



Ghana places 32nd among 59 countries in Open Budget Index

 
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Accra, Oct. 18, GNA - Ghana scored 42 per cent to place 32nd among 59 countries in an Open Budget Index result derived from a Budget Transparency study undertaken in 2005 by the Washington-based International Budget Project (IBP).

The index, which is the first to be launched simultaneously globally, seeks to rate the openness of budget books to citizens by their governments.

Mr Vitus Azeem, Coordinator for the Budget Advocacy, a civil society unit of the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) representing IBP in Ghana, who performed the national launch in Accra on Wednesday said Ghana performed below average in the overall index in the study, which looked at six conditions or indices expected to be met by government in preparing, reading and implementing budgets.

The indices used to rate the countries are the preparation of an executive budget proposal, presentation of a pre-budget statement, a presentation of an in-year report on the execution of a budget, presentation of a mid-year review, a year-end report and an auditor's report.

Ghana did not do well in the preparation of a pre-budget statement, in-year reports on execution, year-end report and auditor's reports.

The country, however, scored 64 per cent for making known her executive budget proposals and 42 per cent in the presentation of a mid-year review of the budget.

Mr Azeem said the countries were assessed on each of the indices on the basis of providing extensive, significant, minimal and scanty information.

He mentioned the United Kingdom, New Zealand, France and South Africa as the countries which topped the executive budget proposal indices scoring 95, 89, 86 and 83 per cent in that order. Ghana is in the same bracket with Malawi and the Czech Republic with the score of 64 per cent.

"The study showed that Ghana's proposal provides substantial information to the public, scoring 64 per cent out of a possible 100 per cent of the information needed to present the public with a comprehensive picture of the government's financial activities," Mr Azeem said and added that there was still room for improvement.

He said Ghana did not provide in-year reports but by making such reports, "we could increase accountability since these documents permit oversight of the budget's execution".

"Bits of Ghana's budget performance are usually found in the subsequent year's budget statement but even then they are usually provisional figures," Mr Azeem said.

He explained that in principle, the auditor-general's reports in Ghana were public documents, once they had been presented to Parliament.

"However, these audit reports are not easily accessible to the public and the government does not provide information on whether the audit report's recommendations are successfully implemented."

Mr Azeem observed that government had in recent times attempted to introduce new measures to open up the budget process, which had been viewed all this while as a technical process better left to the politicians and their collaborators in the civil service.

He said the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning's effort to call for inputs for the budget since 2005 and the provision of financial statements on some statutory funds in the appendices of the 2006 budget were commendable.

"This additional information was expected to enhance the budget process, make Ghanaians know more about resource mobilization and utilization and thus make government more accountable to its constituents."

Mr Nicholas Adamtey, a Policy Analyst at Integrated Social Development (ISODEC), said the government had for some time placed budget statements and information on resources on the internet and this indicated a motive to be accountable to the people.

He explained that when governments made their budget proposals known to the people, it helped them to make inputs and ensure that policy statements on utilization of resources favoured every concern. This also promoted efficient use of resources.

The Open Budget Index was developed by the IBP in collaboration with civil society organizations around the world.

The initiative is aimed to provide citizens, legislators and the civil society advocates with the comprehensive and practical information needed to gauge a government's commitment to budget transparency and accountability.

The Ford Foundation, the Open Society Institution and the Flora and William Hewlett Foundation fund activities of the IBP with additional funding from British, Swedish and Norwegian development agencies.

Three such studies have been conducted so far but this is the first time the results have been indexed.

Initial results have been compiled into a book but organizers believe the next study could be undertaken in 2008 to cover about 80 countries instead of 60 used for the 2005 study.

Source: GNA

<http://www2.ghanatoday.com/index.php?option=news&task=viewarticle&sid=19555#>