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"The government’s budget?! But I’m interested in improving schools.”

"We want to hold the government to account for managing public money, but we don’t know where to start!”

Civil society organizations use many different tools and strategies to fight for what they believe in, whether that is better schools for kids, protecting the environment, or ending poverty. One of the most powerful of these strategies is to use budget analysis, monitoring, and advocacy to try to change what the government spends the public’s money on, and how effectively it spends those funds to address critical issues.

So how do you get started? Play the IBP’s e-learning game! Grab your passport and travel to Polarus to learn how civil society and individuals can use budget analysis and advocacy tools to change lives.
Implementing Land Reforms in Kenya: Budgetary Pitfalls, by Ibrahim Mwathane, Land Development and Governance Institute, Kenya

As Kenyans celebrated the twin victory of first obtaining a national land policy and then anchoring the key features of that policy in the new constitution in 2010, those of us at the Land Development and Governance Institute knew that the next and greatest challenge would be overcoming insufficient funding for implementing reform. So a recent report, “Budgeting for Land Reforms: Ensuring People’s Participation,” could not have come at a better time. A joint effort of the Economic and Social Rights Center (Hakijamii) and the International Budget Partnership (IBP), the report explores the most powerful threat facing the implementation of land reforms in Kenya: a lack of sufficient budgetary support for the reforms and the inappropriate use of public funds that are provided.

The drawn-out, and at times contentious, formulation process for Kenya’s national land policy began in 2004. Those who had benefitted from pre- and post-colonial State land grants under Kenya’s inequitable and corrupt system of land distribution were uncomfortable with some of the new policy’s provisions. In particular, they were concerned with the reform’s provisions on equitable access to land, the review and possible revocation of parcels of public land irregularly allocated, taxation of idle land, maximum and minimum sizes of private land holdings, and the resolution of historical injustices, among others. These groups opposed the policy and engaged in five years of often hostile public debate until the process was finally completed in 2009.

After the policy was enacted, the next step was for it to be firmly established in Kenya’s legal framework. The proposed new Kenyan Constitution set a framework for some key features of national land policy, but it was not an easy process. Chapter Five of the Constitution, which addresses land and the environment, provoked strong opposition. But civil society organizations, such as the Kenya Land Alliance and the Centre for Land, Economy, and Rights of Women (CLEAR), worked to educate the public on the most contested and confusing aspects of the land section. CLEAR translated relevant parts of the Constitution into plain, accessible language and trained vulnerable groups like women not only about what their new rights were but also how to exercise them. Civil society also engaged with parliamentarians, some of whom were not well versed in the new Constitution, and advocated for land experts to be consulted throughout the process. In August 2010 the Kenya Constitution was ratified and disseminated for implementation.

The land question in Kenya has been a complex one since the colonial era, and establishing broad, concrete land policies and associated clear constitutional frameworks was a major milestone. But nearly two years later, Kenya has managed to enact only three enabling land laws: the National Land Commission Act 2012, the Land Act 2012, and the Land Registration Act 2012. These laws call for the establishment of new national and local institutions that will manage public lands, recommend land policy to the national government, and conduct research related to land and use of natural resources, among other things. Substantial financial resources are needed both to fully establish these institutions and support continued public involvement in drafting further laws and regulations needed to “operationalize” these new laws.

Unfortunately, however, no specific government unit or process was established to critically examine the budgetary implications of the land reform process at each stage of implementation. A November 2005 report on the budget implications of land reform, which had been prepared by the land reform unit of the Ministry of Lands and served as the reference benchmark for implementation costs, has been rendered outdated due to post-report content amendments to the law itself and major changes in staff of the ministry. Such a broad report should be updated and should inform annual budgets based on priorities identified under a sectoral implementation plan.

The Hakijamii/IBP research for “Budgeting for Land Reforms” focuses public attention on the budget issues at a critical time. The country is currently establishing the national land commission, which in turn will establish county land management boards in all 47 counties. The land commission will also
coordinate the implementation of many aspects of land reform. This year’s budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Lands thus should reflect a proportional increase to make it possible to take on this additional work. It is clear, however, that the funds actually allocated are insufficient.

“Budgeting For Land Reforms: Ensuring People’s Participation” will help civil society groups in Kenya to intervene and pressure government and parliament to fix the current budget and ensure that adequate funds are allocated for in subsequent ones. The report also demonstrates a need for public involvement in budget making for this sector, but we must keep in mind that those opposed to land reform in Kenya could also undermine its implementation by promoting the allocation of insufficient funds.

In addition to the influence over land reform budgets of those opposed to reform, another factor that could have contributed to the allocation of insufficient resources for implementing the new laws is that the bureaucrats who prepare the initial budget requests may not be well informed on land reform priorities. If the gaps in funding were due to inadvertent omissions by the Ministry of Lands, then the ministry and increasingly engaged stakeholders should prepare a comprehensive implementation plan that identifies key priorities and the level of funding needed for effective implementation.

Visit the IBP website to read more on Budgeting for Land Reforms: Ensuring People’s Participation.

A summary version of the findings and recommendations is also available.

For more information, please write to mwathane@landsca.co.ke.

Grassroots Organizations Explore How to Track Public Budgets in China, by Zhang Lanying, Freelance Consultant, and Ma Jifang, International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease

Government budgets in China have traditionally been closed affairs — with very limited public access to budget information and few opportunities for civil society and the public to engage in decisions over budget policies or oversight over how these policies are implemented. However, more recently there have been some steps toward more open, responsive, and accountable budgeting in China. This progress has been supported by international organizations and donors, and taken forward by local civil society and academia, as well as through some initial reforms by the government itself.

Chinese civil society organizations (CSOs) became involved in efforts to make public budgets in China more open, responsive, and accountable in 2005. With the support of the Ford Foundation and with technical assistance from the International Budget Partnership (IBP), the China Development Research Foundation (CDRF) worked at the macro level to promote participatory and transparent budgets. They secured the commitment of senior government officials to accept and promote the practice of participatory budgeting, educated the media and local officials on relevant issues, and created a website to spread awareness of participatory budgeting methodology/policy. At the same time, ActionAid built grassroots partnerships with CSOs, local governments, and researchers to track budget allocations from a gender perspective and the use of poverty alleviation funds at the village level.

This combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches established a solid basis for further budget work. But scaling up the work proved to be more difficult than expected. Greater impact required a stronger integration of these two directions, in addition to technical support that would assist CSOs in developing action plans, training, and mentoring.

While limited progress has been made since these initial efforts, there are still more openings for civil society to do budget work than there were in 2005. For example, when the “Open Government Information Regulations” came into effect in China in 2008, things shifted in the budget world. These regulations required all government departments and other agencies to publish information that either affects the “vital interests” of individuals or groups, or that should be widely known and discussed. Budget
and financial reports are important components of such information. The open government regulations also gave citizens the right to request information that has not been released by the government.

Since 2009 the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics has also facilitated budget work by producing and releasing an annual Transparency Index on “China’s Fiscal Transparency at the Provincial Level.” (The report is not posted online but is sold as a book.) These reports have attracted much attention from provincial officials, decision makers from central government, the general public, and CSOs.

Most recently, the IBP and the Ford Foundation held a two-day workshop in Beijing in June 2012 to update Chinese CSOs about developments in international budget practices and to explore their local contexts and needs. The workshop involved 20 participants from local CSOs from different parts of the country, international organizations, and universities and other research institutions. Representatives from the IBP and the Ford Foundation facilitated the workshop with the help of two local consultants. Participants discussed international cases of budget tracking and compared them with the Chinese situation. They also shared their own activities relating to budget work. By the end of the workshop, each grassroots organization had presented its own action plan for future activities related to budgets.

These are all promising steps toward more open budgeting in China. With the increased access to budget information from government and universities, as well as technical support in the development of action plans, more actors in government and civil society realize the importance of budget work in China and are excited about its potential.

Social Audits: Bringing South Africa’s Story Home, by Oscar Arredondo, FUNDAR, Mexico

A few months ago, I participated in a social audit in Khayelitsha, a chaotic human settlement on the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa — a community with deplorable conditions of poverty, lacking even basic services. As part of an International Budget Partnership workshop on how to implement techniques for monitoring public resources, I worked with my fellow participants to support two civil society organizations (CSOs) that work to improve living conditions in that unsafe area. We broke into small groups to survey community members about services the city government was supposed to provide. Each group included one local activist who spoke the language spoken by community members, which enabled us to complete the questionnaires.

Due to the lack of running water in the settlement, the city government had formally committed to providing portable toilets. The government entered into a contract with a company that provides toilets and maintenance services that stated that the government was to rent the toilets annually, pay for their twice-daily cleaning, repair toilets not in working condition, and provide training for those hired to maintain the toilets. But reality tells a different story.

The toilets are neither hygienic nor adequate. Community residents occasionally must walk long distances to find a clean one. Some residents bring toilets inside their own houses, while others are shared between crowds of people. The toilets are cleaned only twice a week, and residents are exposed to spoiled contaminants and toxic chemicals. This putrid mixture penetrates their cardboard shacks and poses particular threats to the health of children who play nearby.

These aren’t the only risks — one mother said her son was assaulted while searching for a toilet at night. Others were locked inside the cabins as they were tipped over, and one man was fatally struck while crossing the highway in search of a cleaner bathroom in the next community. Rather than face these dangers, many community members opt to relieve themselves in bags that they throw away the next day.

Community members had surely told these stories to one another, but by compiling these questionnaires, we created a concrete list of violations of the government’s contractual obligations. Community members participated in the survey and expressed their desire for change. Both local CSOs met with government leaders and the service provider company to present the community’s concerns. This kind of evidence helps not only to enforce the contract but also to come up with solutions and initiate proceedings to hold public servants or others like those contracted to provide public services to account.
The bad news for those of us attending the workshop is that the affected community is on the other side of the world. The local CSOs, Ndifuna Ukwasi and the Social Justice Coalition, do not operate in Mexico where we have communities facing distressingly similar conditions of poverty. Many people in Mexico also live without the most basic services and are forgotten by their government and civil society.

Democracy implies participation, which is necessary in a social audit like the one we were part of in Khayelitsha. The affected population and CSOs, and in some cases the government, come together to support strong financial auditing, offering concrete evidence from various sources of mistakes, mismanagement, and, in the worst cases, malfeasance.

A social audit is thus an exercise in democracy in the truest sense; it promotes transparency and accountability. To conduct this kind of audit in Mexico would require the support of CSOs and of authorities, such as a human rights commission or Mexico’s Institute for Access to Public Government Information. It also would depend on citizen participation to verify government compliance in delivering goods and services as agreed. And continued citizen participation would hinge on whether individuals see tangible changes from engaging in this kind of work.

Social audits are not just about verifying whether or not public money is being spent correctly; they are to assess the real impact of government decisions by verifying whether or not the expenditures made any difference. To undertake this work requires access to information, as well as time to assimilate it and to verify the compliance of relevant offices. These audits should be part of the duties of government officers so that they can answer questions at public hearings about the expenditures.

Social audits are democratic processes that have tremendous potential to correct injustices and empower participants. However, for social auditing to be a success in Mexico and elsewhere in the world, various obstacles must be overcome. Complex structures in government and societies at large, indifference, and potential political implications deter officials and citizens from engaging in this kind of work. But we must overcome these obstacles to broad participation to realize the potentially transforming potential of social audits.

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Voices from the Ground

In the Name of Health: an Electronic Revolution, by Artemiza Michel Reyna, Sonora Ciudadana AC, Mexico

In Mexico as in many parts of the world, healthcare is a luxury, and the ability to pay determines one’s right to health. The poor die from common illnesses while the wealthy are saved from the most complex diseases, as if the right to health applies only to the moneyed class.

As a response to this situation, men and women in the north of Mexico have formed a citizens movement called the Rebellion of the Sick. The movement uses concrete evidence of injustices in public health service delivery to demand that the government meet its obligation to correct these injustices and ensure the people’s right to healthcare.

Many people do not know that the state is obliged to finance healthcare regardless of the political party in power. This lack of public awareness poses a big problem because it allows the government to skirt its responsibility without being held accountable. The Rebellion of the Sick promotes a collective effort to demand solutions to this problem. It invites citizens to get involved and voice complaints about issues in the delivery of medical services. More participation in this effort creates more concrete evidence about the state of public health delivery and increases the demand for solutions to the many and varied problems in healthcare in the north of Mexico.

Mobilized citizens: what goes unseen goes unfixed!
To facilitate this process, the Rebellion of the Sick is developing a [website](#) that allows citizens from throughout the state to complain, post photographs of physical problems, and tell stories about their experiences in public clinics. On it, users will discuss long wait times at the Mexican Institute for Social Security, debt collection in general hospitals, discrimination at the Institute of Security and Social Services of the State, and so on. Users will also be able to register complaints about the quality of services, medical equipment, medical facilities, medicines, and out-of-pocket expenses. Without this valuable evidence of problems, it is likely that solutions will take longer, or that they will not come at all. Though the page currently focuses on issues in the north of Mexico, this work will later be replicated throughout the country.

This electronic initiative will take off in the coming months, and we hope that the citizens of the entire Sonora municipality will participate. Healthcare in Mexico and the rest of the world is complex, but we hope that efforts like this one will encourage progress with these issues. Recognizing and publishing weaknesses of the public health system will be the best way to hold the authorities accountable and ensure they fulfill their responsibilities.

The time has come for us, the sick, to get the attention we need!

For more information on the Rebellion of the Sick, please contact the author at [michel@sonoraciudadana.org.mx](mailto:michel@sonoraciudadana.org.mx).

### Publications and Resources

**Moral Hazard in an Economic Union: Politics, Economics, and Fiscal Gimmickry in Europe**

A new paper by James Alt, David Dryer Lassen, and Joachim Wehner examines the relationship between budget transparency and fiscal rules and incentives for fiscal trickery. Using data from the [Open Budget Index (OBI)](https://index.openbudgets.org) and information on fiscal transparency in European Union countries, the paper shows that in circumstances of low fiscal transparency, fiscal rules may create incentives for authorities to resort to “creative accounting” or other such [fiscal gimmicks](#). In situations of high institutional budget process transparency, however, there seem to be fewer incentives to manipulate financial data. The authors also test and expand on several other studies related to fiscal performance. For more information and to download the full paper, [click here](#).

**Fifty Years of U.S. Government Spending in One Graph**, by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget recently published information on how [U.S. government spending](#) has changed over the past 50 years. As part of its [Graphing America](http://www.graphingamerica.org) series, National Public Radio used this data to create and publish a [graph](#) depicting changes in the percentage of total spending for each spending category – defense, social security, transportation, Medicare and Medicaid, safety net programs, international affairs, interest on debt, and everything else. The graph presents the share of spending for these areas for 50 years ago, 25 years ago, and last year. Although the graph does not show the change in spending in real dollars, by focusing on share of total government spending it more clearly and concisely presents how U.S. spending priorities have changed over the last 50 years.

**Land and Freedom? Subsidios al Campo Takes on Vested Agricultural Interests**

In a forthcoming case study commissioned by the IBP, Guillermo Cejudo shows that civil society organizations can bring about public spending reforms even when governments and vested private interests resist, and when oversight institutions don’t follow through. The [Subsidios al Campo](#) campaign used Mexico’s freedom of information laws to obtain official data on the recipients of agricultural subsidies, and then published the data online at [www.subsidiosalcampo.org.mx](http://www.subsidiosalcampo.org.mx).
Subsidios al Campo’s analysis brought a lot of new information into the public domain and shifted the debate about agricultural subsidies from a focus on their size to a focus on equitable distribution, challenging a powerful agricultural industry in the process. The Mexican Ministry of Agriculture reacted by reforming the system to ensure that subsidies were flowing only to those that needed them.

Read the full Subsidios al Campo case study at the IBP website.

Job Announcements and Opportunities

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is Recruiting!

Executive Director, OGP Support Unit
The executive director of the Support Unit is in daily communication with senior government officials and civil society leaders and reports to the Governance and Leadership Sub-Committee of the OGP’s Steering Committee.

Program Manager, OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism
The program manager will oversee the development of a unique multi-country governance assessment effort, working directly with governments and civil society from over 50 countries, in close partnership with the OGP International Expert Panel.

For more detailed position descriptions and instructions on how to apply, visit: www.opengovpartnership.org/employment