

Where's our money going? Challenges of Budget Transparency and Accountability in Indonesia

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Why budget advocacy...?

The budget is the most important economic policy instrument for governments. It reflects a government's social and economic policy priorities more than any other document, translating policies, political commitments, and goals into decisions on where funds should be spent and how funds should be collected. A well-functioning budget system is vital to the formulation of sustainable fiscal policy and facilitates economic growth. Economic problems are exacerbated by weak budget systems and faulty budget choices. That is why the budget can be an indicator to accurately measure governance performance.

While a government's budget directly or indirectly affects the life of all its citizens, frequently it is the people with the most modest means who are influenced the most. They tend to be most vulnerable to weak economic growth or high inflation. The current wellbeing of those with low incomes, and their future prospects, can also hinge on expenditure decisions in areas such as health and education. Yet, budget cuts tend to fall on programmes that benefit the poor more frequently, since other issues such as public debt or the public sector wage bill are more likely to have first claim on scarce resources. Moreover, even when funds have been allocated to anti-poverty programmes, weak expenditure and programme management — and the lack of political power among the poor — can mean that the money never reaches the intended beneficiaries.

The budget process and budget system in a country are also crucial in determining the degree to which it has an open, democratic, and participatory system of government. The general absence of information on budget issues — particularly in accessible, non-technical forms — has seriously hindered the efforts of national

and local organisations to participate in the discussion on the distribution of public resources (Shapiro and Falk 2001).

Philosophically, the source of the budget is the people. The government collects various kinds of taxes from them. It is every citizen's task to spare part of their income to be given to government as income tax, for example. Taxation is the main element of state revenue and makes up a significant portion of the state budget. Because the budget primarily comes from taxpayers, the government – as the state authority that holds power to manage the budget – must be responsible to the public by translating the taxpayers' funds into the people's benefit.

In Indonesia, the basic framework of state budgeting is also institutionalised by the Constitution of 1945. Article 23, point 1 of the Constitution stipulates:

State budget as the implementation of State financial management is endorsed annually under law and the processes are carried out transparently and accountable for the sake of the people's welfare.

The mandate of the Constitution indicates at least two principles of state budgeting. First, the budget must improve people's welfare. Second, budgeting processes must be transparent and accountable. As a nation that upholds democracy and legal values, this constitutional mandate must serve as the fundamental principle in budgeting processes and management of taxpayers' funds.

Those principles are broken down in the 2003 Law on State Finance. Article 3 of the law stipulates: 'state Finance is managed in an orderly, lawful, efficient, economical, effective, transparent, and responsible fashion with consideration of a sense of justice and appropriateness'.

Nevertheless, given its young democracy, which only began in 1998, Indonesia today still suffers from so-called 'power euphoria'. This euphoria has led to weak governance including practices related to budgeting processes. The government has failed to implement state budget management totally under the principles set by the Constitution and the 2003 law.

Among frequent shortcomings are weak budgeting practices resulting in ineffectiveness and inefficiencies. Taxpayers' money is wasted, partly due to the government's failure to adopt the basic values and principles set by the laws. The failure to comply with the laws even sometimes happens as a result of deliberate misappropriations by culprits.

Another problem is the lack of transparency. Officials still tend to treat budget-related documents as state secrets and provide very little public access to them. 'Ordinary' people are considered ineligible to access detailed information about the government's programmes and policies as well as the allocated budget to finance them. An ill-informed public, even among low-level civil servants, was often subject

to this misleading assumption. As a result, some still believe that discussing the state budget, not to mention its deliberation processes, is taboo.

Culprits within the government used this common understanding about privacy of the state budget to continue to misuse taxpayers' funds for their own benefits. They take advantage when people still falsely believe that state officials have full rights to state funds and that their 'exclusive' access to budgeting is compensation for their status as government officials. These culprits have no shame in telling the public that any matters related to budgeting processes are their business only and that the people should not object to this privacy.

This situation has boosted the National Secretariat of the Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency's (Seknas FITRA) spirit to improve efforts to encourage more transparent and publicly accountable expenditures of state budgets aimed directly, as the Constitution requires, at promotion of public welfare. FITRA's organisational mandate and vision are to ensure the public's sovereignty over the state budget by advocating greater budget transparency and accountability in Indonesia.

Inequity of budgeting: a case

FITRA has found malpractices in budgeting that lead to ineffectiveness and inefficiencies almost every year. One indication was the allocation for official overseas visits that kept ballooning even though FITRA's analysis showed that most of the visits had failed to generate any tangible benefits for Indonesia. Inefficiencies could even be seen in allocations for trivial matters, such as the procurement of snacks for meetings which frequently cost an unreasonable amount of the state budget.

A study by FITRA showed that state funds allocated for official trips had drastically increased between 2006 and 2010; from 8.9 trillion rupiah (US\$ 919.71 million) in 2006 to Rp 19.6 trillion in 2010; more than twice as high than it was four years earlier.

Year on year, the allocation for official trips in 2007 was 2.25% higher. It increased significantly by Rp 3 trillion, or about 30%, in 2008.

In 2008, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono began his campaign for budget efficiency in all state bodies, in which he said allocations for official trips, besides seminars and workshops, were the most subject to reductions. In fact, the finance ministry has even issued supporting regulations to help guide state institutions to implement budget efficiencies.

Ironically though, the allocation for official trips increased even more steeply after the President's campaign. In 2009, the government set Rp 15.2 trillion for official trips, or about 40% higher than the Rp 11.1 trillion spent the previous year. A similar trend was seen in the 2009–2010 period.

Legally speaking, there is nothing wrong with the government allocating a massive amount of taxpayers' money for official trips. But the public was irritated by the fact that they did not perceive any benefits to come out of them. Trips, particularly overseas, were seen merely as tours for the pleasure of politicians in the eyes of the people, rather than part of efforts to improve their welfare. It was seen as inappropriate to allocate Rp 19.5 trillion for official trips in 2010 while the funds assigned to the People's Health Insurance Program (Jamkesmas) were only Rp 4.5 trillion or less than one fourth of the amount that the government disbursed to finance its officials going on trips. In fact, some other important programmes in the education and development sectors, such as the School Aid Funds (BOS) and the National Programme for Community Empowerment (PNPM), were financed by foreign loans.

Irregular allocations for official trips were found in almost all ministries and state bodies, even the House of Representatives and the President's office. In 2010, both the House and the President's office topped the list of highest budget allocations for trips with Rp 179 billion and Rp 170 billion respectively.

To make matters worse, the mechanism of utilisation of such funds contained loopholes that were prone to misappropriation. A 2010 Supreme Audit Agency (BPK) study revealed that the misuse of funds allocated for official trips caused the highest losses to the Indonesian State in 2009. In total, the BPK found that Rp 73.6 billion of funds that were supposed to be for official trips had been misappropriated with various kinds of *modi operandi*, such as marking up expenses, fictitious trips, fake tickets, and double payments.

It is in this context that this chapter attempts to address the challenges that FITRA has faced in communicating with policymakers and the public in Indonesia.

Communicating budget-related ideas via the mass media

FITRA's struggles to influence budgeting policies have been ongoing for years but serious advocacy steps began to be carried out in 2004. Between 2004 and 2010, however, FITRA had yet to find specific and focused advocacy points: targets were still generally identified, such as ensuring that allocations for education and health services must be higher than allocations for administrative and bureaucracy expenditure.

At the regional level, the practice of this kind of advocacy is mostly done by analysing the ratio between direct and indirect expenditures. Direct expenditure is the use of taxpayers' funds for programmes that directly affected the people, while indirect expenditure is the use of the budget to finance activities that do not have direct impacts on the taxpayers. Included in indirect expenditures are civil servants' salaries and other kind of allowances.

Advocacy strategies generally aim to conduct public campaigns, strengthen the capacity of the community, and build the awareness of people's rights regarding the budget. Advocacy through lobbying or meeting directly with policymakers is rarely done because FITRA has continued to maintain its position as an external monitoring organisation.

Therefore, one of the instruments used by FITRA is called the 'budget brief' which is basically a summary of a comprehensive and in-depth study. This method is often effective for informing budget policymakers because, as public officials, they have very little time to read a budget analysis of several pages and policy recommendations and as a consequence tend to ignore the reports. Through budget briefs, FITRA presents only the main results of its analysis, which visibly depict injustice and impropriety in budget allocation so that policymakers will be brought straight to the main points. Also included in the budget briefs are tactical recommendations that need to be taken into consideration by policymakers in the hope that they will allocate taxpayers' money for the greatest prosperity of the people.

Budget briefs are submitted to lawmakers and members of regional representative councils. FITRA always hopes that they will take its budget analysis into account and help channel it to the government and regional administrations by, for example, voicing it during hearings with the executives.

However, the practice of this kind of tactic has rarely seen a significant impact particularly when it comes to issues concerning ineffective, inefficient, and inappropriate budget allocation. A simple example is that despite FITRA's sustained criticism the government continues to allocate a great portion of the budget for state officials' travel expenses while the budget for education and health, which would have a direct impact on the poor, has remained low.

Quite clearly then, direct influence by FITRA is not working. A more indirect approach, one that includes the very public that ought to be outraged by this kind of behavior, is necessary.

Therefore, besides the use of budget briefs, FITRA's advocacy work is also done by carrying out public campaigns through the media. The objective of these campaigns is that the results of the analysis – as well as the recommendations – will be published and widely disseminated so that the public will be better informed about the arguments put forward by FITRA. Press conferences, as one of the main tools for working with the media, are also expected to inform public opinion so as to build up public pressure on policymakers to allocate the budget in accordance with the Constitution's mandate.

FITRA is aware that the media is one of the most effective instruments to communicate ideas to the public and to policy makers. As Jurgen Habermas argued, mass media is at the core of the 'living' public (public sphere). Through the mass media, individuals – as equals with the State – discuss, propose, review, criticise

and argue for an agreement for the common good. Mass media is also one of the main forces in a modern democracy that is capable of influencing policies. It is also included in the analysis by Martin Shaw in his book *Global Voice; Civil Society and Media in Global Crisis* (1999) where he describes the relationship of mass media and civil society to democratic institutions as being like fish to water.

Challenges of working with the media

During FITRA's early phase in building a budget advocacy strategy through the media, one of the main challenges it faced was that it was not known by many media outlets, let alone by the public. For months, FITRA appeared as an outsider that could hardly manage to get the media to provide it with even a small spot to publish its reports on budget analysis.

In Indonesia, hundreds of NGOs are spread throughout the nation. With most of them labeled as 'bad' NGOs, due to their obscure activities, it has never been easy to garner public empathy and to be perceived as a 'good' NGO. It wasn't until 2009, when FITRA's budget advocacy work began to find its way to the media, that this began to change.

FITRA had been following the strategy of a particular NGO, which oversees corruption issues and that enjoyed good relations with the media. As a result, FITRA often felt 'forced' to package its budget analysis as an anti-corruption campaign in order to make its way into the news agenda.

However, after following the lead of that NGO for few years, FITRA was still yet to be widely recognised. Its relations with media individuals were still limited. This forced the organisation to reflect on its own approach and it began to explore its own ways to build a unique relationship with the media.

Unfortunately, FITRA's analysis presented in press conferences still failed to win media attention. There were still very few media outlets that were eager to cover and publish FITRA's reports. Apparently, the media still considered 'budgets' an unappealing issue to publish, not to mention their lack of knowledge about FITRA and its work on budget advocacy.

Reflecting on those experiences in working with journalists to advocate for the effectiveness and efficiency of the budget, FITRA identified several factors that explain its failure to achieve its purposes. These factors are:

- a. Before 2010, most of FITRA's press releases presented graphs with data that we thought a journalist would not fail to understand. But graphics usually contains a lot of information that could confuse anyone not familiar with the budget. Confused journalists tended to ignore them simply because they failed to find something newsworthy in the data – even though we thought it was clear as water. FITRA also failed to access budget documents completely, and

so could not offer journalists a sufficiently robust and comprehensive analysis. Public access to budget-related documents was very limited to only general information. Furthermore, access was also granted only a few weeks before the House of Representatives endorsed the budget, leaving only a short period of time for FITRA to produce a good and comprehensive analysis. To avoid being 'too late', FITRA always publishes before endorsement by the House, hoping that there would be still chances for budget policymakers to make revisions that take FITRA's analysis into account. But this meant that the data FITRA could use was not always final.

- a. In a country where citizen participation in the budget process is not prevalent, the budget is still perceived as something that is taboo to discuss in the public sphere. There is still a serious deficit of analysts who are able to link public policies with budget policies. Most analysts provide comments and criticisms on public policy from normative, social, and political viewpoints. As a civil society organisation that focuses on budget advocacy, FITRA has found this situation to be another challenge: how to familiarise the public with the language of budget advocacy via the mass media, when all the public is used to is general policy commentary?
- a. Related to the two points above, journalists do not generally understand the budget and related issues. This was most likely because of a lack of civil society groups who used the budget as an instrument of public policy advocacy, but also of weak media and a feeble journalistic profession.
- a. The media has always been more interested in publishing issues related to corruption. Corruption always involves misconduct or abuse of state funds while budget issues mainly focus on how the budget goes through a series of processes and finally results in allocations and actions. There are indeed connections between corruption and budget policies but budget advocacy tends to focus on how policymakers translate the budget into public benefits in the best possible way. Advocating for effective budgets could also play a preemptive role, but this is not the same as an anti-corruption campaign. If the budget is processed through proper, decent and transparent mechanisms, the chance for culprits to misuse it will be minimised. This is something that the media is not so interested in.

How to respond to these lessons?

Although the budget advocacy done by FITRA has not been optimally achieved yet, we have not reduced the intensity of our work. Instead, these reflections led FITRA to decide that budget advocacy had to be carried out on a larger scale.

Hence, since mid-2009, budget analysis has been done more broadly and creatively. Budget analysis is not always carried out based on the stages of a long research method. A simple but significant and easy-to-understand analysis is done by undertaking straightforward comparisons. For example, comparing the proportion of the budget earmarked for officials and that allocated for development programmes.

Some allocations for officials may look trivial but sometimes the sum is considerable. For instance, the budget allocated to provide facilities and services for state officials, travels and food and beverage in meetings, looks too lavish given the low allocations for education and healthcare for the poor. From that simple example, budgetmakers demonstrate inequality and injustice in distributing taxpayers' money, particularly given the deteriorating gaps between the rich and the poor.

Press releases

To channel these ideas to the public and to policymakers, FITRA decided to continue targeting the media. We paid particular attention to our press releases, which are now sent to both print and electronic media via email. About three to four press releases are sent every month. That means that at least one press release must be produced a week. In the beginning, our expectations were rather realistic and we recognised that it would be hard to be taken seriously by all media outlets. Thus, our objective was to introduce FITRA to the journalists, as well as to familiarise the media with a new perspective in public policy advocacy: budget advocacy. FITRA did not expect the media to publish its studies right away.

Some of the lessons from FITRA's earlier reflection were incorporated into the press releases. Press releases must not be complicated. FITRA had to ensure that each press release did not contain 'confusing' graphics that journalists would struggle to understand. However, using numeric explanations in communicating budget analysis is inevitable most of the time.

Sometimes budget issues associated with corruption are effective in making the media more interested in covering them. This is sometimes also effective in helping journalists and the public understand the budget itself: the substance of a budget issue can reach the heart of the people's attention when it immediately poses a real impact: in this case, corruption.

An ineffective and inefficient budget depicted 'merely' as a violation of constitutional mandate and statutory law may fail to garner great attention but when it shows a real picture of how much taxpayers' money is wasted, budget advocacy can look more attractive. Then, it will not only encourage understanding of the importance of budget advocacy, but it will also encourage journalists to learn more about the budget, even though they might have initially tended to ignore it and FITRA's press releases.

Access to information

In budget advocacy, FITRA assumes that the availability of budget documents is a key to success, particularly in advocacy through the media, as FITRA must convince journalists that its analysis is based on reliable data. This is the power of FITRA's good relationship with journalists: relationships that it must maintain, in order to continue advocating in this way. In our experience of budget advocacy, other observers tend towards 'normative' opinions without strong data to support them.

This kind of 'normative' criticism is not effective because, usually, policymakers have the ability to counter it. FITRA believes that only by using valid data can its studies reach legitimacy. Policymakers will have little room to make biased arguments when all of the data together make a strong argument .

Unfortunately, accessing this information is easier said than done. But when it happens it can have highly positive consequences. In 2011, for example, FITRA found that, according to the 2011 State Budget Allocation List (DIPA), each member of the House of Representatives was entitled to a communications allowance of Rp 14 million (US\$1,442) per month. The House has 560 members so the total allocation for allowances was Rp 7.84 billion (US\$807,520) per month. FITRA issued a press release stating that the amount of taxpayers' money earmarked to support the communications purposes of lawmakers was too big and denied the principle of fairness. In the press release, FITRA argued that such a large amount of money could be more beneficial to the public if reallocated to programmes related to poverty reduction, education or healthcare. This issue grew quickly. Many House members were unable to comment, seeming cornered because the analysis FITRA had used was based on valid and legitimate data. Some lawmakers found an easy way to escape the harsh criticism simply by saying that they were not aware that there were budgets for communications.

Dare to criticise

The budget advocacy approach through the media used by FITRA is dialectic, as its press releases always deliver criticism to budget policymakers. FITRA hopes that this kind of thesis–antithesis–synthesis approach can result in the synthesis of a better budget policy, a change towards the principles of justice, decency and fairness in accordance with the mandates of the Constitution and the law. To us, one indicator of the success of advocacy is when budget policymakers respond to FITRA's budget analysis.

With this dialectical approach, FITRA's budget advocacy tends to focus on the House of Representatives. For approximately one year, FITRA's press releases always positioned these legislators as the guilty party in the flawed budget. It is this House who shares the biggest responsibility when the state budget fails to be attentive to the needs of the people. Lawmakers were not executing their budgeting power well. We expected this approach to push legislators to change their attitude and perform better by actively making a more effective and efficient budget.

In 2010, FITRA shifted its advocacy goals in order to attempt to have a greater impact on budget decisions. FITRA tried instead to address the President directly. At that time, only a small number of analysts managed to criticise the President openly in a public forum. FITRA urged the state budgetmakers to analyse the allocations for infrastructure and facilities for the President and his inner circle. FITRA exposed every item bought using taxpayers' money, from the procurement of a sofa to the expenditures for the President's outfits.

One of the findings that might have come as a surprise to many was that the budget allocated to procure and launder the President's shirts was larger than the budgets for the eradication of maternal and child mortality and malnutrition alleviation programmes together.

FITRA issued a press release on the findings, and concluded that the amount of money earmarked for such facilities was too big and inappropriate. FITRA saw the President, who should actually have been at the forefront of promoting effective and efficient budgets, as endorsing wasteful budget allocation. State budgets should be allocated for the welfare of the people, not for the welfare of the officials.

The downside of this confrontational approach is that it has put FITRA under constant pressure – from both the government and the House of Representatives. It was not a rare scene for FITRA's findings to be totally denied and shot down by officials. Accusations of FITRA's data being invalid, or that it did not know or understand the real conditions 'in the field', were common. Some desperate officials also often accused FITRA of seeking the limelight. They even said that FITRA was a foreign agent who wanted to damage Indonesia. In some way, such denials were good in the sense that FITRA's advocacy through the media managed to gain further attention. And it positioned the organisation as a source of independent, or at least alternative, information.

FITRA's criticism was not only rebuffed by officials: even the President once directly denied FITRA's data. Following the rebuttal, however, the President issued Presidential Decree No. 72/2011 on the prevention of wasteful spending in ministries and other agencies, in the fiscal year of 2011. The President instructed these three main points:

1. Improve the quality and security of state budget expenditures in 2011 by cutting 10% from the budget ceiling of each ministry, after salaries and other routine expenditure.
2. The efficiency of the budget is effected by:
 - a. Limiting travel, except for official journeys considered important.
 - b. Limiting work meetings, seminars, and workshops held outside offices.
 - c. Limiting operational expenditure, except in the defence and civil order sectors.
3. Spare budgets resulting from the increased efficiency must be allocated for:
 - a. Accelerating the achievement of national development priorities, such as infrastructure.
 - b. New policies that have not been included in government planning.
 - c. Programme activities that are urgent.

Despite the presidential instruction, FITRA did not feel it had successfully advocated the budget. The President's instruction indeed showed a focusing of his attention

but more important issues occurred after the issuance of the instruction. FITRA had a much more challenging task in this phase, which was to monitor whether the President's order was actually executed by budget users.

The President's decision was a quite big step for FITRA, particularly in terms of making itself known to the public. The media and the public began to recognise FITRA. Its position as a budget activist grew stronger and became considerably more noticeable to budget policymakers. How could it have such high recognition? FITRA was the first NGO in Indonesia who dared to criticise the budget allocated to procure and take care of the President's facilities. Previously, no other public policy observers or NGOs were willing to do that, indicating that the area was a legitimate part of the President's privacy.

In early 2011, budget advocacy at FITRA had become more popular than ever. FITRA had been able to map the sources that could be used to help find budget documents, including journalists. A close relationship with the media had turned out to be mutually beneficial. Journalists provided budget documents and access to them, while the analysis was done by FITRA.

The budget advocacy dilemma via the media

FITRA's decision to use the mass media as an instrument of advocacy has not been without challenges. As one element of a democracy, the media is faced with two realities. On one hand, the mass media is often seen, and presents itself, as part of the civil society groups that are expected to be a voice for the people. On the other hand, it is also faced with the fact that the mass media is an industry that looks for profit, as once expressed by P. Bambang Wisudo. According to him, the media and journalists are closer to power than to the people. In contrast, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel in their book *The Elements of Journalism* (2001), suggest that the first loyalty of the media is to the citizens. Commitment to citizens can even be bigger than professional egoism. But Kovach further states that media companies' employees are not like those in other kinds of industries. They have the occasional social obligation that can be completely opposite to the interests of their employers.

Based on FITRA's experience, we can identify at least four dilemmas found in budget advocacy through mass media.

Dilemma 1: important versus newsworthy

In advocating budget reform, FITRA and the media often take different perspectives. Some budget issues that FITRA thinks need to be known by the public are sometimes viewed as not important by newsmakers. In this case, the mass media has its own news agenda, different from FITRA's budget advocacy one. So what is important for FITRA is not always newsworthy for the media.

An example is when FITRA advocated that the executive and legislative branches of the Government discuss the draft of the 2013 state budget together in September to November 2012. FITRA found it urgent to advocate for the draft as soon as possible after its analysis showed some substantial flaws. We believed that FITRA must engage the media in order to influence policymakers to put the draft under public scrutiny before it was eventually made effective in December. But the issue failed to garner the interest of the media. Instead, the media preferred stories about the battle of opinion concerning the stand-offs between the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and the National Police, which at that time was at the heart of people's discussion across the country.

In the eye of journalists, what is being anticipated by the public must be put on top priority. That is just how the media industry works. It is becoming more probably that current issues are chosen for coverage, rather than the issues being advocated by FITRA. The media's policy always prioritises topics already in the public's interest, especially popular media such as *The Jakarta Post*. Therefore, those times when there was 'no news' – and no hustle and bustle of politics – were often the 'perfect' time for FITRA to issue its studies because the chance to get media coverage was much bigger, since the media is required to continually write news, whatever happens.

Given such a deduction, FITRA found it pragmatic to 'package' a budget-related issue that it thought important to be addressed. This finding made FITRA try different approaches, particularly when certain budget issues came amid others that were already occupying most of the public's attention. One kind of approach, which most of the time turned out to be very difficult, was relating the current 'hot issue' to the budget. FITRA believes every issue concerning the government has a budget angle and so we try to use people's attention to certain much-discussed issues as the 'entrance' or 'hook' to put the budget forward for public scrutiny. But finding the right connections has been very tricky and challenging.

Each media outlet has its own agenda. That means its journalists have their own priority scale, especially for media that has limited space such as newspaper. FITRA must also understand that general newspapers like *The Jakarta Post* have a wider coverage area than a specific newspaper like business-focused *Bisnis Indonesia*. The Post is likely to be more interested in politics-related budget issues than *Bisnis*, while *Bisnis* has a much wider remit to cover certain budget issues that can be related to business. Taking this into account, FITRA can learn who to invite to a press conference based on the topic or which journalists it will approach to pursue their interests in covering the topic.

Dilemma 2: using the media versus being used by the media

Although not often, numerous times FITRA's name was used by the media as a 'funnel' of the voice of the people, not to mention the media's attempt to use FITRA to please its own agenda.

In these cases, FITRA did not issue a press release on a budget analysis but, regardless, a media outlet ran a story containing suggestions as if it was in accordance with FITRA's analysis even though the analysis was actually made by the journalists themselves. It sometimes used supporting statements by FITRA staff, which none of our FITRA members could recall providing. The statement was made as a direct quote from a FITRA member even though it had never been stated. FITRA sees that this phenomenon happened because it was only FITRA who had been consistent in criticising the budget. FITRA's constant moves to criticise budget policymakers were seen as a 'green light' for journalists to make up statements in our name, as long as they were criticising the government.

It has to be admitted that, since the fall of the New Order dictatorship regime in 1998, freedom of the press has continued to grow, almost euphorically. Now that no more permits are required to establish a media outlet, the number of people involved in the press has grown dramatically, unhampered. But this is not without negative effects. A lot of media groups continued to abuse press freedom to please their owners who have affiliations with certain political groups, for example. Today, many media groups tend to prioritise sensationalism over quality. Breaches of ethics occur when the media is involved in fierce competition. Making up statements is undoubtedly a violation of press ethics, regardless of the reasons behind it. But such a practice is indeed still common, not only because of journalists' tight deadlines, but also because many sources allow them to do so. Some figures may say, 'go ahead and make statements that will make me look decisive,' but this could lead to a bad habit among journalists.

One sample case was when a media outlet wanted to raise an issue about the alleged misappropriation of the budget in the education sector. One journalist phoned a FITRA researcher asking for a comment to address the issue. The journalist brought his own data, presented it to the researcher, and asked for FITRA's comment on the data. According to the journalist, the data, which depicted the irregularities surrounding state budget allocations in the education sector, had been obtained from a member of the House of Representatives. FITRA was stunned the next day. The story appeared in the media as if the data showing the irregularities surrounding the education budget were released by FITRA, and a lawmaker instead appeared as the party who commented on 'FITRA's' data.

Journalists are always posed with pressures by their editors to find 'big stories'. The battle between the media is fierce in the era of press freedom, which today has reached an unprecedented level. A tactic of pursuing sensationalism over everything is often used to win the battle, putting aside the press' code of ethics. Sometimes a big story is not always 'big' in the common sense, but a specific story angle is often sought by the editors, probably to please certain interests. In many cases, it is often fruitful to 'twist' a comment as a quick way to fulfill the editors' order. The media always likes sensationalist statements, rather than flat and normative ones. Journalists also often want to express their own opinion, discharging their own infuriation against the government, in a piece they write themselves. To make that happen, they exercise

so-called ‘mouth-borrowing’. In this practice, journalists ask lawmakers, analysts, or NGO activists to make a comment that is in line with the journalist’s opinion, to make it like a true ‘news’ piece, while it actually carries the media’s own agenda. Despite prolonged back and forth about whether this complies with the press’ code of ethics, such a practice is still common today.

Taking this into account, FITRA believes that providing a clear and comprehensive explanation on an issue should encourage understanding among journalists that a certain budget issue is truly important for the public, without positioning FITRA head to head with the government.

Responding to this, the media thinks that, first, what is important does not always look interesting. Second, even though the journalist eventually finds it important and (probably interesting), what about the editors who have the final say on whether a story can be published or not? Journalists are challenged to channel information from FITRA to their editors in the same way FITRA eventually manages to convince the journalists. In many cases, this failed to work, particularly given the complexity of budget-related issues. Most of the time, however, editors’ final decisions were made on the basis that budget-related issues were too complex for the readers to understand. How could journalists make their stories interesting and understandable to the readers while they themselves were struggling to convince their editors?

Dilemma 3: suggestions for improvement vs criticism and cynicism

In general, results of FITRA’s budget analyses are often perceived in a negative light. But the findings in the analysis are actually aimed at looking for a positive change in budget policy.

The material presented in FITRA’s press releases in general depict criticism saying that policies made by the government and the House of Representatives are wrong, wasteful, and not in line with the target set by the government itself. Through it, FITRA actually wants to put forward changes for a better budget management. However, the journalists who write stories based on FITRA’s studies often exclude our suggestions of improvement. The media only quotes the parts of the material in the releases that contain criticism.

This is understandable because, in the perspective of the media, matters that have some elements of criticism (or even scandals) have always managed to attract greater attention.

People tend not to be enthusiastic when it comes to complicated budgeting phases, presented alongside complicated technicalities, as they are seen as only being comprehensible for the government. Readers want to read something ‘punchy’.

FITRA, however, does not want to be labelled as a ‘constant critic’ or even a ‘specialist on attacking the government’. FITRA wants to be recognised as an NGO that plays a role for a better Indonesia by playing a positive game.

The media thinks that there must be some sort of ‘compromise’ if FITRA wants to use it as the medium to communicate its ideas. As the ‘bridge’, the media is the gatekeeper: FITRA needs to comply with its characteristics in order to be able to go over the bridge smoothly.

Dilemma 4: public interest versus private interest

All of FITRA’s studies are principally for the sake of the public interest. However, certain groups that tend to criticise the government often use FITRA’s budget analyses. As a result, many tend to make assumptions easily and falsely that FITRA has affiliation with the groups, or, even worse, that FITRA and the groups have colluded in a shared agenda to undermine the government and the President.

An opposing political party once ‘abused’ FITRA’s studies to ‘attack’ the government and the ruling political party. Ahead of the general elections in 2009, some contesting political parties uploaded FITRA budget analysis to their websites to undermine the image of the ruling party supporting the candidacy of incumbent President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. To make matters worse, some of the politicians who have media companies abused their outlets to continuously run stories on the analysis only to gain political benefits.

It is undeniable that many media companies in Indonesia are affiliated or even partly owned by political groups or figures. For such media groups, it is almost certain that the consideration of whether or not to publish FITRA’s analysis will be based on the analysis’ significance to the interests of the media’s politically-oriented owners.

Advocacy strategy: how to use the media as an effective instrument for communicating FITRA’s ideas?

Communicating budget-related ideas by using the media has still been FITRA’s choice until now. The media has the power required to empower and strengthen FITRA in influencing public policy, especially when it comes to the budget. Public policy advocacy requires great power and there is great power in public engagement. The mass media can accommodate public concern or serve as public representation amid an environment of public distrust of their official representatives at the House.

Although FITRA has felt that budget advocacy via the media is quite effective, this kind of approach has also found some dilemmas. Indirectly, the media has helped lift FITRA’s bargaining position before policymakers. The more popular an NGO is, the more respect it will get from the government.

In addition, budget advocacy through the media has also provided political education to the people. The budget, which used to be a taboo subject, now can be

widely discussed through the media. In this sense, FITRA has been carrying out its organisational duty to promote transparency of the budget because it should be subject to the knowledge of all people.

As an organisation that constantly uses the media as an instrument for advocacy, FITRA must sustainably maintain its impartiality and consistency. Otherwise, its budget analysis could instead become a boomerang that strikes back. Its bargaining power could also become very low. FITRA has made the commitment not to receive funds from the state budget, even though some ministries have several times come to FITRA's office to offer cooperation in carrying out programmes financed by the State. FITRA has also never received funds from controversial donors. All of this is done to keep its impartiality and maintain its dignity and integrity before the public and budget policymakers.

But FITRA believes there is still much room to improve its 'cooperation' with the media. There are at least two strategies that can be used. First, the media can be seen as part of its extended policy advocacy platform. Press releases and the results of any research must be presented to the media by playing their game: by considering if it is newsworthy. All advocacy activists need to understand this because material that isn't can hardly find any spots in the media. An important factor to achieve this strategy is that every advocacy activist must have political sense and should understand the current political context.

Second, maintain a good relationship with the media. The relationship between journalists and activists and researchers must not be limited to a press conference. In this sense, researchers and activists must be able to treat journalists in a way that means they feel like peers. Establishing good relations with journalist unions is also essential, as well as identifying individual journalists who have interests and concerns that are in line with FITRA's advocacy agenda. Researchers must also always be available to help journalists better understand budget-related issues. It is also necessary to supply journalists with interesting and quality materials and data to support their reporting.

Finding and using the right momentum can also be one of the more effective alternative uses of the media. Recently, for example, the media heavily highlighted a story about the death of a baby from a poor family due to the refusal of some hospitals to treat her. It was the right moment to advocate for sensible healthcare budgets.

Budget advocacy through mass media, however, does not need to rely heavily on current issues that are being discussed by the media. A quality analysis might still be able to attract media coverage even though it does not directly touch current issues. A good and valid analysis can even drive the media and be another hot issue discussed widely by the public. Only following the news that are currently under the media's spotlight can become a boomerang, because many media companies have their own (political) agenda.

Conclusions

Communicating ideas of change in public policy must undoubtedly use the public sphere. In this context, it is the mass media. But, getting media coverage always carries challenges and dilemmas. Not all budget-related issues can be considered to be news. Building personal relationships with journalists can help increase the media's awareness on the importance and urgency of budget advocacy.

Giving great attention to using the right terms in press releases and analysis is also important. This is not an easy challenge. Budget-related issues always carry sophisticated terminologies and complex calculations which can easily bore journalists. Organisations need to practice and make an effort to avoid using specific terms that are only understandable to a few people. If journalists fail to understand FITRA's idea, how can they transfer it to their readers?

Thus, popular language should be used to communicate ideas intended to reach a wider audience. FITRA always tries to find ways to translate its ideas to easy-to-understand arguments without compromising the essence.

Finding and using the 'right momentum', as mentioned above, can be also used in an effort to get the public interested in budget processes. Problematic and prolonged flaws within budget processes may never appear under the public spotlight because of their complexities. But a related incident, like a corruption case being investigated by law enforcement, can serve as the 'gateway'. FITRA can then bring in people to scrutinise the flawed budgeting processes that have led to misappropriation, making them understand of a topic they used to ignore because it was too 'complicated'. This way, more people will understand the whole budgeting processes. This means less room for culprits to misappropriate the budget.

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