

Section C. Engaging citizens in effective participation in budget oversight for universal health coverage

Representation and oversight: the role of parliaments in fostering effective participation in the budget process

One of the key functions of parliaments is representation, as MPs represent the views and needs of their constituents. In order for this role to be effective, MPs should continuously engage with their constituencies, through:

- public consultations and dialogue,
- research and analysis of their needs and perspectives,
- using information and evidence from their constituents in making decisions for which they are responsible; and
- opening parliament to constituents and sharing relevant information with them.

To the extent that MPs do this, “the work of the Parliament will reflect the context and reality of people’s lives” (68).

One area in which effective representation can be ensured is the public budget. If public budgets are the government’s key tool for implementing policies and responding to people’s needs, public participation in the budget and the budget process is paramount. Citizens are, like MPs, key actors in oversight and accountability, as discussed in depth in Chapter 2. In this section, we underscore the role of MPs and parliaments in ensuring effective public participation in the budget process as a means to improve oversight of the budget and the budget for the SDGs and UHC.

MPs consult and talk with their constituents to identify their needs and then ensure that they are reflected in the public budget. MPs also form alliances with their constituents and their organizations or use their information and evidence to make decisions in all phases of the budget process. MPs also provide citizens and their organizations with relevant information to which they might not otherwise have access.

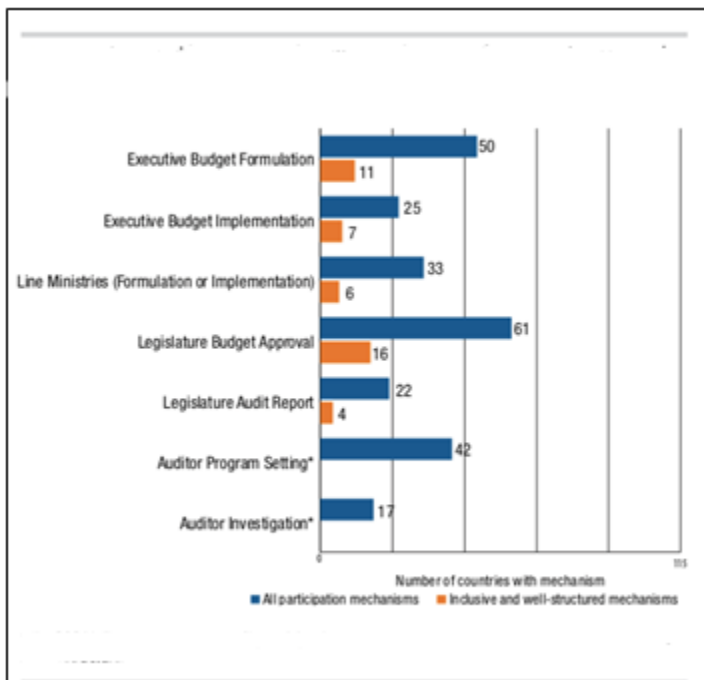
The Open Budget Survey also assessed the extent to which citizens can effectively participate in the budget process. The 2017 survey concluded the following with regards to parliaments and citizen participation (68):

Legislative mechanisms. Another area of relatively strong performance in our participation assessment is for legislative hearings on the formulation of the budget prior to approval. Some kind of public hearing takes place in over half of the surveyed countries (68), and the scope of these hearings is fairly extensive in nearly half of these countries (half or more of the major topics that should be discussed in such hearings are covered). Still, this means most countries fail to

hold extensive legislative hearings. In only 16 countries are all members of the public (as opposed to invited groups or individuals) able to testify on budget formulation or to provide submissions through another mechanism.

The results (Fig. 14) show that there have been some important improvements in the openness of parliaments to involving citizens in budget formulation, but there is still room for improvement. Moreover, the scores for citizen engagement in legislative oversight show that it was possible in only 22 of the surveyed countries.

Fig. 14. Results of the Open Budget Survey with respect to the seven mechanisms of participation assessed



Source: reference 68

The survey assessed whether a mechanism for participation in audits exist but not whether it is inclusive or well structured.

What is the effect on UHC budgets and MP representation?

The results of the [IBP Open Budget Survey \(69\)](#) and the [IPU SDG survey \(67\)](#) show that, although parliaments play an instrumental role in ensuring that the voices of the people and the SDG targets that affect them are reflected in the budget, their role should be strengthened.

The [self-assessment tool](#) provides a means for MPs to understand their role in the SDGs and UHC and to engage more effectively, for example by asking questions about UHC and fostering parliamentary discussion, commissioning reports and raising the issue in parliamentary debates. To ensure participation in UHC budgets and the link with their representation, MPs could explore the following.

- Engage continuously and consistently with constituencies and organizations that have knowledge and experience with regard to UHC, its relevance and how it can be advanced with the public budget.
- Foster dialogue among relevant parliamentary committees and these constituencies during legislative discussion and approval of the budget.
- Use evidence provided by these constituencies to ask the government questions about the executive budget proposal during its approval phase.
- Ensure that the public budget does in fact represent the needs of people in relation to access to health.

Concrete recommendations to parliaments for improving citizen participation in the budget process are provided in the [Open Budget Index 2017 report \(67\)](#).