

Budget Advocacy for Child Rights in the Philippines: How Civil Society Can Increase Public Spending for Child Rights

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ABSTRACT

Policy advocates for child rights work around the world on their mission to realize child rights for all children. In recent times, policy advocates have realized that important policies are often inadequately funded. Policy advocacy must be complimented with budget advocacy which targets the national budget. Budget advocacy is complex and has, therefore, not been widely adopted by advocates. This is an impactful problem. This thesis discusses state of the art budget advocacy literature and outlines the approaches used by experienced budget advocates. It provides key knowledge which allows the Child Rights Coalition Asia to draft concrete budget advocacy plans.

Keywords

Budget Advocacy, Child rights, Policy Advocacy, General Comment 19, UNCRC, Public Investments for Children, Human Rights

INTRODUCTION

With very few exceptions we are programmed to value the well-being of children and would agree that their well-being is of immense value for societies and their economies. It is for this reason that child rights as defined by the United Nations, are so important and that around the world there are countless organisations defending and advocating for children's rights. One way of doing so is through policy advocacy. Policy advocates use an array of instruments to influence government policies with the mission of realising child rights. A limitation of policy advocacy for child rights is that often when policy advocates are successful in their advocacy, the impact of the new policies is unsatisfactory because of inadequate funding. Advocating for funding, investments for child rights, and budget advocacy are recognised by child rights advocates as an essential supplement for policy advocacy.

The secretariat of Child Rights Coalition Asia (CRC Asia) practises policy advocacy in the Philippines and is aware of the lack of knowledge on how to conduct budget advocacy. The secretariat took on the responsibility to relieve this problem among its international coalition members through first becoming experienced with budget advocacy in the Philippines and then assisting its members with the same. Consequently, the policy advocacy officer of the secretariat was made responsible for the learning process. I was personally asked to assist the policy advocacy officer by delivering a report aiding the organisation with the learning process. The undertaken research process was done individually with guidance provided by Deanne Boisvert from the Windesheim Honours College and from the CRC Asia staff. The report describes how budget advocacy is conducted and provides CRC Asia with the essential information it needs to draft concrete budget advocacy plans.

This adapted version of the bachelor thesis starts with a more elaborate problem definition containing the objective of the study as well as the research questions. Furthermore, the results are described in brief covering desk-research findings as well as information retrieved from interviews conducted with experts in the field. Finally, the results and conclusions are stated.

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SRC 2017, November 15, 2017, The Netherlands.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

The national budget is the most accurate reflection of the priorities of a government and what it is committed to achieve (Brearley et al., 2012; Mutua, Muya, & Otieno, 2015; Shastri, Thukral, Heiberg, & Conilleau, 2010). As was explained in the introduction, often government policies that should benefit the rights situation of children are inadequately funded and therefore do not have the intended effects. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, also signed by the Philippines, prescribes that signatory states are obligated to take measures to fight this problem. It does so in article 4 of the convention which states:

States parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016)

In 2016 the Committee on the Rights of the Child released General Comment No. 19 on public budgeting for the realisation of children's rights on this very article. The general comment is to be used by states to utilise public budgeting for the improvement of child rights situations in their respective states. Budget advocacy challenges the notion that public budgets are exclusively the business of governments (Brearley et al., 2012, p. 1). Through budget advocacy, child rights organisations aim to increase the degree of compliance with article 4 by the means elucidated in its general comment. CRC Asia has concluded that budget advocacy must complement its policy advocacy efforts. However, it has adjudged that it lacks key knowledge regarding how budget advocacy can be conducted in general and in the Philippines specifically. CRC Asia is convinced that if the lack of knowledge is not resolved, it will take the Philippines and the countries of its members longer to realise child rights (E. Fortaleza, personal communication, January 30, 2017). In addition to previous efforts to learn more about budget advocacy, there is a clear need for research. A research objective was formulated to address this problem:

Research objective: To collect and organise information that describes how CRC Asia can prepare for budget advocacy activities in the policy subsystem for the improvement of child rights and well-being in the Philippines.

The research objective and the ground-breaking logic model of Gen and Wright (2013) which outlines the connections between advocacy activities, their outcomes and the impact for the target beneficiaries lead to the formulation of the following central research question and sub-questions:

Central research question: How can civil society organisations (CSOs) advocate for public investments that lead to the improvement of child rights in the Philippines?

Research sub-questions:

1. How can CSOs engage in budget advocacy activities?
2. How do social organisations advocate for public investments?
3. How do CSOs in the Philippines advocate for public investments?

RESEARCH METHOD

The research conducted was of exploratory nature and took place between March and May 2017. Data was collected using three different methods. Sub-question one was answered using desk-research. Scientific literature on budget advocacy is limited, but literature published by international CSOs is abundant. Theoretical and practical approaches to budget advocacy were identified, collected, and discussed. The scientific databases SAGE, Wiley, Taylor and Francis were searched, as well as various books and conventional online search engines.

To answer sub-question two, four experts from foreign CSOs with social goals were interviewed as child rights organisations that conduct budget advocacy on a national level are scarce. Using convenience- and snowball sampling, experts were identified and invited for recorded semi-structured interviews through Skype. An interview protocol was prepared beforehand and validated by a subcontracted social researcher. The interviews were aimed to be approximately one-hour long. The recordings of the interviews were summarised and discussed using the common steps taken in the budget advocacy process revealed by saturation from sub question one. To confirm the findings of question two and to identify relevant context specific factors, interviews were held with experts from two national Philippine CSOs and with the assistant director of the government Department of Budget and Management (DBM) who oversaw the introduction of participation spaces in spending agencies.

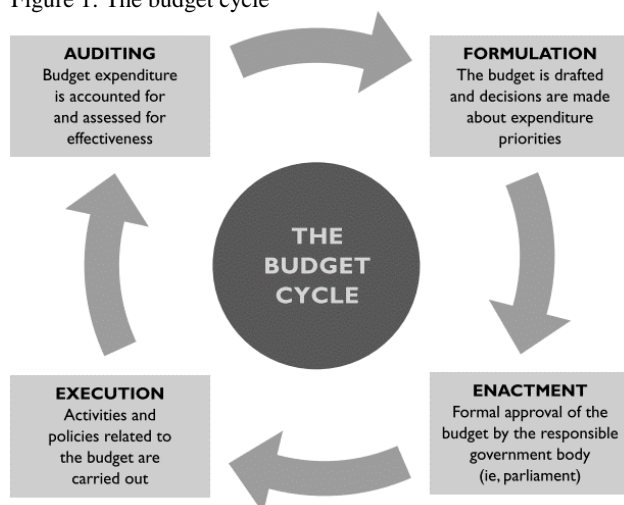
RESULTS

As expected, most literature found was published by international CSOs and funders with budget advocacy experience. The information presented in the literature is highly applied and describes the process of budget advocacy. Saturation was reached regarding the steps taken by advocates. First and foremost, the lens of the advocate and the sector must be understood as argued by the International Budget Partnership ("Political and Policy Context of Budget Analysis," n.d.). Examples of these are the human rights lens and the health sector with its legal frameworks. In the case of health sector advocacy "Legal frameworks include national or state constitutions, national health strategies/plans, national health policies, and national health acts" (Brearley et al., 2012). Understanding the lens in the case of human rights means understanding the concept and awareness of national and international legal provisions as well as the ratification of the concerning government and the compliance (Fundar, International Human Rights Internship Program, & International Budget Project, 2004).

In addition to an understanding of the lens or the sector, the advocate must be knowledgeable of the budget cycle and system of the respective country. Mbuya-Brown and Sapuwa (2015) mention that is especially the budget cycle is most troublesome for CSOs to grasp. A public budget is the instrument used by governments through which national resources are allocated, often per fiscal year (Brearley et al.,

2012). The formulation of national budgets follows similar stages in most countries as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: The budget cycle



Source: Brearley et al., 2012

Only with an understanding and knowledge desired budget advocacy outcomes can be defined by the advocate. It is also important to know the budget system which includes the actors involved in the budget cycle. These understandings allow the advocate to identify problems to be addressed with budget advocacy and to consult with the communities and groups affected, which is deemed absolutely crucial to understand the problem (Mbuya-Brown & Sapuwa, 2015).

Budget analysis must be conducted when the problem is identified and access to relevant budgetary documents is secured. HAQ Centre for Child Rights India, the pioneering organisation on budget advocacy for children generates and disseminates a budget for children when the national budget proposal is released, meaning disaggregating all allocations specifically for children. (Shastri et al., 2010). Depending on the problem budget allocations can be compared to relevant factors such as time and a growing target population (WaterAid Nepal, 2010). The DBM assistant director suggested that especially relevant data for advocacy is research that demonstrates a rational case for increased funding. The findings of budget analysis, complimented with other data is used to construct arguments for advocacy. In the four stages of the budget cycle, there are different opportunities, called entry points for advocacy. Different respondents noted that in the Philippines spending agencies consult CSOs. In other contexts where this is not true, advocates must rely more heavily on informal contacts. The enactment stage provides opportunities for advocates as media attention for new budgets is often high (Shapiro, 2001). There is potential for more monitoring by CSOs during the execution and auditing stage (Krafchik, 2005).

The preparation for budget advocacy activities is long but is required so that the advocate can formulate rational arguments supported by evidence. Tactics employed during advocacy in practice by CSOs vary widely, but tools such as sharing budget analysis findings, working through informal contacts, lobbying, and working in coalition formations were prominent instruments in the budget advocacy toolbox of interview respondents. Respondents agreed that the importance of budget

advocacy cannot be stressed enough and must compliment policy advocacy. If done successfully, budget advocacy will lead to improved essential and lifesaving services for children. This research report outlines approaches used by experienced budget advocates and will guide CRC Asia to draft concrete budget advocacy plans.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the question was asked how public investments can be advocated for by CSOs in the Philippines. The objective was to collect enough information on this so that CRC Asia can start preparing its budget advocacy activities. To conduct budget advocacy, advocates must be fully knowledgeable of their lens and sector. This understanding, together with awareness of the budget cycle and the budget system allows advocates to consult their target beneficiaries about the problems experienced. Budget analysis can take place when all required budget documents are collected. Budget analysis complimented with other data is used to construct arguments for advocacy.

In the formulation, enactment, execution, and auditing stages, advocacy entry points differ per context. Therefore, tactics used by advocates vary. In the Philippines, there are opportunities for CSOs to attend consultations with spending agencies. In other contexts where this is not the case, advocates have to rely more on informal contacts. Also, the enactment stage provides opportunities as the media coverage is here at its highest. Opportunities in the latter two stages remain often unused. Respondents agreed that the importance of budget advocacy cannot be stressed enough and must compliment policy advocacy. If done successfully, budget advocacy will lead to improved essential and lifesaving services for children. The results outlined approaches used by experienced budget advocates and will guide CRC Asia to draft concrete budget advocacy plans, and consequently contribute to the improvement of the lives of Filipino children.

ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Teun van Leeuwen was the research intern for Child Rights Coalition Asia and was specifically invited to deliver a paper which would ease the process of starting advocacy for public investments and budget advocacy in the Philippines. The research topic was proposed by the coalition secretariat. The exact problem definition and research questions were proposed by the student. All other writings are the product of individual work of the student.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all the CRC Asia staff for their support and guidance. My gratitude goes also out to Deanne Boisvert and Agnes Camacho of the Windesheim Honours College for their valuable advice and feedback.

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