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News

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Re-our budgets have been transparent

We refer to the Public Agenda lead story of Friday, 20th of October 2006. The claim that the preparation of Ghana's annual budgets has not been sufficiently transparent is absurd. Even more absurd is the suggestion that the communication of budget contents to the public and the reporting on implementation have been inadequate.

2. It is a practice of government to invite the general public to make inputs into the preparation of our annual budgets. Indeed, in the current budget, bodies and individuals who responded to the invitation were acknowledged in the budget statement itself. Please refer to pages 373 and 374.

3. Additionally, we hold consultative meetings with various stakeholders to capture their perspectives on various policy decisions prior to the preparations of the budget. The recent series of meetings involving organised labour, employers and government in Swedru to fashion out an acceptable policy on wages and public sector reforms in the next budget, for instance, could be cited.

4. Another example worthy of note is the setting up of a consultative committee involving tax administration officers and the leadership of Ghana Union of Traders Association to recommend implementation guidelines for the flat rate Value Added Taxation for input into the next budget. Several other examples could be cited.

5. On provision of information on budget contents to the public, it is hard to imagine how anybody could have come to the conclusion that Ghana falls short in any way. Paragraph 1159 of the 2006 Budget Statement, for example, makes a commitment to communicate government policies and programmes with all sections of the public.

6. In fulfilment of this budgetary promise, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning has organised meetings with several communities, among them the traders and residents of Abosey Okai in Accra, the chiefs and people in the Ayawaso area and traders and shop owners at the Accra Central Business District. The purpose of all these meetings has been to educate the people on their obligations and the opportunities open to them under the 2006 Budget. These meetings were recorded and broadcast on different TV stations for the benefit of the entire nation.

7. Also, specific policies have been isolated and explained in the media. Example is the ongoing education on the Micro-credit Scheme inspired from paragraph 232 and related sections of the 2006 Budget Statement. The many articles explaining opportunities flowing out of policies in the budget that have been published in the print media and in information leaflets are all designed to take the budget to the people.

8. And the reporting on all these budget measures has been properly and frequently done. The print media carry achievements on macroeconomic targets released by the Ghana Statistical Service on monthly basis. The Service has again started releasing data on the outcome of government's employment initiatives.

9. Decisions by the Monetary Policy Committee are also announced immediately after their

quarterly meetings and reported in both the print and electronic media.

10. On top of all these, the budget statements themselves always carry a comprehensive review of achievements and shortfalls under the previous year's budget. And these are done mid-year where government has had to present supplementary estimates for parliamentary approval.

11. While we encourage the public to monitor government actions and budgetary promises, we also advise against uninformed conclusions and commentaries on events in the country. It is important that we make an honest assessment of what we do as a country so we can work on our weaknesses and build on our strength.

Kwaku Kwarteng
Head of Communication

Author:

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