



INTERNATIONAL BUDGET PARTNERSHIP
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[U.K. House of Lords Cites the IBP's Ask Your Government! Initiative in Call for Greater Budget Transparency](#)

In a legislative discussion on the issue of maternal mortality on 12 January 2011, the United Kingdom's House of Lords points out the relevance of public access to information — including budget information — for improving government actions to reduce the risk of disability or death that many women in poor countries face when giving birth. After citing the devastating statistic that "555,000 women in the developing world die each year from complications during pregnancy or childbirth," Lord Black of Brentwood goes on to call for greater transparency about what governments are spending to address the problem based on the results of the [Ask Your Government! Initiative](#):

"Last year, the International Budget P[artnership] conducted a survey to find out what 80 governments were spending on issues relating to international goals, some relating to maternal mortality. Ten African countries with the highest maternal mortality rates did not bother to respond, while many others asserted that there was no central information on issues such as spending on life-saving drugs. To work out what needs to be done, as the IBP pointed out, we need to know what is already being done, which is far from clear."

[Read more about the results of the IBP's Ask Your Government! Initiative](#) | [Watch the legislative debate](#) | [Read the legislative debate](#)

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Mexican Information Service Uses Budget Analysis to Support Policies that Address Women's Health Issues by Anayeli Garcia, Comunicación e Información de la Mujer, A.C.

In Mexico the media plays a crucial role in building a culture of accountability and influencing public decision making through timely and accurate reporting on how the government raises and spends public funds. This is reflected in the mission of the Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (CIMAC), which works to promote collaboration between civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media. CIMAC informs journalists about public administration and gender equity issues and works with CSOs to engaging the media in their communications strategies as a tool for educating the public and promoting social change.

Since 1988 CIMAC gathers and publishes newsworthy information on women's social issues. For example, one of the most important debates in which CIMAC took part was the [Provida case](#) in which the Mexican government misappropriated 30 million pesos of 600 million peso public health funding increase for women's health and HIV/AIDS to Provida, a nongovernmental health provider that opposed the government's policies and blatantly mismanaged the funds. In December 2002 details of the misappropriation became publicly available. CIMAC worked with other CSOs to document the case — formulating a strategy that identified opportunities and partnerships with the media to denounce the scandalous diversion of funds. As part of this strategy, CIMAC conducted media interviews, authored and published news articles, and highlighted the civil society perspective on the case.

In 2007 the Mexican legislature approved a budget that sought to promote equal opportunities for men and women by incorporating a gender perspective into the design, development, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of government subsidy programs. The executive used the mechanism known as "Annex 10 expenditures for equality between women and men" to develop a budget that addressed women's needs and priorities. An analysis of the expenditures made through this annex — including funds for maternal health, family planning, sexual and reproductive health for youths and indigenous women, and HIV/AIDS — found a 63 percent increase from 7.025 billion pesos in 2008 to 11.457 billion pesos in 2010. While this substantial increase reflects a serious commitment on the part of the government, CSOs, such as Fundar, Centro de Análisis e Investigación, monitor whether these resources actually meet the needs of women and promote gender equality.

To ensure that the additional funds were used for the greatest impact, CIMAC formed a civil society coalition for women's health with CSOs like Fundar, SIPAM, MEXFAM, Balance, Ipas, and Kinal. It also deepened its partnerships with these and other organizations to develop and submit a proposal to the legislature for strengthening government accountability mechanisms.

CIMAC publishes documents, newsletters, and budget reports and conducts press conferences, investigations, trainings, and interviews with government officials and CSOs. Much of the results of these efforts are disseminated through the InterPress Service to reach and influence legislators, academics, journalists and civil society throughout the country, as well as national and global agendas for promoting human rights and social equality.

For more information, contact Anayeli García at amery16@gmail.com.

A Civil Society Coalition Promotes Gender Sensitive Budgets in Israel by Valeria Seigelshifer, Women's Budget Forum

The Women's Budget Forum (WBF) is a coalition of more than 30 Jewish and Israeli-Palestinian feminist and human rights organizations that promote social policies to advance women and girls in Israel by advocating for a gender perspective in the design, analysis, and implementation of public policies, particularly budget policies. The WBF analyzes the national budget every year from a gender perspective, examining the government's revenue and expenditure decisions to show their impact on women and men.

In 2009 the WBF began to promote gender-responsive budgeting at the local level by training elected officials, municipal employees, and local advisors on applying a gender perspective to budgeting and policy making and on the socioeconomic status of women.

One of the main activities of the WBF is to write and disseminate position papers on gender budget issues. In 2010 the WBF published a gender-sensitive analysis on a program to reduce income and corporate taxes, an overview of daycare services in Arab localities in Israel, and a position paper on the need to introduce equal and nontransferable paternity leave in Israel, following the example of many European Union countries. As an example of the WBF's work, the analysis of the tax reduction program showed that 66 percent of salaried women have incomes that do not pass the minimum threshold for paying income tax, so they gain nothing from a tax cut. Thus, contrary to official claims, the tax cuts provide no incentive for women to join the labor market or increase their work hours.

Furthermore, these tax cuts reduce state revenues and exacerbate the state's retreat from financing social services, which has long term gender implications.

The WBF also engages in budget advocacy to influence members of parliament and government officials. In 2010 the WBF:

- changed the criteria for qualifying for public daycare subsidies so that more localities could benefit from them, especially those with limited budgets;
- promoted extended and expanded paid maternity leave, including a nontransferable paternity leave component;
- pushed for the enforcement of an amendment to the statistics law that requires all public agencies to disaggregate data by gender — a change in the law that resulted in large part from advocacy work done by the WBF; and
- participated in Knesset committee meetings to discuss employment opportunities for Arab women and the availability of government loans for small businesses, which at present are not accessible to low-income women.

To read the paper *Women and Equality: Gender-based Analysis, Law, and Economic Rights Examining Budgets under a Gender-Responsive Lens: The Example of Israel*, go to:

<http://www.wbf.org.il/Uploaded/kingston%2023.10.pdf>.

For more information, contact Valeria Seigelshifer at valeria.seigelshifer@gmail.com.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting as a Tool for Alternative Economic Planning by Yamini Mishra, United Nations Development Fund for Women

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is a budget analysis methodology that applies a gender perspective to public expenditure analysis, disaggregated beneficiary assessments, budget impact analysis, and assessments of medium-term economic policy frameworks. A GRB analysis is useful to:

1. compare the impact of the budget on men and women;
2. assess the extent to which a sector's policies address gender gaps;
3. evaluate whether budget allocations for implementing gender-sensitive policies and programs are adequate; and
4. monitor the spending and effectiveness of gender-sensitive programs.

At the international level, many governments have made commitments to international agreements and initiatives that focus on women's issues and questions of gender equity. Advocates can use GRB to monitor these government commitments to such efforts as the *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* and to promote government accountability in these international dialogues. At the national level GRB can be a powerful tool for demonstrating to policymakers that men and women have different needs, which must be taken into account in policy and budget decisions, and that when trying to address women's needs policymakers must go beyond merely enacting policies that do not explicitly discriminate against women. Some of the questions that a GRB analysis should ask include:

- What are the utilization patterns for programs for women? Are the resources allocated for women reaching them?
- If there is underutilization, then what are the causes?

- Are there specific program components that consistently show underutilization? How are funds for women divided across different financial quarters (underutilization may be a consequence of poor timing of disbursements)?
- What are the staffing patterns? Are there adequate and trained staff to carry out the mandated services?
- What are the unit costs of delivery? Are they realistic? How do they compare with international or national standards or benchmarks?

Often governments will seek to address the particular needs of women and girls by establishing dedicated programs and departments, but this does not always result in more funds reaching women. Common challenges associated with policies and programs that target women include limited funds, inadequate trained personnel capable of delivering quality services, and a high level of underspending. For example, the creation of an independent Ministry for Women and Child Development in India has not resulted in any significant increase in its budget allocations compared to when it was just a department. Furthermore, priorities for women within the ministry/department have actually decreased from 9.2 percent in 2004–05 (real expenditure) to 3 percent in 2006–07 (real expenditure). The union budget 2009–10 shows a decline in proportional resources for women.

For gender advocates, it is important to understand the factors that affect the utilization of funds allocated for women so as to ensure better outcomes at both the national and local level. This requires an understanding of what happens in each stage of the budget process. In the formulation stage women's priorities must be factored in; in the legislation stage it is important to assess whether a budget for women's schemes is being debated or not; in the implementation phase civil society organizations can contribute budget tracking exercises with a gender perspective; and in the audit phase the parameters of oversight should try to capture the gender component.

This article summarizes a paper published by WIDE and edited by Christa Wichterich. To read the full paper, go to ["In search of economic alternatives for gender and social justice: Voices from India."](#)

For more resources on budget analysis through a gender lens, visit the IBP website at: <http://www.internationalbudget.org/budget-analysis/sectors-issues-demographic/?fa=gender-equity>

Social Audits Examine Public Health Services in El Salvador by Celia Aparicio Fundación Maquilishuatl

The electoral victory of the left-wing Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front party in 2009 opened opportunities for Salvadorian civil society organizations (CSOs) to participate in public decision-making processes. One such opportunity comes out of the creation of the National Health Forum, a citizens' initiative to conduct social audits of public health policies and programs. Currently the Forum is composed of 18 CSOs with expertise in health and civic engagement, but it will soon expand to include democratically elected community representatives in community assemblies.

The Forum provides a space for people to express their perspectives on the delivery of public health services. This is done through regular social audit exercises and studies of the public's perception of the quality of health services and the management and execution of the public health budget. To this end the National Health Forum organizes:

- public consultations in the Ministry of Health's five regions of operation: Eastern, Paracentral, Central, Metropolitan, and Western regions; and
- workshops on sexual and reproductive health, health and medicine, violence, water and sanitation, networks and services, and disaster prevention and mitigation.

Through investigations and complaints from the public, the forum identifies and discusses challenges in the public health system, including drug shortages from insufficient investments, which make it impossible to meet the demand for treatment. The goal of the Forum is to outline possible solutions to issues like this one and strategies for implementing them.

Margarita Posada, National Health Forum coordinator, says "it is important to analyze national financial policies to discover the causes of the problems identified in different regions, because there is a deficiency in the budget in each of the issues raised. It is also important to say that no budget will resolve the situation as long as there is no regulation of drug prices."

In addition to the impact of the high cost of drugs, between 2006 and 2007 the legislature reduced allocations to hospitals from \$238 million to \$157 million dollars, exacerbating the shortage of medications and the lack of equipment in hospital facilities. For this reason, the Forum is pushing for a comprehensive drug law to ensure the quality and registration of medications, regulate pharmaceutical companies' profits, and ensure that these functions are regulated by the Ministry of Health. Currently these functions are divided between the Ministry of Health and the Higher Council of Public Health, complicating access to information and accountability practices.

"One of the variables affecting a budget increase is the political determination of the new health authorities to solve the shortage problem, but there is a reality that will clash with that political will — the fact that even doubling investments will not solve the problem of the high cost of medications," says Margarita Posada. In addition to the issue of drug prices, the problems identified and discussed in the Forum's workshops and regional consultations, namely the poor quality of public health services and shortages of supplies and medications, are due to previous fiscal policies and insufficient funding of the system. Hence the National Health Forum aims to develop participatory policies and proposals that will increase the health budget.

Among the goals for this year is the completion of the first social audit exercise at the national level on the issues identified in the regional consultations. The findings and recommendations to improve the quality of public health services will be submitted to the Ministry of Health to raise awareness of the public's needs and priorities.

For more information, contact Celia Aparicio at programas@fuma.org.sv.

Budget Analysis and Advocacy to Institutionalize Social Programs for Low-Income People in Guatemala by Jorge Santos, Centro Internacional para Investigaciones en Derechos Humanos

Two and half years ago the government of Guatemala established a series of programs to fight poverty, including senior pension programs, programs to distribute food or solidarity packages, soup kitchens, and the conditional cash transfer program MIFAPRO (Mi familia progresa [My Family Makes Progress]).

MIFAPRO is the program that reaches the greatest number of people in Guatemala — around 814,890 families in 273 of the country's 333 municipalities — and represents the strongest mechanism within the national poverty reduction strategy. The program transfers Q300.00 per month (approximately US\$37.50) to families living in poverty and extreme poverty who comply with Guatemala's requirements for pre and postnatal health care, immunizations, and monitoring of children's growth and school attendance. The selection of beneficiary households is based on demographic data from public institutions, such as the National Institute of Statistics, the General Planning Secretariat, and the MIFAPRO program itself. Heads of households that receive MIFAPRO benefits, usually women, receive health and education bonuses as long as they meet the program's requirements.

Despite the program's high demand and political relevance, its budget of around Q2 billion (US\$250 million) represents 4.8 percent of the total national budget and less than one percent of the GDP. This is why the Centro Internacional para Investigaciones en Derechos Humanos (CIIDH) decided to analyze the design, impact, and effectiveness of MIFAPRO, in order to propose measures to ensure its sustainability and proper categorization within the budget so as to ensure benefits for low-income families.

MIFAPRO is currently funded through a private trust managed by the Ministry of Education. The bank is then responsible for distributing the funds to the beneficiaries. Although there is general information available on how the private bank manages the trust, citizens cannot hold the bank accountable for this information. As long as MIFAPRO's public funds are handled through a private trust the program remains vulnerable to low levels of transparency without a legal framework that protects its continuity. Hence CIIDH seeks to formalize MIFAPRO into a specific budget item to:

- simplify and standardize the disbursement and execution of funds, which in the case of MIFAPRO are intersectoral public funds related for health and education; and
- ensure its sustainability as a permanent budget item for social welfare.

In the long term the CIIDH plans to extend MIFAPRO's coverage to include all the people living in poverty, increase the benefits it provides, and promote additional programs to better fight poverty. To this end the CIIDH has identified legislators on the public finance, health, education, family, human rights, transparency and probity committees, as well as the executive, as key players in this advocacy effort. To inform its proposals, the CIIDH plans to conduct interviews with MIFAPRO's beneficiaries in five municipalities and incorporate their perspectives on the need for greater transparency in the operation of this program.

For more information, contact Jorge Santos at santosnatural@gmail.com.

A Review of the Subnational Fiscal Transparency Index for Ecuador by Iván Borja, Grupo Faro

Grupo Faro collaborated with the International Budget Partnership (IBP) to develop the Subnational Fiscal Transparency Index — an analytical tool to assess the transparency of each phase of the budget cycle at the municipal level in Ecuador. The resulting analysis covers 13 municipalities or decentralized autonomous governments (Gobiernos Autónomos Descentralizados, GADs) over the 2009-2010 period. The complete research process included:

- designing the methodology and questionnaire;

- developing a guide for researchers on how to use the questionnaire;
- providing an analysis of the legal framework for municipal budget administration; and
- producing and disseminating a report of the findings.

During the research process, Grupo Faro interviewed a variety of stakeholders, including the comptroller general and ombudsman; public officials in administration, finance, planning, and internal audit units; civil society organizations (CSOs); and professional associations and representatives of parish councils. The interviews not only provided information for the Index but also promoted the methodology and importance of the Index to assess the transparency of local governments.

The Index is based on the Municipal Budget Transparency Survey conducted by Grupo Faro and the IBP, which was based on the [Open Budget Survey](#). The MBT Survey examines the timeliness, availability, and dissemination of official documents produced during the planning, formulation, discussion, approval, implementation, evaluation, and oversight of municipal budgets. These documents represent the basic budget information citizens need to understand, monitor, and oversee public spending.

The Subnational Fiscal Transparency Index drawn from the MBT Survey measures public access to information produced during the fiscal year, as well as its quality. It analyzes the documents generated during the 2009-2010 fiscal cycle in order to understand how the production, comprehensiveness, and dissemination of these documents throughout the budget process promotes, or impedes, transparency and participation at the municipal level.

The average score of the municipalities was 48 points out of 100. Ambato was the municipality with the highest score (78), while Esmeraldas ranked lowest with a score of 16. The municipalities with above average scores are the most densely populated (Ambato, Cuenca, Guayaquil, and Quito). These municipalities usually operate through complex institutional structures that control a large share of the public funds executed at the state level. Orellana is one of the municipalities with highest scores (65). It is a medium-sized city that has had an exponential population growth over the last 20 years but also has considerable resources from oil extraction and production. The Index shows that subnational governments with more robust budgets like Orellana have higher levels of transparency.

The legal framework that regulates the national budget does not address the management of GAD budgets in a comprehensive way. The interaction between government agencies is subject to fund transfers from and budget and financial information requirements imposed by the Ministry of Finance. Although the Code of Land Management, Autonomy, and Decentralization regulates the municipal budget cycle, and the Code of Planning and Public Finance provides a national-subnational budget integration mechanism, the creation of complementary standards is key to preventing the administration of public funds flowing from the national government from undermining states' autonomy and the decentralization processes. This would increase the consistency, accountability, and transparency of subnational governments.

The study concludes that overall the 12 documents that are generated at the municipal level during the budget cycle provide inadequate information and are not widely accessible to the public. This is in part because many of these documents are prepared for purely technical purposes, i.e., to inform the internal management of public resources in each phase of the budget cycle. Sometimes information can be obtained through formal requests under the Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information, however few efforts are made to

proactively disseminate this information. Doing so is key to increasing the levels of budget transparency and participation at the municipal level.

Grupo Faro hopes that the Index will become widely used by CSOs and government agencies to:

- compare municipal transparency levels on a yearly basis;
- make national projections of the state of transparency in all the municipalities in the country; and
- inform municipal agendas on how to improve their level of budget transparency.

To see the Index, go to:

http://www.internationalbudget.org/pdf/Indice_Transparencia_Fiscal_Subnacional_GrupofARO.pdf

For more information, contact Iván Borja at iborja@grupofaro.org.

The Open Budget Survey Elicits Government Response and Action by Michael Castro, International Budget Partnership

By measuring how transparent and accountable governments' budgets are in comparison to nearly 100 countries around the world, the Open Budget Survey pressures governments to improve, provides them with practical steps they can take, and recognizes those that do so. Over the past two rounds of the Survey – 2008 and 2010 – a number of governments have responded to the results in words and, more important, positive actions. Though some governments have raised questions about the Survey and how they were ranked, the IBP and its civil society partners in the countries studied are encouraged by the steps several governments have taken to make their budget systems more open and responsive. Governments have:

- published Citizens Budgets;
- issued statements mentioning their country's performance on the Open Budget Index (OBI), especially highlighting improvement; and
- committed to act to increase budget transparency in their country.

Egypt, Brazil, and Mexico Publish Citizens Budgets

According to the IBP's recently released [Guide to Transparency in Government Budget Reports: Why are Budget Reports Important, and What Should They Include?](#), a Citizens Budget is a nontechnical presentation of either a country's proposed or enacted budget. Budget documents tend to be rather dense and complex, which limits the ability of the average citizen to decipher how the government intends to raise and spend public funds. By presenting the government's budget plans in ways that most people can understand, publishing a Citizens Budgets demonstrates a government's commitment to being open and accountable to the public.

- After the Middle East/North Africa regional release of the Open Budget Survey 2010 in Amman, Jordan, officials from the Egyptian Ministry of Finance and the OBI partner in Egypt, Professor Lobna Abdellatif from the American University of Cairo, discussed the publication of a Citizens Budget. In December 2010 Egypt became the first government in the Middle East and North Africa region to produce a

[Citizens Budget](#). In January 2010 the [Mexican government started publishing a Citizens Budget](#) after several months of dialogue with IBP partner Fundar. The Mexican government worked with Fundar for two years to develop a Citizen's Budgets with the guidelines established in the OBI's *Guide to the Open Budget Questionnaire: An Explanation of the Questions and the Response Options*.

- Officials from the Ministry of Planning, Budget, and Management in Brazil met with the Open Budget Initiative regarding Brazil's score on the Open Budget Survey 2008 and committed to producing a Citizens Budget. In 2010 the [Brazilian government published a Citizens Budget for the 2011 fiscal year](#).

Afghanistan, Guatemala, Kyrgyz Republic, Mexico, and South Africa Issue Statements Responding to the Open Budget Survey

- The Afghanistan [Ministry of Finance issued a press release](#) highlighting the country's significant improvement on the Open Budget Survey 2010 compared to 2008.
- The Kyrgyz Republic Ministry of Finance [regards the results of the Open budget Survey 2010 as "incorrect and biased."](#)
- The Guatemalan government [took credit for earning a 2010 OBI score that was above the regional average for Latin America](#). The Vice Minister of Public Finance, Marco Livio Díaz Reyes, and the Director of Fiscal Transparency, Casta Luz Meza, stated the government's political will to improve budget transparency and the enactment of the Freedom of Information law in the country are the reasons [why the country has improved on the Open Budget Survey](#).
- The Mexican government cites the Open Budget Survey in the [Executive's Budget Proposal 2011](#), stating that the Survey "shows that the federal government provides budget information to citizens, publishes detailed reports throughout the year and budget information necessary to understand the government's progress in implementing a specific project or activity is accessible."
- The South African [Minister of Finance, Pravin Gordhan, praised South Africa's top performance on the Open Budget Survey 2010](#). He challenged parliamentarians to improve oversight, accountability, and service delivery to improve the lives of South Africans.

Government Commitments from Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Guatemala, and Iraq

The Open Budget Survey 2010 shows improvement in budget transparency among the 40 countries that have been measured over three consecutive rounds of the study. Political will can be attributed to the improved performance of many countries, including Afghanistan, Liberia, and Yemen. Governments can improve transparency and accountability quickly and easily by publishing online all of the budget information they already produced. After the international and national releases of the 2010 Survey several governments have committed to increasing budget transparency in their country.

- In December 2010 the Afghanistan Ministry of Finance issued a press release committing to [releasing the Executive's Budget Proposal on the Ministry of Finance's website](#) at the same time it is presented to parliament for approval and to publishing a Citizens Budget.
- In its [2011 Budget Report](#), the Bulgarian government committed to continue expanding opportunities for citizen participation in budget processes and to increasing budget transparency overall.
- In October 2010 the Guatemalan Vice Minister of Public Finance and the Director of Fiscal Transparency committed to increasing budget transparency, and thus

Guatemala's performance in the next round of the Open Budget Survey. In addition, the [government of Guatemala agreed to receive technical assistance from the IBP](#) through its Mentoring Governments Program.

- Officials from the Iraqi Ministry of Finance at the regional release of the Open Budget Survey 2010 in Amman, Jordan, announced its commitment to establish a "Special Committee" on budget transparency.

For more information, contact Michael Castro at castro@cbpp.org.

Measuring Subnational Budget Transparency by Lesley Fisher, International Budget Partnership

Following the progress the Open Budget Survey has made in measuring and establishing benchmarks for government budget transparency and oversight at the national level, the IBP commissioned pilot studies in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, China, Croatia, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Mali, Mongolia, Peru, and South Africa to identify ways to measure transparency at subnational government level. Civil society organizations in each country received financial assistance to explore methods for assessing how much information governments at the state/provincial or local/municipal level made available to the public throughout the budget process. The results of the pilot studies are currently being reviewed and will be published in the near future. The findings from the case studies will assist in designing toolkits and developing standards on subnational budget transparency. In this issue you can read about the pilot study in Ecuador led by Grupo Faro (see "A Review of the Subnational Fiscal Transparency Index for Ecuador" by Iván Borja) and upcoming issues of the newsletter will include updates from other pilot countries.

The International Budget Partnership Participates in the Partnership for Maternal Newborn and Children's Health Forum in New Delhi, India by Rocío Campos, International Budget Partnership

The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (PMNCH) forum gathers high level international stakeholders like the World Health Organization, U.N. agencies, nongovernmental organizations, the media, the private sector, and governments to discuss how to measure progress toward the United Nation's Global Health Strategy. The International Budget Partnership (IBP) presented "Enforcing Accountability through Budget Transparency and Citizen Participation in the Budget Process" at the 2010 PMNCH forum held in New Delhi, India. This presentation was one of the few that discussed the importance of citizen participation and access to public budget information as a precondition to fulfilling governments' commitments to improving maternal, newborn, and child health.

The IBP's presentation focused on government accountability from a citizen perspective and highlighted the importance of producing and publishing budget information on maternal and child health. The IBP also used this opportunity to meet with other international civil society organizations, including the International Initiative for Maternal Mortality and Human Rights (IMMHR), White Ribbon Alliance, and Family Care International, on the need to continue integrating budget analysis and advocacy as a core component of their work on women's and children's health issues.

To read the presentation, go to: http://www.internationalbudget.org/pdf/PMNCH-IBP_Presentation.pdf.

Deciding the Fate of Access to Information in France by Elena Mondo, International Budget Partnership

On 16 December 2010 the French Parliament withdrew a proposed amendment to enhance France's security and access to information laws. This is very good news because the amendment would have required background behavior checks on those who sought access to government information, opening the door to providing discretionary, and potentially discriminatory, access to public information. Fortunately the French Parliament enacted a revised amendment that did not include changes to France's access to information law; although it retained required "morality" checks on those who seek to use the national database of vehicle license plates.

According to the European organizations Access Info and Regards Citoyens, the other measures adopted by the French Parliament, including administrative filtering of Internet content without judicial oversight, may need to be monitored very closely given the concerns of human rights organizations around possible Internet censorship (see <http://www.laquadrature.net/en/administrative-net-censorship-adopted-in-france-pedophiles-unworried>).

The original proposed amendment was softened after an international campaign by a coalition of organizations and experts from 25 countries mobilized the public around the issues of how the proposed law would constrain both access to information and freedom of expression in France. This cross-border advocacy is a model that civil society budget groups looking to increase transparency in their government's budget processes and institutions can use to tap international support for their advocacy efforts.

In spite of the proposed amendment's potential to limit access to information, France's score in the Open Budget Index (OBI) 2010 remains very high at 87 out of 100 (see <http://internationalbudget.org/what-we-do/open-budget-survey/?fa=Rankings>). The OBI the public availability, timeliness, and comprehensiveness of government budget information and, although the proposed amendment would have had a greater impact in areas outside the budget, it raised significant concern among budget transparency advocates. In contrast, other countries that performed at very high levels in the OBI 2010, such as New Zealand, Norway, the U.K. and the U.S. are expanding their efforts to make more information available to the public by posting large volumes of raw data online without any conditions on who may use it or how.

Although many countries do not release the most basic budget documents it is important to acknowledge those countries that have transparent and accountable budget systems but encourage them to think about how to pursue even greater openness.

For more information, contact Elena Mondo at mondo@cbpp.org.

***Lives in the Balance: Improving Accountability for Public Spending in Developing Countries* by Charles C. Griffin, David de Ferranti, Courtney Tolmie, Justin Jacinto, Graeme Ramshaw, and Chinyere Bun**

Foreign aid is under a microscope because of its potential impact and, in some cases, the harm it has brought. Donor countries have a strong interest in ensuring that their foreign assistance is used effectively; recipient countries need to use the resources they have and get so as to have the greatest impact; and analysts, policymakers, and writers are scrutinizing how much aid is flowing, where, and for what. But aid is only a small part of

what developing country governments spend. Their own resources finance 80 percent or more of health and education spending, except in the most aid-dependent countries. *Lives in the Balance* investigates a vital aspect of this landscape — how best to ensure that public spending, including aid money, reaches its intended beneficiaries.

The book outlines how the development of democratic institutions and the spread of cheap communications technologies in developing countries allow citizens and civil society organizations to advocate for improved transparency, stronger accountability, better priorities, reduced corruption, and support for the poor. Securing real reform depends on donors knowing not only how the recipient government operates but also how to work with other stakeholders like the media, the private sector, and legislators to raise awareness and bring change.

To learn more, go to: <http://www.partnership-africa.org/content/lives-balance-improving-accountability-public-spending-developing-nations>.

To obtain the book, go to: <http://www.amazon.com/Lives-Balance-Improving-Accountability-Developing/dp/0815732899>.

***Transparency Squared: The Effects of Aid Transparency on Recipients' Corruption Levels* by Zachary Christensen, Richard Nielsen, Daniel Nielsen, and Michael Tiernay**

In *Transparency Squared: The Effects of Aid Transparency on Recipient Corruption Levels*, the authors measure aid transparency for a range of donors based on the amount of information each makes available about its activities. The research explores the possible link between aid transparency on the part of donors and corruption in their recipient governments, concluding that "more transparent aid appears to lead to lower corruption levels."

The report was prepared for the 2010 International Political Economy Society annual meeting at Harvard University and is available here: https://ncgg.princeton.edu/IPES/2010/papers/F220_paper2.pdf.

Program Officer Position with the Ford Foundation in Cairo

The Ford Foundation is hiring a program officer to be based in Cairo, Egypt, for their Economic and Social Rights, Democracy Rights, and Justice Program in Middle East and North Africa. The deadline to submit applications is 25 February 2011. For more information, go to: <http://www.fordfoundation.org/employment/jobs/306>.

Coordinator Position with Publish What You Pay -Uganda (PWYP-U)

Publish What You Pay (PWYP) - Uganda is seeking to recruit a Coordinator for its work on transparency in the extractive industry. PWYP-U is a loose coalition of more than 40 member civil society organizations (civil society organizations) that was formed in 2008. It aims to build holistic and interdisciplinary approaches that shall ensure that the extractive industry contributes to community development and social transformation. Under the direct supervision of the Executive Committee (EC), the Coordinator is responsible for the implementation of PWYP-U's mandate and for the scope of activities developed within this mandate. For more information, contact pwypuganda@gmail.com.