

1. FOLLOW THE MONEY

KEEP WATCH

IN A NUTSHELL

Citizens rely on governments for essential goods and services. But what's more is they pay for those services through taxation.

If a government, or people within a government, feel like nobody is watching, then the temptation to steal becomes much more seductive. Accountability to the public begins when people – like you! – track government spending and detect corruption by watching how and where the money flows.

REMEMBER

Before getting started on planning, it's important to verify that this activity is in line with your national and local laws and to check what legal permits, if any, are required. You should also let your parents know what you have planned. If you're not permitted to carry out this task, please refer to our other youth activities.

HOW DO YOU SET IT UP?

To track your government's spending, a good way forward is:

- 1. Identify what spending needs to be monitored:** Were promised schools never built? Were potholed roads never paved? Find out what your community is still waiting on.
- 2. Form a team:** Gather peers who want to follow the money with you. Classmates with strong mathematics or analytical skills give you a great advantage.
- 3. Set your goals and ambitions:** What's realistic and manageable? A long "lead-in" time for first-time users is suggested.
- 4. Be prepared!** Plan the research needed to track spending in your country or town. Collect government records to find out how much is being promised to a given project and for how long.
- 5. Collect your evidence:** Go into the field to find data – and recruit others to join if needed.
- 6. Share your findings:** Gather your team together to discuss any discrepancies in government spending. Also highlight instances where promised public resources arrived as planned.
- 7. Get answers:** Hold a public hearing in your community to discuss the findings. Follow up with officials or political leaders to have them address any gaps in spending.
- 8. Keep the momentum:** Consider ways you and your team can continue monitoring spending in the future.

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WHY DO IT?

Governments are often defined by the weak link in their chains. Citizens should play a part in finding those weak links, and expose them if they're corrupt.

The major benefits of citizen participation and scrutiny of public budgets are:

- Less corruption means less money wasted.
- The community at large gets a better sense of the budget process, and in turn a better sense of how their taxes are being spent.

YOU CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

- The budgetary process is a complicated one – so be sure key participants have a technical grasp of budgets and governance.
- People will only feel empowered to take part if there is scope to create change. Find it.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS?

- Restrictive laws can limit public access to financial information. Be sure that you're acting in accordance with the law when researching expenditure.
- There may be widespread and deep-rooted reluctance on the part of officials to share financial information to the public. Consider making allies with officials in other institutions, like the anti-corruption or audit agency, to add some weight to your requests for information.
- It's easy to get side-tracked when examining the details of expenditure, but stay focused. Understand the links between "big picture" spending and the micro-level outcomes that the spending should deliver (i.e. a country's health budget versus one government-funded health centre).

IDEA IN ACTION

Kenya: It's Our Money. Where Has It Gone?

In Kenya, members of parliament receive approximately US\$1 million per year to spend on development projects. They were able to spend this money without meaningful oversight, so the scheme was plagued with mismanagement and corruption. In response to this, community organisation MUHURI carried out social audits on the spending. Their process included gathering records from the government on projects, training community activists to undertake monitoring, inspecting project sites, and following up with public officials, among others.

Using their project analysis forms and a simple questionnaire, the activists visited each project site to assess whether each project was completed according to the specifications. During a social audit, community monitors found that there were irregularities and nepotism involved in the allocation of scholarships.

Find out more: www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/Profile-of-MUHURI-Kenya-2011.pdf

RESOURCE

The Open Budget Initiative, International Budget Partnership

The Open Budget Initiative promotes public access to budget information and the adoption of accountable budget systems. It intends to provide citizens and legislators with the comprehensive and practical information needed to measure a government's commitment to budget transparency and accountability.

Find out more: www.internationalbudget.org/who-we-are