

## Module 1: Introduction to Budget Work

### Slide 1: Introduction

In this presentation, we will introduce the social accountability tool of “budget work.” Budget work can loosely be described as budget research and activities that aim to influence public policy and expenditures. We will begin with a basic overview of this type of approach, the tools and applications used in budget work, and the approach's place in the overall social accountability framework. Later, we will go over the major benefits of budget work as well as its risks, limitations, and challenges.

### Slide 2: What is Budget Work?

What is budget work? “Budget work” refers to many varied and locally-grown activities that are being undertaken around the world. Budget work is occurring with increasing frequency and across all regions and types of government regimes. Implemented by civil society, these activities have the common goal of making public budgets more transparent and influencing the allocation of public funds. Some examples of budget work tools include: independent budget analysis, budget trainings, budget guides, and the preparation of hypothetical “alternative budgets.” Additionally, other types of budget work tools assess the budget process and systems, gauging the degree of budget transparency and advocating for needed improvements. Experience has shown that budget work has the potential to powerfully alter public spending and to exact greater accountability from governments and increase civic participation.

### Slide 3: Growth of Budget Work Worldwide

Budget work is quickly becoming more widespread among civil society groups around the world. A timeline put together by the International Budget Partnership, or IBP, marks the years from 2000 to 2007 as the “growth years” of budget work. IBP estimated in 2005 that over 100 organizations in 70 countries were engaged in budget work, compared to fewer than 10 organizations a decade earlier. As the number of organizations conducting this kind of work continues to grow, the methods used in budget work will expand as well, as such groups are forced to create new and innovative ways to respond to country-specific circumstances.

### Slide 4: Budget Work Strategies

More specifically, the budget work tools we’ve just discussed work in four general ways. Firstly, by using so-called “analytical glasses,” groups engaged in budget work can highlight important aspects of public spending in a particular area or sector. Budget groups should look for trends over time, equity, adequacy of funding levels, and prioritization of the area or sector relative to other budget categories. This type of work can focus on spending at a particular sector level, such as education, health, or defense. It can also focus on spending in areas such as gender or youth, which cut across many sectors. Secondly, other types of budget work “demystify” technical content of budgets by translating technical information into common vocabulary for increased understanding of the budget by ordinary citizens. By “demystifying” the content, budgets are made more broadly accessible and more individuals are enabled to participate in the budget process. Thirdly, S can train a target audience of civil society,

media, academics, or government on budgetary issues or perform a trainer-of-trainers event on the same topic. Lastly, budget work can use advocacy and public information campaigns to motivate citizens to get involved in the budget process. This type of budget work often includes performing media outreach on specific findings and seeks to generate more public awareness regarding budget issues.

#### **Slide 5: Budget Transparency**

It is important to note that the budget work strategies we've just covered can be undertaken only if there is an adequate degree of budget transparency in a certain country or locality. In other words, the necessary first step for any kind of budget work is access to the necessary information – an access that in many cases may be limited. In many countries, documents such as the public budget may be unavailable, and citizens may lack the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the budget process. In these cases, budget work needs to focus on lobbying for increased transparency and information rights. This can be accomplished through forming partnerships with government officials or by building coalitions of civil society organizations interested in budget work to increase pressure on the government to make such information available.

#### **Slide 6: Budget Transparency**

In recognition of the breadth of these global challenges to participating in budget work, the International Budget Partnership conducts an annual survey entitled the Open Budget Survey. This survey evaluates whether governments give citizens access to budget information and whether or not the public is given opportunities to participate in the budget process at the national level. The 2008 survey found that, in the countries surveyed, 80% of governments failed to provide the public with the information necessary to hold governments accountable for managing public funds. The map shown here illustrates the survey's findings in the countries in which it was conducted. Countries marked in blue provide citizens with extensive information on public budgets, and those in green provide citizens with significant information. Countries marked in yellow or orange provide some information or minimal information, whereas countries marked in red provide scant information or none at all.

#### **Slide 7: Budget Work and Social Accountability**

Budget work fits squarely within the social accountability framework by connecting ordinary citizens to governance through enhanced involvement in the public budget cycle. Such exercises can add important value to a country or region's social accountability strategy by improving information-sharing, transparency, and public understanding of the budget. Budget work can be a powerful tool in influencing budget allocations by improving targeting for vulnerable groups and in highlighting specific sectors such as health, education, youth, gender, or others. Budget work can also help governments to better align public spending with citizen priorities, and can influence revenue policies and improve equity therein. Lastly, budget work can be a powerful way to hold governments accountable by checking whether or not their actual spending matches their political promises.

### **Slide 8: Budget Work and the Budget Cycle**

Social accountability tools are most effective when they are institutionalized, or when they are part of a larger “social accountability system” in which citizen involvement is a continual feature of the entire policy process. As the diagram here shows, budget work is merely one way in which civil society can be involved in the budget cycle. The most successful budget analysis exercises combine several or all of the above elements into an ongoing initiative that engages civil society throughout the budget cycle. While each individual tool can contribute to the goals of transparency, participation, service delivery, and needs fulfillment, they are certain to be more effective when they are used together as part of a comprehensive initiative. Also, along the same lines, civil society’s engagement should not be throughout merely one budget cycle. Rather, where such opportunities exist, budget work should also focus on medium-term expenditure frameworks that cover multi-year spending plans and priorities.

### **Slide 9: Why Engage in Budget Work?**

Why should civil society organizations engage in budget work? In fact, civil society budget work can benefit both government and civil society. Firstly, civil society often has a comparative advantage relative to government due to its field presence, existing networks, and proximity to communities that are often excluded from public discourse. Therefore, it can add important value to the budget process by including a broader base of citizenry in the debate. Next, budget analysis by civil society can highlight issues or constituent groups that may otherwise be ignored. It can also encourage stakeholder buy-in to local projects by involving communities in the financial underpinnings of such projects. Moreover, the “hard” data acquired through budget analysis is often a powerful tool for civil society advocacy, giving quantifiable evidence to otherwise “soft” claims. Finally, budget analysis is an empowering exercise in and of itself, bestowing civil society actors with valuable technical skills and affirming their fundamental democratic right to see how public money is spent. By highlighting the mutual benefits to both civil society and government, budget work can be an effective way of “building bridges” between the two groups for constructive and meaningful partnerships.

### **Slide 10: Challenges**

While the benefits of undertaking budget work are evident, it is important to recognize the challenges involved in this type of work. Especially for first-time participants, budget work can be difficult on several fronts. Beyond the initial challenge of securing the necessary information, which we discussed earlier, organizations may lack the technical expertise to present a high-quality and credible budget analysis. Also, it can be difficult to strike the right balance between an exhaustive, detailed analysis and user-friendly briefs that are appropriate for all citizens. Finally, while such a risk is present in all social accountability approaches, the risk that participation is limited to certain sections of civil society and susceptible to elite capture is more pronounced in budget analysis due to the more technical nature of the approach.

**Slide 11: Review**

In this presentation, we introduced a new social accountability tool: budget work, or methods that seek to involve civil society in examining the public budget in order to influence the allocation of public funds. We briefly reviewed some examples of budget work tools and strategies. Next, we learned about the challenge of budget transparency, which is lacking in many countries around the world and that can challenge civil society's participation in budget work. We also explained budget work in the context of the broader social accountability framework and the public financial management cycle. Finally, we reviewed the challenges and many benefits of this type of work in enhancing transparency, accountability, and ultimately improving development outcomes at the national and local levels.