

BUDGET ANALYSIS AND POLICY ADVOCACY: THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL PUBLIC ACTION

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This paper examines the impact of independent budget analysis and advocacy initiatives that are designed to improve budget transparency and government expenditure priorities with a view to promoting greater equity and social justice. It draws six case studies of independent budget groups in Brazil, Croatia, India, Mexico, South Africa, and Uganda, which include non-governmental organisations, research institutions and social movements. The paper presents evidence on the impact of activities that seek to improve the availability of budget information, transparency, and broader societal participation in the budget process on the one hand, and the content of budget priorities, quality of implementation and expenditure outcomes on the other.

The evidence demonstrates that the most significant impacts achieved by independent budget groups include improvements in the transparency of budgetary decisions and the budget process; increased budget awareness and literacy; and enhanced engagement in the budget process on the part of legislators, the media and civil society organisations. The case studies document several innovative methodologies and dissemination tools towards these outcomes, including the use of the internet to spread budget awareness in Brazil to the production of citizen guides to expenditures and taxes in Croatia.

While the structure of the budget process makes substantial shifts in expenditure priorities difficult to achieve, there is evidence that budget groups can directly lead to positive impacts on budget policy, allocations and implementation. The documented impacts take the form of increased allocations of budgetary resources for reproductive health in Mexico, child support grants in South Africa, and tribal development expenditure in Gujarat, India. Tracking of budgetary expenditures and impacts was also found to be especially effective in ensuring effective utilisation of education and health expenditures at sub-district level in Uganda, obstetric care resources to prevent maternal mortality in two Mexican states, and investment in public works by local governments in Gujarat. Increased budget allocations and improved utilisation of public funds that benefit poor and disadvantaged groups can ensure greater equity in budget priorities and further social justice objectives.

The key explanatory factors that shape the positive impact of independent budget groups appear to be as follows: the legitimacy acquired from quality analysis and timely and effective dissemination; the strength and durability of broader alliances in civil society; the quality of relationships established with government and the legislature; the depth and extent of legislative engagement in the budget process; and the openness and flexibility of the budget process.