



## Budget transparency in the Democratic Republic of Congo

In 2002 a peace accord was signed that signaled the official end to many years of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A transition government was established in 2003 — the same year the International Monetary Fund approved the DRC to receive assistance through the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. The HIPC requirements included “transparent handling of budget resources.”

During 2005 more than 300 Congolese civil society organizations came together in a network. The main objective of the network was to support the transition process and the establishment of the rule of law, democracy, and good governance. In 2010 the network’s name was changed to Réseau Gouvernance Economique et Démocratique (REGED).

REGED did the research for the Open Budget Survey 2008. The Survey showed that the DRC government provided information on only one of the eight key budget documents – the Enacted Budget. The DRC scored 0 out of 100 on the 2008 Open Budget Index (OBI, a comparative measure of budget transparency calculated from a subset of Survey questions).

After the release of the OBI results, REGED’s leader, Bishop Abraham, requested a meeting with the Minister of Finance. Several meetings followed after which the government began publishing more detailed budget reports.

Some of the meetings were attended by the Chair of the Editorial Board of the Bill on Public Finance. A few months later this person was appointed as the Coordinator of the Steering Committee for Public Finance Reform. This person’s attendance at the meetings gave new ideas to an important actor and also made him aware of REGED’s knowledge and skills.

In 2009 REGED started the research for the Open Budget Survey 2010. The process included a workshop for civil society on the production of a budget summary (Citizens Budget), and a workshop for journalists on the eight key budget documents. REGED also trained the media on how to follow the parliamentary debate on the budget law, and on how to discuss tax and budget information on television.

In 2010 the Minister of Finance changed. REGED used a meeting of the Economic Governance Thematic Group to state clearly, in front of the government officials, donors, and private-sector participants, that the DRC still did not publish all key budget documents. In response, the new minister said that he would meet with civil society; however, the promised meeting did not happen immediately.

REGED then wrote a memo that called for the release of documents, and the development and publication of a Citizens Budget. REGED also met with officials in the minister’s office to discuss the budget transparency issues highlighted in the memo.

The minister eventually met with REGED. He also called the Director of Budget Preparation and Monitoring to meet with them. The signed memo was not published, but REGED used it to train provincial deputies and civil society members. Meanwhile REGED continued to participate in meetings related to Ministry of Finance reform processes.

By the end of September 2010, the government had made public the budget summary, a Citizens Budget, the Enacted Budget, and In-Year Reports. The DRC’s overall OBI score rose to 6. The government also published the Executive’s Budget Proposal for 2010, but only after the cut-off date used by the Open Budget Survey. The Ministry also started publishing other information, such as the budget timetable and budget preparation guidelines

When the Open Budget Index 2010 was released in the DRC, the Minister of Budget congratulated civil society for its work on improving economic governance in the country.