

The Pre-Budget Strategy Paper: A Transparency and Accountability Perspective

23 October 2020

Introduction

On 16 October 2020, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development released the [2021 Pre- Budget Strategy Paper](#) under the theme: **“Building Resilience and Economic Recovery Post COVID-19.”** According to the prebudget statement, this is in line with the Government of Zimbabwe’s “commitment of ensuring broader stakeholder involvement in policy formulation processes”, which will in turn generate “effective public participation in policy and programmes implementation.” However, the 2021 Pre-Budget Strategy Paper which was supposed to “guide consultative discussions and sharing of ideas on national priority policies, programmes and projects for the forthcoming 2021 National Budget”, was launched on the last day of the National Budget Consultations which were rolled out on 12-16 October 2020. A question to pose would therefore be, whether the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper saved its purpose or it just fulfilled the legal obligation on the part of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to publish the pre-budget strategy paper as required by Statutory Instrument 135 of 2019. It is against this backdrop that this week’s Weekend Digest interrogates the usefulness of the Prebudget Strategy Paper in informing citizen engagement. It also provides insights into the government’s indicative commitments to address corruption and the promotion of transparency and accountability.

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Understanding the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper

A Pre-Budget Statement is a guiding framework which provides a broad policy agenda to be pursued by the government on the basis of available resources within a fiscal year and sometimes in the medium term, not exceeding 3 years. In his address at the [Pre Budget Seminar in 2019](#), the Minister of Finance asserted that the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper sets the tone, performance of the previous National Budget, revenue and expenditure targets, fiscal frameworks, economic outlook, and the key budget assumptions. In essence, the pre-budget statement should set out the fiscal framework, by introducing the government’s high-level budget plans for the forthcoming fiscal year ([OECD, 2020](#)). The OECD further posit that it should promote awareness and debate on the budget aggregates, the implications of maintaining existing policies, and interactions with the broader economy, sets out expectations for the budget and paves way for an informed scrutiny of the actual budget. Broadly, the pre-budget statement should improve the budget formulation process. In the case of Zimbabwe, the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper is provided for under Statutory Instrument 135 of 2019. It has become a best practice that apart from being tabled before cabinet, the Pre-

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Budget Strategy Paper is shared widely with parliament and the public to inform budget consultations. [The Open Budget Partnership](#) suggests that the Pre-Budget Statement should inform public debate on the fiscal variables and budget aggregates, and how they interact with the economy, thus serving to create appropriate expectations for the budget itself. Therefore, together with the information gathered during the budget consultations, the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper informs the pre-budget seminar in which parliament consolidate people’s aspirations for the upcoming fiscal year against the strategic direction that would have been set out by the government.

The Pre-Budget Strategy Paper: Does Time Really Matter?

Time is of essence not just in the release of the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper but rather throughout the National Budget Process - from budget formulation, approval, implementation, and audit. Whilst the Minister of Finance and Economic Development has the power to adjust the steps across the National Budget process consistent with section 11(3) of the SI 135 of 2019, it is particularly important to follow the Budget Calendar as outlined in Section 11(1) of the same Statutory Instrument. The steps and dates for the National Budget Process is as follows;

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Budget Process	Time Frame
Preparation of the Budget Strategy Paper by the Ministry of Finance	Between April and June
Ministries provide inputs to Ministry of Finance for the budget Strategy Paper including providing revised strategic priorities and expenditure intentions	By 1st May
Ministry of Finance provides the Budget Strategy Paper to Cabinet no later than 30th June and provides the Budget Strategy Paper to Parliament for information and comment	No later than 31st July
Cabinet approves the Budget Strategy Paper	No later than 15th July
Ministry of Finance issues the Budget Call Circular including indicative budget expenditure ceilings for the following year	By 31st July
Ministry of Finance provides Mid-year Fiscal Review to Cabinet	No later than 15th August
Ministries provide budget submissions to Ministry of Finance	By 31st August
Ministry of Finance updates the macroeconomic and fiscal information and provides it to Cabinet	By 14th September
Ministry of Finance completes review of budget submissions	By 16th September
Ministry of Finance and ministries hold budget discussions	Between 17th September to 5th October
Ministry of Finance provides draft budget estimates to Cabinet	By 20th October
Cabinet completes consideration of draft budget estimates	By 30th October
Minister of Finance presents Budget to Parliament	1st Thursday of November
Budget is debated and approved	

Steps and dates for the National Budget Process, Source Statutory Instrument 135 of 2019

Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI Z) asserts that whilst the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper was presented, it is important for the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to abide by the set timelines as outlined in legal provisions to ensure that the policy document serves its purpose and allows for informed engagement. When the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper is released on time, it gives ample time for legislators and the public to provide feedback, views, and comments.

Does the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper Guarantee Transparency and Accountability in the 2021 Fiscal Year?

Transparency and accountability form the basis for good governance, and it should remain the cornerstone of public finance management as provided in section 298 of the constitution of Zimbabwe (No. 20) Act 2013. Transparency and accountability become more important in Zimbabwe against a background of rampant corruption, violation of public procurement regulations, unsupported expenditures, poor asset management, poor corporate governance in State Owned Enterprises and non-compliance with statutory regulations. Whilst the Budget Strategy Paper notes some achievements registered under the Transitional Stabilisation Programme which informed the 2019 and 2020 National Budget Statements, TI Z is of the view that it is also important for the GoZ to reflect on the governance challenges that characterised the period in question.

Devolution goes beyond resource allocation

Devolution has been singled out as one of the development approaches that brings transparency and accountability in local governance. Section 264 of the constitution provides that whenever appropriate, governmental powers and responsibilities must be devolved to the lower tiers of government, that is the provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities which are competent to carry out those responsibilities efficiently and effectively. The call for devolution which was reaffirmed in the 2019 and 2020 National Budget Statements were only partially implemented. The government did not go beyond the fulfillment of Section 301 (3) which compels the government to allocate at least 5% of the national revenues raised in any financial year towards local and provincial councils. In essence, little has been done to give powers of local governance to the people and enhance their participation in the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them. The 2021 Budget Strategy Paper outlines the GoZ's commitment to implement devolution. However, TI Z is of the view that concrete efforts must now be taken towards the enactment of subsidiary pieces of legislation required to support the process of devolution.

Anti-Corruption Agenda: Turning the Commitments into Action-

The impacts of corruption on people, society and the economy are glaring and pose a threat to sustainable development. Corruption in Zimbabwe is both an enabler and a violation of human rights. Considerable statements and commitments have been made on the need to fight corruption. However TI Z

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is of the view that acknowledging the existence of corruption and making commitments to fight the scourge without translating those commitments into action is futile. There is need to make the “zero tolerance to corruption” mantra bear fruition. Apart from accepting that there is endemic corruption in Zimbabwe and sharing the strides taken by the different anti-corruption agencies, the GoZ still has a mammoth task of ensuring coordination among the anti-corruption agencies and ensuring that the corruption cases before the courts are finalised, especially those that involve politically exposed persons and cases of grand corruption. The culture of impunity remains a huge stumbling block in Zimbabwe’s anti-corruption agenda. TI Z asserts that the overreporting of anti-corruption efforts without punishing the perpetrators of grand corruption will result in the demise of confidence in the country’s resolve to fight corruption, by both foreign investors and the general populace. The government’s pronouncements seem to remain rhetoric with no tangible results. Efforts to fight corruption must go beyond detection and investigation to prosecution, sentencing, whistleblower protection and recovery and forfeiture of corruptly acquired assets to ensure both prevention and management of corruption in Zimbabwe.

Mining Sector Reforms are Long Overdue

The increasing call for transparency and accountability in the mining sector in Zimbabwe is derived from decades of corruption in the sector, resource leakages and other forms of illicit financial flows from the sector. These have largely been blamed on the archaic Mines and Minerals Act of 1961. There is a general consensus that part of the solution to the natural resource curse in Zimbabwe lies in the mining sector reforms which gave birth to the draft Mines and Minerals Bill. It remains questionable how the GoZ celebrates the US\$4.2 billion Great Dyke Investments, the US\$4 billion Karo Resources Mhondoro-Ngezi platinum project to mention but a few yet there is little progress in finalizing the Bill and enacting it into law. Would it be possible to achieve a US\$12 billion Economy by 2023 without the new law? TI Z is of the view that the government’s target will remain farfetched if legislation and supportive frameworks that support transparency and accountability in the mining sector are not put in place. The government’s commitment to transparency and accountability in the mining sector remains obscure. There seems to be a drawback in the interest to join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Is it an omission in the Pre-Budget Strategy Paper or deliberate? These are some of the questions in the minds of citizens advocating for transparency and accountability in the sector. If EITI is not an option for Zimbabwe, is the country deliberating on alternative transparency and accountability initiatives? The 2021 National budget is expected to clarify most of these issues which remain unclear in the 2021 Pre-Budget Strategy Paper. At a minimum, the government must ensure that the Proposed Mines and Minerals Act provides for transparency and accountability along the mineral value chain. This will enable the public disclosure of contracts, licenses, concession or other agreement governing the exploitation of mineral resources in Zimbabwe. Thus, contributing to the prevention of economic loss

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emanating from smuggling and resource leakages as well as address social disruptions and prevent environmental challenges towards sustainable mining in Zimbabwe. [#AccountableMining](#).

Conclusion

The National Budget remains an important tool for fulfilling human rights of citizens and ensuring economic, social and environmental sustainability. However, this can only be achieved if the budget formulation, adoption, implementation and audit are carried out in a transparent and accountable manner. It is not adequate to have in place clear frameworks for budget making processes without ensuring that the steps and timeframes are followed. When citizens and parliament are given ample time to participate in the budget making process, the outcomes are usually desirable, and this guarantees that the citizens' aspirations are met. There should therefore be transparency along the budget cycle and the budget must guarantee transparency and accountability across sectors. The success of any budget depends on the management of resources at any level to guard against corruption, violation of public procurement regulations, unsupported expenditures, poor asset management, poor corporate governance in State Owned Enterprises and non-compliance with statutory regulations.

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About Transparency International Zimbabwe

Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI Z) is a non-profit, non-partisan, systems-oriented local chapter of the international movement against corruption (Transparency International). The organisation was established in Zimbabwe in 1996 and exists to fight corruption and promote transparency, accountability, and integrity at all levels and across all sectors of society. TI Z currently operates from three regions in Zimbabwe, that is, Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare. However, its community presence reaches to more than ten districts across the country as a result of its vibrant community structures made up of ordinary men and women who have a passion to see Zimbabwe as a corrupt-free country (Accountability Monitoring Committees). TI Z uses a four-unit approach in carrying out its work:

Policy, Legislation, and Institutional Monitoring (PLIM) - engages policy makers and other relevant anti-corruption stakeholders in both the public and private sector. It lobbies and advocates for the development and implementation of effective national anti-corruption strategies to combat corruption in Zimbabwe.

Research and Communications (R&C) - produces knowledge that advances knowledge in the area of anti-corruption and good governance in Zimbabwe, for example the Annual State of Corruption in Zimbabwe Series and periodic researches that respond to key issues such as the 2019 Study on Corruption in the distribution and management of Humanitarian Aid (the case of cyclone idai and cholera outbreak)

Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) - provides free legal aid services to victims and witnesses of corruption and seeks to empower citizens to demand accountability and transparency from public and private institutions.

Community Mobilization and Advocacy (CMA) - targets ordinary citizens with the aim of ensuring maximum participation and involvement of citizens in the fight against corruption.

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