



FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR INEQUALITY REDUCTION (FAIR) – EVEN IT UP

Oxfam in Timor-Leste: making
disability inclusion part of the state
budgeting system

Knowledge Hub on
Governance and Citizenship



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INTRODUCTION

This report describes how Oxfam in Timor-Leste and a coalition of partners made use of a favourable political environment to put the issue of disability rights-based budgeting on the agenda and encourage the national government to incorporate a disability rights-based approach into state budgeting.

It describes challenges, opportunities, achievements and lessons learned regarding policy advocacy and influencing activities to amplify the voices of organizations of people with disabilities (DPOs) in defending the rights of their members in public state budgeting. It highlights the main milestones in the work done to date and describes advocacy and influencing processes and the tactics and strategies adopted by Oxfam in Timor-Leste and its civil society organization (CSO) partners.

The aim is to share this experience with audiences interested in learning about the work being done by Oxfam in Timor-Leste together with eight partner organizations on tax justice, and the struggle to reduce inequality and achieve greater inclusion.

What is disability rights-based budgeting?

Disability rights-based budgeting is about the optimal mobilization and use of public resources for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Influencing on this topic helps the disability movement to understand how government budget processes work, analyse expenditure based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the National Disability Action Plan (NDAP) and develop a costed policy influencing agenda. It also helps to identify areas where government expenditure is not compliant with the CRPD or in line with the [NDAP]. This process helps to bring members of the disability movement together and strengthens collaboration.

Source: based on *Towards Disability Rights-Based Budgeting*, Oxfam in Timor Leste, Transparency- CGT, Associasaun Defisiensiia TimorLeste - ADTL, Hadomi Timor OAN, Christian Blind Mission - CBM, Inclusion advisory group and Center for Inclusive Policy. 2019, p.1.

CONTEXT

Timor-Leste gained its independence from Indonesia only 20 years ago in 2002. Among the many challenges faced by this new country are high rates of poverty, low levels of education and poor health and nutrition among its citizens. The number of people with disabilities is estimated at over 38,000,¹ or around 2% of the population of 1.34 million². However, this is likely to be an underestimation, as the World Health Organization (WHO) calculates that approximately 15% of the world's population live with some kind of difficulty in functioning.³

People with disabilities and the recently established national DPO Ra'és Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO) were unable to access spheres of governmental power and decision-making.

Although a National Action plan for People with Disabilities (DNAP) existed, it was ineffective because its aims were not clearly supported, there was no budget allocated to it and DPOs were unable to properly engage with government. In addition, national social accountability network had never considered including the rights of people with disabilities as part of its demands.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, governments in lower middle income countries (LMICs) allocated very low levels of resources to the needs of people with disabilities, meaning that they faced further impoverishment and greater marginalization. Before the pandemic, on average, such countries spent less than 0.5% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on social protection for people with disabilities⁴, compared with 1.4% spent by high-income countries⁵.

Beginning in 2018, Oxfam in Timor-Leste and its coalition of partners took advantage of a relatively welcoming context where the government showed genuine interest in adopting public policies to take account of the rights and needs of people with disabilities. Their work had to overcome significant challenges in terms of management and implementation, but it has led to important changes in terms of inclusion, empowerment and the recognition of disabled people's rights.

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This report describes the work implemented during the first and second phases of a project funded by Open the Books; the first phase ran from 2018 to 2021 and the second began in July 2021 and will run until 2025. The first phase concentrated on capacity building and building a movement of CSOs, forging links with allies and establishing relationships with government actors. The second phase is focused on strengthening the capacity of DPOs to analyse budgets using a human rights- and gender-based approach; supporting and maintaining the engagement of allies and other relevant social actors with the state budget; and, finally, working to promote a more inclusive approach, taking account of diversity among people with disabilities and expanding the reach of DPOs to include gender analysis and consideration of the needs of children.

ALLIANCE BUILDING AND ADVOCACY FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE STATE BUDGET

The first step taken by Oxfam in Timor-Leste was to build a coalition of organizations interested in working on disability-responsive budgeting, irrespective of whether or not they had been active in this field before. The coalition included the national DPO Ra'és Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO); the Timor-Leste Disability Network or Asosiasaun Defisiensiia Timor-Leste (ADTL); the national social accountability network Core Group Transparency (CGT); women's network Rede Feto Timor-Leste (RFTL); civil

society networks Asosiasaun Rede Covalima (ARC) and Rede Informasaun Oecusse (REINO); and the Monitoring and Research Institute and the Mata Dalan Institute (MDI).

All the organizations involved brought their knowledge and experience to the movement and made particular contributions along the way. Their experience helped the coalition to frame the issue conceptually, improve the capacities and knowledge of CSOs, especially DPOs, on disability rights-based budgeting and formulate key strategies for influencing and conducting advocacy work with decision makers.

The coalition partners started off by identifying the needs of their own teams and gaps in their understanding of the issues of disability rights and budget processes, and the connections between these. This led them to strengthen their alliances – for example, with organizations with expert knowledge in this area, such as the Center for Inclusive Policy (CIP)⁶ – and to undertake key training and knowledge-building work on state budgeting processes and gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), among other topics. This was done despite there being an almost complete absence of prior experience in the country on organizational strengthening and disability rights; however, DPOs gradually began to undertake campaigning activities and to start influencing decision makers both in parliament and in the executive branch of government.

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In partnership with Christian Blind Mission (CBM), an international leader in disability inclusion work, Oxfam in Timor-Leste identified a number of relevant case studies from other countries – India, the Asia-Pacific region (Fiji) and the Philippines – which provided essential lessons on skills needed to manage disability rights-based budgeting and on strategies and ways of working that had proved successful elsewhere. Meanwhile, UN Women and the Rede Feto women’s network, representing the Gender-Responsive Budgeting Working Group, contributed by introducing a gender-responsive budgeting approach into the analysis and messages generated by the movement.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

With the aim of influencing decision makers and ensuring a rights-based approach that took account of the needs of people with disabilities in the state budgeting process, Oxfam in Timor-Leste and its partners built their intervention on a twin-track approach. The first track was disability-specific and involved working on initiatives to build the capacity and confidence of people with disabilities in order to provide them with the means to understand and to contribute to shaping the budget by appreciating how it affected their lives and how they could have a say in the way that monies were allocated. The second track related to disability-inclusive initiatives undertaken by Oxfam in Timor-Leste and partners to raise

awareness of disability inclusion within government and among key social actors by building relationships and working to integrate disability inclusion as part of demands and narratives of social accountability.

As well as the case studies from other countries, the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) were used to support work during phase one and two of the project. One of these principles is that governments should consult with DPOs when planning and using public resources, to avoid people with disabilities being misrepresented or misguided initiatives undermining their rights. The Convention also calls for the mainstreaming of a disability-oriented approach, underpinned by respect for and recognition of the rights of people with disabilities as citizens through programmes, projects and services at all levels of government.

It became clear that the route to influencing decision makers began with putting together a diversified working group consisting of people with disabilities and their allies and providing them with the tools and skills needed to lobby for disability rights-based budgeting. The next step was for this working group to agree on a shared evidence-based advocacy agenda that was costed out, with key messages highlighted. This prepared the working group and its allies to put into action an influencing strategy and a campaign targeting decision-makers, promoting the interests of the disability movement.

The influencing process for disability rights-based budgeting



Source: Oxfam in Timore-Leste team’s presentation in FAIR Forum Call. March 2021

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ENABLING LEARNING AND ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The main challenges involved in the process included fostering a good understanding of disability rights-based budgeting and the skills needed to tackle it, as well as building influencing strategies and advocacy within the DPOs and organizations taking part. During the first part of the process, training was provided by specialized partners to create a shared learning environment across the coalition. In particular, CIP worked with RHTO and ADTL to draw lessons from the case studies from other countries, and CGT and MDI mentored DPOs on monitoring state budgets and on advocacy. RHTO also worked with partners to learn from experiences at the local municipality level.

Throughout the three years of the programme's first phase, shared learning within the coalition had a positive impact on all the CSOs involved and supported their efforts to get to grips with and begin working on disability rights-based budgeting at the national level – a challenging concept and one that was previously almost unknown in the country. Learning to respect one another's experiences and capacities to connect with other actors helped give members of the coalition a solid start in constructing a conceptual framework and envisioning their own narratives and influencing goals for impacts on the state budgeting process.

According to the Project Evaluation Report of Open the Book (OtB) the project partners perceive the programme to be inclusive and educative. It has helped to build capacity, and the links established between partners will be helpful in future activities. *Oxfam in Timor-Leste., August 2021.*

The COVID-19 pandemic threw up new challenges to the capacity-strengthening process. Online training was provided but participants had different types of disabilities, and so specific targeted support was required. However, these challenges did not stop the training process, and people with disabilities could continue to access the knowledge needed to pursue their aims.

The case studies from other countries were one of the first sources of inspiration for the movement, not only in terms of learning about best practices from elsewhere but also in terms of defining the scope and objectives of the initiative and reflecting on opportunities and challenges in the

context of Timor-Leste. Learning from these studies was framed in terms of good practices, tactics and strategies, as well as providing conceptual and methodological backgrounds. Learning strategies were also developed for and by the CSOs involved and for ministry officials, which helped to consolidate relationships with government and win over allies.

MAKING INFLUENCING AND ADVOCACY HAPPEN

Oxfam in Timor-Leste and its partners based the process of influencing and advocacy largely on the lessons learned from earlier advocacy actions on disability-responsive budgeting undertaken in other countries. From the experiences of these other actors, the DPOs and partner organizations developed a good understanding of the issue and were able to frame it conceptually, and they started building a narrative and messages for their own influencing strategies. Different members of the coalition contributed specific knowledge and experience to the mix, ranging from how the state budgeting process worked to gender-sensitive budgeting and to advocacy and influencing strategies used in previous accountability initiatives.

Between 2018 and 2021, the coalition partners focused on enhancing the capacities of networks, local organizations, DPOs and community groups to implement advocacy and influencing strategies to engage with the budgeting process and to win over government allies to support the cause.

In 2020, following a seminar held by ADTL with support from Oxfam in Timor-Leste, government ministers and the President of the National Parliament committed to considering the inclusion of a disability rights-based approach in the state budgeting process. Parliament subsequently passed a 13-point resolution on recognizing and protecting the rights of people with disabilities, which included a commitment to ratifying UN rights for people with disabilities across all ministries. The resolution provided meaningful support and positive impetus from the national government in recognizing key demands from DPOs on inclusion and protection, and covered areas such as education, health care and the justice system in which the government needed to invest in order to respond to specific demands raised by people with disabilities. In October 2020, the Ministry of Public Works produced ministerial guidelines stipulating that all new government and commercial buildings should be accessible to

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people with disabilities. This was a first step towards acknowledging accessibility issues in public spaces, and it opened the way to further dialogue.

Campaigning actions that disseminated information on the need for disability inclusion were also key. In 2019, before the debate in parliament, the coalition partners designed a digital campaign to raise awareness among parliamentarians, government officials and other key stakeholders and help them to understand the needs of people living with disabilities and the importance of specifically including them in state budgets. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the partners to adapt their advocacy strategy, but they continued with actions such as meetings and seminars with ministries and started a social media campaign to help create a buzz around inclusive budgeting that included submissions, TV talk shows, digital media actions and billboards in public spaces, among other means of communication.

One of the most significant milestones in the campaign was a digital media influencing campaign that was implemented in late 2020 and the beginning of 2021. The coalition partners drew attention to the priorities contained in budget allocations across all ministries in the 2021 state budget proposal and called for disability rights-based budgeting to be included. This campaign went well beyond government actors and decision makers to reach the wider population in social networks; for example, around 50% of people in Timor-Leste use Facebook (Project-Evaluation Report. Open the Book (OtB), Oxfam Timor-Leste. From June 2018 to July 2021. August 2021)

Work on the Disability National Action Plan (DNAP) 2021–2030 was another significant element of the influencing path built by Oxfam in Timor-Leste and its partners, who made concrete technical contributions to advancing the

inclusion of disability rights-based budgeting and the consolidation of advocacy processes with all ministries. There is still a long way to go before the whole of the state budget system includes this principle in its accounting. A complicating factor is the frequent turnover of public servants and politicians, meaning that there is a constant need to bring new staff up to speed and to keep influencing the agendas of political parties; this could potentially lead to setbacks to the process. However, there is no doubt that the issue of disability rights is now a recognized part of the public spending and social policy agenda. The Ministry of Social Solidarity and Inclusion (MSSI) the Ministry of Public Works and later the Ministry of Education have decided to allocate specific budgets for actions prioritized in the disability rights budgeting process.

During the second phase of the Open the Books project a Promoter Working Group was established, made up of seven people with disabilities from different vulnerable groups, including three women. This was the first time that women with disabilities had been able to advocate for their own agenda. The main objective of the group is to strengthen the sense of ownership of disability rights-based budgeting felt by people with disabilities; it also aims to provide continuity in the influencing process initiated in phase one of the project. The Promoter Working Group represents demands from DPOs, informal networks and activists, and has been provided with capacity-building and support from partners with a proven technical background in state budgeting, CGT and the Gender-Responsive Budgeting Working Group led by Rede Feto. It will continue to monitor and advocate for the inclusion of disability rights-based budgeting and will lead the decision-making process on advocacy and influencing priorities in the second phase of the project.

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KEY MILESTONES IN THE COALITION'S INFLUENCING WORK

- ◆ A resolution by the National Parliament in September 2019 urged the government to adopt key recommendations to protect the rights of people with disabilities. This has facilitated an enabling context and openness on the part of decision makers to listen to DPOs' influencing work on the NDAP.
- ◆ The digital campaign went viral and reached a significant proportion of internet users in Timor-Leste. The campaign led to widespread recognition and awareness of the issue among the public and helped to empower the coalition.
- ◆ Working through the NDAP gave the coalition the opportunity to strengthen its technical and influencing capacities and to develop relationships with public bodies and expand its influencing capabilities.
- ◆ Outreach to the Ministry of Public Works and important progress in terms of state budgeting wins have enabled a long-lasting relationship and significant learning opportunities for the coalition.
- ◆ The launch of the second phase of the project has given the coalition impetus in visualizing new targets and strategies for implementation to continue with the influencing path laid down in the first phase. It has established a diverse Promoter Working Group which acts as the face of the movement, made up of disabled people with a track record of advocating for their rights and with clear goals.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT?

The influencing process conducted by the coalition for the inclusion of disability rights in state budgeting processes has brought about positive changes not only in the public sphere, where significant progress can be seen – such as civil servants and decision makers being more aware of the issue and concrete progress being made in translating this into policy guidelines and state budget formulation practices – but also in the private social sphere, such as in disability advocacy groups, partner organizations and allies.

- People with disabilities who are members of the movement, especially those who helped form the Promoter Working Group and have been involved in devising influencing strategies and actions, have experienced a change in their understanding of why they deserve better living conditions as citizens and rights holders. They have attained a new level of empowerment and have the capacities to demand that the state include their needs in the state budgeting process.
- Both individuals and organizations that have supported the process and have been allies of the movement now see people with disabilities as rights holders rather than as objects of charity, as was often the case previously.

They understand and have been able to adjust their organizational logistics and ways of working to incorporate inclusive approaches.

- Working alongside the DNAP has given the coalition the chance to contribute to changing the nature of state planning, ensuring that to date two ministries (the MSSSI and the Ministry of Public Works) have built disability rights-based budgeting into their plans, while others as the Ministry of Education are in the process of doing so.
- Human resources departments in ministries that have participated in training processes with RHTO have a better understanding of the issue and acknowledge that a disability rights-based approach to budgeting is a matter of social justice and not simply a minority demand. They realize that this issue needs to be looked at through the lens of a rights-based approach and inclusion in order to respond to poverty and inequality at a national level.
- Sharing knowledge and coordinating actions between member organizations of the coalition has demonstrated that working together is more efficient and effective than working in isolation. Having access to different kinds of expertise, connections with stakeholders and new understanding of the issue has enabled partners to identify strategies and has given the movement strength and relevance for its advocacy work.



WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THIS WORK?

Oxfam in Timor-Leste and its partners, who have worked for over four years for better and more inclusive budgeting systems to benefit people with disabilities, have accumulated knowledge to develop new strategies and innovative ways to raise awareness and conduct advocacy work targeting the public, other local and international CSOs and state decision makers. The following are some of the most important lessons learned.

- **Build on momentum to add value and score wins to move towards the desired change.** The parliamentary resolution passed in 2019 publicly acknowledged that the state was obliged to incorporate a disability rights-based approach into its plans, actions and budgets. This gave the movement opportunities to use this momentum to continue to push the agenda and strengthen the narrative for an inclusive state budgeting process to gain quick wins in terms of building strong alliances, as it has done already with the Ministry of Public Works, the MSSl and the Ministry of Education
- **Working as a coalition made it possible to build a strong and multi-specialist alliance** where each organization contributed to strengthening the skills and capacities of the others, as well as building a strong narrative to conduct advocacy and implement influencing strategies.
- **Working initially with the target population on self-recognition as rights-holders is a fundamental step in driving change and accurately conveying the desired change to those we want to influence.** In the experience of Timor-Leste, working with DPOs on understanding a rights-based approach rather than one based on charity, as well as understanding that disabled people are citizens who deserve better living conditions, was instrumental in putting together a group of advocates for change who act as the public face of the movement and speak on its behalf. This is advocacy in its truest sense.
- **Working with allies within government who are close to decision-making bodies was fundamental.** The role of ambassadors for the cause of inclusion of disability-responsive budgeting was fundamental to the advocacy work undertaken and the definition of the DNAP. They helped to raise awareness of the issue and implement a practical approach to preparing budgets.
- **The influencing strategy was empowered by learning from the experiences of other countries.** Learning from good practices on disability rights-based budgeting from India, the Pacific and the Philippines inspired the coalition in recognizing gaps, challenges and opportunities that needed to be addressed and helped to build an influencing strategy targeted at state actors.

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Fiscal Justice Knowledge and Learning Broker

Knowledge Hub on Governance and Citizenship

About this case study

This case study is part of Oxfam's Fiscal Justice Track Record. This series is a continuation of Oxfam's Global Track Record on Fiscal Justice (2016) and provides an in-depth update on Oxfam and partners' fiscal justice and inequality work in selected countries.

Oxfam's F.A.I.R.-EiU program aims to ensure that citizens are empowered to redress inequality of power and influence, so fiscal systems are more progressive and governments implement tax and spending policies that benefit the many not the few. The F.A.I.R.-EiU program unites the work of Oxfam and partners in over 40 countries.

Photos

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Rosalia Teresa Pereira, Member of Promoter Group –

Association for the Disabled of Timor-Leste/

Asosiasaun Defisiensiia Timor-Leste (ADTL)

Photo: Keith Parsons (OAU)

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Promoter Group (Open the Book Project)

Photo: Keith Parsons (OAU)

Notes

- ¹ UNICEF Timor-Leste (2021). *Improving access to information for children and people with disabilities in Timor-Leste*. <https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/stories/improving-access-information-children-and-people-disabilities-timor-leste#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20most%20recent,2%20per%20cent%20of%20females>
- ² World Bank country data bank of country population <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=TL>, based on Timor Leste last Population and Housing Census among other sources
- ³ According to WHO: "Disability results from the interaction between individuals with a health condition, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and depression, with personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support." WHO (n.d.). *Disability*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1
- ⁴ ILO 2019. Cited by Alexandre Cote and Meenakshi Balsubramanian in *The New Normal. Getting governments to spend more and better for inclusion of all persons with disabilities*. Published by Center for Inclusive Policy, OXFAM in Timor-Leste and Oxfam Australia, CBM Australia and the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). Page 4
- ⁵ OECD. 2020. Cited by Alexandre Cote and Meenakshi Balsubramanian in *The New Normal. Getting governments to spend more and better for inclusion of all persons with disabilities*. Center for Inclusive Policy, OXFAM in Timor-Leste and Oxfam Australia, CBM Australia and the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).Page 4
- ⁶ CIP is an organization that supports the inclusion process of disadvantaged people to be effective and responsive with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and other human rights frameworks and development agendas.



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