**Open Government Partnership Fiscal Openness Working Group**

**Comments on the Philippines draft Fourth OGP National Action Plan 2017-2019**

The process by which the draft action plan was developed models well the GIFT Principles of Public Participation as well as good participation practices. This includes the institutionalization of the Open Government Partnership multi-stakeholder approach, and the manner in which the civil society dialogue, and co-creation of the Action Plan, have been conducted.

The draft contains one commitment on budget transparency (commitment 9), and two other commitments on important elements of fiscal transparency: commitment 4 on participatory auditing, and commitment 10 on resource revenue transparency (EITI).

As a general comment, the draft plan illustrates good practice in the following areas:

1. Related commitments have been grouped together in programs. This facilitates more effective management, as well as the design of relevant performance indicators.
2. A number of commitments have performance measures that are outcomes-focused, including the three fiscal transparency commitments - increase the OBI score, pass legislation on participatory auditing and on the new budget law, and achieve EITI compliance. This is welcome, both in terms of measurability, and in terms of ambition and impact, compared to the many vague and input/process oriented milestones and performance measures in other countries' Action Plans.
3. The template for each commitment contains detailed milestones, the lead and associated institutions, and the name and contact details of the lead official responsible for each commitment.
4. As noted above, two commitments are related to the passage of legislation, by a specific date. It appears the legislature is actively involved and willing to enter OGP commitments.

With respect to commitment 9 on budget reforms:

1. The draft contains a commitment to increase the OBI score from 64 (2015 OBS) to 67 by June 2019 (and a target of 71 by 2022). As noted, it is good to see an outcomes-focused commitment here. While it is only a modest increase, it is harder to increase scores once a country has reached 60 on the index. And according to the IBP Tracker, while the Philippines previously published the mid-year budget review within 3 months of the end of the period, in 2016 the mid-review review was published late, so for that indicator the Philippines score appears likely to go down in the 2017 OBS; an outcomes-focused commitment prevents backsliding in some areas without being penalized while getting credit for some improvements elsewhere. But we would suggest that an element be added to commitment 9: that the mid-year report will be published in 2017 and 2018 no more than 3 months after the end of the period. This would increase the ambition of the commitment.
2. We would also suggest that consideration be given to adding a commitment around the Pre-Budget Statement (PBS). At the moment, according to the 2015 OBS, this is not presented to the legislature for debate. It would be desirable for the PBS to be presented to Congress in time to allow Congress to call for and consider public submissions on it, and to incorporate public views in Congress' response to the executive on the PBS. This would be a further increase in ambition, and would help both to strengthen congressional oversight of fiscal policy and to provide an important new opportunity for public participation in fiscal policy (both of which are government objectives).
3. Two of the milestones refer to stakeholder or public consultations. These could be strengthened by incorporating elements of the quality of consultation, such as that that a summary of citizen inputs from public consultations will be published; and that an indication of how those inputs influenced official advice or decisions will be published. This also applies to the public consultations referred to in commitment 4 on participatory auditing.

Some of the other milestones in the fiscal transparency commitments could be strengthened as follows:

1. How citizen inputs are used could also be improved in commitment 4 on participatory auditing, for instance that a summary of citizen inputs from public consultations will be published, and that an indication of how those inputs influenced official advice or decisions will be published.
2. Also with respect to Commitment 4 on participatory auditing:
3. The fist milestone is: 'At least 1 activity to validate implementation of audit recommendations is conducted annually.' We suggest adding that the result of this activity will be published, and presented to the relevant committee in Congress that considers the audit report.
4. The second last COA milestone is 'conduct an assessment of compliance with *Open Contracting* requirements pertaining to public procurement'. We suggest that the milestone indicate that this assessment will also be published.
5. The same applies to publication of the last COA milestone on piloting geo-spatial information.
6. Commitment 10 on EITI refers to 'timely publication of annual EITI reports." We suggest that 'timely' be defined in the commitment, for example, ‘publication of annual report within x months of the end of the period.’

Additionally, commitment 5 is on engaging and empowering citizens through an effective government feedback mechanism. The second component of this commitment is on citizen satisfaction with commercial public services provided by government-owned and controlled companies, and involves developing a standard approach to independent customer satisfaction surveys across all GOCCs. We suggest that serious consideration be given, in the development of the fifth action plan, to introducing a similar approach to involving citizens in the regular published rating of their satisfaction with public services funded from the national budget. This could strengthen public accountability of the agencies providing public services, help to improve service quality and development outcomes, while also providing more legitimacy to government decisions over taxation and the funding and delivery of public services.

Finally, the FOWG would like to invite the Department of Management and Budget to consider introducing the *Open Fiscal Data Package* to publish budget information in open formats. This is a tool for publishing micro-level budget and fiscal information in open data formats and with data visualization and data analysis tools to help non-experts use the data. The key benefits of the specification include ensuring budget information publication in a high-quality open data format; reliability of the published budget information disclosed; comparability of the data, both between different periods and between national, sub-national and international data.

Mexico has used it at the federal level: <http://www.transparenciapresupuestaria.gob.mx/en/PTP/Datos_Abiertos>. Paraguay has used it to publish budget information, planning and performance indicators data, and Uruguay, Croatia, Guatemala are in the process of publishing budget information in open data formats, using the tool too.