



## Budget Tracking and Parliamentary Action

### RATIONALE

The government is responsible for and accountable to the citizens of a country for the protection of human rights and provision of basic services such as health. Citizens therefore have the right to influence policy decisions about what, where and how public resources are spent. Advocacy efforts targeted at health budget tracking are critical for ensuring that governments and donors are providing the services demanded by the public and are accountable for the resources spent.

At both the national and local levels, civil society organizations can play an important role in ensuring transparency and accountability in government and donor health spending. At the national level, organizations can get involved in defining priority areas and planning processes. At the local level, they can oversee and monitor expenditures, and use ground level findings to call for changes in budget allocations and planning priorities.

### GETTING STARTED

A first step entails an analysis of the health budget of the government in terms of the following:

- Is the budget adequate to meet the stated policy objectives?
- Is the health sector being sufficiently prioritized?
- Is there an earmarked budget for the different components under health?
- Is progress being made in real terms?
- Are budget allocations equitable?
- Are resources being spent efficiently and effectively?

Answers to these questions would help identify the objectives of the advocacy initiative and an appropriate plan to achieve them. It would also ensure that the advocacy efforts are evidence-based and starts at the stage when objectives and need for budget analysis are defined.

### APPROACHES / STEPS



The following key steps are relevant:

#### 1. DEVELOP ADVOCACY STRATEGY FOR BUDGET TRACKING:

- Identify the key objectives that your organization would like to achieve through the advocacy effort, based on the issues identified during the budget analysis.
- Define your 'theory of change' in a step-by step manner – describe the rationale and assumptions for each

objective, how change will happen and where you play a role in bringing about the change in government and/ or donor accountability.

- Identify specific research questions to be answered through further analysis of the budget. Understanding and analyzing the lifecycle of public service provision, from policy formulation to budget-making to final delivery, can inform the identification of research questions.
- Identify the relevant players who influence the decision-making process for the advocacy issue, and ascertain their degree of influence on the entire process. Research on the decision-making process.

#### 2. BUILD STRATEGIC ALLIANCES:

- Develop a multi-stakeholder network of partners based on complementarities and potential for leveraging the partners' skills, resources and experiences. These alliances can involve individuals officially involved in the budget processes and health system as well as research/ academic institutes. Seek partner organizations that have expertise in budget analysis and tracking, which is a technical and specialized activity.
- Identify 'champions' within the parliament and/ or the government (or other decision-makers who can raise issues in the appropriate forums), and build a relationship with them.
- Approach potential partners in a targeted manner, and build trust and reciprocity with the partners by sharing information, ensuring transparency and supporting each other's initiatives.

#### 3. PLAN ACTIVITIES FOR EACH STAGE OF THE BUDGET CYCLE:

- In-depth understanding of the budgeting process is critical for the success of the advocacy initiative. Be aware of the workings of the Ministries of Finance and Planning, and plan for activities for each stage of the budgeting/ planning process.
- Budget formulation – influence budget allocation by carrying out research on the health needs of various groups, disseminating findings of analyses, producing alternative budgets, and recommending changes to the budget.
- Enactment – engage with media, officials and the general public to push for the process of enactment to be more open and transparent; and work with parliamentarians to influence changes.
- Implementation – monitor implementation/ budget spending throughout the budget cycle through engagement with authorities and service providers; measure the impact of budget allocations, and disseminate this information to relevant stakeholders.
- Audit – contribute to the review process by carrying out research on the impact of spend on specific population groups, weighing inputs against outputs, and making recommendations on improving the health sector allocations in the next budget.

#### 4. MANAGE AND DELIVER COMMUNICATIONS:

- Identify the best available vehicles for messaging, e.g. talking points to be delivered by key influencers in highly visible forums or bilateral meetings; media products (Twitter, web packages, press releases, etc.); presentations in parliamentary forums. Understanding what a specific audience needs and expects is critical.
- Delivering the message can fall under three areas – *sensitizing* the target audience by cultivating interest, *asking* the target audience to take concrete action towards an end, and *following up* after the request for action to see if it has been undertaken.

#### 5. EVALUATE ADVOCACY EFFORTS:

- Evaluate the advocacy effort on an ongoing basis and use the feedback generated for streamlining and improving the systems and processes employed in budget planning and analysis.
- Apart from the specific policy outcomes, evaluate advocacy on the ability to address challenges normally faced in budget tracking and advocacy, like access to reliable information in terms of the financial aspects as well as the decision-making process and lack of transparency and accountability among the government bodies.

### ROLE OF ACTORS

This summary may be of use to global, national and local civil society organizations and other advocacy agencies, as they seek to prepare and consolidate their advocacy efforts towards ensuring greater transparency and accountability in government and donor health spending.

### TOOLKIT

STEP INVOLVED	RESOURCES
Developing advocacy strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health Sector Budget Advocacy: A guide for civil society organizations; Save the Children, 2012</li> <li>Advocacy Matters: Helping children change their world, Participant's Manual; Save the Children, 2007</li> <li>Budget for Children Analysis: A beginner's guide; Save the Children, 2010</li> <li>Handbook for Budget Analysis and Tracking in Advocacy Projects; International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2011</li> </ul>
Monitoring government expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ramkumar, V; Our Money, Our Responsibility: A citizen's guide to monitoring government expenditures (International Budget Partnership, 2008)</li> <li>Streak, J; Monitoring Government Budgets to Advance Child Rights: A guide for NGOs (Idasa, 2003)</li> <li>Advancing the Rights of Children, Women and Poor Families Through Better Public Finance Policies; UNICEF, 2010</li> <li>Wampler, B; 'A guide to participatory budgeting', in Anwar Shah (ed), Participatory Budgeting; IBRD/ The World Bank, 2007</li> </ul>

### CASE STUDY

#### **Advocacy work of the White Ribbon Alliance, Bangladesh, towards budget allocation for maternal health in Bangladesh**

The White Ribbon Alliance, Bangladesh (WRAB) has sought to advocate for increased budgetary provisions for

maternal health in Bangladesh through an analysis of the national budget for health, orientation of key influencers for maternal health, organization of advocacy events highlighting priority issues for maternal health (e.g. talk shows for policy makers), and identification of key strategies to promote public sector accountability for maternal health. An important step in the process has been to understand the overall need and the current status for maternal health. In 2009 in Bangladesh, a total of 4 million women received maternal healthcare services through the government, NGO and private sector, with the additional unmet need being 5.4 million women. This figure stands at 8.5 million, if the goal is to ensure universal maternal healthcare coverage. Analysis of the budget of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) as well as that of the national government as a whole revealed that Bangladesh allocates only 2.5% of the annual budget of the MoHFW to maternal health (which translates to 0.15% of the annual government budget) for the year 2009-10 was allocated to provision of maternal health services. Over the previous two years, this figure had been lower still (between 2-2.5% of the annual budget of MoHFW).

The analysis shows that the budget for maternal healthcare services needs to be increased substantially for achieving MDG 5 in Bangladesh. Triangulating three data points – current budgetary allocation for maternal health services, unmet demand, and proportion of services being provided by government – indicated that the required additional allocation towards provision of maternal health services is approximately US\$ 34m, over the current allocation of US\$ 25m.

Understanding the actual allocation and the funding gap informs and enhances the effectiveness of the advocacy effort of CSOs working in this area. On the basis of the budget analysis exercise, WRAB is organizing an all-party parliamentary group on maternal health, and is looking to meet with the ministries of health and finance in Bangladesh to move towards a more equitable budget.

### OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE

Advocacy organizations need to monitor the various stages of the government budget cycle in their countries and find opportunities to engage and advocate on key issues.

### RESOURCES

- For White Ribbon Alliance, prepared by Barkat Abdul, Abdullah M, Poddar Avijit, Majid Murtaza, Human Development Research Centre, Dhaka (2012). *Allocation of funds for maternal health in Bangladesh: A historical analysis.*
- Presentation made by Dr Farhana Ahmad for WRA, Bangladesh (2012). *WRA Voices: Changing Lives for Mothers & Newborns.*
- Series of publications by Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability. *Budget Track*. [http://www.cbgaindia.org/publications\\_budget\\_track.php?action=details&id=32&page=1](http://www.cbgaindia.org/publications_budget_track.php?action=details&id=32&page=1)

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Developed by Cambridge Economic Policy Associates based on key resources included in this summary and inputs from members of the Advocacy Thematic Committee for the Asia-Pacific Leadership and Policy Dialogue for Women's and Children's Health, 2012, co-hosted by PMNCH, WHO, ADB, AusAID and UNICEF.