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BUDGETS: LET'S ENSURE GREATER TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

| Posted: *Tuesday, October 31, 2006*

□ The Centre for Budget Advocacy (CBA), the budget unit of the Integrated Social Development Concern (ISODEC), a fortnight ago launched in Accra the findings of a study on Budget Transparency based on past budgets up to 2005.

The Open Budget Index, an initiative of the International Budget Project of Washington DC, in collaboration with 59 civil society organisations must certainly be of interest to all who are interested in open and transparent governance, probity and accountability, which the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana demands.

Even though Ghana was found to have scored well in the dissemination of information on budget proposals, scoring 64% on the scale of "providing significant information", the country was reported to have zero percentage point on pre-budget statement for not releasing any pre-budget statement to the public prior to the release of the main budget.

The public gets to know about the budgetary provisions and policy statements only after they have been presented to Parliament.

Withholding the Auditor-General's report from the members of the public, as well as the monitoring to ensure budgetary projects and programmes that were being executed were some of the shortfalls Ghana was caught in.

With reference to the last point above, an issue that readily comes up is the disbursement of HIPC funds that many Ghanaians have demanded is done in a more transparent manner.

The Chronicle sometime last year raised issues with the lack of conclusiveness in our budgets.

This is because going back to the 1990s, all our budgets have remained provisional even years after the period for which the revenue and expenditure proposals contained in the budget were past.

So, for instance, the Budget Statement and Economic Policy of Government for the 2005 financial year still carried 'Provisional Actual' expenditure and revenue for 2003, whilst without those provisional figures being firmed, the 2006 Budget Statement also carried 'Provisional Outturns' for 2004.

Working with this kind of information, it is always very difficult to establish if even all of the already inadequate allocations get to their designated accounts to meet the purposes for which they were provided for in the Constitution.

As a country still with cap in hand, globe-trotting for support to meet our needs, some of which are still very basic survival needs like water, it is important we identify all sources of leakages and plug them up so as to maximize the use of the little that we have.

This is quite important, for if we utilise well the resources that what we have, we may not need a lot of the things we go out there begging for.

What The Chronicle finds disheartening is that whilst important issues like the Open Budget Index ratings of Ghana should have engaged national attention and discourse to look at lessons to be learnt from it, a sizable number of the population was engaged in discussions that border on tribalism, ethnocentrism, etc., which hardly add to our development agenda.

It is the hope of The Chronicle that the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, would take the necessary cue and ensure that the shortfalls identified with our budgetary system are addressed to make for greater transparency and accountability.

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