



Civil society budgetary participation
through alternative budget initiatives:

The case of Philippines





At a glance

Population	103,320,222 [1]
GNI per capita (US\$)	3,580 [1]
HIV epidemic type	Concentrated
HIV prevalence	
Adults	0.1% [2]
Men who have sex with men	4.9% [2]
Sex workers	0.6% [2]
People who inject drugs	29% [2]
Transgender	1.7% [2]
Domestic HIV expenditure (US\$)	13,032,000 [3]
Int'l HIV expenditure (US\$)	4,582,000 [3]
Domestic to int'l HIV expenditure ratio	2.8:1 [3]
Latest GF disbursement, HIV/AIDS (US\$)	7,666,624 [4]
HIV prevention expenditure to KP	19.0% [5]

»The issue

International donors that have historically funded a majority of the country's HIV response have in recent years reduced their investment, at times abruptly, creating the circumstances for the national government to take on a greater share of responsibility. Coupled with unstable and unsustainable economic growth, there is concern that the Philippines will not be in a position to continue internationally-supported programs.

Despite a vibrant civil society in the Philippines, there is a limited space for citizens and civil society organisations (CSO) to participate in the domestic budgeting process. It has simultaneously become more difficult for CSOs to participate in the response since the government recently introduced stringent accreditation requirements [7]. As the financial and political landscape evolves, civil society is having to discover how best to engage the government in the response to ensure that essential services are maintained and expanded for those most at risk.

»The context

The Philippines was one of the first countries in the region to establish a national AIDS control body in 1992 with the Philippine National AIDS Council (PNAC) [8]. Its HIV epidemic never became wide-spread, likely due to the country's complex geography, unique sexual morals, and relatively low injecting drug use [9]. Despite this, new HIV infections grew ten-fold between 2005 and 2016, peaking at 10,000 new infections among adults in 2016 [10].

Key populations share the highest burden of HIV infections. Men who have sex with men (MSM) have historically been the group at highest risk of HIV. In 2015, sex between men accounted for approximately 95% of new HIV cases [10]. People who inject drugs, while believed to be a relatively small population (estimated to be 10,000 people in 2015), have high HIV prevalence (29% in 2015) and accounted for approximately 4% of new HIV cases in 2015 [2].

Philippines' highly controversial war against drugs, conservative social norms, and low-level HIV epidemic have made it difficult to secure and maintain adequate political commitment over the years. Drug users' deteriorating welfare in the country as the crackdown intensifies poses a serious risk of exacerbating the spread of HIV among people who inject drugs (PWID) in areas of the country [6].

»Funding landscape

"Thanks to SWP... Journalists have started to get firmer and sharper handles for reporting better on the national budget. Or at the very least, for doing stories that are more accessible, or less Greek to the taxpayers from whose sweat and brow the national budget draws major sustenance."

**-Malou Mangahas,
Philippine Center for
Investigative Journalism**

The HIV response in the Philippines remains underfunded and international donors are reducing their investment at a quicker pace than public investment is increasing [7]. A renewed focus on care and treatment has made prevention—the primary source of budget for key populations—a low priority.

In the Philippines, discussions on the macroeconomic and fiscal framework of its budgets are done in public congressional hearings wherein key members of the Development Budget Coordination Committee are invited to testify. CSO representatives are invited to attend these hearings but are not allowed to raise points or questions.

During these hearings, each administrative government unit is given the opportunity to present and explain the basis of their unit's budgets. As members of the public are not allowed to give testimonies in public administrative budget hearings, CSOs must communicate their concerns to legislators who will voice out the observations or objections on their behalf.

CSOs have been promoting increased transparency on budget discussions by submitting alternative budgets for legislators to propose in administrative budget meetings. These alternative budgets are subjected to hearings by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. Legislators occasionally sponsor items in alternative budget initiatives and include these items as amendments to budget lines.

»Social Watch Philippines (SWP)

Social Watch Philippines (SWP) is a civil society confederation convened in 1997 to put forward a strategy of advocacy, awareness building, monitoring organisational development, and networking. SWP organized a series of national and island organisations with the objective of increasing people's awareness and participation in promoting social development concerns with government. Originating with 27 CSOs and individuals, it has grown to more than 100 CSOs and individuals today.

SWP represents a coalition of members that leverages partnerships with media, legislators, and other supportive individuals and organisations both domestic and international to apply pressure on governments to open a space for CSOs to participate in the budgetary planning process. Social Watch Philippines regularly monitors social development progress based on the government's commitment to various international conferences and agreements.

Every year, SWP analyses government budgets and submits an analysis and alternative budget proposal to legislators during congressional hearings. Generally, the alternative budget proposals advocate for increased spending on social services such as health and education.

In the latest alternative budget proposal, evidence is given to highlight the critical underinvestment in HIV prevention interventions for key populations and cites government commitments that have not been met. The analysis points to several investment scenarios and implores the government to close the investment gap and increase allocative efficiency (e.g., intensifying HIV prevention efforts) [11].

» Alternative Budget Initiative (ABI)

Alternative budgets are an advocacy strategy that seek to highlight the limitations of public budgets with regard to key sectors or issues in society. Alternative budgets accomplish this typically by first emphasising the failure of the budget to serve the interests of specific groups such as women, children, people with disabilities and the poor or cross-sectoral issues such as environmental conservation and then by proposing an alternative budget that addresses the needs of specific groups or issues. Sometimes, CSOs also formulate a comprehensive parallel budget that is more socially equitable, inclusive and responsive. In the Philippines, alternative budgets are one of the only ways for CSO engagement in congressional deliberations on the budget.

CSOs use budget analysis and alternative budgets to: (1) reveal the underlying priorities and biases of the government's actual budget; (2) raise public awareness about both the positive and negative impacts of the government budget on certain groups or issues of public concern; and (3) challenge the government to justify their budget allocations and explain how those correlate with stated policy priorities. Ultimately, alternative budgets can be used to influence budget allocations and to complement other public budget expenditure monitoring practices.

ALTERNATIVE BUDGETS // HOW-TO

- 1 Initiate the process:** Identify or establish a coalition of CSOs working on the issues or sector of priority concern. Convene a workshop or a working group to initiate the process and define the scope of work.
- 2 Clarify the focus and objectives:** Initiatives typically focus on a specific area of interest. In some cases, they may also provide a comprehensive parallel budget, based on a broader theme such as social justice. Typical objectives are raising public awareness, capacity building and advocating changes in budgetary allocations.
- 3 Analyse government budget:** Enlist the support of qualified researchers and specialists to access information on the current or proposed government budget and analyse the budget's impacts on the issue of concern.
- 4 Draft alternative budget:** Based on analysis of the government budget, identify alternative proposals, compute costing for them and draft an alternative budget.
- 5 Publicise alternative budget:** An important component of alternative budget initiatives is media dissemination. The media should be primed to report on the government's budget and its implications before it is announced, as well as to widely publicise the alternative budget and its specific recommendations.
- 6 Advocacy and effective follow-up:** Conduct extensive work with the media, parliamentarians and key government officials in the relevant ministries to change budgetary allocations in favour of marginalized social groups, redistribute resources and change the type and quality of policies and programmes.

Adapted from https://www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/PGX_G_Alternative%20Budgets.pdf

»»The key benefits of alternative budgets »»Lessons

According to SWP, alternative budget proposals have been instrumental in alerting congressmen that they had been reviewing less than half of the national budget; that there are invisible budgets or sources of public funds that are not within their reach; and that billions of pesos worth of funds which were not allocated through congressional initiatives were impounded or never released for years.

Alternative budgets create a firm basis to build an advocacy campaign with specific targets and is a useful tool to rally broad coalitions and to mobilise specific social groups. Crucially, the process serves to build citizen and civil society awareness of budget processes and issues.

ABI represents an innovative partnership that allows citizens, civil society organisations, and legislators to engage with one another and engage in the budgetary process. It gives CSOs the space to voice its concerns in the budgetary process. For CSOs, where access to networks and information may be limited, SWP provides the necessary alliances to supportive ministers, parliamentarians, and a range of other public sectors actors that help lobby for increased budgeting or new legislation.

Compared to other tools for civic engagement in the budgetary process, alternative budgets are one of the most comprehensive and also potentially the most influential. According to SWP's Lead Con-venor and former Philippines National Treasurer, Leonor Magtolis Birones, ABI has had considerable success—as demonstrated by legislators sponsoring items from the alternative budgets and including them in budget amendments.

Alternative budget proposals—the core product of ABI—are the result of hard work. The proposals are studied and formulated by the sectoral leaders and citizens groups who painstakingly generate data from the grassroots by working with and consulting the communities. Further, ABI studies the budget of the implementing agencies, consults the government personnel and thereafter lobbies congress for increases in the budgets of pro-poor programs of Departments of Health, Education, Agriculture, and Environment and Natural Resources.

One of the lessons learned from Social Watch Philippines is that alternative budget initiatives requires high level of technical skills and must be conceived as part of a long-term advocacy agenda. Alternative budget requires in-depth understanding of the current or proposed government budget, rigorous empirical research on its effects on society and specific social groups, and the capacity to not only articulate alternative proposals but also do cost computations. One way to address this is-sue is by organizing budget schools for activists in different sectors to help build knowledge and skills in budget analysis over time. For SWP, educational activities lead to an increased number of sectors that produce alternative budgets in congressional hearings.

It can be challenging to maintain momentum and keep a broad coalition together due to the open-endedness and the long timeframe of such initiatives. It requires key individuals and organizations that are committed to driving the process over a medium to long-term time horizon.

»ABI and the Action for Health Initiative Inc. (ACHIEVE)

In 2017, ABI was approached by Action for Health Initiative Inc. (ACHIEVE), the Philippines country partner for the Global Fund Sustainable HIV Financing in Transition (SHIFT) Program. Under this collaboration, the ABI has been assisting ACHIEVE with (1) accessing data on strategic information, specifically on Department of Health expenditure, domestic funding, and HIV budget policies; (2) contacting and scheduling meetings with key government and HIV stakeholders in the country; (3) engaging local CSOs about the latest policies and political movements that may affect HIV budgeting or spending (e.g., the Universal Health Care Bill, the Sin Tax movement, Secretary of Health appointment hearings, etc.); and (4) providing budget advocacy lessons and holding trainings and workshops to increase CSO capacity to advocate for increased fiscal at the national and local level.

The collaboration between ACHIEVE and ABI provides a strong example of budgetary advocacy that intervenes within an existing country budget structure. It illustrates the types of partnerships that will be needed to assist HIV CSO and KP networks navigate complex bureaucratic budgeting systems and perform the data-driven advocacy that persuades governments to budget appropriately for HIV interventions. Most importantly, this work has made strides towards ensuring the meaningful involvement of KP and their communities in their government's HIV budget processes.

ACHIEVE has ensured the meaningful involvement of PLHIV and communities of mi-grant workers and their families, vulnerable women and girls, and young key populations. It continuously builds the capacity of people living with HIV to be involved in its work and in the greater HIV advocacy in the country. We will continue to engage with ABI to directly engage in the government budget processes to improve and sustain delivery of HIV and AIDS programs in the country."

*- Amara Quesada,
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for Health Initiatives
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Sustainable HIV Financing in Transition