

## Advocacy case studies

# Creatively influencing government budget accountability in a sensitive location in Asia

**Country:**

Sensitive location, Asia

**Themes:**

governance

**Advocacy Approaches:**

Educating community members; using the media; government officials: meeting with; government officials: lobbying; government officials: educating; budget tracking; social accountability

In one of the countries in Asia that Tearfund works in, most of its national budget is spent on military defence and least on education and healthcare, compared to the other countries in the region. This Asian country has also been ranked as one of the worst countries for budget accountability. The nation can be a restrictive place to achieve overt advocacy, particularly on government accountability. However, Tearfund and national partners have taken a creative approach to achieve government policy and practice changes in this context.

In response to these statistics about the national government spending and accountability, Tearfund's partner invited cartoonists from around the country to capture this issue of budget transparency and social accountability. The cartoons needed to respect the country's sensitive political context for their messages to not be censored before reaching their intended audiences. This creative input via cartoon exhibitions and other publications helped communicate the partner's campaigning about national government budget accountability, raise public awareness on this issue, and invite public input in the restrictive civil society space.

As the partner's cartoons gained the media and public's attention, they were able to meet with the national Minister of Finance to promote the transparent use of resources and bolster economic justice. The cartoons and meeting with the Minister of Finance also opened the door to allow Tearfund's partner to host 60 government officials for training on other countries' citizen budget projects. Building on the learning from this training, a national Citizen Budget project was developed. This project was guided by the UN's principles of human rights in business. The Citizen Budget project was created to increase the transparency between the nation's government and citizens, which would then increase the national government's accountability on their spending.

However, the distribution of the Citizen Budget project to citizens was limited. The national government didn't want civil society organisations to lead the distribution. Instead, the government wanted to distribute this to the population. Nevertheless, Tearfund's partner developed illustrated guides with cartoons for citizens, from children to parliamentarians, about accountability to ensure that whoever was exposed to the Citizen Budget project understood it.

These sensitive topics were accepted more easily by the public and the national government when Tearfund's partner used cartoons to communicate its advocacy. This communication strategy allowed the public's most pressing government transparency and accountability issues to be clearly understood by the Finance Ministry officials and major international donors. Tearfund's partner's advocacy has positively influenced the social accountability standards of the Asian government.

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