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98 out of 102 countries lack open budget systems, new report finds

Lack of transparency, public participation and oversight poses a threat to the implementation of pending development and climate accords

WASHINGTON, DC – Ninety-eight of 102 countries surveyed lack adequate systems for ensuring that public funds are used efficiently and effectively, according to the International Budget Partnership’s *Open Budget Survey 2015*. The report, the fifth of its kind, is the world’s only independent, comparative survey of budget transparency, citizen participation, and independent oversight institutions in the budgeting process. The 98 countries fall short on at least one of these pillars of accountability; 32 of these fall short on *all three*. The widespread lack of strong budget accountability systems poses a threat to the implementation of critical international agreements, such as the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals and the international agreement that is expected at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference.

“The public needs access to budget information and opportunities to participate throughout the budget process. Coupled with oversight by legislatures and audit institutions this contributes to a more accountable use of public money,” said **Warren Krafchik, Executive Director of the International Budget Partnership**. “A growing body of evidence indicates such budgetary checks and balances yield better outcomes for people, especially those who are poor or vulnerable.”

A mere 24 countries—less than one in four— score over 60 out of 100 on the Open Budget Index (OBI), the part of the survey that assesses transparency, and thus provide citizens with sufficient information to enable them to monitor the government’s use of public money. Alarming, the remaining 78 countries that provide insufficient budget information are home to 68% of the world’s population. Seventeen of these countries provide scant or no budget information to their citizens.

However, the study finds that budget transparency is generally improving—a finding consistent with previous reports. The average OBI score has increased to 45. Progress was particularly robust among some countries and regions that were previously not as transparent, including the Kyrgyz Republic (its OBI nearly tripled), Tunisia (its OBI effectively quadrupled), and Francophone West Africa.

Compounding the widespread lack of transparency that nonetheless remains is a similar lack of opportunities for public participation and oversight. With scores of 60 or less on this part of the survey, 95 of 102 countries fall short in providing opportunities for public participation. Further, the survey finds that legislative research and analytic capacity, as well as quality assurance systems in most national audit bodies, are lacking, severely compromising the ability of oversight institutions to be effective guardians of the public purse.



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Combining all three pillars, only four countries, Brazil, Norway, South Africa, and the United States, provide sufficient budget transparency, establish sufficient opportunities for public participation, *and* have strong legislatures and supreme audit institutions.

In contrast, the survey finds that 32 countries are insufficient on all three pillars of accountability. These include a number of countries that have consistently provided scant or no budget information at all: Algeria, Bolivia, Cambodia, China, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Iraq, Myanmar, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia

However, substantial progress can be achieved quickly. For instance, the survey finds that most of the least transparent countries actually produce significant budget information for their internal use; major gains could be made at little cost by just posting these documents on the government website.

The means and mechanisms to establish these budget accountability pillars are readily at hand. Ultimately, advancing transparency, participation, and oversight almost always comes down to a question of political will.

The right package of reforms varies from country to country, so individual reports with tailored recommendations have also been prepared. But certain recommendations are frequently applicable, including increasing the number and comprehensiveness of budget documents that are published; preserving gains in transparency by institutionalizing reforms in budget laws and regulations; developing mechanisms to obtain public input on what is in the budget and how it is implemented; and providing legislatures with better access to research and analytic capacity.

The report recognizes that, while it is country governments that must act to strengthen the three pillars of accountable budget systems, such progress will require engagement from a range of actors, including donors, civil society groups, investors, and international institutions.

“Budget accountability can no longer be pushed aside as a technical concern of bureaucrats,” Krafchik continues. “With the amount of funds likely to be mobilized through the new international development goals alone, and potentially through climate change agreements, the world has an unprecedented opportunity to address poverty, inequality, and other global challenges—but this will only happen if these resources are managed transparently and accountably.”

About the Open Budget Survey 2015

The new report examines the current state of budget transparency and how it has changed over time; the degree to which opportunities for public participation in the budget process are present; and the strength of the two formal oversight institutions, the legislature and the supreme audit institution. The report is based on the International Budget Partnership’s Open Budget Survey, the world’s only independent comparable measure of budget transparency, participation, and oversight. The Survey is implemented by independent budget experts based in each of the 102 countries surveyed and anonymously peer reviewed by another expert on the particular country’s



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budget. Governments in all survey countries are also invited to review and comment on the results, and many do so.

The 2015 Survey is the fifth round of this global assessment, which was first undertaken in 2006.

Pillars of Budget Accountability

The Survey consists of 140 factual questions that evaluate three pillars of budget accountability. Budget *transparency* is rated by the answers to 109 survey questions, which produce a score between 0 and 100 on the Open Budget Index (OBI). The second pillar is evaluated using 16 questions that rate opportunities for *public participation*. The final 15 questions of the Survey examine the strength of the *oversight* pillar comprised of the legislature and the supreme audit institution of each country, generating separate scores for each.

The [International Budget Partnership](#) collaborates with civil society organizations around the world to analyze, monitor, and influence government budget processes, institutions, and outcomes. IBP's aim is to make budget systems more transparent and accountable to the public in order to improve governance and combat poverty. The Ford Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the Flora and William Hewlett Foundation, and the U.K. Department for International Development (UKAid) provide funding for the Open Budget Initiative at the International Budget Partnership.

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***For the full report and other resources, including country-specific results, please visit:
www.openbudgetsurvey.org***