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Public financial governance as a mechanism for promoting inclusive growth (The Algerian public budget)

Dr. Bentaiba Fatiha
University Morsli Abdullah of Tipaza. Algeria
Email: bentaibafatiha2016@gmail.com

Dr. Hamoudi Assia
University Morsli Abdullah of Tipaza. Algeria
Email: assiahamoudi2904@gmail.com

Dr. Bentaiba Djamila
University of Lounici Ali, Blida 2. Algeria
Email: bentaiba.dj2017@gmail.com

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Abstract---This research paper aims to evaluate the implementation of public budget governance in Algeria in light of reforms initiated by the relevant authorities. Despite the efforts made, the study found that Algeria is still far from international practices in applying the principles of financial governance. These principles are primarily represented by transparency, which involves presenting and publishing budget documents in a timely manner for all stakeholders to access. The principle of accountability is emphasised by both the legislative authority and civil society organisations to identify errors and shortcomings, and to evaluate performance. Finally, the principle of participation explicitly involves the National Assembly and civil society organisations in shaping financial policy.
Keywords---governance, public budget, transparency, accountability, participation.

Introduction

Over time, it has become clear that many countries that have achieved significant economic growth have not improved the living standards of their populations. This has led to the adoption of the concept of governance at all levels, especially in the financial sector, given that financing is the driving force behind sustainable development.

In recent years, the term 'governance' has spread to various fields, including economics, politics and finance. Due to the evolving role of governments in managing state affairs, some view governance as encompassing more than just the coordinating and supervisory role of governments; the role has shifted to one of coordination and regulation within the governance framework. Recently, interest in governance has increased due to the rise and spread of various types of corruption, particularly in public finance. The 2008 global financial crisis is a testament to this; one of its main causes was non-compliance with applicable rules and regulations, a lack of transparency, and inequality and injustice.

Achieving economic and social objectives relies on the effectiveness of public finance. Therefore, the Algerian authorities have sought to reform their public budget by rationalising public expenditure and utilising available financial resources optimally. Conversely, they have focused on increasing revenues beyond hydrocarbons to prevent the budget deficit from being hostage to fluctuations in hydrocarbon prices. This falls within the framework of public financial governance, which requires sound practices, adherence to laws and regulations, and the implementation of performance oversight mechanisms.

Based on the above, the following question arises:

To what extent is governance applied in Algeria's public budget through the state's undertaken reforms?

This main question branches into a set of sub-questions that can be formulated as follows:

- What is meant by financial governance, and what are its principles?

What is the nature of the public budget in Algeria?

What applications does public budget governance have in Algeria?

Objectives of the study

This study aims to highlight the following:

- Understanding the concept of financial governance and its main performance indicators.
- To clarify the classification of the public budget in Algeria.
- Identify the motivations behind adopting public budget governance in Algeria and its main applications.

In order to address the aforementioned issue, this study is divided into three sections.

Section One: The nature of financial governance.

Section Two: The public budget system in Algeria.

Section Three: The Role of Financial Governance in Enhancing the Performance of the Public Budget in Algeria

Section One: The Nature of Financial Governance

1. The Concept of Financial Governance

The term 'governance' translates as 'governance'. The agreed scientific translation of this term is 'the method of exercising the powers of sound management'. However, the definition of governance has varied due to its overlap with many organisational, economic, financial and social matters, as well as its impact on society and the economy as a whole. However, various attempts have been made to define it[1].

1. Definitions of governance

Here are some definitions of governance:

- It is considered a fundamental tool for achieving modernisation, stability, development and prosperity within a framework of justice and equality[2].

The World Bank defines it as 'the manner in which authority is exercised in managing and administering the economic and social resources of the state for development'[3].

- It is the measures taken to maintain a balance between economic and social objectives, as well as the goals of individuals and society as a whole, with the aim of bringing together the interests of individuals, institutions and society at large (Adrian Cadbury, 1999)[4].

- Good governance refers to the optimal use of all resources and effective control over public spending. From the perspective of international organisations, particularly financial ones such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, good governance focuses on the administrative and economic development of countries to achieve sustainable growth.

2. Definition of financial governance

Financial governance, or budget governance, refers to 'the set of rules, procedures and policies that govern the state budget from preparation and drafting to adoption and execution, and oversight of financial operations'[5]. The goal is to combat the corruption and mismanagement of its components, enabling expenditure to be rationalised and revenues enhanced to achieve development in all its dimensions.

3. Objectives of Governance

A report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on governance in the Middle East and North Africa indicates that public administration and public finance significantly impact governance development, thereby enhancing sustainable development. The report states that developing public administration and public finance is the greatest challenge for MENA countries, and that reforming these areas greatly influences the pace of administrative and political reform[6].

According to United Nations reports, governance has many objectives that fundamentally revolve around three key elements:[7]

- Achieving consistency and social justice.
- Establishing and maintaining legitimacy within society.
- Ensuring the efficient achievement of economic development and the allocation and utilisation of public financial resources.

Second: Principles of Financial Governance

Financial governance adheres to fundamental principles that should be continuously upheld, such as transparency, accountability and participation[8].

Transparency refers to the provision of reliable and timely information relating to the activities, procedures, decisions and policies undertaken by the state and its various institutions, and ensuring this information is accessible. More transparent governments tend to have greater access to international capital markets. Heightened oversight by civil society and international markets encourages governments to adopt sound economic policies, thereby achieving greater financial stability.

- Accountability: This is defined as the ability to clarify how public funds are allocated, and to accept responsibility for decisions made by budget decision-makers.

It also ensures the independence of oversight bodies.

Participation refers to the involvement of all stakeholders in budgeting decisions at all stages. This process plays a crucial role in shaping governance alongside the right to object to decisions that do not align with stakeholders' interests.

Third: the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI).

Despite the existence of multiple governance measurement indicators, the WGI is widely regarded as one of the most reliable measures of governance quality. It contains six indices, each focusing on a particular aspect of governance, as outlined below:[9]

Control of Corruption (CC): This index measures the extent to which corruption can be controlled in a country, encompassing all types of corruption (political, economic and administrative). It helps to assess citizens' ability to hold government officials accountable for their mistakes and monitor government performance.

Government Effectiveness (GE): This indicator assesses the quality of services provided by the government, the quality of regulations and systems governing government operations, adherence to these regulations, and independence from political pressures.

Political Stability and Absence of Violence (PS): Numerous studies and international experiences have demonstrated that political stability significantly impacts economic and human development, as well as the sustainable development of countries. This index measures the likelihood of government instability, unlawful coups, or the use of violence (both political and terrorist).

Regulatory Quality (RQ): The Regulatory Quality Index measures the government's ability to formulate and implement effective policies and regulations that facilitate development, particularly in the private sector.

Rule of Law (RL): The rule of law is one of the Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2000 with the aim of achieving it by 2015. It measures stakeholders' confidence in the government's enforcement of laws. This confidence supports investment and creates a healthy investment environment, influencing the enforcement of contracts, the protection of property rights and the effective operation of the police and courts.

- Voice and Accountability (VA): The World Bank believes that good governance requires action from the government as well as active participation from the public. This indicator refers to citizens' ability to participate in electing their government, their freedom to form associations, and their freedom of expression and of the media.

Section Two: The Public Budget System in Algeria

The public budget in Algeria is governed by rules and regulations, as well as classifications and listings related to public expenditure and revenue.

Definition of the public budget in Algerian legislation
According to Article 6 of Law No. 17/84: 'The final revenues and expenditures of the state are determined annually by the Finance Law and distributed according to legislative provisions; thus, they constitute the public budget of the state.' Therefore, Law No. 17/84, comprising the first six articles, aims to provide a comprehensive overview of finance law in Algeria, indicating that finance law is merely a reflection of the state's public budget. Consequently, the public budget cannot be adopted, executed or approved by legislative authorities except through finance laws[10].

First: Public expenditure policy
This represents a set of actions and decisions taken by the government regarding public spending, with the aim of achieving specific objectives within a designated timeframe. There are rules that must be observed regarding public expenditure, collectively known as the 'Constitution of Public Expenditure'. These include the principles of utility and economy, equity in distribution, and authorisation[11].

1. Classification of public expenditures:
Public expenditures in Algeria's budget are classified into two categories: operating expenses and investment expenses. This is according to Article Three of the Public Accounting Law No. 21/90, which states: 'The budget is the document that estimates the total revenues and expenditures related to management and investment for the financial year, including public investment and capital expenditures, and their authorisation.'

Operating expenditures are the expenses allocated for the normal and regular activities of the state. They enable the management of state activities and ensure that ongoing contributions are applied appropriately. They ensure the continuity of state interests from an administrative perspective. Operating expenditures include employee and equipment expenses, which are recorded in a table referred to as 'B'. Operating expenditures are divided into external public debt burdens, allocations for public authorities, and expenditure specific to the means of operation.

- Investment expenditures: These refer to all expenses aimed at increasing productive capacities by enhancing capital formation. These expenditures are characterised by their investment nature, resulting in an increase in national output and consequently the wealth of the country. They are also referred to as the 'investment budget' or 'capital budget', consisting of economic, social and administrative structural investments, which are considered to be productive investments. Additionally, equipment grants provided to certain public institutions are included. Investment expenditures are generally allocated to various state economic sectors, such as industry and agriculture, to provide them with the means to achieve comprehensive development in the country.

2. Classification of budget burdens

Article 29 of Law No. 18/15 of 2018 regarding finance laws classifies budget burdens according to their economic nature as follows:

Expenses for personnel;

Management expenses.

Investment expenses.

Transfer payments.

Public debt burdens.

Financial operating expenses.

Unexpected expenses.

Second: public revenues.

The theory of public revenues has evolved alongside the changing economic and social role of the state, resulting in increased expenditure and a diversification of sources of public revenue. The nature of these revenues varies depending on the services provided by the state. Revenues encompass all tangible, monetary and real estate assets that flow into the state treasury and are necessary for covering public expenditure. Thus, the importance of public revenues is evident when considering their alignment with the scale of public expenditure, as well as their impact and influence on various aspects of life.

1. Classification of public revenues

It is well known that Algeria primarily relies on oil revenues to finance its various expenditures, in addition to state assets and sovereign revenues. The state may also resort to public borrowing or monetary issuance.

Public revenues in the general budget are classified in a table referred to as 'A', under the heading 'Final revenues applied to the state budget'. This consists of two sections:

Section One: Compulsory Resources, which are deductions obtained by the state without compensation. These revenues include tax revenues, fines, and the state's rightful share of profits from public sector institutions.

Section Two comprises Optional Resources, consisting of certain types of taxes voluntarily paid by individuals in exchange for benefits or services.

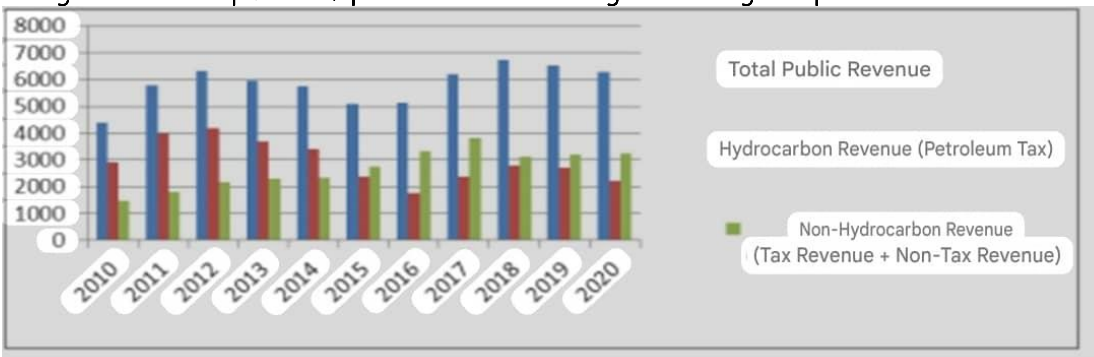
Recommendations from the Bank of Algeria regarding revenues:

Based on the Bank of Algeria's annual report for 2018/19, the Bank issued a set of recommendations concerning non-hydrocarbon tax revenues, including the following:

- Improving the collection of direct taxes, including corporate profits taxes and indirect taxes on local activities (local value-added tax). These taxes currently account for an abnormally low proportion of total tax revenues, compared to wage taxes and value-added taxes on imports, as well as compared to these taxes in developed and emerging countries.
- Reducing explicit and implicit subsidies: This pertains to subsidies on energy and fuel, with the aim of ensuring that lower-income populations benefit from them. For example, a slight increase in petroleum product taxes in 2016 and 2018 resulted in a rise in the amounts collected, from 0.3 billion DZD to 141 billion DZD in 2018.
- Rationalising various tax and customs exemptions: This is aimed at expanding their base, as well as rationalising nearly universal interest rate subsidies, which have had almost no impact on private investment.

Figure 1 illustrates the development of public revenues in Algeria from 2010 to 2020.

Figure 1: Development of public revenues in Algeria during the period 2010–2020.



Source: Azeddine Ben Cherchar, 'Assessment of Public Revenue Policy in Algeria and Its Role in Strengthening Economic Growth: A Standard Analytical Study for the Period (2010–2020)', Journal of Economic and Financial Research, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2021, p. 60.

It is clear from this figure that, from 2010 to 2014, hydrocarbon revenues, specifically oil tax revenues, dominated total revenues. This was due to the rise in oil prices during that period. From 2015 onwards, there has been an observed increase in non-hydrocarbon revenues, which is attributed to heightened incentives and advantages aimed at encouraging investment.

Section Three: The Role of Financial Governance in Enhancing the Performance of the Public Budget in Algeria

In recent years, Algeria has faced significant challenges in controlling the volume of public expenditure, particularly given that public revenues primarily rely on oil taxation. This dependence makes financing the budget deficit susceptible to fluctuations in oil prices while tax revenue remains weak.

First: International indicators for measuring public budget performance
International and regional institutions have established a set of indicators aimed at improving performance[12].

1. Budget transparency indicator
The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) adopted a code of good practices regarding financial transparency in 2007, based on the following principles:
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities.
- Public accessibility of budget processes.
Availability of information for public review.
Guarantees of the accuracy of data and information.

2. Open Budget Index
The Open Budget Initiative, launched by research organisations, aims to empower citizens by giving them access to budget information and encouraging the adoption of budgeting systems that allow for accountability. The Index measures the transparency of a country's public budget and classifies countries into the following categories:
- 0–20 points: countries that rarely or never provide budget information.
41–60 points: countries that provide some information.
- 61–80 points: countries that provide significant information.
- 80–100 points: countries that provide comprehensive information regarding the public budget.

3. Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Index
In 2006, a report was prepared to monitor the implementation of a performance measurement framework comprising a set of 28 high-level indicators. This framework uses certain benchmarking standards to track public expenditure and is based on the Code of Transparency in Public Finance issued by the International Monetary Fund and other standard criteria, which are divided into three categories.
- Outputs of the public budget management system.
Common attributes in the public financial management system.
The budget cycle and practices of donor agencies.
Each indicator measures the performance of a key element of the public budget management system on a four-point scale ranging from category A to category D.

4. Country Assessment of Accountability and Transparency:
This guide, established by the United Nations Development Programme in 2001, enables countries and governments to conduct self-assessments of their financial management. The indicators it relies on include:
- accounting infrastructure.

- Information management.
Expenditure and budget preparation.
- Internal control and auditing.
Financial reporting.
Budget report indicator

5. The government must provide a set of pre- and post-budget reports to ensure complete transparency throughout the various stages of the budget preparation process, from planning and preparation to adoption, execution and the oversight phase, with the aim of improving performance.

Secondly, the motivations for adopting public budget governance in Algeria are that the public budget system suffers from several deficiencies and imbalances, highlighting the need to develop and modernise this system.

1. Imbalances related to budget processes: These are the techniques, principles and rules on which the budget is prepared, including the following key items:[13]

A. Principle of annuality: The evolution of the state's functions has rendered the principle of annuality inflexible, particularly when executing large investments and multi-year development programmes.

B – Estimating allocations

Estimating allocations is currently based on previous years' open allocations. However, this method has become ineffective given the emergence of modern standards that could be employed in this area.

- C – Special Allocation Accounts: The lack of accurate studies prior to the establishment of these accounts has led most ministers to rely on them as their preferred means of managing various sectors, with no monitoring or oversight.

2. Imbalances in the budget code relate to expenditure and revenue.

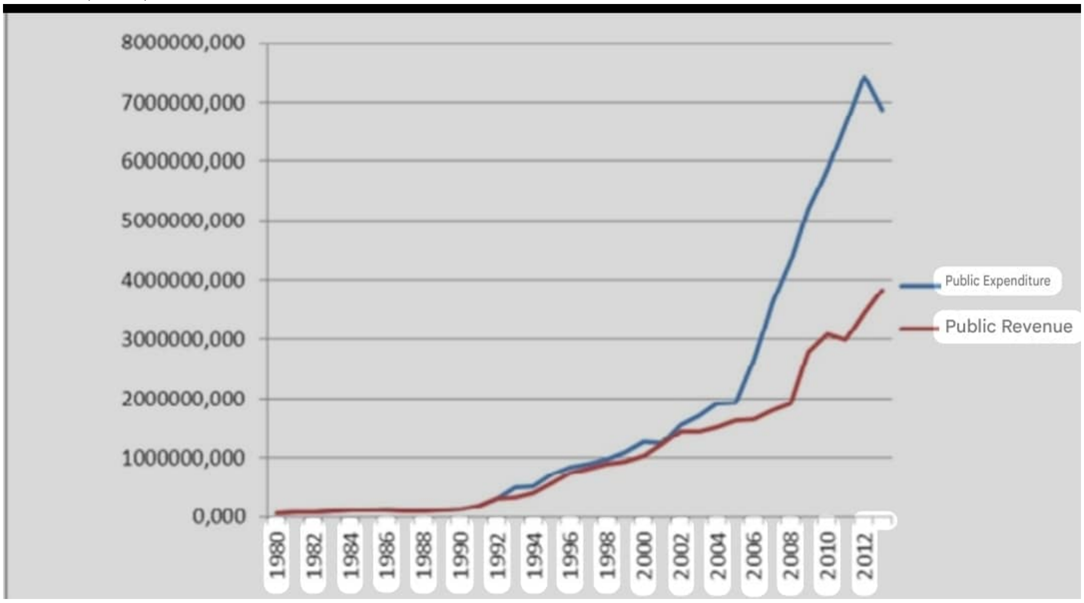
- Lack of detail in expenditure: the current system for classifying expenditure is ineffective as expenditure is scattered and its categories are unclear, making it difficult to identify different spending areas.

- Mismatch between operating and investment expenditures: operating expenditures are classified by ministries, while capital expenditures are classified by sectors (industry, agriculture, irrigation, etc.). This has resulted in expenses being recorded under the investment budget when they should be recorded under the operating budget. For example, vehicle purchases are recorded in one ministry's operating budget and another ministry's investment budget.

- Revenue code: Given the limited challenges, it is appropriate to amend revenue regulations within the framework of automated information processing.

Figure 02 illustrates the development curve of Algeria's public budget from 1980 to 2013.

Figure 02: Development curve of the state budget from 1980 to 2013
Unit: 1,000,000 DZD



Source: Ben Moussa, Oum Kalthoum and Issa Nabouya, 'Rationalising Public Expenditure: A Study of the Development of Public Expenditure in Algeria from 1980 to 2013', Journal of Business Administration and Economic Studies, Issue 4, p. 188.

From this figure, we can see that there was a budget surplus during the 1980s, due to the rise in oil prices which helped to cover the budget deficit. However, from 1993 to 2013, a budget deficit was recorded due to fluctuations in oil prices and an increase in public expenditure, particularly capital expenditure, due to previously planned development programmes.

3. Imbalances in Oversight of the Public Budget

Despite the existence of numerous oversight bodies, their performance remains below the required level. The Court of Auditors is an example of this issue. The current budget system focuses on monitoring accounts without addressing the effectiveness or appropriateness of expenditure. Furthermore, although the budget control law theoretically provides parliament with an opportunity to monitor budget implementation and evaluate the resulting outcomes, the process of voting on it is considered to be merely formal.

Table 01: Development of the Assessment Results of Legislative Oversight and the Supreme Oversight Body in Algeria According to the Open Budget Survey.

Year	**2010**	**2012**	**2015**	**2017**	**2019**	**2021**
Legislative Authority Oversight	Weak	Weak	Limited	Limited	Weak	Weak
Court of Auditors Oversight	Weak	Limited	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak

Source: Saida Aït Cided, Ridwaan Ansaid and Mohamed Tarchi, 'Oversight of the Public Budget in Algeria in Light of Budgetary Reforms: Towards Activating the Role of Oversight Bodies', Journal of Management and Development for Research and Studies, Vol. 13, No. 2, December 2024, p. 387.

From this table, it is evident that legislative oversight and oversight by the Court of Auditors over the public budget have been, and continue to be, weak.

4. Lack of transparency in the budget

The International Monetary Fund's charter on establishing transparency in public financial management emphasises the necessity for budget-related supporting documents to include various disclosures and reference documents. However, in Algeria, these documents are monopolised by a specific authority and are not accessible to the public, making them very difficult to obtain. International institutions recognise state secrecy only in matters of security and defence.

Transparency is measured by the extent to which the public can access information about how governments manage public resources, evaluated by the availability of information online and the timeliness of eight key documents attached to the public budget.

The documents provided by the Algerian Ministry of Finance are insufficient and do not provide essential information. Furthermore, no documents are attached to the budget, as stipulated by the charter of good practices in public financial transparency.

Table 02: Available public budget documents in Algeria from 2010 to 2019.

2019	2017	2015	2012	2010	Year
×	#	#	#	#	Preliminary Budget Statement
#	#	✓	✓	#	Draft General Budget
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Official State Budget
×	×	×	×	×	Citizens' Budget
#	×	✓	#	×	Periodic Reports
#	#	×	#	#	Semi-Annual Audit Reports
×	#	×	#	#	Year-End Report
#	#	×	#	#	Audit Report

Publicly Available Document ✓

Late Published Document, Not Online, or Published for Internal Use Only #

Not Prepared and Not Available Document ×

Source: Iman Abdous, 'Mechanisms of Public Budget Governance and Trends in Its Application According to Budgetary Reforms in Algeria', Journal of the Institute of Economic Sciences, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2021, p. 359.

From the data in the table, it is clear that apart from the official state budget, which is permanently published in finance laws and accessible to the public, the provision and publication of other documents is very weak.

Third: Applications of Public Budget Governance in Algeria

The current budget system in Algeria no longer meets the requirements for modern public financial management. According to the Open Budget Survey report organised by the Global Budget Partnership, which examines the extent to which the general principles of governance are applied, namely transparency, participation and accountability, this is the case.

Public budget governance involves adopting the key principles of public budget governance to achieve better management of state resources:[14]

1. Transparency

Law 18/15 enshrines transparency in Algeria's public budget by emphasising the necessity of attaching documents and reports that provide essential and useful information. While Algeria produces seven out of the eight documents recommended by the International Budget Partnership, these are often not made available to the public or published in a timely manner.

According to the official website of the General Directorate of Budget under the Ministry of Finance, which launched at the end of 2020, Algeria published a Citizens' Budget from 2016 to 2021. This is a positive step towards enhancing budget transparency.

Article 72 of Law 18/15 states that, before the end of the first quarter of the financial year, the government must present a report on the status of the national economy and the direction of public finances in preparation for the Finance Law. This report should include an overview of the major economic and budgetary policy guidelines and a medium-term assessment of the state's resources and liabilities. This supports the principle of good governance, which advocates budget management based on clear, reliable and sustainable fiscal policies with a medium-term perspective[15].

Additionally, Article 75 of the organic law sets out the documents required for submitting the Finance Law.

- a report on the medium-term economic, social and financial situation and prospects, with a particular focus on economic and financial balances.
- explanatory annexes detailing developments by type of tax, including those related to new measures, as well as general revenue estimates from other sources.
- Three volumes of documents pertaining to the draft state budget, a report on priorities and planning prepared by each minister and every head of a public institution responsible for managing the programme portfolio, and the regional distribution of the state budget.

2. Adopting a Performance-Based Programme Budget

A programme is a collection of financial allocations that contribute to the achievement of a specific task associated with one or more departments within one or more ministries or public institutions. These allocations are defined based on a set of clear and coherent objectives. This approach moves away from the current system of dividing financial allocations by chapters and sectors, towards a new distribution system focused on programmes.

3. Medium-Term Budget Framework

This represents a new method of preparing the state budget, utilising a medium-term budget framework instead of the traditional approach based on inputs. This approach enables the planning of appropriate programmes and policies, while providing greater credibility to the budget estimates, taking into account surrounding economic and social conditions.

Article 5 of Law 18/15 states: 'The medium-term budget framework shall be established annually by the government, based on a proposal from the finance minister, at the beginning of the finance law preparation process. It sets the revenue and expenditure estimates, the balance of the state budget and, if applicable, the state's debt for the coming year and the following two years. The medium-term budget framework may be revised during the preparation of the draft finance law for the year.' This law sets a ceiling on the state's expenditure and revenue over a period that allows for the limitation of future obligations.

4. Performance Evaluation

According to Article 87 of the Organic Law concerning the budget settlement submitted each year, the following are to be included: explanatory annexes; a general account of the state; and a ministerial report on productivity. This report outlines the conditions under which the programmes recorded in the budget were implemented, and the extent to which the expected objectives were achieved. These objectives are measured and monitored through related performance indicators, alongside the actual results and explanations concerning any observed discrepancies.

5. Fund accounting

Article 65 of the Organic Law defines accounting divisions as commitment accounting and budget revenue and expenditure accounting, based on the principle of fund accounting. Additionally, general accounting is used for all operations based on the principle of recognising rights and obligations, as well as cost analysis accounting, which aims to analyse the costs of various activities committed within the programmes. The article emphasises the necessity for the state's accounts to be accurate and orderly, reflecting its assets and financial condition, and underlines the efforts aimed at budget governance.

The inclusion of various types of accounting for the state budget is considered a qualitative step forward in the organic laws, as fund accounting has been introduced to provide comprehensive oversight of revenues and expenditures[16].

6. Oversight

The budgetary reform adopted by Algeria through Organic Law 18/15 concerning finance laws has led to the establishment of a set of legal mechanisms aimed at ensuring effective oversight of the public budget. This includes enhancing the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight, activating the supervisory role of the Court of Auditors, and fostering institutional convergence between these two bodies. These measures are vital for improving the management of public finances and combatting corruption.

To enhance oversight of the public budget, the Algerian authorities must prioritise the following measures:[17]

- Voting on the Finance Law should be done item by item, rather than as a whole.

The nature of cases of urgency that require recourse to pre-allocated funds should be clearly defined, along with capping these allocations.

- Grant greater powers to members of parliament when discussing the budget settlement law (formerly the budget control law).
- Provide the legislative authority with the necessary autonomy and reform its internal system, while ensuring greater independence for the Court of Auditors.
Strengthen the framework for cooperation and coordination between the Court of Auditors and the legislative authority.
- Digitise public budget data to allow relevant parties to access unified data and seek regional and international cooperation to exchange experiences in this field.

Conclusion

The public budget is considered one of the most important tools of financial policy, aimed at achieving several objectives. The most important of these are to promote social justice, boost economic growth and combat poverty.

In Algeria, the authorities have sought to rationalise expenditure, increase revenue and enhance oversight of the public budget by providing oversight tools for the legislative authority and granting greater independence to the Court of Auditors, as part of budgetary reforms to implement governance principles in financial policy. However, these reforms have not yet aligned with international standards in this area.

Based on the above, the following key findings can be concluded:
- There is a lack of transparency, weak accountability and oversight in the management of the state's public budget.
- The necessity to embark on deep reforms of the state budget and address the identified weaknesses.
- The importance of enhancing international cooperation and sharing knowledge in the field of public finance.
- The importance of applying governance principles to the public budget in Algeria as a model approach to management.

Footnotes:

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