

Toward rights-based accountability

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Under the patronage of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Finance Minister Ali Hasan Khalil launched the “Citizen Budget 2019,” developed by the Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan in cooperation with the Directorate of Budget and Expenditure Control at the Finance Ministry.

The “Citizen Budget” has been published for the second year as part of the financial and fiscal awareness series in response to Lebanon’s commitment to enhancing budgetary and financial transparency. This will enable citizens to better understand the multifaceted challenges of public financial management.

Lamia Moubayed Bissat, the president of the Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan, presented the history of the institute and highlighted that the “Citizen Budget” publication is considered internationally a key for transparency, public participation and accountability. She expressed hope of improving Lebanon’s financial indicators through such interventions, and stressed that the aim was not only to raise Lebanon’s international indicators but to achieve transparency and trust.

Khalil said in his speech that all civil society organizations would be invited to trigger dialogue on the numbers of the 2019 budget, to be accountable under the evaluation of the community. Building trust requires a series of interrelated procedures, and building a state can’t be achieved without a clear strategic plan that tackles people’s concerns.

Hariri said in his speech that the government had taken important steps in approving three consecutive budgets after 12 years. Approving the budget is an essential step, but what is more important is to approve it within the constitutional deadlines. The premier also stressed that the government was keen on having a permanent dialogue with the international community on the challenges facing Lebanon and how these can be mitigated, and this was ensured at the CEDRE conference through a transparent and robust follow-up mechanism.

The success and sustainability of any reform lies in ensuring political consensus and accompanying it with effective, modern and productive public administrations and institutions.

Hariri urged all public institutions and administrations to be engaged and committed to adopting all the upcoming reforms. He said the government was working to boost Lebanon’s economy and institutions in order to restore the trust of citizens, the private sector and civil society in the state.

Restoration of trust can’t be achieved without building a transparent base. The prime minister’s assertive and practical words attest to the political will in having data and numbers to build a rights-based accountability system in Lebanon that is the cornerstone of restoring trust and economic development.

The mandate of Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan is a milestone for enhancing access to information to accountability. The question is: How much is this institute empowered and supported to act as a technical arm for policymaking in all ministries? What about the other state institutions that produce data and reports - do they have a key role and impact on the policymaking process? The empowerment and progress of such institutions reflect government will and concrete actions in institutional reforms at various levels.

According to “Fiscal Futures: Scenario Thinking for Fiscal Transparency and Accountability,” the disclosure of budget data and access to information are important steps but not sufficient to achieve fiscal accountability. Thus, the budget should be communicated to people in a simplified and clear manner that can be understood by the general public. This will enable citizens to engage effectively in public debates. Such a process is an accumulative and complex one, and it starts with fiscal literacy classes and training on budget participation for students from an early age in order to be equipped to exercise their right to information. Besides being trained on access to information and digital systems, people should be aware of the dark side of technology and the dangers of surveillance and breaching privacy.

We are entering a new era of policymaking and governance systems in response to international regulations and commitments toward having a rights-based accountability system.

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<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2019/Sep-18/491802-toward-rights-based-accountability.ashx>