Making government budgets more accessible and equitable

Description

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(from ID21)

Involvement in the budget process in poor countries has traditionally been limited to a select group of political actors. But this has changed over the last decade with legislators, civil society groups and the media playing a more active role. What impact is broader engagement having?

Research from the Institute of Development Studies, UK, examines the substance and impact of applied budget work undertaken by civil society groups. The research draws on six case studies of independent budget work in Brazil, Croatia, India, Mexico, South Africa and Uganda. One focus of the research is how civil society budget work influences government budget priorities and spending in a way that benefits poor and socially excluded groups.

Budget work is carried out by various types of organisations including non-government organisations (NGOs), networks and social movements, and research organisations. All the groups examined in the case studies share a commitment to increasing the influence of poor and marginalised groups in the budget process and ensuring that budget priorities reflect the needs of these groups.

The six organisations all engage in certain core activities centred on data analysis and dissemination, advocacy and capacity building. Most work on national and state-level budgets, though several groups also work at the local government level.

The research shows that independent budget work has the potential to deepen democracy by strengthening accountability, fostering transparency and encouraging participation. It can also increase financial allocations in areas that contribute to social justice and equity outcomes and ensure that public money is efficiently spent.

The research also reveals the limits to budget work. Any increases in financial allocations secured as a result of advocacy initiatives are likely to represent a small share of overall government spending. Also, the scope of budget work to influence financial allocations depends on the openness and flexibility of the budget process (spending priorities may not be open to change).

The impacts of budget work identified by the research include:

- improving the transparency of budget decisions and budget processes and increasing the accountability of state actors
- increasing awareness and understanding of budget issues
- improving budget allocations in a way that benefits poor and socially excluded groups
- ensuring better use of spending, for example in areas such as health and education, and reducing corruption (by tracking expenditures)
- diversifying the range of actors engaged in budget processes (for example, legislators, civil society groups and the media)

- strengthening democracy and deepening participation.

The research concludes that:

- Budget work has been successful in a range of areas, including improving equity and social justice outcomes.
- The technical nature of the budget process limits the scope for broadening citizen participation.
- The challenge for budget groups is how to scale-up and replicate the successful impacts achieved to date.
- Influencing budget policies requires a combination of sound technical knowledge, effective communications and strategic alliances.
- Promoting the voice of poor and socially excluded groups is an important indirect effect of budget work.

Source(s):
â??Budget Analysis and Policy Advocacy: The Role of Non-governmental Public Actionâ??, IDS Working Paper 279, IDS: Brighton, by Mark Robinson, 2006 Full document.

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Category

1. Uncategorized

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1. governance
2. transparency

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