

Data Use Case Study: Using budget data to improve water policy in Nepal

Govind Shrestha is a Research and Advocacy Officer at WaterAid Nepal. He conducts research and trend analysis of budget data, using his findings to develop guidance and advocacy measures aimed at building support for better allocation of resources to Nepal's water and sanitation sector.

This profile is part of a series looking at how data is being accessed and used by different actors, produced by Development Initiatives (DI) and its partners in Uganda, Kenya and Nepal with financial support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.



Govind's demand for data and information

"We use the information to ensure government, NGOs and other stakeholders are working in areas with low WASH coverage rather than concentrating on districts that already have high coverage"

Govind carries out trend analysis of budget data to determine how much money has been allocated to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects and how this money has been spent, both nationally and at district level. Through his analysis he has found that some districts receive low WASH funding, yet others get more than they need. WaterAid uses this kind of information to develop advocacy messages and guidance to improve Nepal's WASH budget allocations and spending. Govind uses this information to write factsheets, briefings and reports that are used by civil society organisations (CSO), media and other advocacy practitioners at both national and community level to inform the government, donors and civil society about WASH issues. The information is also used in meetings, workshops and training, to encourage government officials to make and monitor the necessary investment in water and sanitation.

Examples of Govind's data use

- **Discovering funding gaps in the national budget:** Govind and the WaterAid team analysed the national budget and identified that NPR 250,000 was allocated to cover the construction cost of girl-friendly toilets in schools, but when analysing local budget information from the Department of Education they discovered that actual costs totalled NPR 600,000 – leaving a NPR 350,000 shortfall per toilet. This budget allocation gap was highlighted in WaterAid's study report on WASH financing in community schools, bringing it to the attention of officials.
- **Finding serious under-spending in a water and sanitation project:** By analysing gaps between government budget allocation and expenditure data, Govind discovered a serious case of budget under-spending relating to a high-profile Nepali water and sanitation project – the Melamchi Water Supply Project. This large scale, multi-year and multi-donor project was planned to alleviate the chronic water shortage suffered by the 4 million people living in the Kathmandu Valley. In the fiscal year 2013/2014, 40% of the total government budget designated to the WASH sector was allocated to the Melamchi Project, but spending records showed that only half of this amount was actually spent. Concerned by the government allocating such a high proportion of WASH budget to high cost urban projects and then not spending it, while inadequate budget is allocated to rural projects where financing is really needed, WaterAid has raised this issue in various forums, using their data analysis to hold the government accountable for their management and targeting of resources.

Challenges to Govind having better information

“The most authorised source of information is official data from the government but in most cases it has been difficult to obtain this data”

Govind has challenges in **accessing data**. Much of the data that he needs comes from the Ministry of Finance's Red Book, and from government agencies such as the Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Education and the Central Bureau of Statistics. The data is not always publically available, and Govind and his team have suffered from the time constraints of the government officials who lack the human resources to disseminate the information.

A lack of a dedicated information officer to respond to data requests means that Govind and WaterAid have to rely on building relationships and rapport with respective government officials. While able to find national-level statistics, **finding district-level information** is much more challenging. Ideally, Govind would like to see budget data that is geocoded, but at the very least the information needs to be disaggregated by location for it to be useful. This is vital for understanding how funding meets the needs of different communities in Nepal and identifying how resources could be allocated most effectively.

Time constraint is a major obstacle for Govind. It takes time to obtain the data, time to process the data and time to analyse it. This leaves very little time to act on it – as in the case of the Melamchi project spending gap – through actions such as writing news articles for national newspapers. Govind would like to use aid data as well as budget data in his work, particularly now that Nepal has a public Aid Management Platform, but this would require his team to have a deeper understanding of how aid data and budget data join up to avoid the risk of double-counting and the problems caused by datasets that are disaggregated differently. **More joined-up and standardised data** would also help them compare data across government departments.

This case study is available online at: <http://devinit.org/#!/post/using-budget-data-to-improve-water-policy-in-nepal-2>. A longer-form version of this case is available from DI's Access to Information programme.

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