The Role of the County Budget and Economic Forum (CBEF) in Kenya

A County Budget and Economic Forum (CBEF) is an important tool for facilitating public participation at the county level. Each of the 47 counties should have an operational County Budget and Economic Forum.

The County Budget and Economic Forum should serve as the major mechanism for the public to participate in the budget process and public finances. Section 137 of the Public Finance Management Act lays down the foundation for the forum.

The County Budget and Economic Forum (CBEF) is set-up to coordinate and collect views from the public during the budgeting process. It should also function as a think-tank for the County government in terms of financial and economic management.

The County Budget and Economic Forum (CBEF) should assist a county to:

- analyse and identify its priorities as they budget for programs,
- improve coordination between the citizens and government, and
- improve harmonization of project implementation and funding.

Establishment of the County Budget and Economic Forum

The Public Finance Management Act (PFM Act) stipulates in Section 137(1) that every county should set up the Forum “as soon as practicable” after the commencement of the PFM Act.

The Public Finance Management Act commenced after the IEBC announced the final results of the first elections under the Constitution in 2013. Therefore, it should be practical that every county should have already set up its own County Budget and Economic Forum.

The CBEF should play a key role to improve transparency, coordination, and public participation in the management of public finance in Kenya.

Membership of the County Budget and Economic Forum

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The County Budget and Economic Forum should include:

- The Governor who is the chairperson;
- Other members of the County Executive Committee.

Several representatives equal to the number of executive committee members appointed by the Governor. They should be nominated by (and represent) organisations representing professionals, business, labour issues, women, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and faith-based groups at the county level. The persons should not come from county public officers.

The Role of the County Budget and Economic Forum

The County Budget and Economic Forum should provide a means for consultation by the county government on Preparation of county plans, the County Fiscal Strategy Paper and the Budget Review and Outlook Paper for the county, Matters relating to budgeting, the economy and financial management at the county level.

While doing the consultations with the public, the County Budget and Economic Forum should follow the consultation process provided in the County Governments Act.

Guidelines for establishing the County Budget and Economic Forum

The county governments faced challenges in setting up their CBEFs in the beginning. The Commission on Revenue Allocation (CRA) established a set of guidelines to enable the counties to set up the CBEFs.

The guidelines came about through a unique collaboration between CRA, the International Budget Partnership Kenya, The Institute for Social Accountability, and CBEF members in both Busia and Taita Taveta Counties.

The guidelines clarify the establishment of the CBEF. They then provide administrative guidance for the CBEF and how to nominate its members. They proceed to break down the functions of CBEF and how to operationalize the forum.

Therefore, the guidelines provide a broad understanding of the establishment, composition, nomination of the members, functions, and consultation process for the CBEF.

Section 137 of the Public Finance Management Act 2012 is the basis for developing the guidelines. If there is a conflict, the PFM Act should preside.
Some of the provisions in the guidelines are as follows.

On composition;

The maximum number of members in the County Budget and Economic Forum from the County Government (excluding the Governor) should be 11, including the Deputy Governor.

This provision seems to borrow from Article 179(3) (b) of the Constitution. It stipulates that the number of the County Executive Committee Members should not go beyond ten if the county has 30 or elected Members of the County Assembly (MCAs).

The members of the non-state actors (businesses, women, etc.) should be equal to the number of the county government officials in the County Budget and Economic Forum.

All members, state and non-state alike, are equal members of CBEF with equal votes and equal access to information.

The members of CBEF shall sit in the forum until an incoming Governor appoints a new CBEF.