

Grassroots Mobilization for Budget Advocacy



The IBP's Learning
from Each Other Series

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This booklet is based on the paper “Grassroots Mobilization around Public Budgets,” written by Sanjeev Kaghram, for the International Budget Partnership (IBP). The paper documents an April 2011 peer exchange in Cape Town, South Africa among the following partners:

- Center for Economic Governance and AIDS in Africa (CEGAA) – South Africa
- HakiElimu – Tanzania
- Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos (INESC) – Brazil
- Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation – Pakistan
- Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) – South Africa
- Treatment Advocacy and Literacy Campaign (TALC) – Zambia
- iScale – USA
- The International Budget Partnership (IBP)

The IBP’s Learning from Each Other Series.

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

The Partnership Initiative is a five-year program that operates in 18 countries, providing financial support, technical assistance, trainings, documentation, knowledge development, and networking opportunities to 45 partner organizations.

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Preface

The IBP's Horizontal Learning Approach

Peer-to-peer learning is a core value of the IBP. Despite differences in contexts, organizational cultures, and social advocacy issues, we find great value in learning from others' strategies, methodologies, impactful experiences, and challenges. With peer-to-peer exchanges, or horizontal learning, practitioners that work with budgets and use similar strategies exchange relevant and timely lessons, creating a valuable opportunity for capacity building and reflection. By discussing their own experiences and those of others, practitioners question their assumptions in a friendly environment and revisit their approaches to budget work. This exchange often inspires groups to incorporate and adapt a vision used on the other side of the world.

To translate this belief into action, the IBP's Partnership Initiative (PI) – a five-year regranteeing technical assistance and learning program with 45 partners in 18 countries – has supported horizontal learning events for partners across the world. PI developed the Learning from Each Other Series to share the deliberations and reflections of these exchanges with a wider community. The series is aimed at International Budget Partnership partners, other civil society groups, and international nongovernmental organizations interested in public finance issues and in learning from the experiences of practitioners.

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Introduction

In April 2011 in Cape Town, South Africa, the IBP, the Center for Economic Governance and Aids in Africa (CEGAA), and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) co-hosted a peer exchange on Grassroots Mobilization around Public Budgets. Facilitated and documented by Sanjeev Kaghram from iScale, this exchange brought together civil society partners to discuss and document innovative approaches to citizen mobilization for budget-related advocacy.

Exchange participants visited a community center in Khayelitsha (Western Cape), where TAC and CEGAA empower citizens to engage in local budget monitoring and advocacy. Through the Budget Monitoring and Expenditure Tracking project, these two organizations have strengthened the capacity of TAC's community health activists to monitor local service delivery, budgeting, and expenditure for HIV/AIDS and TB at the district level.

This field visit provided an active model of citizen engagement around budgets and set the tone for ensuing discussions. Community members and TAC organizers provided first-hand accounts of their day-to-day work, and CEGAA and TAC reflected on their national partnership.

This report consolidates lessons from this exchange. We hope that this document will serve as a resource for other civil society groups interested in using grassroots mobilization as part of their budget advocacy strategies.

Rationale of Grassroots Mobilization for Budget Advocacy

As part of their broader strategies, organizations around the world mobilize citizens around the public budget process. Much of this exciting work is performed at the grassroots level, engaging people regardless of gender, socioeconomic class, HIV status, or level of education. The depth, breadth, and strength of this citizen engagement work varies by region, country, and organization. Lessons from individual initiatives continue to emerge.

We understand grassroots mobilization to be a combination of *organizing* and *mobilizing*, as defined by Just Associates, Institute of Development Studies, and Action Aid :

Organizing "entails deliberate actions intended to bring people together to develop the leadership, strategies, and collective capacity necessary to confront a common issue or push an alternative justice agenda."

Mobilization "refers to engaging people as political activists through actions that build and use the strength of organized numbers to make their demands known and influence those in power."

No single model or tactic of grassroots mobilization around budgets proves more effective than others. The strategic decision of whether or not to engage in grassroots mobilization varies according to the mission of the civil society organization (CSO), its organizational structure and resources, and its advocacy objectives. Some organizations work directly with community members and invest time and effort in citizen engagement and issue awareness. Others emphasize engagement with government or media, focusing more on budget analysis, research, and interaction with decision makers. But one thing remains the same — the choice to engage in grassroots mobilization always responds to the perceived need for community and people to directly push for change.

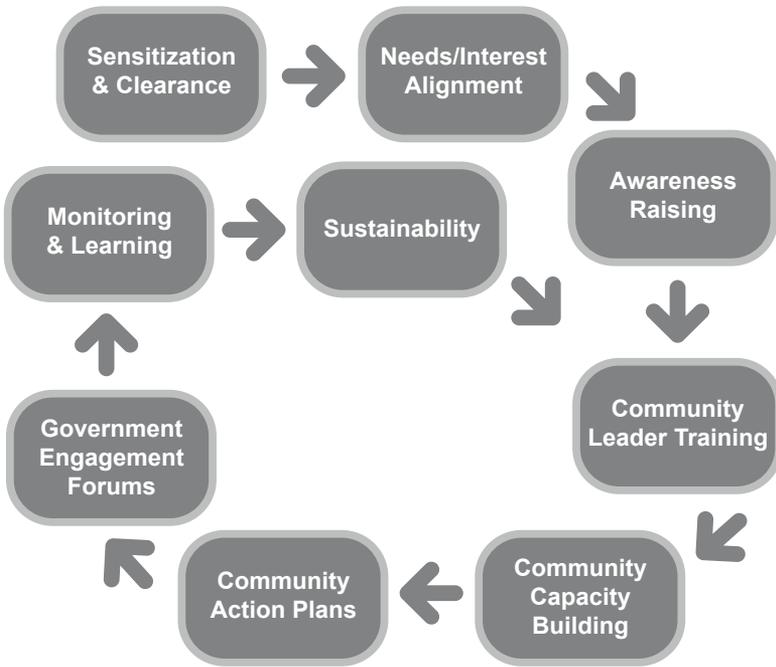


The Grassroots Mobilization Cycle

The Grassroots Mobilization Cycle below was developed by iScale based on a global analysis of community mobilization experiences across issue areas. The cycle comprises interventions that build on previous interventions, which feed into future iterations and eventually to concrete lessons. It is a non-prescriptive model that offers a generic roadmap to mobilize grassroots around budget issues.

Based on practitioners' experiences shared during the exchange, groups have focused their strategies on different parts of the cycle. Most groups have not yet arrived at the monitoring and learning component or the sustainability elements, but do consistently reflect on their strategies and impact.

Partners discussed the proposed stages of this model based on their own strategies and what they have experienced on the ground.



Sensitization and Clearance: Deep and respectful cultivation of community leaders and members to obtain access and trust, without which empowered and sustainable mobilization is not likely to be generated.

Often this part of the cycle is accomplished by building relationships with elders, elected officials, informal leaders, religious leaders, and citizens who can “introduce” outsiders to the community. Doing so provides the CSO with a “license to operate” in the community. Helping community members to understand the organization’s role by presenting options and information – not forcing decisions upon them – is critical to build confidence in the initiative and maintain dignity.

Sensitization and Clearance

The Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation, Pakistan

This foundation works in physically disconnected regions of Pakistan, where interaction with the state is minimal and tribal rule ranks high. Customs vary from region to region, so the foundation must cultivate relationships and devise unique strategies for each region. The organization maintains that consistent contact with beneficiaries of government programs has been critical to its credibility within the community. Without the trust of community members and tribal leaders through sensitization and clearance, the foundation's work would not be as successful.

Needs/Interest Alignment: Participatory assessment with community members to gauge needs and interests priorities. Different groups of community members must be engaged to develop a holistic view.

IBP partners agreed that citizen mobilization around the budget process requires a significant effort to connect with individuals and communities. For a budget initiative to be successful at the grassroots, it must be relevant to a community's day-to-day circumstances. To accurately capture the true priorities of a population, a participatory assessment must allow for a wide range of community members to voice interests. A campaign that wishes to build on the grassroots cannot be defined at the organizational level — it must stem from and address the priorities of the community it seeks to engage.

Needs/Interest Alignment

Treatment Advocacy and Literacy Campaign (TALC), Zambia

TALC is a group of member organizations that lobbies for equitable and sustainable access to affordable and high-quality HIV treatment, support, and care in Zambia since 2005. Prior to launching its budget monitoring and expenditure tracking work in the northwest province of the country, the organization performed a needs assessment. This assessment identified two critical challenges: lack of awareness and comprehension of budget information, and a perceived shortage of trained medical personnel in the province. This information helped TALC develop its initial action in an area akin to the community's needs.

Awareness Raising: Sustained engagement with members of communities to gauge issue comprehension and provide deeper and broader perspectives.

Mobilization is a powerful tool to create dialogue and activate interest in budget openness, allocation, and expenditures with respect to ordinary citizens' various concerns. A consistent awareness raising strategy helps to ensure sustained citizen involvement. Some organizations have achieved such awareness by going door to door, explaining issues, what is at stake, why citizens' participation is important, and so on. Others develop easily understandable pamphlets, while others use local newspapers, community radio, or even television, particularly in indigenous languages. Partners agreed that as technology reaches every corner of the globe, organizations would benefit from harnessing new media to further grassroots budget work. Actively using information platforms and social media tools like Google, Facebook, Twitter, and the blogosphere may require social media consultants or staff. But these platforms can build an unequivocal bridge to community members already involved in the process while reaching out to new ones.

Awareness Raising

HakiElimu, Tanzania

HakiElimu decided to allocate significant funds for media activities. Through short TV and radio spots, HakiElimu has raised awareness about diverse issues that affect the access to and quality of education, thus creating community pressure behind their goals for policy or budget changes. HakiElimu also uses community radio and SMS to distribute campaign and budget information, as most constituents can access them. The organization is slowly developing a social media presence.



Community Leader Training: Identifying and organizing leaders, facilitators, focal points, and others who will mobilize community members from various backgrounds.

It is crucial to identify active, energetic, and influential community leaders to kick start a grassroots mobilization effort. The passion and commitment of charismatic community leaders inspires others to join the effort and helps recruit citizens to serve as data collectors, monitors, and advocates. Leaders come in many forms and can include students, HIV-positive mothers, educators, religious leaders, and others who can mobilize their neighbors and communities to become involved and take action. These community leaders must receive information on issues of citizen concern and they must empower people to make their own decisions.

Community Leader Training:

Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), South Africa

Throughout the years, TAC has mobilized thousands of people across diverse provinces in South Africa to demand their right to access anti-retrovirals and related medical services. To organize and mobilize communities, TAC has relied on an often neglected group: the unemployed. They attend workshops to clearly understand TAC's issues and are trained in door-to-door outreach to explain these issues inside their communities. In recognition of their employment status, TAC provides them with lunch and transportation costs during their "working days."

Community Capacity Building: Education and training for community leaders and members to encourage participation as well as to teach political and technical skills.

Several organizations are developing training to raise basic budget literacy at the grassroots level and to educate citizens about the budget process and opportunities for participation. Often such trainings focus on basic skills but provide a steady flow of information and engagement that otherwise would not be possible. Aside from simplifying the complexities of budget issues, these trainings also politically empower participants. As community members become more familiar with budget issues and confident in their abilities to communicate with decision makers, their willingness to organize others or to replicate what they have learned by participating in the political process increases.

Community Capacity Building

Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos (INESC), Brazil

Some years ago INESC decided to connect its budgets and human rights work to specific communities. The organization developed relationships with local networks, informing them about participatory democracy, tax systems, and education spending. The organization conducts workshops with students in underprivileged schools, discussing democracy, human rights, and the way in which budget decisions affect their opportunities for education. INESC is in the process of developing a five-day methodology that it has applied to work with indigenous tribes and juvenile detention centers.

Community Action Plans: Developed to ensure that grassroots mobilization initiatives are consistent with community priorities and are documented.

Grassroots leaders stress that it is not sufficient to enter a community and raise consciousness about budget issues. Once awareness has been raised and initial capacities have been developed, engaged citizens and communities need an action plan to productively engage service providers or decision-makers. To achieve this, communities have to formulate goals, identify targets, and implement tactics to make government address their demands. The development of the action plan is as critical as every previous step, but is often left unattended because the enthusiasm to demand action is counterintuitive to planning. The strength of grassroots mobilization, however, lies not only in the empowerment of common people to seize political space, but also in having a joint front and a clear strategy.

Community Action Plans

Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), South Africa

TAC assists communities in the development of provincial and national Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), which demonstrate local needs. IDPs include the budget and actual costs of health delivery in a community. Each year TAC aims for the IDPs to be fully funded, and to help communities produce their own evidence and research to influence policy-makers and health sector funding overall.

Government Engagement Forums: Opportunities for citizens and government leaders to interact directly with one another, raise questions, and provide open and transparent feedback.

All grassroots mobilization ultimately hopes to arrive at a stage where citizens interact with government officials to raise their concerns, express their demands, and ultimately see their issues taken into account. Depending on each case, this can mean that citizens take part in policy debates, provide government officials with evidence from the community level, or convene meetings for direct and productive dialogue between citizens and the government. The space for dialogue should be democratic, and the interaction with government as positive and constructive as possible. Previous stages of awareness raising, capacity development, and the integration of an action plan should pave the way to government engagement and, above all, to the definition of clear and unequivocal demands.

Government Engagement Forums

Center for Economic Governance and AIDS in Africa (CEGAA)

CEGAA performs strategic, evidence-based advocacy to educate and build the capacity of government and civil society leaders. The organization works with government leaders (including members of parliament) and civil society to help them better understand the budget process and its relevance to HIV/AIDS and other health issues in South Africa through workshops, technical support, and mentorship. CEGAA also facilitates dialogue between stakeholders.

Monitoring, Learning, and Sustainability: Opportunities to observe and measure the impacts of grassroots mobilization as well as to record and communicate lessons. Improving and reinvesting to reach more community members after measuring impact, reviewing lessons learned, and applying good practices.

As with any other strategy to influence policy and bring about change, grassroots mobilization requires concrete efforts to monitor the impact of the strategy, identify positive and negative experiences, and adapt accordingly. Only by fully understanding decisions made during strategy implementation will civil society groups improve their approaches and make more strategic choices in the next round of similar efforts. To ensure sustainability, we must learn from our experiences so as to not repeat unsuccessful tactics and thus increase the potential impact of our approach.



Concluding Reflections

Participants at the exchange identified several reasons for the necessity of direct engagement in the budget process through grassroots mobilization or community involvement.

1. Citizens who are informed about and involved in public budgeting can hold governments to account for budget allocation and spending decisions. Furthermore, citizens who are aware of the opportunities to engage in the budget process can actively change budget dynamics and the provision of essential services.
2. When coupled with the efforts of civil society policy advocacy, direct citizen engagement yields a powerful voice that can garner the attention of both government and civil society to budget issues. Leveraging citizen engagement in budget accountability work can be a robust way to reach the ears of government and civil society.
3. Empowerment and mobilization of citizens is an ethical and moral obligation of CSOs working on budgets because governments have obligations to individual citizens, the ultimate holders of rights. While CSOs play critical intermediary roles in advancing budget accountability, citizens are the primary constituents and should be agents of public budget accountability.

This booklet is based on a horizontal peer exchanged organized by the IBP's Partnership Initiative in April 2011 and consolidates lessons and reflections from budget advocates around grassroots mobilization for budget advocacy. We hope that this document will serve as a resource for other civil society groups that seek to incorporate grassroots mobilization into their budget advocacy strategies.

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 or "Our Money, Our Responsibility: A Citizen's Guide to Monitoring Government Expenditures," 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.