



Tools and Methods Series

Reference document N° 18

Promoting **civil society participation** in policy and budget processes

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Promoting civil society participation
in policy and budget processes

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I. Introduction

Background

An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and an asset in itself. This is at the core of the communication 'The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with civil society in external relations' which was adopted by the European Commission in September 2012 and endorsed by European Council conclusions in October 2012 ⁽¹⁾.

The communication argues for increased civil society participation in policymaking and for civil society organisations (CSOs) to play a strong role in promoting domestic transparency and accountability. It traces back to a decade of EC policy processes with increased focus on the role of civil society and builds upon the conclusions from the 'structured dialogue' process during 2010–11 and extensive online consultations carried out in 2012. The communication's explicit recognition of civil society as an independent development actor builds on the Accra Agenda for Action (2010) and the Busan Declaration (2012).

The role of CSOs in promoting domestic transparency and accountability is also a key element in the communication 'The future approach to EU budget support to third countries', which introduces a new eligibility criterion: transparency and oversight of the budget, underlining the importance of strengthening domestic accountability and national control mechanisms ⁽²⁾. Increased engagement with CSOs could here be an important complement to existing work with national authorities such as parliaments, ombudsman institutions and supreme audit institutions.

CSOs can also play an important role also at the local level in keeping politicians and officials accountable for responsive and efficient delivery of public services. This is one of the core messages of the communication 'Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes', which highlights the importance of involving CSOs in development processes at the local level ⁽³⁾.

Purpose of the reference document

The purpose of this reference document is to provide guidance on how to promote the participation of civil society in domestic policy and budget processes. The document focuses on both national and local levels, with a view to identifying entry points for EU support in terms of policy dialogue and operational support.

The target audience includes EU staff in delegations and at headquarters engaged in policy dialogue related to budget support and staff responsible for mainstreaming a more strategic engagement with civil society in all instruments and programmes across all sectors of cooperation. This includes colleagues involved in public sector and public financial management (PFM) reform in third countries. Finally, the document is also targeted at colleagues managing instruments and programmes directly targeted at civil society.

The document complements the January 2011 reference document, 'Engaging non-state actors in new aid modalities', by focusing explicitly on domestic policy and budget processes and by focusing on the EU's engagement with both authorities and CSOs. It is a direct response to the September 2012 civil society communication's call for increased civil society participation in domestic policymaking.

The reference document is based on various recent publications and evaluations of civil society participation in policy and budget processes (see 'Key references' at the end of this document). It also builds on a number of interviews with staff in EU delegations and discussions with EU delegations held during the July 2013 seminar organised by DG Development and Cooperation — EuropeAid on 'Engaging strategically with civil society: implementing the new policy on CSOs'. Sincere thanks are extended to all colleagues who have contributed along the way. Comments, contributions and critiques are welcome and should be sent to EUROPEAID-B2@ec.europa.eu.

The remainder of this introductory chapter elaborates on key definitions. The following chapter outlines factors considered essential for effective civil society participation in policy and budget processes. The final chapter suggests specific entry points for EU support.

Key definitions

Policy processes is a generic term covering different stages of policy formulation and implementation. They are neither linear nor circular and may take years or decades to result in policy change and outcomes (if any) and actors and strategies may change over time. Some actors will be formally involved and consulted but many actors will also exercise power through informal channels. In short, policy processes can be characterised as complex and multilayered — in some cases even disordered. Still, to unpack the process, it can crudely be broken down into the following, somewhat overlapping, phases: problem identification and agenda setting, consultation, drafting, decision-making, implementation and, finally, monitoring and evaluation.

⁽¹⁾ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁽²⁾ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0638:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁽³⁾ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0280:FIN:en:PDF>

Policy and budget processes are in many cases initiated and driven by central or local authorities. In other cases the initiative will come from outside — e.g. civil society or the private sector. For policy processes to be successful and legitimate, coordinated action and shared experience is important among different actors involved in the process — CSOs, research institutions, media, government institutions, private sector and politicians. The example from the adoption of legislation against domestic violence in Mozambique described in the box below illustrates well the uneven and lengthy course a policy process may take.

The adoption of legislation on domestic violence in Mozambique

In Mozambique, CSOs took the initiative to advocate for new legislation on domestic violence to protect the victims better. The policy process took place from 2000 to 2009, when the legislation was finally sanctioned by Parliament. Women's organisations were in the forefront of the policy process. A recent evaluation highlights that evidence, strong leadership and the capacity to form coalitions and make use of complementary initiatives and processes were successful strategies. Still, the evaluation also points out that a more effective outreach could have been achieved had broader based organisations also been involved.

Source: 'Support to civil society engagement in policy dialogue: joint evaluation synthesis report', Danida, November 2012 (http://www.netpublikationer.dk/um/11193/pdf/evaluation_synthesis_report.pdf).

Budget processes are, compared to policy processes, generally more structured and predictable. The budget cycle presupposes mobilisation of resources, not least domestic resources. The actual budget formulation process is a cyclic occurrence with a number of steps, which can be summarised as follows ⁽⁴⁾:

1. *Formulation* — when the executive branch puts together the budget plan and produces the executive budget proposal and supporting budget reports.
2. *Approval* — when the legislature debates, alters (if it has the power to do so) and approves the budget plan. The budget law is made available, accompanied by reports from legislative budget committees.
3. *Execution* (procurement, implementation, monitoring and control) — when national and local governments implement the policies in the budget.
4. *Oversight* (auditing and legislative assessment) — when the national audit institution and the legislature account for and assess the expenditures made under the budget and publish audit reports and legislative audit committee reports.

Still, policy and budget processes are often intertwined and should therefore not be seen in isolation — especially not when expenditure-driven policies are concerned (health, education, water, agriculture, etc.).

Authorities are for the purposes of this reference document defined as the executive, legislative and judicial branches, with a particular focus on central governments, national assemblies and, at the local level, local councils and administrations.

Civil society organisations are here defined as all non-state, not-for-profit structures that are non-partisan and non-violent, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic. Operating from the local to the national, regional and international levels, they comprise urban and rural and formal and informal organisations. It is through CSOs that citizens can engage in policy dialogue, collectively voice their opinions and rights and hold authorities and other stakeholders accountable.

Participation of civil society in policy and budget processes can involve anything from merely having improved access to public information and data to civil society providing feedback and participating actively in the policy and budget process.

Participation will typically happen through **spaces** generally defined as 'opportunities, moments and channels' where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests ⁽⁵⁾.

In some cases, also referred to as **invited spaces**, civil society is **invited** by authorities as observers, for consultation or even active participation in decision-making. Such participation will often be institutionalised and in some cases have a legal basis. In other cases they may be more temporary, involving ad hoc consultation fora. Examples include civil society consultations during the annual budget cycle at key strategic moments (e.g. planning, annual reviews and policy development) as well as citizen participation in statutory oversight bodies such as parliamentary standing committees. The purpose of such participation will often be publicised in advance and it is considered good practice to provide feedback to the public on the inputs collected.

Claimed spaces, by contrast, are established on the initiative of civil society and are often informal, organic and based on common concerns and identification. Examples of claimed spaces are advocacy initiatives taken by civil society to claim influence on, for example, legislation, constitutional revision processes, land-grabbing conflicts or discontent concerning public services or political decisions.

The distinction between invited and claimed spaces is useful when assessing possibilities for EU political and financial support in a given country. The situation will, however, never be static and claimed spaces may over time transform into invited spaces and vice versa.

⁽⁴⁾ <http://internationalbudget.org/getting-started/why-are-budgets-important/steps-budget-cycle/>

⁽⁵⁾ Gaventa J., 'Reflections on the uses of the power cube approach for analysing the spaces, places and dynamics of CS participation and engagement', CFP Evaluations Series No 4, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 2005.

II. Civil society participation in policy and budget processes — key factors

This chapter identifies a number of factors considered critical for promoting the participation of civil society organisations in budget and policy processes. They can broadly be categorised into three main areas: (i) transparency: access to information; (ii) mechanisms for participatory policymaking and budgeting; and (iii) vertical accountability mechanisms.

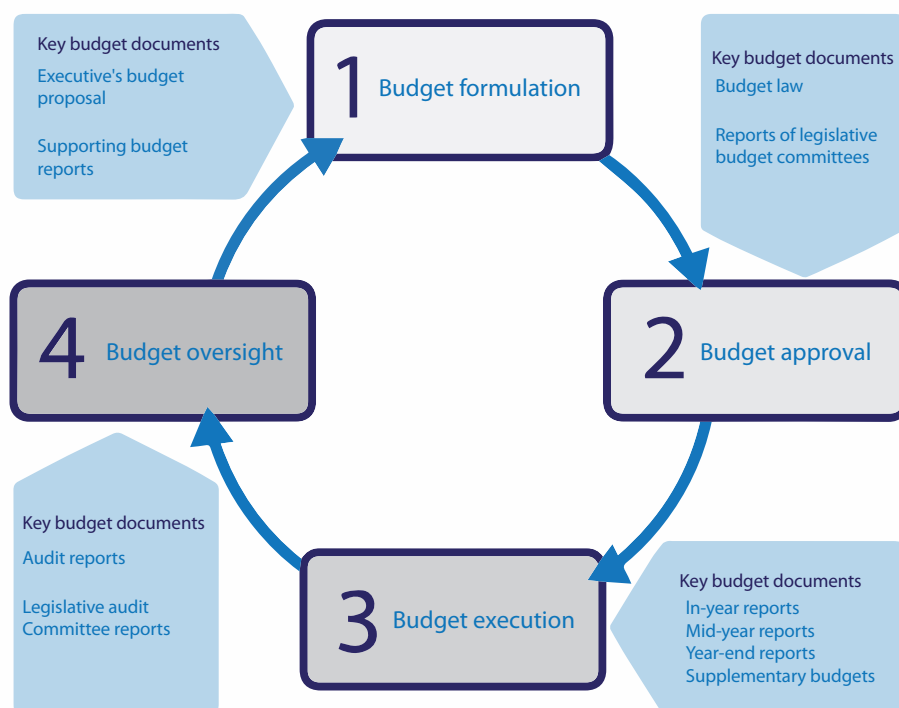
Transparency: access to information

For citizens and civil society to be able to influence policy and budget processes and provide effective independent oversight, access to information is a key requirement, along with freedom of association, assembly and expression.

Many countries have adopted provisions concerning **access to information** in their constitutions and some have also specific acts in place. Still access to information specified in law does not necessarily entail improved access to information. As a case in point procedures for accessing information need to be easy to understand and operate ⁽⁶⁾.

Providing access to information also implies that authorities **make information available in a timely manner**. The budget cycle below illustrates for example, which key budget documents the authorities normally will be required to provide throughout the budget cycle. Such information is necessary to allow the public — including CSOs — to participate in policy and budget discussions. The timely availability of these budget documents is also at the heart of the assessments carried out in the context of EU budget support. Similarly, access to information on domestic and external revenue mobilisation is also a precondition for meaningful policy dialogue.

Key budget documents in the budget cycle



Adapted from the International Budget Partnership (<http://internationalbudget.org>).

The International Budget Partnership (see box overleaf) closely monitors through the Open Budget Survey to what extent governments give the public access to budget information and reviews civil society participation in the budget process. The survey uses internationally accepted criteria to assess each country's budget transparency and accountability. The information collected

⁽⁶⁾ 'Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in the human development sectors', World Bank, 2012.

through the survey, covering more than 100 countries, is used to develop the so-called Open Budget Index (OBI), which assigns a score to each country based on the information it makes available to the public throughout the budget process.

Based on the most recent data available (2012), it can be seen that around 40 countries provide no or only minimal budget information. As a case in point, many countries do not yet publish the government's budget proposal. Another finding is that budget documents often lack sufficient detail.

The International Budget Partnership

The IBP was formed in 1997 within the Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities to collaborate with civil society to undertake budget analysis and advocacy in order to improve governance and reduce poverty. The IBP invests in civil society's capacity to understand and analyse government budgets, participate in budget processes and engage in evidence-based advocacy. The work of the IBP includes building budget analysis and advocacy skills through training and technical assistance, measuring and advancing transparency, accountability, and public participation in the budget process and enhancing knowledge exchange among civil society budget groups and other public finance stakeholders by acting as a hub of information on civil society budget work.

Source: <http://internationalbudget.org/who-we-are/>

The Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) PFM Performance Measurement Framework provides an evidence-based, high-level assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a country's PFM system. It includes a number of indicators related to transparency and oversight, which are important for efficiency, accountability and more participatory budget processes. These indicators include among others: the comprehensiveness of information included in the budget documentation; public access to key fiscal information; the quality and timeliness of in-year budget reports and annual financial statements; the scope, nature and follow-up of external audit; and legislative scrutiny of the annual budget law and external audit reports. Country PEFA assessment reports are available at the PEFA website (<http://www.pefa.org>) and elsewhere. The PEFA framework is currently being revised but transparency will remain a central theme in the assessments.

Apart from the budget documents, authorities can also greatly facilitate participation by making **government data available online** in a format that enables citizens and civil society organisations to conduct analyses and perform research by reusing the data. The validity and reliability of government data is another key concern. The so-called open data movement has greatly expanded since the first open data portals were launched by the United Kingdom and the United States in 2009. In 2011, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) was launched by eight founding governments (Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States) that endorsed an Open Government Declaration and put forward country action plans. The OGP has subsequently been joined by 47 additional governments ⁽⁷⁾.

It is paramount that information is provided in accessible formats. Some countries have in this context published so-called **citizens' budgets** or budget briefs. They summarise and explain basic budget information in an accessible format using simple and clear language. They should ideally be available in all languages commonly used in the country. Citizens' budgets can in this way be an important tool for enhanced civil society participation. The initiative for the elaboration of a citizens' budget lies with government but should be done in consultation with the public and civil society. Citizens' budgets are typically done at central government level but may just as well be elaborated for subnational governments. The International Budget Partnership has published a guide for authorities to develop citizen budgets that provides step-by-step guidance from strategy development to dissemination and evaluation ⁽⁸⁾.

Civil society can also play an instrumental role in **initiating campaigns to inform citizens** about their rights and what services they are entitled to. CSOs can, for example, complement the efforts of the authorities by summarising and disseminating budget information and other complex matters to the public at the local level — often by converting the information into easily understandable formats. This can usefully be combined with capacity development of local community-based organisations in the area of budget literacy.

Finally, a **free and independent media** plays an important role in securing access to information through newspapers, radio and television, as well as the new media platforms ⁽⁹⁾.

⁽⁷⁾ <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>

⁽⁸⁾ 'The power of making it simple: a government guide to developing citizens' budgets', IBP, April 2012.

⁽⁹⁾ More information on support to media and freedom of expression is available in three publications commissioned by DG for International Cooperation and Development — EuropeAid: 'Freedom of expression, media and digital communications — mapping EU media support (2000–10)', 'Freedom of expression, media and digital communications — A practical guide' and 'Freedom of expression, media and digital communications — Key issues'. All are accessible via <http://www.eidhr.eu/library>

Participatory policymaking and budgeting

Apart from having access to information, citizens and civil society need to have meaningful opportunities for participating actively in agenda setting and decision-making. As pointed out by the Open Budget Survey (2012), most countries provide very limited opportunities for engagement with civil society and the public in general.

Still, a number of good practices exist. They range from the establishment of general frameworks for cooperation between authorities and civil society to more specific procedures such as participatory budgeting and planning. They can all be characterised as invited spaces and require cooperation between the authorities, civil society and citizens to become effective.

In some countries, **national strategies or frameworks** have been developed to define standards for the involvement of civil society in policy processes. As exemplified by the case of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (see box below), these generally promote cooperation between public authorities (governments, parliaments) and CSOs. The objective is to structure the dialogue between these parties, create a conducive legal environment, contribute to the development of civil society and encourage citizen participation. They can contain specific commitments mainly for public authorities (strategies or charters) or undertakings for all parties (compact, agreement, memorandum or concept). They can cover issues relevant for the whole of civil society or just one area (development cooperation, volunteering).

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: strategy for cooperation of the government with the civil sector

On 16 June 2012 the government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia adopted the 'Strategy for cooperation of the government with the civil sector' (2012–17) and its accompanying action plan. The adoption of the strategy was a result of an intensive and highly consultative process over almost a year, led by the government unit responsible for NGOs with financial support from the EU. The primary aim of the strategy is to promote, support and improve the partnership between the government and civil society through measures that strengthen cooperation, including a favourable legal environment.

Source: Case study: developing a strategy for cooperation of the government with the civil sector in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' (<http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/public-governance-civilsociety/document/opening-space-equal-partnership-case-study-1-0>).

Participatory budgeting is another, more specific method for involving local people directly in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget. It generally implies that community members identify spending priorities and select budget delegates who in turn develop specific spending proposals (with help from experts). On this basis community members vote on which proposals to fund for implementation by the municipality or institution.

CSOs can play a key role in aggregating and presenting demands on behalf of constituents contributing critical information on the public's needs and priorities. Experience with participatory budgeting is, however, mainly from countries with a certain level of literacy and it has mostly been applied at municipal or institutional level, where the engagement of citizens groups is related to specific expenditures associated with people's everyday life.

Beyond specific participatory budget processes, civil society and citizens may also be engaged and consulted by authorities through other spaces such as consultative fora, observatories and local discussion platforms or via websites, mobile telephone networks and radio and television programmes.

Civil society organisations may also be consulted by **statutory oversight bodies**, for example parliamentary standing committees, sector working groups and various commissions, where civil society representatives may have the opportunity to participate in detailed policymaking, priority setting and influencing decisions.

Where mechanisms for participation (invited spaces) do not exist or do not function properly, civil society may challenge the authorities through more **contentious strategies** (claimed spaces). A CSO, or a coalition of CSOs, may for example decide to submit a shadow budget or policy proposal or conduct independent studies and research to have a proper evidence base for advocacy. CSOs can also, using networks and platforms, demand access to information and influence on decisions. The example of the establishment of the Oil and Gas Platform in Ghana is illustrative in this respect (see box overleaf).

Ghana: the extractive industries platform

When oil and gas were discovered in Ghana in 2007, an Oil and Gas Platform was established by a number of engaged Ghanaian CSOs. The platform has succeeded in influencing legislation that secures revenue for pro-poor budget allocations and avoidance of individual politicians' nepotism and access to revenues. Oil money is now invested in education, health and agriculture. This is, among other things, due to evidence provided by CSO-driven research and the publication of two reports on oil revenues.

Source: EU Delegation to Ghana.

The 'Black Monday' movement in Uganda is another significant example of how civil society can take action to monitor the use of public monies although no invited spaces exist. While the movement started out contending with the authorities, there are indicators that it is now developing into a more collaborative approach. What remains to be seen is whether both civil society and the Ugandan authorities will manage to mediate different views and assessments in such an approach.

Uganda: the 'Black Monday' movement

Ugandan civil society leaders launched the 'Black Monday' movement in December 2012. This is an anti-corruption campaign encompassing several citizens' actions, including wearing black on Mondays to mourn large-scale corruption and distributing information and education materials on corruption to the public, alongside several other activities aimed at encouraging the public to shun corruption and corrupt officials. The movement has been predominantly led by local CSOs, which maintain that despite the existence of anti-corruption institutions and laws, abuse of power and corruption had reached insurmountable proportions. The movement publishes a monthly newsletter the first copy of which, for example, detailed 24 irregularities between 2000 and 2012 totalling USD 1 billion in public funds. In the first few months, the movement members were often arrested whilst distributing the newsletters and carrying out other activities, but more recently the Ministry of Finance has expressed a genuine interest in working with the civil society organisations of the Black Monday movement and other activists in monitoring public spending and accountability, particularly at local level.

Source: EU Delegation to Uganda; <http://www.actionaid.org/tags/255/3194>

Vertical accountability mechanisms and processes

Domestic accountability concerns the relations between the public and those in public office. Vertical accountability focuses on the relationships between citizens and decision-makers, including the extent and capability of citizens to hold the state accountable and make it responsive to their needs ⁽¹⁰⁾.

This section elaborates on a number of vertical accountability mechanisms and processes, often also referred to as social accountability mechanisms, which citizens can use to hold authorities to account throughout the policy and budget cycle from revenue mobilisation to delivery of services. In some cases these originate from authorities and involve collaboration with civil society; in other cases, where civil society takes the initiative, they can be more contentious, challenging to some degree the authorities ⁽¹¹⁾. The example below from South Africa illustrates how independent collection of data combined with a direct, subsequent dialogue with local and national authorities can be organised with a view to holding authorities accountable.

South Africa: CSO monitoring public service delivery

In South Africa, the human rights organisation Black Sash engages in social accountability work and has received funds for monitoring at service delivery points (e.g. health clinics) and has collected feedback from citizens on social security, health at district level and home affairs (ID cards, migration, police). The monitoring was done through interviews of citizens leaving the public service delivery points to register information on waiting times, attendance and general satisfaction. The information was used for direct dialogue with the specific institutions at local and national levels and also for evidence-based advocacy at national level.

Source: EU Delegation to South Africa; <http://www.blacksash.org.za>

⁽¹⁰⁾ 'Accountability and democratic governance: orientations and principles for development', DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, OECD/DAC, Paris, 2011.

⁽¹¹⁾ Bukenya, B. and King, S., 'The contextual factors that shape social accountability', University of Manchester, June 2012 (http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1193949504055/ESW_SAcc_Context_Output1_Annotated_Bibliography_FINAL.pdf).

A common issue related to vertical accountability mechanisms, not least those originating from civil society, is enforceability, i.e. the notion that citizens can sanction authorities. In some of the accountability mechanisms mentioned below there will be no legally based access for citizens and CSOs to do so. Still, many of the measures have proven effective — not least when they are based on solid evidence produced by competent, independent CSOs ⁽¹²⁾.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has in this context greatly enhanced the ability of CSOs to hold authorities accountable through evidence-based advocacy. The many advantages offered by these new technologies include the ability to collect real-time data about the performance of authorities in a quick and low-cost manner with potentially hundreds and thousands participating. The example below from east Africa clearly illustrates the point. The ability to aggregate data at a much higher scale clearly strengthens the impact of such evidence vis-à-vis authorities.

East Africa: using ICT to promote accountability

In east Africa, an ambitious initiative called **Huduma** (Swahili for 'service') invites citizens to submit reports on problems with public service delivery, in the categories of health, education, governance, infrastructure, water and justice. Reports can be submitted via SMS text, by e-mail and by using the web platform. The concept is that citizens and NGOs work together with the government to formulate service charters, which contain details about public service delivery. When there are breakdowns in the public service, Huduma amplifies citizens' voices and the partner NGOs become their champions. The model is an effort to scale up evidence-based advocacy across an entire region.

Source: <http://um.dk/en/~media/UM/English-site/Documents/Danida/Partners/Research-Org/Research-studies/Using%20ICT%20to%20Promote%20Governance%202012.ashx>

Social audits and citizen auditing are one specific method for monitoring authorities that is increasingly used at the local level. The idea is to allow citizens receiving a certain service to examine and triangulate information provided by the service provider with information collected by the users themselves. They typically involve face-to-face public gatherings where users and managers are brought together to discuss findings and find solutions where appropriate. CSOs will often play a key role in equipping volunteers with the necessary skills to carry out the social audit exercise. Here ICT can also be instrumental. In Kenya, for example, an ICT-based tool developed by the NGO Sodnet has allowed citizens to report and view projects and expenditures associated with a national development fund controlled by members of parliament. The tool was based on SMS technology which allowed users to generate thousands of queries that were subsequently aggregated at the website ⁽¹³⁾.

The use of **scorecards** is a method which generally involves users evaluating or assessing the quality of services provided (using scorecards) followed up by face-to-face meetings between users and providers. Here the objective will typically be to agree on main conclusions with a view to arriving at an action plan or similar for follow-up where relevant. Another important step is to publish and disseminate the information collected ⁽¹⁴⁾.

CSOs may also undertake **public expenditure tracking surveys** to 'follow the money' from central government budgets through to service providers, or absenteeism surveys to monitor attendance of teachers, doctors, etc. They can be useful tools for accountability and can help to identify anomalies in the fund flow. These are in many cases funded and contracted by donor agencies. These types of surveys can be particularly challenging to implement since they involve extensive data collection and research and require collaboration from authorities ⁽¹⁵⁾.

⁽¹²⁾ The World Bank publication 'Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in the human development sectors' (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2377/657450PUB0EP1065724809780821389805.pdf?sequence=1>) elaborates further on the evidence of social accountability mechanisms.

⁽¹³⁾ 'Using ICT to promote governance', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2012.

⁽¹⁴⁾ 'Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in the human development sectors', World Bank, 2012.

⁽¹⁵⁾ 'Citizens and service delivery: assessing the use of social accountability approaches in the human development sectors', World Bank, 2012.

III. Entry points for EU support

The EU will offer a combination of dialogue and operational support to promote the participation of civil society in policy and budget processes. This chapter sets out a number of entry points for such support. In some cases dialogue may be the most effective and appropriate course of action and in other cases there will be scope for providing operational support. Often, a combination will prove the most effective approach.

In terms of operational support, a distinction can be made between initiatives contributing to developing the capacity of authorities and measures targeted at reinforcing the capacity of CSOs drawing on all types of instruments and programmes including budget support and specific instruments and programmes targeted at CSOs. An appropriate mix of funding instruments can be foreseen to respond to different types of partners, needs and country contexts.

The point of departure for EU support is a thorough understanding of the country or sector context ⁽¹⁶⁾. The accountability system in a given country will always be a result of local politics, powers and incentives and care should be taken not to import specific models from outside. Instead EU support should be based on a systems perspective in which relations between the various domestic and international stakeholders are taken into account.

Any support should avoid creating imbalances between civil society and authorities and within civil society itself. Further support should to the extent possible build on what already exists instead of creating or promoting processes and institutions that do not fit the local context ⁽¹⁷⁾. Finally it is important to pay attention to gender issues and inequalities with a view to ensure outreach and inclusion.

Engaging with authorities

Policy dialogue

In its dialogue with authorities the EU can encourage partner countries to make **legislation** more conducive. Here it may be pertinent to argue for increased access to information — either through adoption of access to information legislation and/or by making specific documents and data available. The respect, protection and fulfilment of basic legal rights such as freedom of expression (online and offline), assembly and association should also remain at the heart of dialogue with authorities.

Turning to the issue of **budget transparency**, the publication of the Open Budget Index has no doubt strengthened the interest of national authorities in discussing transparency of the budget process. The example below from Cambodia clearly illustrates how an EU dialogue with authorities based on the OBI resulted in concrete, positive steps being taken.

Cambodia: application of International Budget Partnership tools

The EU Delegation to Cambodia has successfully made use of the tools from the International Budget Partnership in its policy dialogue. Using the OBI and PEFA as entry points for discussions with the government and the NGO forum, a number of initiatives and ideas came up. Among these initiatives are the appropriation by sectors of all domestic and external recurrent and capital resources and expenditures into the national budget, the publication of the executive budget proposal, the production of a citizen-friendly budget based on existing budget-briefs and the timely production and release of audit reports.

Source: EU Delegation to Cambodia; <http://internationalbudget.org>

Similarly other **regional and global initiatives and campaigns** can also be harnessed in the policy dialogue. The EU has, for example, supported the Extractive Industries and Transparency Initiative (EITI) to promote good governance and transparency in the hydrocarbon and mining sector. The EITI is a coalition of governments, companies and civil society seeking to promote verification and full publication of company payments and government revenues from oil, gas and mining ⁽¹⁸⁾. The Open Government Declaration is another possible entry point for dialogue with authorities.

Another priority for EU policy dialogue with authorities can be to argue for the **establishment of invited spaces** that will allow CSOs to have a regular, meaningful dialogue with authorities. In situations where invited spaces do not exist, the EU can play a role in pushing for the creation of invited spaces and more formalised dialogue with the authorities — for example by organising

⁽¹⁶⁾ The European Commission concept paper on past, present and future trends for mappings and civil society assessments from September 2012 offers useful guidance in this respect (<http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/t-and-m-series/document/concept-paper-nr-3-mappings-and-civil-society-assessments>).

⁽¹⁷⁾ 'Accountability and democratic governance: orientations and principles for development', DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, OECD/DAC, Paris, 2011.

⁽¹⁸⁾ <http://eiti.org/eiti>

seminars and meetings. National or sectoral policy dialogues should include all concerned actors, such as CSOs and the private sector where relevant, and partner governments, local authorities, parliaments and other national institutions. Several EU delegations have experience with organising discussions with both government and civil society representatives on, for example, the millennium development goals.

The EU may also use the **budget support dialogue** with authorities as leverage for involving civil society in discussions of human rights and broader political issues. The EU budget support guidelines recommend that a dialogue strategy be elaborated to identify the best methods and platforms for dialogue in the given context ⁽¹⁹⁾. Many budget support programmes have already taken the initiative to engage civil society actors in consultations and hearings on plans, budget formulation and monitoring through invited spaces (e.g. annual review planning and meetings).

Operational support

In the area of financial support, authorities may be interested in **capacity development interventions** designed to make public employees aware of what kind of information can be shared and how participation can be organised. Such capacity development needs apply typically to staff in ministries, members of parliaments and local authorities to enable them to provide the necessary information to and engage successfully with citizens and civil society. Communication and negotiating skills to interact with, inter alia, citizen groups and CSOs are equally important. It should be considered whether such support can be integrated in already existing programmes.

Another entry point is support to the **publication and dissemination of policy and budget documents** and, more generally, **open data initiatives**. The decision to make government data publicly available will often involve considerable work in terms of improving quality and consolidation of government data. Experience from various EU delegations shows that supporting authorities in making information and data available is important both at central and local levels. Other donors such as the World Bank are also strongly engaged in this stream of work, notably through the BOOST initiative, which works with national governments to improve the quality of expenditure data, creating easy-to-use databases in support of public expenditure debates and discussions with civil society organisations ⁽²⁰⁾.

Concrete inspiration and tools for support to authorities on civil society engagement in budget processes can be found through international initiatives such as the International Budget Partnership (see box above), which provides a range of ready-made tools for governments, donors and CSOs on participation in budget processes.

The support to authorities may be provided via EU sector support programmes, broader governance and PFM programmes and through envelopes dedicated to institutional support within budget support.

Supporting civil society

This section focuses on the more direct ways of supporting civil society to engage actively in policy and budget processes. A precondition for a strategic engagement with civil society is a structured dialogue with local CSOs. To be meaningful, dialogue must be timely, predictable and transparent. It is important that the dialogue covers a broad selection of CSOs from the local to the national levels, comprising urban and rural organisations.

In terms of operational support, the key entry points involve long-term capacity development for evidence-based advocacy, short-term funds to enable specific actions and support for networking.

As a general principle, EU support should be provided to enable CSOs to realise their own priorities and agenda for policy engagement within the framework of the specific EU priorities for the country in question. The funding may come from programmes and instruments specifically targeted at CSOs or from sector programmes with a view to enhancing the role and capacities of CSOs to participate actively in formulation, implementation and monitoring of national policies and strategies. The specific support will often be provided via call for proposals or when justified through direct awards or through programme funding.

It is vital that the EU engages with accountable and transparent CSOs that share its commitment to better development outcomes, social progress and the fundamental values of peace, freedom, equal rights and human dignity. CSOs, in turn, must be independent and should be representative and/or have competence that facilitates their involvement in budget and policy processes such as budget analysis, expenditure tracking, etc.

Capacity development for evidence based advocacy

The need for increasing support to capacity development in the area of evidence-based advocacy has been confirmed by several recent evaluations as well as the online consultation carried out to inform the European Commission's civil society communication ⁽²¹⁾. Such capacity development support may focus on a range of different skills including lobbying and advocacy, negotiation and communication skills and evidence and case building, which enables CSOs to define, understand, analyse, present and

⁽¹⁹⁾ Budget support guidelines, European Commission, September 2012.

⁽²⁰⁾ More information on BOOST is available at: <http://go.worldbank.org/UX0PVF5YMO>.

⁽²¹⁾ 'Support to civil society engagement in policy dialogue — Joint evaluation: Synthesis report', Danida, November 2012. (http://www.netpublikationer.dk/um/11193/pdf/evaluation_synthesis_report.pdf).

follow up on policy and budget issues to ensure impact. It also includes legal education, public speaking and campaigning, writing and language skills, which will allow CSOs and individual citizens to engage actively with public institutions. Many EU-funded programmes and projects already target this area directly such as the project in Georgia mentioned in the box below.

Georgia: improving the quality of CSO policy dialogue with the parliament

The overall objective of the EU-supported policy dialogue project implemented by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) in Georgia is to develop CSOs that are most likely to be long-term contributors to ongoing dialogue with the Georgian parliament on a variety of issues related to core areas of the European neighbourhood policy. The action targets CSOs that have good reason to engage the parliament but have traditionally struggled to do so due to a lack of skills, knowledge, opportunities and/or resources. Following a call for expressions of interest, the WFD developed the capacity of 15 selected CSOs to conduct research, develop evidence-based policies and undertake effective advocacy. The organisations were provided with opportunities for dialogue with parliamentarians, both through a joint study tour to the United Kingdom's parliament and through the presentation of their concerns to parliamentarians during a plenary session at the parliament. The latter activity was part of the first CSO open day in parliament, which will be institutionalised on an annual basis following the signature of a memorandum of understanding between civil society and the parliament.

Source: EU Delegation to Georgia

A particular important area that needs strengthening is the ability of CSOs to commission, use and critique research studies upon which evidence can be built to support informed and critical participation. It is generally an underfunded area, yet of extreme importance for well-founded advocacy. Think tanks and academia-based CSOs are important players, and the existence of adequate, well-sustained research is an important entry point for policy dialogue, for example on labour market conditions, corruption, ethnicity, citizens' participation and minority rights.

Finally, CSOs may also require capacity development to take better advantage of the opportunities created by ICT, including the ability to use mobile handsets to collect real-time data on a large scale as an input for effective evidence-based advocacy.

Activity-specific funding

In addition to long-term capacity development support, EU support can also be used to enable specific advocacy actions by CSOs. This may include operational funds to travel, make research, develop policy proposals and interact with authorities and other stakeholders. Such support can usefully be provided in combination with funds for longer-term capacity development. This was, for example, the approach taken for EU support to the involvement of civil society in the Moroccan national gender strategy, as described in the box below.

Morocco: Empowering civil society to engage in the national gender strategy

Following the EU decision to provide budget support to Morocco's gender strategy — 'the government's plan for equality' — the EU Delegation to Morocco involved and consulted, jointly with the Moroccan authorities, the main women's rights organisations in identification of performance indicators. These organisations have remained involved in the follow-up of the implementation of this strategy and participate in the regular strategic dialogue including during follow-up missions. In complementarity to this budget support programme, EU support has been granted through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) to one of these organisations with a view to developing its capacity to follow up the national strategy, involving a network of civil society partners.

Source: EU Delegation to Morocco

Support to alliance-building and networking

Advocacy work and efforts to provide evidence often require extensive networks and alliances from the grass-root level to the national, regional and international policy arenas. It is therefore important to support horizontal alliances across sectors and at local/sub-national levels, as well as vertical links from local to national level. This may involve support for networking activities between community-based organisations and stronger CSOs and think tanks at national level. As in many other cases, ICT can again be a game changer, allowing CSOs at all levels to quickly share information and communicate with each other.

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