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PUBLIC TRUST AND EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY: PRIORITIES FOR PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING AT A NEW STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. This article examines the significance and practical outcomes of the participatory budgeting mechanism, using Tashkent Region as a case study. Particular attention is paid to the implementation of selected projects, including opportunities to improve implementation timelines and technical and legal assessment procedures, as well as to the effectiveness of public oversight mechanisms and approaches to enhancing the efficient and rational use of budgetary funds. The study also considers the role of participatory budgeting in strengthening budget transparency, supporting local initiatives, and promoting public engagement in local development processes.

Keywords: participatory budgeting, parliamentary oversight, public oversight, open budget, local budgets, social infrastructure, public administration, budget transparency, project implementation, local initiatives, efficient use of budgetary funds.

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются значение и практические результаты применения механизма инициативного бюджетирования на примере Ташкентской области. Особое внимание уделяется реализации отдельных проектов, в том числе возможностям совершенствования сроков их исполнения и процедур технической и правовой оценки, а также эффективности механизмов общественного контроля и подходам к повышению эффективности и рациональности использования бюджетных средств. Кроме того, рассматривается роль инициативного бюджетирования в повышении прозрачности бюджетных процессов, поддержке местных инициатив и расширении участия граждан в процессах развития территорий.

Ключевые слова: инициативное бюджетирование, парламентский контроль, общественный контроль, открытый бюджет, местные бюджеты, социальная инфраструктура, государственное управление, бюджетная прозрачность, реализация проектов, местные инициативы, эффективное использование бюджетных средств.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, reforms aimed at enhancing public administration, increasing the openness and transparency of budgetary processes, and expanding citizens' participation in decision-making have been consistently implemented in Uzbekistan. One of the important mechanisms supporting these objectives is the participatory budgeting system (*Tashabbusli byudjet*), which has created additional opportunities for citizens to participate directly in addressing issues of local significance.

With the aim of strengthening citizens' participation in addressing priority issues in their communities, supporting local initiatives, and ensuring greater openness and transparency in budgetary processes, the participatory budgeting mechanism has been actively implemented through the "Open Budget" information portal since 2021.

Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-3917 of 22 August 2018, "On Measures to Ensure the Openness of Budget Data and the Active Participation of Citizens in the Budget Process," introduced a mechanism under which, beginning in 2019, at least 10 percent of the additional sources of district (city) budgets were allocated to measures formulated on the basis of public opinion within the framework of participatory allocation of budgetary funds.

Furthermore, in order to expand public participation in the development of regional socio-economic projects and the implementation of initiatives addressing priority local needs, Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PQ-5072 of 13 April 2021, "On Additional Measures to Ensure the Active Participation of Citizens in the Budget Process," was adopted.

Under this Resolution, a new procedure was introduced whereby, beginning in May 2021, 5 percent of the approved total expenditures of the relevant budgets was allocated to financing measures formulated on the basis of public opinion in one district (city) of each region. From 1 January 2022, this procedure was extended to all districts (cities) of the republic. At the current stage of the system's development, 30 percent of the additional funds of district (city) budgets is allocated to financing measures formulated on the basis of public opinion.

In addition, the allocation and use of local budget funds for financing measures formulated on the basis of public opinion are regularly examined through on-site monitoring. The results of such monitoring provide an important basis for identifying opportunities for further improvement and enhancing the effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of the participatory budgeting system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The regulatory and legal framework governing participatory budgeting processes has been consistently developed and improved in recent years. Resolution No. KQ-280-V of the Council of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis, dated 17 December 2025, "On Amendments and Additions to the Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting and Financing Participatory Budgeting Processes," further improved the Model Regulation governing the procedure for allocating district (city) budget funds to measures formulated on the basis of public opinion.

The Resolution introduced several important innovations aimed at further developing the participatory budgeting mechanism. In particular, a deputy-initiated project mechanism was introduced, together with a procedure for financing projects on the basis of partnership between citizens and the state. Within this framework, a separate procedure governing the co-financing of such projects was approved. In addition, in order to support the timely and effective implementation of participatory budgeting projects, funds accumulated in the Citizens' Initiative Funds under district (city) khokimiyats were provided with additional safeguards against recovery measures based on court decisions and other enforcement documents by the Compulsory Enforcement Bureau and other authorised collection bodies.

It was also established that the restriction on submitting new projects after winning the participatory budgeting process in two consecutive cycles would not apply to mahallas located in districts and cities comprising 15 or fewer mahallas, mahallas included in the TOP-100 "Best Taxpayer Mahalla" list, or projects financed through partnership between citizens and the state. These measures contribute to broadening opportunities for participation, supporting local initiatives, and further strengthening the principles of openness, inclusiveness, and fairness within the participatory budgeting system.

At present, the participatory budgeting system enables citizens not only to identify and propose solutions to issues of local significance but also to express their preferences regarding the areas in which budgetary resources should be allocated. This mechanism strengthens the relationship between public needs and local budget priorities, expands opportunities for civic participation, and contributes to the more transparent and needs-oriented allocation of budgetary resources.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a combination of research methods commonly applied in academic research. To assess the practical outcomes of the participatory budgeting mechanism in Tashkent Region, data from the "Open Budget" information portal, relevant regulatory and legal documents, and the results of oversight activities conducted by the prosecutor's offices were examined. The methodological framework included statistical analysis, comparative analysis, logical reasoning, synthesis, and generalisation. These methods were used to identify key trends in project initiation, financing, implementation, and public oversight, as well as to assess opportunities for further improving the effectiveness of the participatory budgeting mechanism.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

An analysis of participatory budgeting activities implemented in Tashkent Region during 2024–2025 indicates a high level of public engagement with the mechanism. Over the two-year period, nearly 9,000 project proposals were submitted, including 4,410 projects in 2024 and 4,518 projects in 2025. As a result of active public participation and voting, 983 projects with a total value of approximately UZS 1.2 trillion were selected for implementation.

The initiatives receiving the greatest public support were concentrated in areas directly related to citizens' everyday well-being, including the improvement of road infrastructure, renovation of educational and healthcare institutions, and development of engineering and communication networks. This pattern indicates growing public interest in improving social infrastructure and increasing engagement with the participatory mechanisms established for identifying and addressing local development priorities.

Alongside the formation and financing of initiatives, ensuring their timely and effective implementation is equally important. Each project supported by citizens reflects a specific local development need, public expectations, and the willingness of communities to participate actively in decision-making processes. Therefore, effective project implementation is an important factor in strengthening the practical value of participatory budgeting and sustaining public confidence in participatory governance mechanisms.

The analysis also identified several areas in which the later stages of participatory budgeting processes can be further improved. In certain cases, project implementation continued beyond the initially established timelines, particularly with regard to construction and renovation activities, indicating opportunities to strengthen coordination between financing and implementation processes. Of the projects selected for implementation in 2025, construction, renovation, and procurement activities were completed and the relevant facilities were commissioned for 332 projects (71%), while implementation activities were continuing for the remaining 136 projects at the time of the analysis.

In some initiatives, allocated financial resources had already been made available, while the commissioning of facilities or completion of construction activities required additional time due to various technical and organisational circumstances. The analysis suggests that strengthening technical and legal assessment during the preliminary evaluation and screening stages could further facilitate subsequent project implementation. This highlights the importance of comprehensively assessing the technical, legal, financial, and organisational feasibility of proposed initiatives before they are submitted for public voting.

The effective utilisation of public oversight mechanisms is another important component of the participatory budgeting system. The "Open Budget" information portal enables the initiators of winning projects to monitor different stages of project implementation and evaluate completed activities. Following project implementation, initiators may assess the completed work using "green," "yellow," and "red" categories in the portal's "Public Oversight" section. Where circumstances requiring additional review are identified, citizens may also submit an "Emergency Report" through the portal, thereby providing direct feedback on project implementation.

During 2025, citizens submitted a number of such reports through this mechanism. In particular, five reports concerned projects in which implementation had not yet been completed, four cases involved projects receiving a "red" rating, and two cases reflected concerns regarding matters requiring further attention. These feedback mechanisms are particularly important because participatory budgeting is intended not only to facilitate the allocation of financial resources but also to broaden citizens' participation in public administration. Accordingly, timely consideration of public feedback constitutes an important component of the effectiveness and responsiveness of the system.

In addition, oversight activities conducted by the prosecutor's offices in relation to projects selected through participatory budgeting processes identified financial and legal compliance issues amounting to UZS 206.5 million across seven projects. The findings relating to financial management, construction activities, quality assurance, and certain aspects of public procurement demonstrate opportunities to further strengthen the efficiency and transparency of budgetary resource utilisation. In this context, enhancing coordination and accountability among customer organisations, contractors, and authorised oversight bodies is important for supporting the timely and effective implementation of projects and ensuring the efficient use of public funds.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, participatory budgeting represents an important mechanism for supporting the development of civil society institutions in Uzbekistan, expanding citizens' participation in addressing issues of local significance, and enhancing the openness and transparency of budgetary processes. At the current stage of its development, particular attention should be given to further strengthening the effectiveness of project implementation and ensuring that each selected initiative generates tangible outcomes aligned with the needs and expectations of local communities.

The effectiveness of participatory budgeting should therefore be assessed not only by the number of votes received or the volume of financial resources allocated, but also by the tangible social and infrastructural outcomes achieved. These include improved educational facilities, renovated roads, enhanced local infrastructure, and, most importantly, strengthened public confidence in participatory governance and budgetary decision-making processes. In this regard, the consistent improvement of project implementation,

public oversight, accountability, and feedback mechanisms can further enhance the contribution of participatory budgeting to transparent, responsive, and citizen-oriented public administration.

Based on the findings of the study, the following practical recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthen the preliminary assessment of project proposals. Before participatory budgeting initiatives are submitted for public voting, their technical, legal, financial, and organisational feasibility should be assessed comprehensively. This approach can help identify implementation requirements at an early stage and contribute to the timely and effective completion of selected projects.

2. Enhance project implementation monitoring and public feedback mechanisms. The functionality of the “Public Oversight” section of the “Open Budget” information portal should be further developed to enable citizens to monitor project progress, provide structured feedback, and receive timely information on the consideration of their submissions. This can strengthen transparency and public confidence throughout the project implementation cycle.

3. Strengthen coordination and accountability among project stakeholders. Clear responsibilities and coordination mechanisms should be established among customer organisations, contractors, local authorities, and authorised oversight bodies. Particular attention should be given to implementation timelines, quality assurance, procurement procedures, and the efficient use of allocated budgetary resources.

4. Introduce a broader performance-based evaluation framework. The effectiveness of participatory budgeting should be assessed not only through the number of submitted initiatives, votes received, or funds allocated, but also through indicators reflecting project completion, quality of implementation, citizen satisfaction, responsiveness to public feedback, and tangible improvements in local social infrastructure. This approach can provide a more comprehensive assessment of the social and institutional outcomes of participatory budgeting.

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