Middle East and North Africa Program

Call for Papers

September 2012

I. Brief Institutional Background

The International Budget Partnership (IBP) works to support the capacity of civil society organizations to understand and monitor government budget processes by providing training and technical assistance, peer networking opportunities, and comparative research initiatives. As part of its research work, the IBP works with partners in over 100 countries to assess the transparency of those countries’ budget processes (more information on the Open Budget Survey can be found here). The IBP has recently begun working in the Middle East and North Africa region, with a focus on Egypt and Tunisia. The IBP is collaborating with civil society organizations, the media, and government officials in these two countries to contribute to the development of open societies by making public finance processes and management more transparent, participatory, and accountable.

II. Purpose of the Research

Given the scope of this work, the IBP is interested in publishing a number of papers that can provide context or analysis of the budgetary process, resource allocation and the budget impact of government policies, and the potential for budget reform in Egypt or Tunisia. The goals of this particular project are twofold: 1) to build up a body of research that helps scholars, policymakers, and civil society activists better understand the budgetary processes in Egypt and Tunisia (and potentially other MENA countries), how these processes affect public policies and in turn socio-economic developments in these countries, and who the key stakeholders and potential reformers are; and 2) to better inform the work of the IBP and its partners in the region, including in civil society budget advocacy and media training workshops—the latter intended to help journalists better report on budgetary issues in their localities and countries.

III. Potential Research Topics

The papers should address one or more of the following questions:

- What do the institutional and legal frameworks of public finance management in Egypt look like? In particular, what are the stages of the budget cycle and who are all the actors involved in the process?

- What are the key trends of the last five years in terms of sources of revenue and budget resource allocation in Egypt, and what kinds of changes can be expected in the coming years?
What has been the distribution of spending by administrative unit, economic classification, and sector?

- Given the ongoing discussions about constitutional and institutional reforms in both Egypt and Tunisia, what changes to the budget process are needed? Which institutions need to be reformed to improve access to budget information, transparency, control, accountability, and public engagement? What are the major obstacles to transparency and accountability in the budget process in both countries?

- How does the level of resource allocation to particular sectors or administrative units have an effect on the myriad socio-economic challenges facing Egypt and Tunisia? Focusing on one or two specific issues (e.g., regional disparity in Tunisia, labor and women’s rights, unemployment, education, health, etc.), how can budget reform and transparency have a positive effect on these particular challenges?

- What have been the challenges in each country on improving budget transparency and passing access to information laws, and what discussions are currently happening regarding these topics?

- Based on factors that have historically led to more budget transparency, what do those factors (e.g., level of legislative power, strength of the independent audit institution, etc.) look like in Egypt and Tunisia? What can the experiences of other democratizing countries, particularly related to budget reform, teach us about what is currently happening in Egypt and Tunisia?

IV. Deadline and Process

The application deadline is October 12, 2012. A modest honorarium will be provided. If you are interested in applying, please submit a one-page abstract, a CV, a writing sample, and a proposed timeline. The abstract should outline your proposed topic, research goals, brief methodology, and potential primary sources. Applications can be in English, Arabic, or French. The IBP will respond to the application within one working week.

Please send all material and direct any questions to Akram Al-Turk at Al-Turk@cbpp.org.