



NABZ-IRAN
E-LEARNING COURSE
Budget Monitoring at the Local and National Level



*Course developed with support from the
Global Dialogue on the Future of Iran (GDFI)*

INTRODUCTION

An important component of a well-functioning and responsive government is transparent and accountable budgeting. Budget monitoring initiatives can rally citizens around a cause that has the potential for very real and tangible results, such as an increase in funding for public services and infrastructure projects that they consider to be priorities. In most countries, the government has a national budget, as well as subnational and local budgets. Focusing on local budgets allows monitoring groups to interact with decision-makers with whom they may already be familiar, but perhaps more importantly, the changes made to local-level budgets are guaranteed to have a direct effect on the community.

Are you interested in better understanding how government resources are allocated and spent? Are you concerned about the quality and quantity of services your government provides? Are you curious about how the government spends your hard earned tax dollars? If so, than this course on budget monitoring may be of interest. The *Budget Monitoring at the Local and National Level* module will help you better understand how to increase government accountability and transparency using budgets as a tool.

The course is divided into five lessons:

- The Budget Cycle
- Planning and Developing a Budget Monitoring Initiative
- Engaging and Building Support to Make Budget Monitoring Successful
- Creating Change from Budget Monitoring
- Conclusion: Tools and Resources for a Monitoring Initiative

Each lesson contains relevant definitions, examples and challenges to consider, and at the end of each lesson, you can take a short quiz to test what you have learned.

Take this Course

LESSON ONE: THE BUDGET CYCLE

(Adapted from Ramkumar, Vivek. *Our Money, Our Responsibility: A Citizens' Guide to Monitoring Government Expenditures*. Washington, DC: International Budget Project, Feb 2008.)

When monitoring government spending, it is important to understand how budgets are developed, the budget approval process, how budgets are implemented and who has oversight responsibility for the budget. This is known as the *budget cycle*. Every budget, whether focused on the national or subnational level, must go through a similar process.

When you complete this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand the four key parts of a budget cycle;
- Learn different strategies for how to get involved in budget monitoring; and
- Identify challenges in the budget monitoring and address ways to overcome them.

Back

Next

What is Budget Monitoring?

Budget monitoring is a process by which monitoring groups collect information, from government meetings and documents, to better understand how the government allocates and spends resources. By monitoring the budget in a systematic, rigorous way, monitoring groups can develop evidence-based advocacy and awareness campaigns that press for an increase in government spending on community priority needs. They do this type of monitoring in order to determine and raise awareness of how public funding is allocated by the government.

Budget monitoring is a process by which monitoring groups collect information, from government meetings and documents, to better understand how the government allocates and spends resources.

When monitoring government spending, it is important to understand how budgets are developed, the budget approval process, how budgets are implemented and who has oversight responsibility for the budget. This is known as the *budget cycle*. Every budget, whether focused on the national or subnational level, must go through a similar process.

Back

Next

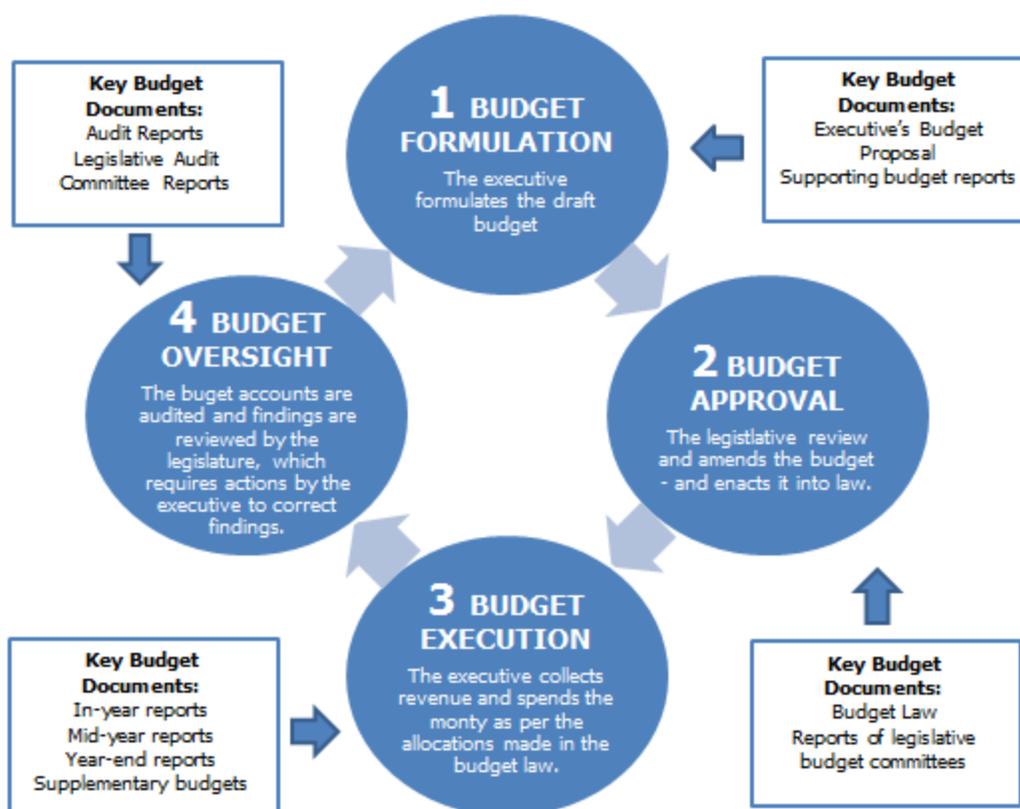
Overview of the Budget Cycle

Depending on the country, a budget cycle can last from 12 to more than 24 months. It is best for monitoring groups to monitor the budget cycle in its *entirety* in order to develop evidence-based budget advocacy initiatives. Monitoring the entire budget cycle from the development stage through implementation provides groups with a complete understanding of the political and administrative perspectives and challenges to budgeting; in other words, who requested specific line item changes, who objected to revisions and so on.

Having as complete of a picture as possible helps groups translate monitoring results into advocacy plans (see lesson four). In addition to understanding and monitoring the entire budget cycle, it is also critical that monitoring groups fully understand the legal framework and budget cycle timeline before they begin collecting data and analyzing their findings.

The budget cycle has four key parts:

1. Budget Formulation
2. Budget Approval
3. Budget Execution
4. Budget Oversight



[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Budget Formulation



Budget formulation is when a draft budget is developed by the authoritative body of government. This is usually the executive office of a country - the prime minister's or president's office. This will be dependent on the authority granted in the legal framework. For Iran, the budget is formulated and proposed by the president's office (see the Nabz-Iran document [An Introductory Primer to the Budget Process in Iran](#) for more details on the budget process).

There are several steps that go into formulating a budget. These may include a review of the previous year's budget, financial reports

on allocation and spending, budget requests from parliamentary committees or budget proposals from other interested parties. As a budget is being formulated or developed, the drafting authority may also include direct inputs from monitoring groups. This is called participatory budgeting. For an example of a complete budget monitoring project check out *Participatory Budgeting and Expenditure Tracking in Indonesia: A Budget Monitoring, Tracking and Advocacy Vignette*

Participatory budgeting is the process of democratic deliberation and decision-making through which governments allocate a percentage of a budget, usually at the municipal level, for civil society to budget directly according to community priorities.

CASE STUDY

[Participatory Budgeting in Brazil](#)



The 1988 constitution brought Brazil a number of democratic measures, including more open and inclusive budgeting processes. The Workers Party (PT), following a relatively successful power transition from previous dictatorial eras began a creative experiment of engaging a wide spectrum of people to formulate city budgets. The Porto Alegre case has, in particular, stood out for demonstrating an efficient practice of democratic resource and has a long standing reputation for hosting a progressive civil society led by intellectuals and labor unions experienced in mobilizing people to partake in public life.

The World Bank [website](#) provides an overview of the budgeting process in Porto Alegre and includes a report that analyzes the process. The [Porto Alegre government website](#), while in Portuguese (you can get a rough translation by using Google Translate) details the national level and local level legislation that governs their budget processes (see left hand tab labeled *Legislação Orçamentária*), as well as strategic planning documents, contracting and budgeting and documentation.

Budget Formulation (continued)

It is important for citizens to be aware and, as much as possible, be a part of the budget formulation process. Being involved, whether through the collection and review of government financial documents, attending budget hearings or submitting budget advocacy proposals, helps citizens better understand how and why certain government budget priorities are made. This foundational understanding is critical for monitoring budget implementation and tracking expenditures. This will also be important as groups consider developing budget advocacy initiatives.

There are several challenges to the budget formulation phase.

Access to Information: Often, citizens do not have access to this phase of the budget cycle. Governments, especially at the national level, are not always transparent and open about how budgetary resources are allocated. For many, citizens only have access to the final approved budget.

Resource Allocation: Another challenge can be understanding not only where and how a government's financial resources are being spent, but also where those resources come from. A government must be able to definitively say where resources for budget line items will come from (taxes, licenses or permitting fees, natural resource revenue, foreign investment or loans, etc.). In Iran, income sources include revenues from taxes, oil sales and investments. This information may be available during the budget formulation or budget approval phases.

However, a significant challenge to those monitoring the budget process is if this information is not available to the public. If this information is not available, it can make expenditure tracking less thorough and potentially difficult. For example, it could raise questions about how personal taxes and fees are being collected and spent within communities.

Back

Next

Budget Approval



Just like the budget formulation step, the budget approval process varies by country. For those monitoring the approval phase, understanding the legal framework (discussed in lesson two) is critical. Having a full, well-rounded understanding of what is legally required of the budget approval process, who is involved and how decisions are made is important when analyzing the findings from budget monitoring efforts.

For many, the budget is approved by legislative bodies, such as parliament or municipal councils. In the case of Iran, the budget must be approved through a parliamentary process followed by concurrence from the Guardian Council. The budget approval body may allow for public access to budget approval hearings, which often includes a presentation by the budget drafters that provides insight into the rationale for some budget line item allocations. The approval process may also include decision memos or other financial records as part of the decision-making process available to the public.

Having a public budget approval process can also help citizens better understand who is involved in the approval process. Understanding the decision-making process can help in later phases of the budget cycle when monitoring groups seek to hold these same decision-makers accountable to budget execution and implementation.

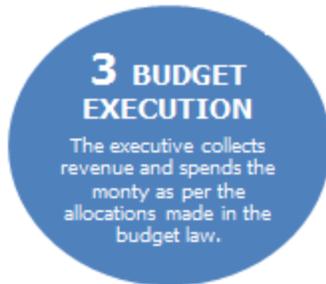
A significant challenge to citizens and monitoring groups interested in monitoring the budget approval phase is access. Often, these final approval decisions are made behind closed doors and public access, including media access, is strictly limited or prohibited. While not knowing is an obvious challenge, it can also be challenging in an open process to know exactly who the decision makers are; while the transparency is good, it can also be a challenge if there is the possibility of significant backlash to monitoring groups if they negatively expose decision-makers.



Back

Next

Budget Execution



(Adapted from National Democratic Institute, *Political Process Monitoring: Activist Tools and Techniques*, "[Participatory Budgeting/Budget Monitoring/Expenditure Tracking Tools](#)," pgs. 21-43).

The budget execution or implementation phase is often the most interesting, and can yield the most data, to citizens monitoring the budget process. This phase of the budget cycle can include: monitoring how government collects and records revenues; and monitoring and tracking government expenditures, procurements and related financial decisions.

Typically, as in Iran, government budgets cover costs for 12 months. Once a budget is approved, the budget should be available for the public to review. Often the publically available budget has fewer details than those distributed to spending agencies. Monitoring groups can access these detailed budgets if provided by the individual spending agencies (for example, the municipal department of public works) if they request them. These detailed budgets will be useful as monitoring groups look to track the implementation of specific procurement projects, such as road construction, or the salaries of government employees.

It is very important when monitoring budget implementation that the monitoring group maintains accurate and rigorous records of their monitoring initiatives. The most successful monitoring initiatives are based on facts, include official government documentation, incorporate documented and observed evidence and are as objective in their findings as possible. To develop such rigorous findings, monitoring groups must be deliberate and methodical in the collection of data. This will help to counter negative feedback when your monitoring results are made public. More about this will be discussed in lesson five.

During the budget execution or implementation phase, citizens and monitoring groups would find good information from the following types of documentation:

Government procurement documents

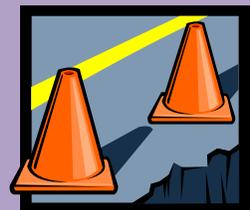
Payroll information

Periodic financial reporting records

Audits

Legislative budget committee hearing records

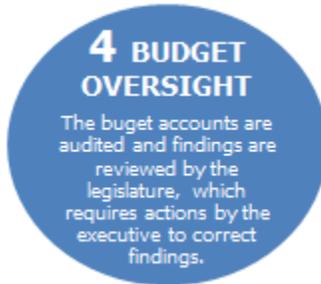
Citizens monitoring specific procurement projects, such as infrastructure development, may be interested in documenting on-site information, as well. Take for example the allocation of \$100,000 for a new road project that connects two towns. After a transparent tender process, a company is identified and begins construction. There have been rumors that the winning company has used cheap materials in the past, leading to the need for frequent road repairs. A citizen group monitoring this specific project may be interested in going to the construction site to document the construction progress, materials being used and workmanship. This in-person evidence collection could be invaluable in a findings report.



Back

Next

Budget Oversight



Monitoring groups that can access government oversight processes will better understand their government's own financial management practices. Accessing budget oversight procedures will help monitoring groups understand the checks and balances that the government has in place to be fiscally responsible. These procedures may outline specific roles and responsibilities of oversight bodies, agencies or individuals. It is important to know who has authority over which parts of the budget process – this is helpful to access information and records, but also to know who to

hold accountable. Government audit reports, as well as budget oversight meetings, will yield the most useful information and data to groups monitoring budgets.

In Iran, for example, the Supreme Audit Court provides a yearly report to the Majlis detailing how all government bodies spent their budget. Similarly, municipalities in Iran must publish and make available to the public, a complete list of all income and spending, along with a comprehensive account of all of the municipality's work every six months.

Resources such as these may help groups understand the rationale behind any significant changes to budget line item allocation or spending. Monitoring groups interested in monitoring government budgets should also research other local and international organizations that may be doing similar exercises.

CASE STUDY

[Local Budget Development in Kosovo](#)



From 2011 onwards, the OSCE observed the municipal budget cycle in Kosovo. Their report provides explanations of each phase of the budget cycle and where citizens were included in the process. The report also highlights where successes and challenges were experienced. You may find this resource useful as you begin to think about where your monitoring project can input into your budget process. It is also useful to look and see what types of resource, analysis and tools may exist, even if for countries other than your own.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Lesson One: Key Points to Remember

- Budget monitoring is when a monitoring group collects information to better understand how the government allocates and spends resources.
- The budget cycle has four key parts: budget formulation, budget approval, budget execution, and budget oversight
- Being involved as much as possible in budget monitoring helps citizens better understand how and why certain government budget priorities are made.
- It is important to understand the decision-making process as it can help in later phases of the budget cycle when groups seek to hold these same decision-makers accountable to budget execution and implementation.
- The most successful monitoring initiatives are based on facts so it is important to maintain accurate and rigorous records of your monitoring initiatives.
- Knowing who has authority over which parts of the budget process is helpful for accessing information formation, but also to know who to hold accountable.

Back

Next

Quiz

- 1. Which of the following is not a specific phase in a budget cycle?**
 - a. Budget Oversight
 - b. Budget Approval
 - c. Budget Formulation
 - d. Budget Hearings
 - e. Budget Execution

- 2. True or False: Monitoring groups may have difficulty accessing the budget cycle.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 3. Participatory budgeting:**
 - a. Allows civil society to budget a specific percentage of a government budget to align with community needs and priorities
 - b. Allows citizens and civil society to control the entire budget cycle
 - c. Ensures that the budget cycle is transparent to the public

- 4. Yearly budget reports are useful during the following phases, except:**
 - a. Budget formulation
 - b. Budget oversight
 - c. Budget approval
 - d. Budget execution

- 5. True or False: Monitoring groups should only monitor the budget cycle phase that is most applicable to their overall monitoring goals.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 6. True or False: It is possible to monitor the budget cycle even if access to budget information and documentation is limited or restricted.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 7. Budgetary oversight bodies may include the following:**
 - a. Legislative committee
 - b. Independent government agency
 - c. Citizen groups
 - d. All of the above

- 8. True or False: Monitoring Groups should monitor as much of the budget cycle as they can access in order to gather as much data as possible.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

Back

Next

LESSON TWO: PLANNING AND DEVELOPING A BUDGET MONITORING INITIATIVE

Prior to beginning a budget monitoring effort, there are several considerations to take into account. First, monitoring groups should understand what type of budget they will need to monitor – national level or subnational budgets may vary in how they are developed and how there is oversight of expenditures. Second, monitoring groups should fully understand the legal framework that governs how the budget is developed, lines of authority and budgetary oversight regulations.

When you complete this lesson, you will be able to:

- Understand different budget types – national vs. subnational budgets;
- Understand the legal framework governing budget development;
- Recognize the political environment needed to conduct a budget monitoring project;
- Determine organization capacity for a monitoring project; and
- Learn to be aware of existing power dynamics among stakeholders.

Back

Next

Types of Budgets

Before you begin a budget monitoring initiative, you will want to have a clear understanding about the types of budgets that your government has, what types of resources are used to fund those budgets, what services or costs are covered under the budget and who has authority over the budget.

This will be different, for example, for **national level budgets** than for **local level budgets**. The public availability of budget documentation can also vary depending on the type of budget. Groups that monitor local level budgets generally have more success in accessing official documentation because of connections to decision makers and the less sensitive nature of the budgeting. These groups also have more success in the acceptance of their findings, however critical they may be, and also are more apt to have budget advocacy initiatives taken up by local governments.

National Level Budgets

National Level budgets typically cover the costs of running the central government. This may include funding for specific line ministries, central government operating expenses and nationwide infrastructure projects. National level budgets are typically funded through national level taxes (export/import, income), foreign investment (loan programs, foreign donor agencies, private companies), revenues generated from extractive industries (oil, gas, minerals) or from government-run companies.

In Iran, these funds come from national oil revenues, tax revenues, and other income such as the sale of state-owned enterprises.

Local Level Budgets

Local level budgets typically cover the expenses of running government operations at a subnational level. This may be for provincial, district or village level expenses. Local level budgets may cover the costs associated with the daily operating expenses of parks, municipal government agencies such as the municipal council, mayoral office or local emergency services, local services such as waste management, transportation and local infrastructure projects.

	In India, the public has considerable access to government budgetary information. On the Ministry of Finance's webpage , you can find a variety of documents that would be useful for a budget monitoring initiative. The website includes strategy and planning documents; budget summaries by sector or ministries; and receipt, expenditure and tax/revenue documents. While your country may provide different levels of access to information that India, it will give you a picture of what a government can provide and what you may need to inquire further to find.
--	--

NATIONAL LEVEL BUDGET	LOCAL LEVEL BUDGET
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pays for the central government including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific line ministries ○ Operating expenses ○ Nationwide infrastructure projects • Funded through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National level taxes ○ Foreign investment ○ Revenues generated from extractive industries or government-run companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pays for subnational government including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provincial level ○ District level ○ Village level • Pays for daily operating expenses of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parks ○ Municipal government agencies ○ Local services

Back

Next

Legal Framework

Understanding the legal framework for budgets in your country is very important to accessing information about budget processes and expenses, understanding roles and responsibilities associated with budgeting and being able to objectively analyze your findings. For most countries, the constitution will provide language about the budget. It is also important to know who has oversight of the budget and at which phase of the budget cycle. Often, budget and finance committees in parliament play a significant role in the approval and oversight of national level budgets, while municipal councils may provide oversight at the local level.

For example, the [Constitution of Indonesia](#) outlines who has authority to draft, approve and provide oversight of the national level budget. The Constitution also provides guidance on the collection of revenues and how those will be used to fund the state budget. Supplemental laws may be passed that also [govern the budget cycle](#), such as the case in Brazil. National level budget priorities and practices may also be shaped by policies that may or may not be guided by partisan politics or international influence.

In addition, governments can issue a variety of regulations, decrees and promulgations that shape who has authority over subnational and local budgets. This is especially true for revenue collection and allocation, service delivery and oversight.

[Parliamentary Budget Process in Pakistan, India and Canada](#)

The Pakistan Institute for Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) developed a comparative case study on the budget process for Pakistan, India and Canada. All three cases discuss how the budget is developed, the supporting legislation and oversight procedures. This resource can be helpful as you consider not just how your budget is developed, but who may have a vested interest in the outcomes of your monitoring initiatives findings.



Back

Next

NATIONAL BUDGET PROCEDURES IN IRAN

The procedures and Iran's budget are Internal Regulations Law. proposed budget from has 10 days to review it recommendations to the Expert Committee has up president's submission of



timeline for creating delineated in the Majlis Upon receiving a the president, the Majlis and provide their Expert Committees. The to 15 days following the the budget to provide

their reports to the Compilation Committee. The Compilation Committee is tasked with reviewing the Expert Committee reports and providing a final assessment to the Majlis general assembly. Once the Compilation Committee submits its report, the Majlis general assembly debates the overall budget relative to funding allocations for the various broad categories such as defense, education, health and other sectors. Once the general assembly agrees on the overall budget, it will reconvene several days later to debate the allocations to specific agencies and institutions. Once the final language is placed in the bill, it is sent to the Guardian Council for ratification. After approval from the Guardian Council or Expediency Council, the bill is signed into law by the speaker of the Majlis and sent to the president for implementation.

Funding for national and provincial agencies is laid out in the annual national budget. Each year, the president submits a budget proposal to the Majlis which modifies it and signs it into law. Total funds for public services provided by the provincial governments (such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and public safety) are allocated in the budget passed by the Majlis. Decisions over how the funds will be allocated throughout the province are made by the president's budget planners as well as the governor's office.

For more information on Iran budget process check out the [Nabz-Iran "Introductory Primer to the Budget Process in Iran."](#)

Back

Next

Political Space, Political Will and Access to Information

Monitoring groups should have a thorough understanding of the political context to determine whether there is enough space available to carry out monitoring activities and to what degree this can be done. In order for citizen engagement in the budget cycle to be successful, governments must be willing to allow citizens access to budget meetings and publicly share budget documents. If there is not a formal law or policy requiring that budget cycles be transparent, then there at least needs to be informal support within key institutions for transparent practices. Without this level of support, it is very unlikely that, even if some citizen engagement in the budget cycle is possible, there will be enough space to effect any concrete changes.

Government Transparency and Access to Information

If there are people within government interested in transparency or helping (usually through some personal connection to the group asking for information), then there is often room or space to do some sort of monitoring. Without such relationships and connections and willingness within the government system to provide information, it can be virtually impossible to do monitoring. Keep in mind that this can present a number of risky situations. For example, if a personal connection gives you access to budget-related documentation and then you expose in your findings that you received a certain document or piece of information, it could put that connection or relationship at risk, as well as potentially endangering that specific individual.

Even when opportunities exist to carry out budget monitoring initiatives, monitoring groups need to be aware of the political challenges associated with this type of activity. When deciding whether to engage in monitoring or support monitoring efforts, the political space first needs to be analyzed. The openness of political space within a country is a key factor in determining the successfulness of monitoring. In order to implement budget monitoring initiative, groups need to have a certain amount of access to information. Monitoring is challenging, and in some cases impossible, if groups are unable to access public documents or observe legislative or budgetary meetings and committees. Keep in mind that often, influence and decisions are made in less formal environments. How many stories are there of political decisions being made over coffee or a meal? The same is true for decisions and requests for budgetary changes.

Political space is the avenues and opportunities that exist for citizens to organize, voice their preferences, act individually and collectively, and engage government.

Test Your Skills: Reflect on your Community

Think about your community, do you think there is political space to conduct a budget monitoring project? Are there leaders in your community that would be open to this process? What are the three or four greatest challenges you will face?

Back

Next



If the media is restricted and citizens are afraid to participate in surveys or interviews, then even data collection that does not directly involve the government would be difficult. Limited political space would also limit the extent to which groups are able to raise awareness of their findings and use those findings to create concrete changes. In a restricted political space, it could be dangerous to publicize documents that are critical of the government.

In some cases, there may be political will within the government to increase citizen participation in decision making processes, but there may be institutional limitations. The government may not have the capacity to meet the needs of groups conducting budget monitoring. For instance, government officials may be unaware of public access to information laws or local government agencies may not have the systems in place to provide information to the public. The capacity of government institutions should be thoroughly examined before conducting any monitoring initiatives, otherwise groups may become frustrated and apathetic when they are not able to have full access to the information they need.

Monitoring groups should also be aware of the government's ability to absorb monitoring findings and recommendations. Institutional problems, such as internal organizational issues or party politics, may limit the ability of government bodies to implement civil society organizations (CSO) recommendations. In such cases, both citizens and local government are likely to become frustrated and see political-process monitoring activities as ineffective and useless. Being aware of these potential institutional limitations is important as groups develop strategies and identify appropriate monitoring methods in an effort to achieve their larger goals.

Keep in Mind

Sometimes the political space to do budget monitoring does not exist – either because of a lack of access to information, an inability to safely make findings public or self-censorship by the public to provide inputs. In these types of circumstances, it may be best to take a step back and consider other initiatives that may pave the way for budget monitoring later – such as awareness-raising or advocacy that focuses on increasing public access to government information, taking the time to build positive and resource-oriented relationships with key government stakeholders or developing networks or coalitions of like-minded organizations drum up support for activities that encourage greater transparency and accountability.

Test Your Skills: Creating Political Space

If you recognize there are limits to the ability to monitor budgets, what are steps you can take over the short-term to try to help create the opportunity in the future?

Back

Next

Organizational Capacity

Equally important is for monitoring groups to be self-reflective to ensure they have the internal capacity to conduct a monitoring initiative. Some of these capacity questions may include:



- ✓ *Do you have the necessary financial and human resources?*
 - Are you able to fund your initiative out of existing resources, or will you need to fundraise additional money?
 - Will you have to recruit additional staff or volunteers?
- ✓ *Do you need any specific technical skills, such as accounting or legal knowledge?*
 - Are there specific trainings or courses needed to conduct a thorough budget monitoring initiative – such as budget analysis, or statistical software training?
- ✓ *What is your organization's reputation for conducting this type of activity?*
 - Will you need to increase your credibility in this area before launching a large budget monitoring project?
 - Perhaps consider a small scale, or local level, budget monitoring project as a first step.

Test Your Skills: Organizational Capacity

Think about your organizational capacity, and on a separate piece of paper write down two to three things you think you need before starting a budget monitoring initiative.

Project Timeline



Another key consideration in planning your monitoring project will be to develop a timeline for your project. Your budget monitoring timeline should be developed to align with where the government is in the budget cycle for the budget you are monitoring (refer back to lesson one for the discussion on the budget cycle).

Budget cycles can be different for national level budgets and local level budgets. Often, local level budgets are dependent upon a national budget passing and funds being allocated from the central level to the local level for spending. Aligning the type of budget with the desired outcome of your monitoring effort (budget advocacy or increased budget transparency, for example) may also help you determine which part of the budget cycle will be most important for you in terms of important data collection.

If you are interested in conducting a budget transparency or budget advocacy initiative, then it is advised to wait for the beginning of the budget cycle to carry out activities. If you are most interested in expenditure tracking, then you will have to wait for the budget execution and oversight phases.

Back

Next

Power Dynamics

Other important factors to take into consideration when supporting or implementing a budget monitoring initiative are the power dynamics amongst the initiative's stakeholders. Challenges may arise if the monitoring group does not gain the respect of government officials or if citizens do not feel that the group represents their interests. If other local civil society organizations (CSOs) or international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) do not regard the group as legitimate or trustworthy, then they will not support monitoring activities and findings will not be as influential.

Keep in Mind

Monitoring groups should understand the power dynamics of the political space in which they are working, and create positive relationships with stakeholders in order to gain their buy-in to the monitoring initiative.

Any group interested in monitoring should already have, or possess the potential for developing, a certain level of political power. This power can stem from:

- ✓ The group's connections with public official;
- ✓ Its ability to mobilize large numbers of people at the grassroots level; and/or
- ✓ A reputation as a highly respected organization.

A group's ability to use its collective power is important so that:

- ✓ It can more easily access information through both formal and informal channels;
- ✓ Its findings will be taken seriously; and
- ✓ It can withstand pushback from the government.

Keep in Mind

Before beginning a monitoring initiative, monitoring groups must also fully understand and accept the risks involved. Probably the greatest challenge of conducting these types of initiatives is ensuring that groups not only have an adequate amount of political space to implement monitoring initiatives, but that they are able to do so safely

Before beginning a monitoring initiative, monitoring groups must also fully understand and accept the risks involved. Even in its most non-confrontational form, budget monitoring requires that CSOs and citizens be openly critical of the government. Probably the greatest challenge of conducting these types of initiatives is ensuring that groups not only have an adequate amount of political space to implement monitoring initiatives, but that they are able to do so safely.

Groups must develop enough "power" to prevent or withstand negative consequences stemming from monitoring initiatives – such as reduced government funding for its programs, threats, intimidation and smear campaigns. Bringing public officials into the process from the beginning and presenting findings so that both the government's successes and shortcomings are highlighted are two ways to reduce risks.

Back

Next

Lesson Two: Key Points to Remember

- Before beginning a budget monitoring initiative you need a clear understanding of the types of budgets your government has, the resources used to fund them the cost of services covered under the budget and who has authority over the budget.
- Understanding the legal framework is very important to accessing information and being able to objectively analyze your findings.
- Prior to engaging in monitoring or support monitoring efforts analyze the political space.
- Be aware of the government's ability to absorb monitoring findings and recommendations.
- Monitoring groups need to be self-reflective to ensure they have the internal capacity to conduct a monitoring initiative.
- The timeline for a budget monitoring project should coincide with the government budget cycle.
- Under existing power dynamics within the political space and create positive relationships with stakeholders in order to gain their buy-in to the monitoring initiative.
- Be aware of the risks before getting involved in a budget monitoring process.

Back

Next

Quiz

1. **True or False: A national budget typically focuses on allocating resources to fund line ministries and central government operating expenses, whereas a local level budget includes resources to fund municipal level expenditures such as operating local transportation and waste management.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. **Knowing who has authority of budget execution is important because:**
 - a. This person may be able to provide you access to budget documentation – such as procurement documents, audit reports, and annual spending reports.
 - b. You will know who to hold accountable
 - c. It may help you better understand the roles of other stakeholders in the budget process – such as political party dynamics, business linkages or personal relationships that could be influencers.
 - d. All of the above

3. **Doing an organizational capacity assessment (self-administered or externally administered) of the monitoring organization is important because:**
 - a. It may help you identify internal weaknesses that need to be strengthened before fully launching a budget monitoring initiative
 - b. It can uncover potential problems with organizational reputation or credibility that may need to be bolstered before launching a budget monitoring initiative
 - c. It can help highlight unrealized resources or strengths a monitoring group may have that can be used toward a budget monitoring initiative
 - d. All of the above

4. **Pick the statement not included in the lesson about the following - Conducting budget monitoring initiatives can be risky because:**
 - a. There may be limited access to the budget cycle, either in its entirety or for specific phases (such as budget formulation and approval).
 - b. There may be little to no access to information about the budget cycle
 - c. Other local organizations may also be conducting budget monitoring initiatives
 - d. There may be no freedom within the political operating environment to make your findings from your monitoring initiative public

5. **It is important for the monitoring group to have credibility because:**
 - a. It may help the government better accept the findings from the budget monitoring initiative – even if they are critical
 - b. It may increase the government’s likelihood of providing access to the budget cycle, including budget documentation
 - c. It may help raise public confidence in civil society’s ability to make government more transparent
 - d. All of the above

6. **True or False: It is not necessary to thoroughly analyze the operating environment before launching your budget monitoring initiative**
 - a. True
 - b. False

7. **Which of the following is NOT true:**
- a. My budget monitoring initiative will be most effective if my group only focuses on one part of the budget cycle
 - b. It is important to consider how the government may be able to address concerns raised in the budget monitoring findings before the monitoring group begins the monitoring project
 - c. It will be beneficial if the monitoring group can get the buy in of some government stakeholders before launching the budget monitoring initiative
8. **True or False: A civil society organization may still decide to monitor the budget cycle even if there is limited political space**
- a. True
 - b. False

Back

Next

LESSON THREE: ENGAGING AND BUILDING SUPPORT TO MAKE BUDGET MONITORING SUCCESSFUL

There are a variety of reasons why citizens are interested in government budgets. Maybe there is an increased perception of corruption or a belief that government is not adequately providing basic services for citizens. There may simply be a lack of understanding about how your tax money is spent.

All of these are good reasons to launch a budget monitoring initiative. To increase your chances of success – in accessing government budget information and having your findings be accepted once published – monitoring groups must build support both with government and with communities.

When you complete this lesson, you will be able to:

- Learn how to build government support for a budget monitoring initiative; and
- Learn how to get buy-in your community and other stakeholders in your project.

Back

Next

Building Government Support

Some of the most successful budget monitoring initiatives began when local monitoring initiatives took the same first step. They all developed or strengthened existing relationships with local government officials who either:

1. Had some budget authority and/or
2. Had the ability to make budget documents available to the monitoring group.

Often, monitoring groups are seen as critical and antagonistic toward government. In many cases, this is a correct role for them to have. But in other cases it can be collaborative to show how more efficient use of funds could take place or mutual priorities could be addressed. In either case, budget information is sensitive and those with control over it may view any questioning related to budgets and expenses as critical, even before any monitoring has taken place.

In order to set the tone for the monitoring initiative, it is a good idea to first introduce the goals and objectives of your project to the government. For example, you may be interested in collecting information about the resources available for environmental protection services in your locality (such as a river cleanup). By describing the projects goals, such as developing a community project that encourages citizens to be environmentally friendly themselves, you are helping to further the governments' goals. Government officials may then be very willing to provide you with the requested information and documentation.

Keep in Mind

More critical approaches, while extremely effective during advocacy and public awareness campaigns, may limit your access to information for your budget monitoring efforts. Approaching government in a positive way, to build collective buy-in is a best practice.

You may also want to treat business owners, especially those who may be involved in procurement processes, similar to government officials. They too may have an opinion in making their contracts and expenses – and that opinion could err on the side of non-disclosure if they worry about accusations of doing something unsavory. On the other hand, businesses may be interested in being of assistance to demonstrate they are following rules properly.

Test Your Skills: Building Government Support

On a separate piece of paper, identify two to three local government officials in your community that you want to engage. Write down how you would describe your projects goals and why you think it is important to your community.

Back

Next

Building Community Support

Just as it is important to build support and buy-in from the government, it is also important to engage your community and other stakeholders in your project. In this case, a community is defined not just as your neighbors and fellow citizens, but also business owners, the media and academics. *For more information check out the "Civic Engagement in Public Service Evaluation" section in Participatory Budgeting and Expenditure Tracking in Indonesia: A Budget Monitoring, Tracking and Advocacy Vignette*

LOCAL COMMUNITY



You will need community members to support your project in a variety of ways. For example, you may recruit community volunteers to collect information for you, such as documenting the construction of infrastructure projects or conducting community surveys. **Check out the Nabz-Iran e-learning course on [service delivery monitoring](#) to learn what you can do as a citizen of your community in monitoring how well the government services respond to citizen needs.**

Local Citizens



Citizens are also a useful data collection point for your monitoring activities. Citizens often are not afforded an opportunity to provide feedback on government services that their tax revenues fund. Collecting information from citizens on public service delivery – specifically the quality, quantity and frequency of service – can be an important data set that can be triangulated against budget allocations and expense reports. For example, if the cost of garbage collection services has tripled in the last three budget cycles, but citizens state that garbage collection is taking place less frequently, then this may be a point of further examination or inquiry in your analysis: Why is the cost rising while service frequency declines?

The Media



The media can also be used as an ally – and not only in the final phases of a budget monitoring project when you want to publicize your findings. Many transparency regulations require the government to make information available to the public via printed media, radio or television. Increasingly digital media is also being used to make information available to the public. In Iran, you can listen to all general sessions of the Majlis on Radio Farhang, while all municipal council meetings are public and available for broadcast and publication; a copy of each meeting's minutes should be archived. For more information on how the media can be helpful to your budget monitoring projects check out [Indonesia: A Budget Monitoring, Tracking and Advocacy](#).

Local Businesses



You may also want to include business owners as community members too. Business often pay specific taxes and fees related to their industries. They too care about how those revenues are being spent by the government and how they are benefitting.

Test Your Skills: Building Community Support

On a separate piece of paper, identify two to three members of community that you want to engage in your budget monitoring initiative. Additionally, write down two to three questions you would ask members of your community in order to get feedback on government services funded by their tax revenues.

Back

Next

Lesson Three: Key Points to Remember

- Strengthening relationships with local government officials is an important first step in any budget monitoring initiative.
- In order to set the tone for the monitoring initiative and not come off as antagonistic, first introduce the goals and objectives of your project to the government
- Just as it is important to build support and buy-in from the government, it is also important to engage your community and other stakeholders in your project.
- Information from citizens on public service delivery can be an important data set that can be triangulated against budget allocations and expense reports.

Back

Next

Quiz

- 1. It is important to try to build a relationship with government officials before and during your budget monitoring initiative because:**
 - a. Relationships are important and can often open access to government processes, procedures and documentation
 - b. Your budget monitoring initiative may have positive implications for existing government priorities or goals
 - c. Developing positive relationships with government early on may help reveal unknown stakeholders that may be interested in the outcome of your monitoring project, such as business owners.
 - d. All of the above
- 2. True or False: There is a time and a place for civil society to be antagonistic towards government. Often this is not the best approach for an inaugural budget monitoring project because it may make government unduly nervous about the projects outcome.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
- 3. True or False: There is no need for monitoring groups to present their budget monitoring initiative to government before beginning the project.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
- 4. Identifying and getting the buy in of other key stakeholders such as business owners, unions and associations is important because:**
 - a. They may have access to information that would be helpful to the budget monitoring initiative
 - b. The monitoring initiative may uncover some unsavory activity that could include more than just government entities. This could put the monitoring group unknowingly in harm's way
 - c. They may have some kick-backs for you to keep your monitoring project from going public
 - d. A and B, but not C.
- 5. Ways to increase community support of the budget monitoring project include:**
 - a. Surveying community priorities and then aligning the budget monitoring initiative with those priority areas (such as school spending, waste management, and tax collection)
 - b. Incorporate a budget literacy component to the monitoring initiative so that the public better understands the budget cycle
 - c. Include the media in your budget monitoring project
 - d. All of the above
- 6. Community surveys can be useful to:**
 - a. Identify priority issues within a community
 - b. Gather feedback on government performance
 - c. Determine community perceptions on service delivery
 - d. All of the above

7. **Introducing your budget monitoring project to key stakeholders is important because:**
- a. They may be able to provide you with access to other budget related documents
 - b. It may make the government official less apprehensive
 - c. It shows that you are transparent
 - d. All of the above
8. **True or False: If you introduce your budget monitoring project to government officials, they will be welcoming and forthcoming with more budget-related information.**
- a. True
 - b. False

Back

Next

LESSON FOUR – CREATING CHANGE FROM BUDGET MONITORING

At the end of the budget cycle, groups have a wealth of data to analyze. As part of this analysis, monitoring groups should consider what type of action to take next. Often this is determined by what type of information was collected. Some information is best used as part of an advocacy campaign or an awareness campaign, while some data analysis can be used for policy reform recommendations. Additionally, some initial budget monitoring may evolve into expenditure tracking activities or participatory budgeting exercises.

When you complete this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify techniques to maintain a budget monitoring initiative;
- Learn how to track government spending during the budget execution process; and
- Use budget monitoring activities to advocate for changes in budget allocation.

However, before making any monitoring analysis public, as was mentioned in the previous lesson, monitoring organizations need to consider what push-back or backlash they may receive for making their findings public. Because political space can be very tenuous, monitoring groups should carefully weigh how government and other stakeholders may react to findings.

Back

Next

Monitoring As an Ongoing Process

Data collection is an ongoing process. Rarely are monitoring groups interested in monitoring a budget for a specific, finite purpose. Budget monitoring is often iterative – monitoring leads to action, which leads to more monitoring, followed by more action.

Following such a pattern can:

- Build public confidence in the organizations monitoring efforts,
- Lead to information that can be compared over time,
- Illustrate that good governance issues are often not the fault of a single administration or party, but may be a part of the evolving democratic process
- Highlight consistency of good governance practices relative to anomalies that may color the public's view of government behavior.

CASE STUDY

Yearly Cycle of Participatory Budget Formulation and Monitoring



March: Informal citizen gatherings to collect demands; no interference from the executive (mayor's office).

April: First regional plenary held between the citizens and the mayor's office to account for previous year's projects, discuss new proposals and elect delegates to the second round.

April to June: Intermediary meetings for delegates to learn technical criteria and discuss needs and priorities in each region; informal preparatory meetings held with citizens and civic associations who rank their demands. The executive aggregates these together with two other criteria: i) how much access a region has had to a service, and ii) what its population size is.

June: Second plenary held when Councilors are elected and regional priorities voted.

July: 44 Councilors installed at the Council of Participatory Budgeting (COP) – 2 from each of the 16 regions, 2 from each of the 5 themes and 2 other reps.

July to September: Council meets for at least two hours a week to discuss chosen criteria, demands of their constituents, allocation of resources as proposed by the mayor's office, etc.

September: New budget approved by the COP, and sent to the legislature for debate and endorsement.

September to December: COP follows the debate in the Chamber, and lobbies, while working separately on a specific sectoral investment plan for different regions; rules are also set for next year's round of meetings.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Awareness-Raising Campaigns

MORE E-LEARNING!

Check out the Nabz-Iran e-learning course on community advocacy to learn how to develop an advocacy campaign from start to finish.

A very common use of monitoring data is for groups to develop public awareness campaigns. These campaigns can range in scope. Often, groups will use budget monitoring initiatives to develop public awareness campaigns that develop budget literacy. If there is little understanding among the public for what actually goes into developing and implementing a budget, these types of awareness campaigns can help citizens better understand their government's budget cycle.

Some groups have monitored and tracked government employee salaries versus budget resource spending on community priority areas. With this information, monitoring groups can develop public awareness campaigns that could lead to reallocation of budgetary resources. These types of awareness campaigns can also work either toward corruption measures – both to correct misperceptions about government spending or call out government corruption with hard, fact-based evidence.

CASE STUDY

Budget Advocacy in Albania



The citizens of Barbullush, Albania advocated the local government to include flood-preventing infrastructure in the 2006 budget. When they studied the budget and realized that the amount allocated for the project would not be sufficient, they negotiated with local officials to increase the allocation.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Expenditure Tracking

Even when citizen groups' budget monitoring and advocacy efforts lead to the inclusion of citizen priorities in a local budget, there is often a difference between the funds allocated for community projects and the funds actually disbursed for these projects. Though there are a variety of reasons for this occurring, it is often due to corruption. Therefore, expenditure tracking initiatives have can help to reduce local corruption and ensure that allocated funds are spent in the intended manner.

Expenditure tracking is when monitoring groups monitor government resource allocations, spending and publicly-funded projects to ensure that budgeted funds are spent accordingly and used efficiently. This takes place during the budget execution and oversight phase of the budget cycle.

Expenditure tracking initiatives can take place during the budget execution and oversight stages of the budget cycle, but the majority of citizen group activities focus on tracking spending during the budget execution process. Monitoring groups can document how funds are spent on local government-funded projects and services throughout the budget execution process. When funding is released by the local treasury for agencies to spend, groups have used government budget documents to track the disbursements.

For example, as agencies initiate spending through payrolls and procurement processes, monitoring groups have kept records of local expenditures and monitored bidding processes for locally funded public project contracts. This is done to help ensure that contracts are awarded according to merit and not on a patronage system. As the projects are rolled out and payments are made, groups have observed the implementation of the projects and conducted citizen-based service delivery evaluations to ensure quality. Even if a contract is awarded based on merit, the contractor could still use subpar materials or do a poor job delivering services.

Expenditure Publication Requirements in Iran

The Transparency and Freedom of Information Act requires councils to publish all information regarding legislation, budget allocations, projects, and taxes and fees for the public. Most city councils and municipal governments will publish this information on their websites. If you cannot find it on their website, contact your city council's public relations office to request the information. Councils are also required to ensure the presence of media in all public meetings.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Expenditure Tracking (continued)

Throughout the process, citizen groups compile regular reports based on their expenditure tracking findings. These reports can then be compared to the local government's record of expenditures and yearly reports and statements. During the budget oversight stage of the budget process some citizen groups have even audited local budgets to reveal how the government's records compare to their own. In addition to ensuring the quality and responsiveness of public projects and services, these findings can help reduce corruption. Groups can use them as a basis for working with local governments to improve the budget execution process or to raise citizen awareness of discrepancies in expenditures.

CASE STUDY

Civic Engagement in Expenditure Tracking in Indonesia



Even when funds were allocated for pro-poor programs, this did not ensure that they would reach intended beneficiaries or that budgets would match specifications in the project contracts. To enhance sound pro-poor program delivery, Technical Assistance-NGOs assisted CSO working groups in monitoring budget implementation by tracking expenditures on several projects intended to benefit the poor. CSO working groups used a variety of tools to track expenditures, including user-based surveys, citizen report cards and direct observation. In one instance, a CSO working group actually measured a length of road by hand to determine if it met the specifications of the original tender.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

CASE STUDY

Malawi: Using Expenditure Tracking for Advocacy and Awareness-Raising Campaigns



In 1994, Malawi held its first competitive multi-party elections, which resulted in the end of “President for Life” Hastings Banda’s 30 year rule. With high expectations for the reinstatement of citizens’ rights, the country began a transition toward multi-party democracy. Initially, CSOs flourished with the easing of restrictions on political and civil liberties, and opposition parties began challenging the ruling party’s hold on power. However, gains in civil society and political rights did not translate into improvements in the daily living conditions of most Malawians. Furthermore, the government and parliament were suspicious of CSOs, which tended to be weak and fragmented organizations. By 2001, civil society had still not fully assumed its role in demanding government accountability.

To address these problems, international donor agencies supported local CSOs and parliament alike to develop stronger linkages and work to develop inclusive, responsive governance practices. Through the “Accountable Democracy in Malawi” program, CSOs established networks with similar issue-oriented organizations focused on reducing poverty by launching national level initiatives that targeted government decision-makers.

Over the course of the project, more than 80 organizations joined networks to begin tracking government expenditures on issues they were most concerned about, while also examining the quality of public goods and services. Through their projects, CSO networks testified before the Parliamentary Budget and Finance Committee on government performance in key sectors of the budget and poverty reduction strategy papers – including health, education and agriculture. The CSO’s findings, based on information collected through expenditure tracking activities, were incorporated into the Committee’s final report to parliament.

CSO networks continued to focus on using their monitoring data for advocacy and awareness-raising purposes. Some of the results of their efforts included:

- The Land Task Force’s campaign to increase civic input into the proposed Land Bill led to increased citizens’ knowledge on land policy, a compilation of priority land issues identified by citizens, a citizens’ pledge to support the advocacy campaign, and dialogues between MPs, civic leaders and citizens on land issues.
- The Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi’s awareness-raising activities led to the enactment of the country’s first ever disability policy
- The NGO Gender Coordination Network’s Taskforce on Domestic Violent Legislation successfully advocated for the passage of domestic violence legislation.

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Budget Advocacy

Many monitoring groups use the information they collect and relationships they form with local public officials through budget monitoring to support advocacy campaigns. These campaigns use data collected during budget monitoring activities to advocate for specific changes in budget allocation or in changing local budgetary practices throughout the budget cycle. These help to ensure that community priorities are reflected in budgets, that specific projects are funded and that the allocated funds are sufficient for project implementation.

The second type of budget advocacy usually involves advocating for more transparent budget practices and easier access to government information. If budget monitoring activities have not met with the desired success due to government push-back, but there is enough political space to change budget procedures, then monitoring groups might find this type of a budget advocacy campaign worthwhile.

Budget advocacy is when monitoring groups lobby and campaign to bring about specific changes in a budget or budget process; it is usually also carried out during the budget formulation and approval phases as well. Budget advocacy can occur either before or after a group has tracked expenditures, depending on the context and where in the budget cycle the group begins its monitoring activities.

MORE E-LEARNING!

Check out the Nabz-Iran e-learning course on [service delivery monitoring](#) to learn how to conduct interviews, citizen surveys and facilitate community meetings.

The approach to budget advocacy, whether for changes in the budget or changes in budgetary practices, begins with developing a proposal for change. When advocating for specific budget allocations, monitoring groups should first identify community budget priorities. If this has not been done during a budget monitoring initiative, groups could use citizen questionnaires, interviews and public discussions to gather community priorities.

Back

Next

Budget Advocacy (continued)

When advocating for reforming local budgetary practices, groups determine the most pressing problem with the current budgetary practices based upon their previous budget monitoring experiences. Once the priority issues are identified, the monitoring groups have developed proposal for specific changes to the budget or budgetary practices. In some cases, groups have created a “budget platform” that lays out a set of citizen priorities for local budget committees to take into consideration while developing the budget.

Test Your Skills: Budget Advocacy Priorities

On a separate piece of paper, write down what you think your community’s top budget priorities are.

To ensure that their proposal or budget platform has traction with local decision-makers, monitoring groups have employed the following budget advocacy tactics:

- Presenting proposals or budget platforms during budget hearings;
- Face-to-face meetings with local officials;
- Letter-writing campaigns; and
- Organizing public forums for local public officials and citizens to discuss budget priorities.

Back

Next

Lesson Four: Key Points to Remember

- Budget monitoring is an iterative process – it leads to action, which leads to more monitoring, followed by more action.
- Expenditure tracking initiatives have can help to reduce local corruption and ensure that allocated funds are spent in the intended manner.
- A common use of monitoring data is for groups to develop public awareness campaigns.
- Budget advocacy, whether for changes in the budget or changes in budgetary practices, begins with developing a proposal for change.

Back

Next

Quiz

1. **True or False: Budget monitoring initiatives can lead to public awareness campaigns that increase budget literacy by informing citizens on what the budget cycle is and why it is important to them**
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. **True or False: Awareness raising campaigns are the only way to use information gathered during a budget monitoring initiative**
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. **A monitoring group may want to include expenditure tracking as part of its budget monitoring initiative because:**
 - a. It may provide more concrete data on differences between resource allocation and actual spending
 - b. It may be useful to develop more concrete budget advocacy proposals
 - c. Expenditure tracking can be useful when monitoring government service delivery
 - d. All of the above

4. **True or False: The most successful budget advocacy proposals incorporate evidence-based data gathered during the budget monitoring initiative.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. **Budget advocacy initiatives:**
 - a. May align with community priorities
 - b. May focus on advocating for increased access to information or budget transparency
 - c. Can focus on a national or local level
 - d. All of the above

6. **True or False: Budget Advocacy can target national or local budgets, but can be more effective if focused at the local level.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

7. **True or False: It is safe to assume that the general public understands the budget cycle and will not need to be made aware of how governments budget and spend money to make my budget project effective.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

8. **After collecting initial data for my budget monitoring project, the same data could be used for:**
 - a. Budget Advocacy
 - b. Expenditure Tracking
 - c. Public Awareness
 - d. All of the above

Back

Next

CONCLUSION: TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR A MONITORING INITIATIVE

No matter what the goal of the budget monitoring initiative is, groups must identify and develop the appropriate tools for their initiative. A community survey is a great way to learn what members of your community want or need.

During a budget monitoring initiative, groups have created monitoring forms for citizens to fill out during budget meetings. Groups have used interview forms and questionnaires to collect information on citizen budget priorities and perspectives on the quality of service delivery to support both budget monitoring and advocacy initiatives. Investment tables have been used to track the expenditures on public projects and service delivery. *For tools and documents to use in your budget monitoring projects check out [Political Process Monitoring: Activist Tools and Techniques](#), "[Participatory Budgeting/Budget Monitoring/Expenditure Tracking Tools](#)," pgs. 21-43).*

COMMUNITY SURVEYS

Surveys ask specific questions and tend to include short answers. They don't have to be too formal or elaborate, but can offer valuable insights. While surveys can be done online, through the mail and filled out in person, many times the most effective way to conduct a survey is through an in-person interview so the surveyor can make a personal connection with the respondent. Surveys are helpful for getting quantitative information like numbers than they are for getting qualitative information, like people's stories.

For more information on how to conduct a [community survey](#) check on the [Nabz-Iran e-learning course on service delivery](#).

At the same time as you are developing your monitoring initiative, you will also want to consider the different ways you will use your information collected for action.

- ✓ Is your goal to raise public awareness or are you seeking evidence to incorporate into a budget advocacy campaign?
- ✓ While your initiative may include a variety of action items, considering your action items first will help you prepare the appropriate data collection tools so that the data is most useful for your action items.

A sample of these types of tools, as well as examples of how to turn these tools into action can be found in this resource section. Because each budget monitoring initiative is unique, your tools and materials will need to be tailored to the specifics of your country and individual project. Use these tools and resource as a guide as you develop your specific tool.

Back

Next

Resource Section One: Project Development and Tool Development

Once your organization has decided that budget monitoring is the right project to launch, there are a variety of budget monitoring focused resources that may be useful to you. The International Budget Project developed [The Super Duper Impact Planning Guide](#). In this guide, organizations are taken step-by-step through a process for developing a plan that represents the sequence of changes that they hope to contribute to through their work. For organizations thinking of developing a budget monitoring project, this resource may help you as you begin to think about how to design and develop a successful project.

Depending on your project, there are a variety of tools that you may choose to use to collect and organize your data. A sample of questionnaires can be found in the NDI guide *Political Process Monitoring: Activists Tools and Techniques* chapter on budget monitoring. [The tool can be found here](#). Other data collection tools can be found on the International Budget Partnerships Resource Library. Specific examples can be found in the *A Guide to Budget Work for NGOs*, which provides a comprehensive description of the basic principles of applied budget work, examples of useful resources, and best practices.

Back

Next

Resource Section Two: Comprehensive Budget Monitoring Reports and Resources

As you begin to plan and design your budget monitoring initiative, reviewing the types of action items that your project can produce will also be useful. As well, you may want to review the reports that other groups have produced, which may be helpful as you refine your budget monitoring initiative. The resources listed here are just the tip of the iceberg, but are some of the best in terms of their findings, their ease of use, the best practices that they discuss and the variety of case studies and issues that they include.

1) International Budget Partnership Resources: [The IBP Library](#) is the hallmark resource for budget monitoring. Some exceptional resources for those new to budget monitoring are:

- [Guide to Transparency in Government Budget Reports: How Civil Society Can Use Budget Reports for Research and Advocacy](#). This guide provides essential information on how civil society organizations can use, and have used, the eight key budget reports that their government should be making available throughout the budget process for research and advocacy purposes.
- [Our Money, Our Responsibility: A Citizens' Guide to Monitoring Government Expenditures](#). This Guide offers an overview of government budget implementation processes and provides practical, tested tools that can be used by civil society organizations interested in monitoring government expenditures. To read a version in Nepalese, please contact Krishna Sakpota at Freedom Forum in Nepal.
- [Getting a Seat at the Table: Civil Society Advocacy for Budget Transparency in "Untransparent" Countries](#). In September 2011 the International Budget Partnership (IBP) and civil society partners in 10 countries with limited transparency launched an advocacy initiative to increase the amount of budget information made available to the public. This note documents the partners' experience of this initiative.
- [Social Audits as a Budget Monitoring Tool](#). This report lays out the main elements of social audits in India and consolidates lessons from a horizontal learning exchange that took place between IBP partner organizations from India, Kenya, Mozambique, Cambodia, and Indonesia. This report is part of the IBP's Learning from Each Other Series, and is based on the paper "Social Audits: Changing the Paradigm of Budget Decision-Making" by Vivek Ramkumar and Sowmya Kidambi.
- [The Super Duper Impact Planning Guide](#). In this guide, organizations are taken step-by-step through a process for developing a plan that represents the sequence of changes that they hope to contribute to through their work.
- [A Guide to Budget Work for NGOs](#). The guide is a comprehensive description of the basic principles of applied budget work, examples of useful resources, and best practices.
- [Social Audits in Kenya](#): This IBP resource focuses on the activities of Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI), a civil society organization (CSO) based in Mombasa, Kenya, demonstrate the significant role budget transparency plays in improving accountability. MUHURI's work also shows how public engagement in the budget process can strengthen oversight and lead to improved public service delivery. At the same time,

MUHURI's impact has been restricted by the lack of a Freedom of Information (FOI) law in Kenya, along with other broad transparency challenges in the country.

2) The National Democratic Institute has worked with local civil society groups around the world for nearly 20 years in different aspects of monitoring political processes. The Institute synthesized a number of global experiences and lessons learned into several guides that include case studies, sample tools and core considerations to help others plan and implement:

- [Political-Process Monitoring: Activist Tools and Techniques](#)
- [Political-Process Monitoring: Considering the Outcomes and How They Can Be Measured](#)

3) The Revenue Watch Institute promotes the effective, transparent and accountable management of oil, gas and mineral resources for the public good. In 2012, it published a briefing on [Iran's Oil and Gas Management](#), which shows how data from the Central Bank of Iran and other sources can be used for analysis.

4) Pakistan Institute for Legislative Development and Transparency: PILDAT is a leader in budget monitoring, budget advocacy and budget awareness at the national and local levels. They have a wealth of resources in their publications library, including:

- [Budget Process Guide for Parliamentarians, Media and Civil Society](#)
- [Provincial level example for Punjab Province](#)

5) New Tactics in Human Rights is an [education program](#) providing resources relating [strategies](#) and [tactics](#) that can be used by people who seek to advance [human rights](#). Resources are organized around [analysis](#) of potential solutions rather than that of specific issues, geographic [regions](#) or target [groups](#) that allow activists to clearly recognize the unique elements of their situation, and to seek approaches that have worked elsewhere and apply them to new regions or issues. This technique may also improve activists' ability to combine diverse tactics into complex strategies.

- Online summary of a [Virtual Meeting about How to Use Budgets for Monitoring](#).
- [Using Government Budgets as a Monitoring Tool](#): The Children's Budget Unit in South Africa: In South Africa, Idasa's Children's Budget Unit (CBU) has used budget analyses to monitor the government's legal obligations, commitments, and progress in advancing child-specific socio economic rights and programs. The CBU monitors and evaluates these programs by looking at the government's budget allocations, spending of funds, and program expenditures and implementation.

Back

Next

QUIZ ANSWERS

Lesson One Quiz

- 1) D. Attending budget hearings is one way citizens can be more involved and informed about budget formulation but it is not a specific phase.
- 2) A. Often, citizens do not have access, especially at the national level, where governments are not always transparent and open about how budgetary resources are allocated.
- 3) A. Participatory budgeting is the process of democratic deliberation and decision-making through which governments allocate a percentage of a budget, usually at the municipal level, for civil society to budget directly according to community priorities.
- 4) C. Yearly budget reports are used as a base in each phase except budget approval, which relies on budget law and reports of legislative budget committees.
- 5) B. It is important for citizens to be aware and, as much as possible, be a part of the entire budget cycle. Tracking how all phases develop allows monitoring groups maintain more accurate and rigorous records of their initiatives. This helps counter negative feedback and strengthens results.
- 6) A. It is possible to monitor the budget cycle even if access to budget information and documentation is limited or restricted. Monitoring initiatives lacking access to the budget can focus on budget oversight meetings in parliamentary committees, reviewing government financial documents on allocation and spending by tracking expenditures, attending budget hearings and submitting budget advocacy proposals.
- 7) D. Oversight procedures may outline specific roles and responsibilities for the legislature, agencies or individuals. Legislative committees often review government audit reports compiled by independent government agencies. These reports provide explanation of each phase of the budget cycle and where citizen groups were included in the process.
- 8) A. Monitoring Groups should monitor as much of the budget cycle as they can access in order to gather as much data as possible. Monitoring initiatives can provide better records by tracking the entire budget cycle.

Lesson Two Quiz

- 1) A. A national budget typically focuses on allocating resources to fund line ministries and central government operating expenses, whereas a local level budget includes resources to fund municipal level expenditures such as operating local transportation and waste management.
- 2) D. Knowing who has authority of budget execution is important for gaining access, ensuring accountability and understanding the role of key stakeholders.
- 3) D. Monitoring groups should know their own abilities for planning to maximize results. Having a thorough understanding of organizational capacity will help allocate resources correctly, predict potential problems and find undiscovered capabilities.
- 4) C. Lesson two explains in governments with limited openness monitoring initiatives may be better taking the time to build positive and resource-oriented relationships like-minded organizations.
- 5) D. Governments are more likely to give monitoring initiatives access they need to budget meetings and publicly share budget documents if they believe that information will not be abused. Organizations can raise public confidence in civil society's ability to make government more transparent if they are considered trustworthy by the public.
- 6) B. Before beginning a monitoring initiative, monitoring groups must also fully understand and accept the risks involved.
- 7) A. Focusing on one part of the budget cycle will fail to ensure accountability throughout the process. To have the most impact budget monitoring initiatives should engage throughout the budget process including reviewing public documents, observing legislation, and attending budgetary meetings.
- 8) A. Civil society organizations in a restricted political space can monitor the budget cycle and focus on awareness-raising, advocacy that focuses on increasing public access to government information and building positive and resource-oriented relationships.

Lesson Three Quiz

- 1) D. Monitoring initiatives that develop positive relationships are more likely to successfully receive budget information and other sensitive information.
- 2) A. Desirable project outcomes can be produced from the negotiation and antagonism of civil society and government. It is better to be collaborative however, to show how more efficient use of funds could take place or mutual priorities could be addressed.
- 3) B. It is a good idea to first introduce the goals and objectives of your project to the government. By describing the projects goals, civil society's monitoring initiatives are helping to further the governments' goals which may make government officials very willing to provide information and documentation.
- 4) D. Business owners, unions, and associations may have an opinion on the budget in making their contracts and expenses. Businesses may be interested in being of assistance to demonstrate they are following rules properly.
- 5) D. Community volunteers can be a source of information on public service delivery through surveys and data collection. The information collected can be used to ensure local citizens are connected through budget literacy initiatives. Media can be used to publicize findings and increase transparency.
- 6) D. Information from community surveys serves a number of purposes and are an easy way to engage with citizens. Citizens are a useful data collection point for monitoring activities, the data set produced can be compared with budget allocations and expense reports.
- 7) D. Strengthening alliances with key stakeholders can help monitoring initiatives gain support, receive data and show credibility.
- 8) B. Budget information is sensitive and government officials are unlikely to share information to those they do not have a relationship with or do not trust.

Lesson Four Quiz

- 1) A. A very common use of monitoring data is for groups to develop public awareness campaigns. These types of awareness campaigns can help citizens better understand their government's budget cycle.
- 2) B. Information gathered during a budget monitoring initiative can also be used for expenditure tracking and budget advocacy. These reports can even be compared to the local government's record of expenditures and yearly reports and statements to prevent corruption.
- 3) D. There is often a difference between where funds are allocated for projects and where the funds are actually disbursed, especially for service delivery. Tracking real spending allows monitoring initiatives to develop accurate budget advocacy proposals.
- 4) A. Evidence-based data is most accurate and specific. Accurate data ensures that community priorities are reflected in budgets, that specific projects are funded and that the allocated funds are sufficient for project implementation.
- 5) D. A budget advocacy initiative monitor groups as well as lobby and campaign to bring about specific changes, locally or nationally, in a budget or budget process. Budget advocacy initiatives may help to ensure that community priorities are reflected in budgets.
- 6) A. Local governments can be more transparent and open about how their budgetary resources are allocated. When advocating for reforming local budgetary practices monitoring initiatives can be more targeted to the budget execution process.
- 7) B. There may be little understanding among the public for what actually goes into developing and implementing a budget, monitoring initiatives can build awareness through informative campaigns that help citizens better understand how government allocates money.
- 8) D. Once data has been collected it can be applied to budget advocacy, expenditure tracking and raising public awareness for different purposes.