



Background Information on Government Spending Watch

www.governmentspendingwatch.org

What is Government Spending Watch?

In 2000, the global community committed itself to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Yet after 10 years of implementation, there was no timely comprehensive data or analysis available on what individual governments were spending to reach the goals.¹ As a result, in 2010, Oxfam and Development Finance International (DFI) committed to work together to track and analyse budget spending on the MDGs.

This collaboration led to the development and launch, in 2013, of the first ever global database - www.governmentspendingwatch.org - to provide comprehensive, up-to-date information on government spending on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Several other organisations publish data on some MDG spending, but often with a 2–3 year delay, and only for a few sectors or countries. This severely hampers efforts by global, regional and national stakeholders to advocate and campaign for higher spending on the MDGs.

Government Spending Watch: the open budget database

GSW has data across seven MDG-related sectors: agriculture, education, environment, gender, health, social protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The Government Spending Watch website currently has information available on government budget commitments and expenditures, for 54 low-income or lower middle-income countries², over 2011-13, and in some cases goes to 2015 for medium-term forecasts. More countries and years are currently being updated and will be online at the end of 2014, and into early 2015 (see below). The offline database also has information, which is not currently available on the website, as far back as 2008 for certain countries, enabling longer term analysis of trends in MDG sectors. The data is meticulously compiled from country budget documents and other published sources. As the data is often hard to find or interpret, a network of country official's worldwide help to compile it.

Data is analysed online by planned and actual spending, disaggregated by type (recurrent or capital) and funding source (government or donor). The data is presented on the website in national currency, US\$ equivalents, constant and current prices, as a percentage of GDP and total government spending, and per capita spend. They can be viewed as graphs or tables, or downloaded in Excel on the website. By disaggregating data into % of government spend and % GDP it is also possible to measure commitments by benchmarking each government against internationally recognised spending targets in the sector.³

The Government Spending Watch database and website is an openly available resource accessible to everyone, from the public, to campaigners, international organisations, or developing country governments. By offering an open budget platform, GSW aims to foster greater fiscal transparency and government accountability, in order to enable global, regional and national stakeholders to advocate for higher spending on the MDGs. It also aims to make governments more accountable by institutionalising demand for, and supply of, better quality data.

GSW bespoke budget accountability services

As well as offering the open budget database, the GSW team offers bespoke analytical services. The access the GSW team has to budget data, as well as the intimate knowledge gained in collating and forensically checking the data, means that GSW has a wealth of knowledge and information that can be tailored to stakeholder's specific analytical needs. A number of organisations in recent years have utilised GSW data for a range of analytical services, including:

¹ There have been sterling efforts by UN agencies and others to capture spending data but most of these are available only 2-3 years after the end of the year covered, and for individual sectors or sub-sectors.

² Afghanistan, Angola, Armenia, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Comoros, DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Moldova, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Uganda, Vanuatu, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

³ For more information on spending data and sources go to: <http://www.governmentspendingwatch.org/spending-data/8-govt-spending-site/7-definitions-and-sources>

- The UNESCO-led 'Education for All Global Monitoring Report' has used GSW analysis to improve the timeliness of data and the quality of tracking public education spending;
- UNICEF analysed the impact of the financial crisis on the expenditure projections and the implications for children and poor families;
- UN WOMEN analysed recent trends in gender-responsive spending, including of it could be better identified and analysed in developing country budgets;
- Save the Children International produced detailed country and global analysis of progress on public spending on children; the equity and impact of the spending; and the transparency and accountability of the spending;
- GSW has worked with WaterAid to produce detailed case studies in Ghana, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda, and on global analysis on budgeting, spending and funding gaps in the water and sanitation sector. GSW is also currently working with WaterAid to develop follow-up country case studies on absorption;
- The Norwegian NGO coalition used GSW data to do an analysis of the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT) lending facilities in delivering poverty reduction and growth to low-income countries.

GSW future directions: expanding & growing to meet new development challenges

GSW will continue to grow and expand in the coming years, building in new up-to-date information on budget spend, as well as adding additional countries to the database. GSW will also begin to build in information on revenues as well as spending to the database, and will evolve the data-sets to track the emerging post-2015 development agenda. Below are some of the key highlights.

Improving the database and website. GSW is currently updating the database to reflect latest budget information, as well as expanding to additional countries. Over the course of the remainder of 2014, the GSW online database will, therefore, be further expanded to take account of latest available budget documents and information (i.e. in most cases to 2014-15, as well as medium-term forecasts, where available), and to add in another 10 countries.⁴ Over the course of 2015, GSW will be expanded to a total of 80 countries. In addition, the website and database will have additional functions added to aid the campaigning of partners.

Tracking revenue as well as spend. It is increasingly clear that holding governments to account on spending is not enough: raising government ambitions to increase their revenue, especially in the context of post-2015 goals, is also necessary. In particular, there is increasing interest in taxation, and its avoidance, which has received extensive attention recently as critical to generating more resources for development. GSW already includes financing aspects such as aid and debt service, and the programme aims to expand to support greater analysis of revenue and make this publically available for campaigners to use. In early 2015, GSW will begin gathering information on revenue for each GSW country, this is also rapidly being developed into a tax progressivity analysis, to be able to generate information on how much pro-poor/MDG/social sector spending is taking place, as well as the degree to which revenue generation is progressive or regressive.

Building towards the post-2015 agenda. In the medium-term it is vital that spending, revenue and aid is effectively monitored as key means of implementation for the post-2015 framework. As the unfolding post-2015 agenda becomes clearer, GSW will adapt budget tracking to this new development framework. GSW will partner with others to advocate for greater fiscal transparency, alongside the tracking of financial targets, to be built into the post-2015 'Means of Implementation' agenda to ensure greater delivery.

Continuing to produce demand driven analysis. GSW will continue to work with a number of organisations in developing and delivering new areas of analysis and research, which can use the GSW data and networks to drive forward ever deeper analysis into new areas.

Building a broader GSW partnership. GSW is a shared resource for all stakeholders who want to ensure greater pro-poor spending and revenue collection, or who have an interest in improving transparency and accountability of governments to their citizens. It is for this reason, GSW's long term aim is to gradually build a wider coalition of organisations working together to improve the sector-by-sector analysis, to help to deepen and improve this vital initiative.

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⁴ Some data available offline, and intentions to expand to the following countries in early 2015: Australia, Colombia, Congo (Republic of), Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Jordan, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Peru, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, West Bank & Gaza.