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**IBP Welcomes New Staff Member**

IBP is happy to welcome its newest staff member Ryan Flynn! Ryan joins the communications team as Writer/Editor and is responsible for writing editorial content, editing a range of material, and managing IBP publications.

Prior to joining IBP, Ryan worked as a communications officer for the Overseas Development Institute in London, where he focused on bringing the institute’s research on aid and public finance to a wider audience. Ryan has worked in communications for a range of international organizations in Australia, Cambodia, and the U.K.

**IBP 2013 Annual Report**

Our 2013 Annual Report, “Mind the Gap: Budgets and Service Delivery,” is now available! Read through the report for our reflections on budget work in 2013 and beyond, IBP publications, workshops, and presentations, as well as a collection of essays on opening budgets and transforming lives. Be sure to read three of our essays on what we’ve learned about opening budgets in this issue!

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Partner News

**Pricing Promises in the 2014 Hungarian Elections**, by Balázs Romhányi, director, Fiscal Responsibility Institute Budapest

Since Hungary moved away from its communist system in 1990, most aspiring political parties believe that the only way to win elections and gain power is to promise a “better world” — unfortunately, these promises can be far beyond the country’s current fiscal capacity. Additionally, if the parties are not transparent about the budget consequences of the different promises, the public is unlikely to demand such information. Politicians can find themselves in a difficult situation — if they do not keep their fiscally irresponsible promises they will face political problems, but if they do keep them, they must deal with the resulting fiscal problems.

The Fiscal Responsibility Institute Budapest (FRIB), a Hungarian civil society organization (CSO) that works to make the impacts of budgetary policies easier to grasp, wanted to help both citizens and political parties better understand the fiscal consequences of various election promises. Using the Dutch system in which the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) quantifies the fiscal impact of campaign promises as a template, FRIB launched a nonpartisan project to do similar analyses and use the findings to educate voters with financial support from the Open Society Foundations. FRIB found the methods used in CPB’s assessments to be helpful as they provided a consistent and accepted form of pricing the “shady” promises that were typical in the programs analyzed.

One of the main difficulties encountered in the project was choosing which campaign promises to analyze. The official programs of the parties chosen included about 500 promises, out of which 250 were deemed specific enough for a fiscal impact assessment. The types of initiatives promised in the elections ranged from building a new hydroelectric power plant to ending deep poverty among children to cutting social security contributions to increasing teachers’ salaries. Special supplementary rules were established for analyzing cases where a promise was clear in terms of content but did not specify the timing and/or the size of the measure. Unless otherwise stated in the program or communicated by the party in some way (for instance, before publication of the FRIB analysis preliminary findings were sent to the parties for comments, clarifications, and corrections) it was assumed that the measures would be implemented in 2015 and that the size of a measure to increase or decrease something was 20 percent. Wherever it was appropriate, static effects (i.e., the direct impact of the proposal on revenues or expenditures) as well as behavioral effects (e.g., if the wage tax is cut people might work more and this would partly compensate the revenue loss from the cut) were calculated. Also, at the party level (rather than examining each individual promise), the “global” effect of each proposal on macroeconomic variables, such as gross domestic product, inflation, employment, etc., and the subsequent fiscal effects stemming from these macro changes were calculated.
To also promote greater openness in general, Transparency International Hungary was invited to supplement the project with assessments of the party programs in terms of institutional guaranties of transparency, such as regulatory changes to increase the freedom of information or strengthening institutions to fight corruption. In late January 2014 the project was launched with the publication of a six chapter review of the state of transparency in Hungary. It covered freedom of information, party financing, fiscal transparency, anticorruption programs, public procurement, and political decision making. This part of the project was generously supported by the Dutch government. The fiscal impact assessment of quantifiable policy promises and the qualitative assessment of what the parties promised in terms of institutional guaranties of transparency were published in late March 2014, 10 days before the elections. The results were promoted in a press conference and on FRIB’s website and Facebook and YouTube pages.

We will see at the next elections whether the project has real world effects. Our best hopes are that citizens will demand, and parties will provide, some proof of the fiscal viability of campaign promises.

For more information, contact Balázs Romhányi at balazs.romhanyi@kfib.hu.

**Improving How the Press in Egypt Reports Economic and Financial News, by Ryan Flynn, International Budget Partnership**

Egypt-based media support network and IBP partner Al Sawt Al Hurr (ASAH) recently completed a project to train journalists in economic and budget reporting. IBP funded the project and provided technical assistance.

The project, which kicked off in early 2013, is having a strong impact on how economic and financial news is reported in Egypt. According to ASAH it has “virtually wiped out the standard practice” among participating media houses of simply reprinting press releases or relying on wire services for economic news. ASAH has also observed marked improvements in the accessibility of budget stories and a widening of subjects and formats used to report budget news.

The project was also directly responsible for stimulating coverage, generating more than 200 individual articles in 33 media outlets.

**What did they do?**

ASAH did their homework before launching the project, conducting in-depth research into economic and financial reporting in Egypt. They found that, despite a large public appetite for economic news, few stories made it to the front pages and coverage was often “superficial” in nature.

ASAH began by inviting heads of economic news sections of media houses to nominate journalists to participate. With the help of IBP, a comprehensive set of course materials was developed on subjects like how to find stories in the national budget. IBP also conducted a number of capacity building workshops with trainers to deepen their knowledge of budget analysis and develop exercises to use during the training. Thirty-two journalists from 30 different media houses were selected for initial training.

The first phase of training consisted of a series of workshops: an introduction to economic reporting with the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate; an introduction to budget analysis; and an advanced course in budget analysis.

A second phase saw more targeted training that included: a writing competition, which coincided with national budget preparations and parliamentary discussions; and a series of monthly meetings with civil society organizations.
What worked?

A number of lessons emerged from the training:

1. The pairing of trainers with experience in budget analysis and those with an understanding of journalism was essential. This allowed trainees to not only be taught about the budget but also how to find interesting and topical stories from budget information.
2. An emphasis on practical written exercises worked well, both as a learning aid and to stimulate individual news stories.
3. Coaching and individual support proved instrumental in improving the quality of reporting. The quality and volume of published pieces initially fell short of expectations. But after trainees were given individual feedback based on their work, marked improvements were observed.
4. Forging connections between journalists and CSOs helped to ensure the training was relevant and remained rooted in issues of real concern. This also helped forge relationships — when a news story is breaking, the journalists now know whom to contact for comment.
5. Involving the heads of economic news from the outset, and keeping them engaged, paid off. This ensured trainee-journalists were provided with the necessary resources and support to pursue budget stories.

ASAH, with continued support from IBP, is planning to deliver an advanced course in investigative journalism later this year. IBP is now planning to distill the lessons learned from ASAH’s training — along with earlier work in Tunisia and Kenya — into a comprehensive guide on training the media in budget reporting.

From the Annual Report: What Have We Learned About Opening Budgets?

How Can Donors Best Complement Domestic Civil Society in Promoting Budget Transparency and Accountability?

Many of the countries where IBP works share a number of challenges. Their governments provide citizens with very limited information on what they do, including how they raise and spend public resources. While often formally democratic, the governments provide little space for debate and contestation, and few spaces for citizens to actively participate in policymaking and monitoring. Civil society organizations often lack sufficient capacity and resources to pressure governments effectively or to mobilize the public to demand greater transparency and accountability. And, government accountability is further weakened by the fact that a good share of public spending is financed not through the taxes people pay, but through foreign aid.

In such countries, donors and international agencies providing financial and technical assistance to the government could play an important role in increasing transparency and strengthening domestic accountability and the efforts of CSOs. Yet, donor efforts at promoting reforms in developing countries have a dubious track record. Past use of conditionality (i.e., tying aid to specific reforms) has been criticized for being negotiated behind closed doors, distorting domestic policy processes, and undermining domestic ownership by imposing “one-size-fits-all” models drawn from foreign experience. While in many cases donors have been able to elicit changes in government policies, their interventions have not always achieved the expected impact, and they often have failed to support the institutions or provide the incentives necessary to sustain reforms. It is very important, therefore, to reflect on how donors can use different tools — such as benchmarks and incentives — in ways that promote domestic dialogue and accountability processes around public finance management, and that maximize the chances for positive and sustainable impacts.
For example, donors can commit to channeling more of their aid directly into the government budget in countries that are more transparent, or demand that specific transparency benchmarks are met before aid funds are disbursed. Donors also can provide technical assistance and funding to support the introduction of comprehensive information systems that allow governments to produce accurate and timely budget information, or the development of information disclosure systems that help disseminate fiscal and service delivery information to the public.

Some of these initiatives are already becoming more common. At the international level, donor agencies have started emphasizing the need for developing countries to take steps to improve transparency and public access to information in government matters. For example, the World Bank, the European Commission, and the U.K.’s Department for International Development have all included some sort of budget transparency-related assessment or benchmark in their budget support guidelines and procedures — often following discussions with IBP. At the country level, too, donors have started promoting transparency, as documented in recent IBP case studies. More recently, donors have supported governments in implementing budget transparency innovations. In all these cases, though to varying degrees, local civil society groups have been part of the dialogue and have benefitted from improvements in budget transparency, ensuring that domestic demand for sustaining any reforms exists.

There is a clear need to further promote and institutionalize some of these encouraging new approaches. Based on our experience in working with both donors and civil society groups across the world (and in collaboration with the ONE Campaign) we have put forward some basic principles for donors interested in promoting a more constructive — and potentially more effective — approach to improving budget transparency and accountability in countries receiving aid. Such an approach also could allow donors to become useful allies to civil society actors in developing countries in the struggle to get governments to open up their books. The principles are:

1) budget transparency benchmarks and incentives should be founded on country-based dialogue, developed and monitored in a transparent manner, and adapted to country context;
2) budget transparency benchmarks and incentives should include both minimum standards and a graduated approach that can promote improvements;
3) budget transparency benchmarks should be linked to positive incentives, such as the provision of an increasing share of aid through government systems, or of targeted technical assistance; and
4) the use of budget transparency benchmarks should be coordinated among all donors, and linked to donor improvements on aid transparency.

IBP has been working, and will continue to work over the next five years, with donors interested in promoting the cause of fiscal transparency and participation to think about how these principles could be most effectively adapted and tailored to existing policies, priorities, and aid portfolios. This is a key part of our efforts to write a new chapter in multistakeholder collaboration in support of deeper and more sustainable governance reforms.

What Have We Learned About Measuring Budget Transparency and Accountability at the Subnational and Sector Level?

IBP’s Open Budget Survey focuses on budget transparency and participation at the central government level. This makes a lot of sense, as it is through the central government budget that most revenue collection and spending takes place in the majority of countries. Yet, in many countries provincial/state and local governments are responsible for a large chunk of public expenditure on social service delivery, and often raise revenues of their own in addition to funds transferred from the central government. In many countries too, public expenditure and service delivery require national and subnational units of
government to work together within a sector, such as health or education, to provide effective services. For these reasons, while pushing for budget transparency at the national level is still an important goal, another key challenge moving forward will be to measure and improve budget transparency at the subnational and sector levels. Working on subnational and sector budgets provides an opportunity to link public budgeting to local public goods and services and thereby interest a much broader segment of the population in budget advocacy.

For example, the key budget documents that central governments produce — and that the Open Budget Survey assesses — may not contain much information on the local level, or on the sectors most relevant to citizens. OBS findings show that in many countries national documents contain little data on resources available at service delivery points like local schools or health posts, or nonfinancial information concerning detailed policy objectives, implementation plans, and expected results. The findings from a 2013 joint IBP/Overseas Development Institute study of whether the budget information made available by governments in Africa met the needs of CSOs seeking to engage in budget analysis and monitoring also bears this out. The study found that reports on actual revenues and expenditures tend to provide only aggregate information, making monitoring service delivery at the local level extremely difficult.

To better understand transparency at the local level — and therefore link budgets and service delivery — IBP has undertaken research to develop and test tools to assess budget transparency at subnational levels of government and in sector budgets. Two rounds of such studies have been completed to date using different approaches to develop transparency assessment methodologies and instruments. While these studies resulted in some useful findings, none of them have satisfied IBP’s standards of rigor and usefulness.

With regard to subnational budget transparency, IBP commissioned civil society researchers to design and implement an initial round of pilot assessments in 10 countries, which were completed in 2011/12. The results from this first round of studies were difficult to interpret as several pilots combined objective and subjective measurements in their indices, which could raise questions on the accuracy of the results. In the second round of subnational studies, completed in 2013, IBP sought both to avoid the methodological problems identified in the pilot studies and to assess the relevance and feasibility of applying a generic methodology across a set of countries with different subnational structures. To accomplish both these objectives, IBP developed a subnational budget transparency methodology that then was implemented by its partners in Brazil, Indonesia, and Tanzania. The methodology drew on the Open Budget Survey, as well as on the insights of the three IBP research partners.

The experience from this second round is mixed. On the one hand, IBP is satisfied that it has developed a generic and objective methodology for assessing subnational budget transparency that has proven to be adaptable to different contexts, including vast capital cities and states in Brazil, huge cities and small rural municipalities in remote islands in Indonesia, as well as isolated rural districts in Africa. On the other hand, the methodology does not assess budget transparency in a manner that directly connects budgets to the lives of citizens, and it struggles to adequately capture how budgets affect service delivery.

Concurrent with each round of subnational studies, IBP partnered with other international organizations to conduct budget transparency assessments within particular sectors. In the first round, IBP and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) collaborated on a methodology for a set of studies of the maternal health care sector, which the IPPF implemented in a few Latin American countries. For round two of the sector studies, IBP joined with Save the Children and Accountability and Transparency for Human Rights (AT4HR) to assess budget transparency for child nutrition programs in a few African countries. AT4HR developed the methodology for the studies with inputs from IBP and Save the Children.
Like the subnational studies, these sector studies show it is feasible to use generic tools to assess transparency and strengthen advocacy (both IPPF and Save the Children are using the studies’ results to advocate for more budget transparency). However, as with the subnational studies, IBP believes that the tools used to conduct these sector-focused studies are not sufficiently focused on how budgets impact service delivery and thereby make a difference in people’s lives.

One reason why these various studies have not covered service delivery issues meaningfully is because very few government budgets provide comprehensive information on the impact of budgets on services. Further, professional public finance bodies have not established good practice standards on this topic. Therefore, IBP and its partners will need to think about how such standards could be established, and how governments could be convinced of the need to adopt them. If IBP’s work on opening budgets is to actually transform lives, we need to identify more direct ways in which the budget transparency, participation, and accountability agenda can be linked with service delivery issues in order to bring budget work ever closer to the real needs and priorities of citizens across the world.

What Have We Learned About Public Participation and Citizen Engagement in Budget Processes?

In order to hold their governments accountable for how they use public resources, citizens need more than just access to budget information. They also need opportunities to engage substantively in the budget process so that they can present their views, obtain feedback, and influence public policies. In other words, public participation in budget preparation and monitoring can be seen as one of the key missing links between transparency and accountability – between opening budgets and transforming lives.

We have documented a number of cases in which IBP partner organizations have managed to have an impact on public policies by putting pressure on governments “from the outside” — through media campaigns, grassroots mobilization, and litigation — but this has often been the result of a significant struggle to use existing opportunities to be heard, and the improvements achieved can be difficult to sustain. In many other cases, however, civil society actors saw the recommendations coming out of their budget analysis and advocacy efforts fall on deaf ears because of the absence of participation mechanisms.

In order to better understand and bring attention to this issue, IBP introduced a new set of questions into the Open Budget Survey 2012 questionnaire related to public participation and citizen engagement at different stages of the budget process. Given the paucity of existing standards and guidelines on what constitutes “good practice” in this area, the new Survey section drew on guidelines for public engagement in the environmental management sector; the literature on local government budget processes; and consultations with experts in the field. The findings that emerged are far from encouraging.

Opportunities for public participation in the budget process are either limited or completely absent in most countries. The average score received by the 100 countries assessed in the 2012 Survey is only 19 out of 100, compared with an average budget transparency score of 43 out of 100. Only one country (South Korea) got close to full marks, while 83 countries scored less than 33, indicating they provide, at best, severely limited opportunities for the public to engage in the budget process.

The Survey research, however, unearthed a number of emerging, innovative practices that could serve as a basis for broader advances in this area. For example, a number of countries (including Botswana, Kenya, and Trinidad and Tobago) organize regular consultations during the formulation stage to identify the public’s budget priorities. In some cases, these are part of sector-specific policy review processes, while in others Ministry of Finance officials travel to different provinces to gather proposals from various
stakeholders. Parliaments in Kenya, Germany, and South Africa hold public hearings on different aspects of the budget proposal before approval, at which various citizen groups and other organizations can present their views and proposals. In some countries, these processes are broadcast live on radio or television. In Colombia and the Philippines, external audit bodies involve civil society groups and citizens in the audit process, both to identify audit priorities and to follow up on audit recommendations. The state of Andhra Pradesh in India has gone further, setting up a program that has carried out more than 3,200 social audits that involved citizens directly auditing a national government employment program, which led to more than 38,000 disciplinary cases against officials. As a result hundreds of government officials have been suspended or otherwise punished, and almost a quarter of the US$24 million of irregularities detected has been recovered.

IBP recently collected a number of examples of mechanisms that make participation in the budget process possible from three pioneers in this area: Brazil, the Philippines, and South Korea. These mechanisms ranged from national multistakeholder councils and commissions that vet policy proposals and influence budget making, to participatory and bottom-up budgeting at the local level, to the use of information technology to allow citizens to feed budget-related information to various government bodies.

In some ways, therefore, the evidence gap on what public participation and citizen engagement in budget processes look like is slowly being filled. More governments are becoming interested in the issue of participation and looking for useful examples that can guide reforms in this area. An interesting example of this trend is from Kenya, where new budget legislation mandates elements of participation as part of a nationwide devolution effort. At the international level, the consensus in favor of stronger public participation in the budget process is slowly growing. The UN General Assembly passed a resolution in January 2013 encouraging member states to intensify efforts to enhance transparency, participation, and accountability in fiscal policies, based on the principles put forward by the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT), of which IBP is a leading member. In addition, the World Bank has started to prioritize research and advocacy on public participation in budgeting processes.

Despite these advances, much remains to be done. The evidence shows that budget transparency alone is not sufficient to ensure that governments are accountable for the use of public resources. Without opportunities for participation, civil society has a very hard time making its voice heard and influencing public policy. Where governments open up avenues for citizen engagement, a different dynamic starts to unfold, bringing about a more constructive partnership — and potentially better policy outcomes. Thus we must ensure that the principle that public participation should be a regular feature of budget processes is more widely incorporated into government budget systems around the world, and accepted and promoted by multilateral institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. Proponents of this idea, including IBP, need to be able to more clearly articulate what citizen engagement in budget processes looks like, and demonstrate the benefits that it brings vis-à-vis the investments and effort that it implies.

Over the next few years, IBP will focus on promoting this agenda by:

- documenting and evaluating emerging good practices in public participation in budgeting;
- establishing international norms and good practices on public participation by integrating these emerging practices into existing codes and standards;
- working with civil society partners, international institutions, and reformist governments to promote broader implementation of these emerging standards; and
- further revising the Open Budget Survey to document changes in participation at the country level over time.
The Intersection of Technology and Transparency

Questioning the Impact and Agenda of Technology and Transparency, by Jay Colburn, International Budget Partnership

This article is a summary of a discussion on Duncan Green’s From Poverty to Power blog.

Issues around government transparency and accountability have garnered increased attention and interest in recent years, from the idea of open government generally to specific areas like open data, open budgets, open contracts, etc. Transparency and accountability are sometimes touted as the simple, low-cost solution that can both save money and reduce poverty. But is there evidence to support these claims? Are politicians and governments sincere in their support of principles and practices of transparency and accountability, or do they have other intentions? Hoping to unpack these questions and other related issues, Duncan Green of Oxfam recently asked three transparency experts to share their thoughts.

Transparency is not a magic bullet but rather part of the arsenal. Transparency, when combined with accountable and responsive institutions as well as the space for civil society to get involved, is a game changer.

- Peter Eigen

Peter Eigen, founder of Transparency International, believes that transparency alone does not necessarily bring about meaningful change in societies. Without a willing government, effective and empowered oversight institutions, and an involved citizenry, putting information in the public domain is not likely to result in policy changes and practical impacts. Even when governments do practice transparency, it is not just the quantity of information that they make available, but also quality that matters. Are the data timely, comprehensive, and understandable? And does the supply of information appropriately match the demand? In other words, is it information that people are actually interested in and able to use? These are crucial questions to ask when considering what is really meant by transparency and whether it is meaningful and has the potential to impact development outcomes.

In his commentary, Rakesh Rajani, head of Twaweza East Africa and civil society co-chair of the Open Government Partnership, commented on transparency and the illusion of the miraculous power of technology for development. With recent technological advances, information has become more decentralized and democratized. But access to mobile phones and the Internet cannot by themselves rid societies of their entrenched inefficiencies and inequalities. Decades of structural imbalances and power asymmetries between rich and poor, powerful and marginalized, cannot be cured by technology overnight. Rajani offered three pieces of advice for thinking about the relationship between technology and transparency and accountability moving forward:

- Technologies that give us new ways to think about, work with, and share information do not necessarily allow people to overcome or change the nontechnological constraints we face.
- We need a deep understanding of human motivation — who, among both the citizenry and those in government, is willing to take the necessary actions that can bring about significant impacts, and why.
- Setting up a structured system and process of experimentation and adaptation can help us learn from successes and failures.

“Not so long ago grownups would talk as if all one had to do was to sprinkle mobile phones or Internet and the persistent, structural imbalances and power asymmetries that had dogged us for decades would melt away.”

- Rakesh Rajani
Rosemary McGee, from the Institute of Development Studies (U.K.), raised the issue of the lack of a single, agreed-upon definition of transparency. Transparency as “openness” or “open government” can mean very different things to different users, from bureaucrats to economists to techies to open society advocates. When framed generally as “openness,” transparency can have positive, neutral, or even negative effects for the poor and marginalized. When combined with new technologies, the scope for both good and bad effects has the potential to increase exponentially.

But transparency can also be conceptualized as a harbinger of accountability. Transparency for accountability means “a value-based commitment to a particular kind of change, one rooted in principles of human rights and fairness.” And accountability in governance is a universally good thing, according to McGee. But the causal relationship between transparency, accountability, and positive impacts on poor people’s lives is long, complex, and not yet entirely understood, which is all the more reason to question what is being pursued under the heading of “transparency,” who is promoting it, and why.

Blog Corner

From the Open Budgets Blog

What to Do When Governments Fight Back? Indian civil society organization Samarthan monitors the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in the state of Madhya Pradesh. After the government was able to find ways to negate the advances the group had made in its monitoring by “working the system,” Samarthan had to change their approach. Here’s how they did it.

Transparency for What? Do Governments Publish the Budget Information that CSOs Need? IBP teamed up with the Overseas Development Institute to see whether the budget information made available by governments responded to CSO needs. The project and resulting report focused on Africa, one region where budget transparency challenges are greatest.

¿Dónde Van Mis Impuestos? (Where Does My Money Go?): How Political Will Can Answer This Question: ¿Dónde Van Mis Impuestos? — the Spanish version of the Open Knowledge Foundation’s Where Does My Money Go? (a website that graphically “visualizes” how tax money is spent in countries around the world) — was launched in December 2010 and quickly became the model for tax visualization in Spain.
Recent Trainings and Events

**IBP Webinar Explores Adjusting Advocacy Strategies**, by Jessica Taylor, International Budget Partnership

On 16 April IBP hosted a webinar titled "How to Adjust Your Advocacy Strategy when the Government Fights Back or the Context Changes" as part of its new webinar series. Presenters Yogesh Kumar, the executive director of Samarthan, and Albert Van Zyl, the manager of learning and knowledge development at IBP drew lessons from the recently updated IBP case study "Samarthan's Campaign to Improve Access to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India." The webinar integrated van Zyl's theoretical insights and Kumar's experiential learning to provide a holistic account of the process of strategy adjustment in an advocacy context.

Van Zyl's presentation focused on the “what, why, and how of strategy adjustment” and emphasized the importance of gathering information about the way a strategy is operating in practice and then using that information to reflect on the strategy and make adjustments where necessary. Kumar dove into the grassroots experience of Samarthan in its attempt to help ensure that India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is implemented successfully. Kumar went on to discuss the significant challenges that Samarthan faced and how it adapted their strategy to overcome them, including scaling up its work to demonstrate the widespread problem of poor implementation of NREGA.

The webinar was well attended, drawing approximately 42 participants, and stimulated rich discussions with several core issues emerging. One of those issues was how should CSOs adjust their strategy when engaging reluctant, resistant, or indifferent government officials? This can be a significant challenge and it's important to engage government officials in open dialogue in order to convey the purpose of the work and its relevance to the communities involved. It is also important for CSOs to figure out where they can draw strength from. In the Samarthan case, the group used the strength of relevant constitutional provisions and NREGA to put pressure on government to do what was required by law.

Additional issues raised during the webinar included how CSOs can maintain sufficient flexibility to reflect on and adjust strategy where necessary, while still fulfilling specific commitments made to donors in proposals and agreements; the important role of youths in advocacy work; and the challenge of coordination and consensus when adjusting strategy.

To listen to the webinar in its entirety and download the presentations, visit the IBP webinar page.

**Human Rights and Budgets Training Workshop in Tunisia**, by Akram Al-Turk, International Budget Partnership

In late April IBP held a human rights and budgets training workshop in the Tunisian capital of Tunis. The three-day training, co-organized with the U.N.’s Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR), gave participants a first look into how to use budget analysis and other monitoring tools to help realize economic and social rights. Participants included civil society activists working on human rights and/or improving governance in Tunisia.

The workshop included sessions on economic and social rights, the link between these rights and government budgets, and the different types of monitoring methodologies that activists around the world have used for advocacy purposes. The rest of the workshop focused on budget analysis, introducing participants to some of the calculations that can be used to examine whether governments are fulfilling their human rights obligations. Given that in the past two years the Tunisian government has released more budget information than ever before, participants were able to analyze actual figures from Tunisia to see whether the government is making a sufficient effort in such sectors as health and education.

IBP is continuing its cooperation with OHCHR in Tunisia and will hold another three workshops in the next three months. These training workshops will be adapted to fit the needs of civil society activists working in...
more disadvantaged regions of the country, and will be held in the states of Kasserine, Gabes, and Jendouba.


IBP’s [Open Budget Initiative](#) — a global research and advocacy program to promote public access to budget information and the adoption of accountable budget systems — launched the 2015 round of the [Open Budget Survey](#) (OBS). The OBS is the only independent, comparative, and regular measure of budget transparency and accountability around the world, and the 2015 Survey will include assessments of 102 countries. To kick off the latest round of the Survey, IBP brought together civil society researchers in 37 countries, from Afghanistan to Zambia, for a four-day training (18-21 March) in Washington, D.C. The biennial Survey is compiled, using data collected by independent civil society researchers throughout the world, and the purpose of the training was to help researchers, particularly those who were new to the OBS, to develop the skills and tools necessary to complete the Survey’s four tables and 133 questions. The gathering also provided participants with an opportunity to learn from and share their experiences with other budget activists.

The trainings included an in-depth examination of the budget cycle, including key actors, important dates, best practices, and budget documents. Using examples from previous rounds of the Survey, the researchers learned how to assess the comprehensiveness of budget documents, such as the Executive’s Budget Proposal or the Year-End Report. They also learned how to evaluate the strength of oversight institutions as well as the different forms that citizen engagement can take during the budgeting process. Additionally, the workshop helped the researchers place the OBS within the wider global push for fiscal transparency and understand how it can be used as a diagnostic, research, and advocacy tool in their countries.

The D.C. workshop was critical in ensuring that the researchers deliver consistent and credible Survey results and was the first component of the ongoing training and technical assistance that IBP staff provides throughout the Survey process. Online webinars and one-on-one assistance are also offered as topics arise.

**Publications**

**IBP Publications**

IBP has added new publications to the online [library](#)! Our impact case studies document the role of CSO budget analysis and advocacy in improving budget policies and implementation. Through these studies IBP has learned that it is useful to understand how CSO responses to changing circumstances can affect the sustainability of their campaign’s accomplishments. To learn more about what this looks like on the ground, IBP revisited three campaigns that were the focus of earlier case studies to see what happened after the dust settled.

- “Samarthan’s Campaign to Improve Implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India” ([summary](#), [full version](#))
Further Reading from the Field – Relevant coverage of budget issues and civil society’s engagement in public budgeting from academia and professional journals

In the research note titled “How Civil Society Organizations Close the Gap between Transparency and Accountability,” published in Governance, IBP’s Albert van Zyl poses “the most critical question for activists and scholars of accountability: How and when does transparency lead to greater accountability?” Van Zyl's note looks particularly at the role of CSOs in demanding and using government budget information, drawing on case studies of CSO activity in 11 countries in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia.

In a policy research working paper titled, “Electoral Accountability and Local Government Spending in Indonesia,” the World Bank’s Poverty Reduction and Equity Unit looks at the effects of the Indonesian Pilkada reforms. These reforms allowed for direct elections in local districts on human development outcomes, public spending, and revenue generation at the district level. The authors find little evidence to suggest that direct elections have had significant effects on human development, but find that district officials have become more responsive to local needs with regard to health expenditures.

Abdirisaq Ibrahim Mohamed and Ali Yassin Sheikh-Ali of SIMAD University examine data from six federal institutions in Somalia in their paper, “Assessing the Financial Accountability of the Somali Federal Government Organizations,” in order to assess the strength of the government’s financial accountability system. The authors make several suggestions for how Somalia can improve its financial accountability system, including regularly publishing significant budget data and promoting public participation in the budgeting process, in order to more effectively deliver basic public services.

Canada’s C.D. Howe Institute has published a report about Canada’s increasing problems with fiscal accountability titled, “Credibility on the (Bottom) Line: The Fiscal Accountability of Canada’s Senior Governments, 2013.” Authors Colin Busby and William B.P. Robson argue that over the last decade, Canada’s provincial governments have overshot their spending targets by $47 billion combined, leading to higher taxes and public debt. Wide disparities across provincial governments in accounting and disclosure of financial information standards has been a main driver of overspending. The authors conclude with suggestions for how provincial governments can improve their financial reporting so legislators and the public can hold government to account.

In a joint project for the National Foundation for India (NFI) and Sambodhi Research and Communications Private Limited, Dharmendra Chandurkar and Nidhi Sen have produced “Developing Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Budget Work Projects: A How-To-Guide For Practitioners.” The guide was created as a reference for helping practitioners develop simple and robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks in an easy step-by-step process. The guide is the result of a series of workshops conducted by the NFI with partner budget groups and it synthesizes lessons learned in order to help budget and policy professionals demonstrate concrete impacts in a complex multistakeholder environment.
Job Openings

Three IBP Positions Available

- **Program Officer – International Advocacy**: IBP is recruiting a Program Officer to support its International Advocacy Program. Through this program, IBP seeks to achieve budget transparency reforms in countries that are among those with the least open budget systems in the world.

- **Program Officer (South Africa) – Catalyst Program**: IBP is seeking a Program Officer for South Africa to join the Catalyst Program team. The Program Officer will represent IBP and manage the Catalyst initiative in South Africa.

- **Accounts Payable and Payroll Specialist**: IBP is seeking an Accounts Payable and Payroll Specialist to take on the responsibility for processing cash disbursements as well as payroll preparation and management.