Stratified Advocacy: Models and Tactics for Working Across Different Levels of Government

IBP’s Learning from Each Other Series

December 2013
Stratified Advocacy: Models and Tactics for Working Across Different Levels of Government

This booklet is based on the January 2013 peer exchange in Ghana. The following IBP partners participated in the exchange:

- SEND Foundation, Ghana
- HakiElimu, Tanzania
- Sikika, Tanzania
- Uganda Debt Network, Uganda
- Center for Budget Governance and Accountability (CBGA), India
- SATHI, India
- Lakpesdam, Indonesia
- FITRA, Indonesia

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IBP’s Learning from Each Other Series

This series was developed as an integral part of the peer exchanges conducted under the IBP’s Partnership Initiative’s Technical Assistance and Mentoring Program.

The Partnership Initiative (PI) was a five-year program that operated in 18 countries, providing financial support, technical assistance, trainings, documentation, knowledge development, and networking opportunities to 45 partner organizations. It ended in March 2013.

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Introduction

Over the course of the past five years, IBP partnered with a diverse range of civil society organizations (CSOs) that focus all or part of their work on public finance-related issues. These CSOs’ efforts targeted different sectors, stages, and elements of the public budget process and sought to achieve a variety of budget outcomes. The analysis and advocacy of our partners reflects a growing trend in civil society budget work in which groups use diverse tools and innovative strategies to engage different levels of government simultaneously in order to achieve greater impact.

To stimulate collective learning around this trend, IBP and SEND-Ghana jointly organized and hosted an exchange between eight CSOs that were part of the Partnership Initiative. In January 2013 groups from Ghana, India, Indonesia, Tanzania, and Uganda came together for five days to share their experience, tactics, and methodologies for working at multiple levels of government. By documenting their discussions and reflections, IBP hopes to provide examples of how budget groups are implementing work at multiple levels. However, this booklet is not a “how to” guide; it simply describes the motivations and tactics the participating practitioners used in response to their own contexts, goals, and needs. We hope that their reflections can serve as a basis for subsequent exchanges and research on this growing trend among budget-oriented organizations. We still have much more to learn.

WHY IS BUDGET WORK ACROSS LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT IMPORTANT?

Before delving into the specifics, we need to clarify what working across different levels of government means.

Let’s start at the national level where, in very basic terms, budget work is based in the capital city and involves engaging primarily with national government decision makers and officials, capital-based stakeholders, and national media. The focus is predominantly on national policies and the national budget and its process, albeit often for a particular sector or issue. This kind of work seeks macro-level impact even though it may entail research on issues that happen or affect policies or public service delivery at the subnational level.

In contrast, CSOs that work at the subnational or local level (these terms are used interchangeably throughout the booklet) typically are based outside the capital and deal with local issues. Most groups working at this level seek to monitor policy and budget implementation, influence officials in charge of implementation, or activate local oversight mechanisms. While the groups might mobilize communities in their work, building citizen agency and enabling participation — they also might focus their energies entirely on policy frameworks, decision makers, and implementing agencies.

Trying to link national and subnational work is complex and raises several challenges. Decentralization is implemented differently across countries, which means that the “local” is defined by very diverse administrative configurations and sublevels of government. Table 1 below compares the administrative divisions of the countries represented at the exchange.

When groups work across levels of government, it could mean connecting three levels, as in Ghana, or, in the case of India, connecting across villages, blocks, districts, regions, states, and the national government. When it comes to the allocation and use of public resources, each level has its own particular decision-making powers and stakeholders, and each level also has a particular link with the national structures. Challenges related to access to information and participation also vary from level to level. As a result, the peer exchange found that most CSOs focus on connecting their work across two or three levels of government at most.

Given this complexity, what motivates CSOs to work across government levels? The rationale behind this

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choice is informed by a wide array of contextual, organizational, and strategic factors. Although groups may share some common motivations, most of the drivers for this type of budget work are system-specific. Factors can include the geographical focus of a group’s work within the country, the country’s budget system and decentralization policies, and the organization’s characteristics and desired outcomes. In addition, some groups only work across levels as part of specific projects or periods, while others see it as an integral part of the work toward their overall goals.

### Box 1: Exchange Participants’ Drivers for Stratified Budget Work

- New policies, i.e., decentralization of resources, and their impact on how budgets are allocated and spent
- The level at which the decisions the partner wants to influence are made
- Easier access to budget information
- Policies that are relevant to the people whose lives they are trying to change
- Size of the country and complexity of the environment in terms of institutions and decision-making processes
- The need to gather layers of evidence for sector work
- Probability of achieving impact
- Interest in and commitment to integrating stakeholders, including communities, into research and advocacy strategies
- The legitimacy that research and evidence from different levels may provide to a particular advocacy agenda
- Donor influence and interest in working at one level or another

Regardless of the contextual and organizational reasons that drive CSOs to work at different levels, all groups at this exchange agreed that, in order for this work to lead to impact and be sustainable, it has to be anchored in their institutional goals and theories of change.

### Strategies and Organizational Configurations CSOs Use in Cross-Level Budget Work

Depending on where the group is based and what its motivations are, CSOs connect nationally focused work to the subnational level, or vice versa. The direction of the flow of work is then further defined by
the extent or degree of connections, which can be partial or complete. A partial link entails some overlap between national and subnational work, which can depend on specific projects, points in the budget process, or the capacity of each group. A complete link means that subnational and national work are fully integrated into one seamless strategy. Diagram 1 shows where the exchange participants stand in this respect:

Diagram 1 illustrates the third relevant conclusion of this exchange: cross-level work varies substantially in terms of its degree of intensity, and the more “complete” links are, the more formal or established the organizational configurations and tactics used to connect across levels will be.

- Sikika and SATHI use ad hoc partnerships to partially connect across levels. In the case of SATHI, these connections are between the state and the district level. Sikika is only now beginning to connect to the district from the national level through partnering with local-level groups.
- UDN, HakiElimu, and CBGA use more formal structures, such as coalitions or networks, to bring evidence from the subnational into national-level research and advocacy agendas. As the diagram shows, they do so in varying degrees.
- SEND, FITRA, and LAKPESDAM are the only groups with a complete link between their national and subnational level budget work. They implement the connections through branches and franchises.

I. Partnerships

Partnerships allow groups to complement their strategies and fill in gaps in order to achieve a particular outcome. They can entail time-bound or project-bound, formal or informal collaboration between two or more groups working at different levels. In such partnerships, a CSO working at the national level may reach out to a local or community-based organization (CBO) to carry out research, collect data, and advocate for an issue; or a group working at the local level may partner with a national organization to disseminate its research and influence national policy debates.

Box 2: SATHI Partners with District-Level CSOs to Collect Budget Implementation and Service Delivery Data

- SATHI is an Indian organization based in the State of Maharashtra. Since 2007, SATHI has been using a community-based monitoring initiative to monitor the policy and budget implementation of the National Rural Health Mission Scheme (NRHM).
- SATHI operates as a state-level nodal CSO and collects data through partnerships with independent district-level community-based organizations. SATHI builds the skills of these groups, provides them with data collection methodologies, and then consolidates and analyzes the data gathered to inform advocacy around the NRHM at the state level.
II. Coalitions and Networks

Coalitions and networks are complex configurations used by a wide array of CSOs aiming to build a cross-level, multisector critical mass, organized around a particular issue or sets of issues for greater visibility and impact. For the purpose of this reflection we are interested in how groups use coalitions and networks as a means to connect work across levels of government, stemming frequently from national initiatives that reach and spread downwards.

Box 3: Using Coalitions to Build Bridges Across Levels of Government

CBGA and the People’s Budget Initiative (PBI): Bringing Budget Agendas to the Forefront

The PBI is India’s largest and most important civil society coalition on governance and budget issues. CBGA is a national CSO focusing on budget research and advocacy, and it hosts the Secretariat of the PBI. The PBI is composed of diverse organizations, including such international NGOs as Oxfam, national groups like CBGA itself, and subnational and local groups, such as SATHI. PBI’s most important activity is to influence the budget process of the Union Government through a Charter of Demands that brings together the priorities and recommendations of groups across India and across sectors.

The PBI has provided CBGA with an entry point to the subnational level and a connection to issues that it would otherwise lack. Given that 50 percent of the budget spent at the state and subnational levels comes from the Union Budget, it is paramount for CBGA to have a platform to gather information of how these funds are used. Opening field offices to do this would be too expensive and limited. The coalition is the most resource-effective strategy for CBGA to strengthen its advocacy around the Union budget.

At the same time, CBGA provides technical support to local groups and partners with them for subnational advocacy.

HakiElimu Leads Friends of Education in the Fight for High-Quality Education

HakiElimu is a Tanzanian CSO that advocates for equal access to high-quality education. HakiElimu’s work has a strong policy and budget analysis component, and also integrates Public Expenditure Tracking into its activities.

In order to link to the community and build stronger connections between their research and the constituency they try to affect, HakiElimu initiated the Friends of Education (FOE) Network. FOE is composed of individuals, community members, CBOs, national CSOs, and media groups fighting to achieve the right to education.

FOE processes are facilitated by HakiElimu’s Community Engagement and Action Unit (CEAU), which coordinates activities that include mobilization, capacity-building sessions, and data collection through FOE members. Initially, the community engagement was done through field offices at the local level. However, as FOE became stronger HakiElimu scaled back to managing from the capital. FOE is a means through which HakiElimu stays connected with the local level and collects information for national policy advocacy. But, it is also a tool through which the organization mobilizes public opinion around education issues and obtains legitimacy for its work.

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The work of UDN is one example of how coalitions are used to connect across levels. UDN formed in 1996 as an ad hoc coalition of CSOs campaigning for debt relief in Uganda. At the national level, UDN has been monitoring the social sector budget and campaigning for the efficient and effective use of resources. One of UDN’s key strategies has been to work in collaboration with district CSOs that collect evidence on budget implementation and service delivery, which informs UDN’s national-level advocacy.

III. Branches

One organization can operate formally at different levels, which is done most often through branches. A branch of an organization shares the goals and objectives of the larger organization and is financed and overseen by the national head office but is operated by regional staff in field offices. The branch strategy, which, of the participants at the exchange, is being used by only SEND-Ghana, is a more complex, formal, and structured effort to connect across levels. The branch entails continuous formal presence at the local level through the existence of established field offices and staff directly responsible for direct data collection and local advocacy. It creates connections across levels in a more sustained way, but it also involves enormous financial and human resources.

Box 4: SEND-Ghana Monitors the District Assembly Common Fund through Branch Offices and Community Leadership

“We went into the subnational because we wanted to strengthen the demand at the community level and for people to also be at the forefront of demanding accountability.”

SEND-Ghana is the branch office of SEND-Foundation, a regional organization in Africa that also operates in Liberia and Sierra Leone. SEND-Ghana previously focused on national budget advocacy, which involved some degree of local engagement without a formal presence. As their projects began to focus more on budget implementation, and as budgets became more decentralized, SEND decided to open branch offices to ensure direct, sustained engagement at the local level. Currently, SEND-Ghana has three regional offices: Greater Accra, Upper West Region, and Northern Region. Each office has dedicated staff and activities, but all connect back to and are managed by the central Greater Accra office.

This organizational structure has been fundamental for the implementation of their District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) Monitoring Project. The DACF comprises 7.5 percent of the national budget and is implemented directly by district authorities. Through the branch offices, SEND-Ghana has formed Citizen District Monitoring Committees to monitor the implementation of the DACF. These monitoring committees are continuously trained to gather and analyze information, which is then compiled for advocacy both at the national and district level. District-level advocacy is carried out directly by the branch offices.

IV. The Franchises

The franchise model is one in which separate, independent organizations work at different levels and operate independent projects, using their own resources, but share a common identity and overarching goals. The franchise model generally includes a head office or national secretariat, which coordinates and shares information with local franchises to inform shared or joint advocacy.

The exchange participants who successfully operate as a franchise are Seknas-Fitra and Lakpesdam, both from Indonesia. The high degree of decentralization and geographic dispersion of the country, as well as the diversity of contexts within each region, demand a decentralized and independent model in order to achieve greater impact across levels.
Box 5: The Franchise Model in Indonesia

Seknas Fitra’s Nationwide Struggle for Transparent Budgets

“It is at the local level where funds are actually spent, and if we want to look at expenditures we need to go to this level.”

Seknas Fitra understands itself as a nationwide forum composed of 15 subnational franchises that share a common vision and strategy to contribute to transparent public finance.

Under this configuration, the national secretariat based in Jakarta coordinates with the 15 subnational Fitra franchises. Each franchise has independent projects, funding, and staff, albeit collaborating toward common advocacy goals. The National Secretariat builds the capacities of the local franchises around access to information and budgets, assists in fundraising, and supports their local advocacy. In parallel, the local franchises provide the national secretariat with data and information.

The relationship between the secretariat and the franchises is close and, in spite of their independence, they share common identities and goals. The local franchises engage with the community and local authorities, while the national secretariat is responsible for national advocacy.

Lakpesdam’s Social Audits on Health Insurance Schemes through Franchises

Lakpesdam is a capital-based organization springing from the Nhdlatul Ulama (NU), which is Indonesia’s largest Muslim CSO forum. Lakpesdam operates similarly to Seknas Fitra, but through a much more complex model, which includes 144 franchises throughout the country. All members share a common general goal but operate independently and coordinate through the national Lakpesdam.

This configuration has allowed Lakpesdam to implement social audits to monitor the country’s most important health insurance schemes: Jamkesmas, through which the national government decentralizes funds implemented by local governments; and Jamkesda, which is the local-level financed health insurance scheme.

For this work, Lakpesdam provided its franchises with the methodology and technical assistance to collect data from as many districts as possible. The evidence gathered through the subnational social audits is used by the national office for advocacy around the health schemes. Advocacy strategies at the local level are led and implemented independently by each franchise.

Lessons to Share on Tactics Used for Cross-Level Work

Throughout the document we have outlined some of the important conclusions of this exchange between groups working across levels. Mainly that cross-level work is complex by definition, that groups connect at two or three levels at most and, finally, that the degree of intensity of their links defines the organizational configuration by which they implement this work.

In addition to these preliminary lessons, which focus mainly on the motivations, there are also important conclusions to draw as to why groups choose these particular strategies and what they identify as the key advantages to using them. Table 2 below summarizes the conclusions of these partners, specifically around the intricacies of each of the configurations. As a collective, we hope that this analysis can provide other interested groups with some useful insights to define the best approach for connecting their budget work across levels.
Table 2: Rationales for the Different Approaches to Stratified Budget Work

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactic/Configuration</th>
<th>Why do practitioners use it for cross-level work?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnerships</strong></td>
<td>It opens up the space to build the skills of local groups to carry out joint and then independent budget analysis. It also allows local groups to access specialized skills from national CSOs. It provides national groups with data on budget implementation and evidence of the impact of budget policies on affected communities. It allows national groups to connect and engage with community members. It provides local groups with a voice in national debates. It adds legitimacy at both levels and multiplies dissemination platforms. It reduces the costs implicit in having a presence at multiple levels. It is more flexible than other, more formal approaches.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coalitions/Networks</strong></td>
<td>It consolidates demands from groups working in different regions around a common issue. It improves the credibility of groups at different levels among a wider set of decision makers. It fills in gaps in terms of data collection and skills. It maximizes scarce resources. It increases the chances of impact, through a unified voice around an issue. It is flexible and not binding. It allows for a wide variety of groups to work together.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Branches</strong></td>
<td>It is core to the identity of organizations that derive their mission from direct engagement and mobilization at the local level. Mission and approach are controlled by the national organization, as opposed to a looser partnership where organizations with very different approaches work together on a particular issue. It provides legitimacy across levels, with the community, allies, and decision makers. It enables direct interaction with officials at multiple levels and allows staff to specialize in advocacy at specific levels. It facilitates engagement with the community and the development of community-based monitoring configurations. It forces organizations to develop different skills and allows incorporation of a wider variety of personnel and expertise.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Franchises</strong></td>
<td>It enables a deeper level of decentralization of activities and strategies for pursuing a common mission, particularly important in large and complex countries with substantial decentralization and geographic dispersion. It allows organizations to cover a wide territory, as franchises are more independent than branches in terms of resource generation. It allows the national secretariat to focus its energy at the national level, while still connecting to and having a presence at the local level. It provides legitimacy to both national and subnational advocacy efforts. It can allow for the integration of a larger number of people and communities into monitoring work.</td>
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This booklet is based on a horizontal peer exchange organized by IBP’s Partnership Initiative in January 2013 and consolidates lessons and reflections from budget advocates around engaging in budget advocacy at different levels of government. We hope that this document will serve as a resource for other civil society groups.

For more detailed information on this exchange and to read the "From Analysis to Impact: Partnership Initiative Case Study Series" coordinated by Albert van Zyl, please visit internationalbudget.org.

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The International Budget Partnership collaborates with a large and diverse network of civil society organizations around the world to fight poverty and improve governance by reforming government budget systems and influencing budget policies. At the heart of this work are efforts to make government budgeting more transparent and participatory, more responsive to national priorities, better able to resist corruption, and more efficient and effective.