Experimenting ways to present budget information in ways that is simple and accessible to ordinary citizens as means of improving participation.

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Introduction

Generally, public finance has been considered a difficult field for various classes of people in the society around world. It is even made difficult when the segment of the society with low levels of public knowledge on the matter are expected to read and understand the contents of technical and voluminous nature of most of the common and important planning and budget documents – considering these factors, and that, these are the documents the public are expected derive knowledge and information about how their taxes are managed and what kind of goods and services are to be expected from their spending, delivery of services and developmental decisions are always far from their alignment to public needs. In addition, majority of the technocrats who generate these documents as well as the political class whose role is to scrutinize the contents with view of approval, both are not spared by the technicalities of these documents. The Center for Innovations in Open Governance would like to establish the level of simplicity necessary for ordinary citizens[1] to enable them to extract important information from budgets with aim of aiding informed citizen participation at budget formulation, enactment and subsequently, at implementation and evaluation stages.

The problem

Public participation in setting budget priorities and subsequently participating in implementation of the same has been hampered by access to sufficient information. This has also been contributed by public's inability to read budgets and comprehend the information in these documents, in cases where they may have access to, due low public knowledge on matters public finance.

The proposal to address this problem

The Center for Innovation intends to convene targeted forums (inform of FGDS) each in one village[2] in seven selected Wards in Elgeyo Marakwet County to engage in an exercise. The exercise is organized to test participants' ability to extract information from different ways of presentation which we call EXHIBITS, by answering questions which are annexed below. This will give us objective data about EXHIBITS in which people may consider simple while at the end of the exercise, we will engage participants in a discussion to obtain subjective data about EXHIBITS that might have impressed participants. Both these data will give us (the Center and its stakeholders in this process, including the county government) ideas about what template of simplifying budgets and present to the ordinary citizens may look like and subsequently, helps us to commence process of designing the template.

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[1] The definition of ordinary citizen in this case being a resident of the county at the village level.
[2] In our exercise, village is given the meaning of the locality manned by a village elder.

The exercise commences a three (or more) part series of similar exercises in near future. From this exercise, the solution is limited to the presentation of complex budget information. In the future, we want to establish the type of budget information that citizens consider to be more relevant to aid informed participation at different stages in the budget cycle and the stages to which such information is necessary. For example, is historical information about distribution at sector level considered useful by citizens while setting sector priorities between November and February every year, and can it be presented as a standalone information, independent of other types of information from the budget? Overall, the exercise is designed to link accessibility to information and its effects on public participation.

The experiment

In the height of complexities and technicalities of budget and related documents, simplification has been touted as viable solution, however, simplification comes with its challenges. There are various ways of simplification. More generally, it is defined as "process of making something easier to understand. It is also defined further as making things clearer." From this definition, simplification therefore is means of communication of complex information in an easier way, which makes things clearer for the user of such information to understand. However, without engaging with the user to determine ways that are considered simple and easy for a target user, we may not tell or in fact be able to design a template or means of presentation that considered simple and easy. It is on this note that the Center for Innovations intends to test out four ways of presenting the same information through EXHIBITS A, B, C and D as described and shown in the table below:

Table 1: EXHIBITS and descriptions.

SN	EXHIBITS	EXHIBIT description
1.	D	1) Represent default or rather current means of presentation as is in the current year (2017/18) county's budget.
2.	A	2) represent non-visual written, simplified version of the target information in EXHIBIT D above
3.	B	3) represent visualized written, simplified version of the target information in EXHIBIT A above
4.	C	4) is a short film, representing an innovative medium of communication *(film of a person plus graphics or voice only plus graphics of the information in EHIBIT B above)*

Exercise design

In terms of conduct of the exercise, we learnt a few lessons from a recent pilot during IBP kenya's annual seminar also known as "Practitioners' Seminar" (PS) held on July 10-11, 2017 in Nairobi. We learnt that, considering the questions and the content is the same across the EXHIBITS throughout the exercise, people learn as they engage with the EXHIBITS and the questions. For example, if the exercise followed a particular sequence for everyone, people will answer the questions more accurately and easily towards the end of the exercise meaning, there is very high chance that we may not learn much to tell the difference between the simplicity of the various EXHIBITS. We are therefore going to alter the sequence at which people engage with the exercise. The exercise will be held in two places (parts), but similar in structure and content: part one will be held in Kapsowar while the second part will be held in Iten

townships. We will divide participants, into groups and have the exercise in the order shown in the table below:

Table 2: order of exercise

Groups	EXHIBITS IN ORDER FROM START TO END			
Group 1	A	C	D	B
Group 2	B	A	C	D
Group 2	D	B	A	C
Group 4	C	D	B	A

Analysis of the data

The EXHIBITS may not contain the same information across board. For example, EXHIBIT D differs with the rest because it does contain historical data on most of the key elements such as distribution of budget at sector level and therefore, it may be unfair to generalize how people answered such questions. In order to address this question, during analysis, we will omit such questions from D that may not have been answered because there were no data provided. However, we will document separately, data (findings) about how much people would appreciate such data if included in the budget to help in decision making, as means of stressing the need to have historical data included in the budget.

The locality for experimentation, timing and selected wards

The experiment will be conducted in purposively sampled villages in 7 wards of Elgeyo Marakwet County. The number of selected wards and their respective schedules is as shown in the table below.

Ward	Date as agreed with wards administrators of the selected wards
Kapsowar	Monday July 31, 2017
Moiben/Kuswerwo	Tuesday August 1, 2017
Metkei	Wednesday August 2, 2017
Kaptarakwa	Wednesday August 2, 2017
Tambach	Friday August 4, 2017
Cherangany	Friday August 4, 2017
Kapeygo	Saturday August 5, 2017

Questions for assessing EXHIBITS

Questionnaire for budget simplification exercise		
Respondent code		
Exhibit ID:		
Time	**Start**	
	End	

Sn.	Questions		
1.	**What is the total revenue for the following years:**		
	2016/17:		
	2017/18:		
2.	**By what percentage did the revenue increase or decrease between the two years of 2016/17 and 2017/18**		
	% change from 2016/17:		
3.	**What is the total spending for the 2016/17 and 2017/18?**		
	2016/17:		
	2017/18:		
4.	**By what percentage is the budget for 2018/19 projected to increase from 2017/18?**		
	% increase in 2018/19?		
5.	**Does the document provide any information to allow you to assess INCREASES and DECREASES in budgetary allocations across sectors? (tick one)**		
	Yes:	No:	
6.	**If yes in Q5, which sectors have the highest percentage budget INCREASES between the two years of 2016/7 and 2017/18? (Name two sectors below)**		
	sector 1:		
	sector 2:		
7.	**If yes in Q5, which sectors have the highest percentage budget DECREASES between the two years of 2016/17 and 2017/18? (Name two sectors below)**		
	sector 1:		
	sector 2:		
8.	**Which two sectors have the highest budget for countywide projects?**		
	Sector 1:		
	sector 2:		
9.	**Which two wards have highest allocations (ward ceiling) in 2017/18?**		
	Highest Ward 1:		
	Highest Ward 2:		
10.	**From the indicators and targets section of the EXHIBIT, does the document provide any information to allow you to asses if the government has been making progress in meetings its targets? (Tick one)**		
	Yes:	No:	
11.	**If yes in Q10, from the indicators and targets section of the EXHIBIT, kindly identify two areas the county is making progress**		
	Progressive area 1:		

Sn.	Questions	
	Progressive area 2:	
12.	**What additional information would make the targets and indicators useful to you?**	