Open Government Partnership: Accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals
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What is the Open Government Partnership?
The Open Government Partnership has a simple but powerful goal: that governments should truly serve and empower their citizens. OGP’s vision is that governments become more transparent, more accountable, and more responsive to their own citizens, improving the quality of governance and services that citizens receive. In this way OGP aims to be a powerful, positive global movement for openness and deeper democracy, and as a countervailing force against the rise of closed government.

OGP was founded by eight heads of states and nine civil society leaders in 2011 as a response to increasing demands for governments to be smarter, more open, and accountable. It was designed to create space for reformers that wanted to tip the balance in favor of openness, and learn the lessons from past failures in global development by ingraining country ownership and accountability at its core.

To join OGP, governments must meet eligibility criteria on fiscal transparency, access to information laws, and citizen participation. Upon joining, a government must work with civil society to produce an action plan containing specific commitments for reform. Progress against these commitments is monitored by OGP’s independent accountability arm, the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM). In addition to action and accountability, OGP also emphasizes learning. By sharing inspiration, lessons learned, and technical expertise among peers in its global network of reformers, OGP aims to spark a race to the top in the pursuit of ambitious open government reforms.

Building a Global Movement for Open Government
Since 2011, OGP has grown from 8 founding national governments to 76 national and 20 subnational governments, which have together made over 3,000 commitments toward more open and accountable governance. These commitments have been co-created with civil society organizations, with over 1,000 groups involved around the world. These organizations focus on a wide range of topics, including anti-corruption, access to information, gender equality, youth empowerment and open data.

Government and civil society reformers in many OGP countries are undertaking transformative policy reforms that put citizens at the heart of government, allowing them to shape legislation and policies in areas most critical to daily life. These include many long-fought-for landmark reforms in both North and South countries, including beneficial ownership disclosure in the UK and Norway, lobbying laws in Chile and Ireland, open contracting in Ukraine and Nigeria, and Access to Information laws in Brazil, Sri Lanka, and Kenya.

This growing movement draws its political support from a diverse range of background. While President Obama was instrumental in founding OGP, Prime Minister Kvirikashvili and Prime Minister Trudeau currently co-chair the partnership. There has also been strong support from local government leaders such as the Mayors of Paris and Buenos Aires. OGP also has six global ambassadors, including Oxfam CEO Winnie Byanyima and Mo Ibrahim, and has formal
relationships with seven leading multilateral agencies, including the World Bank, UNDP, and OECD.

Results

OGP is fundamentally about action. Every participating government - local or national - has to work with their civil society to produce an open government action plan every two years, detailing precise reform commitments. These locally-owned plans tackle different issues according to the context, and ideally reflect the priorities of citizens. While not every commitment is ambitious, or implemented, an impressive collection of results are now emerging from the reforms members have implemented in the first six years of OGP.

1. Strengthening global norms and national efforts on open government

OGP has strengthened the international effort and normative framework for openness in government. One indicator of OGP’s influence lies in the reforms that governments initiated to become eligible for joining the partnership. For example, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d’Ivoire have all passed substantial legislation in an effort to qualify for OGP membership. At the domestic level, open government as a concept and priority has taken root in several countries. Through the OGP process, countries are carving out basic institutional features, rules and mechanisms that legitimize and establish the foundation for open government reforms to take place.

2. Securing high-level political commitment

OGP has been highly successful in securing public commitments from heads of state and other high-level political officials, spurred in part by international peer pressure and the alignment of OGP commitments with preexisting reform proposals or movements. High-level political commitment to open government raises the priority of those reforms and provides valuable “cover” for political leaders and administrators to pursue a reform that may be unpopular with other colleagues or considered risky. High-level commitment also often provides impetus for domestic open government reforms, even if it is not sufficient in and of itself to bring about those reforms.

3. Fostering civil society-government dialogue

What began as a bold and challenging idea to governments—co-creating policy reforms with civil society based on equality and mutual respect — is now a much more established concept, especially in OGP countries that have gone through several action plan cycles. National OGP platforms have helped to build relationships between government and civil society stakeholders, which has led to better understanding and more constructive dialogue. This cultural shift, at least within the OGP process, has been one of the great successes of the OGP model.

4. Accountability and learning

OGP’s Independent reporting Mechanism reports are widely considered credible and fact-based, where participating countries are judged by rigorous standards common to all. By sharing
inspiration, lessons learned, and technical expertise among peers in its global network of reformers, OGP also aims to spark a race to the top in the pursuit of ambitious open government reforms.

Below are a few examples of open government reforms by OGP countries:

- **Anti-Corruption – UK:** Organized crime costs the UK at least £24 billion each year, often hidden in shell companies. Lifting the veil of secrecy over who ultimately owns and controls companies can expose wrongdoing and disrupt illicit financial flows, including those derived from corruption. Through their OGP action plan, the UK was the first country to commit to a publicly available register of beneficial ownership — making public who really owns and controls UK companies. Since implementing this commitment, the UK has become a national leader in the area of Beneficial Ownership, and has encouraged and supported other countries making similar commitments. OGP has facilitated the emergence of a global norm with 14 countries now committing to beneficial ownership reforms in their action plans.

- **Public Participation – Paraguay:** In 2015, allegations of corruption, mismanagement of public funds, and lack of transparency around education funding were leveled against Paraguay’s national government, compounded by the general absence of public participation in government. To address these issues, the government and local civil society used OGP to create an ambitious program to develop more than fifty Municipal Development Councils across the country. Designed to bring people together to discuss management of public funds and services, they provide a participatory forum for citizens to develop, monitor, and conduct hearings on local development initiatives in order to make public services more responsive to community needs.

- **Natural Resources Transparency – Mongolia:** Mongolia has used OGP as a platform to boost natural resource transparency. Over 1,000 companies holding more than 3,000 leases, exploration licenses, and production sharing agreements work across Mongolia's vast lands, looking for natural resources. The environmental and health impacts of this work are of major concern to the public, illustrated by the thousands of people protesting poor air quality in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Working in partnership with local NGOs, the government now publishes information on actions taken by companies that are potentially harmful to the environment and to people’s health. So far, the environmental ministry published 22 environmental datasets, including information on pollution, and developed a website to allow citizens to monitor real time air quality changes that was used by over 120,000 people by early 2017.

- **Access to Justice – Kenya:** Through their OGP NAP, Kenya began reforming their judiciary in 2011. The government committed to public vetting of judges and of the case allocation system. The Minister of Justice and the Chief Justice introduced software that randomly allocates cases to judges to reduce corruption in handling and allocation of cases. These reforms promote transparency in the administration of justice in part by integrating new technologies to improve expediency in judgements.

- **Public service delivery feedback at the subnational level:** Inconsistent participation in attempts to gather public service feedback from citizens created a perception of government indifference to citizen needs in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. In response, the county government committed in their first Sub-National Action Plan to institutionalizing the WhatsApp messaging platform as the official communication channel to provide timely government information and rapid response to citizen feedback. Through
this commitment, the government is working to become more responsive to citizen needs and improve public services based on an open dialogue with citizens.

- **Declassification and Access to Information - Ukraine:** In an environment characterized by low trust in government given historical suppression of information by authorities, reformers from both government and civil society used OGP to develop a policy that established open and effective access to classified documents on the struggle for Ukraine’s independence. Ukrainians can now examine records on the political persecutions and human rights violations carried out against relatives and friends by the Soviet state. After decades, many Ukrainians are able to find the truth about atrocities that occurred under the Soviet regime.

- **Opening up the bureaucracy and reducing red tape - Philippines:** The government used the national action plan to publicly commit to reforms to reduce bureaucratic red tape in the cost of doing business. The reform program resulted in the Philippines significantly improving its ranking in the World Bank’s Doing Business Report, from 138 out of 189 countries in 2013 to 108 in 2014 and 95 in 2015. Investment in the Philippines increased by 10% over a similar period, thanks to an improved business climate.

**Lessons Learned**
Over the last seven years, we’ve learned a lot from our work in supporting government and civil society reformers on the ground in OGP countries.

1. **Closing civic space**
A critical precondition for the transformative effects of open government is healthy civic space, which is shrinking or under attack in many parts of the world. Together, OGP participating governments, civil society and partners need to protect and enhance civic space. Through a combination of thought leadership and action leadership roles, they must make the case that citizen engagement is vital to a healthy democracy.

2. **Working politically**
OGP countries’ performance depends to a great extent on the incentives, resources and interests facing domestic political actors. Country level reformers need support to navigate the complex politics surrounding major reforms. Thus OGP needs to be sensitive to discrete political climates and their impact on OGP commitments, particularly in navigating political transitions.

3. **Implementation gap**
In some member countries there is a real gap between political commitment to OGP and implementation of reforms at the country level. We need to understand better how political will translates into reform and support countries with brokering the technical and financial inputs needed to successfully implement reforms.

4. **Ambition beyond transparency**
An often-predicted shift from foundational transparency reforms to the hard work of civic engagement, with government responsiveness to tackle the root of citizen distrust and elite capture, has not taken place at scale. OGP is making investments to support countries to go beyond transparency reforms with commitments that tackle the day-to-day needs of citizens like health, education, corruption, etc.
5. Scaling up learning
Establishing the rules, mechanisms and institutions to facilitate open government are not enough to produce ambitious reforms. While a focus on helping OGP countries comply with OGP processes is necessary, this needs to be balanced with other value-adding activities such as peer exchange and learning to encourage greater ambition of open government reforms. Support to OGP reformers on OGP processes needs to be complemented learning on implementing reforms on the ground.

OGP and the SDGs
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development demands bold action. It requires coordinating policy on multiple fronts, forming new partnerships, and committing significant resources across the globe. It also requires an open and accountable approach to implementation. With government and civil society working together in 76 countries to make governments more open and effective, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) presents a unique opportunity to advance the 2030 Agenda.

As an international partnership with a country-owned policy platform and independent accountability mechanism—i.e. action plans and the Independent Reporting Mechanism—OGP provides a readymade vehicle for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. OGP action plans can be used to adopt concrete commitments aligned with SDGs across member countries, while its Independent Reporting Mechanism ensures a focus on results by holding governments accountable for implementation.

Joint Declaration on Open Government for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
Recognizing the synergies between the OGP and SDGs agendas, members of the OGP Steering Committee met on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City in September 2015 to endorse the Joint Declaration on Open Government for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By endorsing the Declaration, governments commit to use OGP action plans to adopt commitments that promote transparent and accountable implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since then, many more governments and civil society organizations have signed the declaration, which commits governments to use OGP to encourage transparent, accountable, participatory, and technology-enabled implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

To help member countries use OGP’s action plan framework to spur progress on the 17 SDGs, the OGP Secretariat and the Transparency and Accountability Initiative published a special SDGs edition of its flagship Open Government Guide. The OGP secretariat is also supporting governments and civil society to develop open government reforms that tackle the SDGs through its country support program.

Advancing SDG16

Open government principles directly address Goal 16 targets. OGP’s goal is to advance key open government principles—transparency, civic participation, accountability, and technological
innovation—in order to strengthen the rule of law and build just, effective and accountable institutions. Increasing the availability of information on government activities, enabling and deepening civic participation, ensuring government is not corrupt and held accountable to the highest standards of service, and harnessing new technologies to strengthen governance are synonymous with open government and the advancement of Goal 16. The following examples illustrate how countries are using OGP to advance SDG 16:

- **Liberia - Increasing judicial transparency:** Liberia is increasing the transparency of the judiciary by proactively publishing court documents in order to facilitate citizen monitoring and build trust in the justice system.

- **Serbia - Strengthening the anti-corruption agency:** Serbia is improving the ability of its anti-corruption agency to prevent conflicts of interest through increased transparency on the rights and obligations of public officials and more accurate monitoring of asset declarations.

- **Sri Lanka - Strengthening the right to information:** Sri Lanka is implementing the Right to Information act with an emphasis on building the capacity of the bureaucracy to provision RTI requests and pursue proactive disclosure policies.

**Beyond SDG16**

Beyond SDG16, OGP countries are tackling challenges such as health, education, natural resources, climate change that are directly related to the goals by promoting transparency and accountability, empowering citizens and civil society, and fighting corruption in those sectors. Examples of how open government is being used to tackle these goals are illustrated in the SDGs Edition of the Open Government Guide.