

We need to know if vested interests are siphoning off funds that are needed for development and the elimination of poverty. In short, we need budget transparency.

#### Recommendations

In order to ensure the public can participate in shaping and holding governments accountable for the policies and programmes which will guarantee progress towards the MDGs, governments should:

- Ensure that information relating to the current and future aid spending is compiled and communicated between donor and recipient countries in line with commitments made under the Accra Agenda for Action, and that this information is made **available in a timely, comparable and accessible way to the public**. In particular, donor countries must notify recipient governments of disbursement dates for committed funds. Recipient governments must also ensure that the information they receive about international development aid is maintained within relevant Ministries to ensure that civil society can access data on development funding;
- Ensure that relevant public bodies **collect and make public the information necessary to define and oversee policies, budgets and practices to reduce maternal mortality**. Achievement of MDG5 is contingent upon targeting spending to better attend to the primary causes of maternal deaths. Too many governments do not systematically collect and maintain this kind of information.
- Ensure that central government bodies compile and publish budget information related to the environment, particularly **budget data on environmental protection activities and on all state subsidies and tax breaks** which promote consumption of fossil fuels.

For more information on the *Ask Your Government Initiative*, visit:  
[www.internationalbudget.org](http://www.internationalbudget.org)  
[www.access-info.org](http://www.access-info.org)  
[www.law-democracy.org](http://www.law-democracy.org)



## HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT Millennium Development Goals Spending?

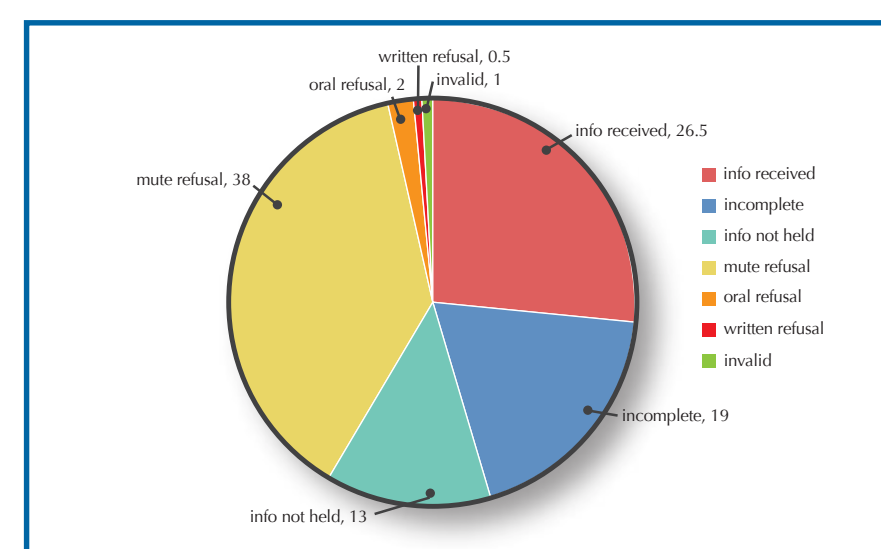
The first global testing of access to budget information in the areas of health, environment and development has found that governments provide woefully little data for the public to evaluate what is being done to take action against poverty.

Access Info Europe, the Centre for Law and Democracy, and the International Budget Partnership, together with 90 thematic and national partners around the world, found that too little information is available about spending on key interventions related to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

In early 2010, six questions were submitted to governments in 80 countries. Seven months and over 1,000 letters, visits and phone calls later, the main finding is that the information we asked for was provided less than half of the time.

The biggest problem faced by the requestors was administrative silence: a lack of response to information requests. Figure 1 below shows the overall outcomes for all 480 requests in the 80 countries.

Figure 1: Overall outcomes for 480 requests in 80 countries



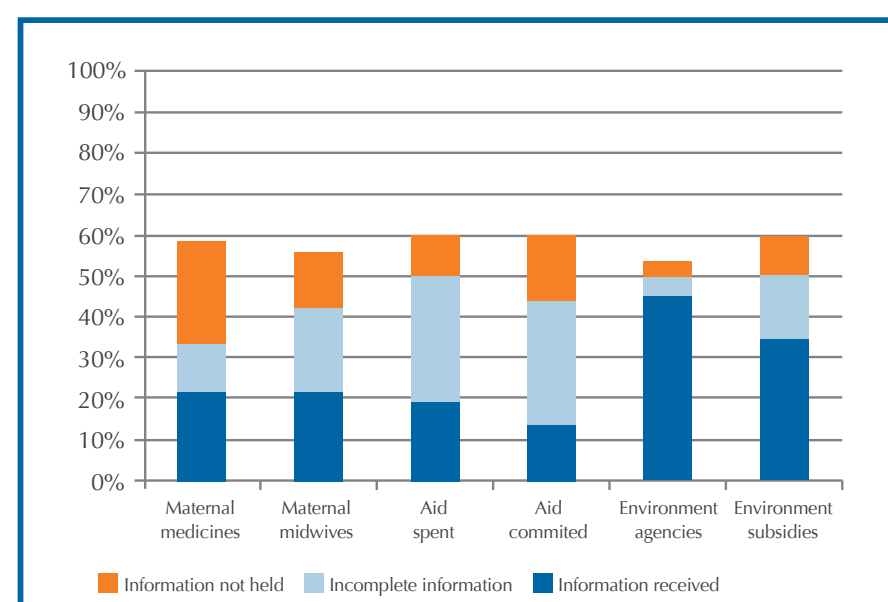
#### Of the 80 countries where we filed requests for information:

- Only one country, New Zealand, responded with substantive budget information to all the questions filed;
- One third of governments gave less than half the information asked for;
- Only half of the governments answered all the information requests, but not with all the required budget data;
- One in every seven governments gave us no information at all.

#### Results by Question

We asked six questions in three key areas – development, maternal health and the environment. Here are the results by question where an answer was received:

Figure 2: Results by Question – Information Received / Incomplete / Not Held



Questions about the environment and about the amount of aid funds already spent received at least some information in half of the cases. In contrast, the questions about future aid commitments and about spending on maternal health received information in less than half the cases and full information in less than a quarter of cases. The question about medicines to prevent death during childbirth was particularly poorly responded to, with nearly 70 percent of countries providing no information at all.

#### The Problem of Information Not Held

One significant issue identified by this global monitoring is the number of cases where public bodies told us that they did not have the information we were asking for.

Once again, the question on medicines for childbirth scored the worst, with 25 percent of all countries indicating the information was not held. The question on future aid commitments was the next worst, with 15 percent of countries responding in this way.

A common problem with the medicines question was that central government bodies do not hold this information because drugs are procured at a local or hospital level. This raises concerns about how central government oversees measures to prevent maternal mortality and ensures that they are being implemented. In decentralised systems where specific spending decisions are taken at a regional or local level, systems should be in place to ensure that information seekers are able to access the relevant information.

Regarding future aid commitments, we found that in many cases governments, particularly in recipient countries, did not hold complete information. Similarly, only three donor countries (Germany, New Zealand and Slovenia) were able to provide complete information about future aid commitments. In the majority of cases, both donor and recipient countries were not able to provide precise dates when those funds would be disbursed.

#### Conclusions

Overall, the results demonstrate several failings. They indicate both a lack of commitment to openness as a democratic and human rights value generally, as well as a lack of interest in budget openness more specifically. At least as importantly, they demonstrate that many national governments simply do not hold key information required to deliver the MDGs.

From a citizen perspective, without budget transparency, we cannot hold governments to account for their fulfilment of the MDG commitments. If citizens, civil society groups and the media do not know where government budgets are going, they cannot exert the kind of democratic oversight needed to ensure that the people-first approach of the MDGs is implemented.

We need to know more about how public development funding is used. We need to know where investments are lacking and where they are working.