

Budget Work and Democracy Building: The Case of IBASE in Brazil
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Executive Summary

IBASE is a Brazilian NGO that works to promote human rights and government accountability. The mission of the organization is to contribute to a democratic society where freedom, participation, and diversity flourish. IBASE therefore views its work on budget issues as an instrument of democracy building, working to equip broader civil society with budget information and analysis to strengthen social justice advocacy. IBASE does not include specific analytic efforts or targeted attempts to itself influence government policy, IBASE's efforts are entirely focused on providing skills and information to enable broader civil society budget advocacy.

Budget work is a relatively small component of IBASE's activities. Five full-time members of IBASE's total staff of 50 people work on budget issues. Of the organization's eight areas of focus in 2005, two were directly linked to its budget work: examining civil society participation during the current administration of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and monitoring public policies through budget education and information.

Congruent with its mission, IBASE's budget work focuses on raising the importance of certain issues on the public agenda, enhancing the capacity of other civil society actors to participate in public finance debates, and promoting public access to information. As the authors of the case study conclude: "IBASE's approach to budget work is about putting basic budget information into citizen's hands on the assumption that eventually power will follow." Many testify that IBASE's long-term educational and participatory work on budgets has expanded awareness, catalyzed civil society advocacy efforts, and linked groups into a single network—beginning in Rio de Janeiro state and later throughout Brazil.

IBASE's research and bulletins have helped to directly expand the level of budget transparency in Brazil. But, their primary impact is on building the capacity of other oversight actors to intervene. Through a program that educates journalists, IBASE has clearly enhanced and boosted media coverage of budget and finance issues. The organization has also increased awareness and participation of citizen's and legislators at the local and national level through dissemination of its bulletins, newsletters, and resources in popular languages. Its capacity-building efforts include training on budget monitoring geared toward the general public and preparing "social leaders" for advocacy work. Both programs were developed initially in the state of Rio de Janeiro, but have later substantially expanded their reach through an innovative internet-based distance-learning program.

As IBASE's commitment to budget work further deepens, they will confront several challenges including finding ways to integrate budget analysis into the project and advocacy work of the rest of the organization, sharpening its expanding citizen capacity-building efforts into effective campaign leadership on budget issues; orienting the organization's targets to executive levels of government; and developing its investigative work to include taxes, revenues, and the effectiveness of public spending.