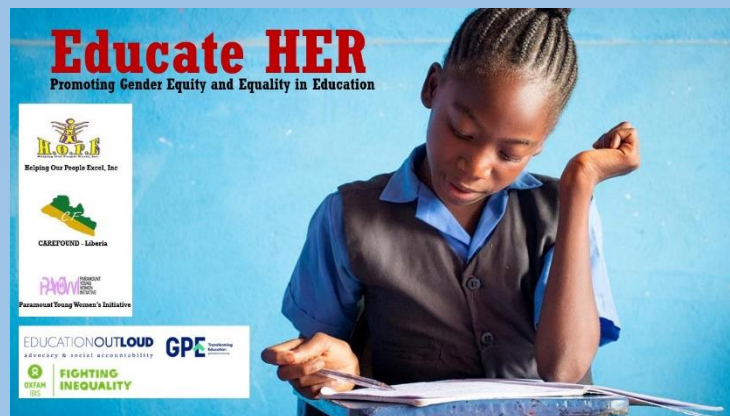




NATIONAL BUDGET CYCLES & DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES for the NATIONAL POLICY ON GIRLS' EDUCATION (NPGE)

A Critical Review of National Financing for Girls' Education in Liberia



Legislative

Parliament (makes laws, approves budgets)



Executive

President, Prime Minister, Cabinet of Ministers (makes budgets, implements policies)



Judiciary

Courts (interprets laws)

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BTs	Budgetary Transfers
Care-Found	Care-Found Liberia
CSA	Civil Service Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
GAC	General Auditing Commission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HOPE	Helping Our People Excel, Incorporated
HoR	House of Representatives
LMAs	Line Ministries and Agencies
LBO	Legislative Budget Office
MFPD	Ministry of Finance & Development Planning
MOE	Ministry of Education
NBC	National Budget Committee
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PANs	Personnel Action Notices
PAYOWI	Paramount Young Women Initiative

Introduction

This review analysis of the national budget cycle was developed by Educate HER Coalition, with funding from Education Out Load through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)/Oxfam IBIS. The Coalition comprises of three women-led and women-focused national-level non-governmental organizations, including Helping Our People Excel Incorporated (HOPE), Paramount Young Women Initiative (PAYOWI) and Care-Found Liberia (Care-Found). It is part of a three-year nationwide project aimed at working with diverse stakeholders and partners to advocate for elimination of all barriers to girls' school attendance, retention, and completion in Liberia.

As a key tool and strategy of the project and campaign, this document has been developed to enable the Coalition members fully understand and constructively engage relevant actors at various stages and levels of decision-making processes around the national budget. This is important to allow the Coalition and its partners utilize the right spaces to engage with the right actors in a bid to push for more budgetary support to Girls Education and related issues. This is pertinent to achieving inclusive and good quality education in Liberia as well as promoting and increasing girls' school attendance, retention, and completion at all levels.

It highlights key actors, including public institutions vested with monetary/financial decision-making power within the Executive and Legislative branches of Government. In addition, outlines fiscal challenges that continue to undercut the budget process so as to equip educational stakeholders with the knowledge and tools necessary to engage with and influence decision-making at all levels of the budget cycle. Lastly, it provides civil society organizations and independent actors with strategic information and tips that can be used to meaningfully and constructively engage with and influence the national budget decision making processes at the planning, formulation, approval, implementation, and monitoring stages.

Goal:

To inform and strengthen advocacy efforts aimed at addressing gender inequality in education through increased budgetary support and full implementation of the National Policy on Girls' Education (NPGE) in Liberia.

Main Objectives:

- To inform and help educational stakeholders and civil society actors fully understand and constructively engage with various levels and stages of national budget decision-making processes;
- To strategically identify and map-out key policymakers/public officials with influence and power in national budget decision-making processes for constructive engagement and advocacy to increase by CSOs and other actors;
- To assist the Educate HER Coalition and partners build strong collaboration and network to advance advocacy campaign for full implementation of the national policy on girls' education to increase girls' school attendance, retention and completion

Rationale

While government may have addressed some of the issues civil society often raise about “More for Education”, there are still lot more to be done in terms of financial support and budgetary increment to education. This is particularly germane and remains part of efforts to achieving inclusive and quality education, while empowering women and girls and promoting gender equality in education in Liberia. This is critical to realizing the internationally recommended benchmark for education. According to Global Education Monitoring Report benchmark¹ allocate at least 15% to 20% of public expenditure and 4% to 6% of Government GDP to education.

This is where the budget cycle review analysis comes in to provide much needed information on the processes as well as actors involved to enable the Educate HER Coalition and Partners to constructively engage with Government in demand of full implementation of the NPGE and increase budgetary support to education in Liberia. This is not only in line with the NPGE but other key pillars of Government Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development as well as the Inclusive Education Policy; all which are part of Government’s efforts to eliminate all barriers to women access to education, healthcare and other basic social services.

Methodology

Several approaches were used to address the objectives of this budget cycle and decision-making process review analysis. In particular, direct and indirect evidence was gathered from primary and secondary sources including the Ministry of Education, Senate and House of Representatives, National Teachers Association, National PTA Network of Liberia among others. The methodology used is qualitative and grounded on evidence-based analysis of major policy documents, mainly Public Financial Management Act, 1986 Constitution of the Republic of Liberia and other framework documents. Also, the data collection process targeted twelve (12) stakeholders using interview questions to gauge their perspectives on budget cycles, stages and decision-making processes. These include, but not limited to the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Legislature, and Civil Society. Additionally, a one-day information sharing session held for the Educate HER Coalition members and partners, mainly civil society actors in the education space, helped to generate information that equally informed development of this document.

Overview of the Budget Process

The national budget is an annual financial plan containing expected revenues and proposed expenditures. It also shows how government allocates resources based on revenues received and expended over a fiscal period. Revenues of the national budget are generated from both domestic/ internal (taxes, penalties, levies, etc.) and external sources (loans, grants, etc.) and contained expenditure/spending plans for a given period. Apart from being a financial plan, the budget is a policy instrument that outlines government’s priorities, plans and programs for

¹ <http://gem-report-2016.unesco.org/en/chapter/target-4-8-finance/>

implementation in the course of the year. In a nutshell, the budget is a financial projection within which government priorities are set for execution based on its financial capability and as may be subjected by economic conditions.

What is Government Budgeting Process?

Government budgeting process involves estimation and forecasting of tax revenues including income tax, corporation tax, import taxes as well as customs duties and other fees with expenditure or spending plan over a fiscal period. It's basically a financial plan for a fiscal period, normally a year which may or may not correspond with a calendar year. For example, the Government of Liberia every year formulates a fiscal budget that runs from June to the next calendar year of June. But it was recently changed by the National Legislature to begin from January to December every calendar year. Preparation of the budget process usually starts with the Executive and involves series of steps that begins with determination of overall economic envelop of revenues projection, expenditure levels and financial plan.

There two main components of the budget: **Revenues and Expenditure**

Revenue is money that government collects which consists of taxes, customs duties, and fees inputs, exports and other receivables from businesses as well as donors' contributions from World Bank, International Monetary Fund among others. **Expenditure** shows how provision of services will be financed based on spending on activities, programs and priorities of government to achieve its objectives and development plans. So, the budget is basically a financial document with detailed descriptions on how government revenues are raised, allotted and expensed within a fiscal year.

How is the National Budget Prepared?

The preparation of the annual budget involves a series of steps that begins with the determination of the overall economic targets, expenditure levels, revenue projection and the financing plan by the Ministry of Finance Planning and Development.

The following key steps are used to prepare the national budget:

- Determination of macroeconomic framework of expected revenues receipts and expenditure plan and deficits levels
- Issued budget ceiling and guidelines are set to aid ministries and agencies draft their budgets
- Call for budget estimates form line ministries and agencies as well as other sectors
- Collect and collate submitted budget from ministries and agencies and make amendments where necessary
- Consolidate final ministries and agencies budget proposals into draft national budget
- Submit draft national budget to the president for consideration and onward submission to the Legislature
- President then submits final draft of the national budget to the Legislature for review and passage into law
- Legislature conduct budget hearing and invite ministries and agencies to justify their proposed budgets before plenary
- Legislature make amendments and reprioritization where necessary in a joint session and then vote and or passed a resolution to enact the budget and return approved budget to the President

- President then signs final approved budget from the Legislature into law making bonding as legal instrument for implementation of government's programs, project, policies and development agenda.

Who responsible for Planning and Deciding the Budget:

Every year, the national budget is prepared, voted upon and approved and as well executed to meet government priorities, programs, projects and development agenda or implement policies. These decisions are reached by policy makers and public officials. Therefore, it is important to understand the framework within which budget decision are reached, who are responsible and how allocations are made to various sectors.

Executive:

The Executive branch has the responsibility of formulating the budget. Within the Executive branch,²the President- has absolute responsibility for all policy matters related to the National Budget and public financial management system of the Republic of Liberia as well as authority to take decisions and actions necessary to carry out such responsibilities as stated in Section 5 of Public Financial Management Act. While the Minister of Finance & Planning and Development has responsibility to develop Government's fiscal and economic policy framework, collecting and allocating public revenues and playing an important role in the socio-economic development of the country. In addition, determines format for annual estimates of revenue and expenditures; preparation of development plans, strategies, and projects; monitoring of economic performance; providing advice to Government on economic and financial matters; ensure public finances are maintained in a satisfactory condition and for fiscal and economic performance; and prepare annual budget for approval by Parliament. So, within the Executive branch of Government, the President and the Minister of Finance play a very crucial role in budget formulation process.

Legislature/Parliament:

As representation of the people, the constitution grants the legislature power and authority to represent their citizens' interests in national decision-making processes. The main responsibilities of the Legislative branch include making laws, oversight and representation. The Legislature also has power to adopt national budget, ratify treaties and conventions, and confirm executive appointments of certain public officials nominated by the president. In addition, the body investigates the executive branch, impeach and or remove from office members of the executive and judiciary. As stated above, one of the cardinal responsibilities of the Legislature is law making which include passing and adopting the budget, bills, laws and policies. In particular, the legislature shall conduct review, hearing and passing of the budget in accordance with the rules and procedures set forth in the Constitution of the Republic of Liberia. They play crucial role at every stage of the budget including formulation, implementation approval and monitoring and oversight of budget decision-making processes. Upon receipt of the draft national budget from the Executive, they proceed with reviewing of revenue estimates, hearing and debating the budget, and voting to pass the budget into law for implementation, in keeping with Article 34 D of the Liberian Constitution. Article 34 D states that the³“Legislature has power to “levy taxes, duties, imports, exercise and other revenues, to borrow money, issue currency, mint coins, and to make appropriations for the fiscal governance of the Republic”.

² <https://www.moci.gov.lr/doc/Public%20Finance%20Management%20Act.pdf>

³ <http://judiciary.gov.lr/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CONSTITUTION-OF-THE-REPUBLIC-OF-LIBERIA.pdf>

Budget Committee

In addition to the Legislature's oversight responsibility, the Senate and House of Representatives have in place a Budget Committees that also scrutinize the budget, asking cabinet officials with regards to allocations made in the budget estimates to provide reasons and justifications to defend their budgets. In the instance where there's need for amendments or reprioritization, it is sent to a committee room. Member of the Committee hold mark-up sessions to make any changes or updates they think are important. When the committee is pleased with the content amendments, it is sent back to the Plenary, the highest decision-making body of the Senate and House of Representatives. A joint session is then held to discuss and make any proposed amendments, harmonize and or finalize changes and vote on the budget by means of legislative enactment. Thereafter, the national budget is returned to the President to be signed into law. Once enacted by the Legislature and signed by the President, the budget becomes a national law that cannot be changed or modified in any way without recourse to the legislature.

Citizens' Participation

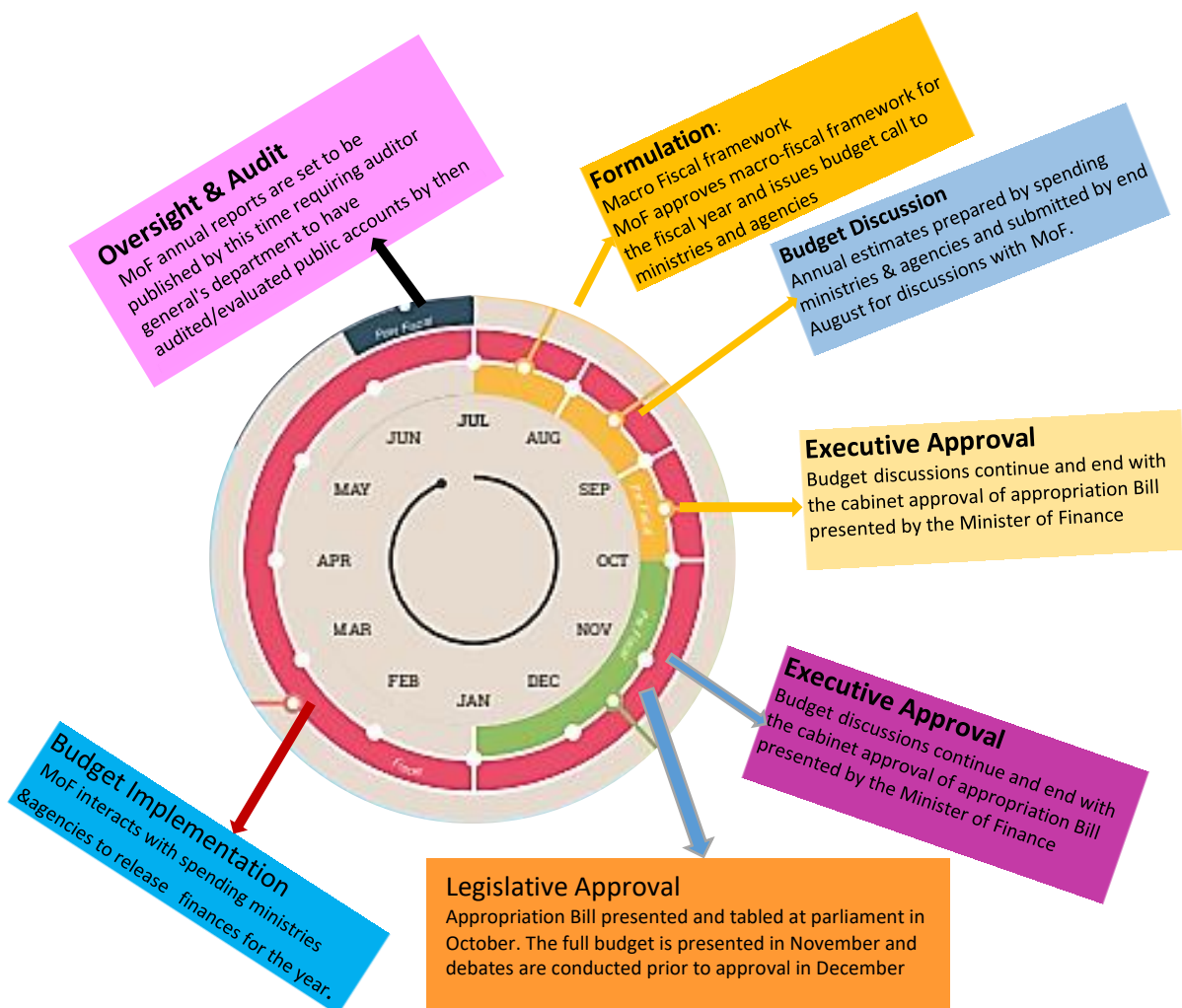
Citizens continue to make straggling efforts to participate in budget decision making processes, but very limited spaces have been provided for their involvement despite provision in the constitution. Article 7 of the Liberian Constitution states, *⁴consistent with the principles of individual freedom and social justice enshrined in the Constitution, management of the national economy and the natural resources of Liberia in such manner as shall ensure the maximum feasible participation of Liberian citizens under conditions of equality as to advance the general welfare of the Liberian people and the economic development of Liberia.* This clearly gives citizens the right to participate not only in governance of the state, but national economy, especially budget decision making processes. Additionally, their Representatives and Senators are under obligation to consult with them on pertinent national issues to factor in their views and concerns and the budget formulation process is no exception. However generally there's low citizens participation in the budget formulation and decision-making processes at all levels (national and sub-national). Citizens in many instances are made to live by whatever budget decisions government makes and what services they provide even if is not their choice which is contrary to good governance practices. A 2019 report from International Budget Partnership, which examined practices of central government's executive, the legislature and supreme audit institution using 18 equally weighted indicators scored Liberia 6 out of 100 in public participation among seven African countries and ranked the lowest of all categories.

⁴ <http://judiciary.gov.lr/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CONSTITUTION-OF-THE-REPUBLIC-OF-LIBERIA.pdf>

Budget Decision Making Cycle and Timetable

Previous June to June Fiscal Budget Decision Making Cycles & Timetable		
Dates	Key Activities	Institution/Person Responsible
July 1	Beginning of Government's financial Year	
Oct – Jan	Spending entities produce budget policy notes which define public expenditure plan in line with Government overall objectives	Government Ministries & Agencies
January	Ministry of Finance & Development Planning publishes the budget framework paper with summary of the amount of money that is needed, and plan of what money will be spent on	Ministry of Finance & Development Planning
Feb. - March	Spending entities present their expenditure needs in line with amount of money that can be collected for the coming year. This is usually during discussions between spending entities and Ministry of Finance & Development Planning	Government Ministries and Agencies
April 15	Draft National Budget is presented to the President	Minister of Finance & Development Planning
April 30	President sends the Draft National Budget to the Legislature for Discussion	President
June 30	Budget Approved by Legislature and President	Legislature and President

Anticipated New Budget Decision Making Cycle and Timetable



Understanding the Budget Cycles

There are several steps and processes involved in government budgeting, but focus is placed on four distinct processes of the budget cycle which include formulation or preparation of the budget; legislative approval/authorization; execution and monitoring and oversight.

1. Formulation and Preparation of the National Budget:

The first and foremost step in the budget preparation is determining the macroeconomic framework of the budget year. This involves projection of revenues and expenditure plan which is based on tax revenues, non-tax revenue, and external resources. The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning does the budget forecast and determines overall envelop which is largely contingent on expected revenues receipt, expenditure and level of deficit that can safely

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be financed without adverse implications. Once the revenue envelop is determined, preparation commences through issuance of call for estimates from line ministries and agencies based on perimeters and specifics guidelines set by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning to aid ministries and agencies in preparation and submission of their budget proposals. When line ministries and agencies submit their draft budget proposals, the Ministry of Finance & Planning Development through its Budget Department consolidates them into the national budget and where necessary, makes adjustments. Thereafter, submits final draft national budget to the President. The President will then submit same to the National Legislature no later than two months before start of the fiscal year. This is in fulfillment of constitutional mandates. But if the President is unable to do so, he/she can designate the Minister of Finance to proxy on his/her behalf.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Based on the information above, budget advocacy can take place at two levels.

First, engagement with MFPD, the body that finalizes, consolidates, and submits the draft national budget to the President on behalf of the Executive Branch of Government. Here, the engagement can also be at two fronts: The Budget Departments in these areas often oversee the process, aided and or advised by senior management. So, engaging the Minister, principal deputies and staff at MFPD is very key to achieving meaningful results. Other strategies and approaches include, but not limited to press conferences, formal letter outlining priorities and the need for attention; policy brief on thematic issues for girls' education; formal meetings; policy dialogues; and joint planning and engagement sessions.

Second level of engagement is the Presidency. The Chief Executive cannot be underestimated in preparation of the national budget because he/she has substantial power over all appointed public officials and the Ministry of Finance is no exceptions. Besides, he/she oversees submission of the budget envelop to the National Legislature. Apart from the Presidency, there are other external actors who could be relevant in the process, unofficially part of the budget process but wheels a lot of influence that could likely shape decisions. For example, donors and partners could engage government on certain priorities, in the form of matchings funds to complement their support. So, they could be important in this case, but the chances are often limited. Therefore, it is important to engage donor partners in the process so that their engagements public officials could help shape decisions and priorities in the best interest of the public.

2. **Legislative Approval and Authorization:**

The Legislature upon receipt of the final national draft budget, conducts review and hearing in chambers and through its Budget Committee. This involves scrutinizing and debating the budget envelop including programs, priorities as well as allocations made to ministries and agencies for implementation. Hearing and deliberations usually start from the Lower House of Representatives and then moves to the Senate for further scrutiny and may undergo amendments or reprioritization where necessary but in consultation and collaboration with the Ministry of Finance. This process involves first, second and third reading just as other bills submitted to the legislature. In addition, the Budget Committee also have vested authority to invite various line ministries and agencies for questioning to justify their budget.

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However, when one or both Houses proposed amendments or reprioritization of budget line items as deemed necessary, a joint hearing is constituted for the purpose of discussing and harmonizing such provisions in the budget. Once finalized by both Houses, a joint resolution is passed to vote and approve the amended budget by legislative enactment. After which, it is presented to the President for final signing into law in keeping with Article 35 of the Liberian Constitution which states, ⁵“each bill or resolution which shall have passed both Houses of the Legislature shall, before it becomes law, be laid before the President for his/her approval. If he/she grants approval, it shall become law thereby making it legally bonding as a government financial policy for the fiscal year.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The Legislature become primary actor at this stage as of the receipt of the budget. They take full charge in determining what stays therein or not. It is at this point; sector ministries and agencies are invited to defend their respective budget and make convincing case why they should be given the projected amount or even more. This is one area CSOs and educational stakeholders can leverage and as well advocate for funding support to increase education budget in key priority areas during approval stage. Because the Legislature may identify potential revenue sources or redirect funds to different priority areas in the budget based on needs. This could be an opportunity for engagement, whereby civil society can accompany educational stakeholders and the Ministry of Education to defend their budget and or make pleas for budgetary increment.

In addition, civil society, educational stakeholders and other professional can design different strategies to weigh in on what’s being deliberated at the Legislature to engage and influence the hearing process. For example, strategic communication and engagement by civil society and educational stakeholders can be of immense value in this case. They can push and make case for increment in education budget by engaging the Budget Committee, Education Committee, Gender and Inclusion, the leaderships of both houses (Speaker and Senate Pro-Temporo), Individual influential lawmakers, County Caucuses etc. Engagement here has to be strategic, persistent and beyond the parliament, where necessary. Efforts at his level should include holding of policy dialogues, press release, press conferences, strategic leadership, committees, individual and group meetings; preparation of policy briefs, holding of workshops and working sessions, etc. Any of the above could possibly influence the budget and increase allocation to education. However, this can only be possible based on resource availability. So, determine what is at your disposal or team, certain strategies could be prioritized. More importantly, be consistent until the final approval process of the budget approval.

3. Budget Execution/Implementation

Put simply, the budget execution stage is when funds are actually spent to implement government’s policies, programs, and projects as outlined in the enacted budget. Once both Houses passed a joint resolution and approved the National Budget, it is returned to the President to be signed into law thereby making it a legal instrument for implementation. At this juncture, the fiscal year begins with full implementation of the budget. The budget implementation is done through release of financial resources to government ministries and agencies including counties toward achieving their obligations and programs for which budgets was approved.

⁵ <http://judiciary.gov.lr/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CONSTITUTION-OF-THE-REPUBLIC-OF-LIBERIA.pdf>

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The Ministry of Finance is tasked with the responsibility to ensure issuance of guidelines for release of funds, allotments and disbursement to government ministries and agencies to accelerate implementation of government programs and projects and ensure the judicious use of budgeted allotments. This is intended to ensure compliance with both legal and administrative requirements sanctioned by the Executive branch and that of the Legislature. It is at the budget implementation stage that the expenditure portion is executed. Allotments are issued and execution of the budget starts with release of funds to ensure prudent use of budgetary allotments. More importantly, all ministries and agencies are required to operate according to approved budgetary plan and must ensure that expenditure does not exceed appropriation. The Ministry of Finance in fact, does keep a close watch throughout the year on the flow of revenue and the pattern of expenditures against its projections. In addition, prohibits line ministries and agencies from spending more than the amounts appropriated or apportioned and as well control their spending.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Engagement here will be preemptive in terms of keeping the lines of communication open for future collaboration and partnership. During implementation of the budget, civil society can watch out for full compliance with what has been approved. This is where the focus of the advocacy might shift somehow, moving away from allocation of the funds to actual utilization of what's budgeted for to achieve intended purpose. It is possible that budgeted amounts for certain items be diverted or channeled to other things if not monitored or tracked. So, closely following the disbursement and expenditure processes is key to achieving actual impacts from the budget. So, instead of allocation, foremost attention will be on ensuring that funds budgeted are disbursed used for the intended purpose(s).

Monitoring and Oversight:

The Legislature responsibility does not end with passage of the national budget into law. They also have monitoring and oversight functions to ensure that all appropriations made are enforced in accordance with approved budgetary allocations. They also have mandate to ensure full compliance of approved budget and ensure public resources are used appropriately in a transparent manner with value for money. So, they are by law required to measure how effective public spending has been utilized and or reaching desired outcomes by assessing how well, or poorly, the budget was implemented which in many ways help disclose if any government ministries or agencies underspend or overspend. Their oversight responsibility is critical as public financial system and use scarce public resources to meet the needs of the country and its people through various programs and projects. So, the legislature monitoring and oversight is to ensure adherence to implementation of the budget with a view to reduce mismanagement or corruption and ensure transparent use of public resources.

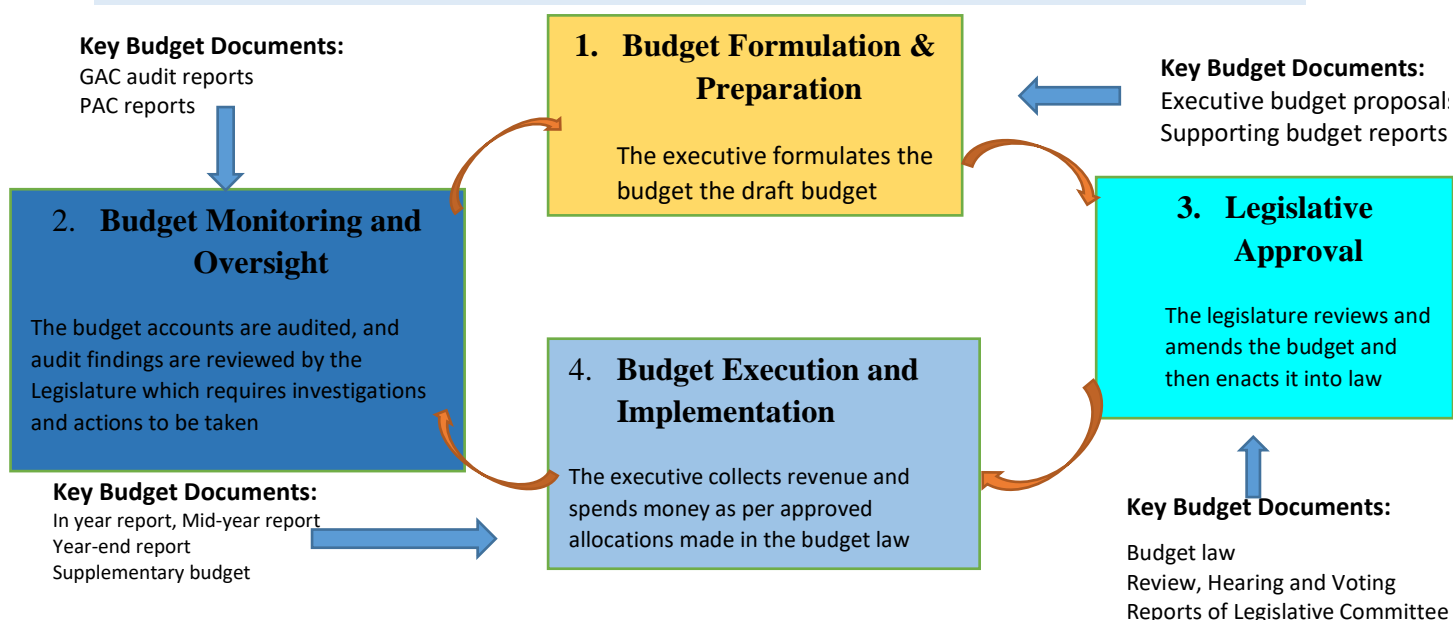
In addition, the Legislature have in place a Joint Public Account Expenditure and Audit Committee known as (PAC) established by Rule 57, section 6 and Rule 44 Section 22 of standing orders of the House of Representative and Senate. The work of PAC is further in support of the Legislature monitoring and oversight responsible functions to ensure transparent use of public resources and value for money. PAC oversees all matters relating to audit reports from General Auditing Commission and ensure all audit reports are thoroughly reviewed and investigated. And where discrepancies or misapplications exist in spending and operations,

subpoena whichever entity and conducts hearing and investigation to validate GAC findings. This allows parliament to know where money goes and also hold ministries and agencies accountable thus increasing transparency in governance processes.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Accountability matters in everything, especially in a democratic society like Liberia. Leaders are required to be fully accountable to citizens for their actions and inactions. The same applies to the national budget because it is a major instrument or policy tool used by Government to implement programs, projects and development agenda. Therefore, decisions at this level, is not only ideal but can have serious implications for future budgetary allocations. Therefore, if a given spending entity does not properly use or account for what’s previously received, it might be difficult to receive any requested amount. So, while attention here may not be direct advocacy for increased support and financing to education budget, push for accountability, transparency, effective and efficient performance public resources is important to influence decisions during the next budget period. CSOs and educational stakeholders. In addition, engagements with the beneficiary institutions should also be about the need to be more accountability in expending resources received. Not only that, but they should also produce good quality reports and timely submit same to the institutions concerned, for processing and onward submission to the Legislature to inform decision making and deliberations around the new budget.

DIAGRAM OF BUDGET CYCLE⁶



Key Observations, Issues and Challenges Identified

Public budget allocations (current and capital expenditures) and distribution are the main engine of people’s well-being, economic growth and development through funding of Government programs, projects and policies that contribute to providing efficient delivery of public services. Every year the national budget is prepared by government and scarce resources are allocated covering compensation, procurement of goods and services, debts, social benefits and funding government policies and programs to provide public services. But overall budget performance reports indicate that public spending have not been reaching

⁶ <https://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/MODULE-2-Defining-the-Problem.pdf>

desired outcomes and the needs of the citizenry, especially the most vulnerable groups. Very little is also done towards infrastructural development and provision of much needed public services that are germane to ordinary people such as education and healthcare. Additionally, allotment of public resources is often characterized by political interest in addition to policy consideration. Every branch of government tends to be primarily concerned about their own allotment and advancement of their priorities and programs and also strive for increment either through the Executive or Legislature

There should be transparency and accountability at all levels of the budget process. From the budget formulation stage through its implementation and monitoring, there should be openness and space provided for increased citizens and stakeholders' meaningful engagement, but this is largely not the case. There are often lots of issues and challenges that continue to undermine the budget realization and implementation, which some of which are highlighted below.

Political Interest and Manipulation in Budget Decision Making Processes

Ideally, the budget decision making process should ensure scarce resources are allocated in a strategic, transparent, accountable, fair, and democratic way to meet the needs of ordinary people in terms of efficient public service delivery. Unfortunately, this ideal is rarely met. Instead of the budget going through painstaking review, hearing, amendments and before voting in plenary, it is often characterized by political interest between the Executive and the Legislature. There is very little political will or time to do a proper scrutiny of the budget. As a result, there's misallocation of scarce resources that should be used to enhance development and social safety net while funds are allocated to areas that benefit few people-the power holders, politicians and their allies. This makes government budget planning biased and ineffective and it erodes public confidence government decisions and commitments.

Despite civil society quest for budget transparency, there's limited spaces for participation

Civil Society Organizations, which largely comprised of non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, cooperatives, trade unions, professional associations, faith-based organizations, media groups, movements, foundations are widely considered the most vibrant group to engage with, but they have limited participation in the budget process. Additionally, citizen engagement in the budget process has been limited due to lack of formal consultation mechanisms and socio-political environment that constricted the democratic space and good governance practice.

Budget Deficit Crisis

Government revenues projection targets are sometimes not met while spending exceeds expenditure plan which often to budget shortfall. This may be as a result of unrealistic revenue targets, overestimation or poor analysis of revenues forecast, and or politically motivated projections without proper analysis of macroeconomic assumptions of revenue envelop. This was observed ⁷in 2017/2018 budget year with US\$ 83.7 million shortfall. Also in 2019, budget deficit amounted to around 4.6% of GDP while in 2020 there US\$ 20 million shortfall. There have been missed income target in roll for three fiscal years now.

Unscrupulous Decision Making

⁷ https://www.cabri-sbo.org/uploads/bia/LiberiaLib%C3%A9ria_2017Approval_External_AdjustedBudget_MinFin

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Budget decision making processes mainly focus on assumptions of available revenues and expenditure plans through allocation of resources to fund government programs, projects and policies without much consideration on the needs and priorities of citizens, especially key sectors that provide public services for vulnerable and marginalized groups. Government budget decisions making should be based on social and economic priorities and needs of its citizens and commit to meeting the needs through policies, programs and services have a direct impact on the citizenry. For example, increasing education budget will lead to provision of quality education services and conducive learning environment.

Conclusion

The budget has been for many years more about revenues generation and spending resources to achieve government policies, priorities and programs. Often times, huge chunk of public resources are directed to recurrent cost for compensation and to procure goods and services while discretionary allocations are made to security apparatus in lump-sum with no transparency and accountability. But very little has been done to understand the important needs of critical service providing public sectors like education and healthcare that directly benefit ordinary citizens, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups who depend on those services.

Therefore, to achieve budget equity and transparency, allocation of public resources should not be based on political interest in certain areas but rather on the significant of every sector that meets the needs of citizens' wellbeing. Also, budget allocation and execution should be based on the lens of marginalized section of population with the objective of prioritizing public expenditures in ways that are socially equitable and benefits them. This is to say when government enacts the budget, we expect it to function as a comprehensive roadmap that guides funds toward effective delivery of public services to enhance people's wellbeing and foster broad based socioeconomic development, not merely recurrent cost, or procurement of goods and services. Therefore, making budget work is not only critical but necessary for efficient and effective public services delivery, as well as economic growth and development.

Recommendations

Based on the above analysis, the below recommendations are proffered not only to improve budgetary allocations to key public sector institutions like education and healthcare but also to push for greater transparency in management of public resources

- Government revenues projection as well as expenditure plan should be realistic and not politically motivated as repeated budget shortfall erode people's confidence in the ability of their government to adhere to its own commitments and undermines delivery of essential public services;
- Government budgeting and allocation of public resources must not be based on political interest or party line but rather the significant of the sector in terms of public services delivery to meet the needs of ordinary citizens;
- Oversight bodies and auditing institutions (Legislature, GAC and IAA) should monitor budget implementation more closely and ensure proper accountability of public resources usage;
- Educational stakeholders and Civil Society actors must track implementation of priority public services and programs especially those related to education and ensure government deliver on them fully/effectively and demand explanations when there's shortfall;

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- Government must enhance fiscal transparency practices and openness mechanism to report whether budgets have been executed as planned, or whether there have been deviations along with clear explanations for the reasons for deviations; and
- Government must provide adequate opportunities for citizens' participation in the budget process. Mainly CSOs including educators, parents, community members and civil society groups participation will give people from the margins of the society a voice to influence budgeting to be more responsive to their needs and improves effectiveness of public services delivery

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