

MODULE 3



ACCESS TO INFORMATION FOR MONITORING

MODULE 3 ❖ ACCESS TO INFORMATION FOR MONITORING

LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS MODULE

By the end of this module, participants will have:

- recognized the importance of information for budget work;
- explained what budget information should be made publicly available;
- outlined the range of different documents that are relevant for budget advocacy work;
- identified gaps in available budget documents/information;
- explained the purpose and process of the Ask Your Government Campaign and its key findings;
- described and gave examples of the access to information process in their countries;
- recognized barriers to accessing budget information; and
- listed strategies for overcoming some barriers to budget information.

STRUCTURE OF THE MODULE

Session 5: Advocating for Access to Information

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|--|------------|
| 1. Brainstorm: “Access to Information is Important because...” | 10 minutes |
| 2. MKSS documentary + discussion | 25 minutes |
| 3. Input & Discussion: Essential budget documents | 45 minutes |
| 4. Energizer: Fruit salad | 10 minutes |

Session 6: Accessing Budget Information

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|---|------------|
| 1. TASK 3.1 ■ Match the budget documents | 20 minutes |
| 2. Input & Discussion: Ask Your Government campaign | 20 minutes |
| 3. TASK 3.2 ■ Access to Information Process in my Country | 15 minutes |
| 4. Pair Sharing | 10 minutes |
| 5. Input: Sources of Information to support our Evidence-based advocacy | 15 minutes |
| 6. Task 3.3 ■ Barriers to accessing information | 20 minutes |
| 7. Task 3.4 ■ Strategies for overcoming barriers | 20 minutes |

RESOURCES NEEDED FOR MODULE 3

- Flipchart paper and colored pens
- Flashcards or large post-its
- Ask Your Government Campaign PowerPoint presentation
- Cards with names of 8 key budget documents and definitions
- MKSS documentary on the Right to Information

SESSION 5

ADVOCATING FOR ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Duration of session: 1 hour and 30 minutes

STRUCTURE OF THE SESSION

1. Brainstorm: “Access to Information is Important because...”	10 minutes
2. MKSS documentary + discussion	25 minutes
3. Input & Discussion: Essential budget documents	45 minutes
4. Energizer: Fruit salad	10 minutes

1. BRAINSTORM “ACCESS TO INFORMATION IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE...”

10 MINUTES

- Ask participants to complete the sentence **Access to information is important because...**
- Each participant will receive two **FLASHCARDS**
- Participants should write out one reason per **FLASHCARD**.
- Invite participants to paste this up on a prepared flipchart.
- Traditionally, budget processes have been very secretive and have involved a handful of officials in any country.
- Since the mid-nineties, civil society groups have begun to engage in budget work but a major barrier to their work is lack of access to information.
- More than any other sector in civil society, budget work is fundamentally dependent on “evidence-based” advocacy, i.e., budget work requires the presentation of “facts and figures” in an accurate and accessible format.
- This dependence on facts and figures requires budget groups to access information on government budgets – something that is not very easy even today.
- This session will focus on two current IBP projects on access to information. The purpose of this focus is to understand how to use government information for expenditure tracking activities and related advocacy campaigns.

2. WATCHING A DOCUMENTARY: MKSS + DISCUSSION

25 MINUTES

- Invite participants to watch the MKSS documentary on the right to information.
- Hold a brief plenary discussion about the right to information issues raised in the documentary.

3. INPUT & DISCUSSION: ESSENTIAL BUDGET DOCUMENTS

45 MINUTES

- Introduce this input by explaining that it is important to understand what sort of budget information should be available in countries in terms of international best practice. This provides a benchmark against which to evaluate the situation in your country, and advocate for access better, more or other kinds of budget information.
- Governments should produce and make available to the public in a timely manner the following eight key budget documents:
 - The **Pre-Budget Statement** should be released during the first phase of the Executive's Formulation of the budget. This document is intended to disclose the parameters in which the executive will form its budget proposal -- specifically, total expenditures, total revenues expected and debt to be incurred during the upcoming budget year.
 - The **Executive's Budget Proposal** is the draft budget which should be made available to the public before the actual budget law is passed by the legislature, so that citizens have the opportunity to provide their input into the drafting of the budget law before it is finalized and passed. The Executive's budget proposal should contain the following information:

Expenditure classification

- administrative
- functional
- economic
- programme

Revenue classification

- tax
- non-tax

Debt

- stock at the beginning and at the end (yearly additional borrowing)
- composition (different instruments, different maturities, interests, currencies, domestic vs. external)
- interest

Macroeconomic information

- different info can be relevant for different countries (e.g. oil producing countries)
- basic info is: GDP growth, inflation, unemployment, interest rate
- changes in the macroeconomic framework can have a significant impact on budget (on both revenues and expenditures sides)

Multi-annual data

- future projections
- past data

Public policy information

- new policies as distinct from existing policies
 - links between policies and budget
 - links between budget and policies to fight poverty
- The **Enacted Budget** is a document that is approved by the legislature and passed into law as the budget to be implemented for the upcoming fiscal year.

- The **Citizens Budget** is a non technical representation of the terms and the concepts in the budget which can be understood by citizens that do not have technical background in budgets or fiscal policy.
- **In-Year Reports** should be produced and made available to the public on a monthly or quarterly basis and they should report on the implementation of the budget including the revenue, expenditure and the debt situation of the government.
- The **Mid-Year Review** also provides a comprehensive update regarding the implementation of the budget including a review of the economic assumptions underlying the budget and an updated forecast of the budget outcome for the current budget year.
- The **Year-End Report** should be produced and made available to the public by the executive branch, and it should report extensively on the government's fiscal activities.
- The **Audit Report** is the annual report issued by the Supreme Audit Institution attesting to the government's year-end final accounts and whether public resources have been utilized effectively.
- Additional (official) information that is necessary to obtain a deeper perspective regarding the budget:
 - Demographic information.
 - Sector-specific documents (e.g. health, education, defense)
 - Sector-specific information (geographical distribution, number of teachers/doctors in different regions, epidemiologic profile of the country).
- Participants will find notes on the information covered in this input in **READING 3.1 ■ ESSENTIAL BUDGET DOCUMENTS** in their Workbooks.
- Invite questions from the floor and facilitate a discussion to make sure that all participants are familiar with all the types of documents.
 - Which of these documents are not produced?
 - Which of these documents are produced but are not publicly available in your country?
 - Which of these documents are produced and made public in your country?

4. **ENERGIZER: FRUIT SALAD**

10 MINUTES

- Use this **ENERGIZER** to divide the participants into groups.
- Ask participants and facilitators to arrange themselves, with their chairs, in a closed circle.
- Assign one of the following fruits to each person in the circle, including yourself: apple, banana, mango, plum. The number of fruits you introduce should match the number of groups you want to divide participants into.
- Explain to the participants that everyone will sit on a chair. There will also be a caller, who will not have a chair.
- The caller will call out the name of a fruit. When the name of a fruit is called out, all the participants with that name of fruit, including the caller (irrespective whether he/she is that fruit) will get up and run to a vacant chair.

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- The caller can also call “fruit salad” – this means that everyone will get up to find a vacant chair.
- Repeat this a few times, to increase energizer levels and to get some laughter going. It is great fun, but be cautious with less mobile participants.
- Request that participants with the same fruit name gather together to work in a group in the next session.

END OF SESSION 5

READING 3.1: ESSENTIAL BUDGET DOCUMENTS

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- future projections
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Public policy information

- new policies as distinct from existing policies
- links between policies and budget
- links between budget and policies to fight poverty

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- **In-Year Reports** should be produced and made available to the public on a monthly or quarterly basis and they should report on the implementation of the budget including the revenue, expenditure and the debt situation of the government.
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Additional (official) information that is necessary to obtain a deeper perspective regarding the budget:

- Demographic information
- Sector-specific documents (e.g. health, education, defense)
- Sector-specific information (geographical distribution, number of teachers/doctors in different regions, epidemiologic profile of the country)

SESSION 6

ACCESSING BUDGET INFORMATION

Duration of session: 2 hours

STRUCTURE OF THE SESSION

1. TASK 3.1 ■ Match the budget documents	20 minutes
2. Input & Discussion: Ask Your Government campaign	20 minutes
3. TASK 3.2 ■ Access to Information Process in my Country	15 minutes
4. Pair Sharing	10 minutes
5. Input: Sources of Information to support our evidence-based advocacy	15 minutes
6. Task 3.3 ■ Barriers to accessing information	20 minutes
7. Task 3.4 ■ Strategies for overcoming barriers	20 minutes

1. TASK 3.1 ■ MATCH THE BUDGET DOCUMENTS 20 MINUTES

- **Aim:** to identify the eight key budget documents.
- Divide participants into pairs. Ask them to turn to **TASK 3.1 ■ MATCH THE BUDGET DOCUMENTS** in their Workbooks.
- Working with their partners, invite participants to match the document names in the left-hand column with the definitions in the right-hand column.
- This exercise can also be done using cards. Photocopy the page with the budget document names and definitions onto card, making sure that the budget document names are on one color, and the definitions on another. Cut the sheets into cards and give each pair or team a full set of both color cards to match up.
- The first team to complete this task wins a prize.
- After 10 to 15 minutes, ask all the pairs to call out the budget documents and their definitions. Make sure everyone has the correct matches.

ANSWERS TO TASK 3.1

- A – 4 Pre Budget Statement:** A document which is produced during the first phase of the Executive's Formulation of the budget and which discloses the parameters of the budget for the upcoming year.
- B – 1 In Year Report:** A document that is released on a monthly or quarterly basis to report on the implementation of the budget.
- C – 7 Executive Budget Proposal:** A document which should be made available to the public before the actual budget law is passed by the legislature.
- D – 3 Audit Report:** A document issued by the country's watch dog organization that attests to whether public resources have been utilized effectively.
- E – 8 Enacted Budget:** A document that is approved by the legislature and passed into law as the budget to be implemented for the upcoming fiscal year.

- F – 2 Citizens Budget:** A nontechnical representation of the terms and the concepts in the budget which can be understood by citizens that do not have technical background in budgets or fiscal policy.
- G – 5 Mid-Year Report:** A document that contains a comprehensive update on the implementation of the budget, including a review of the economic assumptions underlying the budget and an updated forecast of the budget outcome for the current budget year.
- H – 6 Year-End Report:** A document that reports extensively on the government's fiscal activities and the government's performance.

2. INPUT & DISCUSSION: ASK YOUR GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN 20 MINUTES

Note: This input is supported by PowerPoint file *MODULE 3 Ask Your Government Campaign*.

3. TASK 3.2 ■ ACCESS TO INFORMATION PROCESS IN MY COUNTRY 15 MINUTES

- a. Describe the formal process to follow in your country to access government information.
- b. List the gaps in your knowledge of this formal process.
- c. Which of these gaps would you need to fill for your budget advocacy work?

4. PAIR SHARING 10 MINUTES

Request participants to find one person who they would like to share their findings with, as well the access to information context for that participant's country.

5. INPUT: SOURCES OF INFORMATION TO SUPPORT OUR EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY 15 MINUTES

Introduce this input by explaining that there are some alternative ways of obtaining budget information besides the budget documents that were listed.

- Budget information may be available on official government websites, including:
 - the ministry of finance
 - the ministry of planning
 - the presidency
 - the official statistics institute
 - sector-specific ministries
 - local governments
 - the central bank
- Budget information may be available from international institutions including:
 - World Bank country reports
 - UNDP global and country reports
 - Transparency International corruption reports
 - Reports from agencies working in a country
 - Information in the hands of the above-mentioned agencies

- Budget information can be obtained by:
 - Requesting information from agencies working in a country.
 - Reviewing what is available in the Congress or Parliament -they should have this information.
 - Using the access to information law if it exists in the country.
 - Review information that is available through donor agencies and multilateral allies.
 - Review the sites of international organizations to find information specific to a country.
 - Locate and meet with NGOs to share information and perspectives.
 - Partner with academic institutions and research centers.
- Participants will find notes on the information presented during this input in **READING 3.2 ■ SOURCES OF INFORMATION TO SUPPORT OUR EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY** in their Workbooks.

6. TASK 3.3 ■ BARRIERS TO ACCESSING INFORMATION

20 MINUTES

- **Aim:** to identify typical barriers to accessing budget information and to develop ideas for overcoming these barriers.
- Introduce this task by highlighting the following points:
 - Budget documents maintained by national governments frequently do not disclose all the information in a format that is in line with international good practices.
 - However, lack of transparency in budgets is affected by many other reasons.
 - This session will focus on the typical barriers to accessing information at national and local levels and discuss techniques of overcoming these barriers.
- Invite participants to help you brainstorm some typical barriers to accessing information. Ask anyone from the group to call out their ideas and list these on flip chart paper.
- Participants can also record their ideas on the worksheet **TASK 3.3 ■ BARRIERS TO ACCESSING INFORMATION** in their Workbooks.
- A typical list of barriers could include:
 - Lack of knowledge or limited knowledge on what information is kept by the government.
 - Lack of knowledge or limited knowledge on which government department keeps the information you want.
 - Lack of knowledge or limited knowledge on which government official keeps the information you want.
 - The government official who has the information you need is repeatedly evasive, not available or absent when you visit his/her office.
 - Government official(s) respond with hostility when you request information.
 - Record keeping practices are poor and documents are not available or only partly available in government office(s).
 - Records are maintained in very poor condition and are illegible.
 - Records are voluminous and technical.
 - Records are misleading or contradictory.
 - Websites are not updated or contain very large files that are difficult to download or internet access is weak.
- Place this list in a prominent place in the venue.

7. TASK 3.4 ■ STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS

20 MINUTES

- **Aim:** for participants to draw on their own experiences and knowledge to identify possible solutions for overcoming barriers to budget information.
- Provide participants with flashcards (one color only). Ask participants to write down some typical strategies for overcoming barriers to budget information. One example only should be written on each flashcard.
- Stick a clean sheet of flipchart paper up on the wall next to the one where participants brainstormed barriers to accessing budget information. Invite participants to stick their solutions up on the clean sheet.
- Ask participants to gather around the two flipcharts. Briefly review and acknowledge the strategies emerging from the group. Invite participants to record some or all of the strategies in their Workbooks at **TASK 3.4 ■ STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS**.
- While participants are standing around the flipcharts, add to their by confirming or highlighting the following strategies.

STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

IDENTIFY SYMPATHETIC OFFICIALS

- No government is a monolith: while some public officials are hostile to civil society's requests for information and assistance, others are extremely forthcoming.
- The latter can be critical allies in an effort to obtain information on public programs.
- To win over officials who are less forthcoming but not completely opposed, civil society groups can try to persuade them of the need for transparency, provide an example of how transparency would benefit them, and/or appeal to their egos by offering them an opportunity to showcase their work.
- One way to obtain information from hostile officials is to pressure them, such as by going over their heads, i.e., appealing to their bosses.
- Alternatively, civil society organizations can also work to build a relationship of trust with both officials who are not completely supportive as well as those who are initially hostile to them.

USE "RIGHT TO INFORMATION" LAWS

- Approximately 90 countries around the world have laws that guarantee citizens the right to information.
- An access to information law can be central to an organization's strategy for conducting a social audit.
- Even if their country has such a law, however, groups will not always be able to obtain needed information.
- Information requests can run into a variety of obstacles, including claims that files are missing or that their disclosure would harm national security.
- An excellent collection of studies on access to information laws, including implementation problems, is available at www.freedominfo.org.

USE INDIVIDUAL AGENCY DISCLOSURE POLICIES, COURTS, AND CIVIL PETITIONS

- In countries where there is no law guaranteeing access to information, individual agencies may sometimes have disclosure policies or charters on citizen rights that can provide for such access.
- Some countries that do not have access to information laws do have provisions or laws for access to public procurement information.
- In other countries, the national constitution may protect individual liberties that include the right to information.
- Citizens have successfully used constitutional provisions to file petitions in national courts to obtain information, though this is obviously a complicated process that can take years to complete.

COLLABORATE WITH AUDITORS, LEGISLATORS, AND DONORS

- Public audit institutions can be an excellent source of information.
- Legislators too often have much more information on public projects than ordinary citizens do, and civil society groups may be able to obtain extensive information through a sympathetic legislator.
- Similarly, in countries that are highly donor-dependent, donor organizations may have access to information on public projects – especially the projects these donors fund.
- Donors may be very forthcoming to a social audit process given their interest in ensuring that the funds they have donated are spent properly.

DIRECT ACTION AND CAMPAIGNS

- The pioneer of non-violent direct action, Mahatma Gandhi, encouraged the use of direct action campaigns to demand changes from the government.
- He described the government response to such a campaign as follows: “First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.” Organizations that are repeatedly denied information might choose a strategy that relies on direct non-violent confrontation with the government agency that denies them information.
- Such a strategy should be undertaken only after careful deliberation given its possible consequences, including violent retribution from the government.

KEEP IN MIND

- When conducting analysis and advocacy work using aid and/or budget information, don't jump to conclusions about the information or data that you cannot see. Be honest about the limitations of your findings, stressing that they are based on the limited information that is available.
- When publicly available information is limited, use this as an opportunity to demand more information so that you can have a better understanding of what is really happening with regard to the particular development issue that you are working on.
- It is valid to make your own choices and decisions regarding the use of limited data and/or incomplete information in your advocacy work, but always explain these decisions. If the government says that you are wrong, ask them to offer a more complete picture.

Participants will find information on the strategies outlined above in **READING 3.3 ■ STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO BUDGET INFORMATION** in their Workbooks.

TASK SHEET 3.1: MATCH THE BUDGET DOCUMENTS

Match the names of the **budget documents** in the left-hand column with the **definitions** in the right-hand column.

BUDGET DOCUMENTS	DEFINITIONS
<p style="text-align: center;">A</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PRE-BUDGET STATEMENT</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>A document that is released on a monthly or quarterly basis to report on the implementation of the budget.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">B</p> <p style="text-align: center;">IN-YEAR REPORT</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p>A non-technical representation of the terms and the concepts in the budget which can be understood by citizens that do not have technical background in budgets or fiscal policy.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">C</p> <p style="text-align: center;">EXECUTIVE'S BUDGET PROPOSAL</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>A document issued by the country's watchdog organization that attests to whether public resources have been utilized effectively.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">D</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AUDIT REPORT</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p>A document which is produced during the first phase of the Executive's Formulation of the budget and which discloses the parameters of the budget for the upcoming year.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">E</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ENACTED BUDGET</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p>A document that contains a comprehensive update on the implementation of the budget, including a review of the economic assumptions underlying the budget and an updated forecast of the budget outcome for the current budget year.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">F</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CITIZENS BUDGET</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">6</p> <p>A document that reports extensively on the government's fiscal activities and the government's performance.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">G</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MID-YEAR REVIEW</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">7</p> <p>A document which should be made available to the public before the actual budget law is passed by the legislature.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">H</p> <p style="text-align: center;">YEAR-END REPORT</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">8</p> <p>A document which is passed into law by the legislature as the budget to be implemented for the upcoming financial year.</p>

TASK SHEET 3.2: FORMAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION PROCESS IN MY COUNTRY

a. Describe the formal process to follow in your country to access government information.

b. List the gaps in your knowledge of this formal process.

c. Which of these gaps would you need to fill for your budget advocacy work?

READING 3.2: SOURCES OF INFORMATION TO SUPPORT OUR EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY

- Budget information may be available on official government websites, including:
 - the ministry of finance
 - the ministry of planning
 - the presidency
 - the official statistics institute
 - sector-specific ministries
 - local governments
 - the central bank.

- Budget information may be available from international institutions including:
 - World Bank country reports
 - UNDP global and country reports
 - Transparency International corruption reports
 - Reports from agencies working in a country
 - Information in the hands of the above-mentioned agencies

- Budget information can be obtained by:
 - Requesting information from agencies working in a country.
 - Reviewing what is available in the Congress or Parliament -they should have this information.
 - Using the access to information law if it exists in the country.
 - Review information that is available through donor agencies and multilateral allies.
 - Review the sites of international organizations to find information specific to a country.
 - Locate and meet with NGOs to share information and perspectives.
 - Partner with academic institutions and research centers.

READING 3.3: STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO BUDGET INFORMATION

IDENTIFY SYMPATHETIC OFFICIALS

- No government is a monolith: while some public officials are hostile to civil society's requests for information and assistance, others are extremely forthcoming.
- The latter can be critical allies in an effort to obtain information on public programs.
- To win over officials who are less forthcoming but not completely opposed, civil society groups can try to persuade them of the need for transparency, provide an example of how transparency would benefit them, and/or appeal to their egos by offering them an opportunity to showcase their work.
- One way to obtain information from hostile officials is to pressure them, such as by going over their heads, i.e., appealing to their bosses.
- Alternatively, civil society organizations can also work to build a relationship of trust with both officials who are not completely supportive as well as those who are initially hostile to them.

USE "RIGHT TO INFORMATION" LAWS

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- An access to information law can be central to an organization's strategy for conducting a social audit.
- Even if their country has such a law, however, groups will not always be able to obtain needed information.
- Information requests can run into a variety of obstacles, including claims that files are missing or that their disclosure would harm national security.
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USE INDIVIDUAL AGENCY DISCLOSURE POLICIES, COURTS, AND CIVIL PETITIONS

- In countries where there is no law guaranteeing access to information, individual agencies may sometimes have disclosure policies or charters on citizen rights that can provide for such access.
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DIRECT ACTION AND CAMPAIGNS

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- He described the government response to such a campaign as follows: “First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.” Organizations that are repeatedly denied information might choose a strategy that relies on direct non-violent confrontation with the government agency that denies them information.
- Such a strategy should be undertaken only after careful deliberation given its possible consequences, including violent retribution from the government.

KEEP IN MIND

- When conducting analysis and advocacy work using aid and/or budget information, don't jump to conclusions about the information or data that you cannot see. Be honest about the limitations of your findings, stressing that they are based on the limited information that is available.
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