

## Launch Activities in India

India's Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA) released the Open Budget Initiative findings during a media event at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi on December 12<sup>th</sup> 2006. Speakers included Shri V. K. Shunglu, Former Comptroller and Auditor General of India, and Mr. Rupchand Pal, minister of parliament and member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance. The discussion focused on the survey's results and the level of transparency in India. More than 30 accredited journalists and media representatives attended the release.

Mr. Siba Sankar Mohanty of CBGA presented the report's major findings. Commenting on the findings, Mr. Rupchand Pal noted that a veil of secrecy continues to exist around the budget, and that the philosophy behind budget-making in India is largely governed by the country's colonial legacy and the character of its democracy.

Highlighting the complicated federal structure, Mr. V. K. Shunglu stressed that a proper understanding of the budget should take into account resource transfers by the central government and implementation by states. Mr. Shunglu also emphasized that civil society can determine whether issues important to the majority are reflected in the budget. Yamini Mishra, CBGA Coordinator said that exercises such as the Open Budget Initiative constitute a small step towards the "deepening of democracy."

There are a number of limits to transparency in India. Pre-budget statements are not made public and there is no multi-year budgeting, a common feature in many other countries. In addition, policy proposals are not linked to budgets and impact assessments are not presented. The parliament has less than six weeks to discuss the budget, which restricts effective participation. While India has an independent audit authority (CAG) that monitors government expenditure, the government does not follow-up on its recommendations adequately. The government posts budget information on the Internet, which facilitates access to these otherwise closed documents. However, in 2004, only 32 in 1,000 thousand of people could use the Internet. In addition, useful information is available only for the central government finances. At the state level, the budget speech is usually the only information provided.

The Open Budget report will be helpful for policy makers in making budget processes more transparent and accessible. Seventeen media houses reported on the media release. This coverage was broadcast on Star News and on Enadu TV in. The event was covered in the *Hindustan Express*, the *Hindustan Times*, the *Business Standard*, the *National Herald*, and on websites including [inhome.rediff.com](http://inhome.rediff.com), [RxPGnews.com](http://RxPGnews.com), [indiaprwire.com](http://indiaprwire.com), [dailyindia.com](http://dailyindia.com), [newkerala.com](http://newkerala.com), [teluguportal.com](http://teluguportal.com), [indiaenews.com](http://indiaenews.com), [ibnlive.com](http://ibnlive.com).