HEALTH BUDGET ADVOCACY TOOLBOX
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INTRODUCTION

To influence how much money is spent on health services in your country, it is important to understand when and how decisions are made. The ‘budget cycle’ (see figure 1) are the steps that a government takes to develop, implement, and monitor funding, including to the health sector. Throughout the budget cycle, it is possible for advocates to influence decisions on what funds are allocated to health priorities, how much is actually spent, and track whether more money actually results in better health.

This document provides a summary of approaches that advocates can use to engage in the health budget cycle. The full toolbox is available online on the Evidence for Action (E4A) website and is available for public consumption. The resources are based on work from this programme, implemented by Options Consultancy Services Ltd, and brings together a mix of tools and training materials used with advocates to improve public investment in health.

The E4A project

The E4A project (also called ‘MamaYe!’ by our partners) is implemented by Options Consultancy Services Ltd and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). E4A works to catalyse change by bringing together government, civil society, and health practitioners to use existing information and resources to identify why woman and babies are dying of preventable causes. They do this by: 1. Identifying the reasons why women and babies are dying. 2. Agreeing on how available resources can be used most effectively to address these reasons. 3. Advocating for the changes needed.

As a result, government and health practitioners are better able to respond appropriately to the issues causing unnecessary deaths and injuries. This means women and children have better access to improved quality health services, and more women have safe births.

E4A’s approach to health budget advocacy

E4A’s approach to advocacy is grounded in the following three concepts:

1. **Evidence-based advocacy is more likely to trigger effective change.** If information is gathered, organised, and visualised clearly, decision makers and other audiences are more likely to be convinced to act. In addition, actions advocated for, and taken, are more likely to addresses the root cause of the problem.

2. **By ‘thinking and working politically’ advocates are better able to understand contextual changes and adapt to new opportunities and barriers that exist.** Thinking politically encourages us to better understand how those who currently have power can support or frustrate change, and what factors make change possible or unlikely. E4A supports actors to apply this by integrating practical Political Economy Analysis (PEA) approaches into their advocacy.

3. **Advocacy is a cornerstone of accountability.** Instead of advocacy where CSOs advocate and positions themselves ‘against’ government, E4A’s approaches focus on building a culture of institutionalised advocacy and accountability by building multi-stakeholder coalitions. These coalitions facilitate the building of trust among government, CSOs and practitioners through transparent use of information which informs joint action.

Figure 1: Thinking and Working politically
Eight actions health budget advocates can take

The health budget advocacy toolbox summarises eight actions that advocates can do to further their health budget advocacy goals, depending on what stage of the budget cycle their government is in:

1. Map the health financing context
2. Analyse budget performance
3. Establish the funding flow
4. Map the budget cycle
5. Develop a scorecard
6. Develop a health budget advocacy brief
7. Plan health budget advocacy
8. Engage in public participation

The techniques described under each step can be adapted to support advocacy in a variety of sectors and countries.

Figure 2: The budget cycle
I. MAP THE HEALTH FINANCING CONTEXT

Mapping the health financing context can help you to get a better picture of the state of funding for health in your country. It will help you to check who is paying for health and to what extent the Government are moving towards universal health coverage.

This is when you can use it:

The tool

The Health Financing Context tool provides advocates with better understanding of a country’s performance against key health financing indicators and what these indicators mean. It can be used to gain a better understanding of how a country or region performs against its health financing objectives, what questions to ask, and what problems prevent sufficient resources of health services.

The training slides provide information about what UHC is, define key health financing concepts, and identify key indicators that will help you to establish the health financing context in your country. Mapping the health financing context gives you a quick snapshot of the health financing status in a country to identify what opportunities and challenges there might be that prevent adequate funding for health.

[Click here to download these tools]

What do I need?

- The Health Financing Context tool
- Connections with decision makers, health workers, other organisations and/or the community to ask more questions
- An understanding of how people are meant to pay for health services according to policies- by insurance, tax or user fees

Tips for using the tool

- Select your country from the dropdown list
- Examine the 3 graphs
- Review the information on what each indicator means and why it matters
- Consider asking the suggested questions to find out more around the indicators you are interested in
- Use these indicators to help to inform the objectives for your advocacy efforts
- Look at the graphs and the indicator table and discuss these questions as a group:
- What is the trend of Government Health Expenditure over time? Is it accounting for an increasing share of current health expenditure? Is it accounting for an increasing share of government expenditure? Why might this be the case?

- With your group, have you, or do you know of others who have been asked to pay out of pocket to access health services? Are you surprised by the proportion of current health expenditure from out-of-pocket payments? How can they be further reduced?

- Does your country conduct National Health Accounts? If yes, when is the next one? Can you keep an eye out for findings? If no, can you advocate for this important data to be collected?

Specific questions relating to each indicator are included in the Health Financing Context Tool. As you ask yourself these questions, consider what it can tell you about the bottlenecks or challenges that might require advocacy efforts to improve.

**When to use the tool**

Use the tool as you are starting to engage in health financing in your country or want to get a better understanding of the context to inform interventions. This can be done as part of a political economy analysis (further information on this is available here). The data comes from the WHO Global Expenditure Database and is drawn from the National Health Accounts. The data is not updated regularly (the latest annual figures are for 2018), so it is important to complement this data with the experiences of the communities you represent—finding out how funding and health services have changed for them.

2. **ANALYSE BUDGET PERFORMANCE**

Analysing budget performance can help you to understand how much money was committed and spent on the matters that you are advocating for.

This is when you can use it:
The tool

The Budget Performance Dashboard tool visualises how much has been spent on a sector, programme or item, compared to commitments. The dashboard can be presented in meetings to assess whether the budget has been implemented as planned and used to facilitate discussion on what actions can be taken to improve budget performance.

The budget performance training slides can help you to understand the key information sources for budget analysis, know what calculations will enable you to understand and communicate budget performance, and ask the right questions to interrogate your findings.

Tracking budget performance is critical to understand whether political will has translated to action. By packaging evidence in a visual format, advocates can make their case to decision makers and catalyse action.

Tip here to download these tools

What do I need?

- A list of the priorities you want to track the annual budget and/or costed workplan expenditure reports the Budget Performance Dashboard tool (identify your priority)
- The budget line item, programme or sector to be tracked
- Tabulate and list allocations using the annual budget
- List expenditure recorded against each budget line selected
- The tool will perform a simple calculation (amount spent/amount allocated × 100)

Tips for using the tool

Look at the numbers and dashboard and discuss the following questions as a group:

- Is the budget allocated to health higher or lower than any commitments or benchmarks? (If there is no local benchmark, you can compare against the Abuja Declaration – 15% of the total budget for health.)
- Is the budget allocated to health close to the budget allocations in comparable regions (e.g. other states, counties, districts or countries)?
- Is the proportion of the allocated budget spent on health close to 100%? If the budget performance is good (e.g. benchmarks are being met and 100% of the allocated budget is spent on health), have health service delivery indicators improved?

If the answer to any of these questions is ‘no’, probe to understand ‘why’. Asking ‘why?’ repeatedly will lead you to the root cause of the issue that you are trying to address.

When to use the tool

The Budget Performance Dashboard should be updated on a quarterly basis during the implementation of the annual budget. The dashboard can be presented during quarterly review meetings to explore budget performance and identify potential bottlenecks that prevent planned funding being spent. The dashboard can also be used on an annual basis, to review performance of the previous financial year’s budget and determine what needs to be done to improve the performance of the current year’s budget.
3. ANALYSING THE FUNDING FLOW

A better understanding of the funding flow can give you insights into how money flows through the health system and where there might be bottlenecks preventing money from reaching health facilities.

This is when you can use it:

The tool

The Funding Flow tool maps the sources of funds, the financing and management agents (those who manage the funds) and the providers of health services. This enables advocates to understand in which directions funds flow and the interactions between different funding streams.

The training slides outline the key concepts in health financing, how to identify how a health financing system is structured and explore examples of different funding flow maps.

The advocacy coalitions that E4A support have mapped funding flows to develop a better understanding of their context, facilitate discussions with stakeholders in the health sector and identify bottlenecks that require advocacy.

What do I need?

• The Funding Flow tool or a pen and paper
• Connections with decision-makers, health workers, other organisations and/or the community to ask questions
• An idea of what aspect of the funding flow you want to focus on.

Tips for using the tool

• Define your advocacy ask – what is the problem that you expect decision makers to address
• Conduct a desk review to answer key questions regarding your advocacy topic and what funding streams finance the funding flow topic that you have addressed
• Hold discussions with key stakeholders to understand how your advocacy issues is financed
• Map the funding flow using the tool provided or with a pen and paper
• Use the funding flow map to facilitate further discussion with stakeholders on bottlenecks and to inform your advocacy

Click here to download these tools
Take the funding flow map you have developed and share it with stakeholders, making it clear that it is not final and is only intended to facilitate discussion. Ask the following questions:

- Does this funding flow map reflect your experience of how funds flow in the health sector? If not, could you show us the changes you would make?

- If you look at the funding flow, where do you think there are bottlenecks that prevent funds getting from the source to the health provider? Why is this a bottleneck (what is the cause)?

- What do you think we can do to help mitigate these bottlenecks?

By asking these questions to a range of stakeholders you will develop an understanding of whether the different stakeholders perceive funding flows differently, which may contribute to bottlenecks. In addition, by asking stakeholders what the bottlenecks are and where they are on the map, you can target your advocacy more effectively to address the problems that cause poor budget performance.

**When to use the tool**

A funding flow map can be prepared at any time during your budget advocacy. It is a particularly useful activity to do before developing your health budget advocacy plan, so you can identify your target audiences and advocacy messages. We have found that the advocacy coalitions find it helpful to revisit this mapping regularly as part of maintaining an up-to-date understanding of the political economy of their context. They then use this to routinely adapt and update their planned advocacy interventions.
The tool
The Budget Cycle Mapping tool enables advocates to visualise what the budget process looks like in their context. The tool identifies who can help you to achieve your goals and to consider what evidence may convince decision makers to take action.

The training slides explain what the budget cycle is, explore the four stages in the budget cycle and how to engage in each stage of the budget making process. The advocacy coalitions that E4A support have found that having an increased awareness of the budget cycle and using this to inform their planning of advocacy interventions, has helped them to achieve their advocacy goals more effectively.

What do I need?
- The Budget Cycle Mapping tool
- A group of people. If possible, this should include government officials, civil society and health providers
- Flipchart and post it notes

Tips for using the tool
- Map the 4 broad stages of the budget cycle
- Identify the decisions relevant to your priorities, by whom and when
- Discuss as a group whether the decision making spaces are closed, invited or claimed
- Identify potential champions to help you to access closed decision spaces
- Discuss what evidence may help to convince stakeholders to champion your priority
- Use this information for your advocacy

Look at the decision-making map you have created and consider these questions as a group:
- Are there closed decision-making spaces that citizens should be invited to contribute to?
- Is there information you need to fully participate in invited decision spaces?
- How can you claim access to decision making spaces? Are there collaboration groups between government and civil society that could help you to claim access to these spaces?
- In all of these decision-making spaces, how are you making sure that you open up access to others who may find it more difficult to engage? For example, marginalised populations.

As you consider these questions, think about how the answers can help you to more effectively time and target your advocacy.

When to use the tool
Map the budget cycle at the start of your engagement in the health budget advocacy to ensure that all your advocacy interventions are strategic from the outset. We have found that the advocacy coalitions we support find it helpful to revisit this mapping as part of maintaining an up to date understanding of the political economy of their context. They then use this to routinely adapt and update their planned advocacy interventions.
A scorecard is a visual display of performance against a set of agreed indicators. Usually, traffic lights colours – green, amber and red – are used to depict performance with green meaning good progress, amber meaning moderate progress and red meaning poor progress.

This is when you can use it:

5. DEVELOP A SCORECARD

The tool
The Health Budget Scorecard tool provides a visual and periodic status update on the priority finance and health indicators that you aim to track as part of your advocacy.

The training slides provide information about what scorecards are, learn how to develop your own scorecard, and identify how you can use a budget scorecard for advocacy.

The advocacy coalitions that E4A collaborates with use scorecards to facilitate discussion with policymakers on how to improve performance against their priority issues. This discussion informs what issues advocates focus on and provides a means of tracking whether their advocacy is leading to change.

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What do I need?
- The Health Budget Scorecard tool
- Agreement on the priority indicators
- Data on the priority indicators
- A group of people to discuss the findings, develop asks for target stakeholders to improve performance and conduct advocacy to catalyse action.

Tips for using the tool
- Gather a group of people to agree on the priority indicators and set benchmarks
- Assign people responsibility for collecting data on each indicator
- Fill in the Scorecard Reference Sheet
- Look at the scorecard sheet, discuss findings and develop asks
- Use the scorecard to facilitate discussion and inform advocacy
A health budget scorecard can be used to track performance and progress of indicators. Consider using a scorecard in the following ways:

- To engage policymakers who have the power to influence actions to improve indicator performance
- To engage the media by showing them what issues require public attention
- To track commitments made by policymakers to improve performance and ensure actions are taken to address findings
- To encourage policymakers to develop SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound) actions and commitments
- To share information on progress with other organisations in the sector who can use this to inform their strategies and actions

**When to use the tool**

Progress against scorecard indicators can be tracked monthly, quarterly or annually depending on when new data against each indicator is available. It is advisable to produce a Health Budget Scorecard biannually or annually due to the lag in processing budget implementation reports in most countries. For example, an annual Health Budget Scorecard is often produced in the first quarter of the financial year using data from the previous year.

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**6. DEVELOP A HEALTH BUDGET ADVOCACY BRIEF**

The Health Budget Advocacy Brief visualises complex health and budget information. It links financial data on budget allocation and budget performance (release and spending) to data on service delivery and utilisation.

This is when you can use it:
The tool

The Health Budget Advocacy Brief tool links financial data on budget allocation and budget performance (release and spending) to data on service delivery and utilisation in a visual format to present to decision makers.

The training slides can help you to explore how to make the case for investment in health, identify what data can help to make your case, and how to visualise this data to present to decision makers.

The advocacy coalitions that E4A work with use an advocacy brief to demonstrate the links between health financing and health outcomes. The combination of data visualisations and narrative ensure that the brief caters to different audiences and that the key advocacy messages are amplified.

What do I need?

- The Health Budget Advocacy Brief tool
- Data gathered for the health sector priorities you identified such as:
  - Health performance indicators,
  - Budget allocation
  - Budget execution, disbursement
  - Service delivery data

Tips for using the tool

- Open the Expenditure Brief tool
- Read through the instructions on slide 1
- Work through the instructions, step by step, adding in the data you have collected
- Add in a narrative, explaining what the numbers say and what it means for health in your context.
- Finally, develop asks for your audience

A health budget advocacy brief is not a standalone document – it should be used with other advocacy materials to influence action. A health budget advocacy brief can be used to:

- present to policymakers who have limited time
- accompany advocacy engagements or public participation events to provide additional facts on budget increases or disbursements
- monitor and reflect on the success of advocacy interventions
- facilitate round-table discussions. Disseminate the brief to policymakers and then facilitate a discussion with them on the findings and how performance can be improved
- compare performance across regions or countries to learn what works and why

When to use the tool

A health budget advocacy brief summarises facts, insights and demands on an issue(s) by presenting ‘asks’ – a request to those with the power to make decision about an advocacy issue. It is important to have the brief ready to share before decisions are made and actions are taken. This could be during the budget planning stage of the cycle to influence decisions on budget allocations, during the budget execution period to influence decisions on budget disbursements, or to provide evidence for oversight and review. We recommend you develop briefs on a regular basis, to share routine evidence on the status of funding for health in your context.
7. PLAN HEALTH BUDGET ADVOCACY

Planning health budget advocacy helps advocates to ensure that your advocacy efforts happen at the right time and deliver the right information to the right audience.

This is when you can use it:

The tool

The Health Budget Advocacy Planning tool maps what advocacy interventions you will implement, when and to whom. The tool can be routinely updated as you continue to monitor and evaluate your advocacy interventions.

The training slides provide information about why it is important to plan for health budget advocacy, explain how to identify the stages of planning for budget advocacy, and learn how to develop an advocacy plan.

Advocates that we have collaborated with have found that they are more likely to be listened to if they speak with a unified voice. Developing a budget advocacy plan enables advocates to coordinate and review their advocacy efforts, and work as a team to achieve change.

Click here to download these tools

What do I need?

- The Health Budget Advocacy Planning tool
- The group of people you are working with
- A joint understanding of a problem that needs to be resolved and what objective you would like to achieve

Tips for using the tool

- Identify the issue that causes the problem you aim to address
- Agree on key objectives
- Select a target audience
- Develop your message
- Set out activities
- Identify collaborators
- Set out how you will monitor your interventions and evaluate their impact
Advocacy plans are very useful to ensure your advocacy is strategic. However, the plan is only effective if it leads to action! As a group, ask yourselves the following questions:

- What is our first advocacy activity and when does it need to take place?
- What sub-activities might need to take place first (e.g. evidence generation)?
- Who is responsible for implementing these sub-activities and for keeping track of when the advocacy will happen?
- What resources are available and how much more do we need to implement the activities? Who has them?
- If the advocacy activity involves verbal communication, we recommend role playing to make sure you are fully prepared to make your case for action.

Once the advocacy has taken place, make sure you document any changes that happen, small or big, so you can reflect on them when you next look at your plan.

**When to use the tool**

Plan your health budget advocacy at the start of your engagement in the budget cycle to ensure that all your advocacy interventions are coordinated, planned and strategic from the outset. The advocates we support have found it helpful to revisit their advocacy plan on a quarterly basis. Regularly updating their plan helps them to account for the changing context in their country and to reflect on what they have learnt while implementing their advocacy interventions. This also allows them to coordinate with other organisations working in the same place, so that they can align advocacy efforts and amplify their collective voice.

**Public participation**

Public participation can enable citizens, including advocacy groups, to access information on budget decisions so that they are able to better understand the issues and options that the Government are considering. While participating in the process, citizens can influence decisions by speaking on behalf of the people they represent.

This is when you can use it:
The tool

The Public Participation Tool is intended for any advocacy group that wishes to engage in government planning and budgeting processes through public participation. The tool includes a template that can be used to communicate your priorities during public participation hearings and gives tips on how to ensure your organisation is heard.

The training slides explain why public participation matters, what it entails, and learn how advocates supported by E4A have used public participation to achieve their objectives.

Advocates who E4A collaborates with have highlighted to us the importance of organising and presenting inputs to public participation processes, to maximise the chance that their voice is heard. They have used memos and coordinated verbal presentations to ensure that the priorities they have identified in their communities are heard by decision makers and inform governments’ plans and budgets.

Click here to download these tools

What do I need?

• The document that citizens have been invited to review or discuss
• A list of your advocacy priorities (on which you should focus your analysis)
• The Public Participation tool

Tips for using the tool

• Review the document, and cross-check it against your priorities
• Fill in the memo template, communicating what you want to change.
• Identify opportunities to share the memo in verbal or written form with key decision-makers

Before you join a government planning meeting or present your memo to decision-makers, we recommend role play! Put yourself in the shoes of the person you want to advocate to and take turns to play the role of the decision-maker and the advocate. As you do this, consider the following questions:

• What does the decision-maker care about?
• Does the decision-maker like numbers or do they prefer human stories?
• How long will you be able to speak for? Will you have a microphone?
• What would you think if you were the decision-maker hearing your argument?

Ask yourselves whether there is anything you can add or remove to make sure your priorities are heard loud and clear!

When to use the tool

Look at your country or region’s planning and budgeting cycle. It is critical that you identify the earliest opportunity for public participation relating to a specific plan, budget or document to ensure that there is maximum opportunity for changes to be made. For example, if there are two public participation hearings – one during formulation and one during approval – it is critical to communicate your priorities during the formulation stage.

Try to communicate your priorities at multiple points in the cycle, in open forums and one-to-one meetings, both verbally and in writing. This will maximise your chances of success.

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions or would like assistance with using this toolbox, please get in touch with us. We welcome collaboration and look forward to hearing from you.

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