
ECONOMIC LITERACY & BUDGET ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GOVERNANCE (ELBAG): MAKING GOVERNMENTS ACCOUNTABLE

“NEVER DOUBT THAT A SMALL GROUP OF THOUGHTFUL CITIZENS CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. INDEED, IT IS THE ONLY THING THAT EVER HAS.”

- MARGARET MEAD

CHALLENGING ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

In a world where exclusion, inequity and infringements of the basic rights of people continues to rise, challenging and changing power structures which perpetuate inequity and injustice is an important and necessary function in reclaiming and deepening democracy.

While the basic services and rights of poor people are rolled back, the funds of the state – to which the poor contribute through direct and indirect taxes meant for their welfare – do not reach them. Public resources are squandered without accountability on military, large-scale infrastructure and dams displacing thousands, and the ever-growing needs of industry and middle classes. In private hands, these investments only marginally benefit the excluded. The gains instead fill the coffers of corporates and elites and in turn the multilateral institutions, relegating the poor further into the margins.

Such economic and social injustices are the realities of life for the poor and excluded in the global south. In this context, Economic Literacy and Budget Accountability for Governance (ELBAG) is a process to build capacities of communities to be able to empower themselves to seek accountability from governments and international governance mechanisms through reclaiming rights and challenging injustice.

LINKING THE LOCAL WITH THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

Since economic injustice needs to be challenged at many levels, the trajectory

of ELBAG connects the micro with the macro by linking up processes of people's struggles at the grassroots and feeding those voices, concerns, issues and rights at national level policy making. This also means challenging global and macro injustices like forced privatizations, infringement of land rights, politics of aid and debt conditionality that affect the realities of people.



VILLAGE WOMEN IN BANGLADESH CONDUCT COMMUNITY LEVEL ECONOMIC LITERACY ACTIVITIES AND WTO-RELATED LIVELIHOOD ANALYSIS © actionaid bangladesh

Economic literacy is the main focus at the local level. The groups that form the base of ELBAG circles at local level in turn link with citizen's groupings at the local/provincial and national levels. At the national level, the process includes building platforms (or working with existing) civil society networks comprised of NGOs, social movements, people's struggle groups, trade union movements, women's groups, academia and media that take up sustained budget and economic analysis and advocacy and lobbying from the perspective of the poor and excluded.

ELBAG as an international collective and synergistic movement on budget accountability and economic justice aims to build the south-south solidarity among different civil society actors, social movements and coalitions.

SOME OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES OF ELBAG

The ELBAG process presents possibilities of various outputs depending upon the need and context locally and nationally. These include status reports of development services, as well as process outputs such as informed citizenship and strengthened interfaces among state, service providers and public consumers. A range of specific micro, meso and macro level outputs are also envisaged. For community level capacity building, manuals and tool-kits which communicate economic and budgetary concepts and social mobilization and accountability practices in their simplest terms are used. At the meso level, national level budget analyses and/or national budget and policy and rights monitoring processes are likely to emerge. Meanwhile, at the global level, alliances can be built across various countries engaging them with the ELBAG process and where appropriate international budget and policy promise monitoring processes are key.

The combination of the four key elements of ELBAG are intended to promote citizens' monitoring of public expenditure and policy promises, which ultimately would lead to greater empowerment, democratization of knowledge, and a change of power relationships in favor of the poor and excluded. **PP**



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Why Economic Literacy & Budget Accountability for Governance?

Poor and excluded people are cheated on a daily basis due to broken policy promises, increasing corruption at all levels, rollback and lack of access to social services and basic rights. Lack of information and knowledge about local economy, budget and public policy processes take away their ability to question, challenge and change unjust power relations and unaccountable governance at different levels. With top down processes of “good governance” and increasing digital divides, poor and excluded people have lesser information, knowledge and access to organs and institutions of governance. ELBAG is a response to this process of marginalization.

What is ELBAG?

ELBAG is a process and methodological framework that involves organizing people, developing grassroots monitoring mechanisms, democratizing knowledge (particularly of political economy and economic literacy), and using participatory tools and methods for public accountability and transparency to initiate people-centered advocacy processes.

This means knowledge-based social mobilization and grassroots action and advocacy to seek accountability from the institutions of governance through analyzing and monitoring the public expenditure and government budgets and use of accountability processes like social auditing, citizens’ tribunals and public hearings. The ultimate objective is to bring about changes in favor of poor and marginalized groups and to increase citizens’ participation in the economic and budgetary processes of governance.

What does ELBAG consist of?

ELBAG consist of four interlinked processes:

a) Social mobilisation for monitoring governance and rights at the grassroots level

The ELBAG process aims to create an operational model for social mobilization. The focus is on economic literacy and budget analysis: the status of public distribution, budget and functioning of local services, and public availability of such information. People’s committees are encouraged to display results on

transparency boards of all ongoing analysis and trends for the community. They are also encouraged to initiate discussions on it with local governance authorities.

b) Democratisation of knowledge and policy (through capacity building, public education and alternate media)

An important part of the ELBAG process involves promoting accessibility of knowledge and information for poor people (including those lacking literacy skills) through grassroots capacity building on issues such as local economy, key budgetary processes, and economic governance. Examples, taken from household economic processes familiar to community members, are used to explain larger governmental budgetary processes. These processes build on economic literacy activities that explain and analyze macro-economic policies such as privatization of development services or the impact of WTO agreements.

c) People-centered advocacy to make governance work at the grassroots level for the poor

ELBAG aims to put people at the center of lobbying efforts aimed at engaging policy makers and other pro-poor advocacy targets by promoting a range of people-centered advocacy processes such as People’s Parliament and regular Public Hearings. These bring all the ELBAG groups in a particular area together with the relevant authorities to look at activities and services at regular intervals.

d) Methods and strategies to ensure people’s participation and public accountability

Some of the methods and tools ELBAG uses for promoting the ability of people to question and enter into a dialogue with authorities are those of budget analysis, social audits, public hearings, people’s report cards, opinion polls, poverty dialogues, community newspapers/wallpaper and other public information processes.

Where is ELBAG being used?

ELBAG processes and activities are being supported by ActionAid International and partners in a number of countries across Asia, Africa and Americas. These are at different stages of development in Cambodia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Malawi and Brazil. **PP**