Germany to promote budget reporting in East Africa

By Walter Wafula

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Germany's International Institute for Journalism (IIJ) is set to train East African journalists on covering public spending to improve reporting on national budgets and the use of tax payer's money.

In its bid, IIJ plans to hold a two week training course on "Reporting on Public Spending", in Nairobi, Kenya, from 24 October to 4 November 2011, according to Hans-Jürgen Bösel the senior project manager at IIJ. The course will focus on topics including; public financial management, budget preparation and implementation, enhanced political oversight and accountability for public fund.

Bösel said, the goal of the course is to contribute to timely and quality reporting on the budget and the use of public funds. "This is envisaged to strengthen transparency and effective communication in budget management and, ultimately increase participatory and informed decision making and enhanced accountability in the use of public funds," he said while announcing the course last week.

The course is open to journalists from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda who work for print and online media and have a special interest in economic and budget reporting. Applicants are required to have a minimum of four years of professional experience in economic and/or political reporting and be proficient in English.

Focus on public reporting

According to Bösel, IIJ is focusing on public reporting because the budget reflects a government's social and economic policy priorities. "It is the most important policy instrument that drives the economic and social development agenda and, effectively implemented, would significantly impact on the daily lives of all citizens."

East Africa's public spending faces challenges such as corruption, misappropriation of funds, and lack of absorption capacity which undermine the importance of national budgets. Yet, transparency and accountability in the allocation and use of public funds are crucial prerequisites for achieving higher development goals according to IIJ.

"The media can play a crucial role in enhancing transparency and communication - by providing public access to information on government budgets and public spending. This should, in turn, facilitate a better informed public debate about the focus of the budget and make governments more accountable for spending public funds," Bosel said.

Tho course in October is designed to enhance the capacity of print and online journalists to report comprehensively on budget issues and public spending in general. The institute expects beneficiaries to improve their understanding of the concept, principles and best practices of public financial management, at the end of the course. It also expects the beneficiaries to improve their skills in researching and writing comprehensible articles on the budget and its implementation.

ABOUT WALTER WAFULA

Walter Wafula is a seasoned journalist who has reported for the *Daily Monitor* newspaper in Kampala-Uganda. He is also a contributor on Bizcommunity.com website. Email Walter at wafwalt@yahoo.com and connect on LinkedIn.

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