



INTERNATIONAL BUDGET PARTNERSHIP
Open Budgets. Transform Lives.

July 10, 2014

The International Budget Partnership Response to the Open Working Group's "Zero Draft rev 1" on Sustainable Development Goals

The International Budget Partnership (IBP) collaborates with civil society around the world to ensure that scarce public resources are used to reduce poverty and promote effective governance. Our experience, as well as a growing body of evidence, shows that when citizens have access to information and opportunities to participate in the policy and budget process they can help to improve service delivery and strengthen oversight, resulting in substantive improvements in poverty and development outcomes.

The IBP and its civil society partners from 60 countries congratulate the United Nations' Open Working Group (OWG) on the latest draft of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We endorse the recommended goals and targets in the revised zero draft that emphasize greater transparency, public participation (16.4), and accountability (16.9) in development efforts, in particular target 16.7 that seeks to "promote free and easy access to information, freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly."

We are, however, extremely concerned about the removal of the specific reference to access to information on public financial management, procurement, and national development plans from the list of enumerated targets in focus area 16. The previous version of the zero draft included the following specific target: "by 2020 improve public access to information and government data, *including on public finance management, public procurement and on the implementation of national development plans.*" Unfortunately, the italicized text no longer appears in the draft issued on 30 June 2014.

This memo sets out the basis of our concern and proposes two alternative solutions to address the issue.

What is at stake?

Defining the next generation of international development goals is an incredible opportunity to harness the energy and leverage the political will of governments, civil society, and other development actors to build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and address some of their shortcomings. To achieve the SDGs governments will need to raise and spend public funds in a more equitable and effective manner. To support this process, the public and other stakeholders – domestic and international – will need detailed and timely information on government plans, actual spending, and results. Without ensuring that this information is available at the start and during the implementation of

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the SDGs, it will be almost impossible to monitor progress and hold governments accountable for reaching their targets.

This is a major problem with the current MDGs. Many countries that signed the MDG declaration did not publish sufficient information on their MDG-related spending and outcomes. To this day we do not know how much these countries spent on which MDGs, and with what results. This lack of information compromised the ability of domestic and international stakeholders to monitor and hold governments to account for their MDG commitments, and undermined our capacity to learn about what strategies worked or did not work. If these practices continue, they will threaten the success of the next generation of development goals.

We urge you to consider this lesson in order to ensure that the SDG framework fully supports the potential for success. The OWG document proposes that a general target requiring an improvement in public access to information will be sufficient to ensure accountable governance. Free and easy access to information is a fundamental cornerstone of open government and is essential in creating an enabling environment for holding governments accountable. It does, however, require important institutional reforms that may take time to take root and produce tangible results. While such reforms are being pursued, citizens and other stakeholders still need to be able to monitor what their governments are doing to improve development outcomes. In other words, while access to information reforms create the conditions for citizens to be able to request and obtain information from their governments, governments need to be encouraged to proactively disclose information that is key to ensuring that the SDG enterprise and spirit live up to their promise.

What are the solutions?

In order to effectively monitor – and thereby improve – government performance on the SDGs, timely and detailed information on government plans, actual spending, and outcomes will be required from the very beginning of the process, above and beyond commitments to increase public access to information. We think that an international solution that builds on existing standards for the reporting of public finances can provide an effective way to ensure that the specific information required for monitoring and learning is available from the start of the process in 2015. There is broad agreement among international financial institutions, governments, donors, and civil society about what information governments should provide to enable accountability for development commitments. Much of this information is already collected by governments, though it is often not shared publicly. Moreover, with adequate technical support governments can learn to collect this information relatively quickly.

Building on these international standards, we offer two alternative options to the OWG to promote adequate transparency on public finances and development outcomes. The first is for the OWG to reinstate language on the access to information target from the previous zero draft. This will ensure that all governments that sign on to the SDGs also commit to providing access to information on public finance management and procurement that will enable both monitoring and learning. Further elaboration of the specific data required can be itemized in the indicators associated with this focus area.

The second option, which could potentially be even more effective, is to leave target 16.7 as it currently stands, but include specific cross-cutting reporting requirements against all the goals included in the post-2015 framework. This would require all governments to report publicly and regularly on spending, outputs, and results achieved against each SDG.

For example, if the goal to achieve universal primary education were to be confirmed, governments would then have to produce and publish detailed information on planned and actual spending devoted to the primary education subsector (e.g., teacher salaries, teacher training, school materials, infrastructure for primary education, and so on), on activities and outputs (e.g., teachers recruited and trained, delivery of school material, primary schools built, and so on), and on results achieved (e.g., enrollment levels, test results, literacy levels, and so on).

Of course, not all governments have the same capacity to collect and publish this kind of data. Such a target would be designed to ensure that all governments provide at least the basic information required to measure inputs and outcomes. Governments with greater capacity could be encouraged to provide data that surpasses this minimum threshold. In order to minimize additional reporting burden on countries, the above data could be provided as part of the government's ongoing policy and budget cycle.

Ideally, and where possible, these reporting mechanisms should include resources obtained through development assistance. In any case, donor agencies and other development actors should publish such information separately and provide it to recipient governments in formats that are compatible with country systems.

We hope that you will recognize the importance of the issues at stake, both for country-level accountability and for international monitoring and learning efforts. We thank you for your consideration and urge you to contact us if we can answer any additional questions.

Sincerely,

International Budget Partnership

Organizations and Individuals Calling for the Inclusion of a Target on Transparency in Public Finance Management and Procurement in Sustainable Development Goals

Afghanistan: Integrity Watch Afghanistan
Albania: Forumi Shqiptar Social Ekonomik, University of Tirana
Albania: Transparency International Anti-corruption Center NGO
Algeria: Zine Barka, Association Nationale de Finances Publiques
Azerbaijan: Public Finance Monitoring Center
Benin: Social Watch
Botswana: Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis
Brazil: Instituto de Estudos Sócioeconômicos
Bulgaria: Industry Watch Group
Burkina Faso: Centre Pour La Gouvernance Démocratique
Cambodia: The NGO Forum on Cambodia
Cameroon: Budget Information Centre
Colombia: Grupo de Investigación de Ciudadanía y Finanzas Publicas
Côte d'Ivoire: Social Justice
Dominican Republic: Fundación Solidaridad
Ecuador: Grupo FARO
Egypt: Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights
Equatorial Guinea: Sensacion Joven del Futuro

France: Association pour la Fondation Internationale de Finances
Ghana: SEND-Ghana
Guatemala: El Centro Internacional para Investigaciones en Derechos Humanos
Honduras: Federación de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales Para el Desarrollo de Honduras
Hungary: Fiscal Responsibility Institute
India: National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights
India: Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability
Indonesia: Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency (FITRA)
Iraq: Iraq Institute for Economic Reform
Italy: Sbilanciamoci
Kazakhstan: Sange Research Center
Liberia: Actions for Genuine Democratic Alternatives
Macedonia: Center for Economic Analyses
Malawi: Malawi Economic Justice Network
Malaysia: Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs
Mexico: Fundar, Centro de Analisis e Investigacion, A.C.
Myanmar: Spectrum
Namibia: Institute for Public Policy Research
New Zealand: Jonathan Dunn
Nepal: Freedom Forum
Nicaragua: Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Públicas
Niger: Alternative Espaces Citoyens
Nigeria: Civil Resource Development and Documentation Centre
Pakistan: Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation
Palestine: Transparency Palestine
Papua New Guinea: Institute of National Affairs
Peru: CAD Ciudadanos al Día
Philippines: Philippines Center for Investigative Journalism
Poland: Pawel Bialynicki Birula, University of Krakow
Portugal: Institute of Public Policy Thomas Jefferson – Correia da Serra
Russia: Strategy Center, St. Petersburg
Sao Tome e Principe: Webeto.org
Senegal: Groupe d'Etude, de Recherche et d'Action pour le Developpement
Sierra Leone: Budget Advocacy Network
Slovakia: Radovan Kavicky, MESA 10
South Africa: Public Service Accountability Monitor
South Korea: Korea Institute of Public Finance
South Korea: Keakook Song, Public Audit Research
Sri Lanka: Verité Research
Sweden: Accountability and Transparency for Human Rights
Tajikistan: Open Society Institute—Assistance Foundation in Tajikistan
Tanzania: HakiElimu
Tanzania: Policy Forum
Trinidad and Tobago: University of West Indies
Tunisia: Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail
United Kingdom: Joachim Wehner, London School of Economics
Venezuela: Transparencia Venezuela
Vietnam: Center for Development and Integration

