Mentoring Governments Program - Specific activities in the pilot countries

Dominican Republic

Activities.

Fiscal Transparency Portal. The Ministry of Finance launched in 2011, a Fiscal Transparency Portal aimed at making key budget information more accessible and useful for citizens. MGP mentored the Ministry of Finance in designing the portal and in organizing a consultation process with potential users in order to improve contents, formats and accessibility. After this consultation, important changes were made to the portal and now it shows information on the legal framework of the budget process, expenditure, revenue, debt, investment projects and it included a glossary of terms.

Citizen’s Budget.

Enacted Budget. During the first part of our work in the country, as part of our collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, a first draft of the Citizen’s Budget for year 2011 was elaborated and submitted to the contact in the Ministry of Finance. However, the document was not published.

Audit Report. During the second stage of our work in the country, in collaboration with the Cámara de Cuentas (SAI), a draft of a citizen version of the Audit Report for year 2010 was elaborated and submitted to the public servants of the Cámara de Cuentas. This effort constitutes an important step, because we have no evidence that a citizen’s budget version of this kind of report has been published yet.

Training. As part of our collaboration with the Cámara de Cuentas, a Social Audit workshop was conducted. The workshop aimed to train public servants, members of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and members of the media on different issues regarding social audits. The workshop, held at the Chamber of Accounts (Cámara de Cuentas) in Santo Domingo, was organized by the MPG, the USAID’s Project of Transparency in Public Administration and the staff of the President of the Chamber of Accounts. The workshop was inaugurated by Licelott Marte de Barrios, President of the Chamber of Accounts, three other members of the plenum: Pablo del Rosario, Alfredo Cruz Polanco and Pedro Ortiz, Robert Rhodes, General Development Officer of USAID, Leonel Díaz, Officer of Control and Audit of USAID, Gustavo Montalvo and Juan Pablo Guerrero from IBP.

The objectives of the workshop were to help participants in understanding the main needs and justifications for social audits, provide elements to assess the utility of social audits and to share international best practices in the implementation of social audits. In order to fulfill these objectives, the MGP invited a group of experts on social audits who shared their experiences and helped in facilitating the sessions. The group of participants was very diverse. Half of them came from different areas within the Chamber of Accounts: Budget, Budget Analysis, Planning, Social Control; the other half came from CSOs: Acción Comunitaria para el Progreso (ACOPRO), Fundación Solidaridad, and the media (Canal 19). During the two days of the workshop an average of 35 participants attended the sessions.

The workshop was extremely successful; it attracted the attention and support of the five
members of the plenum of the Chamber of Accounts, members of CSOs and of the media. This level of attention is explained because the President of the Chamber of Accounts is very interested and directly involved in improving transparency in the country by collaborating with the MGP, in general and in conducting social audits, in particular. Another important factor of success was that the workshop was a joint project among the IBP, the Chamber of Accounts and USAID’s Project of Transparency in Public Administration.

For the MGP, the workshop was useful because it was the first workshop that was facilitated by experts (previous workshops were conducted only by IBP staff), it tested and completed a first set of training contents and materials on social audits. The complete set of materials includes: power point presentations, working groups exercises and materials, list of references and other supporting documents, evaluation forms and attendance certificates. Finally, the workshop was important because it settled the basis for designing a proposal for the implementation of a Social Audit Pilot project with the Chamber of Accounts.

Social audits. The most important expected outcome of the Workshop was to settle the basis for launching a pilot project to conduct a social audit to a social program that involved the Chamber of Accounts, members of CSOs and other relevant stakeholders. As a follow-up, a visit was made in November 2011 to explore possible collaboration with CSOs partners and the Supreme Audit Institution (Cámara de Cuentas) to conduct a social audit pilot project during year 2012. A proposal for the design and implementation of the social audit has been submitted to our contact in governments and to our partners in the country.

Egypt and Tunisia
The work in Egypt and Tunisia, in close collaboration with the Training Program team it is also an innovative initiative for IBP since it aims at the creation of a national multi-stakeholder platform for access to information and budget transparency. This network integrates the high level officials of the MoF and members of CSOs as key elements, but also the initiative seeks to work closely with academics and journalist as a way to help in building human capacity to understand the importance of budget transparency and access to information as a key component in the institutionalization of a democratic regime in the region.

Activities

Training. A two-day workshop on budget transparency and OBI methodology was conducted in Egypt in November 2011 with public servants of the Ministry of Finance. The workshop aimed at understanding OBI methodology and reviewing the results of Egypt in the 2010 OBI. The workshop was also important because the MGP completed a first set of training materials that incorporate concrete examples of best practices in the publication of the eight key budget documents.

El Salvador
Activities.

Secondary Access to Information Regulation. Although the Law of Access to Public Information is good for exercising the right of access to information, Article 66 states that petitioner shall be required to file an identity document to make an application. International experience shows that this constitutes a major obstacle for people to have confidence in their government to request information. Thus, in order to overcome this flaw we worked in a proposal to create a secondary regulation that helps petitioners to lodge information requests by minimizing the administrative burden and transaction costs. This included a proposal on contents and formats of mandatory information that is accessible and useful for the users of access to information. The working group for this task included members of CSOs and representatives of the World Bank.

Training. Conducted a training workshop for public servants in budget transparency and participation, OBI methodology and OBS results for 2010.

Ghana

Activities

Training. MGP staff has participated as facilitators on two training courses for members of CSOs that are part of the Ghana Aid Effectiveness Forum (GAEF). These training have been organized by the PI Program Officer and had the collaboration of OBI and training teams as well. The first course was intended as a general introduction of the Ghanaian budget and the IBP tools for budget analysis. This participation was useful for the Mentoring Governments Program not only as an activity of collaboration with the other programs, but also because it established a basic setting of analysis for the Ghanaian budget and it provided training materials for the coming up activities with the Members of the Parliament. The second course was a follow-up aimed at enhancing the knowledge of the first training and to strengthen participants’ capacities to present their budget analysis findings based on the document that the Forum presented, “What is our purse really funding?”.

Budget Analysis Handbook. A first draft of a Handbook on budget analysis was concluded in December 2011. The Handbook aims at providing a useful guide for Members of the Parliament to read, understand and analyze the budget in Ghana and it is intended to be updated every year and therefore serve as a guide for future assemblies of MPs and their staff. The Handbook briefly explains the budget process in Ghana and the role of Parliament during the budget process; it provides a basic introduction to the budget and its main figures for year 2012. The Handbook also identifies, from a comparative law perspective, the challenges and opportunities to facilitate the right of access to information in Ghana, with special emphasis on budget information and, finally, it identifies best international practices on the findings and challenges in the conduction of budget analysis.

Guatemala

Activities

Citizen’s Budget. Contents and formats of the Citizen’s Budget were agreed among MGP, CIIDH and the Ministry of Finance. During a third visit, in September 2010, a meeting with
experts on budget transparency, members of different civil society organizations, the media, and donors that collaborate with the Ministry of Finance took place in order to present and discuss the basic outline of the Citizen’s Budget. These actors welcomed the document and provided useful comments to improve the information, language and the format of the CB. Based on these discussions, a first draft of the first Guatemalan Citizen’s Budget was elaborated and submitted to the Ministry of Finance and the CIIDH for their comments and review. The final version of the Citizen’s Budget was published in April 2011 and had the support of GTZ that provided money for printing the document and distributed it into the most important offices. An important feature of the final document was that it included cartoons that were previously used by the Colom’s government in other pamphlets and brochures to introduce and provide information to citizens of the most important social programs. The follow-up steps for the Ministry of Finance were to translate the Citizen’s Budget into Maya to get to indigenous audiences. However, the publication did not occur for the year 2011 and the new Citizen’s Budget for year 2012 has not been published yet.

Honduras Activities.

Citizen’s Budget. After the first visit, the MGP team prepared a first draft of the Citizen’s Budget that was sent to public servants of the Ministries of the Presidency and Finance for comments. Based on this draft, the Ministry of Finance elaborated two versions of the Citizen’s Budget (a word document and a power point presentation) that were published in the website of the Ministry of Finance. However, the document did not include a consultation with the main users of the document. Thus, during the third visit, a two-day consultation workshop was conducted for elaborating the Citizen’s Budget for year 2012. The objectives of the workshop were to show participants the main objectives of a CB and best practices from an international perspective; to present the Citizen's Budget 2011 that will be the model to elaborate the 2012 version and to receive feedback on the contents and formats for the 2012 CB. The workshop was organized in three different sessions held with different audiences: Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and donors; academia and consultants and; the media (radio, TV and newspapers). The workshop attracted the attention and support of important actors on the national arena and started dialogue among potential users of the document and the government.

For the MGP, the workshop was useful because it helped in systematizing a methodology in the elaboration of Citizen’s Budget. The Citizen’s Budget for year 2012 was published on the website of the Ministry of Finance in December 2011.

Training. In July 2011, The Mentoring Governments Program team traveled to Tegucigalpa for the Budget Transparency Workshop that aimed to train public servants on different issues regarding budget transparency. The workshop on Budget Transparency was organized by the MPG and the staff of the Vice ministry of the Presidency with the collaboration of the University of Chicago National Opinion Research Center (NORC). The workshop was inaugurated by José Zacapa, General Secretary of the Ministry of the Presidency and was closed by William Chong Wong, the Ministry of Finance.
The objectives of the workshop were to help public servants in understanding the importance of budget transparency, access to information and public participation from an international perspective; understanding OBI methodology and reviewing the results of Honduras in the 2010 OBI; assessing the contents and main features of a Citizens Budget and explaining the methodology of the PEFA Assessment (this sessions were in charged of the NORC working work team that will be conducting the assessment during the first weeks of July).

The workshop was extremely successful; it attracted the attention of high-level public servants and of the media. For the MGP, the workshop was useful because it tested and completed a first set of training contents and materials for public servants. The complete set of materials includes: power point presentations, facilitator’s manual, working groups exercises and materials, list of references and other supporting documents, evaluation forms and attendance certificates.

Mali

Activities.

Citizen’s Budget. The contents of the citizen’s budget were discussed and agreed among public servants of the Ministry of Finance, MGP and IBP’s partner. After this basic agreement, a draft of the first citizen’s budget was elaborated by the MGP staff and presented to relevant users of the document. During this consultation, participants provided comments on the contents and formats of the Citizen’s Budget. The document was presented in a press conference to the media, donors, governmental actors and members of CSOs including all IBP partners: GREAT Mali, Coalition des Alternatives Africaines Dette et Développement and the Groupe de Suivi Budgétaire, in February 2011. The document was also presented to the civil society in a very poor community near to Bamako. During this last presentation, it became clear that the document was still too technical and too long to get to these communities. Thus, in order to make budget information more available to a broader audience, a brochure was designed and elaborated and it was to be translated into 10 local languages. The brochure contained basic information on revenue, expenditure and debt for year 2011. However, the brochure was not published. During this meeting another important idea was discussed: to produce short clips (3 – 5 minutes) for radio and TV with an oral version of the citizen’s budget in indigenous languages, with a very clear, perhaps illustrated explanation about how the people’s money is used. The Ministry of Finance in Mali has sustained the publication of the Citizen’s Budget and has elaborated a first draft for year 2012; the draft of the brochure of the Citizen’s Budget for year 2012 is ready. The two documents should be published in the first two months of year 2012.

Training. In collaboration with PI, a two-day training on Citizen’s Budget for members of civil society organizations was conducted. This workshop was directed at civil society organizations in Mali who are beginning to develop applied budget work and who would be potential users of the recently published citizen’s budget. This includes PI partner CAD-Mali, Groupe de Suivi Budgetaire, OBI partner GREAT and Water Aid’s partner organizations.
Civil society budget work in Mali is recent and very incipient. Civil society organizations doing some sort of budget work have very weak capacities, and they are not necessarily collaborating with each other around common budget advocacy objectives. The recent publication of the citizen's budget in Mali, which is one of the countries with the lowest OBI scores, implies a step forward in terms of budget transparency at the same time that it has opened an unprecedented window of opportunity for these organizations to access budget information, to engage with key budget decision makers in improving this first version of the citizens budget and pushing for more information, and to find common ground. Through its three core initiatives operating in Mali, IBP can play a very significant role in bringing these organizations together and facilitating the interaction between governmental and non-governmental actors, in a productive dialogue that could favor the supply of budget information that reflect the information needs of civil society. By the same token, this could provide IBP and its government partner with feedback on how to improve the citizen’s budget to make it more relevant to civil society’s information needs and budget agendas.

Zambia

Activities

Citizen’s Budget. The contents of the citizen’s budget were discussed and agreed among public servants of the Ministry of Finance and National Planning, MGP and IBP’s partner. After the first visit to Zambia, the MGP staff elaborated a first draft of a citizen’s budget. During the second visit to the country, the MGP staff presented the draft to public servants of the Ministry of Finance and National Planning and then a consultation meeting was conducted with relevant users of the document, including CSOs and members of the donor community. During this consultation, participants provided comments on the contents and formats of the Citizen’s Budget, mainly to incorporate information on allocation to provinces, explain how macroeconomic figures affect people’s everyday life and use simple language. A second draft was elaborated and submitted to the MoFNP. The final version will be published in April 2012. A one-page brochure will also be elaborated and translated in various local languages.

Training and Technical Assistance. In collaboration with PI, a three-day training on access to information was conducted. The workshop aimed at enhancing participants’ awareness of the importance of access to information (ATT) for ensuring transparency, accountability and public participation with specific reference to budget transparency and advocacy in Zambia. The workshop was structure in three parts: basic analytical tools for discussing contents of the Freedom of Information Bill of 2007; basic strategies for forming a coalition that allow Civil Society to have a leading role during the discussion and approval of the bill next July; Rhoda K. Mpembamoto from the MOFNP gave a presentation on the budget cycle in Zambia and the budget reports that are available to the public.

The workshop was attended by 30 members of the following CSOs: TI Zambia, Zambia Civic Education Association, Zambia Media Women Association, JCTR and Caritas. In general, participants showed interest in the workshop and were very participative. During the last day, they worked in drafting agenda and next steps for the coalition. After the workshop, IBP has been providing technical assistance and follow-up to participants in order to help them on the coalition’s advocacy campaign for ATI.