



Open Budget Initiative

www.openbudgetindex.org



INTERNATIONAL BUDGET PARTNERSHIP
Open Budgets. Transform Lives.

The International Budget Partnership's (IBP) Open Budget Initiative is a global research and advocacy program that supports the adoption of transparent, accountable, and participatory public finance systems.



The IBP believes that open budgets allow the public to be the judge of whether or not their government officials are good stewards of public funds. Further, because they reduce opportunities for wasteful or corrupt spending, transparent and participatory budgets can increase the resources available to fight poverty.

The Initiative works in more than 100 countries worldwide and seeks to achieve its objectives by:

- conducting assessments of budget transparency and participation at national and subnational levels of government;
- informing the field of public finance by developing guides on budget transparency and publishing research studies on the causes and impact of budget transparency; and
- building coalitions and supporting the adoption of international norms and standards for transparent and participatory public budgeting.

Assessing Budget Transparency and Participation

The Open Budget Survey and the Open Budget Index

The Open Budget Survey is a comprehensive analysis and survey that evaluates whether central governments in countries around the world provide the public with access to budget information and opportunities to participate in the budget process. It is the only independent cross-country survey on budget transparency in the world. Beginning in 2006, the Survey is conducted biennially in partnership with independent civil society researchers within each country. To easily measure the overall commitment of the countries surveyed to transparency and to allow for comparisons among countries, the IBP created the Open Budget Index (OBI) from the Survey. The OBI assigns a score to each country based on the information it makes available to the public throughout the budget process.

The Open Budget Survey has resulted in the world's most comprehensive databank on public budget transparency, participation, and accountability. This database is available at www.openbudgetindex.org.

Subnational Budget Transparency Assessments

The Open Budget Initiative supports assessments of budget transparency at the subnational level (i.e., state/provincial governments, district/county governments, municipal governments, and service delivery agencies at the community level). As part of this effort, which began in 2009 with one-year grants to some civil society partners to develop and implement pilot subnational assessments, the Initiative provides financial support and uses the findings from its partners' research to produce materials to provide guidance subnational budget transparency assessments, such as diagnostic toolkits.



Who Are the Initiative's Partners?

The Open Budget Initiative typically collaborates with civil society organizations that focus all or a significant part of their work on analyzing and influencing government budget systems, policies, and outcomes in order to make these systems responsive to the needs of low-income and disadvantaged communities.

Our partners are based primarily in developing countries and new democracies and include think tanks, advocacy organizations, networks, academic institutions, community-based organizations, and social movements.



Advocacy to Promote Open and Responsive Public Budgeting

To deepen the impact of the Open Budget Survey on actual government budgeting practices and systems, the Initiative supports its partners' targeted advocacy campaigns. Advocacy grants made to organizations in different regions of the world are used to engage government officials, legislators, and supreme audit institution officials in dialogues on how to improve budget transparency practices; publish model Citizens Budgets; produce short documentary films; and broadcast radio talk shows to raise awareness of the need for budget transparency.

Building Coalitions and Developing Norms

Broad-based Campaigns to Promote Budget Transparency

The Open Budget Initiative has brought together advocacy networks that work on such topics as maternal health care, access to information, aid transparency, and environmental protection to advocate for greater budget transparency. For example, in 2009 the OBI helped to develop the Ask Your Government initiative — a broad-based research and advocacy effort calling for more open and accountable public budgets. Local civil society groups in over 80 countries asked their national governments six questions on how much was being spent for maternal health care and environmental protection and on information on aid flows. The government responses to these questions were systematically documented and used as evidence for the campaign. In future years, the Initiative will continue to spearhead and support international and national transparency campaigns.

International Norms on Budget Transparency

The Open Budget Initiative seeks to develop norms for transparent and participatory public finance management by convening a wide range of stakeholders — Open Budget Survey researchers; civil society actors working on budget-related issues; and select legislators, senior government budget officials, and officials from oversight and donor institutions — to discuss and debate the need for and content of such

norms. As part of this process, the Initiative is commissioning studies to articulate the contents of such norms, identifying the organizations that should advocate for them, and exploring the process through which the norms should be adopted.

Informing the Field on Budget Transparency

A significant part of the Initiative is its work to use evidence from its research and advocacy activities to establish standards for transparent and responsive public budgeting, inform debates, and increase the capacity and knowledge of civil society advocates, government officials, and actors within donor agencies, international financial institutions, and academia. Some of the Initiative's recent projects include:

- *A Manual to Budget Transparency*
Geared toward civil society organizations and governments, the manual provides information on the contents and potential uses of the eight key budget documents that international good practices recommend that central governments make available to the public during the fiscal year.
- *A Book on the Causes and Consequences of Budget Transparency*
A look at the factors that cause countries to be more or less transparent, and the consequences of a lack of transparency for effective governance and poverty alleviation.
- *Research Briefs on Transparent Public Finance Management*
Short publications that assess budget transparency standards and policies to inform the work of civil society and development practitioners.



The Open Budget Initiative will build on the work described here by reaching out to new constituencies with our message that there is a critical need for more transparent and participatory public finance systems.

For more information on the Open Budget Initiative, contact info@internationalbudget.org or visit www.openbudgetindex.org.

The Open Budget Initiative is based at the International Budget Partnership

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The IBP also has offices in Mexico City, Mexico; Cape Town, South Africa; and Mumbai, India.

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