

By Dr. Kay Brown

THE International Budget Partnership describes itself as an organisation that collaborates with civil societies around the world to promote using budget analysis and advocacy as a tool to improve effective governance and reduce poverty.

As part of its efforts to achieve this goal it regularly conducts the Open Budget Survey, an independent assessment, to examine the level of budget accountability across a wide range of countries.

Citizens must be afforded opportunities to have informed engagements with governments, enabling them to hold governments accountable for choices made that impact on people's livelihoods and wellbeing.

This Survey examines the three main areas of budget accountability, that is:

1 Transparency: Whether countries make detailed information on their budgets available to the public at large;

2 Participation: Whether the public are given opportunities to use this information to engage in the budget process; and,

3 Oversight: Whether parliaments and the government audit institution have sufficient mechanisms to appropriately oversee the government's implementation of approved budgets.

This survey has been conducted, across multiple countries, five times in the last decade, that is in 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2015.

To enhance the credibility of the Survey results, it is conducted by independent researchers in each country and results are reviewed by an anonymous expert, prior to their publication.

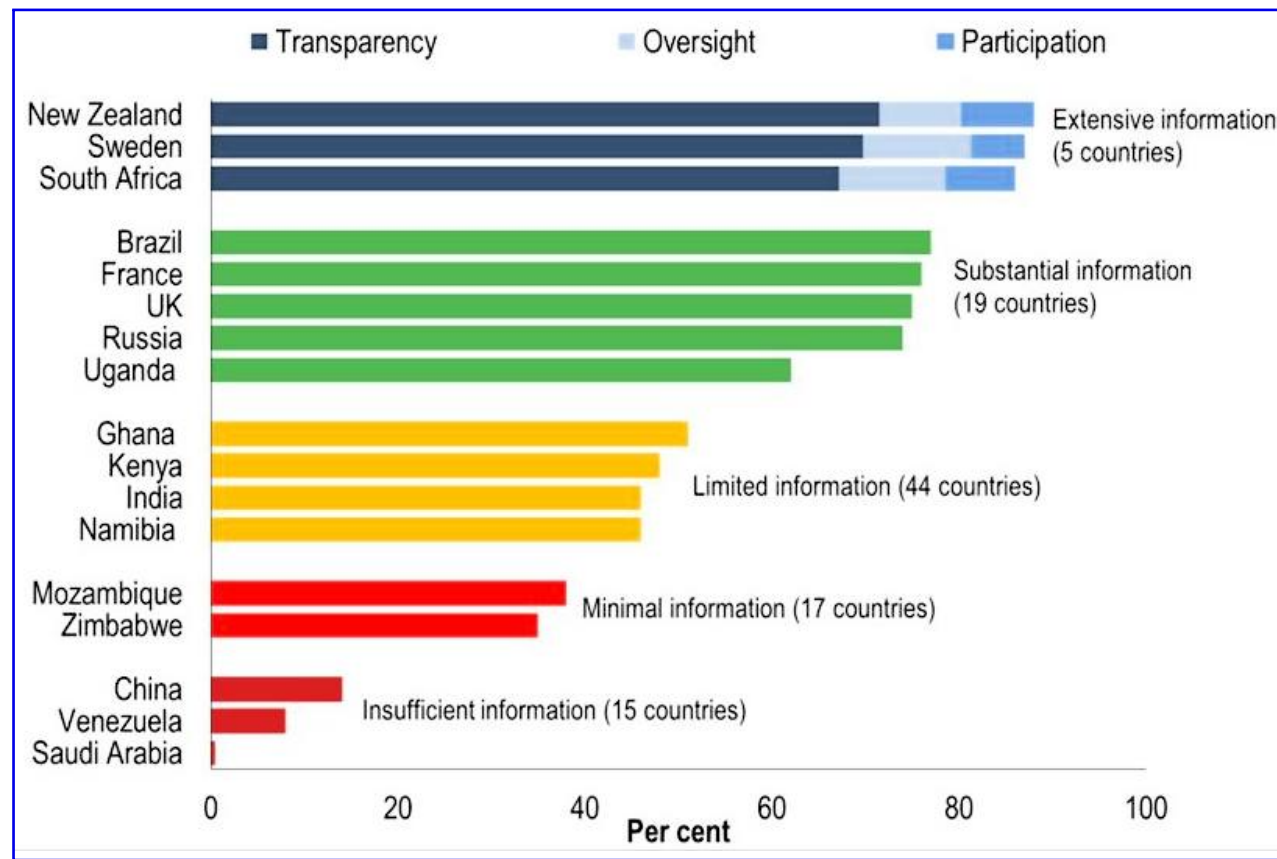
Researchers and reviewers base their assessment on evidence of country budget outputs and systems. Did you know that South Africa surpassed all of the other countries surveyed in 2010 to win the 'gold medal', being ranked number 1?

In the most recent 2015 Survey, South Africa continued to perform

How open budgeting empowers you, the ordinary South African



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exceptionally, ranking third out of the 102 countries that participated.

New Zealand scored 88 out of 100, Sweden 87 and South Africa 86.

These scores are significantly higher than the average score of 45 across all of the 102 countries surveyed.

The graph above summarises how we rank in the 3 main areas of budget accountability, against some of the other countries that took part in the survey.

Measuring budget transparency, public participation and parliament and audit oversight, South Africa was in the top five countries.



South Africa scored third of all 102 countries for transparency. The bulk of the questions in the survey examine the level of budget

transparency, that is the amount of budget information made available to the public.

You have more budget information at your fingertips than most other citizens of the world. This information is available to you in printed budget documentation, and on the National Treasury's website. The information available ranges from highly detailed information contained in voluminous Estimates of National Expenditure publications, to the summarised graphic information contained in the citizens' guide to the budget. Information contained in budget publication tables is also made available in Microsoft Excel format, enabling you to download the data

and use the data to best suit your analysis needs.

If you haven't yet witnessed the magnitude of information available to you, jump onto <http://www.treasury.gov.za/> and start clicking away.

Another sub-set of the Survey questions examines opportunities for you as members of the public to participate in budget processes. South Africa ranked jointly fifth for public participation.

There are various avenues available to you as citizens to engage the National Treasury on the budget process. These include a facility for citi-

zens to record your budget suggestions for the Minister of Finance on the National Treasury's website, and later opportunities provided by parliament for citizens to provide their views on budgets tabled for approval.

In recent years, the National Treasury has worked to improve dialogue with citizens on the budget process.

Treasury officials make regular budget presentations at universities, and hold workshops with civil society organisations following the tabling of the national budget.

For the future, parliament, audit institutions and the executive do need to consider how to deepen citizen engagement on the public finances.

South Africa remains committed to constantly expanding the quantity and quality of information it provides to citizens on how public resources are generated and used.

Our international reputation as a global leader in budget transparency is built up since the dawn of our democracy and is well deserved.

Current steps to strengthen budget transparency include the National Treasury publishing more details of the underlying economic information taken into account to formulate the estimates of an upcoming budget, published in its Medium Term Budget Policy Statement.

The Office of the Chief Procurement Officer is also leading efforts to make procurement and tender information available to the public.

The National Treasury is working with civil society organisations to consider how to make South African budget data more understandable and accessible.

Go now to the National Treasury website and use the extensive information available.

If you actively participate in our budget process, it will be for the benefit of all South Africans.

Let your voice be heard!

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THE Citizen-Based Monitoring (CBM) pilot concluded major field activities at the end of August 2015 with community feedback meetings in Elundini, Eastern Cape and Kabokweni, Mpumalanga.

This marked the close of an intensive two-year action learning process implemented by DPME, the South African Police Service, the Department of Health, South African Social Security Agency and the Department of Social Development, together with Offices of the Premier and Seriti Institute, a non-governmental organisation.

With financial support from the Department for International Development (DFID), the pilot was implemented in 34 government facilities, serving nine communities across all nine provinces.

The pilot has, for the past 24 months, focused on developing a method for citizen-based monitoring at a facility level, and thus setting the conditions fair for service delivery improvements and monitoring that are informed and driven by citizen's experiences and voices.

This is in keeping with the Framework For Strengthening Citizen Government Partnerships for Monitoring Frontline Service Delivery, approved by Cabinet in August 2013 as well as the DPME's Open Government Partnership commitment to strengthen citizen voices in monitoring and planning.

Sustainable development and accountability thrive on meaningful and informed participation of citizens in decisions that affect them.

The CBM method has evolved as a three step approach:

Sustainable development and accountability thrive on meaningful and informed participation of citizens in decisions that affect them

Step 1 – Collecting feedback on a particular service through citizen and staff surveys.

Step 2 – Using this feedback to develop a set of actions and commitment through a participatory process involving community members, local leaders and frontline officials.

Step 3 – Monitoring and reporting on the actions agreed to achieve the commitments.

The pilot has invested effort into achieving what has not been possible until now, that is, to bring citizens, government officials and local leaders under the same roof, have them work together to identify priority service delivery issues, collectively get to the roots of these issues and formulate actions to be taken to address them.

It has carved out spaces of dialogue, learning, reflection, and communication where government and citizens participate meaningfully. "Ndiva Ndikwe" or "Nkulule ke go Utlwe" which loosely translates to "Listen to me and I will listen to you",

captures the spirit that anchors these interactions. A government that listens is a government of the people!

DPME continues its involvement with the pilot sites through follow up monitoring visits, to support facilities and community structures on the implementation of the commitments and local level monitoring and reporting.

For this purpose, DPME has over the past 6 months made return visits to all nine CBM pilot sites. These discussions saw the participation of different stakeholders who were part of CBM pilot from inception.

"When you suggest improvement of signage as an official, you are not taken seriously but once citizens pointed out the same thing, action was taken.

"This for me is the spin-off of CBM, where citizens' experiences trigger change in how we do things," a Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Social Development (DSD) Official said during one

of the follow up sessions.

The learning from the CBM pilot is being written up in a toolkit aimed at public sector managers and officials wanting to implement CBM in their own sectors or facilities.

The toolkit will comprise of a 50 page guide outlining the steps in the CBM method, video and online resources.

The video captures experiences and insights from the field, giving a textured picture of CBM in action and will support training of officials and communities in preparing to implement a CBM exercise.

CBM take up in government

The South African Police Service (SAPS) has started to roll out the CBM method in selected police stations across the country.

The first implementation took place towards end of 2015, at Wolmaransstad Police Station in the North West.

"We want to use CBM to create a platform for dialogue between SAPS and citizens about the level, quality and pace of service delivery.

"CBM is integral to restoring the confidence of people in SAPS services and government as a whole," Brigadier Mathonsi of SAPS National shared with Amangwe Police Station.

The station is the second to have CBM implemented.

The CBM pilot by DPME has identified a number of systemic challenges through its focus on the specific experiences of frontline managers, staff and the communities they serve.

These have included turn-around time in vehicle maintenance, allocations of resources for rural stations and the unintended consequences of targets.

It is expected that the expansion of the CBM method to other police stations will allow SAPS to test practical solution to these challenges, while building healthy relationships with their communities.

DPME's CBM team will continue to provide close support to SAPS officials and work with them to develop a SAPS compatible version of the method.

This "learning through doing" approach to capacity building and customizing the method was key to the pilot phase of CBM and will be used by DPME in its support to service delivery departments.

Legislative openness is one of OGP's greatest success stories

Daniel Swislow

THE Open Government Partnership (OGP) has always been positioned primarily as a platform.

There are few detailed prescriptions of what member countries must do aside from meeting initial eligibility requirements and creating a process that puts the government and civil society at the table in order to build home-grown agendas for government transparency and citizen engagement.

The beauty of promoting this relatively open-ended process, rather than a more prescriptive approach, is that successes can be organic and extend far beyond what was initially intended.

With this in mind, legislative branch participation in the OGP model should be seen as one of its greatest achievements—albeit one that wasn't perhaps envisioned when OGP was created.

OGP was launched in 2011 as a platform for the executive branches of member countries to engage with civil society organizations to advance executive branch openness.

Until 2013, there was little discussion of the inclusion of other branches or levels of government. Late that year, OGP launched the Legislative Openness Working Group (LOWG), co-chaired by the Congress of Chile and NDI, in order to begin the conversation about how legislatures might participate in this process and to promote exchange

around OGP national action plan (NAP) commitments that require legislative action.

The LOWG also provided an opportunity to engage a growing community of civil society organizations focused on parliamentary monitoring and reform, including over 180 organizations from 80 countries which have endorsed the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness.

In retrospect, engagement of parliaments in OGP seems obvious—under most constitutions, legislatures are supposed to be the most open and responsive branch of government.

Their engagement is also pragmatic—roughly fifteen percent of total government action plan commitments require legislative action.

And if there is to be sustained engagement in OGP despite a change in government, it is helpful to have leadership from across the political spectrum engaged. Such leadership only operates within legislatures.

Since the LOWG's launch, there has been growing legislative participation in OGP, including a formal legislative track at last year's OGP Summit in Mexico.

But what's most notable is that many legislatures have used the OGP model in order to pursue reform efforts outside of the established OGP process.

In many countries, legislators are now interacting with civil society to pursue dialogue around reform.

Some legislatures have created

their own separate action plans, which is often important given separation of powers concerns.

As a result of this momentum, OGP's Steering Committee is planning to discuss legislative participation in OGP at the Africa regional meeting in Cape Town next month.

In the lead-up to that event, NDI and the Legislative Openness Working Group will publish a new guide on legislative participation in OGP.

In it, we detail key examples of how OGP countries have pursued legislative openness agendas and the types of commitments being made.

The case studies range from the establishment of alliances with civil society, legislative caucuses, commissions and committees, to ultimately the creation of legislative action plans.

Legislative success stories around the globe

Some of the most remarkable stories have come out of Latin America. The Congress of Chile was the first legislature of an OGP-member country to launch a separate action plan in 2014, under the leadership of their Bicameral Commission on Transparency.

Mexico was the first to bring together a formal alliance of Congress with civil society to promote greater dialogue and the discussion of commitments for greater legislative openness. The sharing of the experiences of

these countries and others played a crucial role in the passage of an access to information law in Paraguay in 2014.

This law had been championed by a transparency caucus in the Paraguayan Senate and a coalition of civil society groups, which had participated together in the 2013 OGP Annual Summit in London.

Just this month, members formed a permanent committee on transparency in the Paraguayan Senate and are beginning the process of creating a legislative action plan.

Following this momentum, the President of the National Assembly of Costa Rica has worked with civil society to launch a legislative action plan in late 2015, and in March 2016 these partners worked with the LOWG and hosted an international exchange with peers from the region in San Jose. Regionally, ParAméricas, the network of legislatures in the Americas, has established a regional Open Parliament Network, which met for the first time in Mexico City at the 2015 OGP Summit.

Progress is by no means limited to Latin America. Georgia has taken a leadership role in Europe to advance legislative openness. Following participation in several LOWG events and with the support of Georgian civil society groups such as the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), the Georgian Parliament established a multi-party working group to work with civil society to create an action

plan. The Open Parliament Georgia Action Plan was launched in 2015, participants in the working group won the first ever OGP Government Champions Award at the 2015 OGP Summit.

It is noteworthy that the award was given to a parliamentary body, rather than a government. To build on the working group, the parliament created a permanent council on open and transparent governance in December 2015.

Georgia hosted a meeting of the LOWG with participants from 30 countries in September 2015, and several countries in the region are now working on similar initiatives, including Ukraine, where the parliament launched an action plan in February.

In Serbia, the parliament has established a working group with civil society to pursue openness reform. France's National Assembly also submitted a legislative action plan in 2015.

In Africa, Ghana has led the way in integrating members of parliament, along with government and civil society, in developing its NAP. Ghana's national OGP steering committee was among the first to formally invite representatives of parliament and parliamentary-focused civil society organizations (CSOs) to participate in this process.

Ghana's 2016-2017 National Action Plan contains important parliamentary commitments, and several new

processes are being implemented, including the opening of committee hearings and the release of MPs' asset declarations.

Hon. Emmanuel Bedzah, who is a member of Ghana's national OGP steering committee, has piloted new methods of citizen engagement in his position as chair of the parliament's Government Assurances Committee.

Elsewhere in the region, Kenya has replicated Ghana's example, and recently invited an MP to participate in the process of developing the national action plan.

Other Kenyan parliamentarians have expressed interest in convening an open parliament caucus.

And South Africa has listed parliamentary openness as one of its priorities as lead chair of OGP, and will invite sessions on the topic as part of the OGP regional meeting in Cape Town.

Like in Latin America, regional bodies such as the Pan African Parliament, whose president participated at the 2015 OGP Summit in Mexico, have expressed interest in advancing the OGP model on the continent.

Taking citizen engagement seriously

What's remarkable about all of these examples is that the momentum around legislative openness and the OGP model has been built despite

there being no formal processes for legislatures to participate in OGP aside from a working group.

A growing number of parliaments continue to create legislative action plans. However, unlike with government's OGP commitments, there is, as yet, no independent review mechanism (IRM) for these legislative action plans, which provide an important complement to NAPs.

The OGP Steering Committee meeting in Cape Town in May provides an opportunity to recognize and build upon the incredible progress made by parliaments as a result of their use of OGP as a platform.

There are a host of other international organizations that are or have expressed willingness to support legislatures interested in greater openness, from UNDP to ParAméricas, the OAS, World Bank, Pan African Parliament, to name only a few. At a time when OGP encourages its member governments to make "stretch commitments" that are transformative in nature, OGP should hold itself to the same standard, making commitments that continue to stretch itself organizationally.

If open government is about citizen engagement as well as open data, there are few things that OGP could do that are more potentially transformative than welcoming the representative branch of government—parliaments and legislatures—into the OGP process.