

B3. Why should I work on health budget accountability for UHC?

The following broad criteria are proposed for choosing issues to be covered by the media and how.

- Does the issue uphold or go against the ethical values for journalism?
- Is it in the public interest? Whose interest? Who is most affected, and who can influence change?
- What are my responsibilities in covering this issue in the media? To my sources, audience and myself? (No story is worth a person's life.)
- Do I have enough good-quality, reliable evidence to tell the story?
- Is this story important, compelling, original enough to command the attention of the audience in the saturated media market?¹

As part of health accountability, the media can stress evidence-based health priorities, analyse health budgets, identify gaps in national health statistics and health spending, explain new health policies, fact-check sensational stories and dispel rumours (103). A close look at national budgets shows whether government policies favour the rich or the poor. Reporting sheds light on who wins, who loses and who is missed by the system. At its best, media scrutiny helps keep governments honest and stimulates public debate.

According to the IBP, transparency in budget processes requires that governments provide timely, accurate, comprehensive information in eight key budgets documents (see chapter 1, module 2, section D): pre-budget statement, executive budget proposal, enacted budget, citizens' budget, annual report, mid-year review, year-end report and audit report. The media can help their audiences understand these documents and provide opportunities for them to engage with government on the information in the documents.

Health budget accountability is promoted not only by journalism; personal stories, drama, games and story-telling can also build understanding, skills, motivation and confidence among audiences to engage in health budget accountability.

¹ From meetings and talks with various teams of BBC journalists