



FISCAL OPENNESS ACCELERATOR

Fiscal Transparency for Public Participation
for Better Use of Public Resources



GIFT

Fiscal Openness Accelerator Countries Meeting

8th April 2021

Minutes of the meeting (materials and video of the meeting are [here](#))

Welcome Remarks from the GIFT Director

After expressing gratitude to FOA country representatives for joining the meeting, GIFT Network Director Juan Pablo Guerrero presented the meeting agenda. The aim of the meeting is to get quick updates around the table and plan together for the next set of activities of the FOA Project for 2021. He relayed that the meeting also aimed to provide updates on the status of GIFT/IBP's coordination with the U.S. Department of State, with regard to the provision of technical assistance to countries..

JPGA then facilitated an exchange where FOA country representatives shared progress in the discussion and selection of their public participation mechanism pilot project. The said updates are described in more detail in the following sections of this document.

Updates Around the Table

Benin

Benin's updates addressed recommendations made by GIFT/IBP team on the submitted documentation on their pilot public participation mechanism, the Bousprob mobile application. They also provided updates on actions taken in response to the recommendations.

Rodrigue Chaou, General Director of the Budget (DGB) of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance (MEF) of Benin, started their presentation and introduced his team to the body. Afterwards, he shared that as part of their Trust Framework, they have already been able to organize activities with different sectors. They held their very first Transparency Meeting in the country's administrative capital to address questions and recommendations from civil society. DGB also presented their innovative transparency and public participation projects to students.

Continuing the presentation of Benin's updates, DGB's Pierrot Sego relayed that they have shared project documentation on their public participation mechanism to the GIFT/IBP team that contained information on the principles and features of Benin's public participation model. He thanked the GIFT/IBP team for working on the consolidated comments and recommendations to validate and assess Benin's mechanism.

The GIFT/IBP team shared comments and recommendations in matrix format, and Mr. Sego shared that the Benin team has also prepared a similar report that provides updates on the actions taken to align the mechanism better with international standards and principles. He



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relayed that the GIFT/IBP team's comments have been thoroughly examined by the DGB and have been very useful.

As a response, the Benin team made adjustments to their work plan to be able to collect and validate more information, specifically from the civil society. The process has been slow at first, with both upsides and downsides, but Benin was finally able to make a presentation to civil society representatives and gather their feedback.

The DGB will be submitting new documentation on the communication strategies and tools that Benin is using to make sure that they are reflecting and getting more insights, especially from the persons with disabilities (PWD) sector. They are planning to upload budget information to the Bousprob application in audible format and adding more settings that will cater specifically to visually-impaired users.

Mr. Sego shared that they are also continuously making adjustments to their presentation on the Beninese model for public participation in the budget process and their work plan. During their very first meeting with civil society, they addressed concerns and questions raised on the public participation mechanism. The meeting also provided a venue for the DGB to listen to the aspirations of citizens and integrate all these feedback into their process. He furthered that they will be conducting such meetings at least four (4) times a year, and will also disclose and disseminate their documentation report collating citizen feedback.

GIFT's Juan Pablo Guerrero congratulated Benin on their progress, especially on the dialogue that they have conducted with CSO representatives. He expressed an intention of learning more from Benin's experience and shared that he is glad that the GIFT/IBP team's comments have already had a positive impact on and enriched the FOA process in the country.

He extended an invitation to have a separate meeting or activity to continue the conversation, discuss further the consolidated comments and address specific details in the document.

Senegal

On behalf of the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) of Senegal, Mor Diouf, Executive Secretary of the Project for the Coordination of Budgetary and Financial Reforms, briefly presented their situation. Albeit slowly, Senegal has been progressing and informed IBP that they have selected the civil society organization representatives of their advisory group. They also shared that they are trying to organize a new meeting with CSOs to get their feedback on the project and its terms of reference. They are still in the process of consolidating such kinds of feedback gathered and look forward to presenting it to the FOA group.

Juan Pablo Guerrero offered to provide support and technical assistance to Senegal in the process of finalizing their Advisory Group terms of reference, organizing of advisory group meetings, and facilitating project selection workshop/s, among others. He also shared that GIFT/IBP can organize in-person meetings in Dakar.

South Africa



Prudence Cele, Director of Budget Reforms from the National Treasury, provided updates.

IBP and the Advisory Group co-designed a workshop held last March 11, 2021, that reviewed the three initial public mechanisms--Pre-Budget Hearings, Community-Based Monitoring, and Performance Expenditure Review--in terms of what is feasible and what had the greatest impact. Hosted by IBP, the said workshop facilitated a selection process that eventually led to a consensus and final decision on recommending the **Pre-Budget Hearings** as the pilot public participation mechanism project to be implemented in South Africa. She explained that the group decided on the Pre-Budget Hearings as it is an initiative that is within the control of the National Treasury, and thus, can be realistically implemented and sustained, should it go beyond the piloting stage.

After the workshop, the proposal was then presented to the National Budget Director and the Fiscal Policy team to hear their views on how to approach the project and prepare them to solicit endorsement from the Budget Group in the National Treasury. The Budget Group consists of the Intergovernmental Program and Public Finance, which directly coordinate with line departments. They are now in the process of scheduling a meeting with the senior management of the Budget Group to work on the Action Plan and start implementation as soon as possible. Some comments from the National Budget Director were related to the clarity of the objectives of the project. He also advised to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the process, roles and responsibilities are clear to everyone.

Juan Pablo Guerrero expressed his appreciation and admiration of the South African process. The process has been open and democratic, with the Advisory Group having a strong role in decision-making and selection of the mechanism based on robust negotiation and pragmatism.

Dr. Anne Nzegwu, Director of the Reform Coordination and Service Improvement Department of the Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning (MFBP) of Nigeria, asked South Africa representatives if they are considering another option for their public participation mechanism aside from the pre-budget hearings. In response, Prudence Cele said that they intend to continue with the implementation of the pre-budget hearings as their public participation mechanism. However, because it is something new, they are expecting that some time to explain and to get institutional ownership will be needed, which is natural. But they are willing to push forward the process, and in fact, they are very encouraged because the timing is good. There is enough time to refine the action plan and consider everyone's inputs and perspectives. She furthered that they also appreciate even the naysayers, as they will help cover the blindspots of the process.

Juan Pablo Guerrero also acknowledged the possibility of encountering challenges in introducing a new reform, and reiterated that South Africa can count on GIFT/IBP to provide any necessary technical assistance to help push forward their FOA process.

Nigeria



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Dr. Anne Nzegwu, Director of the Reform Coordination and Service Improvement Department of Nigeria MFBP, shared that coming from their last meeting with GIFT/IBP where they presented their scoping work on the options for public participation mechanisms in Nigeria, the project's progress has encountered challenges due to delays in their national budget process.

She shared that they have identified target stakeholders and decided to get public input before finalizing their decision on their pilot public participation mechanism. They are planning to have an in-person consultation forum and virtual meetings with government officials, civil society, and other special sectors. Once the consultation is done, the proposal can be further drafted. This activity was initially planned to be held in April, but has been postponed due to the delay in their national budget process.

Dr. Nzegwu, also relayed plans to have another meeting with GIFT/IBP to discuss further the guidelines on accessing the technical assistance.

As a reaction to the updates provided, Marianne Fabian of the GIFT team relayed that she looks forward to having a separate meeting with Nigeria where challenges shared can be discussed further and revisit the initial proposal of the GIFT/IBP team on the workshop on narrowing down the list of options for Nigeria's public participation mechanism. In response, Dr. Nzegwu said that they will be very glad to have this discussion once the methodology and logistics of the face-to-face consultation forum is concluded.

Liberia

Juan Pablo Guerrero and Marianne Fabian of the GIFT team shared the updates from Liberia, as country representatives could not make it to the meeting. The GIFT/IBP team met with Mr. Johnson Williams from Liberia's Ministry of Finance (MoF) last March 31, 2021. During the meeting, he shared that Liberia now has an advisory group and they have drafted the Terms of Reference to be authorized by their MoF Minister.

The Members of the Advisory Group under their draft ToR include:

Government

1. Ministry of Finance
2. Legislative Budget Office
3. National Bureau of Concessions
4. Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (L-EITI)
5. Public Procurement Commission
6. General Auditing Commission
7. Open Government Partnership (OGP) Liberia Office

Civil Society

8. Center for Transparency and Accountability Liberia (CENTAL)
9. Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD)
10. Community Development and Research Agency (CODRA)



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11. Integrity Watch Liberia

Where are we in the FOA process?

As a summary, and to see where each country is in the FOA process, Marianne Fabian presented the following chart:

Activities	2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Apr 2021	May 2021	Jun 2021	July 2021 - onwards
Step 1. Finalization of AG TOR				Liberia and Senegal				
Step 2. Revamping Phase				Nigeria				
Step 3. Project Selection Workshop								
Step 4. Process Documentation								
Step 5. Outreach and Consultation				South Africa				
Step 6. Draft Action Plan					Benin			
Step 7. Consultation of Action Plan								
Step 8. Submission of Final Proposal to MoF and Approval								
Step 9. Implementation								

She recognized and congratulated South Africa and Benin for being able to select their public participation mechanism. For all our FOA countries, she also reiterated GIFT and IBP's readiness to provide technical assistance in the design and implementation of their pilot participation mechanisms.

Next Steps and Closing Remarks

As a final part of the meeting, Juan Pablo Guerrero provided updates on the status of GIFT/IBP team's coordination with the US Department of State. With regard to the realignment of certain budgetary items under the public participation grant, he confirmed that GIFT/IBP can now proceed with the extension of assistance on the following areas:

- Hiring of a local consultant that can assist countries in the administrative, logistics, communication, and documentation, and other requirements of the project
- Hiring of a public participation expert who can help in the design and implementation of the selected pilot mechanism



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- Logistics Support to FOA Project Implementation Activities (venue, meals, transportation, etc)

In addition, Juan Pablo Guerrero shared that the GIFT/IBP team will be circulating soon to FOA countries guidance notes on the process for provision of technical support.

Albertina Meana of the GIFT team also shared the following important terms and conditions on accessing the technical support mentioned:

- All of the expenses related to the technical support mentioned will be contracted through IBP. For this, there is a need to follow specific procurement procedures.
- For the people to be hired, IBP will need three candidates for the relevant position. Guidance will be provided on building specific terms of reference.
- On logistics requirements, it is also important to consider that all expenses will be paid from the United States through wire transfers or credit cards, if possible.

Albertina also sought the help of country representatives on identifying specific services and project needs, and relayed that she will be supporting them throughout the whole contracting process.

To close, Juan Pablo Guerrero shared that he looks forward to facilitating the hiring of more people that can help enrich the FOA process and thanked again all participants for joining the meeting.