



OPENING BUDGETS IN MEXICO HELPS OPEN CARE OPTIONS FOR NEW MOTHERS

Far too often, the joys of a new baby are tragically cut short for many Mexican families, when a mother succumbs to hypertension, hemorrhaging or other life-ending complications related to pregnancy.

While the Mexican government has long voiced its commitment to improving healthcare and decreasing maternal mortality, the death rate hovered at approximately 6.2 women's deaths per 10,000 live births for more than a decade (from 1990 to 2003). Poor women in rural areas were disproportionately affected.

In the late 1990s, a series of reports revealing the existence of secret presidential slush funds galvanized civil society groups in Mexico to push for increased public access to information, including increased access to information on the Mexican government's budget. By 2002, a law guaranteeing citizen's rights to information had been passed and a highly-respected commission to oversee its implementation established.

The next year, Fundar, a civil society organization based in Mexico City, was convinced that resources in the national budget were not being allocated effectively to combat the loss of women's lives during childbirth. Fundar was able to use budget information that had previously been unavailable to the public to identify a lack of funding for emergency obstetric care throughout the country.

Armed with the new information, Fundar, along with a coalition of other nongovernmental organizations, met with policymakers to argue for specific funding allocations, emphasizing that increased funds for emergency health care would directly benefit pregnant women, especially those from poorer, indigenous communities.

Fundar secured an increase of US \$50 million in 2003 for a national program expressly designed to decrease maternal mortality rates. "Our challenge is to ensure that this funding is sustained and that women in the poorest Mexican states are able to benefit from it," said Helena Hofbauer, Director General of Fundar. "But the experience convinced us that linking access to information with credible analysis of the budget can impact people's daily lives and well-being."

Since 1999, the Fundar Center for Research and Analysis has monitored public funds in Mexico as a way of advancing democracy. Fundar has developed a unique role in Mexico's civil society as a professional, research-based organization that aims to participate in social justice debates by highlighting the importance of budget transparency to the expansion of democracy. Fundar's strategy of advocating for increased public access to government budget information at the national and local level, coupled with its clear and relevant analyses, has built a greater understanding of the connection between the budget and its impact on people's lives in Mexico.

“In the case of reducing maternal mortality,” noted Helena, “emergency obstetric care was finally included in the health insurance scheme that was promoted by this government for the poorest sectors of the population, with additional fresh resources.”

This upcoming year, Fundar plans to use the results of the *Open Budget Index 2006* as it continues to advocate for increased transparency and access to budget information.

The Open Budget Index available at: <http://www.openbudgetindex.org>