What did the commitment seek to achieve, and why is this important?

In March 2007, the Norwegian Government invited almost 100 ordinary citizens to ‘The Governments Citizen Conference’ to give their views on how the government could work better. Two of the most important lessons learned from the citizens they met were that the Government should treat people with respect and that it should use plain language.

So, in 2008, The Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi) was awarded the task of “working, in cooperation with the Language Council of Norway (In Norwegian ‘Språkrådet’), to promote clearer language and more accessible content in public documents and publications intended for citizens”.

The project was formally launched in March 2009 with the aim of stimulating public agencies to adopt clear, user-friendly language.

A telephone survey in 2009 revealed that 2 of 3 Norwegian citizens thought the public sector didn’t write in plain language and that public forms were difficult to complete.

Finally, in September 2011, the Plain Language Project was incorporated into Norway’s OGP National Action Plan. A report on its progress so far can be found in the Norwegian Self Assessment report from April 2013, pages 4 - 5.

How did you go about implementing the commitment? Who were the key advocates both within and outside of government during the implementation phase?

The Norwegian Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs (FAD) has overall responsibility for The Plain Language Project.

Difi was responsible for the project's management and communication, and the Language Council of Norway (Språkrådet) was responsible for matters which require language expertise. The project group also had an associated resource group which provided advice and feedback throughout the project.

The combination of the technical resources and the professional expertise in both Difi and the Language Council was crucial for the project’s success. Difis knowledge of government administration, public communication and project management in combination with the language expertise in the Language Council, meant the government was able to prioritise clearly and reach as many government agencies as possible.
The government took the year of 2008 to plan and develop the project.

In 2009-2010, the project launched with the following initiatives:

- **www.klarsprak.no**: A web-based toolbox for civil servants: The toolbox includes advice, tools and tips on how written language can be made more user-friendly, clear and understandable. In addition, users of the web site can find information on how to carry out language projects in public agencies. Some information on the website is in English.

- **Courses**: Civil servants are given the opportunity to attend courses on how to write clearly. The project group has also created a specific course for people wanting to start language improvement projects within their workplaces.

- **Project grants and support**: Public agencies can apply for central provides funding towards language improvement projects. Public agencies can also receive practical support in the form of advice from Difi and the Language Council of Norway.

- **The Plain Language Prize**: FAD awards an annual prize to the public agency which has most improved its written information. The prize aims to encourage agencies to continue their efforts in using good, clear language. The prize has been awarded four times, and the winners are appointed by an independent committee.

- **Surveys and documentation**: The project gathers findings from relevant surveys, research and other documentation about language used by the Norwegian Civil Service. The project has also conducted its own surveys, including a survey on plain language in acts and regulations. The findings are published on www.klarsprak.no.

- **Experience from language improvement projects**: The project ‘Plain Language in Norway’s Civil Service’ reviews a number of other government language projects and publishes findings from these on www.klarsprak.no.

- **Lectures and presentations**: The project group arranges lectures and presentations for public agencies and related organizations who wish to carry out plain language related work.

How have citizens benefitted from this reform? If possible, please include evidence of results or uptake, e.g. links to news coverage, quotes, and/or quantitative measures, such as web analytics.
**Surveys and documentation:** The project gathers findings from relevant surveys, research and other documentation about language used by the Norwegian Civil Service. The project has also conducted its own surveys, including a survey on plain language in acts and regulations. The findings are published on www.klarsprak.no.

**Experience from language improvement projects:** The project ‘Plain Language in Norway’s Civil Service’ reviews a number of other government language projects and publishes findings from these on www.klarsprak.no.

**What did NOT go as planned, and what did you learn from this? What is the unfinished business, e.g. how might you take this work forward in your next OGP action plan?**

The Norwegian Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs (FAD) is conducting the evaluation. A preliminary report was delivered in December 2012, and the final report will be launched in November 2013.

An independent firm (Ideas2evidence) is conducting the evaluation. A preliminary report was delivered in December 2012, and the final report will be launched in November 2013.
Lessons learned so far:

- Involvement from management is crucial when trying to implement plain language.
- Documentation and facts are important.
- Investment in plain language is important for promoting democracy, but in many cases it can save money as well (fewer complaints and fewer requests for information and help).
- For the initial phase, it’s great to have those enthusiasts who will drive the project forward, but in the long-run, everyone needs to be on board. Plain language work must be included in the daily work of the organization.
- Having a Plain Language Prize helped to gain publicity for the project, but also served as an inspiration for the public agencies in their plain language work.
- Project grants and professional support from an external source is very helpful in order to initiate local projects.
- The origin of unclear letters and unclear forms is often unclear language in acts and central regulations. In some cases, one central act could be the basis of several hundred or thousands of letters to the citizens. In such cases, it is more efficient to work with the cause, rather than the symptom.

The next steps

The Plain Language Pilot Project was formally closed on December 31st 2012. Based on the experience of the pilot, The Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs has decided pursue the Plain Language Prize, the website and some of the central initiatives, such as courses for civil servants.

The project has expanded to start trying to understand why unclear language happens in governments and where it comes from in an initiative called “Plain Acts for Citizens”.

The ‘Plain Acts’ project involves looking into the language used in legislation and acts and trying to reformulate them in plain language. Priority is given to acts considered the most important to average citizens. Through this work, we will also try to work out a general method that can be used in the future, both when new acts are being made, but also when existing acts are going to be amended or revised. The aim is to start this process for the first two acts before July 1st 2014.

Contact information

- Web: www.klarsprak.no ("English button” in upper right corner)
- The project’s e-mail address: klarsprak@sprakradet.no
- The Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi):
  - Anniken Willumsen (anniken.willumsen@difi.no)
• The Language Council of Norway (Språkrådet):
  o Margrethe Kvarenes (margrethe.kvarenes@sprakradet.no)

• The Norwegian Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs (FAD):
  o Cæcilie Riis (cri@fad.dep.no)