WEEKEND READER

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Socio-Economic Justice"

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Beyond Publishing Budgets: Why Local Authorities Must Embrace the People's Budget Approach



The publication of a budget document does not automatically translate into transparency. Neither does inviting residents to attend budget consultation meetings necessarily guarantee meaningful public participation. For citizens to participate effectively in public financial management, they must first be able to understand the information presented to them.

The recently published 103-page Proposed 2027 Budget Tariffs by the City of Harare provides an opportunity to reflect on an important but often overlooked aspect of local governance: the accessibility of public budget information. The challenge is not necessarily the length of the document itself. Local authorities have legitimate administrative, accounting and statutory requirements that demand detailed financial schedules. The concern is that such technical documents are often the primary and sometimes only means through which residents are expected to engage with proposed budgets and tariffs. Can an ordinary resident meaningfully interrogate a 103-page technical document filled with financial terminology, tariff schedules and administrative classifications? How many residents have the time, financial literacy or technical knowledge required to interpret such information and identify the implications for their households, businesses and livelihoods? These questions go to the heart of meaningful public participation.

The People's Budget: An approach worth extending to local government

At national level, Zimbabwe has recognised the importance of making budget information accessible through the production of the People's Budget. This approach seeks to translate complex national budget proposals into simpler language and formats that ordinary citizens can understand. Rather than expecting citizens to navigate technical budget statements, the People's Budget helps explain government revenue, expenditure priorities, taxation measures and their implications for different sections of society. This approach recognises that public financial management should not remain the preserve of economists, accountants and policymakers. Citizens are taxpayers, service users and rights-holders. They should be able to understand how public resources are mobilised, allocated and spent. However, this principle should not end at national government level. Local authorities are equally responsible for managing public resources, collecting revenue and delivering essential services. Their budgets have an immediate and direct bearing on residents' daily lives.

There is therefore a strong case for extending the People's Budget approach to urban and rural local authorities. The experience of Gweru City Council provides an important local example. The council has been producing simplified budget information to make its financial proposals more accessible to residents. This demonstrates that preparing a citizen-friendly budget is not an unrealistic expectation or an additional burden that local authorities cannot accommodate. It is a practical communication and accountability measure that other councils can adopt. Harare City Council and other local authorities should consider institutionalising this practice.

A simplified residents' budget should accompany the detailed technical budget and tariff schedules. It should explain, in plain language, the proposed revenue sources, expenditure priorities, changes in tariffs, service delivery commitments and the implications for different categories of residents. Visual illustrations, infographics, simplified tables and translations into local languages such as Shona and Ndebele would further improve accessibility. The objective is not to dilute the technical content of council budgets. It is to ensure that technical information is not a barrier to public understanding.

Inaccessible information weakens public participation

One of the fundamental challenges in local governance is the gap between formal opportunities for participation and the ability of residents to use those opportunities effectively. Residents may be notified that a proposed budget is available for scrutiny and that objections can be submitted within a specified period. However, if the information is difficult to understand, their capacity to identify concerns, assess proposed changes and formulate meaningful submissions is significantly constrained.

This creates a situation where public participation risks becoming a compliance exercise rather than a genuine process of citizen engagement. The problem also has an equity dimension. Women, young people, informal traders, persons with disabilities and residents from low-income communities may have limited access to technical financial information and the resources needed to interpret it. A budget consultation process should not privilege those who have the educational background or professional expertise to understand municipal financial documents. The right to participate in local governance should be accompanied by the right to accessible information.

What should local authorities do?

There is a need for local authorities to move beyond simply publishing budget documents and adopt more deliberate approaches to communicating public financial information.

- Every local authority should produce a simplified People's Budget alongside its detailed annual budget. This should become an institutional practice rather than an occasional communication initiative.
- Simplified budgets should use plain language and visual presentations to explain revenue, expenditure, proposed tariffs, capital projects and service delivery priorities.
- Information should be available in locally understood languages and through different platforms, including community radio, social media, ward meetings and printed materials.
- Councils should explain how public submissions have informed the final budget. This would strengthen accountability and demonstrate that consultation is more than a statutory requirement.
- Civil society organisations and residents' associations should advocate for the institutionalisation of citizen-friendly budgeting as part of broader efforts to strengthen transparency, accountability and participatory governance.

Every local authority should have a People's Budget. Because citizens cannot meaningfully participate in decisions they cannot understand.

Regulating Survirval: Will new E-Hailing Rules kill informal livelihoods?



As government proposes tough new rules for digital taxi services, drivers are facing two threats at once: police harassment on the road, and a compliance trap that could wipe out their investments. For the past three years, Tinashe has used his car to feed his family. He is one of thousands of young Zimbabweans who joined ride-hailing platforms like Bolt and inDrive after the formal economy shut them out. His car is eleven years old. It is not luxurious, but it is roadworthy. It pays his rent, pays school fees, and puts a decent meal on the table.Last week, Tinashe learnt that under the new proposals, his car could soon become illegal. On top of that, he has to deal with Harare municipal police who regularly impound vehicles and demand bribes during enforcement operations.

The proposed regulations have raised serious concern about the future of thousands of young people who depend on Bolt and inDrive for work and income. The proposed ten-year vehicle age limit would force many drivers to replace affordable second-hand cars, putting them under heavy financial pressure and possibly pushing the most vulnerable drivers out of the sector completely. These fears are made worse by reports of harassment, unfair impoundments, and bribe demands by municipal police.

While the Zimbabwe E-Hailing Transport Association supports regulation, it is calling for fair and consistent enforcement, and for a National E-Hailing Transport Stakeholder Engagement Platform to protect drivers. The draft regulations also raise legal and labour rights issues. There are questions about whether they comply with Section 134 of the Constitution, the right to privacy under Section 57, and the failure to include decent work protections, social security contributions, and algorithmic transparency. However, not all the proposals are negative. Some are positive and could bring fairness to the sector, including the 18% cap on platform commissions, payment of drivers within seven days and limits on surge pricing. Lessons from South Africa and Zambia show the need for a balanced approach. Zimbabwe should therefore adopt an inclusive and proportionate framework that protects passenger safety, encourages tax compliance, and protects workers' livelihoods, without imposing heavy compliance costs that destroy jobs and economic opportunities.

Recommendations

To the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructural Development

- The Ministry must extend the deadline for public comments and hold physical consultations with driver associations across the country. Consequently, this will ensure that the voices of workers who cannot access the internet are heard.
- The Ministry must introduce a phased implementation plan for the ten-year vehicle age limit and provide a grace period of at least three years. Furthermore, the government should establish a vehicle financing facility to help young and women drivers acquire compliant vehicles through government empowerment initiatives .
- The Ministry must review the legal basis for regulating software platforms under the Road Motor Transportation Act to avoid constitutional challenges. Therefore, the Ministry must align the regulations with Section 134 of the Constitution and incorporate the provisions of ILO Convention 193.

To the Parliament of Zimbabwe

- Parliament must scrutinise the draft regulations to ensure that the financial provisions such as the eighteen percent commission cap and seven-day payment rule are enforceable. Furthermore,Parliament must demand accountability from platform operators regarding how they treat their drivers.

To the Citizens of Zimbabwe and Civil Society Organizations

- Driver associations and civil society organisations must organize and submit collective submissions to the Ministry of Transport. Therefore, they must demand that the regulations protect the livelihoods of workers and not just the interests of platform operators.
- Drivers must document instances of exploitation by platforms and report them to the relevant authorities. Furthermore, they must advocate for the establishment of a formal grievance mechanism where workers can seek redress without fear of retaliation from the police or platform operators.

Conclusion

The proposed regulations present both an opportunity and a threat. If designed correctly they can create a safer more transparent and equitable sector that protects the rights of workers. However, if they are imposed without consultation and without support for low-income drivers, they will simply push thousands of families further into poverty. The government must choose between regulation that protects the rich and regulation that protects the worker. The time for inclusive dialogue and pro poor policy is therefore now.

OPPORTUNITIES

Secretarial Assistant – UNESCO
https://careers.unesco.org/
(Deadline: 14 December 2026)

Transport and Office Associate – African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)
https://theacbf.org/the_vacancies/transport-and-office-associate/
(Deadline: 30 November 2026)

Stores Clerk – Judicial Service Commission (JSC)
The Secretary, JSC House, No. 161 Josiah Chinamano Avenue, Harare (Hand Delivery)
(Deadline: 19 November 2026)

Workshop Foreman – Judicial Service Commission (JSC)
The Secretary, JSC House, No. 161 Josiah Chinamano Avenue, Harare (Hand Delivery)
(Deadline: 19 November 2026)

Artisan (3 Posts) – Judicial Service Commission (JSC)
The Secretary, JSC House, No. 161 Josiah Chinamano Avenue, Harare (Hand Delivery)
(Deadline: 19 November 2026)

Assistant Artisan (3 Posts) – Judicial Service Commission (JSC)
The Secretary, JSC House, No. 161 Josiah Chinamano Avenue, Harare (Hand Delivery)
(Deadline: 19 November 2026)

Internship Program – African Union (AU)
https://au.int/en/internships
(Deadline: 31 December 2026)

Communications Officer (Graphic Design & Social Media) – UNOPS
https://jobs.unops.org/
(Deadline: 22 November 2026)

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https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/KTxgmwPAbJ