Child-participatory budgeting is a process by which children can influence decisions on public spending that affect their human rights. From Albania to Zimbabwe, many child-participatory budget projects are involving children and young people of different ages and backgrounds.

International human rights policy has made child rights budgeting a core focus. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter ‘the Committee’) has consistently recommended that States Parties develop child budgets as a key aspect of implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. A central tenet of the Committee’s most recent guidance on children’s budgeting is the participation of children in all stages of budgetary planning and decision-making.¹

While many projects exist in this area, there is a lack of research that reviews these processes and their effect collectively. This study has been developed to contribute to the Committee’s call for examples of good practice that are appropriate to context.²

The Study
Overarching the research for this study was the question: how can children be involved in decisions about public expenditure in ways that are effective, inclusive and impactful?

To address this, the study’s authors drew on research they had undertaken in 2015 to collate the views of more than 2,700 children in 71 countries on public expenditure for children’s rights.³ The current study used this data as a framework to investigate and identify the key learning from existing examples of child-participatory budgeting in different global contexts.

For this study, the authors carried out a scoping review that gathered around 30 examples of child-participatory budgeting processes from each major world region. Most were initiated and resourced by civil society organisations, though often conducted in partnership with local, regional and national level authorities.

To study the processes in more detail, three in-depth case studies were then arranged with local facilitators in Croatia, Guatemala and Kenya as well as two shorter case studies in Togo and Wales – selected for geographic diversity and diversity of approach.

Based on these analyses, the study presents lessons and enabling factors for good practice, grouped under four thematic headings: supportive, inclusive, accountable and effective.

Supportive
Child-participatory budgeting relies in most cases on support from adults who are committed to working with children and young people in a respectful, inclusive, transparent and accountable way.

- **Non-governmental organisations** have played a vital role in enabling child participation in budgeting. Their work creates ‘a platform’ for child participation through activities that support children and adult decision-makers to engage meaningfully and effectively prior to, during and after budgetary decision-making.

¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) General comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children’s rights (art. 4), CRC/C/GC/19.
² Ibid. para 56.
A strong supportive factor was decision-makers’ previous experience in child participation and children’s rights, helping to build a culture of participation at many levels.

In many cases, adults who supported children in their budget work described the importance of developing and using accessible information and child- or youth-friendly materials to support them to better engage with often highly complex budgeting processes. Many respondents described the important work of the adults involved in answering questions and facilitating discussions about complex, technical information.

Developing the knowledge and capacity among supporting adults to deal with the complexities of budgeting processes is also vital. It emerged that civil society organisations often do not have the expertise to engage in budgeting processes.

Inclusive
Children are not a homogenous group and participatory budgeting initiatives need to make efforts to ensure that the voices of girls and boys from vulnerable or excluded groups are heard (such as those from ethnic minorities, rural children, children with disabilities, out-of-school or homeless children).

- **Gender equality** is a critical piece of inclusive practice. Most of the initiatives reported making particular efforts to include an equal number of female and male participants. But there was little information about the extent to which girls’ and young women’s views were aired and considered equal to those of their male counterparts.
- Inclusive practice involved children being elected by other children and young people as representatives; participating as members of groups or networks; or as individuals already participating in budgeting processes. They may be direct participants or their views are specifically sought and included in exercises led by adults.
- In several cases, large numbers of children have been involved through questionnaire-based consultation exercises, online platforms or specific calls to thousands of youth residents for project ideas.

Accountable
The study highlights the lack of appropriate and accessible feedback from decision-makers, and the difficulties in monitoring and tracking spending through publicly available information.

- In many cases children and young people received little or no feedback about the outcome or effect of their participation – due to an overall lack of transparency, a lack of specific information disseminated from the relevant authorities or project funding coming to an end.
- **Very little child and youth participation in the analysis, monitoring and evaluation stages** of the budgeting cycle was found – in part due to the disproportionate number of initiatives supported by civil society programming concentrating on the budget planning phase rather than sustained mechanisms for child participation embedded in public budgeting processes.
- **Few opportunities existed to share information** with decision-makers to affect future planning processes.

Effective
This section notes the importance of examining the effect of child-participatory budgeting. It reviews achievements and challenges, not least to reiterate the role played by child-participatory budgeting in achieving the broader goal of realising children’s rights.

- Child-participatory budgeting processes are generally most effective when decision-makers in public funding are committed to hearing and taking children’s views into account.
- Examples showed that there seems to be greater potential to influence change at municipal or county level. However, the priorities that young participants raise are not always within the remit of local government and instead rely on national-level action, which can limit effectiveness.
• **Positive broader outcomes** were: the establishment or strengthening of democratic structures for future engagement; specific allocation and reprioritisation of the municipal budget towards children’s programmes; enhanced transparency in budgetary decision-making; desire to build children’s and young people’s capacity for citizenship.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The initiatives considered in this study show that, where there is meaningful engagement, children’s views have directly influenced public spending decision-making in ways that have increased spending on children and/or resulted in existing allocations being directed to areas that they identified as a priority.

The most successful initiatives had the following features: accessible information; support for children to develop and express their views freely; time for them to process the information and prepare inputs; adults who listen to their views and engage with respect; feedback on what happened to their input.

The study made several recommendations on the understanding that all four thematic areas require attention in order to achieve an optimal child-participatory budgeting process.

**Supportive**
- Develop materials explaining budgeting processes in accessible language.
- Build the capacity of adults, especially decision-makers, to engage respectfully with children.

**Inclusive**
- Audit and identify the groups of children whose views may not be represented and establish mechanisms to include them.
- Establish mechanisms for collating the views of as many children as possible (eg. social media; online; through schools or local children’s councils).

**Accountable**
- Provide children with specific and accessible feedback on their input.
- Engage child participants in follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of public spending.

**Effective**
- Identify champions in local or national level decision-making responsible for activating funding in response to children’s expressed priorities.
- Establish platforms for child participants to meet decision-makers throughout the budget cycle (eg. planning, monitoring and evaluation, follow-up and review).
**Case Study: Guatemala: the ‘Building democracy in Central America’ project**

This project had three main aims: to develop municipal authorities’ capacities to budget for children and young people; to support children and young people in analysing the problems that affect them; to develop public policies on priorities that children have identified.

The project involved around 75 children aged 14 to 17 in the Alta Verapaz department of Guatemala. It worked on a representative basis, with the young people elected to represent the views of children and young people in their municipalities and to feed back information gained through training workshops.

The participants’ situational analysis of the priority rights issues for children in their districts led directly to public policies being developed in response – for instance, support for dealing with violence and drug addiction. However, some participants said that they initially faced resistance when attempting to raise their concerns. They also noted that there would be challenges in monitoring the implementation of the policies due to a lack of relevant guidelines or any clear role mapped out for the children and young people in the monitoring.

Broader outcomes included wider awareness-raising of children’s rights in the district – not least because the participants took their role of feeding back to their communities very seriously. A major challenge in realising children’s rights is the lack of effective data collection and recording about issues facing children. This project established an evidence base about the realisation of children’s rights in the area.

Enabling factors for this project included: provision of resources (space, materials, staff funding); support from civil society especially on rights awareness; encouragement from parents for their children to participate. The hands-on contributions from facilitating organisations (CHILDHOPE and Plan International Guatemala) were critical to this project’s success.

The project succeeded in building the capacity of children and young people to see themselves as active participants in decisions that affect them. However, it also highlighted that achieving longer-term change is difficult with time-limited funding for projects – child and youth participation in budgeting needs to be fostered in more sustained ways.