



THE Weekend Reader

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Social & Economic Justice"

CITIZENS' DEMANDS ON THE PUBLIC FINANCE MANAGEMENT BILL

The Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development is conducting various engagements on the Public Finance Management Bill as a way of ensuring that citizens have an opportunity to input before it becomes law. This weekend reader focuses on some of the citizens' views and perspectives on how the Public Finance Management (PFM) bill can be strengthened towards promoting sound public finance management in Zimbabwe. The following issues are some of the emerging contributions from citizens:

- **I** The PFM Act should provide for mechanisms for the full implementation of the Auditor General's recommendations by public and constitutional bodies. Historically, the implementation of the recommendations has been characterised by reluctance of public entities with no resolve and accountability. Citizens are therefore calling for mechanisms to enforce and monitor implementation of the recommendations by public entities with penalties put in place in cases of non-compliance. The Act should further provide for the establishment of a Committee in each public entity to enforce implementation of the recommendations from the AG's Office and mandate Parliament to play a critical role in enforcing the implementation of the recommendations.
- **II** Public Finance Management Act should strengthen and advance local and national budget transparency, participation and oversight. Citizens are demanding that the local and national budgets should only be approved upon sufficient evidence of genuine and meaningful citizen engagement and consultation in the preparation of the budgets. This requires adequate notice to the public and proper timing for the meetings to enable citizens to participate.
- **III** The PFM Act should compel the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to timely produce and avail citizen versions of key budget documents including the Budget Strategy Paper and the budget itself. This will increase citizen participation in the national budget process. Furthermore, measures should be put in place to ensure compliance and adherence by the Treasury.

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The citizens are proposing for the repeal of the amendment of Section 327 of the Constitution to ensure that the PFM Act strengthens the Parliament's oversight role on public finance management. The essence of the PFM Bill in strengthening PFM in Zimbabwe will be undermined if the constitutional amendment of Section 327 is allowed to pass. This will limit the Parliament's power to approve international agreements even if such agreements impose fiscal obligations of Zimbabweans.

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The Bill and eventually the Act should provide for comprehensive principles and best practices that guides public finance management in Zimbabwe for instance the principle of equity. As of now, the Bill contains a general provision that public finances must be guided by the principles in the Constitution. The PFM Bill and the subsequent Act must be more lucid and specific than the Constitution, but as it stands the vice versa is true.

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The Bill should conform to Section 308 (4) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which states that an Act of Parliament must provide for the speedy detection of public financial misconduct by custodians of public funds and the disciplining and punishment of the perpetrators. The Act should therefore set deterrent and punitive measures for perpetrators who engage in public financial misconduct.