



10 YEARS! How it all started

GIFT was created to advance fiscal transparency, accountability and participation around the world, using a multi-stakeholder action network approach, including international financial institutions, ministries of finances and other budget focused organizations. Its launch meeting took place in Washington DC in July 2011, hosted by the International Budget Partnership (IBP).

The IBP (Warren Krafchik), the World Bank (Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Jim Brumby and Adrian Fozzard), The General Comptroller of the Union of Brazil (Jorge Hage) and the Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management of the Philippines (Florencio Butch Abad) attended the launch meeting, facilitated by Sanjeev Khagram. The IMF was represented by Min Zhu and Julio Escolano. A follow up meeting of these founders was then held in March 2012 in Brasilia, hosted by the General Comptroller, mainly to discuss GIFT's High-Level Principles for Fiscal Transparency, Accountability and Participation, drafted by Murray Petrie (the OECD and other important stakeholders and funders attended the Brazil meeting).

The early years

The network's first crucial feat came in 2012 with the publication of its High-Level Principles on Fiscal Transparency, Participation and Accountability, intended to guide policy makers and all other stakeholders in fiscal policy in their efforts to improve fiscal transparency, participation and accountability, and to help promote improvements in the coverage, consistency and coherence of the then existing standards and norms for fiscal transparency. Importantly they established public participation in fiscal policies as a **right**, comparable to the right to access to fiscal information. Under the leadership of the Government of the Philippines, with the support of the Brazilian Government, these Principles were acknowledged in 2012 by the UN General Assembly. This provided the base for GIFT's main vocation going forward, anchored on the premise that fiscal transparency and accountability, coupled with public participation, are indispensable elements for the efficient, effective, and honest use of public resources.

As gatherings and activities led to work streams being established and growing, GIFT's Steering Committee became the General Stewards, and the founding members of GIFT (WBG, IMF, IBP and the Governments of Brazil -General Comptroller of the Union, later replaced by the Budget Secretary- and the Philippines -Department of Budget and Management) became the Lead Stewards. Playing the role of an architect for the network's design, Sanjeev Khagram, then GIFT Coordinator, hosted meetings regarding governance issues and working groups, providing the basis for rules of engagement then GIFT coordinator, for the General Steward and Lead Steward bodies.

Until 2014, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation provided the main financial support stream for the network, funding specific activities and deliverables, such as meetings to develop the High-Level Principles. In 2013, the World Bank awarded a Development Grant Facility of 4 years to IBP for the establishment and growth of the network, including the hiring of a network director. Juan Pablo Guerrero joined GIFT as its

Director in May 2014. In 2015, the stewards discussed a governance plan, approving Operating Procedures at the General Stewards Meeting held in July. This was a significant step forward in defining GIFT's governance framework and in advancing its institutionalization. The network had 15 members in 2015.

Growth over a decade

According to an external evaluation (2016) and two independent assessments of the GIFT network (A. Falconer and D. Stewart, 2019), GIFT largely met or exceeded the expectations of its founders and its founding donors: to provide a forum for the negotiation of ambitious international norms on budget transparency and participation, and to encourage through peer learning the improvement of country practices on budget transparency, participation, and accountability.

GIFT became a credible institutional forum for discussing global fiscal transparency norms (IMF Fiscal Transparency Code, IBP Open Budget Survey, PEFA indicators, OECD Principles of Budgetary Governance and Budget Transparency Toolkit), helping to harmonize them. These norms are aligned with GIFT High Level Principles and are more consistent and complementary, and now include the right to access to information and to participation in fiscal policies.

GIFT's peer-to-peer learning developed in parallel with the expansion of the Open Government Partnership, creating a reliable forum for dialogue between key finance officials, civil society and other implementers, leading to the gathering of a robust and diverse group of champions in the field of fiscal transparency and participation, seeking the better use of public resources and higher quality in the delivery of public services (from 2014 to 2017, GIFT co-hosted the OGP Fiscal Openness Working Group).

Over the last ten years, the GIFT network has provided opportunities, services and structured paths for reaching fiscal accountability goals in member countries. The network members effectively engage in advising and supporting each other on the implementation of specific transparency, accountability and public engagement practices. Major international financial organizations have found GIFT to be a valuable partner in achieving their own institutional fiscal transparency goals, relying on the network to motivate and support countries in their efforts to comply with international norms. The fact that leading development financial institutions have permanent slots within the Lead Stewards membership, has also strengthened the hand of GIFT in its dealings with country actors, providing assurance that the advice provided is a reliable measure of how to successfully conform to global norms. GIFT has been able to support governments and other key actors in translating a global set of commitments and goals, into positive impact in people's lives, improving the lives of common citizens.

GIFT's approach to advancing fiscal transparency has evolved. From advocating for the disclosure of government revenues and spending, to this being coupled with a greater focus on the development of opportunities for citizens to have a voice in resource allocation. GIFT's Principles of Public Participation in Fiscal Policies, produced in 2015, were the first global effort to establish norms on citizens' engagement in fiscal policies. They contributed to the inclusion of the principle of public participation in public financial management's (PFM) main global transparency and governance standards, and recognized the role of civil society as an indispensable element in the accountability system.

More recently, GIFT and IBP have launched an ambitious project, the Fiscal Openness Accelerator, to empower citizens, including the marginalized population, by promoting participation around the flow of public resources, in a collaborative dialogue with ministries of finance. This push for accountability directly involving national ministries of finance is unprecedented, and will likely prove an important pathway to pursue improvements in service delivery.

GIFT is now also emphasizing targeted approaches, supporting efforts to ensure the uptake of data and to drive accountability and responsiveness in specific sectors, such as in public infrastructure, where rallies and dataquests have triggered institutional changes in the execution of public resources.

Tools such as the Open Fiscal Data Package and the methodology on developing fiscal transparency portals centered on the users of fiscal information have assisted national governments such as those of Brazil, the Philippines, Indonesia, Uruguay, South Africa, Dominican Republic, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, Mexico, Guatemala, Argentina, Nigeria, Croatia, El Salvador, Mongolia, Costa Rica, as well as subnational governments, including Mexico City, Guanajuato, Queretaro, Michoacan, and Bogota in developing or redesigning fiscal transparency portals that better respond to the needs of the users of fiscal information. These processes have opened new opportunities for citizen engagement in fiscal policies.

GIFT's network membership has grown substantially over the last decade, to 54 members (22 budget authorities, 19 budget civil society organizations, 9 international organizations/networks and 4 funders) in 2021. Some stewards have led the workstreams in a remarkable way, with significant in-kind contributions, although the network still faces a public good dilemma. The network development has been supported by a flexible, nimble, small and adaptable coordination team, hosted by IBP in a crucial way.

GIFT provides a valuable anchor going forward

The network, including the active participation of major international players in the field, important governments and leading civil society groups is, undoubtedly, GIFT's main asset. The value of GIFT lies in its foundational nature as a multi-stakeholder network, providing:

- i) a forum for the discussion, development and promotion of the coherence of global norms;
- ii) capacity for it to act as a convener and broker, and
- iii) a space where civil society, governments, and international development institutions can work together to achieve real impacts at the country level.

Time has shown that the network has helped to advance the agenda faster than members would have been able to, acting individually. As some of the main challenges of PFM systems increasingly require informed citizen engagement, participation and the empowerment of the users of public services, the GIFT network has been filling the gap that no single actor could have on their own, bringing together multiple, influential and engaged actors to advance fiscal transparency and participation in a sustainable manner (development partners). While traditional models are sometimes slow-moving and risk-averse, the GIFT peer-learning system can inspire and support actors from civil society, government and international financial institutions, when a window for rapid systemic change occurs or where there is a trend towards closing civic space, for example.

GIFT has contributed to making informed public participation a key element in PFM systems. Both as a component that complements, checks and balances procedures and systems, as well as in its key role in guiding the allocation and implementation of public resources that favor more inclusive development. Back in 2011, the role of public participation in all of the phases of the budget process was questioned by GIFT's founders. Today, they advocate that informed public participation is a central tool for achieving better results.

GIFT has produced principles, technological tools and methods to support government efforts to disclose fiscal information, focusing on user-centered meaningful fiscal transparency. The development of projects involving finance ministries and civil society organizations, such as user-centered portals or the publication



of open budget data linked to key databases with performance and development indicators, have broadened the dialogue on budget transparency to include public works, infrastructure, and development policies. They have also enabled governments to respond quickly to emergencies, such as COVID-19.

All of these elements of GIFT's value proposition put it in good stead to continue doing ground breaking work into the next decade.