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The IMF's Middle East Regional Technical Assistance Center and the International Budget Partnership Conclude Workshop on Budget Transparency

Following the release of the 2017 Open Budget Survey (OBS)¹, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s Middle East Regional Technical Assistance Center (METAC) and the International Budget Partnership (IBP) held a regional workshop on "**Budget Transparency in the Middle East and North Africa**" in Amman Jordan, during February 14-15, 2018. It gathered representatives of finance ministries and civil society from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, as well as international experts in public finance.

Launched in 2006 by the IBP, the OBS measures whether central governments provide adequate public access to national budget information and opportunities to participate in the budget process. It also examines the role and effectiveness of legislators and auditors in the budget process. The OBS is implemented by independent budget experts in each country. The Open Budget Survey draws extensively on the IMF's Fiscal Transparency Code (FTC). The sixth round of this biennial assessment, the 2017 survey evaluated 115 countries.

Overall, the OBS 2017 shows that progress has been limited in the MENA region since the 2015 survey. Out of 10 countries assessed, only Jordan scored above 61 - which is considered by the IBP as the benchmark for sufficient budget transparency – and three scored above 40 (Afghanistan, Egypt, and Morocco) - demonstrating significant progress.

The workshop provided a venue to share experience of governments and civil society organizations and analyze the gaps between the existing budget documentation and principles set by international standards, such as the FTC. It alternated presentations, group work, and open discussions aiming at (i) understanding the rationale for fiscal transparency standards and reforms, (ii) identifying information expected to be released during the budget process and its qualitative characteristics, (iii) defining possible actions to improve budget transparency at the country level, and (iv) presenting means to promote collaboration and peer-to-peer learning between countries, as well as the technical support available from other stakeholders.

¹ <https://www.internationalbudget.org/open-budget-survey/>

The workshop highlighted how effectively governments, civil society organizations, and international organizations can work together to implement actions or reforms that increase transparency and strengthen institutions aiming at improving governance, tackling corruption, and ensuring responsibility for inclusive policies – a key objective of the Marrakesh Call for Action.²

² <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2018/01/30/pr1831-statement-by-imf-arab-fund-for-economic-and-social-development-and-arab-monetary-fund>