

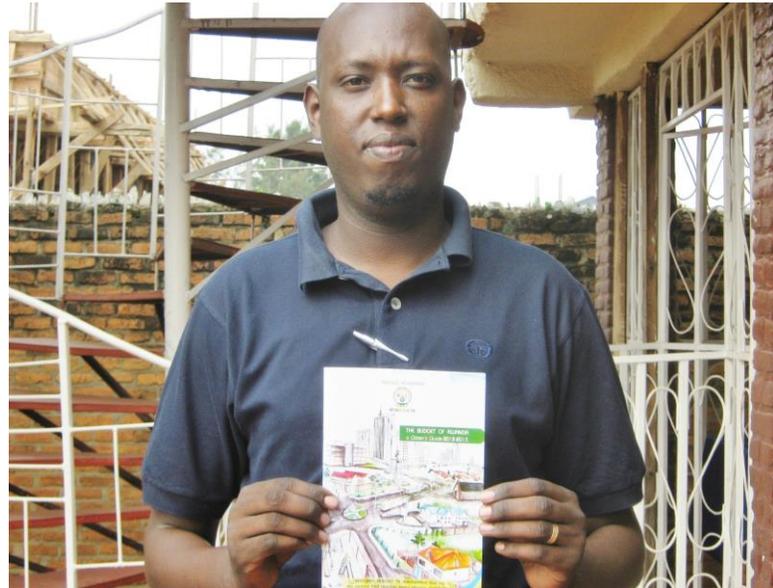
Transparency Expert: Alexis Nkurunziza

A researcher and human rights advocate is leveraging a tiny investment of US foreign aid to open up budgets and improve governance in Rwanda.

US foreign aid works best as a tool in the hands of the right local leaders—those trying to solve their own problems in their own nations and neighborhoods.

Until a few years ago, the national budget process in Rwanda was shrouded in secrecy. The budget was never made public. There were no hearings. People didn't know exactly how the nation's resources were being spent, enabling corruption. The details of the budget might still be hidden if it were not for the courage and conviction of one man—Alexis Nkurunziza.

Using USAID funding provided initially through a Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold Program, and working with CLADHO, an umbrella of human rights groups in Rwanda, Nkurunziza assisted the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning to develop [The Budget of Rwanda: a Citizens Guide 2012-2013](#). (Nkurunziza is pictured holding the guide.) The guide helps educate Rwandans about the purpose of the national budget and how they can get involved in developing and monitoring it at local levels.



POVERTY-FIGHTING FOREIGN AID IS <1% OF THE US FEDERAL BUDGET.

COMPARE THIS TO:



Americans spend more on caring for pets—\$45 billion annually—than the US government spends on foreign aid.



Americans spend as much on candy—\$30 billion annually—as the US government spends on foreign aid.

From Oxfam publication, "Foreign Aid 101."

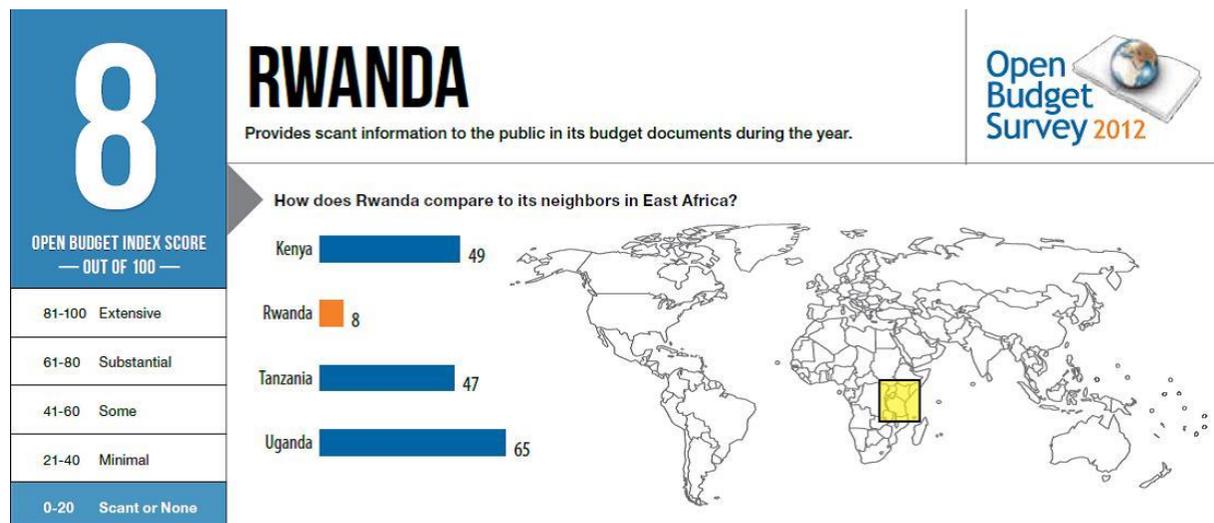
Nkurunziza knows how important this is because of his experience with CLADHO hosting forums with citizens to share their needs and priorities with local government. Nkurunziza reports that in one district recently, citizens gathered were very clear about what support they needed.

"They said, 'We have requested clean water for five years, but government has built a marketplace. We already have three marketplaces.'"

With support from the US, discrepancies between citizens' and the governments' priorities for public spending are no longer unchecked in Rwanda today.

But the journey wasn't easy.

Nkurunziza conducted the research to complete Rwanda's Open Budget Survey. Progress had been made between 2008 and 2010, but the score in 2012 indicated that the Government of Rwanda was shielding the budget and financial activities from public view.



International media covered his report, which in turn caught the attention of top government officials. Nkurunziza and his CLADHO colleagues and the Rwanda Ministry of Finance met several times about it. Despite some very difficult moments, Nkurunziza held fast to his principles about what is required for citizens to hold government answerable for its management of the public's money.

"It was a small price to pay for promoting the cause of good governance and transparency," he says.

His sacrifice eventually triggered the government reverse course and to release the budget. Nkurunziza turned a difficult interaction into an opportunity to liaise more closely with the government.

"The government recognized that they have challenges to overcome, and they have accepted to involve us," Nkurunziza explains.

By creating a citizen's guide to make budget less technical and more user-friendly, it reaches and can be understood by as large a segment of the public as possible, reducing the risk of corruption and enabling the Rwandan government to become more responsive to its citizens.

And that is why to Alexis Nkurunziza, the price is worthwhile.

Foreign Aid Fact or Fiction?

Myth: The US spends a significant proportion of the federal budget on foreign aid to poor countries.

Statistic: Foreign aid that's poverty-focused is less than 1 percent of the federal budget.

From Oxfam publication, "Foreign Aid 101"

In recent years, the US government launched policy reforms that make US foreign aid more accountable to you, US taxpayers, and local leaders like Alexis Nkurunziza.

Aid works best when it supports local actors to take action and change the circumstances which place them or their fellow citizens in poverty. Supporting effective aid now reduces the need for more aid later.

That's why Oxfam America is working to deepen the US government's commitment to making aid more effective. **Tell Congress: Don't cut aid. Keep investing directly in heroes like Alexis Nkurunziza.**

Read more stories at: www.oxfamamerica.org/aidworks/



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