of people living in poverty:

- Some changes in mentalities occur little by little among citizens in relation to the budget monitoring into the six communes of the project.
- Members of committees in the six communes are aware of their rights of having access to budget information and they can claim to be informed about the use of the municipal budget in their respective communes.
- Establishment of consultations on budget monitoring with local committees at local level and with civil society organizations at national level.

## Policy and practice changes

A summary of the national budget into the national language Kirundi was widely disseminated amongst civil society and media organizations.

# LESSONS LEARNED

## Successes

- Thanks to the establishment of good relationship with government departments, PARCEM has acquired freedom of access to documents of public finances for budget monitoring: Right of access to information.
- Today, the authorities are willing to share documents and information on public finances with civil society on request.
- The right to communication applies only to documents completed. It does not concern the preparatory documents for an administrative decision as it is being developed.

## Failures

- The major difficulty to what PARCEM has been faced was the failure or unavailability of information from some government departments like the difficulties of access to information from the Burundi office revenue.
- Lack of legislation on rules of access and publication of information and administrative documents relating to the public finances.

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