

Terms of Reference

Evaluation of IBP's Strengthening Public Accountability for Resources and Knowledge (SPARK) Program

March 2022

Background

IBP's [Strengthening Public Accountability for Results and Knowledge \(SPARK\) initiative](#) partners with diverse grassroots organizations and social movements representing historically marginalized constituencies to help them understand the fiscal challenges behind poor service delivery and equip them with the knowledge and tools necessary to effectively advocate for improved public spending and services. SPARK combines the strength and momentum of large, "bottom-up" advocacy movements with the targeted public finance expertise and experience we offer to improve public services for vulnerable communities.

Since launching SPARK in 2018, IBP and its civil society partners have successfully piloted a model in seven countries (Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa) that harnesses the collective power and political influence of grassroots groups and social movements to build powerful service delivery and budget-focused reform campaigns. Over the past four years, SPARK has achieved significant results at scale in improving fiscal governance systems and service delivery. Just as critically, centering groups that represent marginalized communities (including women, small-scale farmers, and people with disabilities) as the main drivers of change represents an important shift in the field of public finance. Historically, the key players in public finance systems have been technical experts (e.g., think tanks, civil society groups that specialize in budget advocacy and analysis, etc.), and there have been few opportunities for grassroots groups and social movements to actively and meaningfully participate in budget processes and debates. Emerging lessons from SPARK have been documented on [building collective agency](#), [working in coalitions](#), and [engaging and shifting government](#).

The first phase of SPARK (2018-2022) focused largely on the budget and service delivery issues that are the most salient and visible in terms of citizens' daily lives. SPARK has embedded sustainable capacities in powerful local actors and coalitions, and achieved important outcomes from increased budget allocations and execution to direct service delivery improvements for historically excluded groups. But increasingly, there is recognition of the need to focus on deeper, fiscal governance systems issues to sustain and scale reforms and impacts. The focus of a second phase of SPARK (beginning in 2023) will be that targeted fiscal governance and service delivery systems are more inclusive, responsive, and accountable to the needs of historically excluded groups, especially women and girls. In order to take stock of progress in phase 1 of SPARK and leverage evidence and insights to inform phase 2, IBP will undertake an evaluative assessment of the program, its results and lessons learned.

See "Journey of SPARK phase one to phase two" below.

Evaluation scope, objective and approach

IBP seeks to evaluate the SPARK program to better understand the nature and extent of the outcomes that the program has contributed to and how the program has contributed to those outcomes, alongside other contextual factors. As noted, as SPARK ends its first phase and looks towards a second phase, now is an opportune time to take stock of the progress that has been made towards the long-term changes the program seeks to advance. This evaluation will be participatory and learning focused, and its overall goal is to inform further efforts by IBP and partners (particularly the next phase of the SPARK program) and those of other actors who can learn from the SPARK experience.

The evaluation needs to include all seven SPARK countries,¹ but IBP expects the evaluators to focus deeper exploration on 3-4² specific SPARK entry points. SPARK entry points consist of a set of core CSO partners/coalition with a shared strategy, and their collective engagements with a defined fiscal governance system (a target public service in a defined geographic area and its related public financial management and oversight mechanisms). The entry point explorations should explore outcomes, causal pathways and mechanisms, and the contribution of SPARK and other actors and contextual factors, and be written up as short case studies. An evaluation report will reflect these case studies and a broader assessment of the SPARK program.

The evaluation is expected to take place from April to July 2022, with reflection and outreach events (internal to IBP and external for broader audiences) to share evidence and insights from the evaluation from July through December 2022. The maximum budget for this evaluation is \$75,000.

Evaluation approach and methodology

The SPARK evaluation should be independent and rigorous, as well as participatory and learning focused. The overall goal is to generate evidence and insights that will improve the effectiveness and impact of the next phase of the SPARK program, based on clearer understanding of outcomes, contribution of the program's efforts to date, and causal pathways and mechanisms (including contextual factors and other actors' efforts) that are emerging. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that SPARK country teams and partners benefit from the evidence and insights in ways that can shape their understanding and approaches going forward. Thus, the entry point explorations should prioritize those that are most likely continuing into the second phase of the program.

Of particular interest is evidence and learning about how the actors and efforts in the SPARK program have understood, navigated and shifted the relevant fiscal governance system in focus entry points in the direction of inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability towards historically excluded constituencies IBP is partnering with. The fiscal governance system entails:

- Effective and democratic engagement of traditionally excluded grassroots groups and their coalitions
- Public financial management priorities, policies and processes
- Sectoral policies, processes, and service delivery dynamics

¹ The SPARK program in South Africa is currently undertaking a three-year (2021-2023) longitudinal evaluation. Emerging findings from this evaluation will be incorporated into this SPARK program evaluation.

² Likely one entry point from Senegal, Nigeria, Indonesia, and South Africa

- “Accountability ecosystem” of fiscal governance oversight actors, processes and dynamics

Thus, the evaluation should clarify the progress and outcomes achieved thus far in SPARK phase 1, including who was impacted by them, and contextualize these in terms of changes in relevant fiscal governance systems that SPARK will seek to continue to advance in its second phase.

Because of these interests, we anticipate that the right methodology will include in-depth case study exploration that should generate evidence and insights about the ongoing analysis and understanding of the fiscal governance system by SPARK core stakeholders, how the evolving SPARK theory of action and strategic approach sought to generate change in the fiscal governance systems, what shifts in the fiscal governance system have been observed, how the SPARK approach (and other relevant actors and factors) contributed to these shifts, and what the implications are for deepening and sustaining these shifts over time in ways that ensure equitable access to improved services by the historically excluded constituencies IBP is partnering with.

The evaluation team is free to propose an appropriate methodology or methodologies to generate robust and useful evidence and insights that addresses the below evaluation questions and products.

Proposed Evaluation questions (to be finalized with evaluation team)

1. What outcomes were achieved? To what extent (scale and quality of change)? And how sustainable?
 - a. What were the tangible impacts of the program outcomes on citizens? Which groups were directly and indirectly impacted, particularly from a gender perspective?
 - b. To what extent was the [collective agency](#)³ of grassroots actors and their coalitions strengthened? How inclusive, healthy and sustainable are these coalitions, including from a gender perspective?
 - c. To what extent were priority space/processes in which grassroots organizations engaged government actors and decisions inclusive, participatory and meaningful (in terms of influencing decisions)?
 - d. What do the observed outcomes indicate about the nature, extent and sustainability of shifts in relevant fiscal governance systems? What are the implications of these shifts from a broader equity perspective (e.g. did improvements in resources/services for target groups come at the expense of other disadvantaged groups)?
2. How and why did change happen that led to observed outcomes?
 - a. What was the contribution by individual and collective elements of SPARK strategy, resources and stakeholders? By other stakeholders and contextual factors?
 - b. What were the causal pathways and mechanisms that led to priority changes in service delivery and fiscal governance systems?
 - c. To what extent did these change pathways reflect the SPARK program Theory of Change and entry point Theories of Action? How should these Theories of Action be updated to reflect evidence and insights from the evaluation?
3. How effective and efficient was the SPARK program in achieving the above outcomes and contribution?
 - a. How effective and efficient were SPARK country team roles and processes, and how could they be improved?

³ Also referred to as ‘bargaining power’ or ‘countervailing power’

- b. How did grassroots partners experience the SPARK program, and what could be done to ensure more effective and balanced partnerships between IBP and partners?
- 4. What other lessons emerge from the evaluation?
 - a. What evidence and insights are relevant SPARK's [existing lessons](#)⁴?
 - b. What other insights are relevant to SPARK, IBP and broader stakeholders?

Evaluation case studies and report

The evaluative case studies should address the following (to be reviewed and finalized with evaluation team):

1. Theory of action
 - a. Initial and evolving understanding of the fiscal governance problem(s) and its causes
 - b. Initial and evolving strategic approach by SPARK to addressing the problem and advancing objectives
 - c. Current theory of action informing entry point strategy
2. Outcomes
 - a. Expected and unexpected outcomes across the various dimensions of the SPARK program's focus (see Annex 1: SPARK Theory of Change and Annex 2: SPARK Results Framework), including:
 - i. Strengthened collective agency of grassroots organizations and their coalitions⁵
 - ii. Inclusive, participatory and meaningful engagement and influence of grassroots organizations in priority spaces/processes for engaging government actors and decisions
 - iii. Shifts in entry point fiscal governance systems, including (but not limited to):
 1. Identifying and addressing key PFM and/or service delivery bottlenecks
 2. Overall shifts towards more inclusiveness, [responsiveness and accountability](#) to target groups
 - b. Actors who benefited from the outcomes, directly and (where possible) indirectly, including from a gender and equity perspective
 - c. Extent and sustainability of the outcomes
3. Understanding how and why change happened
 - a. Causal factors, mechanisms and pathways that led to priority outcomes (with a focus on service delivery outcomes and overall fiscal governance system shifts)
4. Contribution
 - a. Contribution of SPARK program resources and stakeholder actions to observed outcomes (specific outcomes and overall shifts in fiscal governance system)
 - b. Contribution of other actors and contextual factors to observed outcomes (specific outcomes and overall shifts in fiscal governance system)
5. Other insights and considerations

The overall SPARK assessment should address the following (in addition to other elements agreed between evaluation team and IBP):

⁴ See also [here](#) and [here](#).

⁵ This should include an assessment of the inclusiveness, health and effectiveness of the principal coalition in each entry point using (adapting as needed) an existing IBP assessment tool

- Relevance of the SPARK Theory of Change, including the updated ToC for the second phase of the program
- Program effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability
- Program learning insights and recommendations for SPARK phase 2, IBP and its partners, and the broader fiscal governance field

Evaluation Deliverables

1. Evaluation inception report and workshop (Q2 2022)
2. Draft entry point case studies [max 12 pages each] (end of Q2 2022)
3. Final case studies and draft evaluation report (Q3 2022)
4. Final Evaluation report [max 20 pages, excluding annexes] and summary of high-level findings [short document or PPT] (Q3 2022)
5. Contribution to IBP evidence and insights workshop (SPARK program and country levels, including informing SPARK phase 2 strategies) (Q3 2022)
6. Contribution to external evidence and insights workshop⁶ (Q4 2022)

Evaluation management, quality assurance, and timeline

IBP Roles and responsibilities⁷ with respect to the evaluation:

Head of Strategy and Learning Team

- Provide overall guidance and day-to-day management of evaluation
- Facilitate the availability of program data and documentation
- Support design and facilitation of inception and uptake workshops
- Review and approve final evaluation documents

SPARK Program Director and Country Managers

- Engage actively in shaping, contributing to and learning from evaluation
- Facilitate engagement between evaluation team and country stakeholders (IBP team, partners and other relevant stakeholders)

SPARK teams⁸ and core partners in case study countries

- Engage actively in shaping, contributing to and learning from evaluation (particularly case studies)
- Ensure availability of relevant data and documentation as required by the evaluation team
- Facilitate engagement between evaluation team and external stakeholders

⁶ The evaluation evidence, findings and recommendations will be presented to external audiences alongside a broader set of SPARK learning insights

⁷ An evaluation coordination committee will ensure that the evaluation is undertaken in a practical, participatory and robust manner, and will include the Head of Strategy and Learning, SPARK MEL Senior Program Officer, Director of Partnerships, a Country Manager, and a country MEL staff or action research lead (ARL) who has been providing research and learning support in each SPARK country

⁸ Including the Action Research Lead

QUALIFICATIONS, SELECTION CRITERIA AND APPLICATION PROCESS

Desired evaluation team profile:

- Demonstrated experience conducting evaluations of complex governance programs, advocacy strategies and/or systems change using rigorous qualitative methods with quantitative data where relevant, experience with public budgets and finance a strong plus
- Knowledge about evidence, tactics and approaches related to government reform, capacity building, coalition building, and technical assistance; strong plus for evaluator(s) to have exposure to and understanding of fiscal governance and public financial management
- Excellent written english; French and Bahasa skills strongly recommended
- Experience leading interactive and meaningful reflection on evaluation evidence and insights which enable decision-makers and implementers to make changes that improve the impact and efficacy of their work

Evaluation teams will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

- Clarity and appropriateness of proposed evaluation approach, including approach to participation of program stakeholders and learning uptake
- Relevant experience of team members with evaluations of similar programs in governance, civil society and public financial management domains
- Relevant capacity and experience with proposed methodologies

[We are open to candidates from any location, and especially eager to receive applications from teams led by women, people of color, and applicants from the Global South. Given the uncertainties of COVID-19, the consultant(s) should prepare to conduct the majority (if not all) of their inquiry virtually.]

Submitting an application:

1. CVs of key personnel (3 page maximum for each CV)
2. Brief (5-6 page maximum) concept note including:
 - a. Relevant prior experiences
 - b. Approach to the evaluation, including:
 - i. Proposed methodological approach
 - ii. Proposed participation and uptake approach
 - c. Relevant methodological questions and other considerations that need to be addressed
3. One example of relevant previous work (e.g. final evaluation report or similar)
4. Proposed budget of up to \$75,000

Proposal submissions should be sent to Brendan Halloran (bhalloran@internationalbudget.org) no later than April 1, 2022, with a final decision on evaluator by April 12, and an anticipated start of the evaluation in May 2022. Questions on this ToR may be submitted and will be answered as promptly as possible.⁹

⁹ In the event of several questions being received, an FAQ addressing all questions will be developed and circulated in an updated TOR by March 21.

Annex 1: SPARK Phase One Strategy Concept Note

SPARK will support and leverage public engagement around service delivery issues that affect citizens' lives as an entry point to shaping budget processes and outcomes in the directions of justice, inclusiveness and democracy.

The Spark approach is in recognition that advances in civil society engagement in fiscal governance have still fallen short of the impacts needed to democratize budgets for more equitable outcomes. Whilst many gains have been made in terms of fiscal transparency and CSO capacity it has not brought us change in budget accountability or meaningful outcomes for citizens. Ordinary citizens especially the most marginalized are still excluded from the budgeting process whilst other groups in society are given preferential treatment and governments do not feel pressure to change this status quo. The result is a set of outcomes that benefit the better off and perpetuate poverty and exclusion. The budget is the greatest expression of political will and exists within a broader political economy and set of power interests. In order to shift budgets we must engage with those root causes. In order to shift governments we need to build countervailing power to put them under pressure to change.

Countervailing power is defined as the **capacity** to “select, reward and sanction the leaders, institutions, policies, formal rules and informal norms that directly affect their lives”.¹⁰ Collective organizing and action often happens around local issues and particularly service delivery outcomes. Spark believes that by using this as an entry point we can more likely transform lives as well as transform systems.

The starting point will be partnerships between IBP country teams and civil society partners (both formal CSOs and organizations and movements led by citizens). These collaborations will be oriented towards a tangible and relevant issue around service delivery. IBP will expose the budgetary reasons for poor service outcomes as well as provide multifaceted support to partners to build capacities to engage in fiscal governance processes, navigate the accountability ecosystem, analyze political dynamics, build wider coalitions and strategize, reflect and learn. The aim being to bolster the countervailing power of these coalitions to shape budget processes and outcomes.

What success would look like in SPARK?

We identify four interrelated areas of outcomes: countervailing power of marginalized groups in the fiscal domain, democratizing fiscal governance spaces, producing more equitable outcomes (£ and services), and contributing to more meaningful accountability.

Specifically we will seek to contribute to the adoption of improved budget policies for services targeting poor and marginalized groups in each SPARK country as well as the improved implementation of said budget policies. In addition SPARK will seek to increase both the capacity of civil society to influence budget policies and service delivery and the participation of civil society in decision making processes relevant to budget policies and service delivery. SPARK will also strengthen reform coalitions and civil society relationships with influential state officials who are able to address budget and service issues.

¹⁰ Desai, R. (2010). The Political Economy of Urban Poverty in Developing Countries: Theories, Issues, and an Agenda for Research. Washington, D.C., Brookings Institution Wolfenson Center for Development.

The Context

The past several decades have been ones of expanding democracy and prosperity around the world. Yet, despite these improvements, hundreds millions of people around the world continue to live in conditions of deprivation and vulnerability, and unable to meaningfully influence government decisions that affect their lives. Although most countries in the world now have the domestic resource potential to meaningfully improve public services, particularly for the most marginalized groups, progress has been uneven. The processes, institutions and outcomes of fiscal governance are not oriented to those populations, and in fact often exclude them, formally or informally. Furthermore, countries around the world are taking actions to reduce the space for civic society and citizen organizing and expression.

This exclusion is a product of formal and visible policies and institutional features that limit the engagement of citizens, particularly from marginalized groups, and does not reflect their priorities. The structural drivers of these visible problems are rooted in power and politics, and their reflection in formal and informal institutions that govern the use of public resources. Exclusionary fiscal governance is rooted in the ability of powerful actors and groups to influence decision making in an opaque, undemocratic and unaccountable manner. This is a reflection of the lack of countervailing power, particularly on the part of poor groups, and the weakness of the accountability ecosystem of fiscal governance and service delivery.

The International Budget Partnership

Two decades ago the fiscal transparency and accountability field barely existed. In most countries, budgets were developed within a tight circle of the finance ministry, to be adopted and implemented without public inspection or debate, or even meaningful input from other parts of government. Today there is widespread belief among international institutions, donors, and within a sizable number of governments, that governments, donors and the private sector should be more fiscally transparent, that citizens have the intrinsic right to understand and assess fiscal transparency and accountability issues and that their voice can add value to discussions and outcomes in this field.

Contributing to these shifts, there has been a rapid growth of independent organizations around the world that enable citizens and civil society organizations to better trace how public money flows throughout the public resource chain at local, national, and international levels. Yet we know that CSO engagement in monitoring and advocating for improvements in public expenditures runs up against powerful interests and must navigate an – often weak – accountability ecosystem. This reality has led to increasingly sophisticated civil society strategies for engaging decision makers and the public around budget issues, often by building wider coalitions, adopting multiple tactics, and working across levels of governance to effectively influence government decisions and processes.

Lessons and evidence from the fiscal governance sector and our work that informs SPARK:

1. The route to desired reforms is more likely to be navigated by changing underlying governmental systems AND by changing particular policies or service delivery that have direct impact on people's lives. Both are important and can occur simultaneously.
2. Citizens are most likely to mobilise around public programs and services that affect people's quality of life. Collective organizing and action is essential to enable them to engage and shape decision making, bolstered by the technical capacities to navigate PFM and accountability

processes.¹¹ People are also most likely to do so without focusing on technical issues or broader fiscal governance issues.

3. Shrinking civic space demands a different approach. We must work with civil society organisations with credibility and legitimacy which is why we are moving towards new partnerships with unions, faith based networks, and other membership-based organizations that are increasingly representative of citizens. We are engaging on issues such as service delivery outcomes that are hard to refute and citizen mobilization that is hard to shut down.
4. The IBP is not best placed to do grassroots organizing rather will play a brokering and strategic accompaniment role for networks, coalitions and campaigns.
5. If you really want to build civil society capacities, technical assistance must reflect the specific needs of those partners in the context of their campaigns and engagements. One-off generic trainings have limited value, rather an intensive accompaniment model including peer learning and engagement is much more effective.
6. Feasible and sustainable reform will often not be driven by individuals or small groups, nor will it necessarily be a product of civil society advocacy. Rather, it will require broader and more diverse coalitions that include organizations with dedicated/deep technical experience in public budgeting but also grassroots movements, progressive elements in government etc.¹²
7. Context is everything and context is complex and constantly changing. Robust analysis, ongoing monitoring, experimental approaches and adaptive programme planning is therefore essential to achieve impact.
8. There have been very few examples of citizen movements shifting fiscal systems. We believe that a budget tool as well as a broader understanding of root causes can add value and power to the work of these movements that will achieve deeper outcomes. For example we know that deep reasons why there isn't enough money for health may not have anything to do with health, and everything to do with the larger PFM system.
9. Building sustainable budget advocacy skills takes a variety of forms. In some countries they can be focused in a central institution that services the needs of other civil society and grassroots organizations. In other context they need to be embedded in service delivery campaigns. Important to learn more about these options.

Strategic components of a Spark country strategy

1. ***Bolster agency from the bottom up:*** Ensure, through tailor made support that poor and marginalized groups can meaningfully engage in shaping fiscal and service delivery decisions and implementation that affect them through strengthened collective political agency and technical capacities. In other words, democratize fiscal governance and service delivery from below. The sustainability of such agency will be ensured by building the people, institutions, resources and repertoires of collective action that can hold and develop this work over the medium to long term.

¹¹ Gaventa, J. and G. Barrett (2010). "So What Difference Does it Make? Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement." [IDS Working Paper 347](#): 1-72.

¹² This goes beyond our core CSO partners to include reformists within government, more progressive elements of the elite, social movements, international actors, etc. See Sidel, John T. "Achieving Reforms in Oligarchical Democracies: The role of leadership and coalitions in the Philippines". The Developmental Leadership Program, University of Birmingham, UK.

2. **Support broader reform coalitions:** involving actors inside and outside the state, from formal CSOs and broader citizen movements, with incentives and capacity to pursue meaningful reforms to strengthen and democratize fiscal governance institutions and processes. Depending on the issue, this will involve vertical integration of partnerships up the fiscal system to more effectively monitor and engage fiscal governance and service delivery processes. These partnerships should help achieve scale by impacting systems as well as by bringing much larger numbers of people into engagement with the state.
3. **Strengthen and leverage the accountability ecosystem:** Support partners and campaigns to navigate the budget accountability ecosystem (through an ecosystem of formal and informal actors and mechanisms, including media, formal oversight actors, CSO watchdogs, etc.), to bolster their engagement in fiscal governance and service delivery. Contribute where possible to meaningful oversight of decision making and implementation through direct and indirect support of and engagement with oversight actors, as well through support of citizen-led accountability efforts.
4. **Improve the enabling environment:** for the engagement of poor and marginalized individuals in the budget process. This can include more granular information disclosure, more meaningful participatory mechanisms, resources and other facilitation, and other enabling factors that encourage inclusive and meaningful engagement in fiscal processes. This can also include negotiating with and supporting governmental actors to undertake or bolster participatory mechanisms.
5. **Influence ideas and discourse:** Produce evidence, narratives, etc. to shape information, ideas, norms and discourse around fiscal governance in a way that supports our work with partners towards tangible outcomes and deeper structural shifts in the direction of inclusion, democracy and accountability. This will involve engagement with media, traditional and digital, to shape decision makers ideas and incentives. This will also involve information and narratives that helps shape citizens' understanding and, more importantly, engagement around key service delivery, fiscal governance, and accountability issues that connect to our partners' campaigns and systems change efforts.

Learning in SPARK

IBP has a long history of embedding learning in our approaches to supporting civil society engagement in public fiscal governance. Learning in SPARK will be embedded in a holistic strategic thinking, planning, assessing, and learning framework. This framework will provide tools and guidance to ensure that learning is driven by strategic priorities and practice-oriented. A key feature of this strategic learning approach will be embedded action research at the country level, in partnership with an academic institution(s).

An action research and learning partnership makes intrinsic sense as a complement to the SPARK strategy. IBP does not have much evidence or experience with respect to analyzing and addressing the root causes of exclusionary governance and institutions, nor is it alone in this regard as many organizations share similar gaps. Indeed, although broader evidence does suggest some important elements of a strategic approach, including expanding our work with grassroots organizations and movements representing marginalized groups, there is little guidance about how to put these into practice. Thus, an action research partnership will give us an opportunity to work with thought leaders on the governance challenges and change approaches we are proposing for SPARK. Furthermore, it suggests an action research approach, in which invest more resources in testing and learning about

complex change pathways as we go. An action research approach will provide us tactical insights, broader strategic lessons, and potentially comparative knowledge about the nature of change and impact for more democratic and equitable fiscal governance processes and institutions that can shape efforts by IBP and the broader field going forward. In terms of more comparative or even generalizable knowledge, some kinds of quantitative and/or experimental research approaches will likely be appropriate.

Annex 2: Journey of SPARK phase one to phase two

IBP's innovative SPARK program sought to support and leverage engagement by grassroots organizations and movements around service delivery issues that affect marginalized citizens' lives as an entry point to shaping budget processes and outcomes in the directions of justice, inclusiveness and democracy. SPARK focused on changes that affect the lives of poor and excluded groups, but also on supporting the mobilization of these same groups to be agents of collective change. Furthermore, SPARK was grounded in an understanding that exclusionary practices and policies in service delivery and budgets are shaped by structural factors deeply rooted in politics and institutions. Thus, SPARK sought to support action to strengthen and leverage the countervailing power of marginalized groups, along with complementary tools and approaches, to meaningfully engage and influence formal and informal fiscal institutions and the accountability ecosystem. In other words, SPARK attempted to democratize fiscal governance and service delivery from below.

A fundamental hypothesis in SPARK was the need to combine political agency and technical skills to shift government action in fiscal governance (budget, service and oversight) systems, policies and practices. The political influence we thought would come from partnering with membership-based organizations or movements able to represent marginalized communities and facilitate their collective action. By building budget skills and knowledge in these groups we thought we could both grow the field of budget champions and link political and technical influence. This was based on the limitations of expert budget CSOs alone in influencing governments on behalf of these groups, while acknowledging that technical skills and understanding of fiscal governance actors and systems are still an important part of the collective budget agency equation. What we have learned in SPARK is that the collective organizing, representation and legitimacy of grassroots membership-based organizations can play a significant role in informing and influencing government when paired with credible data and evidence related to specific service and budget issues.

SPARK's citizen-led advocacy resulted in significant changes in service provision, budget allocations and service delivery processes. Highlights are provided below:

- 2.25 million targeted poor and marginalized persons directly accessed new or improved services since the beginning of SPARK (COVID-19 relief packages, social protection assistance, water, sanitation, agricultural inputs, fuel subsidy assistance etc.);
- 19 instances of increased budget allocations in Kenya, India, Indonesia and Nigeria. *In Nigeria, budget advocacy during the pandemic prevented a major cut to the 2020 national agricultural budget;*
- 29 changes in policies relevant to service delivery have been observed across SPARK countries. *In South Africa, a new sanitation contract was implemented in Ekurhuleni following a social audit involving 20,000 residents, and benefitting 600 000 residents.*

IBP's Mid-Strategy Review process recognized the strong progress being made in most SPARK entry points and the significant service delivery outcomes being achieved. At the same time, it noted that in

general there was less clear progress on shifting some of the underlying causes of service delivery gaps for marginalized groups, from PFM bottlenecks to ineffective channels for citizen engagement with government to weak accountability dynamics. SPARK campaigns need tangible progress to keep partnerships energized and to ensure direct results in the lives of marginalized groups. However, most of these gains came as a result of discretionary decisions by government authorities, and thus have questions about their sustainability. Furthermore, we have identified diverse PFM bottlenecks in many of these service delivery areas, from procurement issues to delays in disbursements, that we have not yet addressed in most entry points.

Thus, while the gains made by SPARK coalitions are important, particularly in the context of COVID, these do not yet represent sustainable advances towards addressing the underlying causes of inadequate public resources and services for the marginalized groups we are working with. Therefore, the big strategic issue for SPARK is the need to balance the tangible and service delivery wins that have been achieved with more intentional efforts to generate systemic changes to deepen and reinforce these gains. This acknowledges that SPARK successfully navigated fiscal governance systems and broader contextual dynamics (including the COVID crisis) to achieve initial advances, but our efforts will face significant challenges going forward in terms of full implementation and sustainability.

As SPARK campaigns continue to develop, and sharpen their focus on systemic issues, there is a need not only to identify in a forensic way where different bottlenecks or blockages lie (and that progress in addressing one issue won't be undermined by another related challenge), but also to monitor across the system to make sure progress isn't 'squeezing the balloon' – moving the blockage or resistance or exclusionary practice somewhere else in the system. This kind of approach is also about identifying where different parts of the system (diverse government actors, processes, etc.) are dysfunctional and how these relate to one another. The mid-strategy review for SPARK proposed four areas for deepening our focus going forward:

1. **Civic mobilization:** Continue to strengthen effective, inclusive and sustainable civic mobilization, both with grassroots partners and broader coalitions. Collective agency should continue to be strengthened by leveraging federations and movements to engage government from national to local levels, including more meaningful engagement of grassroots members in both action and decision making in SPARK. Strengthening investment in strategic coalitions, particularly to address systemic issues (including those below).
2. **Civic participation:** Focus more on enabling inclusive and meaningful engagement by marginalized groups in formal participatory spaces. SPARK partners should identify participatory mechanisms, existing or in some cases new, that are potentially meaningful for securing sustainable citizen engagement by marginalized groups in planning, monitoring or other processes related to budgets and services. This will include strategies for addressing weaknesses in existing spaces, through institutional shifts and effective links to civic mobilizing. This could include a variety of state and municipal budget planning processes across SPARK entry points.
3. **Oversight actors and systems:** Invest more in engaging, leveraging and strengthening accountability ecosystem actors relevant to area of focus. Media and state oversight actors (especially auditors) are emerging as the most relevant accountability actors across SPARK, and we must continue to build relationships with them and establish concrete opportunities for connection and collaboration.
4. **Public Financial Management Systems:** Revisit and focus more intentionally on PFM bottlenecks to more systemic change. This involves continuing to identifying specific PFM constraints on service delivery, and focusing on those going forward. This will also include monitoring implementation of allocations and other policy wins, and addressing issues as they arise to ensure meaningful and sustainable impacts.

In sum, SPARK's central hypothesis was that strengthening and leveraging collective citizen action around tangible service delivery issues can serve as an entry point for engaging with and shaping more democratic and accountable fiscal governance processes and more equitable outcomes. Our learning the far has validated the fundamental effectiveness of engaging legitimate collective citizen groups and helping them navigate fiscal governance actors and processes to influence decisions around budgets and services. Our lessons are that there are opportunities to advance service and budget changes by navigating and engaging existing institutions and actors, working to align priorities to influence decisions and outcomes. Our experience of shifting the enabling environment needed to deepen and sustain these changes, as well as shape more inclusive and responsive fiscal governance going forward, is at an earlier stage, with areas to strengthen outlined above. This will be the focus of SPARK 2 going forward.