

In 2009, the Mexico City government implemented an innovative budgeting approach – the first of its kind – to specifically link the budget with human rights. As a result, 75% of the Mexico City budget is now tied to implementing specific actions to promote human rights.

MEXICO CITY'S INNOVATION: BUDGETING WITH A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

SUMMARY

Increasingly, the budget is being seen as an effective tool to promote human rights, though most governments around the world still designate their budgets without specifically linking them to human rights improvements. This brief describes how the first budgeting process with a human rights approach was designed and implemented by the [Government of Mexico City](#) (GMC) (*Gobierno de la Ciudad de México*), analyzing the process, initial outcomes and lessons learned, to help potentially replicate the initiative in other contexts.



USING SPENDING TO MAKE HUMAN RIGHTS A REALITY

By ratifying human rights treaties, states assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. However, these legal obligations do nothing if governments do not devote sufficient financial resources to realising human rights. In the last decade, human rights and budget activists from around the world have begun to argue that governments should formulate their budgets with a human rights approach to effectively link public spending with human rights objectives. The GMC became the first in the world to put these arguments into practice.

LEGAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS AND DUTIES ASSUMED BY STATES DO NOTHING IF GOVERNMENTS DO NOT DEVOTE SUFFICIENT FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO REALIZING THESE RIGHTS

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Budgeting with a human rights approach can increase the human rights actions undertaken by governments by specifically linking spending allocations with the realization of human rights.

Incorporating a human rights approach into the budgeting process is feasible, but it requires changes in institutional processes and routines, while also enacting legal reforms to sustain the process over time.

Civil society participation and the multi-stakeholder set-up proved crucial to implementing this innovative approach.



DEVELOPING MEXICO CITY'S HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAMME: THE FOUNDATION FOR AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH

In 2007, following a suggestion from the [UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mexico](#) (UNOHCHR), the GMC undertook a [Human Rights Diagnosis](#) (HRD) (*Diagnóstico de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal*) and developed a corresponding [Human Rights Programme](#) (HRP) (*Programa de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal*) for Mexico City. The process was inclusive and transparent, with civil society organisations (CSOs) and academia participating actively in the discussion and drafting of both documents.

Building on the human rights diagnosis, the HRP highlighted 2412 concrete actions that needed to be implemented to improve human rights in the city. To ensure that enough resources were allocated to implementing these actions, one of the HRD recommendations was to include a human rights approach into the budgeting process.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

Budgeting with a human rights approach was a challenging

process to undertake. First, it was a ground-breaking idea that had never before been implemented in the world. There was therefore no methodology, no tools already tested, and no past experience for showing how to tailor the process to the Mexico City context. In addition, changing the way in which the budget was designed and executed entailed institutionalising new processes within the government. It also meant convincing public officers and legislators about the value and need for this new approach.

The initiative was implemented in three key phases, each of which was designed to specifically address the challenges above.

1. DESIGNING AND TESTING THE NEW BUDGETING TOOLS

Designing the budgeting approach and the specific tools it would use was a crucial first step to align GMC spending with the human rights actions of the HRP. To guide the creation and implementation of the approach and the tools, a working group was set up, formed by government ministries, CSOs, and the UNOHCHR¹. Each working group member brought their particular expertise on issues like budgeting, human rights, and public management, providing technical knowledge and guidance to design the tools. Building on an initial proposal made by the CSO [Gesoc](#), the working group studied the results-based budget tool already in use by the

Figure 1: Changes made in the budget tool to link spending to human rights actions
Source: Training course for GMC public officers, 2010

¹ This group was formed by: four government entities, [Mexico City Human Rights Commission](#), [Sub-secretary of Government](#), [Sub-secretary of Finance](#), and the [Mexico City Women's Institute](#); two CSOs, [Gesoc](#) and [Fundar](#); and the UNOHCHR.



GMC, called the 'public policy framework' and adapted it so that public officials had to specifically list out the human rights actions that were linked with each spending line (see Figure 1). Once implemented, public officers would have to use the adapted tool when formulating their annual budgets.

2. ENACTING LEGAL REFORMS TO SUSTAIN THE INITIATIVE

Changing the way the budgeting process was done in the city required enacting legal reforms and specific changes to the manual that public officers consult to design their budget. These reforms were needed to legally enforce the changes made to the budgeting process, but also serve the purpose of sustaining the initiative over time.

3. CHANGING PUBLIC SERVANTS' VISION OF BUDGETING

The majority of public servants and elected officials do not see a link between their daily work and the advancement of human rights. For the new budgeting strategy to be effectively implemented, it was therefore necessary to first change public officers' and legislators' vision of budgeting itself. For public officers, a training course was implemented collaboratively between the government and CSOs to sensitize public officers about human rights issues and teach them how to incorporate human rights actions in the adapted budgeting tool. For legislators, given their role in approving the budget, meetings were carried out to convince them about the importance of adopting this novel approach.

Some of the reforms and laws enacted are:

2009

The Local Budget Law was modified so that information on spending allocations and human rights could be requested by the Ministry of Finance.

2010 and 2011

The Programming and Budgeting Manual was modified to reflect the changes made to the 'public policy framework'.

2011

The Law of the Mexico City Human Rights Program was enacted, making budgeting with a human rights approach and some of the human rights principles of international pacts mandatory.



Figure 2: Training GMC public officers on human rights issues and on budgeting with a human rights approach
Source: Training course for GMC public officers, 2010

OUTCOMES OF THE APPROACH

The GMC's inventive budgeting approach has only been operating for two years in all the local ministries and municipalities and is still considered an ongoing process. That being said, some early results show the success of the implementation and the potential the approach has for addressing human rights.

For example, compliance is high amongst public officials: in 2011, 75% of the units that prepared budgets successfully linked their spending allocations to human rights actions.

Furthermore, using the new approach, spending allocations in 2011 funded 52 new human rights actions that were not carried out before in the city, but that were identified as essential by the HRP. The three ministries that incorporated most of these new human rights actions were the [Ministry for Integral Development of the Family](#) (*Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*), the [Ministry of Social Development](#) (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social*), and the [General Accounting Office](#) (*Contraloría General*). The human rights being advanced the most, based on the number of actions related to them that have been budgeted, are equality (157 actions), environment (52), health (49), and education (45).

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

ENABLING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS BUDGETING APPROACH



To better understand this ground-breaking case, and to think about how the lessons learned can be applied in other regions, it is necessary to understand the underlying contextual and enabling factors that impacted how the initiative was designed and its successful implementation.

The government's commitment to involve civil society in decisions and to implement their recommendations proved to be key. Overall, the GMC opened spaces for citizen participation in decision making and was receptive to their proposals. In fact, the very recommendation to implement this new budgeting methodology came from a multi-stakeholder exercise involving government and civil society.

The GMC also showed a willingness to 'open' the formulation stage of the budget cycle. Though the tools and criteria used for allocating the budget are usually not shared with citizens, the working group was able to adapt the 'public policy framework' precisely because the GMC was transparent and willing to share the budget tools and criteria.

In addition, the GMC has been eager to innovate and adopt

new models and approaches more generally. With regards to budgeting, the city has also implemented gender-sensitive and results-based budgeting approaches, as well as participatory budgeting.

Sufficient financial resources were designated to cover the costs of implementing the initiative, such as the public officers training and modifying the online platform that ministries and local municipalities use to prepare and submit their budgets.

The GMC showed the capacity to enact legal reforms and to get legislators' political support. The fact that the executive and legislative majority were from the same political party facilitated the lobbying process.

Finally, civil society's technical expertise and interest in participating and nurturing the process proved to be important. The CSOs that participated had demonstrated know-how on management, budget, and human rights issues, and this expertise turned out to be crucial for the design of the budget tools and during the implementation phase.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 The Mexico City case shows that the approach can be a successful strategy for ensuring governments implement specific actions to promote human rights.
- 2 Governments' commitment to advance human rights, be transparent, and give voice to civil society opens the possibility to design and undertake innovative budgeting approaches that have not been tested before.
- 3 Incorporating a human rights approach into the budgeting process requires changes in institutional processes and routines. These changes come slowly and it is necessary to invest time, effort, and financial resources in transforming public officials' and legislators' vision of budgeting.
- 4 Enacting legal reforms ensures the sustainability of novel budgeting processes.
- 5 Opening spaces for citizen participation and creating multi-stakeholder working groups can nurture and enrich policy reform processes. In this case, each member of the working group contributed unique expertise and technical knowledge to the process.

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