Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by human beings. And overcoming poverty is not an act of charity. It is an act of justice."—Nelson Mandela, Nobel Peace prize 1993.

Project: Creating Awareness and Networks for Participatory Budgeting in South America.
Group members: Mario Villalba (University of Richmond ’10), Nicolás Raga (Skidmore College ’10), Shaun M. Dozier, (Duke ’08), Luciano H. Romero, (Duke ’11).
Requested Funding: $10,000.00

Participatory Budgeting:
The participatory budget (PB) was first established in Brazil in 1989. This initiative allowed individuals from the city of Porto Alegre to be active participants in deciding the budget of their community. By attending local meetings, people were (a) informed of the resources available in their community, (b) given a chance to present their needs (such as connection to treated water or sewage), and (c) given the opportunity to vote upon where and how would the community’s resources be allocated.

The participatory budget in Porto Alegre was translated into extremely positive results (which in 1998 encouraged the state-wide adoption of PB): by 1998 public spending on housing quadrupled, the number of municipal schools increased from 22 to 90 as the drop out rate of school students fell from 30 to 10 percent, the percentage of the population connected to sewages grew from 50 to 83 percent, the percentage of the population connected to treated water hit 99 percent, and Porto Alegre’s bus company was the first in Brazil having busses equipped for wheelchairs.1

The PB’s success in reducing poverty has direct consequences in the process of peace-making; poverty reduction is considered a pre-condition to peace. At the same, more awareness of the community’s resources encourages sustainable development. Furthermore, as Allegreti and Herzberg point out, participatory budgeting creates a place in which social tensions are resolved. This is done through communication and creative construction of solutions to the most pressing issues of a community, which contributes to the resolution of local conflicts, decrease in violence, and the promotion of peace in communities. Ultimately, the participatory budget improves civic participation and education, and creates a place in which often discriminated minorities, such as women and the poor, can be heard.

Today, a few small and large communities in Argentina, Chile, Dominican Republic, Peru, Paraguay Nicaragua and Uruguay (to name a few) are following Brazil’s examples.

Problem:
Unfortunately, the initiative of participatory budgeting has been poorly promoted. Although the number of communities that are using the PB has grown considerably in the last years, they still represent an extremely small percentage of the population. International Organizations such as the World Bank and UN Habitat have become fundamental in the research of the PB’s benefits, and in provision of resources and technical support to communities that have shown interest in the PB. However, there is virtually no literature that has comprehensively studied and compared the benefits of the PB in communities outside of Porto Alegre; only this year the World Bank has published a book that has amalgamated the existing knowledge of the PB in the world, yet, such text is highly scholarly and inaccessible for individuals without higher education. The promotion of the PB across the globe, and in poorer areas in particular, remains inexistent. Furthermore, the scarce resources of the PB communities prevent them from communicating with other PB municipalities that have more developed PB systems.

Solution:
Given this problem, we believe that it is fundamental to create awareness, particularly in poorer areas, of the participative budget initiative. This will be done by (a) the creation and appropriate distribution of a film documentary on the current initiatives of PB in three regions of Latin America, and (b) the creation of a blog that will work as: 1) means of communication among communities that have an active PB, and 2) a source for those who are interested in developing the PB in their own communities.

Communities:
Because of the complexity and costs of the Participatory Budgeting for Peace project, it has been divided in three geographical areas.2 All regions will conduct research to create a single film and blog that will encompass the three areas. The “La Plata Area”, presented by Duke University includes the communities Flores

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2 Mario Villalba (Paraguay), Nicolas Raga (Chile), Luciano Romero (Argentina), Shaun M. Dozier (United States). Students representing the project’s areas of impact.
and Parque Chacabuco in Buenos Aires province, and Municipality of Rosario in Santa Fe province in Argentina, and Zone 9 “Sindicato FUNSA” in Municipality of Montevideo, Uruguay. The “Andean Area”, presented by Skidmore College will study Villa El Salvador and Independencia in Peru, and La Pintana, Puerto Montt and Cerro Navia in Chile. The “Litoral Area”, to which this specific project concerns, includes Porto Alegre in Brazil and Villarica and Tobati in Paraguay. In order to reach more effectively to these communities we have contacted local NGOs, such as CIRD (Centro de Información y Recursos para el Desarrollo) in Paraguay that work directly with the mentioned communities. Each of these areas is a separate candidate for the grant but they are part of a single inter-college project intended to produce and edit one complete documentary.

Documentary:

The film documentary will portray the experiences of participatory budgeting in different communities across Latin America. It will also act as a comparison of how the PB has been adapted under different environments. In this way, the film will be a resource that will allow communities that are currently using the PB to improve their practices, and encourage communication among communities that are engaged in the PB.

With the purpose of making the documentary accessible to the widest possible audience, it will be done in both, English and Spanish. It will be distributed for free to the communities that are already engaged in PB activities, with the purpose of giving them a resource to promote the PB among their own groups. At the same time, giving the film to these communities will also give them a resource to promote the PB in their surrounding area. Also, the film documentary will be shown at Colleges and Universities in the United States, and sent to film festivals (see below). In this way, we will create widespread awareness of the PB projects. Furthermore, the film will be available in the blog that will be created to enhance the promotion of the PB.

In summary, the film documentary will (a) be a resource for communities with current PB programs to improve their practices and promote their initiative within and outside their community, (b) create awareness of the PB outside of Latin America.

Blog:

Whereas the film documentary aims to present the concept of PB to communities and motivate them to adopt the project, the blog aims to be a resource for individuals who are interested in developing the PB in their area. By providing contact information, the blog will be a link between communities and organizations – namely UN Habitat and Porto Alegre’s local government, both of which have guided PB efforts in the past – that can provide resources and technical support.

At the same time, the blog will be a resource in which people from different communities that are engaged in PB activities will be able to share their experiences. In summary, the blog will (a) allow communities with PB to communicate, and (b) to be a resource for those who are interested in developing the PB in their area. The blog will also be made public and promoted in the website of Inter-American Platform of Human Rights, Democracy and Development (Plataforma Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo) and the Development Awareness section of the Czech Human Rights Organization “People in Need”.

Expectations:

First, we expect to create a resource that will encourage social groups with PB projects to communicate, ultimately encouraging the improvement of participatory budgeting practices. Second, we aim to spread awareness of the PB in Latin America and the United States. The documentary will be presented in the following film festivals:

- CUNUFF: Columbia University National Undergraduate Film Festival, to be presented by January 2009. The money of the prize will be spent in more copies of the documentary.  
- One World: documentary film festival organized by Czech humanitarian organization “People In Need”, Czech Republic, to be presented by February 2009.  
- Tribeca Film Festival, New York City, to be presented by April 2009.

After the filming and finalization of the research, the documentary will be sent to the Norwegian Human Rights organization Raftostiftelsen (Theodor Rafto Human Rights organization), for the candidacy of one of the PB communities for the Rafto Prize 2009. Finally, we are expecting to connect communities without PB projects with organizations that can provide them with the necessary assistance to develop a PB program.

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3 See http://www.pidhdd.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=3
4 See www.ROZVOJOVKA.cz
5 The money of the prize will be spent in more copies and distribution of the documentary.
7 See www.rafto.no.