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Pandemic did not undo accountable budgeting practices worldwide survey finds

Washington, DC—The International Budget Partnership (IBP) unveiled its latest Open Budget Survey, which found that most countries preserved accountable spending practices in their annual budget processes during the pandemic. The Dominican Republic has entered the top 10 performers who are leading the way in advancing and institutionalizing transparency, while South Korea is spearheading inclusive practices for public consultation in the budget process. Benin, Nigeria and the Gambia are among the biggest improvers in this round of the survey.

“Accountability systems are still weak overall, but several countries are showing that where there is political will, progress is possible,” said Anjali Garg, head of the Open Budget Survey. “Open budget practices are a winning proposition-- they build public trust that governments can deliver and can lead to lower borrowing costs at a time when global debt and inequality is at all-time high. We hope more countries will be emboldened to open up their budget process to public consultation and scrutiny to ensure scarce resources reach those who need them most.”

Somewhat surprisingly, the pandemic did not undo hard-fought gains in transparent and accountable budgeting practices worldwide. Most countries were able to maintain, and in some cases build on earlier gains in their annual budget processes, thanks to increased digitalization of information and the institutionalization of accountability practices. The average transparency score has increased more than 20 percent since 2008. Eastern Europe and Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa (after a dip in the OBS 2017) have made significant strides in transparency since 2008.

However, the survey found that legislative oversight has declined due to political unrest, the pandemic and executive overreach. Some executive governments have found ways to undermine Supreme Audit Institutions while staying within the boundaries of the law. Less than a third of countries provide sufficiently detailed information to understand how their budget addresses poverty and only 14 percent present their expenditures by gender. Only 8 countries worldwide have formal channels to engage underserved communities in budget processes.

“We need an all-hand on deck approach so that everyone has a say in how and how much public money is collected, borrowed and spent,” said Vivek Ramkumar, senior director of policy for IBP. “Reform-minded countries, and donors, must invest in fiscal accountability systems that empower key government agencies, legislators, national auditors, civil society groups and the public to ensure public funds are managed effectively and equitably.”

“We are heartened to see the progress that Nigeria and other countries have made in the survey,” said Austin Ndiokwelu, Nigeria country manager for IBP. “Inclusion pays dividends. We urge governments to sustain progress and engage communities more meaningfully around their revenue and spending priorities. Community feedback can help governments better manage vital public resources.”

The Open Budget is the world’s only comparative, independent and regular assessment of transparency, oversight and public participation in public budgets in 120 countries.

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