

Influencing Public Budgets: Strategic Entry Points for Accountability and Citizen Participation

Engaging the right actors, at the right moments, to shape public spending

Africa Community of Practice – PFM Learning Lab

12th March 2026

About IBP

The International Budget Partnership is a global partnership of budget analysts, community organizers, and advocates working to advance public budget systems that work for all people, not a privileged few.

Together, we generate data, advocate for reform, and build the skills and knowledge of people so that everyone can have a voice in budget decisions that impact their lives.



Checking In: Reflections on the Previous Homework

Homework Reflection: Mapping Your Country's PFM Framework

In the previous session facilitated by **Bajeti Hub**, participants were asked to identify key **Public Financial Management (PFM) laws and frameworks** in their respective countries.

Let's briefly reflect:

- *Were you able to identify the **main PFM legislation** governing the budget process in your country?*
- *Which **institutions play the most important roles** in the budget process?*
- *Did you encounter any **challenges in finding this information**?*



Session Roadmap

Today we will explore four key areas:

01

Why influencing public budgets matters

Budgets as political and strategic processes

02

Where influence happens in the budget cycle

Identifying key decision moments

03

How organisations can engage strategically

Evidence, coalitions, and political economy

04

Common challenges in budget engagement

Lessons from practice

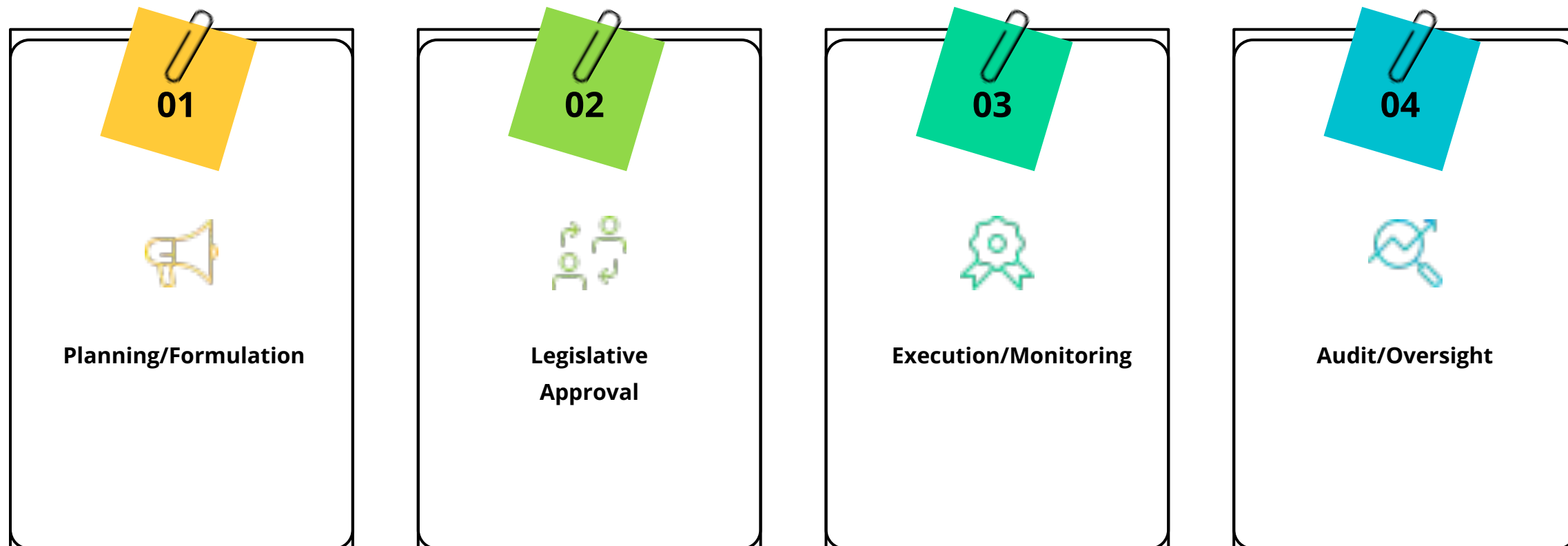
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Applying the framework in practice

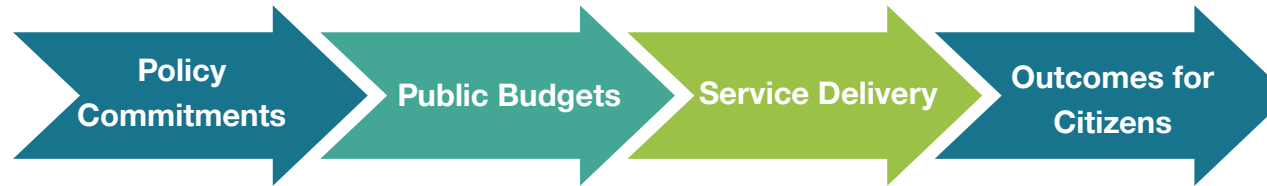
Group reflection and discussion

Quick Check: Where Do You Usually Engage?

At what stage of the budget process does your organisation usually engage?



Why Influencing Public Budgets Matters



Why Public Budgets Matter

Budgets determine priorities

They decide which sectors and programmes receive resources

Budgets translate policy into action

Without funding, policy commitments remain promises

Budgets shape service delivery

Health, education, and social protection depend on public spending

Budgets affect equity and accountability

They influence who benefits from public resources and who is left behind

Influence in Public Budgets Does Not Happen at Only One Moment



- Public budgets are often described as a sequence of stages: **formulation, legislative approval, execution, and oversight.**
- In many countries, civil society organisations concentrate most of their advocacy efforts during the **formulation stage**, when governments prepare draft budgets and set sector priorities. This is understandable, because it is the moment when issues can first enter the budget and receive initial allocations.
- However, **important decisions continue to be made throughout the entire budget process.**
- Each stage involves actors who exercise authority over different aspects of public spending, and each stage presents **distinct opportunities for influence and accountability.**

Where Influence Happens in the Budget Cycle

Budget Stage	Key Decisions Being Made	How Organisations Can Influence
Budget Formulation	Government defines priorities and prepares the draft budget	Advocate for policy priorities, present evidence on sector needs, participate in consultations
Legislative Review & Approval	Parliament debates and approves the budget	Provide analysis to legislators, highlight gaps in allocations, advocate for adjustments
Budget Execution	Funds are released and programmes are implemented	Monitor spending, track whether funds reach intended programmes, raise concerns about delays
Oversight & Audit	Spending is reviewed by oversight institutions	Analyse audit findings, engage oversight bodies, use citizen evidence to demand accountability

How Organisations Can Engage Strategically

Identifying entry points in the budget cycle is only the first step.

Strategic engagement requires understanding:

- **when decisions are made**
- **who holds power**
- **what approaches can influence those decisions.**



Timing – Engage when decisions are still open

Influence is strongest **before decisions are finalised**.

Engaging too late often means reacting to decisions rather than shaping them.

Power and Actors – Identify who controls the decision

Budgets are shaped by **people and institutions**, not only processes.

This requires identifying- who sets priorities, who approves allocations, who controls releases, who oversees spending.

Tools of Influence – Use the right approach

Different **stages** require **different tools**, including:

- Evidence and budget analysis
- Coalitions with other organisations
- Media and public communication
- Citizen monitoring and service delivery feedback

QUICK CHECK

Why do you think some advocacy efforts succeed while others fail — even when the evidence is strong?

Example from Nigeria: Expanding Health Insurance Access for Vulnerable Groups

The Issue

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Oyo State, Nigeria faced **significant barriers enrolling in the state health insurance scheme**, limiting their access to healthcare services.

What JDPC Ibadan and Partners Did

- Worked with **PWD associations** to document barriers preventing enrolment.
- Engaged the **Oyo State Health Insurance Agency** to highlight gaps in inclusion.
- Presented **evidence and community voices** showing how exclusion affected access to care.
- Framed the issue as an opportunity for government to **demonstrate commitment to inclusive healthcare and social protection**.

Government Incentives

For the government, expanding enrolment helped:

- Demonstrate progress toward **inclusive health coverage**
- Strengthen the reach of the **state health insurance programme**
- Show responsiveness to **citizen concerns and vulnerable groups**

Result

As a result of this engagement:

Over 200 persons with disabilities were enrolled in the Oyo State health insurance scheme, and enrolment continues to grow.

Using a Political Economy Lens in Budget Engagement

Public budgets are ***not only technical financial documents***. They are shaped by ***power, interests, and incentives***.

Understanding these dynamics helps organisations identify ***realistic opportunities for influence***.

Three Questions to Ask Before Engaging

01

Interests

Who benefits from current budget decisions?

Different actors benefit differently from how resources are allocated.
Understanding interests helps anticipate **support or resistance to reform**.

02

Institutions

What rules shape decision-making?

Both formal and informal rules influence how budgets are decided.
These rules determine **where engagement is possible**.

03

Incentives

What motivates decision-makers?

Actors respond to political and institutional incentives.
Recognising incentives helps organisations identify **leverage points for influence**.



Common Mistakes When Engaging in Budget Processes

Many organisations invest significant effort in budget advocacy, but impact is often limited because engagement strategies **do not align with how budget decisions actually happen**.

Four Common Mistakes:

1

Engaging Too Late in the Budget Cycle

Many organisations focus only on the **legislative stage**, when key priorities and allocations have already been decided during formulation.

2

Ignoring Political Incentives

Evidence alone rarely drives decisions.
Budget priorities are often shaped by **political interests, electoral considerations, and institutional incentives**.

3


Focusing Only on Budget Allocations

Even when budgets allocate resources to priority sectors, problems often occur during **execution**, including delayed releases, procurement bottlenecks, or reallocations.

4

Working in Isolation

Budget influence often requires **coalitions, partnerships, and public pressure**.



Group WORK

The illustration depicts a workspace with a light brown background. A white notepad with blue horizontal lines is the central focus. A black paperclip is attached to the top left of the notepad. A hand holding a white pen with a red band is positioned at the bottom left, having just finished writing the words 'Group WORK' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The word 'Group' is in title case, and 'WORK' is in all caps. To the right of the notepad, a silver ID card with a black silhouette of a person is hanging from a black lanyard. Two small, torn pieces of white paper are scattered on the background surface. A curved arrow points from the ID card towards the text on the notepad. Two small red dots are visible on the bottom right of the notepad.

Breakout Questions

Looking at the stage where your organisation engages, **what specific decision are you trying to influence?**

Who are the most important actors influencing that decision, and what interests or incentives might shape their choices?

Is there another stage of the budget cycle where your organisation could engage more strategically?

Key Takeaways

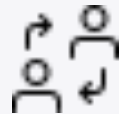
Effective engagement depends on:

1



Recognising that
influence exists
**across the entire
budget cycle.**

2



Budget decisions are
shaped by **power,**
interests, and
incentives.

3



Aligning **timing,**
evidence, and
collaboration to
influence outcomes.

Take-Home Exercise: Mapping Your Entry Point for Influence

Identify **one public spending issue** your organisation works on and reflect on the following:

- **Which stage of the budget cycle does this issue appear in?**
(Formulation, approval, execution, or oversight)
- **What decision are you trying to influence?**
- **Who are the key actors involved in that decision?**
- **What interests or incentives might shape their choices?**
- **What is one new opportunity for engagement your organisation could explore?**



For more information, visit
www.internationalbudget.org

