OGP Vital Signs

10 Years of Data in Review

YEARS

Open Government Partnership

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Executive Summary

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) has grown rapidly since its founding ten years ago. OGP today includes 78 countries, 76 local governments, and thousands of civil society organizations. Together, they have made more than 4,500 reform commitments in more than 300 action plans.

Moving into its next ten years, OGP has an important opportunity to look back and assess whether the platform is working as intended: Are governments and civil society collaborating to design reforms? Are governments implementing the reforms they commit to? And, importantly, what predicts success, and what can we do about it?

To address these questions, in this report, we—the OGP Support Unit—review data covering nearly 200 OGP national action plans submitted between 2012 and 2020. This includes assessments from OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) and from other governance organizations. The goal is to understand where the action plan process is working well, where it needs improvement, and what this means for future OGP strategy.

The report covers four main areas of analysis. This summary outlines the key findings in each:

- **Civil society engagement:** OGP member progress in involving civil society during the design and implementation of action plans

- **Institutions:** The stability and placement of government offices participating in the OGP process

- **Action plans and commitments:** The quality of action plans, including their thematic scope, levels of ambition, and results

- **Policy areas:** OGP country performance in key areas such as anti-corruption, public services, and civic space

Civil society engagement

Civil society engagement is a core component of the OGP model. OGP members co-create action plans and engage in regular dialogue with civil society through platforms like multi-stakeholder forums on open government. In the paper, we find—for the first time—statistical evidence that the strength of this civil society engagement predicts[1] positive outcomes. We also find that civil society is becoming more involved in OGP, though several gaps remain.

Civil society engagement matters

Substantive civil society involvement is correlated with stronger OGP outcomes. We find that civil society engagement throughout the OGP process is associated with more ambitious commitments, higher rates of implementation, and stronger early results (see Figure 1), even after controlling for factors like region, governance, and commitment to OGP:

- **Dialogue and feedback are associated with more ambitious commitments.** When civil society participates in iterative dialogue and agenda setting with the government, commitments tend to be more ambitious. The same is true when governments communicate to participants how their inputs were considered.

- **Civil society involvement during implementation is associated with better results.** Action plans discussed regularly at a multi-stakeholder forum have a higher rate of completion and yield more significant changes in government practices.

FIGURE 1. Civil society engagement in OGP predicts several outcomes
Regression analysis points to a simplified theory of change for OGP action plans, illustrated below.
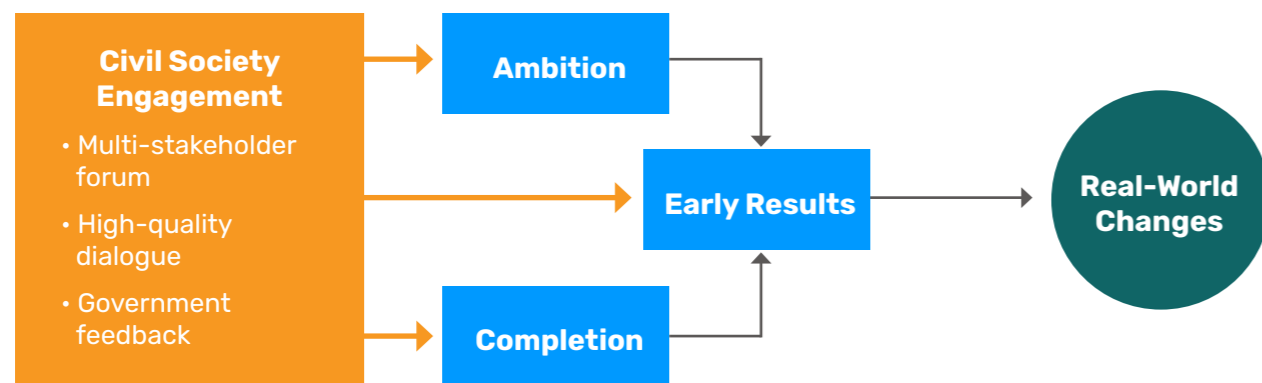
Civil society engagement in OGP is improving, but gaps remain

OGP processes are becoming more participatory over time. The level of public influence in designing action plans has increased significantly (see Figure 2). In most countries, government officials no longer just inform or consult civil society about the OGP process—they engage in back-and-forth dialogue. More countries have also established, or are establishing, multi-stakeholder forums. Partnership-wide factors may be driving these improvements, including increased peer learning, expanded guidance, and more technical support from partners.

FIGURE 2. Level of public influence in action plan design grows
A high level of public influence includes establishing a multi-stakeholder forum and providing feedback to participants on how their inputs were considered.
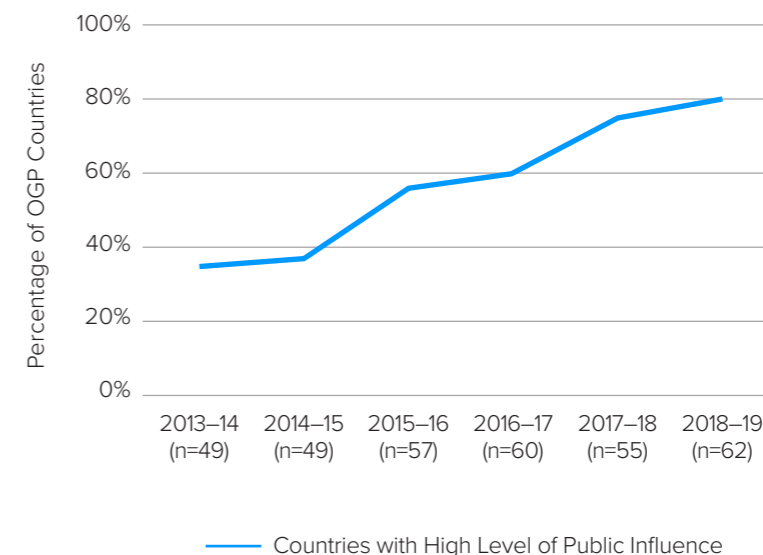
However, gaps in civil society involvement remain. For example, country performance is mixed on minimum requirements to remain active in OGP. Most countries have established multi-stakeholder forums, but government feedback to participants poses a challenge. Only half of the countries maintain a repository of proceedings and progress, and fewer than half respond to participants on how their inputs were considered (see Figure 3). In addition, about a quarter of OGP processes are not fully open to anyone who wishes to participate.

FIGURE 3. Most OGP countries meet minimum process requirements
These IRM assessments cover national action plans submitted between 2017 and 2020.
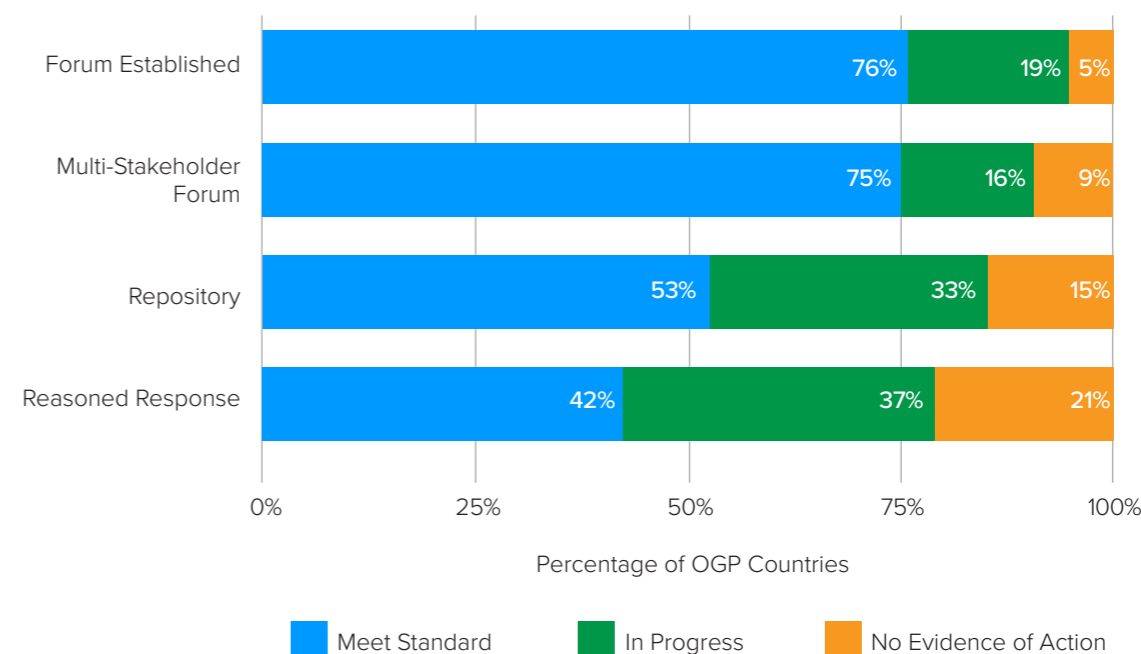
[1] We do not assess causality in this report. We determine statistical associations through multiple linear regression analysis. See Chapter 4, Predicting Outcomes, for details.

Political institutions

Institutional arrangements matter for OGP. This paper finds that a stable government office leading OGP is associated with stronger early results (i.e., significant changes in government practice during the action plan cycle). Moreover, an increasing number of OGP countries have such an arrangement.

Stable institutions predict better results

Stable OGP institutions, in particular, are a predictor of results. Less turnover in the OGP lead office—the government agency coordinating OGP—is associated with more early results. Changes in government, on the other hand, are not.

OGP institutions are seeing less turnover. The OGP lead office has become more stable over time (see Figure 4). In the first several years of OGP, half of countries experienced a change in this office during the action plan cycle, compared to only about one in five in 2019.

FIGURE 4. OGP lead offices grow stable, and head of government involvement decreases

An OGP lead office is stable if it remains in charge of OGP for the full duration of an action plan. Head of government involvement refers to any participation in co-creation by the office of the president or prime minister.
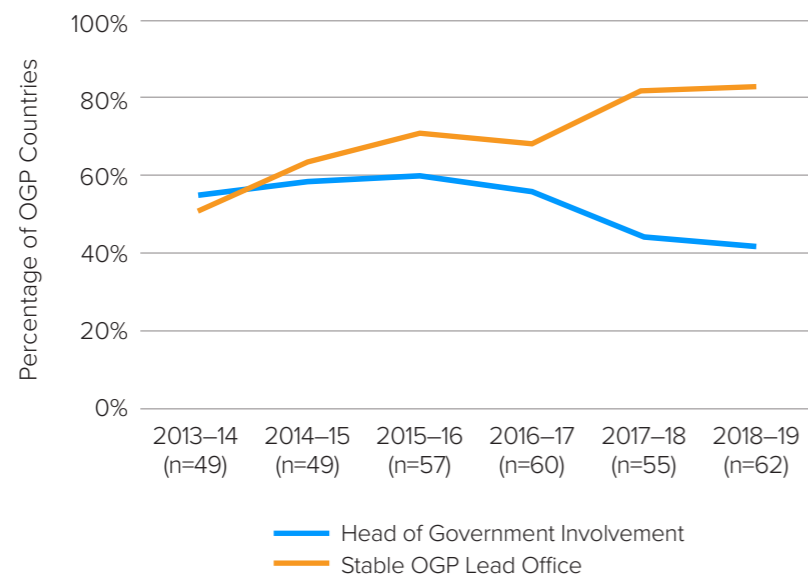
Head of government involvement declines

Fewer heads of government are involved in the co-creation process. Direct involvement by the head of government or their office at co-creation events and meetings peaked at 60% of countries in 2015–2016 but has since declined to about 40% (see Figure 4).

OGP is becoming more institutionalized. The lower head of government involvement does not imply that high-level political buy-in has declined. Instead, together with the growth in multi-stakeholder forums and stable OGP lead offices, it may suggest that OGP institutions are becoming more predictable and better able to weather political change.

Action plans and commitments

Action plans tackle an increasing number of issues, but several challenges remain. In particular, levels of ambition, implementation, and early results have not improved.

Action plans are becoming shorter but more diverse

National action plans have fewer commitments, in line with OGP guidance. The average number of commitments per plan dropped to 15 (the maximum recommended by the OGP Support Unit) for the first time in 2018 and has continued to decline since then.

Although action plans are becoming shorter, they cover a growing range of issues. The number of policy areas and sectors covered by the average action plan has more than doubled compared to the early days of OGP (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. OGP action plans are covering more policy areas and sectors

Policy areas refer to open government tools (e.g., open contracting, audits). Sectors refer to the areas of society affected (e.g., education, health). The numbers shown are for an average action plan with 10 commitments.
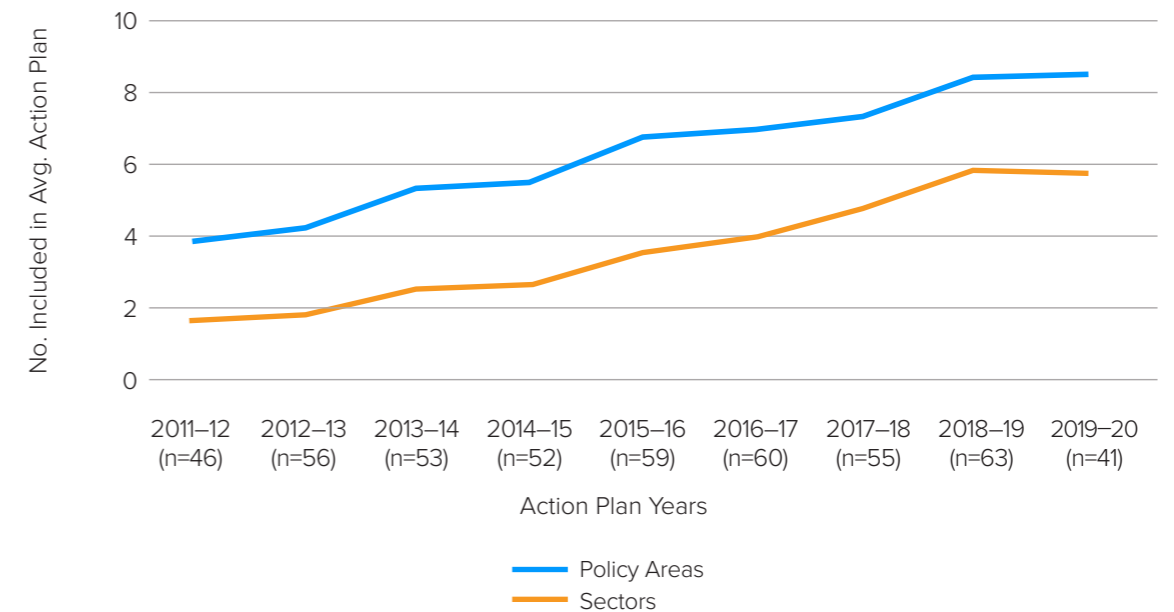
Ambition predicts success but remains a binding constraint

Action plan ambition is the strongest predictor of positive early results. Ambitious commitments have the potential to make a moderate or transformative change in open government practices. On average, an action plan in which all commitments are ambitious has 33% more strong early results than an action plan that lacks any ambitious commitments, after controlling for other factors.

However, raising ambition remains a challenge. Rates of commitment verifiability (96%) and relevance (93%) are increasing, but the percentage of commitments that are potentially transformative (7%) remains low.

Action plan ambition has not improved over time. The percentage of ambitious commitments declined from 55% in 2014–2015 to just over 40% in the latest round of action plans, though this decline is not statistically significant.

Ambition nonetheless varies widely depending on the type of commitment. Commitments related to certain topics like public services and inclusion are generally less ambitious than commitments in other areas, such as anti-corruption.

Rates of early results remain steady, despite challenges in some countries

Several OGP countries, particularly lower-income countries, struggle with implementation. The difference in the implementation rate between the highest- and lowest-income OGP countries is more than 30%, even when controlling for other factors.

Overall, rates of implementation have not changed. Since the IRM began tracking this data, about two-thirds of all commitments are substantially or fully implemented by the end of the action plan period.

The rate of strong early results has also remained stable. Each year, about one in five commitments achieve significant changes to government practices. However, IRM assessments only consider changes during the action plan period, so this is a significant undercount of actual results, which often take several years to emerge.

Implementing IRM recommendations is linked to better action plans

Most OGP members implement a majority of IRM key recommendations. The implementation rate varies depending on the member, but overall, it has stayed constant at about 50%. This rate suggests that the IRM is influencing OGP action plans and processes.

Implementing IRM recommendations is associated with higher-quality action plans and processes. An action plan that implements all IRM key recommendations is, on average, about 25% more ambitious than an action plan that does not implement any recommendations (see Figure 6). In addition, implementing IRM recommendations specifically related to the OGP process is associated with more collaborative co-creation processes. Both findings may be due to a host of other factors.

- OGP Action Plan
- OGP Global Average
- Trend Line
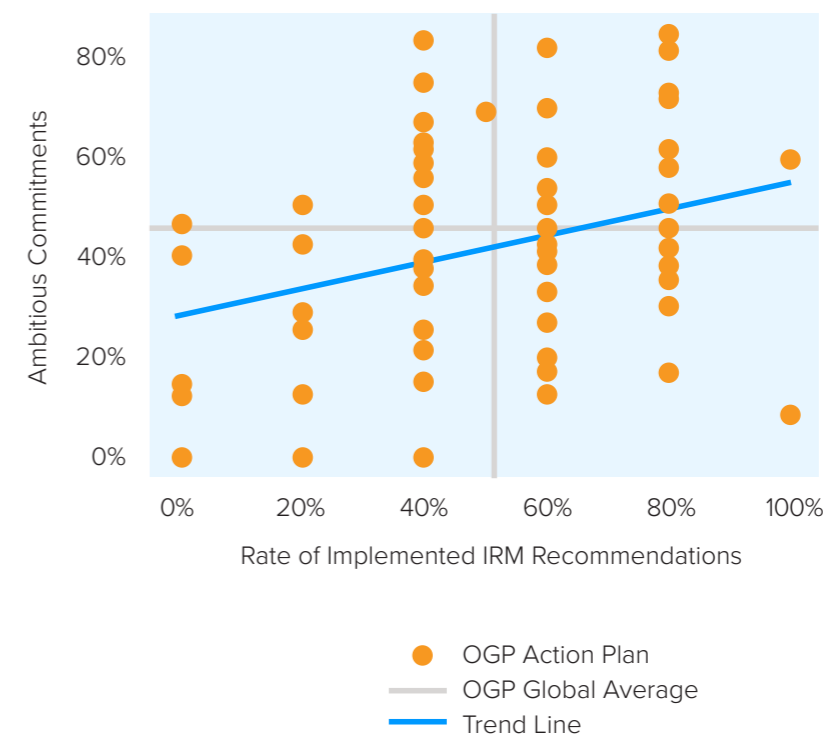
Policy areas

OGP action plans advance particular policy areas. Countries consistently produce strong anti-corruption commitments but rarely use their action plans to commit to civic space. Countries that make commitments related to beneficial ownership and budget transparency, in particular, have become more open in these areas.

Anti-corruption shows a high return on investment

OGP anti-corruption commitments are strong. Commitments in several areas of anti-corruption are among the most ambitious and most likely to generate strong early results. These areas include whistleblowing, extractive industries, audits, and open contracting.

Action plans increasingly address a subset of anti-corruption reforms. The number of commitments related to beneficial ownership and open contracting, in particular, is significantly increasing (see Figure 7). However, many anti-corruption topics—such as whistleblowing and lobbying—still see few commitments, despite their effectiveness.

FIGURE 7. **Increasing adoption of beneficial ownership and open contracting reforms**

The rate of adoption is defined as the percentage of action plans that includes at least one commitment related to the topic.
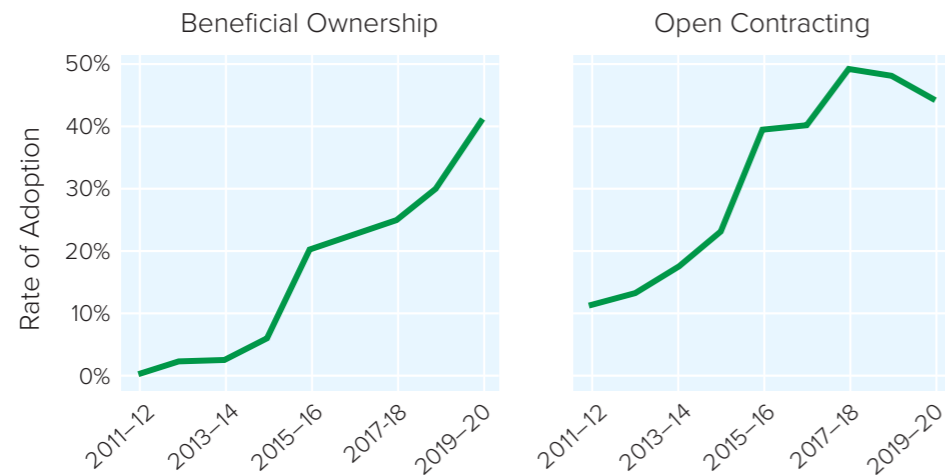
Civic space remains an urgent area of concern

Civic space is declining in most OGP countries. Globally, civic space continues a long-standing decline, and OGP countries are not immune. For the first time, five OGP countries fail the OGP Values Check, which measures the degree to which civil society can operate freely without government repression or interference. The safety of journalists and activists, in particular, is worsening.

OGP commitments related to civic space are too few and far between. Fewer than a quarter of OGP members made a commitment related to civic space in the latest round of action plans. Moreover, the number of civic space commitments is not increasing over time. These commitments also tend to produce fewer early results than commitments in other areas.

Advancing policy areas through OGP is associated with real-world changes

OGP commitments are associated with better performance in beneficial ownership transparency and open budgets. OGP countries that have made commitments in these areas—ambitious commitments across multiple action plans, especially—have become more open than other countries according to third-party assessments (see Figure 8).

OGP countries outperform non-OGP countries. Since 2011, OGP countries have improved more than non-OGP countries in beneficial ownership transparency, fiscal transparency, and open contracting, regardless of whether they had commitments related to these topics.

FIGURE 8. **Improvements in beneficial ownership transparency across OGP countries**

OGP countries that address beneficial ownership transparency in their action plans have seen greater improvements in the collection of beneficial ownership data, according to the Tax Justice Network.
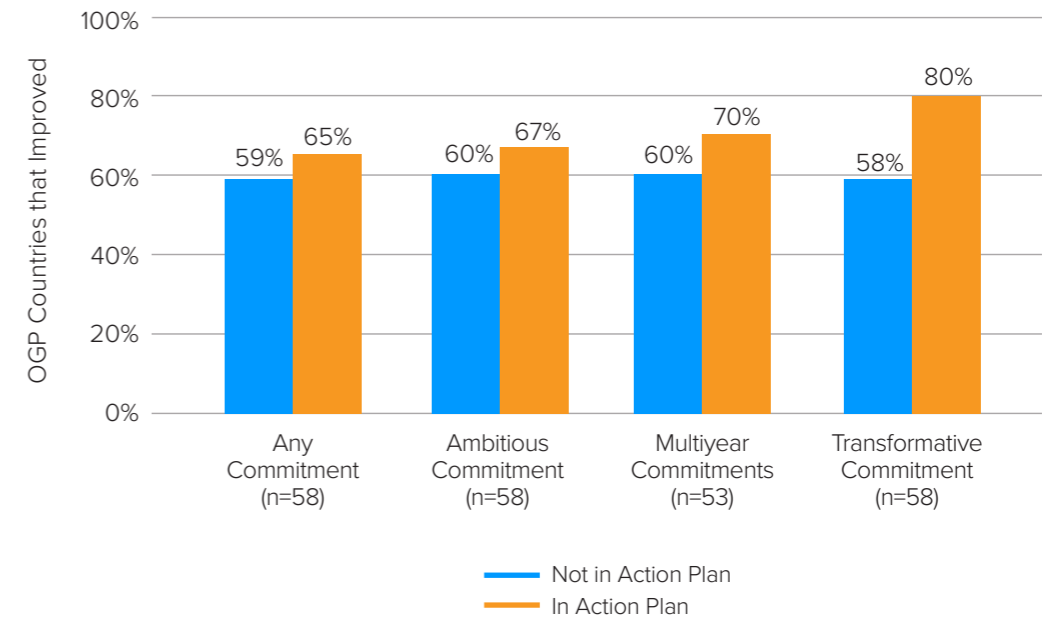
Key takeaways

The research validates the OGP model of co-creation and domestically owned action plans. Collaboration between government and civil society is linked to more ambitious and implemented action plans, which are translating to measurable improvements in government openness. In sum, where the OGP process is strongest, OGP outcomes tend to be strongest. The implications of this finding and various others fall into five overarching areas of work:

1. **Civil society involvement**
   - Civil society engagement may help drive better OGP outcomes.
   - Dialogue is improving, but who can participate is sometimes limited.
   - Government feedback to civil society poses a particular challenge.

2. **Political institutions**
   - Stable OGP staffing is important.
   - OGP is becoming increasingly institutionalized.
   - More research is needed on high-level political engagement.

3. **Action plan ambition**
   - Strong commitment design matters.
   - Raising ambition is particularly needed in certain policy areas.
   - Anti-corruption commitments are smart investments.

4. **Action plan implementation**
   - An implementation gap exists, particularly in low-income countries.
   - Civil society monitoring may help to strengthen OGP implementation.

5. **Fundamental freedoms**
   - OGP countries are improving in specific areas of open government like open data but are declining on systemic issues like civic space.
   - OGP reforms run the risk of being ineffective without a strong enabling environment and engaged citizens to hold governments accountable.

TABLE 1. Key OGP Vital Signs

Topic	Indicator	Information Collected	Location in Paper	Trend
Civil society engagement: How open and participatory is action plan design and implementation?	Basic requirements	Compliance with OGP standards around dissemination of information, spaces and platforms for dialogue and co-creation, and joint decision-making	Chapter 1: Section 1.1	NA
	Reasoned response	Government response to civil society on how their inputs were or were not integrated into the OGP action plan (and why)	Chapter 1: Section 1.1	NA
	Multi-stakeholder forum	Space for government and civil society to regularly discuss, agree, and oversee the OGP process	Chapter 1: Section 1.2.1	▲
	Level of public influence: Involve	Existence of a multi-stakeholder forum and a reasoned response	Chapter 1: Section 1.2.2	▲
Institutions: How are governments set up to implement their plans?	Head of government involvement	Participation in co-creation by the office of the president or prime minister, a staff member, or the president or prime minister themselves	Chapter 1: Section 1.4.1	▼
	Stability of OGP lead agency	Change in agency/office in charge of OGP during action plan cycle	Chapter 1: Section 1.4.2	▲
Ambition: How well designed are OGP action plans?	Scope	Diversity of policy areas and sectors included in action plan	Chapter 2: Section 2.1	▲
	Potential impact	Degree to which commitments would stretch government practice beyond business as usual in respective policy area	Chapter 2: Section 2.2	=
	Verifiability	Level of specificity and measurability of commitment activities	Chapter 2: Section 2.2.1	▲
	Relevance	Relevance of commitments to OGP principles of access to information, civic participation, and public accountability	Chapter 2: Section 2.2.1	▲
Completion: Do action plans meet their own stated aims?	Completion	Level of implementation of commitment activities	Chapter 2: Section 2.4.1	=
Early results: Do action plans change governance practices?	Early results	Change in government practice as a result of commitment implementation	Chapter 2: Section 2.4.2	=
Real-world changes: How do OGP countries perform according to third-party metrics?	Several	Level of openness in key policy areas, such as beneficial ownership transparency, open contracting, civic space, and fiscal openness	Chapter 3: Section 3.3	Varies

Note: Chapter 4 studies the relationships between most of the Vital Signs listed in this table.

Introduction

In 2021, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) turned 10. To date, OGP members have submitted more than 300 action plans and more than 4,500 commitments. This makes it an advantageous time to assess whether the OGP action plan process is working as it should, why or why not, and what this means for future activities.

For this reason, we at the OGP Support Unit are reviewing OGP's "Vital Signs." We consider "Vital Signs" an apt metaphor for this report because just as doctors use vital signs like body temperature and pulse rate to screen patients, we can examine the health of OGP—as a process for delivering change—by monitoring the following core metrics of the action plan process:

- **Civil society engagement:** How open and participatory is action plan design and implementation?

- **Institutions:** How well are governments set up to implement their plans?

- **Ambition:** How well designed are OGP action plans?

- **Completion:** Do action plans meet their own stated aims?

- **Early results:** Do action plans change governance practices?

- **Ultimate results:** Do action plans produce real-world changes?

Just as a doctor checks vital signs before moving to more specific tests, this report focuses on the big picture. It presents general trends and associations based on data from nearly 200 action plans assessed by OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM). The report does not assess causality or identify specific dynamics at play.

Nonetheless, this report's findings represent a major step forward for OGP. After years of inconclusive results, we find that the OGP process, when followed as expected, is associated with strong outcomes. While this finding has been supported anecdotally for years, this report provides the first statistical evidence for the strength of this relationship.

This report is not, however, the first data-driven analysis of OGP. Every few years, the OGP Support Unit or the IRM reviews existing data to determine whether OGP is working as intended. This work was previously referred to as IRM Technical Papers and was later included as a chapter of the 2019 OGP Global Report. This quantitative analysis complements other more nuanced reviews of OGP, including an independent, multiyear evaluation in a handful of OGP countries.

We hope this report informs readers about what works in OGP, what needs improvement, and how similar initiatives can learn from our experience. Specifically, the research aims to support:

- **Reform design**: Deepening our understanding of what makes a good reform and a good reform process within the context of OGP.

- **Rules of the game**: Improving OGP policy and practice (for members of the Steering Committee's Criteria and Standards Subcommittee, Support Unit, and IRM).

- **Strategy**: Taking stock of changes over time and identifying where OGP is not yet meeting its goals.

- **Research gaps**: Mapping what we know (and do not know) about OGP while encouraging more creative use of OGP data.

The rest of this report is divided into four chapters. The first three each analyze an essential component of the OGP process, while the fourth investigates the interplay between them. These chapters are:

- **Chapter 1. Civil Society Engagement and Institutions**: Investigates the degree to which OGP countries involve civil society in co-creating and implementing action plans and how this has changed over time. Also looks at trends around the government institutions that lead the OGP process.

- **Chapter 2. Action Plans and Commitments**: Reviews the quality of action plans over time, including their scope, ambition, and results. Also explores the role of the IRM in advancing these goals.

- **Chapter 3. Policy Areas**: Assesses the performance of OGP commitments in key policy areas, such as anti-corruption, civic space, and public service delivery. Also reviews how OGP countries perform in particular policy areas according to third-party metrics.

- **Chapter 4. Predicting Outcomes**: Identifies the predictors of positive (and negative) outcomes in OGP, namely ambition, completion, early results, and policy area performance according to third-party metrics.

These chapters can be grouped into two different kinds of analysis. The first three chapters deal with snapshots and trends, each with *descriptive* statistics presenting the direction of change and identifying what is (and is not) improving. Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes," on the other hand, focuses on associations. It applies *inferential* statistics to discern the relationship between the different Vital Signs.

About the Vital Signs metrics

OGP's Vital Signs are based on several core metrics assessed by the IRM. These metrics have evolved to ensure that the Partnership delivers on credible, ambitious reforms. Today, the IRM is responsible for assessing whether OGP action plans are created collaboratively, whether they include ambitious commitments, and whether those commitments are implemented and produce tangible results. These responsibilities are outlined in the IRM Charter, which is endorsed by the OGP Steering Committee.[2]

A handful of the core IRM metrics, known as the OGP Vital Signs, form the bulk of the analysis in this report. They are listed in Table 1 in the Executive Summary, along with simple indicators for recent trends. See the corresponding sections of the report, also listed in the table, for more details.

The data cover nearly 200 IRM-assessed national action plans submitted between 2012 and 2020.[3] Unless specified otherwise, the analysis does not include local OGP members. **All data included in the paper is updated as of October 2021.** The data, as well as many of the calculations and results, are publicly available online. In addition, the underlying IRM data are also available online.[4] For more details, see the Annex section entitled "About the Vital Signs data."

2 OGP Articles of Governance, Addendum F: IRM Charter, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/OGP_Articles-of-Governance_For-Public-Comment_20190311.pdf.

3 Certain analyses include a subset of these action plans, depending on the indicators used.

4 The "IRM Charter" requires that the IRM release its reporting as open data: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/OGP_Articles-of-Governance_For-Public-Comment_20190311.pdf.

The Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) provides land rights training to the community in Blayah Town, Liberia. Civil society organizations are essential in creating a space for dialogue and learning. Photo by Morgana Wingard.

1. Civil Society Engagement and Institutions

Collaboration between government and civil society during the action plan cycle is core to the OGP model and represents a key metric of OGP's health. Unlike other international partnerships or treaty organizations that prescribe a set of reforms that members must undertake, OGP members determine their own domestic priorities through a process of co-creation. The OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards set out the expectations for this process. The IRM assesses how well members meet these expectations in its reporting. This chapter examines this IRM data to identify key strengths and weaknesses of co-creation processes, as well as trends.

1.1 Countries meet most minimum requirements

OGP country performance on basic process requirements is mixed. Most OGP governments have implemented a multi-stakeholder forum, but fewer provide feedback to stakeholders.

In the past, a small but significant number of governments in OGP selected which civil society groups could participate.[5] In a larger number of countries, a weak link existed between civil society inputs and final commitments, with limited government feedback.[6] In worst-case scenarios, no multi-stakeholder discussion took place. For this reason, the OGP Support Unit and Steering Committee developed a set of standards with expectations for the co-creation process.

The 2016 iteration of these standards, the OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards, outlines a series of *basic requirements* that members are expected to meet (See Box 1.1 on how OGP is updating these Standards). Assessing member performance against these requirements is critical to determining if governments maintain spaces for dialogue and enable joint decision-making.

Four requirements, in particular, represent *minimum* requirements that OGP members must meet to remain active in the Partnership.[7] They include (1) establishing a **forum**, (2) ensuring that the forum is **multi-stakeholder** with both government and nongovernmental representatives, (3) maintaining a **repository** of proceedings and progress, and (4) providing a **reasoned response** to stakeholders on how their inputs were considered. We analyze performance on these minimum requirements next.

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5   See Foti (2014) and Foti (2016) at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Technical-paper-1_final.pdf and https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/IRM-Report_Technical-Paper_20161130_web.pdf.

6   Ibid.

7   According to OGP's Procedural Review policy, a country that fails to meet certain criteria is considered to act contrary to OGP process. If this happens twice in consecutive action plan cycles, the country is placed under review. Failure to meet the minimum requirements again can result in the country being designated as inactive. Details about OGP's Procedural Review policy are available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/procedural-review/.

8   The IRM began measuring OGP member performance against these Standards in its assessments of 2017–2019 action plans. Enforcement began with the 2018–2020 action plans.

9   Aidan Eyakuze and Marco Marrazza, Reviewing OGP Processes for its Tenth Anniversary, 3 September 2020, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/reviewing-ogp-processes-for-its-tenth-anniversary/.

10   Alonso Cerdan, Help Us Finalize the OGP Co-Creation and Participation Standards, 13 September 2021, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/help-us-finalize-the-ogp-co-creation-and-participation-standards/.

11   Open Government Partnership Consultation, Participation and Co-Creation Standards, https://ogpconsultation.org/standards.

1.1.1 Minimum requirements

Since 2017, OGP country performance has been mixed on the minimum requirements.[12] Most countries have established a multi-stakeholder forum, but fewer have maintained a repository, and fewer than half of governments have provided a reasoned response to participants in the co-creation process (see Figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1. **Most OGP countries meet minimum process requirements**
These IRM assessments cover national action plans submitted between 2017 and 2020.

Percentage of OGP Countries

	Forum Established	Multi-Stakeholder Forum	Repository	Reasoned Response
Meets Standard	77%	76%	53%	43%
In Progress	18%	15%	33%	36%
No Evidence of Action	5%	10%	15%	21%

Legend: Meets Standard · In Progress · No Evidence of Action
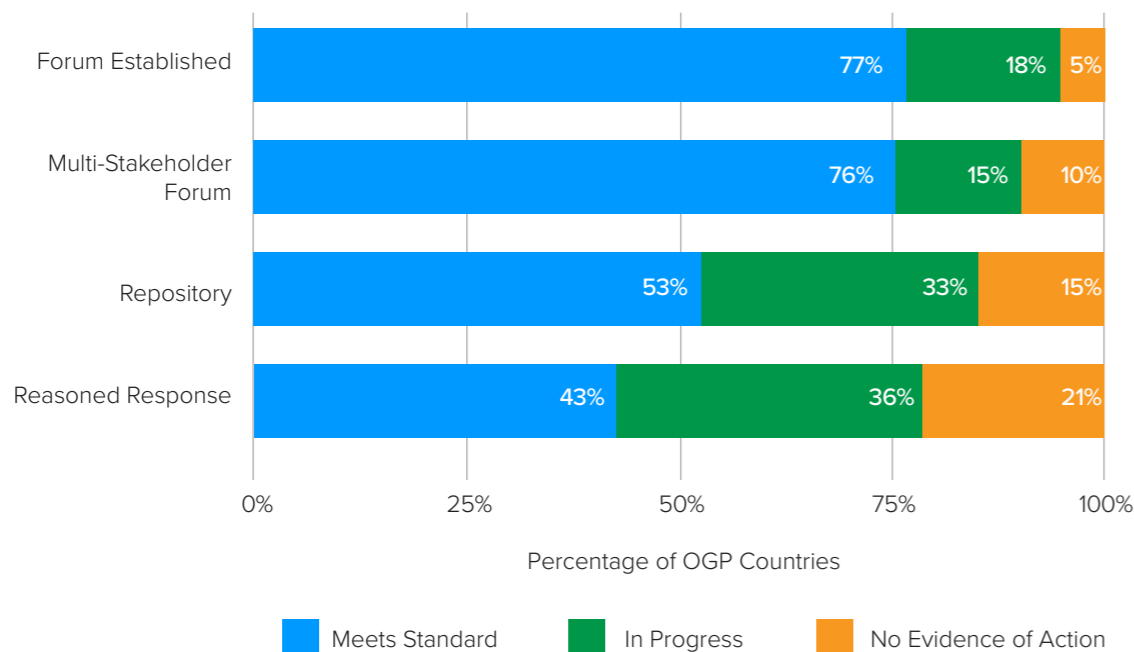
The lack of a reasoned response, in particular, shows room for improvement. To meet the "reasoned response" requirement, the government or multi-stakeholder forum must show that they provided feedback to stakeholders on how their inputs were considered in drafting the action plan.[13] This could include a summary of major categories of comments and the basis for their inclusion, amendment, or rejection. Just over 40% of countries currently meet this requirement, though about a third of countries are making progress.[14]

Longitudinal data suggest that countries are improving on this metric over time. Since the IRM began tracking these data in 2017, the rate of reasoned responses has increased. For 2019 and 2020 action plans, about 50% of countries provided a reasoned response, compared to just over 40% for 2017 and 2018 plans. The rate of OGP repositories, on the other hand, has not improved. See Section 1.2 for a more in-depth review of how OGP processes have changed over time, based on data going further back in time.

1.1.2 Other basic requirements

Compliance with the other basic requirements varies depending on the particular requirement. In general, about half of OGP countries meet each basic requirement.[15] Figure 1.2 illustrates the difference between performance on minimum versus other basic requirements.

The two least-met requirements relate to government feedback to stakeholders. Specifically, fewer than two in five countries meet the "minutes" requirement (the government or forum proactively communicates and reports back on decisions, activities, and results to wider government and civil society stakeholders). The next least-implemented requirement is, perhaps surprisingly, the reasoned response minimum requirement discussed in the previous subsection.

FIGURE 1.2. **OGP governments lag in providing feedback to stakeholders**
These IRM assessments cover national action plans submitted between 2017 and 2020.

Percentage of OGP Countries (n=90)

Legend: Meets Standard · In Progress · No Evidence of Action
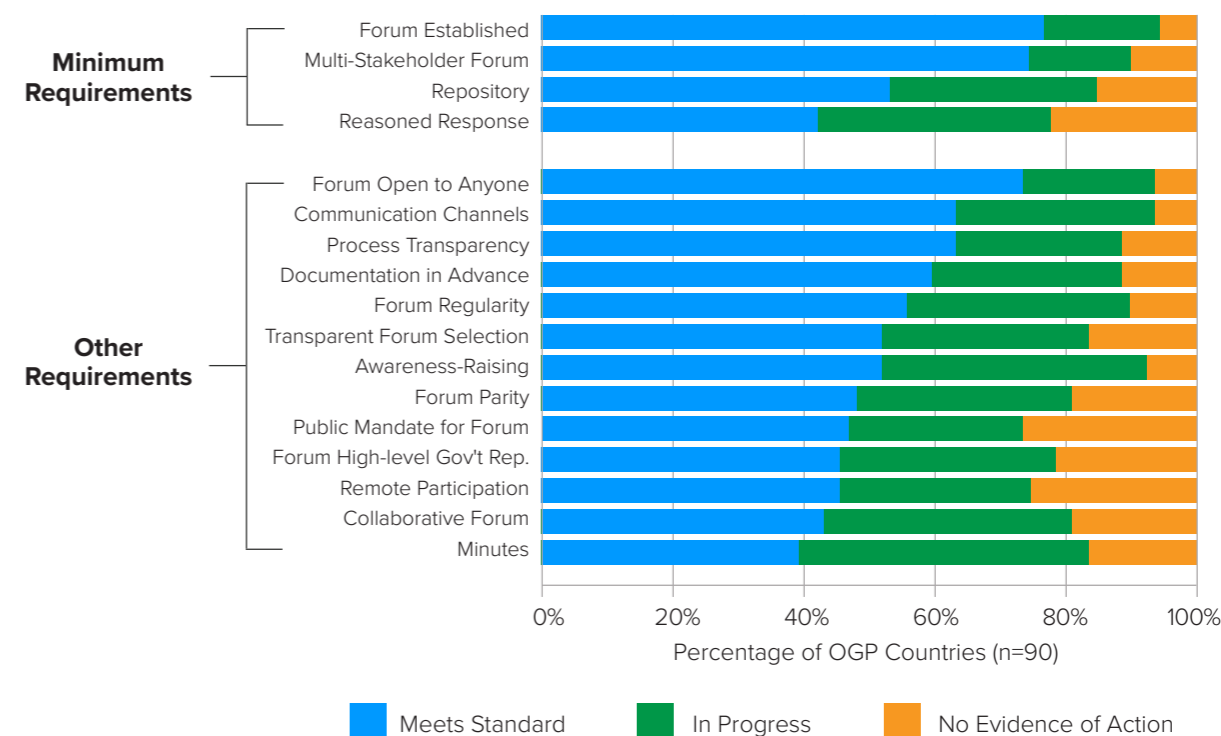
The lower rates of government feedback to stakeholders are important for two reasons. First, these measures are essential to understanding whether OGP is actually changing the culture of government. Second, as we will see later in this paper, some of these measures are strong predictors of other positive OGP outcomes.

This section focused on the performance of OGP processes since the introduction of the 2016 standards. In the next section, we explore trends going back further in time.

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12 The IRM started reviewing member performance based on these standards with the 2017–2019 cohort of OGP action plans.

13 IRM, IRM Guidance on minimum threshold for involve, February 2020, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IRM-Guidance-Involve.pdf.

14 According to the IRM, "in progress" means that the country has taken steps to meet the standard, though the standard is not yet met.

15 To see the full list of basic requirements assessed by the IRM (and their definitions), see Chapter III of the IRM report template, available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/for-web_2019-21-Design-Report-Template.pdf.

1.2 OGP processes are largely improving over time

More countries are making progress toward establishing multi-stakeholder forums. The quality of dialogue during co-creation is also improving. The openness of the OGP process, however, remains a challenge in several countries.

This section analyzes long-term process data to determine if OGP co-creation processes are becoming more inclusive, accessible, and effective. Given that a long-term analysis requires looking back before the introduction of the latest standards, this section focuses on three key variables tracked since at least 2014:

1. The existence of a regular, multi-stakeholder forum

2. The level of public influence during co-creation

3. The openness of the OGP process

Although the IRM methodology has changed over time, these variables have remained largely consistent and serve as adequate proxies for the overall quality of an OGP process.[16] Each variable is described in detail in the subsections below. For this trends analysis, we use two-year rolling averages to account for the fluctuations in the set of countries that submit an action plan each year.[17]

1.2.1 Existence of OGP forums over time

Ongoing dialogue between government and civil society is foundational to the OGP model. Having a space for regular collaboration builds trust, promotes joint problem-solving, and empowers civil society to influence the design, implementation, and monitoring of reforms. However, in the early years of OGP, collaboration between government and civil society occurred mostly during the co-creation process and not during implementation.

For this reason, establishing a multi-stakeholder forum that meets regularly to co-create and oversee the action plan became a basic requirement of all OGP countries starting in 2016. These forums can take the form of legally mandated commissions and secretariats or more informal structures such as working groups. However, for purposes of this analysis, we consider only forums that met regularly and included civil society.[18]

OGP countries are making steady progress in meeting this requirement. Figure 1.3 illustrates the rate of OGP countries with a regular, multi-stakeholder forum (in orange).[19] The shaded area represents the countries that have not yet met the standard but are making progress. Despite a modest decline in recent years, progress has generally improved over time. Today, four in five OGP countries either have a regular forum or are in the process of establishing one (as shown in blue). This trend is especially noteworthy because the 2016 standards introduced a stricter definition of a *regular* forum.[20]

16 See the section in the Annex on variable construction for details on how the IRM method has changed over time, the "sensitivity analysis" we conducted to evaluate the feasibility of building longitudinal data, and how we operationalized the variables as a result.

17 OGP members are divided into even- and odd-year cohorts, depending on the year in which their action plan is due. As a result, the members submitting plans in any given year are different from those submitting in the previous or following year. The two-year rolling average smooths out the fluctuations caused by this changing set of countries.

18 Before 2017, the IRM evaluated whether a forum was regular and multi-stakeholder as part of a single, binary indicator. As of 2017, the indicators are assessed separately, each on a three-point scale. These sources were combined into a single indicator for this analysis. For more details about the operationalization of this variable, see the Annex.

19 In 2017, the IRM began using a three-point scale to assess the existence of forums, adding "In progress" to the previously binary scale.

20 In 2016, as a result of the new standards, OGP forums became required to meet at least quarterly. Establishing a multi-stakeholder forum also became a minimum requirement for OGP participation. See note 7 for details.

FIGURE 1.3. OGP countries are making progress in establishing regular forums
A regular forum must meet regularly to co-create and oversee the OGP action plan and must include both government and civil society.
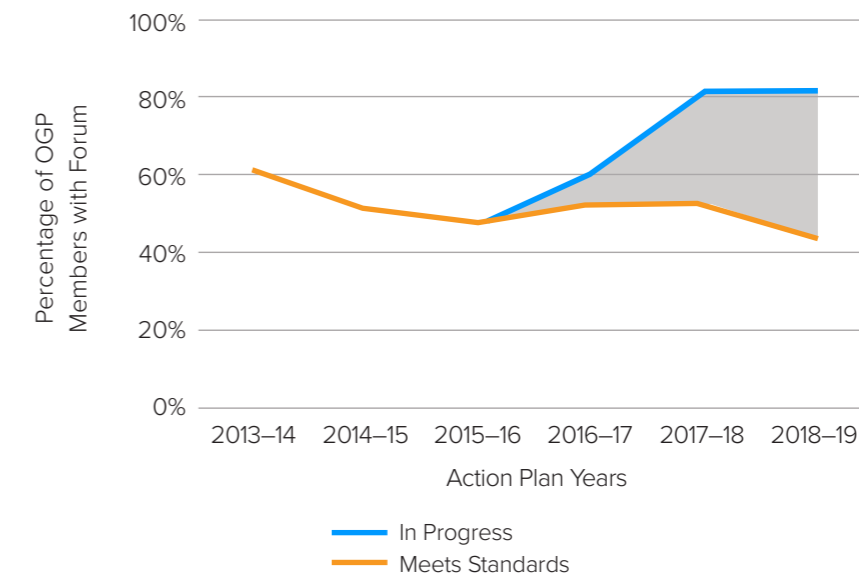
Note: Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle.

This finding has several implications. First, it implies that dialogue between government and civil society is becoming more institutionalized over time. At the same time, it underscores that much work remains—more than half of OGP countries still do not meet the full standard in terms of having a multi-stakeholder forum that meets regularly.

This subsection focused on the *space* for dialogue. Next, we look at the *quality* of dialogue.

1.2.2 Level of public influence over time

In the early years of OGP, the IRM measured public participation during the OGP process by assessing whether governments completed certain steps.[21] However, this had the potential of creating a "box-ticking" exercise in which governments went through the motions without actually listening and responding to people's concerns. As a result, the IRM introduced the level of public influence indicator to capture the degree to which civil society actually has a say in shaping action plans.

This analysis specifically looks at the percentage of action plans that achieve "Involve" or better on the IRM's Level of Public Influence scale. To meet this mark, (1) a forum must exist, (2) the forum must be multi-stakeholder, and (3) the government must provide a reasoned response during the co-creation process.[22] As of 2017, meeting these three criteria is a requirement to remain an active member of OGP.[23]

Since the IRM began using this metric in 2013, the level of public influence in the design of OGP action plans has increased significantly (see Figure 1.4). Four in five OGP countries currently meet "Involve," compared to only a third in 2013. This finding is remarkable considering that the 2016 standards introduced additional requirements to achieve this mark.[24] It is also notable considering that many early OGP action plans lacked any consultation at all, let alone feedback to participants and space for multi-stakeholder dialogue.

21 These included setting up multiple channels for consultation, providing advance notice of consultation, and providing a summary of comments, among others.

22 For more details about the current IRM method, including how the IRM defines a reasoned response, see https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IRM-Guidance-Involve.pdf.

23 See note 7 for details.

24 Before the introduction of the 2016 standards, there was no requirement to have a multi-stakeholder forum to achieve "Involve." The only requirement was for the government to provide feedback on how public inputs were considered in the development of the action plan.

FIGURE 1.4. **Public influence grows while openness remains the same**

A high level of public influence includes establishing a multi-stakeholder forum and providing feedback to participants on how their inputs were considered. An open process is open to anyone who wishes to participate, not only to invited civil society organizations.

— Open Process
— Strong Level of Public Influence (Involve+)
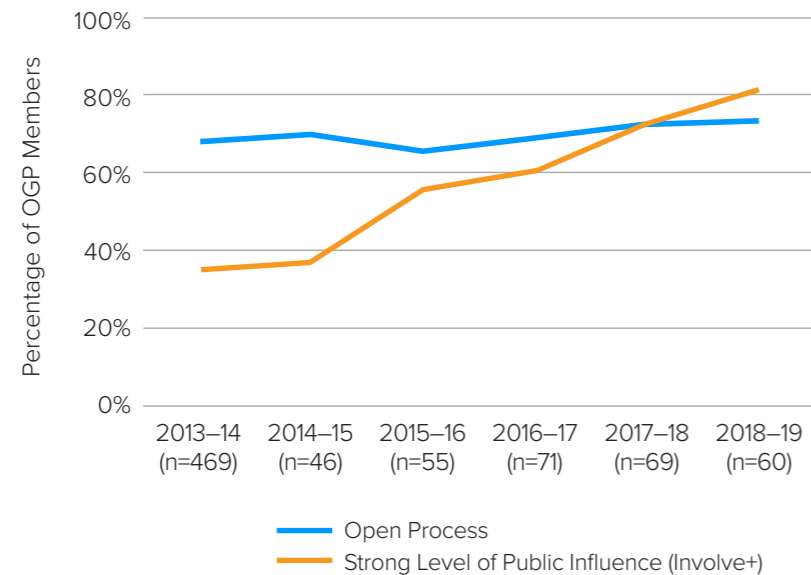
Note: Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle.

1.2.3 Openness of OGP processes over time

A long-standing expectation for OGP processes is that they should enable anyone to observe, provide inputs, or inform decision-making. The IRM has tracked these data in some form since at least 2013. According to the 2016 standards, OGP governments (or multi-stakeholder forums) are expected to accept "inputs and representation on the [action plan] process from any civil society or other stakeholders."[25] Here, we focus on the percentage of OGP processes that fully meet this requirement (i.e., open to anyone who wishes to participate, not only to particular civil society organizations).

As seen in Figure 1.4 above, the openness of OGP processes has remained largely constant over time. Roughly three-quarters of OGP countries allow anyone to participate. This means that while the quality and

space for dialogue are improving, many processes—about a quarter of all processes—still maintain some form of selection over who can participate in that dialogue.

These "closed" processes are problematic because leaders could manipulate them, especially since they are more likely to lack transparency. For example, only one-third of these "closed" processes are transparent about how nongovernmental members are selected to participate.[26]

Why these processes are "closed" is not entirely clear. The existing data do not identify whether these processes failed to meet the requirement because of a lack of opportunities to (1) provide inputs or (2) be represented in the decision-making process. The next section explores possible explanations for this trend in greater detail.

1.3 Possible explanations for OGP co-creation trends

It seems that OGP-wide guidance, support, and learning are driving the increasing levels of public influence during co-creation. The reasons for the closed processes in several OGP countries, on the other hand, are less clear.

This section identifies some hypotheses about what could be driving the trends mentioned in the previous section. In particular, we propose possible explanations for the trends in the levels of public influence and openness of OGP processes. However, additional qualitative analysis is needed to investigate the specific country-level dynamics at play.

1.3.1 Possible explanations for the rising levels of public influence

Understanding what causes changes in the level of public influence is important. As we show later in the paper, the level of public influence is one of the major predictors of high-quality action plans. Consequently, it is worth asking: Is the stability of government staffing

driving higher levels of civil society engagement? Do government officers with more experience in OGP involve the public more? Or are Partnership-wide factors, like peer learning and OGP Support Unit guidance, driving improvements? Evidence suggests it is the latter.

When we look at multiple action plans for each national and local member, the level of public influence tends to increase from one action plan to the next. This makes it seem as though people participating across multiple OGP action plans are learning from each cycle and improving accordingly. However, if this were the case, we would expect a strong association between the level of public influence and the action plan number, which the data does not show.

Instead, we find that action plans submitted later show higher levels of public influence, regardless of how many plans came before them. This means that when countries and local jurisdictions join OGP now, they perform significantly better than those that joined OGP a few years ago (see Figure 1.5).

FIGURE 1.5. **New action plans show increasing levels of public influence over time**

A high level of public influence includes establishing a multi-stakeholder forum and providing feedback to participants on how their inputs were considered.

— Two-Year Moving Average
■ Action Plans from New Members
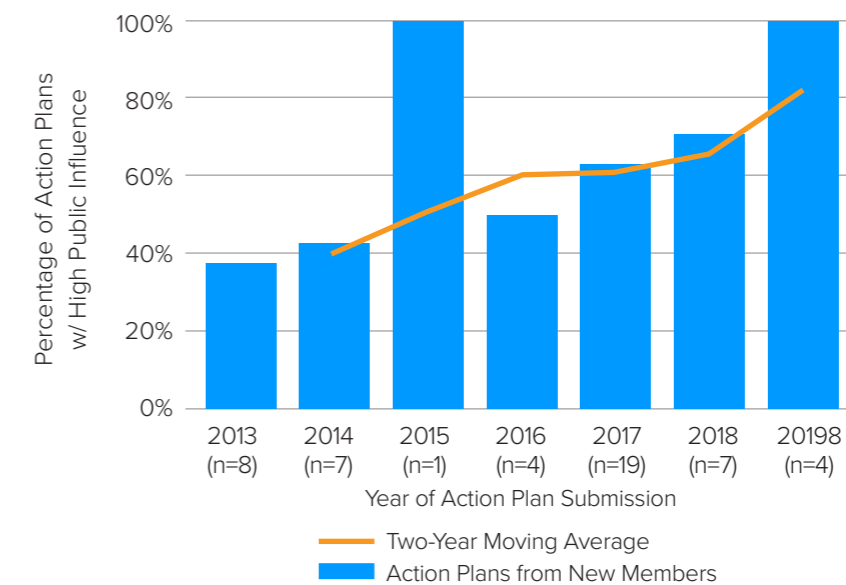
Note: This includes local OGP members, which explains the large sample size in 2017, when the OGP local program first launched. The two-year moving average smooths fluctuations given the small sample sizes.

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[25] OGP Participation & Co-Creation Standards, 2016, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/ogp-participation-co-creation-standards/.

[26] Specifically, in only one-third of these processes, nongovernmental members of the multi-stakeholder forum are selected through a fair and transparent process. This contrasts with other processes in which two-thirds meet these criteria.

These findings suggest that Partnership-wide guidance, support, and exchange might be driving the increasing levels of public influence in OGP action plans. Unfortunately, we cannot draw firm conclusions as we lack any sort of data that could validate this. Nonetheless, we can advance a few reasonable hypotheses:

- **Standards:** More clearly defined standards from the OGP Steering Committee and Support Unit mean that more people know the "rules of the game."

- **Learning:** The community has gained more experience and knowledge of what works, which means that countries—even new members—can better learn from others.

- **Guidance:** A greatly expanded OGP Support Unit that now has dedicated staff members for each country (a major change since 2018) offers better guidance, support, and tools.

- **Technical support:** Greater technical support from the Multi-Donor Trust Fund, funders, and other implementing partners means that more civil society organizations and governments have dedicated money to support staffing and infrastructure for OGP.

- **Exchanges:** More frequent cross-national peer exchanges and learning mean that more members can share their challenges and triumphs around a set of common expectations.

- **Awareness:** Improved awareness of IRM standards, methodology, and recommendations increase the likelihood that members will adhere to them.

1.3.2 Possible explanations for the stagnant levels of openness

One of the lessons learned over the first decade of OGP is that the mere existence of a participatory co-creation process does not mean that it is open and pluralistic (i.e., competing ideas can enter into discussions). Indeed, as shown in Section 1.2.3, several OGP processes are not open to any civil society or other stakeholders. This lack of openness could result in uncontroversial or unambitious action plans as governments may tend toward reforms that avoid conflict within the bureaucracy or with more political operators. This result runs counter to OGP's aims of providing a pathway to discussing difficult topics and making progress on politically difficult goals.

If we look more closely at the data on open processes, we find that half of the countries have maintained open processes throughout their membership in OGP. Specifically, Figure 1.6 shows that half of all countries with multiple action plans have consistently organized open processes. Only a handful (five) have never had open processes, and the rest have alternated between open and closed processes. However, the question remains: why are some processes not open?

An open OGP process enables anyone to participate, not only invited civil society organizations.
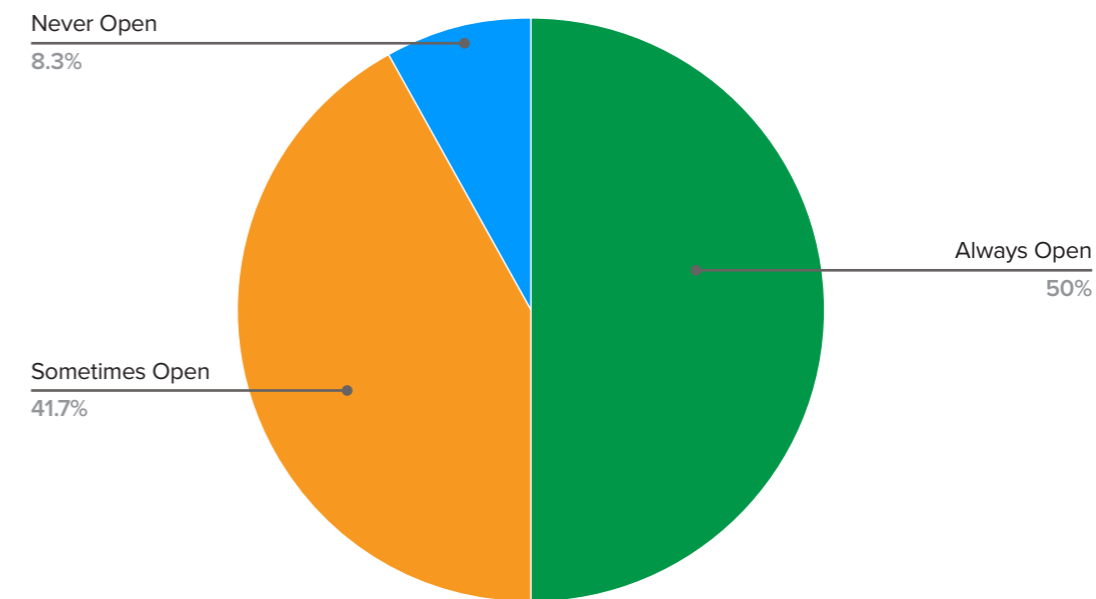
One possible explanation is a lack of awareness, resources, or history of open collaboration within the administrative culture. Another possibility is that some governments may prefer to work with more elite civil society organizations that can help brainstorm, prioritize, and draft commitments instead of a more diverse, yet perhaps less technical, group of civil society organizations. Finally, a more pessimistic view is that some governments may be manipulating the OGP process by intentionally choosing participants that will conform to their preferences.

More research is needed, particularly in two areas. First, why do some processes remain closed to the public (except the invited)? What are the stated and implied reasons? How much of a problem does this pose to the credibility of the OGP process, both within particular countries and for the Partnership as a whole? Second, what would change performance on this issue? Are countries or governments unaware of the rules (in which case, training and discussion are needed)? Is the issue high-level political resistance? Is it a matter of capacity and finance? Or have a small group of individuals and organizations outside of government monopolized the process to advance their agenda?

In the previous sections, we have alluded to the importance of political buy-in and the government's knowledge, skills, and finance. In many ways, these issues may be fundamental to understanding how the OGP process is working. We turn to these topics next.

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27 This is looking only at OGP countries with multiple action plans reviewed by the IRM.

1.4 OGP institutions are changing over time

The government office in charge of coordinating the OGP process is becoming more stable over time. The office of the head of government is becoming less involved. Both of these findings may point to the increased institutionalization of OGP.

It seems intuitive that which government institutions are involved in the OGP process would significantly affect the results. Each OGP-participating government selects the institution that coordinates OGP activities (i.e., the OGP lead office). Among other things, these offices are responsible for involving other government institutions. In this section, we focus on two particular topics related to these institutions: (1) how often they include the office of the head of government and (2) the rate of turnover in the lead offices themselves.

1.4.1 Involvement of the head of government

An operating assumption of OGP has been that opening government is not just a technical exercise. Since OGP began, high-level politicians and major civil society actors have been encouraged to be a part of the process. Before we look at *whether* this is important in Chapter 4 "Predicting Outcomes," we first study trends.

Specifically, we review how often the head of government is involved in OGP and how this has changed over time. We define the head of government as the office of the president or prime minister, an individual staff member within the office, or the president or prime minister themselves. Involvement refers to any participation during the co-creation process, including speaking at a kick-off event, attending meetings of the multi-stakeholder forum, or serving as the OGP lead office.

Using these data, we find that involvement of the head of government is declining (see Figure 1.7). The involvement rate reached a peak of 60% in 2015–2016 but has since declined to about 40% of OGP countries.

Importantly, this decline does not imply that political buy-in for OGP is decreasing. Instead, the shift may have more to do with the increasing institutionalization of OGP (as evidenced by the growth of multi-stakeholder forums) and the ensuing push to provide staffing that can better weather political change. Indeed, other metrics may be better measures of high-level political engagement, such as ministerial participation in the OGP process, high-level attendees at OGP events, and interest in joining the OGP Steering Committee. Future research into these areas may provide further insights. See the analysis in Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes," for more on the implications of this decline.

FIGURE 1.7. Head of government involvement declines as stability grows

An OGP lead office is stable if it remains in charge of OGP for the full duration of an action plan. Head of government involvement refers to any participation in co-creation by the office of the president or prime minister.
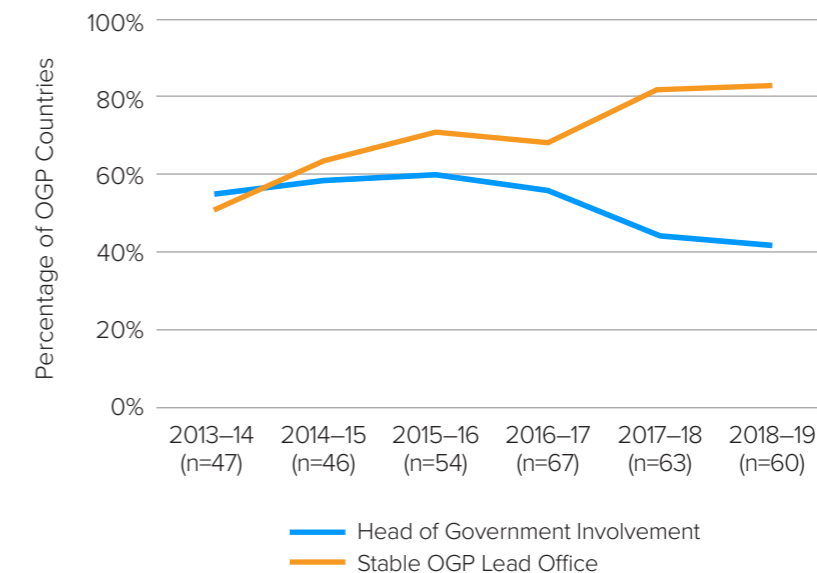
Note: Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle.

1.4.2 Stability of the OGP lead office

It is difficult to coordinate an action plan if governmental staffing is unstable and constantly changing.[28] Indeed, an earlier OGP Technical Paper found a correlation—albeit a weak one—between completion rates and office stability (with a much smaller sample size).[29] For this reason, the Support Unit has provided increasing guidance in the *OGP Handbook* on how to maintain stable staffing. In addition, similar initiatives such as the OECD's Governance of Open Government work seek to strengthen the capacity for coordination.

The OGP lead office has become more stable over time (see Figure 1.7 above). In the first several years of OGP, half of the countries experienced a change in the lead office during the action plan cycle, compared to only about one in five today.

Lead offices may change for several reasons, including elections, newly appointed ministers, and strategic realignments. While these changes are sometimes unavoidable, frequent turnover in the lead office can negatively affect the OGP process, as outlined in more detail in Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes." The rising stability mirrors the trend described earlier around the growing institutionalization of OGP and the more concerted efforts to safeguard the initiative against political shifts.

The data presented in this chapter reveal three trends:

1. Most OGP countries are meeting, or making progress toward meeting, formal requirements, though gaps remain around providing better feedback to participants.

2. The quality of dialogue during co-creation is improving, though who can participate in that dialogue remains limited in some countries.

3. OGP is becoming more institutionalized domestically as lead offices grow more stable and multi-stakeholder forums become more common.

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[28] This is not to say that changes are always detrimental. In some cases, staffing might remain inside an agency incapable of developing and coordinating an action plan, in which case a change would be productive.

[29] Joseph Foti, Technical Paper 1, Independent Reporting Mechanism, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Technical-paper-1_final.pdf.

2. Action Plans and Commitments

The quality of the commitments included in OGP action plans is one of the most important measures of OGP's health. With 10 years of reporting from the IRM, and nearly 300 OGP action plans and 4,500 commitments, there are several ways to assess performance. This chapter looks at four key metrics of action plan performance:

1. **Scope:** The number of commitments and topics covered

2. **Ambition:** The potential impact of individual commitments

3. **Completion:** The implementation of individual commitments

4. **Early results:** The changes to government practice as a result of implementation

The following analysis focuses on action plans, rather than commitments, as the main unit of analysis. This means that most performance numbers cited are average rates *per action plan*.[30] Since some action plans include more commitments than others, this method has the benefit of weighing plans equally, no matter their length. See the Annex for more details.

Paraguay's 2014 action plan included the creation of Municipal Development Councils to partner with citizens to determine budget priorities and discuss issues of health and infrastructure. Photo by OGP.

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[30] Country weights are also included so that countries with more action plans are not weighed more heavily than countries with fewer plans. See the Annex for more details.

2.1 Action plan scope

Action plans are becoming shorter in length but more diverse, covering more policy areas and sectors. While more commitments involve civic participation, fewer include mechanisms for public accountability.

Scope is an important measure of an action plan's quality for several reasons. For one, it shows the extent to which an action plan addresses a diversity of stakeholder priorities. Inclusion of more issues also encourages—and to a certain degree, reflects—a wider diversity of participating groups and individuals.

At the same time, more is not necessarily better. Longer action plans often include less ambitious commitments, even if they span several areas of open government. For these reasons, in this section we look at both the length of action plans and the diversity of topics they cover.

To do this, we rely on OGP commitment data. Once submitted to the Support Unit, every commitment is tagged by OGP staff according to a list of more than 50 topics related to open government.[31] These topics are grouped into two categories: policy areas and sectors. Policy areas refer to specific policy tools that governments use to open government,[32] whereas sectors are the broad areas of society affected.[33] Before diving into this level of detail, we start by looking at the length of OGP action plans over time.

2.1.1 Length of action plans

Overall, OGP national action plans are becoming shorter in length, in line with OGP guidance.[34] In an effort to incentivize the adoption of fewer, yet more ambitious commitments, the *OGP Handbook* recommends that reformers include between 5 and 15 commitments in each two-year action plan.[35] In addition, to further promote ambitious reforms, the OGP Steering Committee strongly recommended that, beginning in 2018, countries cap their action plans at 20 commitments.[36]

The length of national action plans is decreasing, particularly since the Steering Committee decision.[37] In 2018, for the first time, the average number of commitments per plan dropped to 15, the maximum recommended in the *OGP Handbook* (see Figure 2.1). Several national action plans continue to exceed this suggested length, but fewer than in previous years.[38]

FIGURE 2.1. OGP national action plans are decreasing in length
The average number of commitments in national action plans has fallen below 15, the maximum recommended in the OGP Handbook (indicated in red).
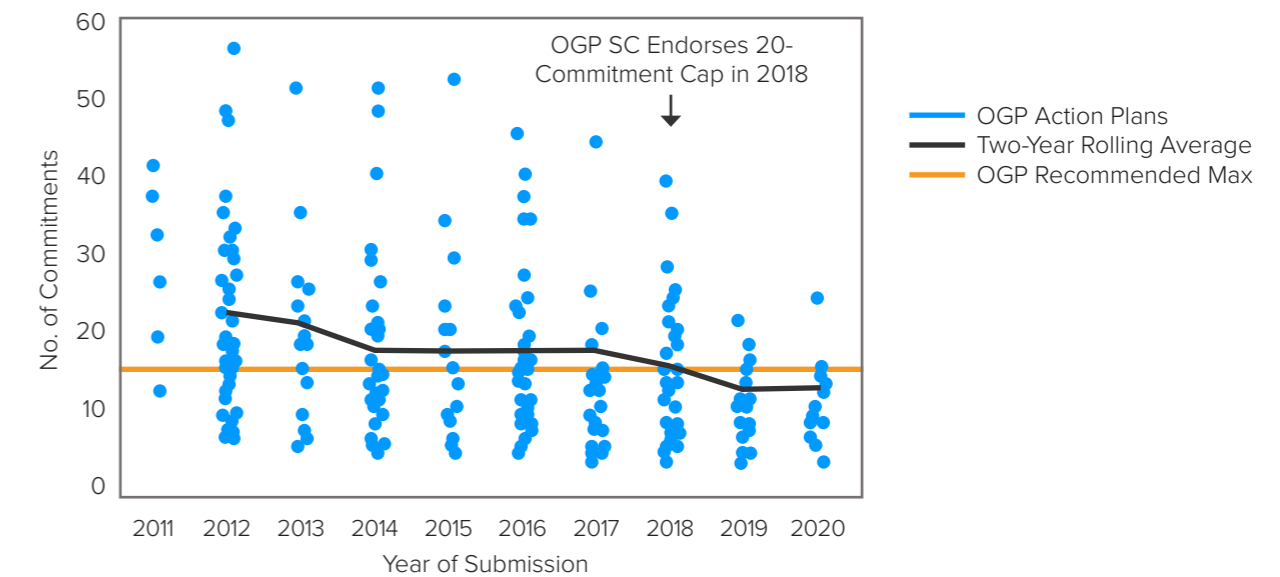
The goal of shorter, more ambitious action plans has often seemed to contradict the goal of advancing more policy areas and engaging new actors through the OGP process. After all, it can be difficult to tackle various open government issues through OGP with a limited number of two-year commitments. To investigate this further, in the next subsection, we look at the diversity of action plans to determine if the reduction in action plan length has produced an equal reduction in thematic scope.

2.1.2 Diversity of action plans

Although action plans are getting shorter, they cover a wider range of issues. For example, Figure 2.2 depicts a clear increase in the number of policy areas and sectors addressed by the average national action plan.[39] Specifically, a 2019 or 2020 action plan with ten commitments covers, on average, about eight different policy areas and five sectors. Although we expect this trend to plateau eventually (there are only so many topics an action plan can cover), the latest numbers represent more than double what they were during the early days of OGP when action plans focused on a limited number of issues like open data and e-procurement.[40]

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[31] See the OGP Data Guide for the list of policy area tags, available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-data/#data-guide.

[32] For example, these include open contracting, open budgets, and beneficial ownership transparency. See the OGP Data Guide for the full list of policy area and sector tags, available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-data/#data-guide.

[33] For example, these include education, water and sanitation, and extractive industries. Sectors also include reforms led by other branches of government, such as open justice and open parliament commitments.

[34] This subsection looks only at national members, as local action plans were capped at five commitments from the outset of the local program.

[35] OGP Handbook: Rules + Guidance for Participants, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/OGP_Handbook-Rules-and-Guidance_20200207.pdf.

[36] OGP Steering Committee Ministerial & Working Level Meeting, New York - September 2017, https://us3.campaign-archive.com/?u=b25f647af089f5f52485a663d&id=48c22ffc5d.

[37] The decline between 2012 and 2014 may be partly due to the nature of data entry at the time. During those early years, commitments and major milestones within those commitments were entered separately, therefore "artificially" increasing the length of some action plans. Since 2014, individual milestones are no longer considered commitments for data purposes.

[38] This includes Spain's 2020 action plan, an outlier not pictured in Figure 2.1 that contains 62 commitments.

[39] This analysis controls for the number of commitments in each action plan. For ease of interpretation, Figure 2.2 shows the average number of policy areas and sectors for a hypothetical action plan with 10 commitments.

[40] For example, Jordan's 2015 action plan had eight commitments on the same public service digitization process.

FIGURE 2.2. **OGP action plans are becoming more diverse**

Policy areas refer to open government tools (e.g., open contracting, audits). Sectors refer to the areas of society affected (e.g., education, health).
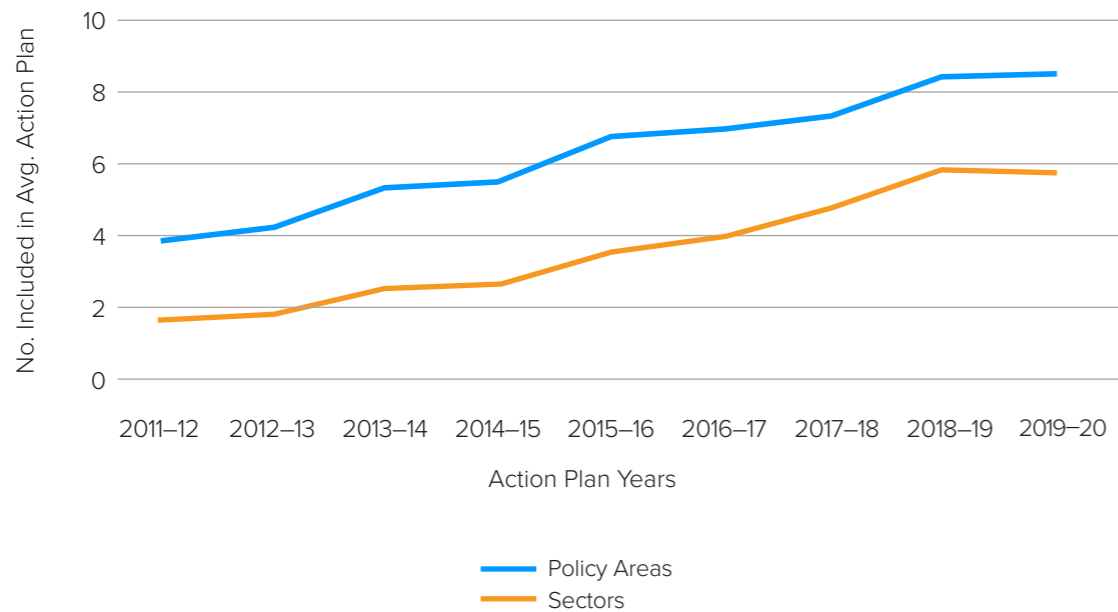
Note: The numbers shown are for an average national action plan with 10 commitments.
Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle.

More diverse action plans may suggest that new actors are taking part in the co-creation process. However, these measures are still distant proxies for the actual diversity of civil society engaging in co-creation. Going forward, OGP will need new metrics to capture the type of interest groups, organizations, and actors who actively participate in the action plan process, with a special focus on measuring the level of engagement of marginalized groups.

Another way to measure the diversity of action plans is to look at the degree to which commitments address the three OGP values of open government: access to information, civic participation, and public accountability.[41] The IRM assesses the relevance of commitments to these values in its reports.[42]

These data show diverging trends. As seen in Figure 2.3, commitments increasingly include elements of civic participation. About half of commitments involved civic participation in 2019 action plans, nearly double the rate during the first few years of OGP. On the other hand, the percentage of commitments related to public accountability has declined over time, from about a third in the first round of action plans to less than 10% in 2018 and 2019.

FIGURE 2.3. **Commitments with public accountability elements have declined**

The percentage of national and local commitments relevant to each of the three OGP values. The values are not mutually exclusive.
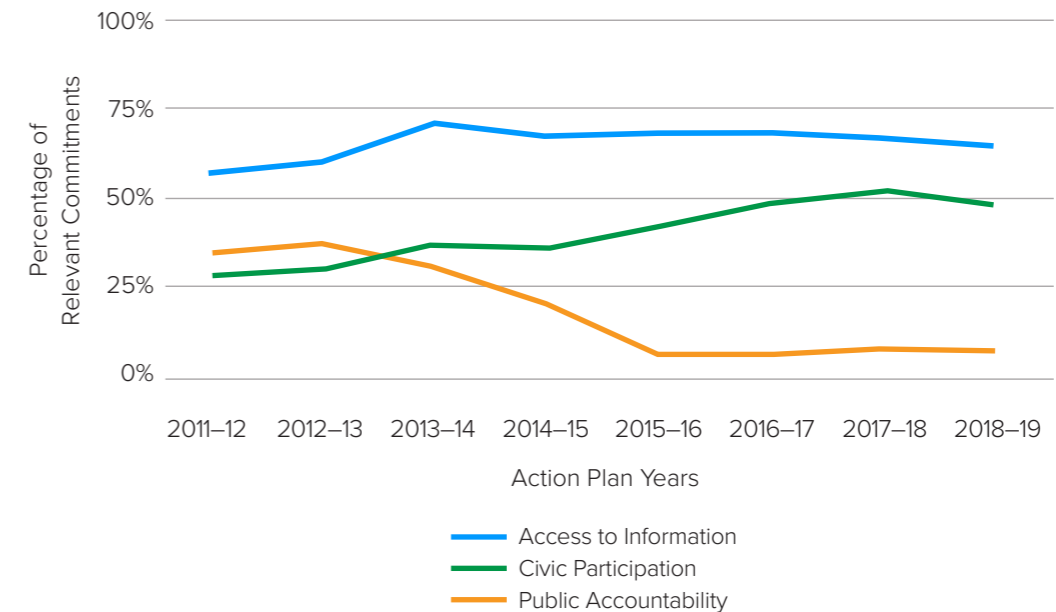
Note: Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle.

This analysis suggests that OGP action plans are establishing channels for public participation in an increasing number of policies and sectors. At the same time, many of these reforms do not include concrete mechanisms through which citizens can achieve redress or hold government officials accountable for their actions. Given the broader context of open government described later in Chapter 3, "Policy Areas," this finding implies a mismatch between the type of commitments made through OGP and key governance challenges.

Moreover, if OGP is to be sustainable, a diverse set of commitments is not enough—commitments must be ambitious. They should aim to solve real problems, like ending grand corruption, ensuring delivery of vital public services, and making communities cleaner and safer. In the next section, we turn to this issue. Specifically, we try to determine just how impactful OGP commitments could be.

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41   Definitions for these values are available on the OGP Values Guidance Note, available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/OGPvaluesguidancenote.pdf.

42   The IRM evaluated each commitment's relevance to the three OGP values through the 2019-2021 action plans. Since then, the IRM provides an overall assessment indicating if each commitment is relevant to at least one of the three values.

2.2 Action plan ambition

Action plan ambition is not improving over time. Few OGP commitments are potentially "transformative". This remains a binding constraint for the strong design of commitments.

After the first major round of action plans was published in the run-up to the Brasilia Summit in 2012, a pattern emerged: too many action plans, even if fully implemented, would simply not make a difference. Many commitments focused on cosmetic upgrades or website redesigns. Some were completed before the action plan period started. Others would not be started until after it ended. The issue was, unfortunately, widespread. More than half of the commitments in the first round of action plans would have had minimal effect if implemented.[43]

As a consequence, the OGP Steering Committee adopted guidance that the IRM should measure ambition and discuss the context, both good and bad, around the action plan. At the advice of the IRM, ambition—an inherently vague concept—was operationalized as *potential impact*. This indicator captures the potential impact of a commitment if implemented as written. The IRM assesses this metric through a three-part test:

1. Identify the social, economic, political, or environmental problem.

2. Establish the status quo at the outset of the action plan.

3. Assess the degree to which the commitment, if implemented, would impact performance and tackle the problem.

The IRM uses a four-point scale to code answers. The options include "none," "minor," "moderate," and "transformative." Most relevant here, "moderate" indicates a major step forward that is limited in scale or scope, and "transformative" implies a more expansive change that could transform business as usual.[44]

It is important not to confuse potential impact with actual impact, which the IRM does not capture due to issues of time and scale. See Box 2.1 for other limitations of this metric. With this background in mind, note that the terms "ambition" and its operationalized form, "potential impact," are often used interchangeably.

Before diving into specifics, we first examine why ambition is such an important challenge for OGP commitments. Then, we explore the latest trends and how OGP members can influence them.

Box 2.1. Limitations of the IRM's potential impact metric

The metrics used by the IRM in its commitment assessments have several limitations. In particular, the IRM's ambition metric may not capture the cumulative impact of longer-term reforms. Given the two-year time frame of OGP action plans, the IRM may assess some commitments as incremental in scope and therefore of low ambition. However, opening government is often an incremental process requiring a series of small steps to achieve broader cultural change. As a result, many commitments with low ambition may ultimately produce important outcomes. Nevertheless, commitment ambition is strongly predictive of early results (see Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes") and remains our best measure of commitment design in the absence of better data around how OGP commitments influence long-term behavioral changes in government.

2.2.1 Ambition remains weaker than other elements of commitment design

Ambition is not the only issue with the design of commitments. Many commitments have issues with *verifiability*—they are so vague that they cannot be assessed—while others have issues of *relevance* in that they do not relate to the OGP values of access to information, civic participation, and public accountability. Together, these three elements represent the core elements of commitment design.

A perennial goal for OGP has been to reduce the number of commitments that suffer from these design challenges. To incentivize these improvements, the IRM introduced "starred commitments" in 2014. The initial aim of this designation was to publicly recognize well-designed commitments. The IRM awarded "stars" when commitments met four criteria: verifiability, relevance to OGP values, a transformative level of ambition, and a significant level of completion.[45] This subsection shows that improving some of these elements has been more successful than others.

In particular, ambition remains the main binding constraint for the successful design of OGP commitments. Earlier OGP research similarly found that this was the most lacking design element.[46] Figure 2.4 shows that this trend remains unchanged. While OGP commitments are becoming increasingly verifiable (96%) and relevant to open government values (93%), "transformative" potential impact remains much lower (7%). As *Chapter 4. Predicting Outcomes* lays out in more detail, this is concerning given that ambition is a key predictor of strong early results. We now turn to a more nuanced analysis of how ambition has changed over time.

FIGURE 2.4. Commitment verifiability and relevance grow while ambition falls behind[47]

Relevant commitments are related to access to information, civic participation, or public accountability. Verifiable commitments can be measured. Potentially "transformative" commitments would transform business as usual if implemented.

Note: Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle. Figure shows average rates per action plan. Includes country weights.

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43 Joseph Foti, Technical Paper 1, Independent Reporting Mechanism, p. 23, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Technical-paper-1_final.pdf.

44 For more details about the IRM methodology, see the IRM Procedures Manual, available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/irm-procedures-manual/. Note that in 2021, the IRM launched a new method for assessing the level of ambition of OGP commitments. For more details, see the new IRM report templates, available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/irm-reports-and-analysis/.

45 The specific criteria used by the IRM to award "stars" includes verifiability, relevance to open government values, "transformative" potential impact, and at least "substantial" completion.

46 Laura Vossler and Joseph Foti, When More is More: Toward Higher Impact OGP Commitments, 2018, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2001/01/IRM_Analysis-Paper_Higher-Impact_20180327.pdf.

47 Previous research found that the drop in commitments rated as "transformative" between 2012 and 2014 can be attributed to measurement error on the part of the IRM. See Foti (2016): https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/IRM-Report_Technical-Paper_20161130_web.pdf.

2.2.2 Rates of ambition over time

The rate of ambitious commitments, even when defined more generously, has not improved over time. Just under half of all commitments today receive a rating of either "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact from the IRM (see Figure 2.5). However, most of these are rated as "moderate"; only about 7% of commitments are potentially "transformative." Although this metric does not fully capture long-term potential, this rate is arguably still too low in terms of the original goal of incentivizing ambition.

FIGURE 2.5. **OGP countries are making few potentially "transformative" commitments**

"Moderate" ambition represents a major step forward yet is limited in scale or scope. "Transformative" ambition indicates a more expansive change that could transform business as usual.
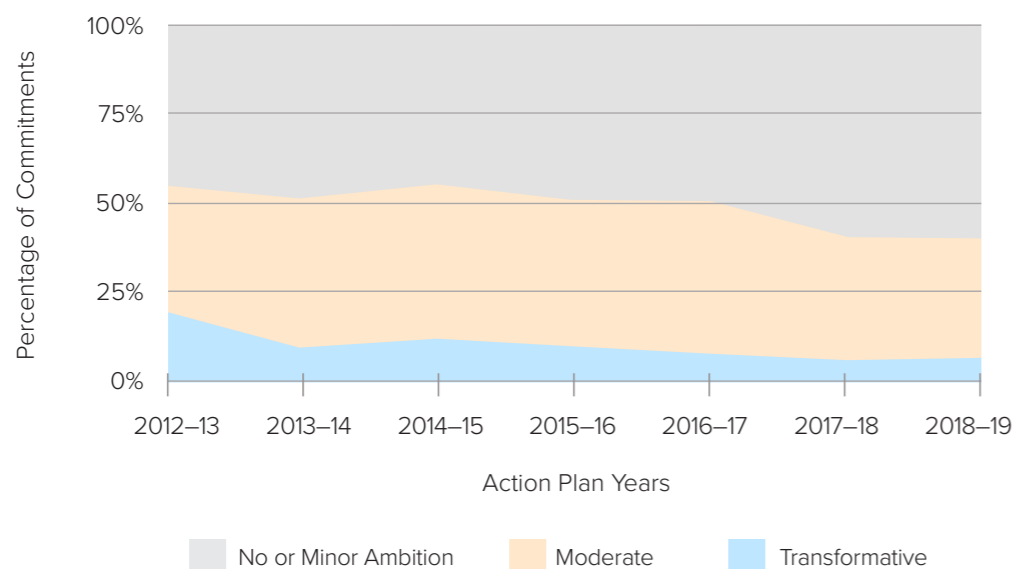
Action Plan Years

No or Minor Ambition ▢ Moderate ▢ Transformative

Note: Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle. Figure shows average rates per action plan. Includes country weights.

Figure 2.5 above also shows that the number of "moderate" and "transformative" commitments has slightly declined in recent years. The average rate of these ambitious commitments dropped from 55% in 2015–2016 to 41% in the latest round of assessed action plans.[48] We investigate if this apparent decline is statistically significant in the next subsection.

2.2.3 Statistical significance of the trend in ambition

The apparent decline in the rate of ambitious commitments is not statistically significant. Figure 2.6 visualizes the rate of ambitious commitments over time. This figure includes "moderate" and "transformative" potential impact as before but now considers only commitments that are also relevant to the open government values of access to information, civic participation, or public accountability. This information produces a better picture of how the ambition of *open government* commitments, in particular, has changed.

The trend is nearly identical to that shown in Figure 2.5. However, Figure 2.6 also includes a 95% confidence interval around the trend line, calculated using the individual action plan rates during each two-year window. The visualization suggests that the decline is not statistically significant, though it will be critical to monitor this metric going forward and take measures to reverse this trend. See the next subsection for specific next steps.

FIGURE 2.6. **Ambition is declining, but not statistically significantly**

Ambitious commitments have either "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact and are relevant to OGP values.
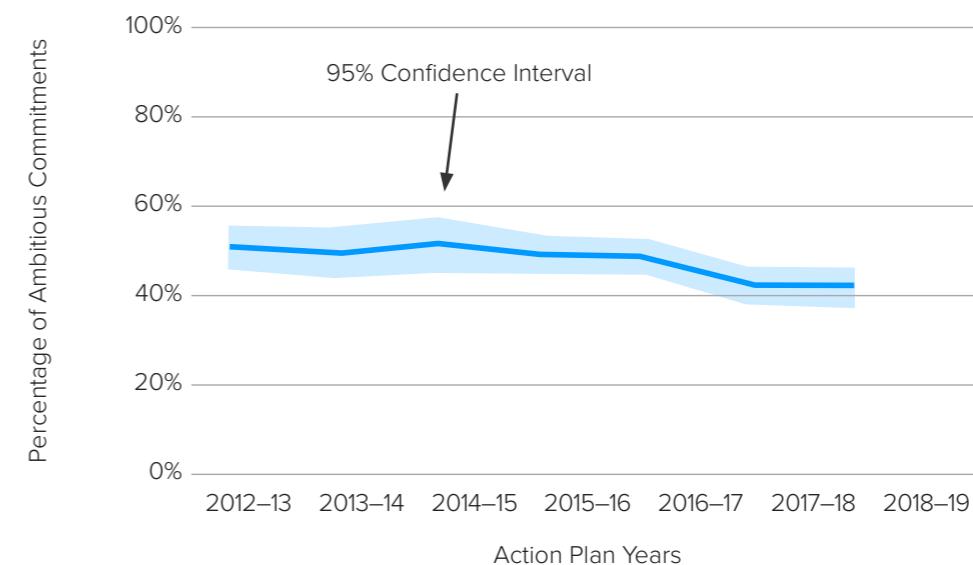
Action Plan Years

Note: Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle. Figure shows average rates per action plan. Includes country weights.

2.2.4 Explaining the ambition gap

Several possible explanations exist for the lack of progress in closing the ambition gap. These can be grouped into six broad categories:

1. **Justification:** The IRM assesses potential impact based on how well the commitment objective would address the respective policy problem. In many cases, however, governments are clear about the activities they aim to achieve, but not about how those activities respond to important societal issues, resulting in a less favorable assessment.

2. **Feasibility:** Governments may be including less ambitious commitments in their action plans to ensure higher levels of implementation. However, as the next section clarifies, the slight decline in levels of ambition has not been accompanied by an equal rise in levels of completion.

3. **Diversity:** A consequence of the greater diversity of action plans described in Section 2.1.2 may be that governments are including new areas of work that are still in their infancy, such as parliamentary openness and algorithmic transparency. A wider variety of government participants may also mean that many implementers are new to open government and therefore more likely to start with incremental reforms.

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[48] The apparent decline in the rate of potentially "transformative" commitments beginning in 2015 may be due to the IRM raising the threshold for "starred" commitments from "moderate" to "transformative" that same year. This may have made the IRM more judicious about the awarding of this top score. Nonetheless, this does not explain the apparent decline in the rate of potentially moderate commitments occurring simultaneously.

4. **Politics:** The decline in the involvement of the head of government mentioned in the previous chapter could suggest declining high-level political support for committing to ambitious reforms.

5. **Capacity:** Previous research has found that budgets and technical capacity are the reasons most often cited by OGP reformers for not achieving reforms.[49] Though capacity may be a proximate cause of less ambitious commitments, other factors (such as politics) may play a more fundamental role.

6. **Measurement:** Previous research found that the IRM became stricter in its assessments of potential impact after revising the criteria for starred commitments back in 2015.[50] A similar case of measurement bias could be playing a role.

Of these issues, arguably the easiest to address are the commitment justifications. Ensuring that OGP commitments clearly articulate the policy problem they aim to address and specify how the proposed solutions will directly improve the lives of citizens may provide the largest return on investment. In addition, OGP is well placed to facilitate peer exchanges and learning around particular policy areas that are yet to see greater ambition or adoption in action plans. See Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes," for a more detailed discussion of the concrete measures that OGP members can take.

Another tool that OGP members can leverage to raise the ambition of their action plans is the IRM itself. The following section looks at the relationship between IRM reports—specifically key recommendations—and several of the metrics discussed so far, including action plan ambition and scope.

2.3 IRM recommendations and action plan quality

Most OGP members are implementing a majority of IRM key recommendations. Members that implement these recommendations have more ambitious action plans and stronger co-creation processes than those that do not. There are several possible explanations for this finding.

Since the launch of OGP, the IRM has served as a learning and accountability tool for members. An important feature of IRM reports is that they include technical recommendations for country stakeholders around how to better structure their OGP process, design their action plans, and implement reforms.

In particular, each IRM report features a series of key IRM recommendations. These cross-cutting recommendations suggest improvements related to both the co-creation process and the content of

the action plan. In 2014, the Criteria and Standards Subcommittee of the OGP Steering Committee asked the IRM to publish five specific recommendations and required that governments respond to them in their subsequent action plans. This enabled tracking response rates.

In this section, we look at how often governments implement these key recommendations and how this relates to the quality of the ensuing action plan. This analysis serves several important purposes:

- **Studying the IRM's influence:** This analysis helps to identify the level of influence of the IRM over OGP processes. The implementation of IRM recommendations is, in effect, an indication of how well the IRM is serving its learning functions. The higher the rate, the more the IRM is helping members to adapt and improve.

- **Measuring course-correction:** The IRM enables course-correction and iteration over time. Indeed, learning from past successes and failures is a critical feature of the OGP model. How often members incorporate IRM recommendations therefore serves as a proxy for how frequently they make adjustments based on the experience of previous action plans.

- **Explaining OGP outcomes:** We also explore here whether members that incorporate IRM recommendations produce more ambitious and diverse action plans. Even though we cannot establish causation (governments that incorporate IRM recommendations are more likely to succeed for various reasons), this analysis still offers a glimpse into what makes for a strong action plan, if indirectly.

The data for this section covers a smaller set of action plans than most of the Vital Signs included in this paper. Given the nature of the metric, it only exists for OGP members with multiple action plans. The IRM also only started tracking implementation of its recommendations beginning in 2017. For these reasons, the data cover 67 action plans submitted between 2017 and 2019, rather than the nearly 200 plans since 2012 used as the sample for the majority of this report. Given the small sample size, local members are included.[51]

2.3.1 Implementation of IRM recommendations

On average, OGP members implement about half of IRM recommendations. Figure 2.7 shows that implementation varies widely; some members implement none of the IRM's recommendations, while some implement all of them. The most common rate is 40%, though the average is just above 50% as more action plans fall on the higher end of the scale.

FIGURE 2.7. Most OGP members implement about half of IRM recommendations
Breakdown of 2017–2019 national and local action plans by percentage of implemented IRM key recommendations.

Number of Action Plans (y-axis)
Percentage of IRM Recommendations Incorporated (x-axis)
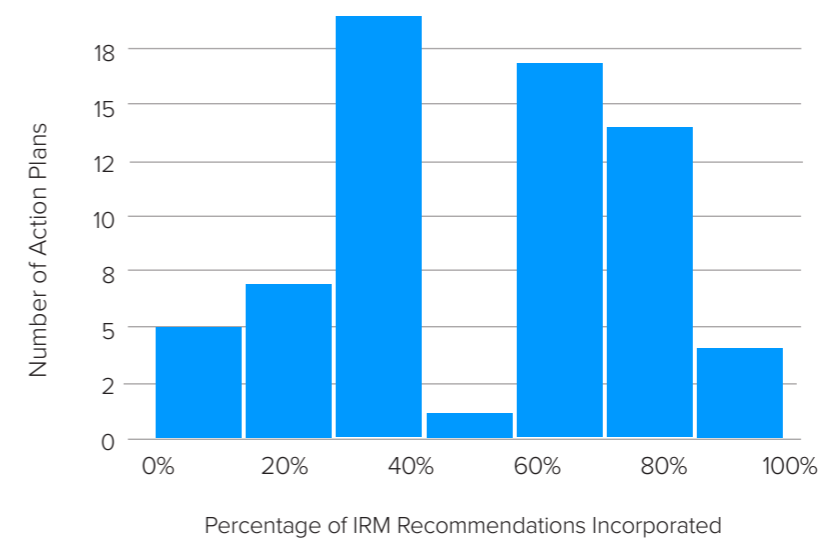
Note: Most IRM reports include five key recommendations, which is why 50% is an uncommon rate of implementation.

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49   Renzo Falla, Why OGP Commitments Fall Behind, 2017, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2001/01/IRM_Technical-Paper_Failure_Dec2017.pdf.

50   See note 47 above.

51   Specifically, the sample includes 58 national action plans and 9 local action plans.

This rate has stayed relatively constant over time at around 50% of recommendations implemented. There also does not appear to be a pattern of improvement among members with multiple action plans (though only seven OGP members have been assessed on this metric at least twice).

These data show that IRM recommendations are mostly making it into action plans. More than half of OGP members are implementing a majority of recommendations. This implies that the IRM *is* influencing OGP processes. It also suggests that members are using IRM reports to adjust their approaches.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to draw conclusions without more context. Research on how often governments respond to recommendations from other voluntary initiatives would better contextualize these findings.[52] More research is also needed to understand which types of recommendations are most often implemented and which are most often ignored. This level of granularity in the analysis might better inform IRM strategy.

This analysis focused on how often OGP members implement IRM recommendations. Next, we look at the relationship between the implementation of these recommendations and measures of action plan quality.

2.3.2 IRM recommendations and action plan quality

In general, implementing IRM recommendations is associated with higher-quality action plans. We operationalize "high-quality plans" using the two metrics described so far in this chapter: ambition and scope. First, we look at ambition.

Implementing IRM recommendations is generally associated with higher levels of action plan ambition. The plot on the left of Figure 2.8 illustrates this relationship at the action-plan level. The trend line in the chart is statistically significant at the 1% level of significance. The slope of the trend line indicates that an action plan that implements all IRM key recommendations is, on average, 26% more ambitious than an action plan that does not implement any recommendations.

Interestingly, the implementation of IRM recommendations remains a statistically significant predictor of ambition even when taking into account other explanatory variables, such as institutional arrangements, the strength of co-creation, and regions.[53] Of course, this relationship may result from some other unmeasured—or unaccounted for—factor. Section 2.3.3 below discusses this further.

As for the relationship between the implementation of IRM recommendations and the scope of action plans, the plot on the right of Figure 2.8 shows no discernible trend. The trend line in this case is not statistically significant. This means that the percentage of IRM recommendations that are implemented does not appear to be related to the number of policy areas covered by the action plan.

To explore this further, we dive deeper into the types of recommendations that the IRM makes. Specifically, we break down IRM recommendations into two types: content-related and process-related recommendations. The former deals with commitments and policy areas included (or not yet included) in the action plan; the latter focuses on co-creation and civil society engagement throughout the OGP process.

The IRM collected these disaggregated data at the level of members, so we know which members implemented content and process-related recommendations and which ones did not. These data cover only 30 national and local action plans submitted in 2018, so the sample size is quite small. Still, we would expect the additional granularity of these data to show a stronger link between IRM recommendations and specific aspects of the OGP process, such as ambition and the strength of the co-creation process.

Indeed, when we look at IRM recommendations through this additional lens, we find that implementing content and process-related commitments is associated with stronger outcomes, namely more ambitious action plans and more collaborative co-creation processes. For instance, we find that members that implemented content-related IRM recommendations had more ambitious action plans (see Figure 2.9). As before, we find a positive association between implementing IRM recommendations and ambition but no statistically significant link to the scope of the action plan.

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[52] For example, a similar, yet distinct, line of previous research found that IRM reports ranked highly in terms of perceived importance (among civil servants) when compared to other governance assessments. See Masaki et al. (2016), available at https://www.aiddata.org/publications/2016-governance-assessment-profiles.

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[53] For the results of this particular analysis, see the Annex. For more information on the explanatory variables and how they relate to action plan ambition, see Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes."

FIGURE 2.8. Positive relationship between IRM recommendation uptake and ambition

Ambitious commitments have either "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact and are relevant to OGP values. Policy areas refer to specific open government tools (e.g., open contracting, audits).

FIGURE 2.9. Adopting content-related IRM recommendations is associated with higher ambition

Ambitious commitments have either "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact and are relevant to OGP values. Policy areas refer to specific open government tools (e.g., open contracting, audits).

A possible explanation for this is that only some content-related IRM recommendations deal with expanding the scope of an action plan. Many focus on other areas, such as strengthening existing commitments or even removing certain topics from future action plans. Further disaggregating IRM recommendations into subtopics would provide more clarity.

As for the process-related recommendations, we find that they are associated with more collaborative co-creation processes. Specifically, as seen in Figure 2.10 below, we find that a higher percentage of OGP members that implemented process-related recommendations met the "Involve" tier of the level of public influence spectrum (mentioned in the previous chapter) compared to members that did not implement these recommendations. Given the requirements for achieving "Involve," this means that these members were more likely to provide a reasoned response to public inputs and establish a forum for multi-stakeholder dialogue.[54] However, the difference between these two groups is not statistically significant, in part because of the small sample size of members that did not implement a process-related recommendation.

Implementing process-related recommendations is linked to better co-creation
A high level of public influence includes establishing a multi-stakeholder forum and providing feedback to participants on how their inputs were considered.

Integrated Process Recommendations (n=23): 91%

Did Not Integrate Process Recommendations (n=7): 71%

Action Plans Achieving Involve+ on Level of Public Influence

2.3.3 Implications

The findings in this section do not imply causation. A causal link between IRM recommendations and stronger outcomes is plausible but unlikely. A more likely explanation is that OGP members that implement IRM recommendations are more committed to OGP, take open government more seriously, or have more resources and staff to make technical improvements.

Even if some combination of these other explanations is true, this IRM recommendation indicator still serves as an effective proxy for the level of commitment to OGP. This makes it an important control variable in trying to predict positive OGP outcomes. While we lack sufficient longitudinal data to use this indicator in the statistical analyses in Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes," it is an important metric for the OGP Support Unit and IRM to continue monitoring.
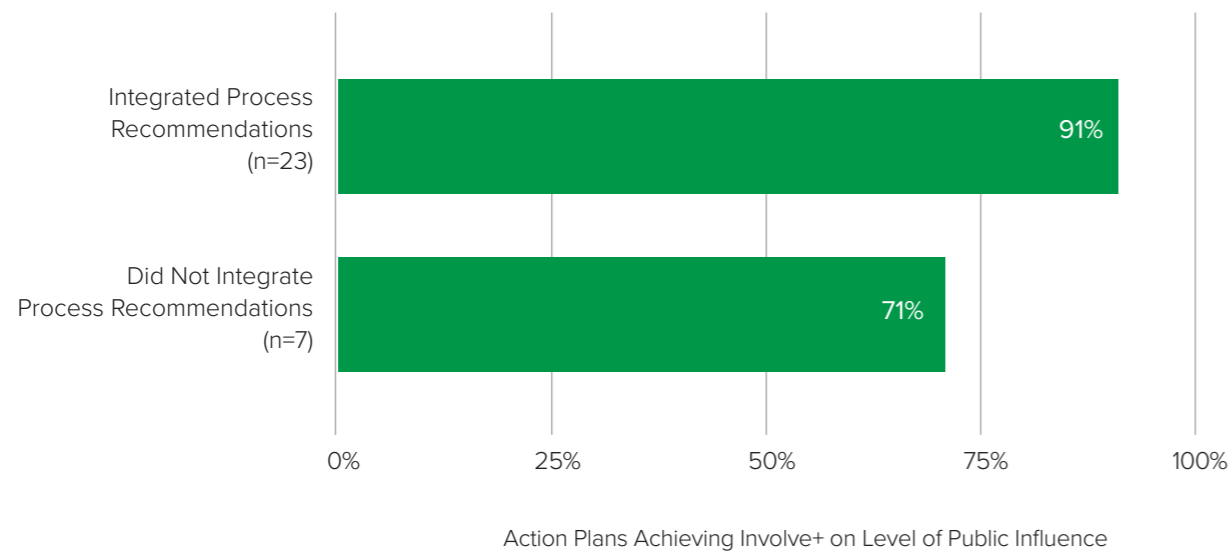
Future research could look to further categorize IRM recommendations based on their target area. This would facilitate analysis of the links between the recommendations and elements of the OGP process. For example, we would not expect an implemented recommendation around monitoring during implementation to affect the quality of the co-creation process, but we currently lack a way to distinguish between different kinds of process-related recommendations. This type of research would also enable identifying the kinds of recommendations that are most likely to go unheeded. Finally, it would be important for the IRM to capture data on who is participating in the OGP process. These data do not currently exist in a structured format, even though this area is a focus of many IRM recommendations.

High-quality commitments and action plans—the focus of the past few sections—are an important step of the OGP process, but they are not enough on their own. To achieve actual change, governments must follow through on their promises. The next section explores this critical step of the OGP process. Specifically, are governments implementing the commitments they make, and are action plans producing meaningful results?

2.4 Action plan completion and early results

The rate of completed OGP commitments and strong early results has remained largely constant over time. Few commitments produce "outstanding" early results—the most significant of changes in government practices.

OGP action plans need to be implemented. A fundamental aspect of OGP is that it is not a "talk shop" in which leaders make empty promises. For that reason, the founders of OGP ensured that a fundamental role of the IRM is to monitor implementation of commitments. This protects the credibility of reformers striving to make important changes from those who might use OGP to burnish their international image without taking concrete action.

Civil society also loses a key incentive to participate in the OGP process if governments do not follow through on their commitments. Why put in the time and resources to co-create ambitious reforms if the government does not implement them? We have seen this play out before.[55]

For these reasons, the IRM has always assessed the status of commitments in one way or another. Early on, these assessments took place at the one-year mark of the action plan. However, this painted an incomplete picture of what governments were accomplishing during the full action plan period. There were also questions around whether completed milestones and deliverables were changing anything on the ground.

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54 To meet "Involve," (1) a forum must exist, (2) the forum must be multi-stakeholder, and (3) the government must provide a reasoned response during the co-creation process. See Section 1.2.2 for details.

55 Gabriella Razzano, Political language and political action: An OGP lesson for South Africa, 22 February 2017, https://www.makingallvoicescount.org/blog/political-language-and-political-action-an-ogp-lesson-for-south-africa/.

As a result, the IRM introduced two new indicators assessed at the end of the action plan period. The first was *completion*, which measures outputs (i.e., whether or not individual activities were carried out). This responded to the absence of information on implementation at the end of the action plan period.

The second innovation was the assessment of *early results*. The IRM's "Did it open government?" indicator, specifically, became the first systematized

indicator that went beyond outputs and deliverables to measure actual changes in practice. This metric captures the degree to which commitment outputs have changed government practices as they relate to open government. Today, despite its limitations (see Box 2.2), this indicator serves as the best proxy of where commitments are producing concrete changes. This section presents trends for both this indicator and completion.

Box 2.2. Limitations of the IRM's early results metric

This assessment takes place at the conclusion of the two-year action plan and looks only at results achieved *during the action plan period*. This is therefore a significant undercount of actual results, as even ambitious and completed reforms may take many years to show tangible changes to government practices. As a result, these data are most useful for identifying "early bloomers" and comparing trends across time, members, and policy areas. It is less useful—and in fact misleading—as a way of quantifying the impact of OGP commitments on open government practices.

An example of the amount of time it can take to show results is Nigeria's new beneficial ownership legislation. Nigeria first committed to implementing a registry for beneficial ownership information in its 2017–2019 OGP action plan but made little legislative progress during this period. It was only after the conclusion of the action plan in 2020 that Nigeria established a new legal framework for beneficial ownership disclosure.[56] This is only the first step in developing a registry and illustrates the potential for results long after the two-year action plan cycle is complete.

2.4.1 Completion over time

The completion rate of OGP commitments has remained mostly constant, though the rate of fully completed commitments has slightly increased in recent years. Ever since the IRM began tracking these data, about two-thirds of commitments have been assessed

as substantially or fully implemented by the end of the action plan period. Of these, about half are substantially completed, and half are fully completed. As seen in Figure 2.11 below, recent years have seen a slight change in favor of more fully completed commitments and fewer substantially completed commitments, but the combined number has stayed steady.

FIGURE 2.11. **Completion rates have remained consistent over time**
Figure shows average completion rates for national action plans by the end of the two-year period.
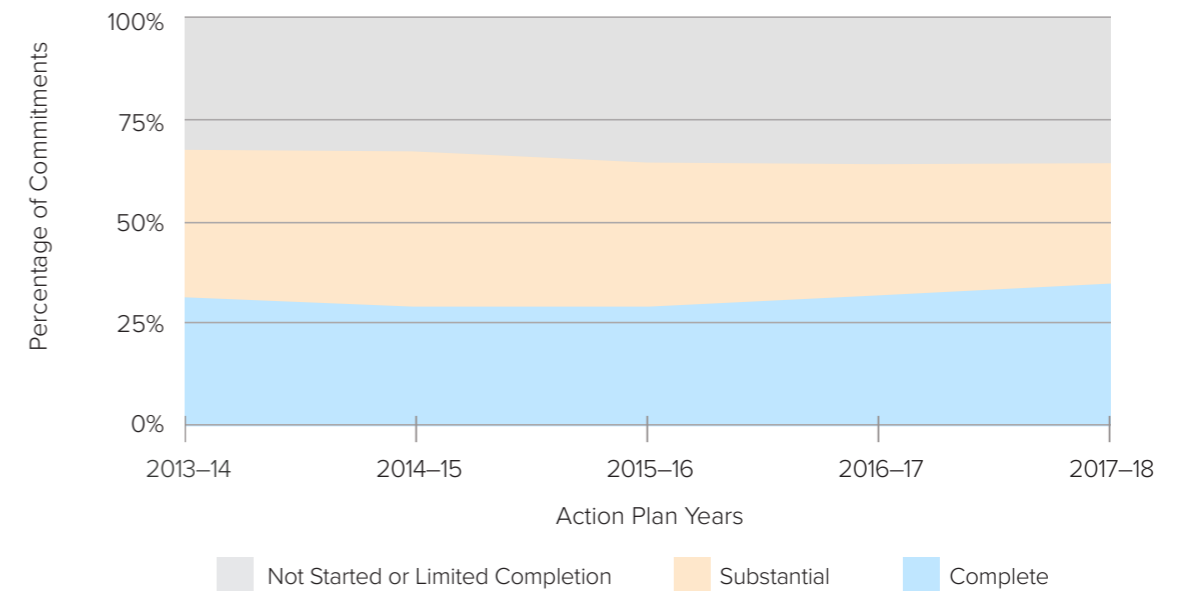
Note: Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle. Figure shows average rates per action plan. Includes country weights.

Interpreting OGP's implementation rate requires nuance. Given that OGP is a platform for experimenting and championing innovative reforms, it is unclear if the current two-thirds completion rate is adequate. Ultimately, this is subjective. Nonetheless, the low rate of potentially "transformative" commitments outlined earlier in this chapter suggests the need for a recalibration toward more ambitious—even if harder to achieve—commitments.

It is also difficult to draw conclusions without implementation data from comparable initiatives.

Similar multi-stakeholder initiatives either do not follow a commitment model or lack an assessment mechanism. One possible avenue for future research may be the implementation rate of pledges made at international fora. A recent OGP study on this topic found that the rate of completed pledges from the 2016 Anti-Corruption Summit was similar to the rate of completed pledges embedded in OGP action plans as commitments.[57] This finding suggests that OGP's implementation rate may be comparable to other initiatives. However, further research drawing on a wider set of examples is needed.

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[56] OGP, Nigeria Spearheads Open Government in Africa, Takes Steps to Stop US$15.7B of Illicit Flow through Financial Systems, 14 August 2020, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/news/nigeria-spearheads-open-government-in-africa-takes-steps-to-stop-us15-7b-of-illicit-flow-through-financial-systems/.

[57] Kate Meads and Joe Powell, Five Years Later: Four Lessons We Learned from the London Anti-Corruption Summit, 22 June 2021, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/five-years-later-four-lessons-we-learned-from-the-london-anti-corruption-summit/.

2.4.2 Early results over time

The rate of strong early results has proven stable throughout the years. Each year, about one-in-five commitments achieve either "major" or "outstanding" early results. These are changes in government practices as a result of commitment implementation. According to the IRM, an "outstanding" commitment can transform "business as usual" in its policy area, whereas "major" early results indicate an important step forward that is limited in scope.[58] Figure 2.12 shows that a majority of these commitments obtained "major" early results, whereas few achieved "outstanding" results. In the latest round of assessed action plans, about 1% of commitments reached the top mark.[59]

The low number of "outstanding" early results is not inherently problematic given that these IRM assessments only consider results achieved *during the action plan period* (see Box 2.2). Consequently, they do not capture any results produced beyond the two-year window of the action plan. While it is possible that some early results may be reversed by future administrations, this is likely to be far outnumbered by the many reforms that will take years to mature and will produce important outcomes in the medium to long term.

This section makes it seem as though all OGP commitments have performed similarly over time. However, in reality, performance has varied significantly depending on the commitment's area of focus. To explore these differences across commitments, the next chapter of the paper looks at policy areas as the main unit of analysis.

FIGURE 2.12. **Few OGP commitments show "outstanding" early results**

"Major" early results indicate important changes to government practices yet are limited in scope. "Outstanding" early results represent transformations in business as usual. These IRM assessments cover only changes that took place during the two-year action period.
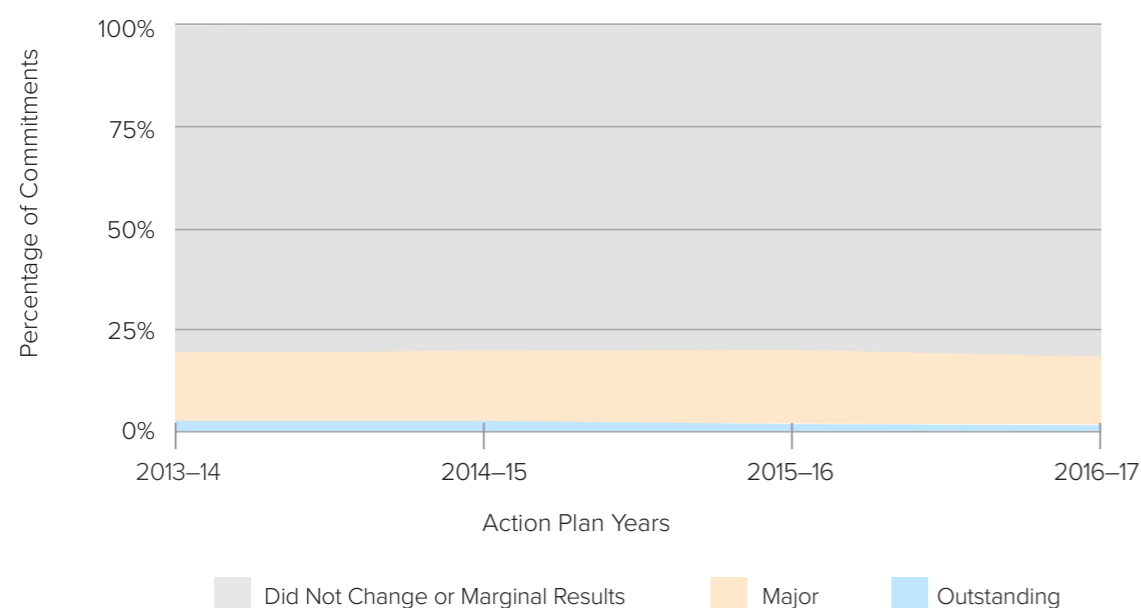
Note: Includes two-year rolling average to account for two-year action plan cycle.

Figure shows average rates per action plan. Includes country weights.

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[58] For example, a commitment leading to the disclosure of licenses related to oil exploration may not be considered "outstanding" if licenses related to natural gas are not included in the scope of the commitment and these are an important part of the extractives sector in the country.

[59] The IRM updated its methodology for assessing early results in 2018 reports. Only certain commitments were assessed for results in these reports, which is why data from this year is excluded from the analysis.

3. Policy Areas

OGP members often use their action plans to advance particular open government policies. Some of these have been commonly included in action plans since the founding of OGP, such as right to information, fiscal openness, and public procurement. Others are newer. For instance, beneficial ownership transparency reforms have grown in popularity in recent years, while digital governance reforms are only now beginning to emerge in action plans.

This chapter explores performance across these various policy areas, both within and outside of the OGP framework. The next chapter then explores the links between policy area performance in OGP action plans and progress on third-party metrics. A deep dive into the kinds of commitments made in particular open government topics is beyond the scope of this paper. For more detailed policy area analysis, see OGP's latest thematic research, which includes papers on open justice, regulatory governance, and pandemic-related openness.[60]

Gwanghwamun Plaza became a physical manifestation of anti-corruption when, in October 2016, the "Candlelight Demonstrations" brought tens of thousands into the street to demand the resignation of Park Geun-Hye after the extortion of millions from major industrial interests. Since the Candlelight Movement, the Republic of Korea has expanded the citizen proposal platform from in-person to online. Photo by sinsy via iStock.

60   Open Government Partnership, Research, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/learning/research/.

3.1 OGP member performance in focus policy areas

OGP commitments related to several focus policy areas are stronger than other commitments. Many focus policy areas are also growing in popularity across action plans. However, civic space stands out as an under-addressed area of work.

In recent years, the OGP Support Unit has provided more intensive support to members on several focus policy areas. These areas are selected based on requests from reformers, opportunities for collaboration with partners, and trends from action plans and other global initiatives. Currently, these focus policy areas include:

- **Anti-corruption**, particularly beneficial ownership transparency, open contracting, political integrity (including lobbying and money in politics), and extractive industries

- **Justice**, particularly open justice and justice for open government

- **Citizens shaping public services** in sectors such as education, health, and water

- **Digital governance**, specifically accountability of automated decision-making, political communication, disinformation, and civic space online (i.e., more than just use of technology and digital initiatives)

- **Gender** and **civic space** as cross-cutting issues

The following subsections examine where these focus policy areas stand in terms of adoption, commitment ambition, and rate of results.

3.1.1 Adoption of focus policy areas

The degree to which OGP members include focus policy areas in their action plans varies significantly. Figure 3.1 illustrates adoption in the latest round of national and local action plans submitted in 2019 and 2020.[61] For this analysis, adoption is defined as the percentage of action plans that include at least one relevant commitment in the respective policy area.[62] The graph suggests a few key takeaways:

- Nearly three-quarters of OGP members have included a commitment that engages citizens in public service delivery.[63]

- At the other end of the spectrum, about one in six have committed to passing a digital governance reform, a growing yet still nascent policy area.

Civic space stands out as an under-addressed area of work. Fewer than a quarter of members have made a relevant commitment in the latest action plans.

Percentage of Latest Action Plans with Relevant Commitment

Policy Area	Percentage
Citizens Shaping Public Services	71%
Justice	60%
Beneficial Ownership	43%
Open Contracting	43%
Gender	43%
Money in Politics	41%
Extractive Industries	32%
Civic Space	23%
Digital Governance	17%

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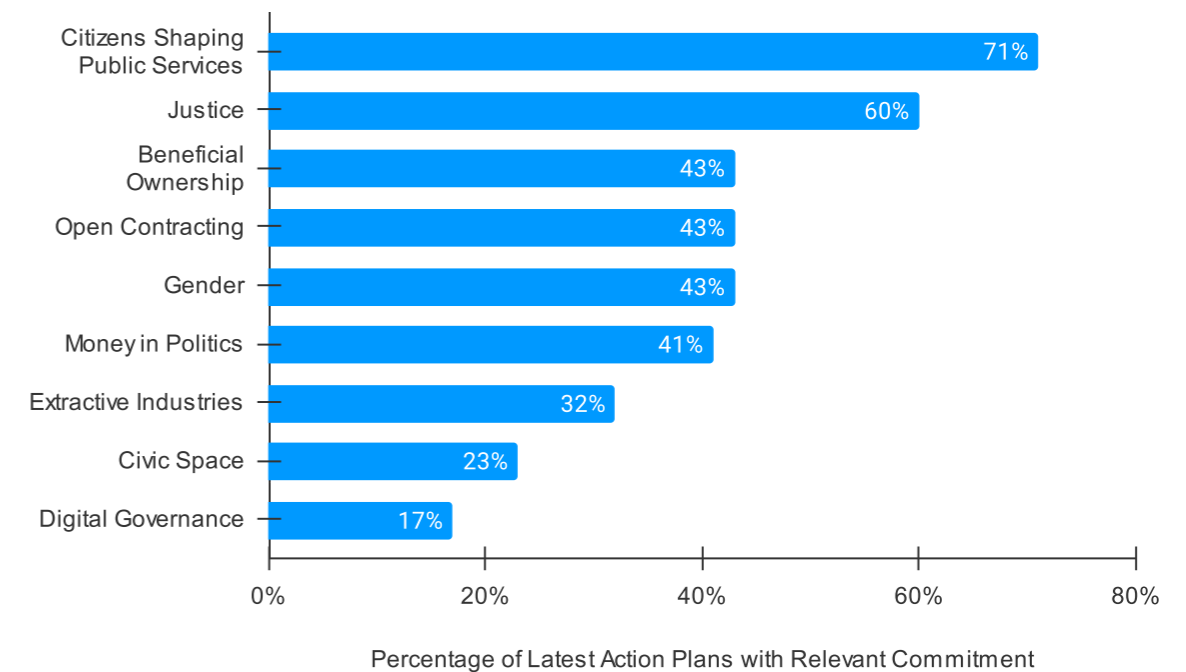
61 This includes 46 action plans out of a total of 326 action plans submitted by OGP members all-time (at the time of writing). Specifically, the sample includes 41 national action plans and 5 local action plans.

62 The graph depicts adoption across both local and national OGP members, except for beneficial ownership, which looks only at national members given that local entities usually cannot implement this type of reform.

63 Citizens shaping public services is defined here as commitments that are relevant to the public services tag and either to the public participation or public accountability tags. See the OGP Data Guide for more details about these tags, available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-data/#data-guide.

The rate of adoption of these policy areas has also varied over time. Figure 3.2 below visualizes the rate of OGP action plans addressing each focus policy area over time. Most focus policy areas are growing in popularity (as shown in green), particularly gender, beneficial ownership transparency, and open contracting. On the other hand, the number of commitments related to money in politics and citizens shaping public services has declined in the latest batch of action plans.

FIGURE 3.2. **Adoption of focus policy areas over time similarly varies**

The rate of adoption is defined as the percentage of action plans that include at least one commitment related to the topic. Charts in green show long-term increases in adoption.

Note: Includes two-year rolling averages to account for two-year action plan cycle. Beneficial ownership includes only national members.

3.1.2 Commitment performance across focus policy areas

Comparing the strength of national and local commitments across focus policy areas also shows diverging trends. Figure 3.3 depicts the rate of high ambition[64] and strong early results[65] for each of the focus policy areas.[66] The figure points to several findings:

- Commitments in several policy areas—extractive industries, open contracting, and citizens shaping public services—significantly exceed the global OGP averages for both ambition and early results.[67]

- All of the focus policy areas surpass or match the global average for ambition.

- Civic space commitments produce relatively few early results.

- Commitments related to beneficial ownership transparency stand out for the high disparity between levels of ambition and results, which seems to point to the difficulty of implementing these highly technical yet potentially "transformative" reforms.

FIGURE 3.3. **Commitment performance across focus policy areas also varies**

Ambition refers to commitments with "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact that are relevant to OGP values. Early results refer to "major" or "outstanding" changes in government practices.

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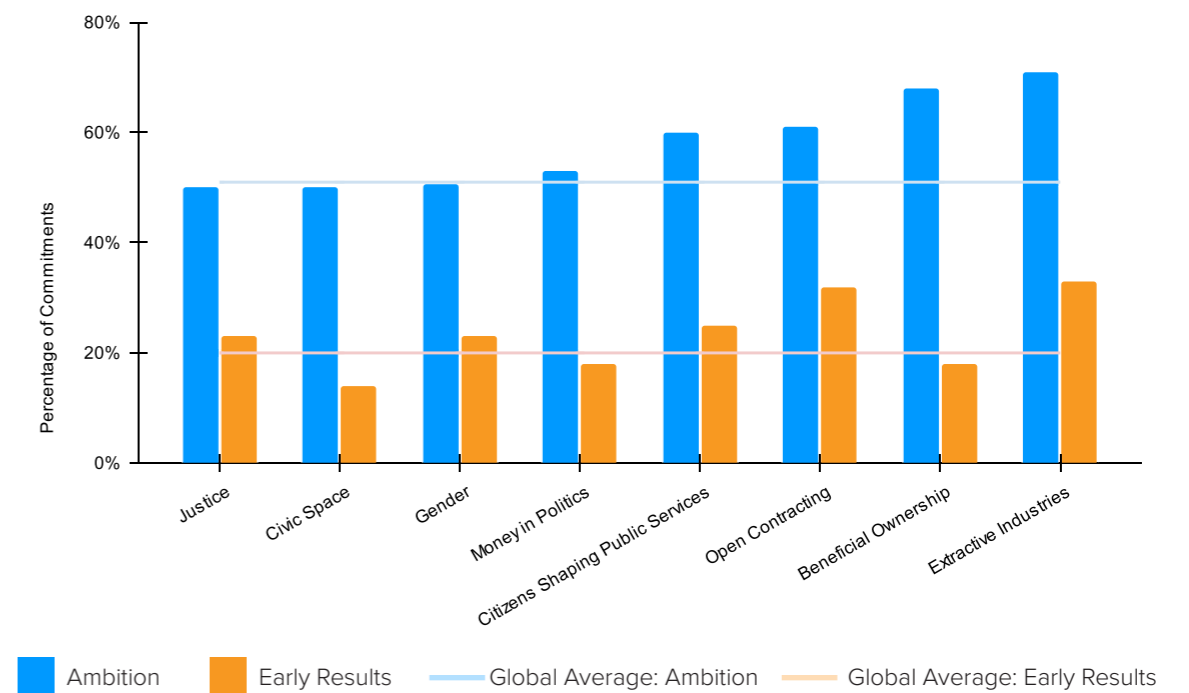
[64] High ambition is defined as commitments with "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact that are also relevant to open government values, according to the IRM.

[65] Strong early results are defined as commitments with "major" or "outstanding" early results according to the IRM.

[66] Digital governance is the only focus policy area not included because it lacks a large enough sample size of assessed commitments from which to draw conclusions.

[67] Interestingly, commitments related to citizens shaping public services are generally more ambitious than commitments related to public service transparency alone. Even when compared to other commitments that specifically focus on improving civic participation and public accountability, commitments involving citizens in public services still show higher ambition.

3.2 OGP member performance across all policy areas

OGP members perform particularly well in policy areas related to anti-corruption. The opposite is true for policy areas related to public services. Members also tend to make few commitments in the highest-impact policy areas.

This section explores OGP commitment data across all policy areas for both national and local members. The OGP Support Unit tags all commitments according to their policy area and sector from a list of more than 50 tags.[68] These include policy tools like open contracting and lobbying reform and sectors such as education

and infrastructure. See OGP's thematic research for more details on member performance around particular open government issues.[69]

3.2.1 Commitment performance across policy areas and sectors

Commitment performance varies widely depending on the issue. Figure 3.4 graphs policy areas and sectors according to how many commitments are ambitious vs. how many achieve strong early results. The visualization illustrates several points, described on the next page.

FIGURE 3.4. OGP anti-corruption commitments are highly ambitious
High ambition refers to commitments with "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact that are relevant to OGP values. Strong early results refer to changes in government practices as a result of commitment implementation.
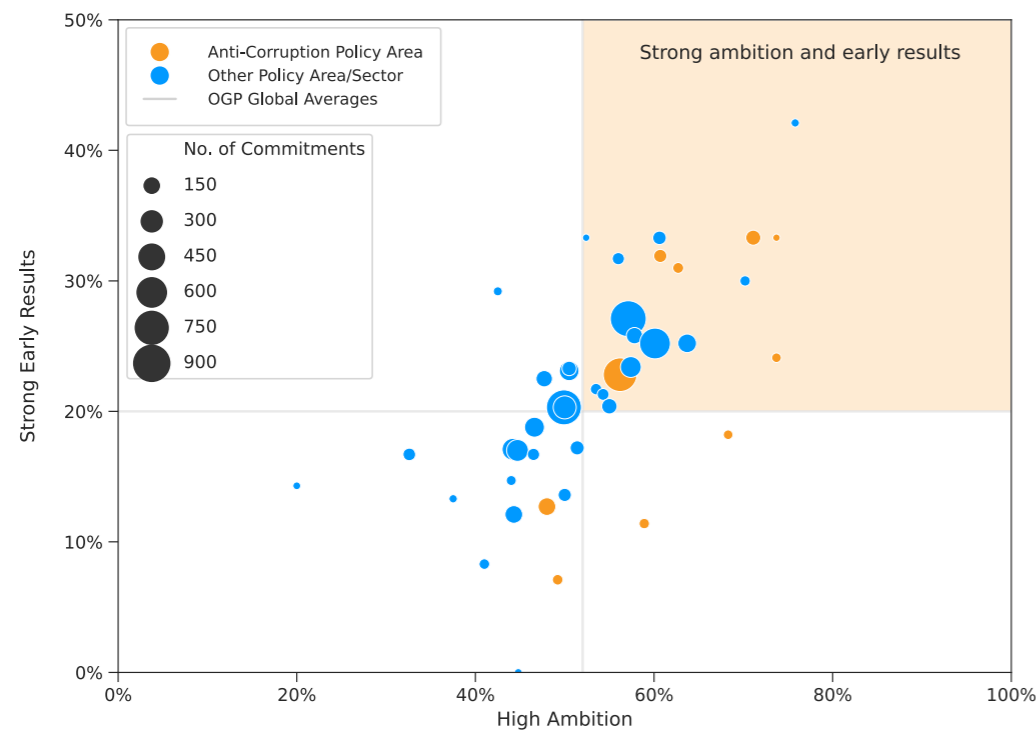
Note: Anti-corruption policy areas include anti-corruption institutions, asset disclosure, audits, beneficial ownership, conflicts of interest, elections & political finance, extractive industries, open contracting, public procurement, and whistleblower protections.

First, anti-corruption reforms tend to be among the most ambitious reforms in OGP action plans. Nearly all of the anti-corruption policy areas (pictured in orange) are on the right side of the chart, which indicates that they are more ambitious than the average OGP commitment.[70] Of these, only two fall below the global average of early results: beneficial ownership transparency and asset disclosure (in the bottom-right quadrant). All others produce more early results than commitments in other areas. This reinforces the notion that including anti-corruption topics in action plans is a worthwhile investment.

Second, OGP members make relatively few commitments in the most ambitious policy areas and sectors. The size of the bubbles in the chart corresponds to the number of commitments made in that area of work. As seen in the top right of the figure, the most ambitious and effective topics often receive few commitments (e.g., lobbying, whistleblowing, and e-petitions). The following subsection explores these standout topics in greater detail.

Third, there is a significant, positive relationship between rates of ambition and rates of strong early results. This is unsurprising, as ambitious commitments by their very nature have the potential to produce significant changes in government behavior. This suggests that making ambitious commitments from the outset is essential in guaranteeing tangible outcomes. See Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes," for more details about this relationship and how it manifests when looking at action plans, instead of policy areas, as the main unit of analysis.

Ultimately, this analysis has two concrete implications for OGP reformers:

1. **More high-impact policy commitments:** First, *more* commitments are needed in areas that reliably produce tangible changes in practices. This would be an effective way of raising the impact of action plans. We know that several policy areas are particularly "good investments," such as open contracting, lobbying, and other anti-corruption reforms (see the next subsection for an expanded list). These areas point to specific types of reforms that more members can adapt to their own contexts and include in their action plans.

2. **Better commitments in currently lower-impact areas:** The second implication is that *better* commitments are needed in other areas. As seen on the left side of Figure 3.4, several policy areas have an ambition rate of less than 50%. These include topics such as inclusion, access to justice, and education. Raising the bar in these areas is equally important.

3.2.2 Top-performing policy areas and sectors

The data suggest that a handful of policy areas and sectors are most likely to feature ambitious commitments and strong early results. These topics are listed in Figure 3.5. Included in the visualization are policy areas and sectors in the top 15 in both rates of ambition and early results.

The figure illustrates three main points:

1. **Ambition and results go together:** Eleven topics are on both lists (of 15), reinforcing the close relationship between ambition and results mentioned in the previous subsection.

2. **Anti-corruption performs well:** Many of the topics relate to anti-corruption, such as whistleblowing, open contracting, and extractive industries.

3. **Public services perform relatively poorly:** Few public service sectors appear in this list of top performers. Commitments in public service sectors like education, health and nutrition, and citizenship and immigration all fall below the OGP global averages in both ambition and early results.

FIGURE 3.5. **Policy areas with highest rates of both ambition and early results in OGP**

High ambition refers to commitments with "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact that are relevant to OGP values. Strong early results refer to changes in government practices as a result of commitment implementation.
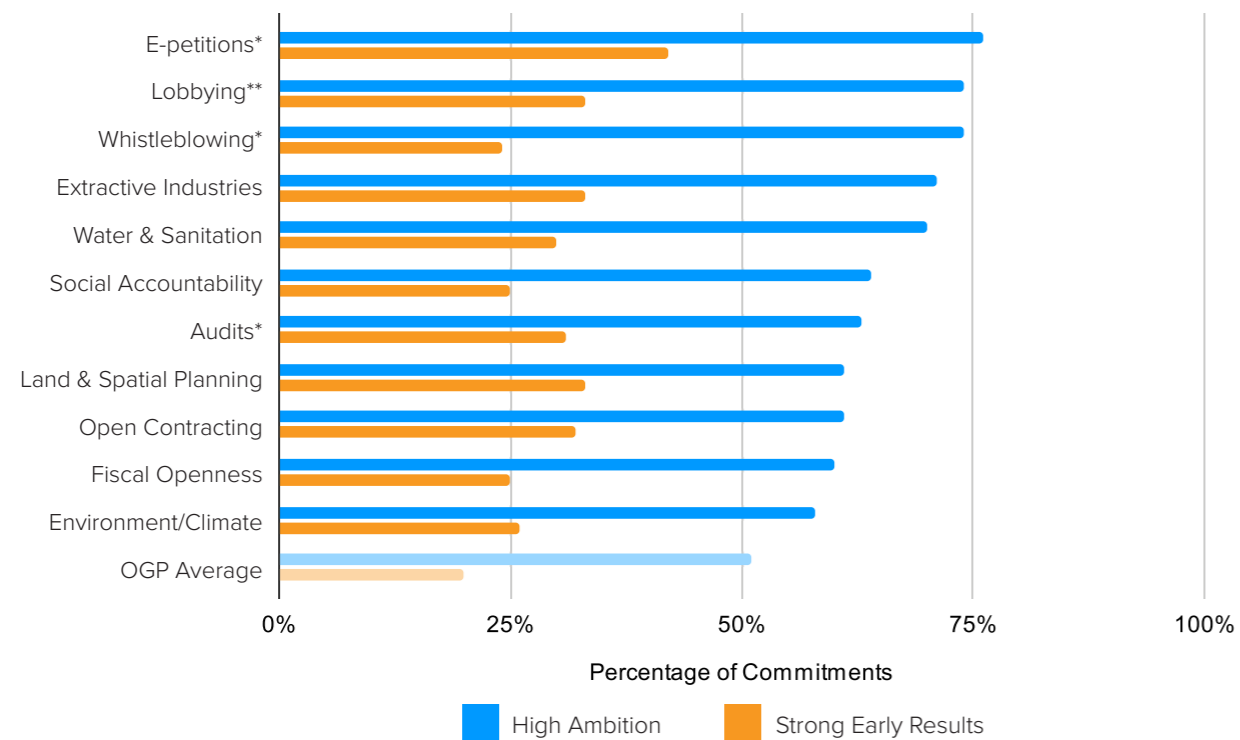
* Policy area has fewer than 30 commitments assessed for early results.
** Policy area has fewer than 30 commitments assessed for both ambition and early results.
Note: Policy areas with fewer than 10 assessed commitments are not included in these rankings.

All of these metrics are internal to OGP and subject to the judgment of expert-reviewed IRM reports. They likely correspond to the real world, but they are inherently relativistic. For example, a commitment to involve a few dozen people in transport planning might be ambitious in a country where this type of participation occurs infrequently but not so in a country that regularly involves thousands in such a process. Consequently, IRM descriptions of ambition are in *relative* terms depending on the baseline and the results. They do not describe *absolute* change. To assess absolute changes over time, we turn to third-party "real-world" metrics in the next section and compare them to OGP performance.

3.3 OGP country performance on external metrics

While OGP countries are improving in areas like anti-corruption and open data, civic space is declining across the Partnership, particularly as it relates to the safety of journalists and activists. Protecting fundamental freedoms is an important next step for OGP countries.

The previous two sections looked at how well OGP members perform across various policy areas based on the IRM assessment of their OGP commitments. This section focuses on performance *outside of OGP action plans*. The analysis is based on data from OGP's eligibility criteria and the OGP Global Report, which tracks data from several partner organizations to better understand the state of open government in each participating member country. The following subsections discuss where countries stand today on these metrics and how their performance has changed over time. We start by looking at the broad eligibility criteria before diving into the more granular Global Report data.

3.3.1 Performance on OGP eligibility criteria

To gain eligibility to join OGP and subsequently maintain membership, countries must demonstrate a commitment to open government. Since 2016, this has included two elements: a four-part *eligibility score* and a two-part *Values Check*.

Eligibility scores

Initial eligibility for OGP is measured through performance on four Core Eligibility Criteria, which are assessed annually using third-party data on a 0–4 scale.[71] The four Core Eligibility Criteria are:

1. **Fiscal openness:** Timely publication of essential budget documents (executive's budget proposal and audit report), based on the Open Budget Survey (OBS).

2. **Access to information:** Access to information law in place, based on the RTI Rating.

3. **Asset disclosure:** Law in place requiring officials to submit asset disclosures that are accessible to the public, based on the World Bank's Financial Disclosure Law Library.

4. **Citizen engagement:** Basic protections for civil liberties (according to the Civil Liberties sub-indicator in The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index).

Performance on these criteria has seen diverging trends. Figure 3.6 illustrates the percentage of OGP countries[72] that have scored full points on each of the three criteria for which we have long-term data.[73] In this analysis, we see the following:

- **Improved access to information:** Access to information has seen the largest increase since 2012, with nearly all countries now scoring full points for having an access to information law in place.

- **Little change in fiscal openness:** Fiscal openness eligibility scores have slightly declined. This may be a result of the changing sample of OGP members over the years.

- **Declining citizen engagement:** The percentage of countries scoring full points on the citizen engagement criterion has decreased by over 20%.

- **Averages remain largely unchanged:** Despite the decline in citizen engagement, the average score for OGP countries on each criterion has never fallen below three out of four points, indicating that changes have been mostly marginal, with OGP countries continuing to outperform noneligible countries.

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71   The full list of indicators, as well as how they are used, is available on OGP's eligibility criteria web page, available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/process/joining-ogp/eligibility-criteria/.

72   See the Collective Results section of the OGP Global Report (2019) for analysis of how trends differ between OGP member countries and non-member countries: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/campaigns/global-report/collective-results-open-government-ogp/.

73   Asset disclosure trends are not pictured given that the World Bank stopped updating the data in 2014-2015.

FIGURE 3.6. **Performance on Core Eligibility Criteria has seen diverging trends**
Percentage of OGP countries scoring full points (four out of four) on each eligibility criterion.
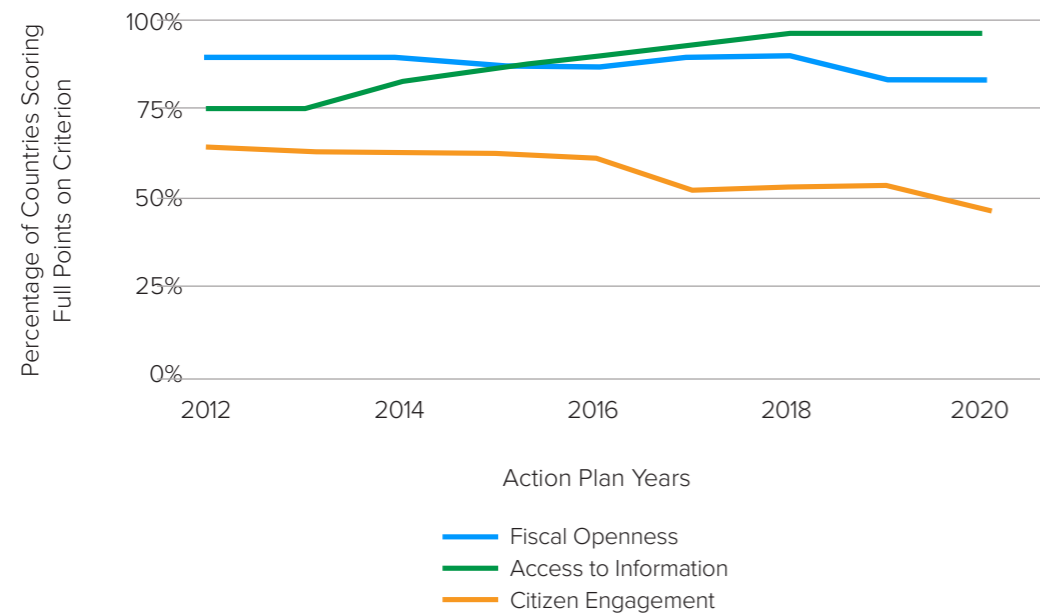
Sources: Open Budget Survey (Fiscal Openness); Right2Info and RTI Rating (Access to Information); Economist Intelligence Unit (Citizen Engagement)

Values Check

The Values Check is an additional requirement to become eligible for OGP membership. The Values Check consists of two third-party indicators measuring the freedoms of civil society organizations.[74] Unlike the Core Eligibility Criteria, the Values Check only applies to countries that have yet to join OGP and does not affect the status of countries once they become OGP members.

The vast majority of OGP countries pass the Values Check. However, a growing number of countries (five in 2020) do not.[75] This points to a growing decline in civic space within OGP members that is particularly acute in a handful of countries. To explore this further, next we review more granular data from the latest edition of the OGP Global Report data, which offers a closer look into the state of open government in OGP countries.

3.3.2 Performance according to Global Report third-party metrics

The OGP eligibility criteria cover a narrow subset of open government reforms. To track performance of OGP countries across a wider set of reforms and to ensure that action plans address the areas of most serious concern (like civic space), in 2018, the OGP Support Unit began collecting third-party data beyond the eligibility requirements. This took place through the OGP Global Report.

First launched in 2019, the OGP Global Report monitors performance of OGP countries across 14 areas of open government and combines IRM-based data with third-party indicators (see Box 3.1). Table 3.1 presents the latest data collected through this initiative. The table lists the 14 areas of open government, the average OGP country score on each topic, and the most common action implication.

Box 3.1. About the OGP Global Report

The OGP Global Report represents OGP's first comprehensive assessment of the state of open government. It includes global, thematic, and member-level analysis. The goal of the member-level analysis, featured in this paper, is to enable:

1. Assessments of member performance within and outside the OGP framework
2. Comparisons of performance across OGP members
3. Action implications for each member

To meet these goals, the OGP Support Unit annually gathers third-party data across 14 dimensions of open government. Altogether, these data include more than 50 national-level indicators collected by nine organizations. For example, data from the Financial Secrecy Index on the online availability of beneficial ownership information are used in the *Beneficial Ownership* section. The full list of indicators is available online.[76]

The 14 dimensions are not meant to capture the rich diversity of reforms that fall under the umbrella of open government, nor are they meant to suggest that OGP requires action in any of the areas. While the data can serve as an input into policy discussions, OGP action plans are ultimately supposed to reflect domestic priorities.

TABLE 3.1. **TABLE 3.1.** Third-party metrics show varying levels of OGP country performance
Average performance across OGP countries based on latest IRM data and 2021 third-party indicators.

Policy Area	Most Common Action Implication	Average Third-Party Score for OGP Countries (0–4)
Anti-Corruption		
Beneficial Ownership	Consider Action[77]	0.9
Open Contracting	Implement for Results[78]	2.1
Civic Space		
Freedom of Assembly	Share Innovation[79]	2.9
Freedom of Association	Share Innovation	3.2
Defending Journalists and Activists	Consider Action	2.6
Open Policy-Making		
Participation in Lawmaking	Consider Action	2.4
Regulatory Governance	Share Innovation	2.6
Access to Information		
Right to Information	Implement for Results	2.4
Open Data (Water/Sanitation)	Consider Action	1.9
Open Data (Health)	Consider Action	1.9
Open Data (Education)	Consider Action	1.8
Fiscal Openness		
Transparency	Implement for Results	2.3
Participation	Implement for Results	0.7
Oversight	Consider Action	2.5

The analysis points to several areas where OGP countries could consider further action, either within or outside of the OGP framework. These are marked in Table 3.1 as "Consider Action." This action implication means that most OGP countries have weak third-party scores (below 3) and have not made an ambitious (or any) OGP commitment to address the gap. Three policy areas in particular stand out

1. **Beneficial ownership transparency:** Most OGP countries have low scores, indicating that they are not yet publishing comprehensive beneficial ownership data online according to the Tax Justice Network's Financial Secrecy Index (FSI). Despite a growing number of OGP commitments on this topic, most countries have still not addressed beneficial ownership in their action plans.

2. **Fiscal oversight:** Few OGP countries have made commitments related to fiscal oversight, despite a growing number of commitments around participation in fiscal policy. This mirrors a general lack of commitments aimed at improving government oversight, more broadly. For more details about this topic, see the OGP Justice Policy Series.[80]

3. **Defending journalists and activists:** Many OGP countries have weak scores in this area, particularly around effective human rights investigations and follow-ups to human rights reports (as measured by the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index). As we will see in the next section, this is particularly troubling as scores in this area are largely declining.

3.3.3 Trends in performance on Global Report third-party metrics

Since the OGP Support Unit began formally tracking third-party data on open government in 2019, the direction of change has varied significantly by policy area. Figure 3.7 illustrates the percentage change in the average OGP score for each of the 14 dimensions of open government listed in Table 3.1. The figure shows no clear trend in certain areas, such as the right to information, regulatory governance, and open contracting. On the other hand, between 2019 and 2021, countries have mostly improved on the following topics:

- **Beneficial ownership transparency:** Although only about 10% of OGP countries made significant improvements in the 2020 edition of the FSI, the direction of change is entirely positive. Denmark, Ecuador, and Estonia are among the countries that have expanded online disclosure of beneficial ownership information.

- **Fiscal openness:** Although most improvements have been minor, a majority of countries have improved their scores according to the OBS, particularly around participation in fiscal policies. Major OGP improvers include Brazil, Croatia, Morocco, and Serbia.

- **Open data on public services:** Open education and health data have become more common, according to the latest assessment by the Open Data Inventory. In particular, nearly a quarter of OGP countries made significant improvements in open health data, including Germany, Slovakia, and Spain.

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77 These members have room for improvement in the respective policy area according to the third-party score and have not leveraged their OGP action plans to address the issue. They may consider reforms in the respective policy area, either within or outside of the OGP framework.

78 These are members making OGP commitments to improve their performance in the respective policy area. As members that have demonstrated political commitment through OGP, the next step is ensuring that implemented commitments have maximal impact.

79 As leaders, these members may consider playing a peer-support role by sharing their experiences and innovations with others in OGP, if they are not already doing so.

80 Open Government Partnership, Justice Policy Series, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/topic/justice-policy-series/.

Average change in third-party score for OGP countries between 2019 and 2021.

Percentage Change in Average Score of OGP Countries from 2019–2021

This analysis shows that OGP member performance varies significantly across policy areas, both within and outside of OGP. However, despite these differences, two main threads connect the various individual findings:

- **Need for protecting fundamental freedoms:** Civic space, as measured by both the OGP Global Report and eligibility scores, is declining across the Partnership. The safety of journalists and activists is a particular concern. Unfortunately, OGP commitments to address these issues are largely lacking, and where they exist, have not produced meaningful results. This is an important gap for OGP members to address.

- **Continued investment in anti-corruption:** Policy areas related to anti-corruption, such as whistleblowing, open contracting, and extractive industries, continue to show the greatest return on investment. These areas have shown the strongest results within OGP and merit further investment. Some areas of anti-corruption, like beneficial ownership transparency, are seeing higher rates of adoption by OGP members as well as higher scores according to third-party metrics. The next chapter investigates if there is a link between the two.

On the other side of the spectrum, performance has continued to decline in civic space, namely, free expression (including defending journalists and activists), free assembly, and free association. Although most declines have been small, more than half of OGP countries saw declines in protecting journalists and activists. Scores also declined, though to a lesser extent, in freedom of assembly. Encouragingly, a few OGP countries did improve across a variety of civic space issues, including Armenia, Ecuador, and Jamaica.

The main takeaway from this trends analysis is that OGP members should consider more concerted efforts to protect fundamental rights. In particular, OGP member performance on civic space—freedom of expression, assembly, and association—continues to decline, as does public access to information through right to information frameworks.[81] These topics deserve particular attention in OGP action plans as they provide the essential underpinning of an open government. However, as the beginning of this chapter makes clear, OGP commitments in these areas are still few and far between.

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[81] Access to information here refers to *de facto* access. This stands in contrast to the growth in right to information *laws* over time, as captured by the OGP eligibility criteria. See Section 3.3.1 for details.

Latvian Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš and Director of State Chancellery Janis Citskovskis meet with OGP Chief Executive Officer Sanjay Pradhan and team to discuss open government strategies in Riga, Latvia. Photo Leva Ābele, Saeima Izmantošanas, saeima.lv/lv/autortiesības.

4. Predicting Outcomes

The findings in the previous chapters raise an important question: what explains the trends in OGP outcomes? This chapter begins to tackle this complex question by studying the associations between the various OGP Vital Sign metrics presented thus far. Through inferential statistics, we can identify which elements of the OGP process (e.g., co-creation, institutional arrangements, action plan content) are associated with better outcomes.

This analysis does not determine causality. Consequently, we do not identify *drivers* of positive outcomes. Other OGP studies looking at a small number of countries and employing process-tracing methods are therefore important complements to this analysis.[82] Nonetheless, by analyzing data from across all OGP countries, we still glean insights that can inform OGP strategy, rules and standards, funder priorities, and the open government research agenda.

This chapter focuses specifically on four key *outcome and results* metrics of success discussed in the previous chapters: ambition, completion, early results, and policy area performance. These form the basis of a simplified theory of change for OGP action plans, illustrated in Figure 4.1.[83]

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[82] Munyema Hasan, Launching an Evaluation of OGP, 9 October 2019, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/launching-an-evaluation-of-ogp/.

[83] This theory of change is simplified and much narrower in scope than OGP's overall theory of change, available in OGP's 2020-2022 Implementation Plan: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/OGP_MTR-Report_Final-Jan26-20161.pdf

FIGURE 4.1. **Simplified theory of change for OGP action plans**
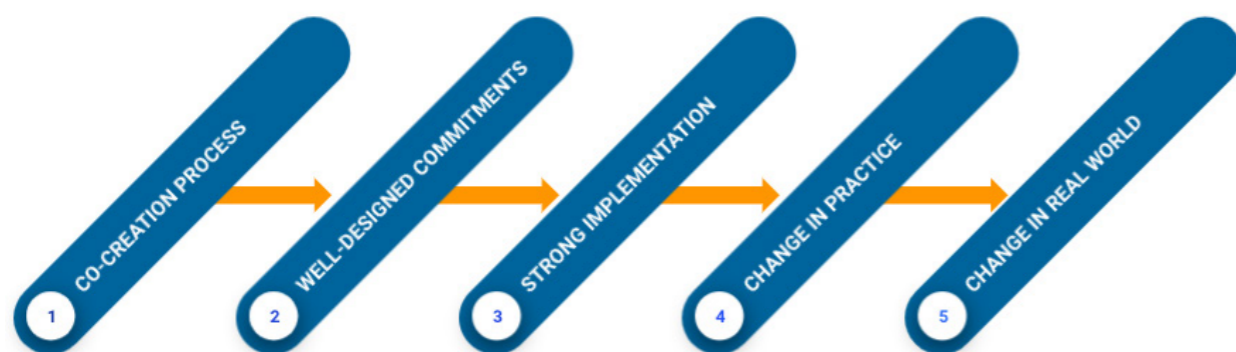
The intuition behind the theory is that a strong co-creation process in which civil society helps to prioritize and shape commitments (Step 1) produces ambitious action plans (Step 2). When followed by robust implementation (Step 3), the ambitious action plan produces early results (Step 4) or changes in government practice. Finally, these changes are reflected in improved openness across policy areas (Step 5).

To test this theory, this chapter attempts to predict each of the OGP links in the chain (Steps 2–5) using the prior links and internal and external factors to OGP. The next section delves deeper into these specific factors. For those who simply want to see the results, skip ahead to Section 4.3.

4.1 Variables in analysis

The variables in the analysis cover OGP and real-world outcomes, action plan co-creation, political institutions, and controls. The OGP outcomes are used as both dependent and explanatory variables.

This section looks at each of the major variables, along with their justification, provenance, and usage in this paper. See the Annex for descriptive statistics for all variables and additional details around how they were constructed. The variables in the analysis fall into four broad categories—outcomes, co-creation, institutions, and controls—each of which is discussed below.

4.1.1 Outcome variables

There are four main outcome variables that we try to explain in this analysis. They also help in explaining each other. These are Steps 2–5 in Figure 4.1 above. Three of the outcome variables are OGP outcomes, while the last one is external to OGP.

The three OGP outcome variables are *ambition*, *completion*, and *early results*. These variables capture whether governments are making commitments that could matter, whether they are following through on those commitments, and whether the commitments are having tangible effects on existing practices. Table 4.1 shows that all three are derived from IRM reports and operationalized at the action plan level. See Box 2.1 and Box 2.2 earlier in the paper for a discussion of limitations.

The remainder of this chapter looks at these outcomes as both *dependent variables* and *explanatory variables*:

- **As dependent variables:** These metrics are important by themselves. As dependent variables, we want to identify the factors associated with getting *more* of each of them. In basic terms, we want to see more ambitious action plans, more complete action plans, and more changes in practice, and so we want to understand how certain policies might play a role.

- **As explanatory variables:** *Ambition*, *completion*, and *early results* can also explain other results. (See Figure 4.1 on the previous page.) We therefore also assess whether these outcome variables are themselves predictors of subsequent outcomes. For example, ambitious commitments may be more likely to be completed because they have a higher profile and more political buy-in, whereas early results may depend on commitments being completed.

The fourth outcome variable in the analysis is "real-world" performance in particular policy areas, namely beneficial ownership transparency, open contracting, and fiscal openness.[84] This represents the outcome in Figure 4.1. Our goal is to determine if strong OGP outcomes are associated with higher scores on these metrics. As in the previous chapter, these data come from third-party organizations.[85]

TABLE 4.1. **Overview of outcome variables**

Variable	Source	Description
Ambition	IRM Reports	Percentage of commitments in action plan relevant to open government and achieving "moderate" or "transformative" on IRM's potential impact indicator. Assessed pre-implementation based on commitment text in action plan.
Completion	IRM Reports	Operationalized as two variables, both assessed at end of action plan cycle: • **Completed commitments:** Percentage of commitments in action plan that achieve "complete" on IRM's completion indicator. • **High completion:** Percentage of commitments in action plan that achieve "substantial" or "complete" on IRM's completion indicator.
Early Results	IRM Reports	Percentage of commitments in action plan that achieve "major" or "outstanding" on IRM's "Did it Open Government?" indicator. Reflects changes to government practices *during action plan cycle* as a result of commitment implementation.
Policy Area Performance	Several Third Parties[86]	Levels of openness in beneficial ownership transparency, open contracting, and fiscal openness.

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84 See Section 4.6 for details on why these three policy areas were chosen for the analysis.

85 These include the Tax Justice Network's Financial Secrecy Index (FSI) for beneficial ownership transparency, the Open Data Barometer (ODB) for open contracting, and the International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Survey (OBS) for fiscal openness.

86 Ibid.

4.1.2 Civil society engagement variables

The quality of civil society engagement throughout the OGP process is a key explanatory variable in the analysis. Past research has shown some correlations between certain process requirements and outcomes.[87] Members of the OGP community have also long believed that the quality of engagement impacts the quality of the action plan and the extent of its results.[88] We can break this down into two specific hypotheses:

1. **Civil society engagement and ambition:** The first is that collaboration between government and civil society in brainstorming, prioritizing, and finalizing commitments produces action plans that are more likely to address high-profile areas that might not have been prioritized by the government alone. Consequently, these commitments should be more ambitious on average.

2. **Civil society engagement and implementation:** The second is that regular civil society engagement throughout the implementation of the action plan enables civil society to monitor progress, pose questions of implementers, and suggest ways forward, all of which drives implementation and results.

To evaluate these hypotheses, we use the variables in Table 4.2 below as proxies for the collaborative nature of the OGP process.

TABLE 4.2. Overview of civil society engagement variables

Variable	Source	Description
Level of Public Influence[89]	IRM Reports	Five-point scale measuring degree to which civil society has say in OGP process. Assessed separately during co-creation and implementation. Operationalized as binary variables using thresholds: • **"Collaborate" or higher:** Civil society helps set agenda and is involved throughout process. • **"Involve" or higher** (focus of this analysis): Civil society receives government response regarding inclusion, modification, or rejection of inputs and can meet with government in multi-stakeholder forum. • **"Consult" or higher:** Civil society can give inputs, but government does not provide response, and forum may not exist.
Reasoned Response	IRM Reports	Binary variable measuring whether government responded to public inputs (subcomponent of "Involve" threshold above).[90]
Multi-Stakeholder Forum	IRM Reports	Binary variable measuring existence of space for civil society and governments to discuss action plan regularly (subcomponent of "Involve" threshold above).[91]

4.1.3 Institutional variables

As one of the key players in the OGP process, the government agency in charge of coordinating the OGP process (the lead OGP agency) is likely to significantly impact outcomes. As seen in Table 4.3 below, we focus on four institutional variables in this analysis.

• **Head of government:** First, we test the theory that involving the head of government in the co-creation process can raise ambition by lending high-level political support to commitments. Given their political weight, these offices may also be more successful in encouraging other agencies to submit ambitious commitments.

• **Political instability:** We use three variables as proxies for political instability.

  • **Change in staff:** The first is the instability of the OGP lead agency. Frequent changes in this office can result in a disjointed process, delays in co-creation and implementation, and additional time spent briefing officials on the OGP process. All of these could have a dampening effect on the three key outcome variables.

• **Change in executive:** We also consider changes of power during the action plan cycle, which may similarly disrupt the OGP calendar or weaken political support for existing commitments.

• **Elections:** Finally, we consider presidential and parliamentary elections during the action plan cycle, which may shift attention away from co-creation and implementation, even if there is no change in power.

TABLE 4.3. Overview of institutional variables

Variable	Source	Description
Head of Government Involvement	IRM Reports and OGP Support Unit	Binary variable measuring participation in co-creation by the office of the president or prime minister, a staff member, or the president or prime minister themselves.
OGP Lead Instability	IRM reports and OGP Support Unit	Binary variable measuring whether lead OGP agency changed during action plan cycle.
Change of Power	Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM)	Binary variable measuring whether head of government (and ruling party or coalition) changed during action plan cycle.
Elections	V-DEM	Binary variables measuring whether presidential/parliamentary elections took place during action plan cycle.

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[87]   Joseph Foti, Independent Reporting Mechanism, Technical Paper 1, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Technical-paper-1_final.pdf.

[88]   For example, the co-creation awards of the OGP Multi-Donor Trust Fund were partly motivated by a desire for more ambitious commitments, as seen here: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/ogp-multi-donor-trust-fund/co-creation-for-ambitious-action-plans-request-for-expressions-of-interest/.

[89]   For details about this indicator, see IRM guidance, available at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IRM-Guidance-Involve.pdf.

[90]   The IRM has tracked this indicator since 2017. To ensure longitudinal data, for pre-2017 action plans, we use IRM data on whether the government provided civil society with a summary of comments. See the Annex for details about variable construction.

[91]   Since 2017, this has implied quarterly forum meetings. Prior to 2017, there was no required frequency, as long as meetings took place on a regular schedule. See Annex for more details.

4.1.4 Control variables

Recognizing that non-OGP factors may significantly influence OGP outcomes, we employ a variety of control variables in the analysis. These variables control for four factors: countries' general commitment to OGP, their governance context, region, and wealth. They are listed in Table 4.4.

Controlling for general commitment to OGP is particularly important. One of the major limitations of this research is the so-called "endogeneity problem," where omitted variables explain both the explanatory and outcome variables.[92] In the case of OGP, an external factor that may explain OGP process variables (like citizen engagement during co-creation) *and* OGP outcomes is a country's general commitment to the initiative. Specifically, we may expect countries with more political buy-in or resources for OGP to perform well on a range of metrics, such as the strength of the co-creation process, ambition, and early results. To account for this, albeit imperfectly, we include controls for political commitment among the full set of control variables, described below:

- **Political commitment:** We employ two proxies: *membership in the OGP Steering Committee* and *financial contributions to OGP*. Given the criteria for joining the Steering Committee and the participation requirements (both at the working and ministerial levels), we would expect Steering Committee members to generally exhibit higher levels of commitment to OGP.[93] Likewise, although financial contributions have been a requirement of OGP participation since 2015,[94] only about half of OGP countries contribute.[95] The sample of contributing countries skews higher income than the overall OGP membership, but we think this is still an effective form of "revealed preference" for OGP.

- **Governance context:** Another important set of controls take into account each country's governance context. Specifically, we focus on *political corruption* and *civic space*. The former serves as a proxy for weak governance contexts, which may impact OGP outcomes. On the one hand, political interests may be too entrenched in some countries to enable open government champions to make and implement ambitious commitments. On the other hand, these countries have more room for improvement, which means that certain reforms may achieve greater impact than they would elsewhere. In terms of civic space, limited opportunities for civil society to engage with the government in policy discussions could make it more difficult for a country to succeed in an initiative like OGP, where government-civil society collaboration is required.

- **Geography and income:** Finally, we control for region and wealth. We control for geography because there are plainly observable regional disparities when it comes to OGP outcomes. For example, the average rate of ambition for African OGP countries is 60%, compared to 43% for European countries. The opposite is true for completion, with African countries implementing nearly half of their commitments, compared to more than two-thirds for European countries. As for wealth, we use *OECD membership* as a crude proxy because 29 of the 38 OECD member countries are also OGP countries. We would expect these wealthier countries to be better able to implement ambitious reforms, particularly reforms that require highly technical skills and long-term budget planning, such as beneficial ownership registries and open data portals.

92 In technical terms, the endogeneity problem arises when explanatory variables are correlated with the error term in a regression. Omitted variable bias is a possible source of this problem, though there are others.

93 Read more about the OGP Steering Committee online at https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/who-we-are/steering-committee/.

94 OGP Steering Committee Meeting, 4–5 May 2014, Bali, Indonesia, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/May2014SC_SC_Minutes_Final_0.pdf.

95 OGP Country Contributions, updated 4 May 2021, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/transparency-financial-information/government-contributions/.

TABLE 4.4. Overview of control variables

Variable	Source	Description
Political Corruption	V-DEM	Continuous variable (0–1) measuring pervasiveness of political corruption during action plan years, combining corruption indexes for public sector, executive, legislature, and judiciary.
Civic Space	V-DEM	Continuous variable (0–1) measuring government attempt to repress civil society organizations during action plan years.
OGP Contribution	OGP Support Unit	Binary variable measuring if government contributed financially to OGP during action plan years through country contribution, bilateral grant, or Multi-Donor Trust Fund contribution.
OGP Steering Committee	OGP Support Unit	Dummy variable for membership in OGP Steering Committee during action plan years.
OECD	OECD	Dummy variable for membership in OECD.
Region	UN Regional Groups	Dummy variables for four regions: Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Europe.

4.2 Method

The analysis involves a multivariate regression that identifies associations between variables. It does not assess causality. The data set covers 174 action plans made by 74 OGP member countries between 2014 and 2019.

Before moving to the analysis, this section provides a brief overview of the method used, as well as the benefits and limitations. For a more detailed discussion of the method, see the Annex. For those who wish to skip to the results, go to Section 4.3.

4.2.1 Summary of method

The analysis aims to identify which variables covary with three key OGP outcomes: ambition of action plans, completion rates of action plans, and early results per action plan.[96] To accurately predict these three variables, multiple explanatory variables are needed, as outlined above (civil society engagement, institutions, governance, geography, and wealth). This requires a method that can control for multiple variables at once (i.e., a multivariate regression).

The particular analysis used here involves a pooled ordinary least square (OLS) regression (i.e., an OLS regression using panel data with observations across countries and over time). Specifically, we analyze data for each OGP action plan, broken down by the member country and year of submission. See the Annex for a more detailed justification of this approach as well as sensitivity analyses applying other approaches, such as random and fixed-effects regression models.

The sample includes action plans submitted by 74 OGP member countries. We do not include local action plans in the sample, as we lack subnational data for

96 See Section 4.6 for more details about the method to explain changes on "real-world" metrics, which differs from the method described here.

key control variables, such as political corruption and civic space. In addition, we only look at OGP action plans assessed by the IRM on the outcome variables. This means that most action plans in the sample were submitted between 2014 and 2019 for a maximum sample size of 174 action plans. Any action plans with missing data for any of the variables in the analysis were dropped. See the Annex for descriptive statistics and more details.

4.2.2 Benefits and limitations

Our approach has benefits and limitations. One benefit is being able to study relationships between variables while holding others constant, such as wealth and political instability. However, a key downside is that we cannot identify causal relationships, as there may be unmeasured OGP phenomena or non-OGP factors causing observed trends (see Figure 4.2). Still, the analysis enables us to identify predictors of positive outcomes, a critical step in understanding how OGP is working. See the Annex for a more detailed discussion of the research limitations.

FIGURE 4.2. **Multiple channels can affect real-world outcomes**
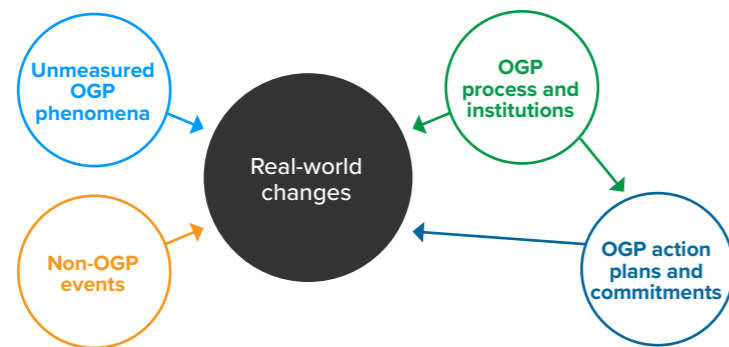
Having described the method and the variables, we now turn to the analysis. Specifically, we begin to isolate the predictors of each of the OGP outcome variables presented in Table 4.1 earlier in this chapter:

ambition, completion, and early results. We begin with ambition—the first outcome, in chronological order, in the theory of change for OGP action plans.

4.3 Predictors of ambition

High-quality dialogue between governments and civil society during co-creation is associated with higher ambition, even when controlling for other factors. Political transitions and the mere existence of a multi-stakeholder forum, on the other hand, are not.

This section looks to identify key predictors of action plan ambition. As laid out in Section 2.2, levels of ambition have not improved in recent years. This makes understanding the determinants of ambition an especially important exercise. In particular, this section

focuses on understanding the relationship between the quality of the OGP co-creation process and the level of ambition of the resulting action plan. As discussed previously in this chapter, an inclusive and participatory co-creation process, in theory, helps to ensure that governments make OGP commitments that are ambitious and tailored to address the issues most important to citizens. We begin to test this theory here. Before introducing complexity to the analysis, we first conduct a simple bivariate analysis.

4.3.1 Co-creation and ambition are positively correlated

The level of public influence during co-creation is positively associated with the level of ambition of the ensuing action plan. Figure 4.3 visualizes this relationship and shows how the IRM codes action plans on the various tiers of the spectrum. Intuitively, this suggests that action plans are more ambitious

when civil society is actively shaping them. However, as discussed previously, there are many other factors that may influence ambition. To account for these factors and test for the statistical significance of the relationship, we turn to the multivariate regression analysis next.

FIGURE 4.3. **Relationship between ambition and level of public influence is positive**
High ambition refers to the rate of commitments with "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact.
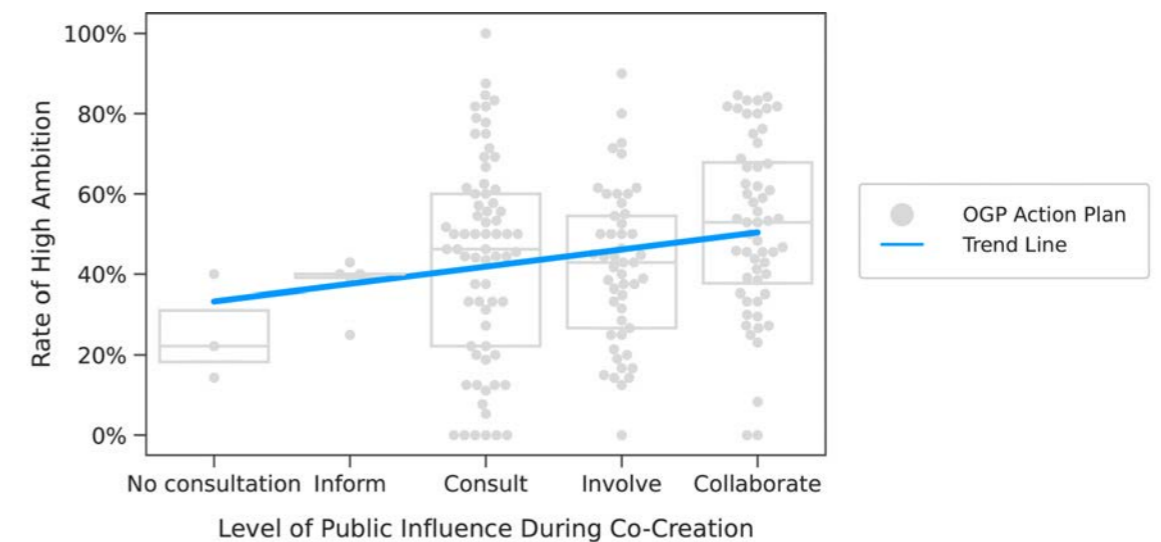
No consultation	No consultation.
Inform	The government provided the public with information on the action plan.
Consult	The public could give inputs.
Involve	The government gave feedback on how public input was considered.
Collaborate	There was iterative dialogue, AND the public helped set the agenda.

4.3.2 Co-creation is a significant predictor of ambition

Even when taking into account other explanatory and control variables, the strength of the co-creation process—specifically the quality of dialogue in shaping the plan—remains a positive and significant predictor of ambition. Figure 4.4 illustrates the results of the main regression analysis (see the Annex for the full regression tables). The quality of the co-creation process is a strong predictor of ambition even when using different methods of measurement:

- **"Involve" or better:** Achieving "Involve" on the level of public influence spectrum is associated with nearly 10% more ambitious commitments.[97] This threshold is the minimum required of OGP countries according to the OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards.

- **"Collaborate" or better:** The regression coefficient is slightly higher for the higher "Collaborate"

threshold.[98] This further supports the idea that greater public involvement is associated with higher ambition (see the Annex for the exact numbers).

Governments providing a reasoned response to civil society, in particular, seems to be a key predictor of ambition. The "Involve" threshold requires that governments (1) provide a reasoned response to civil society and (2) maintain a regular forum for dialogue with civil society. Including each subcomponent in the regression model shows that publishing a reasoned response to public inputs is a statistically significant predictor of ambition. Having a multi-stakeholder forum is also positively associated with ambition, though not statistically significantly so. See the Annex for the full regression results.

While this analysis neither proves nor disproves a causal link, it does mean that meaningful civil society engagement at the outset of the OGP process is associated with more ambitious action plans.

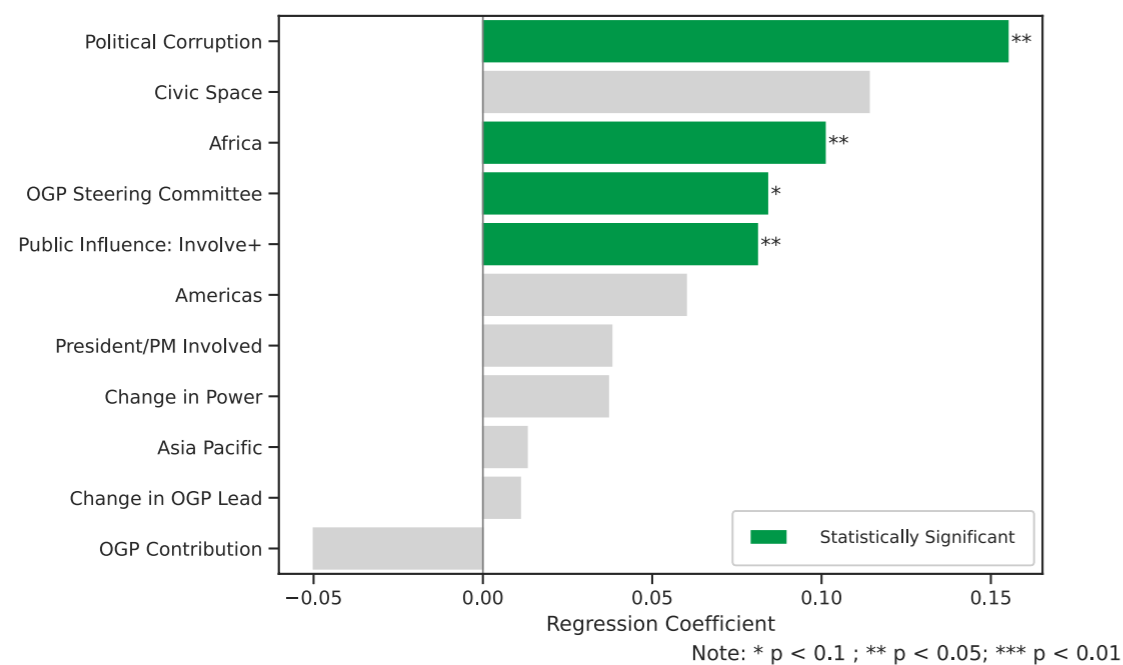**FIGURE 4.4.** **Association between explanatory variables and ambition**

Regression coefficients for pooled OLS model. Dependent variable is high ambition, defined as the rate of commitments with "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact.

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

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[97] As a reminder, to receive the "Involve" rating, an action plan process must meet two criteria: (1) the government provided a reasoned response to the public on how their inputs were considered, and (2) a regular forum existed for government and civil society to discuss the action plan.

[98] The "Collaborate" threshold implies that civil society helped to set the co-creation agenda and were involved throughout the process.

4.3.3 Other predictors of ambition

Two of the control variables, political corruption and OGP Steering Committee membership, are also significantly associated with ambition.

Interestingly, higher levels of political corruption are associated with higher rates of ambition, presumably because the IRM assesses ambition by comparing commitment objectives to the status quo in the affected policy area. As a result, the same reform may be considered more ambitious in a country with a relatively lower starting point. This means that political corruption is an effective control variable because it takes into account any effects of the IRM methodology on rates of ambition.

Steering Committee membership is associated with about 8% more ambitious action plans. As theorized, this may capture how some OGP members are more engaged in OGP (and perhaps open government more broadly), which in turn may explain the higher rates of ambition. If so, this too points to the effectiveness of this control variable, as we find a link between co-creation and ambition even when we take into account the stronger performance by this subset of OGP countries. Future research could look more closely at OGP Steering Committee members and how domestic dynamics predict their performance in international initiatives.

In terms of regions, Africa is the sole statistically significant predictor of ambition. Europe is the baseline in the regression model, which means that African action plans are on average 10% more ambitious than European action plans, holding all else equal, including levels of corruption. OGP countries in the Americas and Asia-Pacific also seem to have more ambitious action plans than their European equivalents, though the differences are not statistically significant.

The non-findings are worth mentioning. In particular, we find no statistically significant association between institutional arrangements and action plan ambition. Involvement of the head of government, changes in power, and changes in the OGP lead agency all exhibit weak positive associations with ambition but lack statistical significance. Civic space is also positively associated with higher ambition, though this

relationship is not significant either. The same applies to OECD membership when included in the model as a proxy for development. Finally, we find that financial contributions to OGP are negatively associated with ambition, though the finding is not statistically significant. As a consequence, while some of these characteristics are worth investment in their own right, the data does not suggest, at this time, that we should reasonably expect them to result in greater ambition.

4.3.4 Implications

There are three key takeaways from the analysis. Each is described below.

Strong co-creation is associated with more ambition.

High-quality dialogue between governments and civil society during co-creation may be a driver of ambition. This finding has many implications for OGP and its partners. Perhaps most importantly, it validates the OGP model's emphasis on ensuring collaboration between government and civil society during the design of action plans and commitments.

Additionally, it underscores the urgent need for OGP reformers to improve on the co-creation metrics assessed here. As mentioned in Section 1.1, fewer than half of OGP governments currently provide a reasoned response to civil society on their inputs. Furthermore, just under 20% of governments are also not meeting the "Involve" threshold of the level of public influence. Several recommendations follow from this:

- **Guidance:** The OGP Support Unit can provide country reformers with targeted resources focused on achieving high-quality dialogue during the co-creation process, such as manuals, lessons learned from other members, and peer exchanges.

- **Research:** More work is needed to explain *how* collaborative co-creation processes may impact ambition. Understanding the specific dynamics at play is beyond the scope of this paper and will yield a better understanding of how reformers should shape their processes to ensure the best results.

- **Monitoring:** The research points to the continued importance of tracking the level of public influence in shaping action plans and whether or not governments are providing reasoned responses

to the public. The IRM should continue to include these metrics in its reporting and could develop new ways of assessing the quality of dialogue during co-creation.

- **Standards:** The analysis suggests that the level of public influence and the provision of a reasoned response are currently the best proxies for the quality of the co-creation process. This validates the decision to include these metrics as minimum requirements of OGP members. Future standards should continue to focus on these characteristics of the process and prioritize the quality of dialogue as a key requirement for membership.

Political transitions are not associated with ambition.

The second important takeaway from the analysis is that political transitions are not significant predictors of ambition. One possible explanation is that these events—elections, changes in power, and changes in the OGP lead agency—may present opportunities as much as obstacles. For example, while a ministerial reshuffling may introduce delays to the co-creation process, it may also yield new political support for certain reforms. If this is the case, the OGP Support Unit and country reformers would benefit from focusing on how to best leverage OGP institutions at the international and domestic levels to benefit from these political moments.

4.4 Predictors of completion

Civil society engagement throughout the action plan is a key predictor of completion. We also find low rates of implementation in lower-income OGP countries and in countries that involve the head of government in the co-creation process. No clear link exists between action plan ambition and completion, though further research is needed.

This section isolates key predictors of commitment completion and identifies implications for OGP and its partners. As explained in Section 2.4.1 of this paper, rates of completion have remained relatively constant since OGP was founded. About two-thirds

Regular forums are not associated with ambition.

Finally, the third takeaway is that the existence of a multi-stakeholder forum is not a significant predictor of action plan ambition. However, as the next two sections make clear, this does not lessen the importance of ensuring these spaces during the OGP process. Nonetheless, more research is needed to better understand the link between forums and ambition.

On the one hand, this finding may be the product of a data quirk. For many years, the IRM assessed the existence of a multi-stakeholder forum only during the implementation of the action plan. This could mean that many of the forums in the dataset were simply not functioning during co-creation, which would explain the weak relationship with ambition. On the other hand, this finding could suggest that many forums currently lack certain essential ingredients for designing ambitious commitments, such as participation by political decision makers or rules empowering civil society to weigh in on decisions. Regardless, the finding merits exploration in future research.

Once ambitious commitments are in an OGP action plan, the next step is to ensure that they are implemented. As a result, we now turn to completion. Specifically, in the next section, we begin to answer the following questions: what drives the differences in rates of implementation across OGP, and what can OGP reformers do about it?

of commitments are substantially completed on average by the end of the two-year action plan period. Nevertheless, completion rates vary significantly depending on the region and country. In this section, we explore why these differences exist.

The previous chapter showed that a more collaborative co-creation process predicts more ambition. Here, we test whether the same is true for completion. As discussed earlier, we would expect meaningful civil society engagement during the implementation period to enable monitoring and course-correction. In theory, this would raise levels of completion.

We also focus on ambition. Does having a more ambitious action plan lead to higher or lower rates of completion? Ambitious commitments may be harder to implement than other commitments, but they may also have stronger buy-in from implementers. Before introducing other explanatory and control variables, we first look at simple bivariate analyses.

4.4.1 Civil society engagement and completion are positively correlated

Higher levels of civil society engagement are associated with higher levels of completion. We use two indicators for the quality of civil society engagement during the action plan period: the level of public influence during implementation and the

existence of a multi-stakeholder forum. We look at both in this subsection, starting with the level of public influence.

Greater public influence during implementation is associated with higher rates of implementation. Figure 4.5 below visualizes the relationship between the various tiers of the level of public influence and rates of completed commitments. The chart shows a clear positive trend. As civil society is more involved during implementation, the more commitments are completed. Interestingly, the relationship is not as clear when looking at commitments that are at least substantially completed. For this reason, we look at both thresholds in the multivariate analysis later in this chapter (in Section 4.4.3).

FIGURE 4.5. Relationship between completion and level of public influence is positive
Completed commitments refers to commitments that were fully implemented during the two-year action plan period.
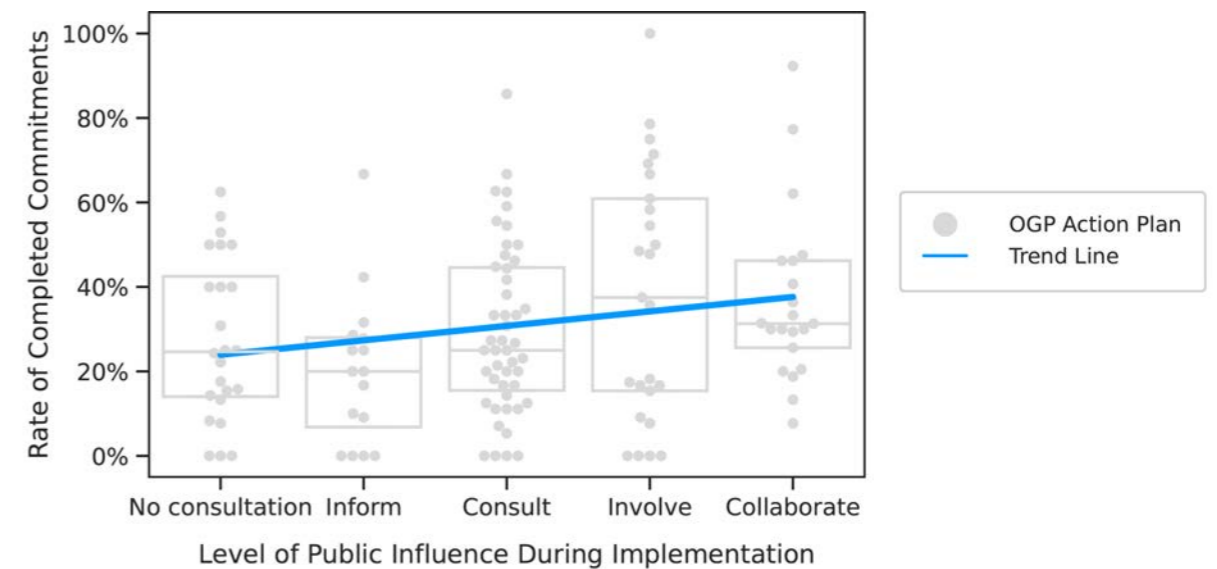
No consultation	No consultation.
Inform	The government provided the public with information on the action plan.
Consult	The public could give inputs.
Involve	The government gave feedback on how public input was considered.
Collaborate	There was iterative dialogue, AND the public helped set the agenda.

We see a similarly positive relationship between the existence of a multi-stakeholder forum and rates of completion. Figure 4.6 below illustrates the difference in completion between OGP action plans that were discussed regularly at a multi-stakeholder forum and those that were not. The orange points at the top-right corner of the chart reveal that the action plans with the highest rates of completed commitments were all accompanied by a multi-stakeholder forum.

Figure shows rates of fully completed commitments by existence of a multi-stakeholder forum.

However, these simple bivariate analyses do not account for several potential confounding variables. For this reason, we explore the relationships further through a multivariate regression analysis later in this section. Before doing so, we look at the relationship between completion and the preceding step in the OGP action plan theory of change: ambition.

4.4.2 Ambition lacks a clear link to completion

The level of ambition of an OGP action plan does not seem to impact the rate of implementation. As seen in Figure 4.7 on the next page, there is no clear relationship between the two metrics. When we look only at completed commitments (instead of substantially and fully completed commitments), there appears to be a very weak negative association between the two variables. This suggests that it may be harder to fully implement action plans with many ambitious commitments. To investigate this further, we turn to the multivariate regression analysis next.

High ambition refers to the rate of commitments with "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact. High completion refers to the rate of commitments with "substantial" or "complete" implementation.
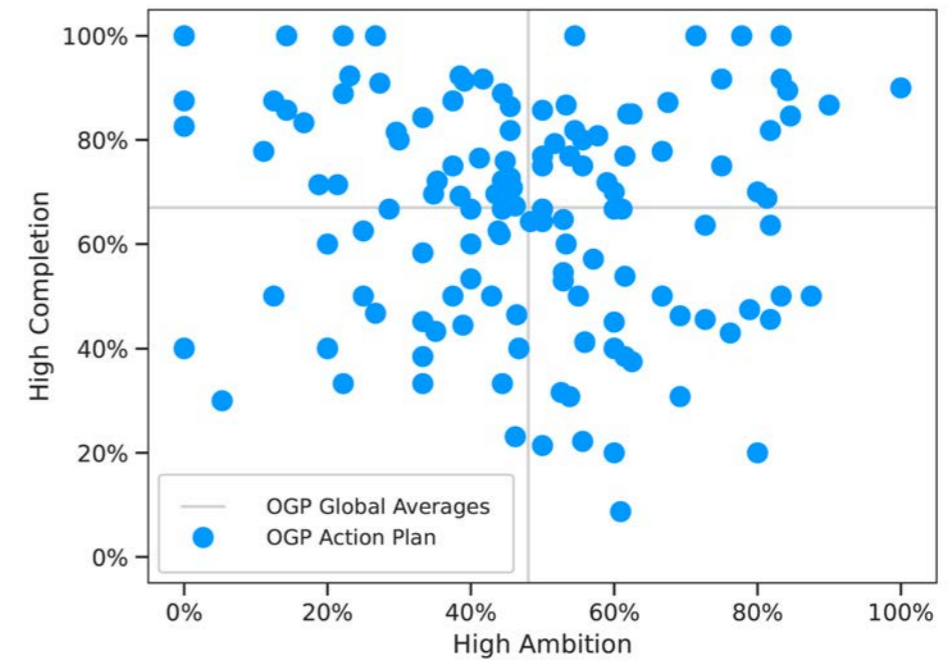
4.4.3 Civil society engagement is a statistically significant predictor of completion

The level of civil society engagement during implementation remains a significant predictor of completion, even when taking into account several other factors. As in the previous section, this does not imply a causal relationship between the two variables. Nonetheless, it reinforces the idea that collaboration between governments and civil society is linked to stronger open government reforms.

Figure 4.8 on the following page visualizes the main regression results (see the Annex for more details). The dependent variable here is the percentage of commitments in each action plan that are substantially or fully complete. The regression coefficient for the multi-stakeholder forum (second from the top) is 0.10. This implies that having a multi-stakeholder forum is associated with a 10% higher rate of completion, holding all else equal.

FIGURE 4.8. Associations between explanatory variables and high completion

Regression coefficients for pooled OLS model. Dependent variable is high completion, defined as the rate of commitments with "substantial" or "complete" implementation.
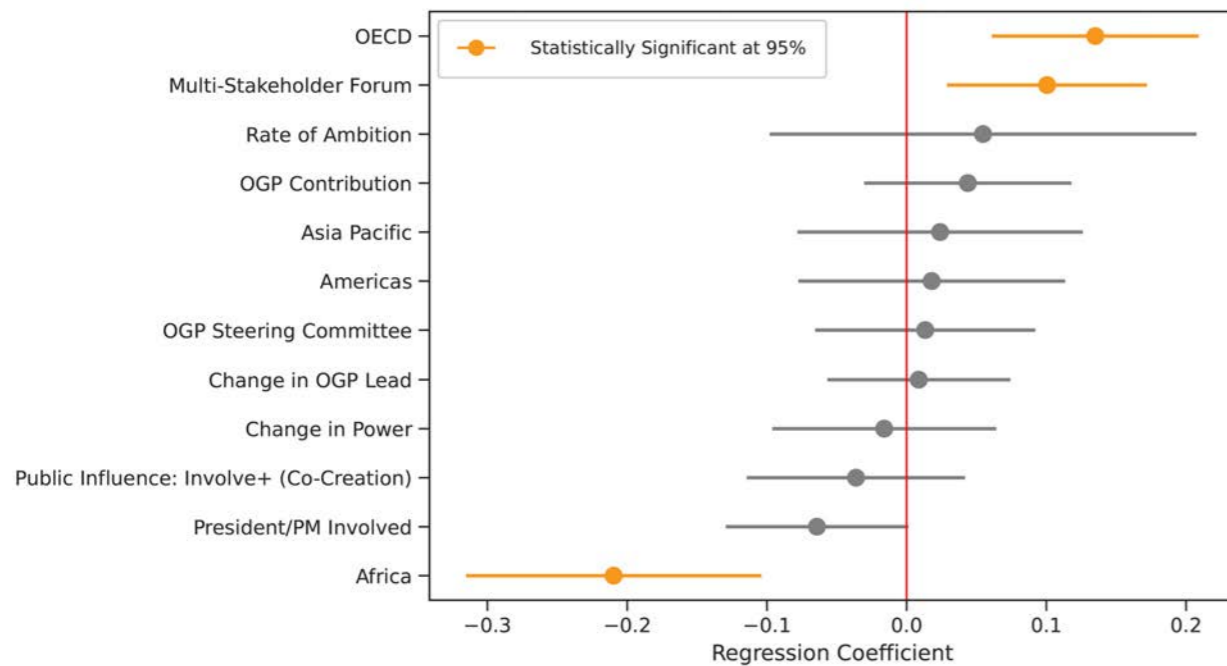
The relationship between civil society engagement and completion is robust across several variations of the analysis. Specifically, the following "sensitivity analysis" examines whether changing how we operationalize dependent and independent variables affects the results:[99]

- **Complete only:** If we only look at *fully completed* commitments, the relationship between civil society engagement and completion is actually stronger. The regression coefficient for the multi-stakeholder forum becomes 0.14 (up from 0.10 in the results above).

- **Level of public influence ("Involve"):** When replacing the multi-stakeholder forum with the "Involve" threshold of public influence during implementation, the association is similarly positive and significant.

- **Level of public influence ("Consult"):** While positive, the relationship between governments meeting the lower "Consult" threshold and their rate of high completion is not statistically significant. The relationship does become positive and significant

when looking only at completed commitments as the dependent variable, but the regression coefficient (the strength of the relationship) is smaller than in the case of the "Involve" threshold. This is consistent with the idea that higher levels of civil society engagement are linked to stronger rates of implementation.

4.4.4 Ambition is not a predictor of completion

The relationship between an action plan's rate of ambition and its rate of completion is not statistically significant across any of the regression models. Nonetheless, a notable finding is that the relationship is positive when explaining the rate of substantially and fully completed commitments but negative when looking only at fully completed commitments. This trend also holds when operationalizing ambition as only commitments with "transformative" potential impact.[100] This suggests, albeit weakly, that it may be harder to *fully* implement ambitious commitments. Research using individual commitments as the unit of analysis is needed to explore this relationship further.

4.4.5 OECD membership is positively associated with completion

Another statistically significant predictor of completion is membership in the OECD. On average, OECD membership is associated with a nearly 15% higher rate of completion. This could be the result of several factors. For one, these countries have more financial and technical resources. This would coincide with previous research, which found lack of financial and technical capacity to be the main obstacle to OGP commitment implementation.[101]

The positive relationship may also have to do with the governance environment of OECD member countries. For instance, factors such as public sector efficiency, professionalization of the civil service, and incentive structures may all affect implementation. We included two relevant V-DEM variables in the analysis to explore this further: bureaucratic remuneration[102] and the criteria for appointments in the state administration.[103] The latter was closely correlated with OECD membership and was therefore dropped, while the former showed no statistically significant relationship with completion.[104] Future research focused on high-income OGP countries may shed light on the particular dynamics at play.

4.4.6 Other predictors of completion

Three other variables are of particular interest. These include geography, involvement of the head of government, and levels of public influence during co-creation. Each of these is discussed in turn.

In terms of regions, we find that commitments in African action plans tend to be completed less than in European plans. Holding other factors equal, the difference in implementation between the two regions exceeds 20%. The previous section found that African

action plans also tend to be more ambitious, but given that we control for ambition here, the implementation gap between the regions cannot be explained by the differences in ambition alone.

Involvement of the head of government in the co-creation process is also negatively associated with completion. The relationship is statistically significant at the 10% level. A possible explanation for this finding is that the office of the head of government is more susceptible to political shifts and transitions. As a result, while it may ensure greater political buy-in during co-creation, its involvement later on—particularly as the OGP lead office—may hinder implementation. None of the other institutional variables (change in power, elections, and change in OGP lead agency) were significant predictors of completion.

Finally, the negative relationship between the level of public influence during co-creation and completion stands out. The relationship is not statistically significant in the model presented in Figure 4.8 above, but it *is* significant at the 10% level when the level of public influence during implementation is in the model (see the Annex for the full results).

This finding is difficult to explain. One possible explanation is that stronger co-creation may result in more aspirational commitments that are less easily implemented during the two-year action plan period. Another possible explanation is that government and civil society must dedicate significant resources, time, and energy to carry out a meaningful co-creation process, which may leave less capacity and interest in engaging during implementation. Some evidence for this theory exists: the multi-stakeholder forum variable better captures *sustained* participation throughout the action plan, and when this variable is included in the model, the relationship between the level of public influence during co-creation and completion loses significance.

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[99] See the Annex for the full regression results.

[100] In the model presented in Figure 4.8, ambition is operationalized as commitments that are relevant to open government and have "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact.

[101] Renzo Falla, Why OGP Commitments Fall Behind, 2017, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2001/01/IRM_Technical-Paper_Failure_Dec2017.pdf.

[102] This indicates the extent to which state employees are salaried. For more details, see the V-DEM codebook, available at https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/be/11/be11d657-a240-4fb0-a47f-bc151296e779/codebook.pdf.

[103] This indicates the extent to which appointment decisions in the state administration are based on skills and merit, as opposed to personal and political connections. For more details, see the V-DEM codebook, available at https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/be/11/be11d657-a240-4fb0-a47f-bc151296e779/codebook.pdf.

[104] The political corruption variable was also closely correlated with the OECD variable and was dropped as a result.

4.4.7 Implications

Four key findings of the analysis have several implications for OGP and its partners.

Civil society engagement is associated with higher rates of implementation.

The main finding is that there is a positive association between civil society engagement during implementation and rates of completion. This provides the first statistical evidence for the importance of involving the public throughout the implementation cycle of the action plan. Several implications follow:

- **Sustaining engagement:** The analysis points to the importance of OGP members continuing to establish regular forums. As laid out in Section 1.1, most OGP countries now either have a functioning multi-stakeholder forum or are in the process of setting one up. Nonetheless, nearly half of OGP countries still do not meet the full standard.

- **Standards:** The research validates the requirement in the latest standards to have a functioning multi-stakeholder forum. The analysis suggests that both the space for dialogue *and* the quality of dialogue during implementation are important factors. As a result, future standards could include a combination of these elements in the requirements for implementation.

- **Research into forums during implementation:** More research is needed to better understand the specific characteristics of OGP forums that make them effective. Since 2017, the IRM has collected detailed data about forums, including whether they have high-level political representation, possibilities for remote participation, and parity of government and civil society members. Understanding how these factors influence outcomes will be critical.[105]

- **Research into repositories:** According to the latest standards, all OGP countries must maintain an online repository that links to evidence of implementation, is freely available online, and is updated regularly.

Given this section's findings about multi-stakeholder forums, an important next step is investigating whether the existence of repositories is equally associated with completion.[106]

No clear link between ambition and completion

The second key finding in this section is that ambition and completion are not associated with each other, at least at the action-plan level. This implies that a trade-off does not exist between including more ambitious commitments in a plan and achieving higher levels of implementation. This, in turn, suggests that OGP members should strive to raise the ambition of their commitments across the board without fear of being "penalized" on completion. Nonetheless, more research is needed to understand if there is a relationship between these two metrics at the level of individual commitments.

Several OGP countries struggle with implementation

The third takeaway is that a subset of OGP countries, particularly lower-income countries, struggle with commitment implementation. The differences in completion across regions and income groups are striking. For instance, according to the regression results, when holding other factors constant, the gap in the rate of completion between an OECD country in Europe (the region with the highest income) and a non-OECD country in Africa (the region with the lowest income) is nearly 35%.

The implication is straightforward: the OGP Support Unit, thematic partners, and donors need to find better ways of providing political, financial, and technical support to member countries during implementation. As we will see in the next chapter, implementation is fundamental to achieving behavioral change. In the past few years, the OGP Support Unit has become more intentional about supporting implementation by convening in-country stakeholders, hosting peer exchanges, and mobilizing the Multi-Donor Trust Fund.[107] Future research should evaluate the impact of these interventions in closing the implementation gap.

Head of government involvement is associated with lower rates of completion

The final takeaway is that head of government involvement in the OGP process is negatively associated with commitment implementation. This may reflect the fact that the office of the head of government sometimes coordinates the OGP process. Other agencies—ministries of planning, treasury, or public administration—may be less susceptible to political changes and therefore may be more able to effectively coordinate OGP activities. However, the previous section found a weak, positive relationship between ambition and head of government

involvement. The implication may then be that government reformers would benefit from involving this office early in the OGP process, such as through the multi-stakeholder forum, without relying on it to coordinate the entire process.

Following through on ambitious OGP commitments is important but not sufficient to achieve real-world changes in open government. An essential intermediary step is translating commitment deliverables and outputs into actual changes in government behavior. In the next section, we focus on predicting these changes, which we call early results.

4.5 Predictors of early results

Ambition and completion are the strongest predictors of early results. Ambition, in particular, is highly predictive. Civil society engagement—both during co-creation and implementation—is also positively associated with early results.

Common sense suggests that committing to big changes and actually following through on those commitments should result in changes to government practices. In broad strokes, this section shows that the data support this idea.

This section identifies predictors of OGP early results (i.e., changes in government practices resulting from the implementation of commitments). Similar to rates of completion, overall rates of early results have remained steady since the IRM first began tracking this metric in 2016 (see Section 2.3 for more details). About one in five OGP commitments produces "major" or "outstanding" changes to government practices.

However, as with completion, this rate varies widely depending on the region and country. In this section, we look at why this may be the case. In particular, we explore whether the earlier steps in the action plan

theory of change—civil society engagement, ambition, and implementation—help to explain the differences across action plans. As in the other sections, we begin with simple bivariate analyses.

4.5.1 Civil society engagement is positively correlated with early results

First, the general pattern of this paper holds for changes in government practice. Just as we saw that more public involvement is associated with better ambition and completion, we see that it is also associated with more changes in government practice.

Specifically, a positive relationship exists between the level of public influence during implementation and the rate of strong early results. Figure 4.9 below shows that as government officials increasingly involve civil society during implementation, action plans tend to see a higher rate of results. More specifically, the average rate of strong early results for action plans at the "Collaborate" tier is 33%, compared to 11% for those in the "No consultation" tier.

[105] These data are limited to relatively new assessments, which is why it is not evaluated here. However, the dataset is growing and will be an important resource going forward.

[106] The IRM data on implementation of repositories is limited in scope but growing. It covers only 25 countries at the time of writing.

[107] OGP Support to Countries and Locals, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/ogp-support-to-countries-and-locals/

Strong early results refer to the rate of commitments that produce "major" or "outstanding" changes in government practices.

High ambition refers to commitments with "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact. High completion refers to commitments with "substantial" or "full" implementation. Strong early results refer to commitments that produce "major" or "outstanding" changes in government practices.
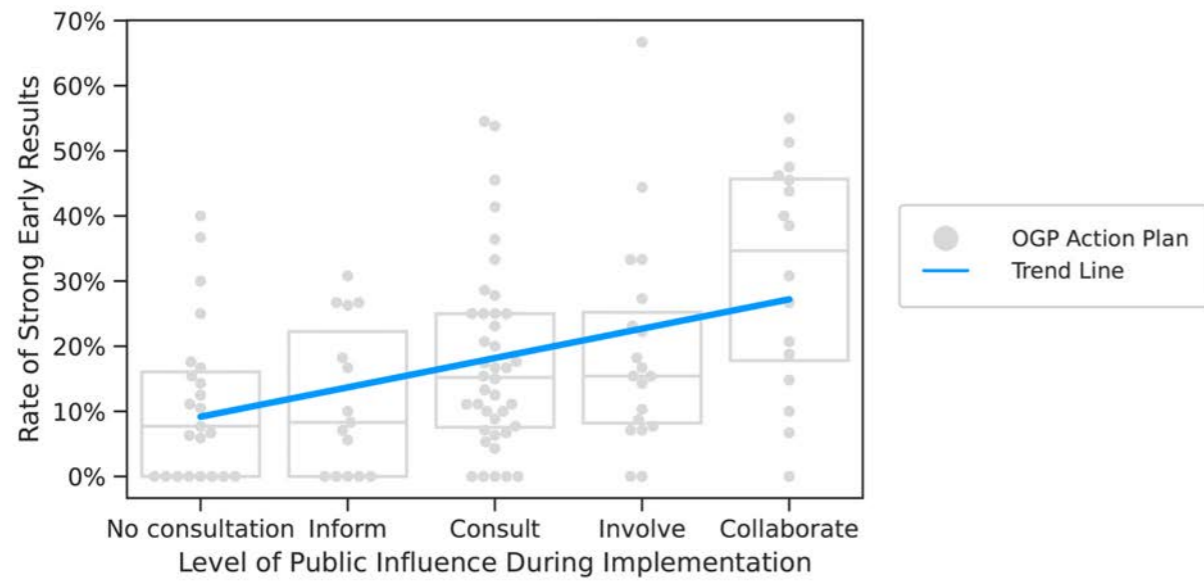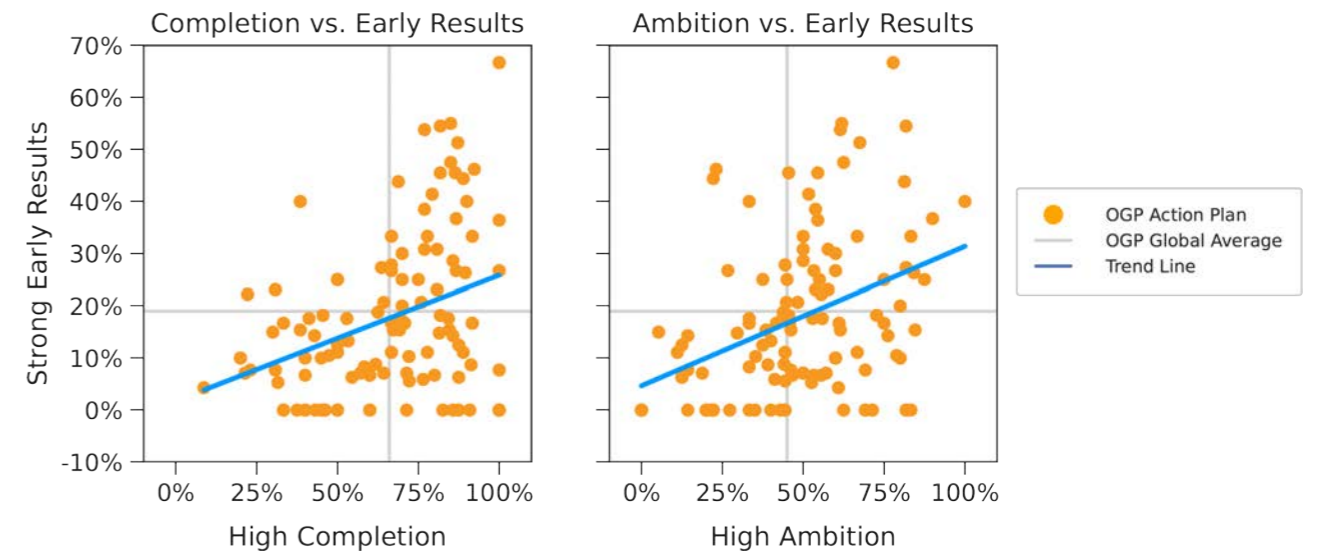

We do not see as strong of a positive relationship when looking at the mere existence of a multi-stakeholder forum. Still, action plans discussed at a regular forum average about 22% strong early results, compared to 16% for other plans. This merits a closer look. The previous section demonstrated that higher levels of public influence during implementation and the existence of a multi-stakeholder forum are associated with higher completion, which we expect to be a factor in achieving early results. For this reason, we control for completion and re-examine these relationships in the multivariate regression analysis later (in Section 4.5.3).

4.5.2 Ambition and completion are both positively correlated with early results

Ambition and completion are positively associated with strong early results. Figure 4.10 visualizes these relationships. This makes sense intuitively. It is hard to expect an action plan to produce changes in government practices if most commitments were not started or saw only limited implementation. Likewise, more ambitious commitments are inherently more likely to stretch existing practices if implemented. To determine if these relationships hold when adding in other possible explanatory variables, we turn to the multivariate regression next.

4.5.3 Ambition and completion are statistically significant predictors of early results

An action plan's levels of ambition and completion are the strongest predictors of early results. Figure 4.11 below presents the multivariate regression results, showing the influence of ambition and completion in comparison to the other explanatory and control variables.

Ambition, in particular, is highly predictive of early results. A regression coefficient of about 0.3 indicates that an action plan with all ambitious commitments on average has a 30% higher rate of early results than an action plan that lacks any ambitious commitments. While completion is also a strong predictor (regression coefficient of 0.22), its relationship with early results is weaker.

Future research could also further examine these relationships at the commitment level, where experience suggests the relationship would be even stronger. Fully implemented, ambitious commitments tend to beget actual changes in practice.

Regression coefficients for pooled OLS model. Dependent variable is strong early results, defined as the rate of commitments that produce "major" or "outstanding" changes in government practices.
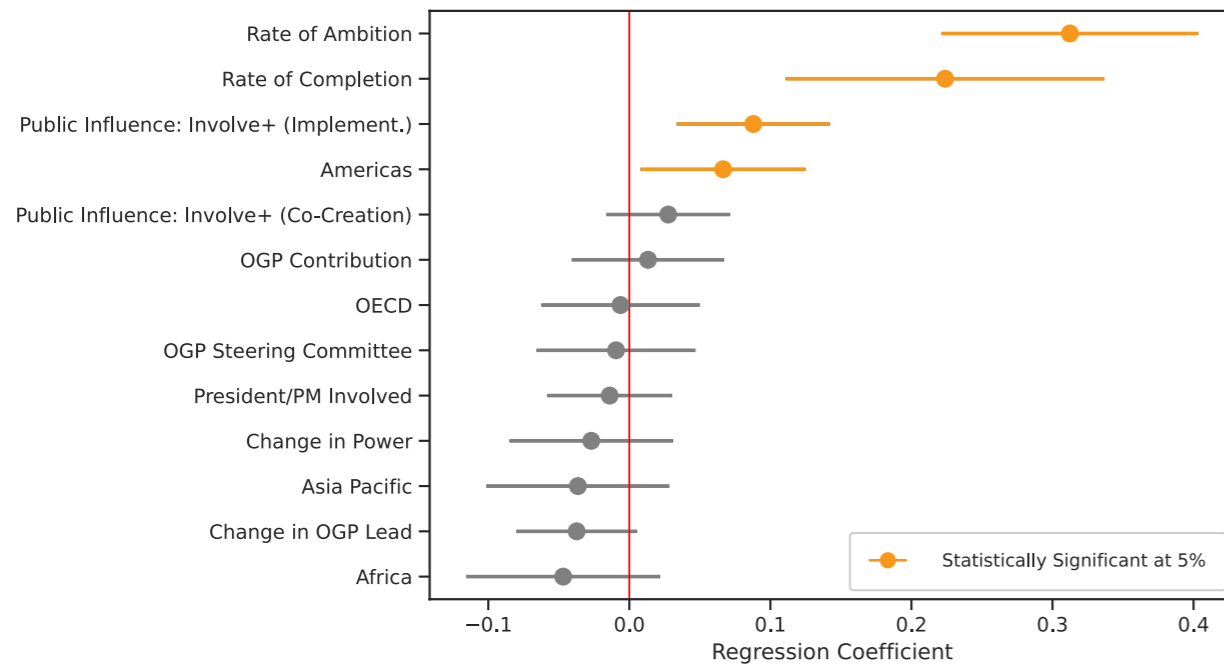
4.5.4 Civil society engagement is a statistically significant predictor of early results

From the previous section, we know that civil society engagement during implementation is positively associated with completion. Yet even when we control for completion in this analysis, the level of public influence during implementation remains a statistically significant predictor of strong early results. Specifically, involving civil society during implementation (by responding to inputs, i.e., engaging in dialogue) is associated with a nearly 10% increase in the rate of strong early results. While this does not necessarily point to a causal relationship, it does at least indicate that the connection between the two metrics goes beyond their links to completion.

The relationship mostly holds when looking at multi-stakeholder forums instead of the level of public influence. The regression coefficient drops to 0.05, but the relationship remains statistically significant (p-value is .026). Together, this finding and the finding around the level of public influence provide strong statistical evidence for the positive association between civil society engagement and early results.

4.5.5 Other predictors of early results

Regionally, action plans from the Americas show the highest rate of early results. On the other end of the spectrum, African action plans on average produce fewer early results, though the difference between these plans and those from Europe (the baseline in the model) is not statistically significant.

Instability of the OGP lead agency is also associated with fewer strong results. The negative relationship is statistically significant at the 10% level in the model presented above and at the 5% level when including the multi-stakeholder forum instead of the level of public influence. It is unclear how this instability could affect early results if not through lower rates of implementation. A possible explanation is that changes in the lead agency could make it harder to

disseminate action plan outputs across government, making it harder to translate completed milestones into changes in practices. Other institutional variables, such as changes in power and involvement of the head of government's office, are not statistically associated with early results.

Finally, there is a notable positive association between the level of public influence *during co-creation* and the rate of early results. This relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level when including the multi-stakeholder forum in the model.

There is no obvious explanation for this link. One theory is that an individual commitment may be more likely to produce concrete changes when civil society is involved in designing it. While this would probably also produce a more ambitious commitment, it may not be reflected in the action plan's overall rate of ambition, as civil society does not influence all commitments equally. This would explain why this relationship is significant even after controlling for the action plan's overall rate of ambition.

This finding points to the value of a future analysis looking at commitments instead of action plans. Although we currently lack data on the strength of co-creation of individual commitments, this may be an important avenue for further investigation.

4.5.6 Implications

The two main findings of this section have several implications for OGP and its partners:

- **Completion and (particularly) ambition are key predictors of early results.** This validates the idea that stronger commitment design is associated with stronger results. More importantly, however, this points to the importance of raising ambition in OGP action plans. As documented in Section 2.2, rates of ambition are not improving over time. This analysis suggests that one of the smartest investments—for the OGP Support Unit, partners, and funders—is in the co-creation process to ensure that high-quality commitments make it into action plans. While completion is also predictive of early results, the weaker relationship suggests that *working on commitment design is a higher return on investment, especially at the scale of dozens of action plans.*

- **Civil society engagement throughout the OGP process is linked to stronger results.** As in the section on predicting completion, this reinforces the need for OGP members to continue to make progress in establishing forums, creating repositories, and engaging civil society in dialogue. In addition, the positive relationship between early results and the quality of the co-creation process provides further support for the idea that civil society engagement *throughout* the OGP process is critical for success.

Everything in this chapter thus far has focused on explaining outcomes that are internal to OGP. We now turn to the final step in the OGP action plan theory of change, which looks beyond outcomes evaluated by the IRM. Specifically, we look to see if the OGP outcomes presented thus far—ambition, completion, and early results—relate to broader improvements in open government.

4.6 The link between OGP outcomes and real-world changes

Advancing beneficial ownership transparency and open budgets through OGP action plans is positively associated with improved "real-world" performance. Open contracting, on the other hand, remains inconclusive, and data for other areas is currently inadequate for such analysis.

The final part of this chapter explores the relationship between OGP outcomes and real-world changes. Although the strong early results documented by the IRM represent meaningful changes to the status quo, the goal of OGP is ultimately to translate these sometimes isolated gains into broader cultural shifts toward open government. As a result, this section looks at the relationship between OGP outcomes and measurable open government trends.

Specifically, we focus here on studying associations between OGP outcomes in specific policy areas and changes in relevant third-party indices. In effect, we are exploring whether strong outcomes within the OGP framework are reflected in external assessments. It is important to note that this analysis does not look at whether OGP produces impacts. The link between OGP commitments and practical improvements in people's lives is beyond the scope of this paper.[108]

We look at three policy areas in particular: beneficial ownership transparency, open contracting, and fiscal transparency. These policy areas are by no means representative of the reforms that OGP members are carrying out, but they meet the following criteria, which are required for this kind of analysis:

- **Widespread adoption**: These policy areas have seen high levels of adoption by OGP members as well as many ambitious commitments. As a result,

we hypothesize that results in these areas are most likely to be associated with improvements in third-party assessments.

- **Narrowly defined:** These policy areas are narrow enough in scope that we can make reasonable comparisons between OGP reforms and third-party data. For instance, while OGP commitments may have moved the needle on anti-corruption, corruption is too broad of a topic for meaningful analysis. OGP anti-corruption commitments, which tackle issues like whistleblowing, conflicts of interest, and audits, are not comparable to a general corruption index. As an example, it would not be a reasonable hypothesis that passage of a strong whistleblower protection law would, by itself, result in public perception of less grand corruption in a country.

- **Existing longitudinal data:** To identify trends over time, we require third-party data going back to the early years of OGP. For some topics, such as implementation of RTI laws and lobbying transparency, we lack large-scale, cross-country panel data altogether.

We conduct two types of analyses. First, we compare changes in third-party metrics between OGP countries and non-OGP countries. Second, we compare changes between two sets of OGP countries: (1) those that have made progress through their action plans and (2) those that have not. We use the following five metrics to capture progress made through OGP:

- **Any/many commitments:** At least one or several commitments made in the respective policy area[109]

- **Ambitious commitments:** At least one ambitious commitment made in the respective policy area[110]

- **Potentially "transformative" commitments:** At least one potentially "transformative" commitment made in the respective policy area

- **Commitments over multiple action plans:** At least one commitment made in the respective policy area in multiple action plans

- **Strong early results:** At least one commitment has produced strong early results[111]

This method gives us a sense of whether OGP outcomes are associated with real-world changes. However, this is not a causal analysis. We cannot directly attribute improvements on third-party metrics to OGP for many reasons. For one, OGP countries share many characteristics that make them more likely to achieve open government reforms than non-OGP countries, such as higher income and more democratic systems of government. Even within OGP, commitments represent only a small subset of the many open government reforms that countries are implementing, making it difficult to isolate OGP's effect. Causal analysis is essential for understanding what works in OGP but will likely remain the domain of small-*n* qualitative methods for the near future.[112] With these caveats in mind, we turn to the analysis.

4.6.1 Beneficial ownership transparency

OGP countries have shown greater levels of improvement in beneficial ownership transparency (BOT) than non-OGP countries. In addition, OGP countries that have advanced BOT through their action plans have performed slightly better over time on third-party metrics than other OGP countries.

The third-party metric used in this subsection is the Tax Justice Network's Financial Secrecy Index (FSI). Between 2013 and 2020, the FSI has tracked whether countries are registering and publishing beneficial ownership information.[113] For reasons of sample size, we focus here on BO registration, which refers to whether or not governments require *all* companies to record their BO information.[114] This indicator does not cover the quality of the information collected, such as how often it is updated, the threshold for ownership, or if it is validated. It also only looks at companies, not other legal vehicles like trusts or partnerships.

Most OGP countries have improved in requiring the collection of BO information. According to the FSI, no country required all companies to record BO information in 2013. Today, just over 60% of OGP countries meet this mark.[115] This stands in contrast to the rate for non-OGP countries, which is just over 35%. This difference is statistically significant at the 1% level.[116]

Within OGP, countries that have made progress on BOT in their action plans have improved slightly more than other countries. Figure 4.12 below breaks down the rate of improvement by the OGP performance metrics mentioned earlier.[117] The graph points to the slightly higher levels of improvement among countries that advanced BOT through their action plans, particularly those that made commitments across multiple action plans and those that made potentially "transformative" commitments.

This analysis suggests that strong OGP performers in BOT show higher rates of real-world improvements. However, the differences in the percentages shown in Figure 4.12 are *not statistically significant*, in part

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[108] For example, this paper does not examine whether the introduction of a beneficial ownership register results in fewer potholes because local officials have a harder time embezzling funds. This type of impact is not measured across a broad enough range of policies and contexts, nor is the timeframe comparable to that of an OGP action plan.

[109] For policy areas in which nearly all OGP countries have made one commitment, "many" commitments is defined as more commitments made than the average across OGP.

[110] As in the rest of this report, ambitious commitment is defined as a commitment that is relevant to open government values and of "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact according to the IRM's potential impact indicator.

[111] As in the rest of this report, strong early results is defined as a commitment that produced "major" or "outstanding" early results according to the IRM's "Did it Open Government?" indicator.

[112] Munyema Hasan, Launching an Evaluation of OGP, 9 October 2019, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/launching-an-evaluation-of-ogp/.

[113] The first edition of the FSI dates back to 2009, but the specific questions around availability and registration of company ownership information first appear in their current form in the 2013 edition. See the Annex for more details.

[114] Too few countries are publishing comprehensive beneficial ownership information for us to draw conclusions. According to the latest edition of the FSI in 2020, three OGP countries are now publishing comprehensive beneficial ownership data: Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. Two of these countries (Ireland and the United Kingdom) have advanced BOT through commitments in their OGP action plans. This is of course too small of a sample from which to draw conclusions.

[115] All EU-based OGP member countries are required to make progress on beneficial ownership according to EU law.

[116] This is applying a simple two-proportion, two-tailed Z-test using the statsmodels package in Python.

[117] We do not include early results as one of the performance metrics as only four OGP countries (Armenia, Kenya, Nigeria, and the United Kingdom) have implemented a BOT-related commitment that achieved strong early results.

due to the small sample sizes and binary nature of the data. Even if they were significant, the improvements are not necessarily *caused by* progress made through OGP, as explained earlier. In this sense, the OGP action plan might serve more as a way to highlight, reinforce, or get credit for reforms initiated elsewhere.

FIGURE 4.12. OGP countries addressing BOT have improved slightly more in BO registration

OGP countries that address BOT in their action plans saw greater improvements in the collection of beneficial ownership data between 2013 and 2020.
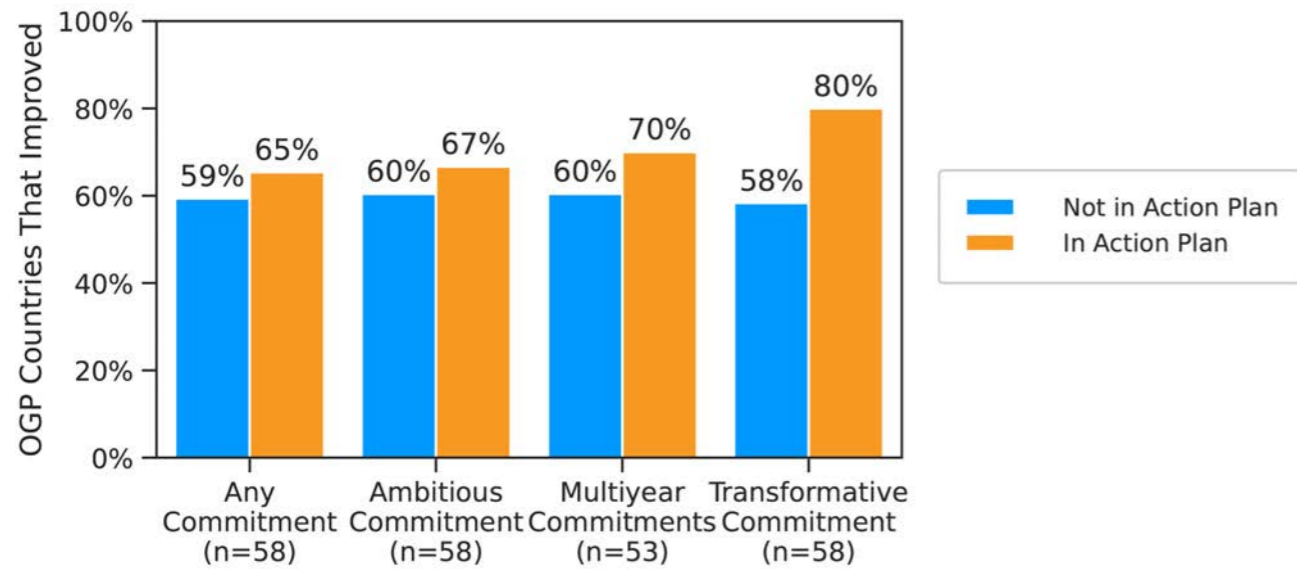
Source: Tax Justice Network, Financial Secrecy Index

The analysis points to the need for further research on this topic. As the third-party data matures and more OGP countries achieve strong results through their action plans, it will become easier to understand the relationship between BOT-related OGP reforms and real-world changes. Future research could also look at the role of OGP interventions in this area, such as Multi-Donor Trust Fund support and the Beneficial Ownership Leadership Group.

4.6.2 Open contracting

OGP countries appear to have achieved more progress in open contracting than non-OGP countries. However, no clear relationship exists between strong OGP performance and greater improvements in third-party scores.

This subsection uses data from the Open Data Barometer (ODB), which tracked the global availability and quality of contracting data (among other types of data) from 2013 to 2017. ODB scores range from 0 to 100, with points awarded for various elements of open data quality, such as machine readability, bulk downloads, open licenses, and regular updates.

While this dataset is the most comprehensive of its kind, it presents several limitations. First, the data does not extend to the present. As a result, it does not capture the latest trends and may not reflect OGP results from recent years. This is an issue since most open contracting commitments in OGP are recent. Second, the last edition of the ODB looked only at 30 countries, which limits the sample available for longitudinal analysis.[118]

With these limitations in mind, OGP countries show higher rates of improvements than non-OGP countries. Between 2013 and 2017, OGP countries improved by an average of 24 points. On the other hand, non-OGP

countries improved by 17 points on average, though only six non-OGP countries are in the sample. This difference is not statistically significant, in large part due to the small sample size.

Unlike with BOT, there is no clear relationship between strong OGP performance in open contracting and improvements over time on ODB scores. Figure 4.13 below illustrates how OGP countries have improved according to the four performance metrics for which we have data.[119] No clear trend emerges.[120] Moreover, the differences between the categories are negligible and largely due to rounding.[121]

FIGURE 4.13. No relationship between OGP outcomes and open contracting improvements

OGP countries that address open contracting in their action plans improved about as much as other countries in the availability of procurement information between 2013 and 2017.
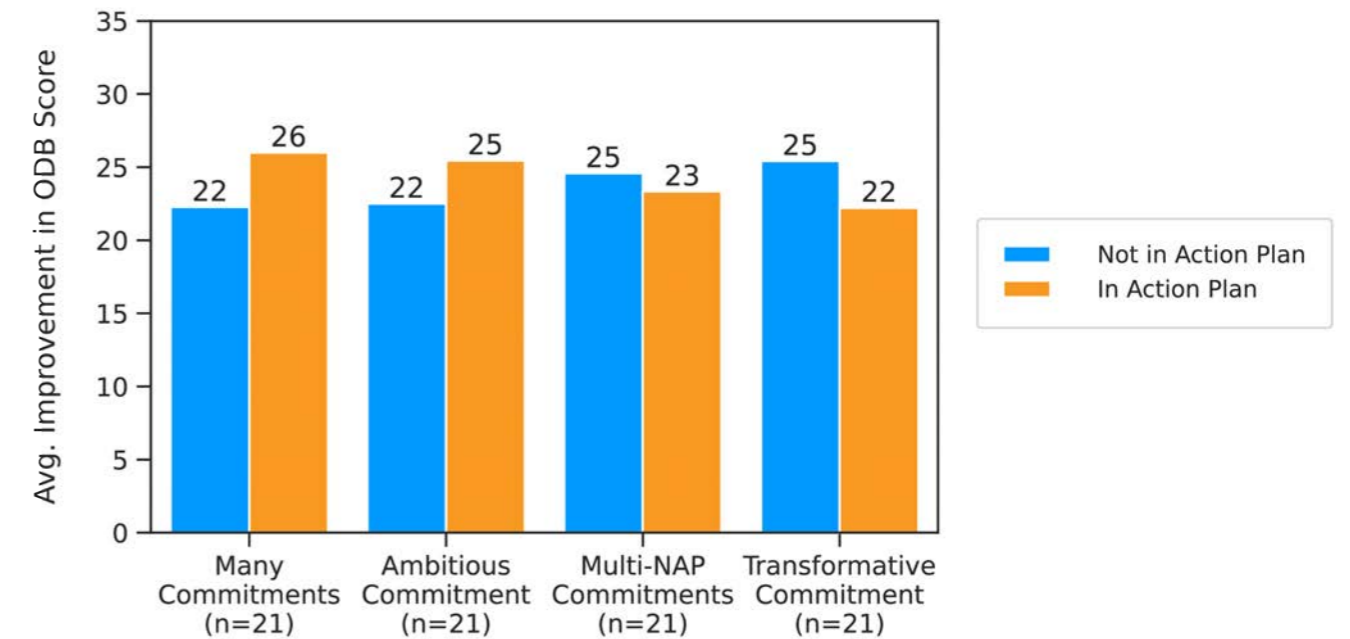
Source: Open Data Barometer

The ODB limitations mentioned above are the likeliest explanation for this non-finding, especially the gap in time between the latest ODB assessments and many of the OGP open contracting commitments. Another possible explanation is that many open contracting commitments are not strictly about data availability. Unlike the ODB, they also cover topics like involving civil society in planning and making the contracting process more accessible for marginalized groups. As a result, the scope of OGP commitments and that of the ODB do not align perfectly.

As the number of open contracting commitments in OGP increases, future research could focus on a subset of commitments that better match the third-party data. In addition, new sources of third-party data on procurement practices, such as the Global Data Barometer, could enable an analysis with greater global coverage that factors in the latest trends.

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[118] It focused on countries that either publicly committed to adopt the International Open Data Charter Principles or the G20 Anti-Corruption Open Data Principles.

[119] Only three countries in the sample have made a potentially "transformative" commitment. Given these small sample sizes, these metrics are not shown in Figure 4.13.

[120] Since only four OGP countries have not made a commitment related to open contracting, we used the average number of commitments across all countries (1.4) to raise the threshold to be above the average (so in this case at least two commitments made).

[121] The differences are not statistically significant and are sensitive to individual country scores given the small sample sizes.

4.6.3 Fiscal transparency

We see a positive relationship between OGP membership and improvement over time on fiscal transparency scores. We also find evidence that strong OGP performers have improved more than other OGP countries.

The third-party data for this subsection comes from the International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Survey (OBS). The OBS covers 228 questions related to fiscal transparency, participation, and oversight. We focus here on fiscal transparency scores, as this is where we have seen the bulk of OGP commitments. The answers to 109 OBS questions in this area form

a score between 0 and 100. In this analysis, we look at how these country scores have changed between 2012 and the latest edition of the OBS in 2019.

At first glance, there appears to be no clear link between OGP membership and improvement over time. Figure 4.14 below visualizes changes in OBS scores over time by OGP membership status. The plot on the far left shows the data for all countries. While it reveals that most OGP countries have improved, as evidenced by the bulge of points above zero, the distribution of data does not differ much from that of non-OGP countries.
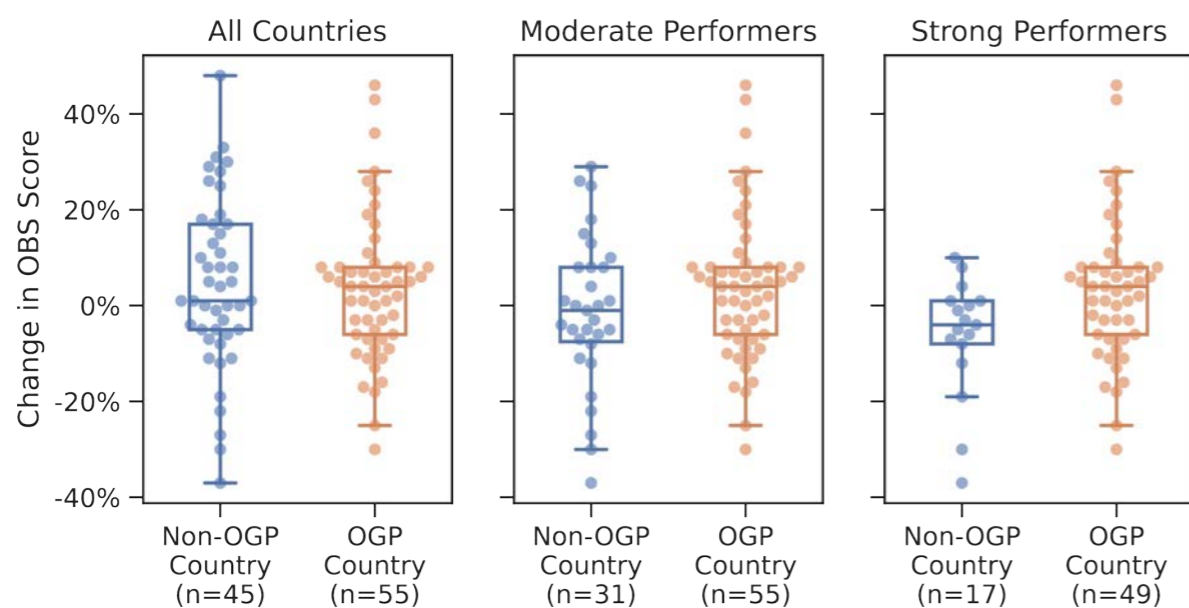
However, the variance is higher among non-OGP countries. Although the median improvement in this subset (1%) is lower than in OGP countries (4%), the mean improvement is higher. This is due to several positive outliers (at the top-left of the figure) that skew the data. These lower-income countries started with very weak scores and have improved significantly since, such as Benin, Fiji, Myanmar, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe.

This finding suggests that the starting point—and therefore the country sample—matters. OGP countries tend to be higher income and more open to begin with than other countries, especially given that publishing key budget documents is among the eligibility criteria for joining the Partnership. As a result, improvement within OGP countries may be more incremental. To account for this, the two plots on the right of Figure 4.14 look at changes over time among countries that

partially and fully meet the OGP eligibility criterion around fiscal openness. The plots show that the differences between OGP and non-OGP countries become starker when we control for their starting point. Future research in this area could incorporate additional controls, such as regional and income-level controls, to further account for cross-country differences.

As for the differences in improvement *within* OGP countries, we see that strong OGP performers have generally improved more than other OGP countries. Figure 4.15 below shows the median change[122] in OBS scores across four metrics of performance.[123] Across the board, OGP countries that have advanced fiscal transparency in their action plans—be it through several commitments across action plans, potentially "transformative" commitments, or strong early results— have improved slightly more than other OGP countries.

FIGURE 4.14. OGP countries have improved more on fiscal transparency than non-OGP countries

Changes in Open Budget Scores between 2012 and 2019. "Moderate" performers include countries that received at least two out of four points on the fiscal openness eligibility criterion in 2012. Strong performers received all four points.

Source: International Budget Partnership, Open Budget Survey

FIGURE 4.15. Strong OGP performers in fiscal transparency have improved more over time

OGP countries that address fiscal transparency in their action plans saw greater improvements in their Open Budget Survey scores between 2012 and 2019.
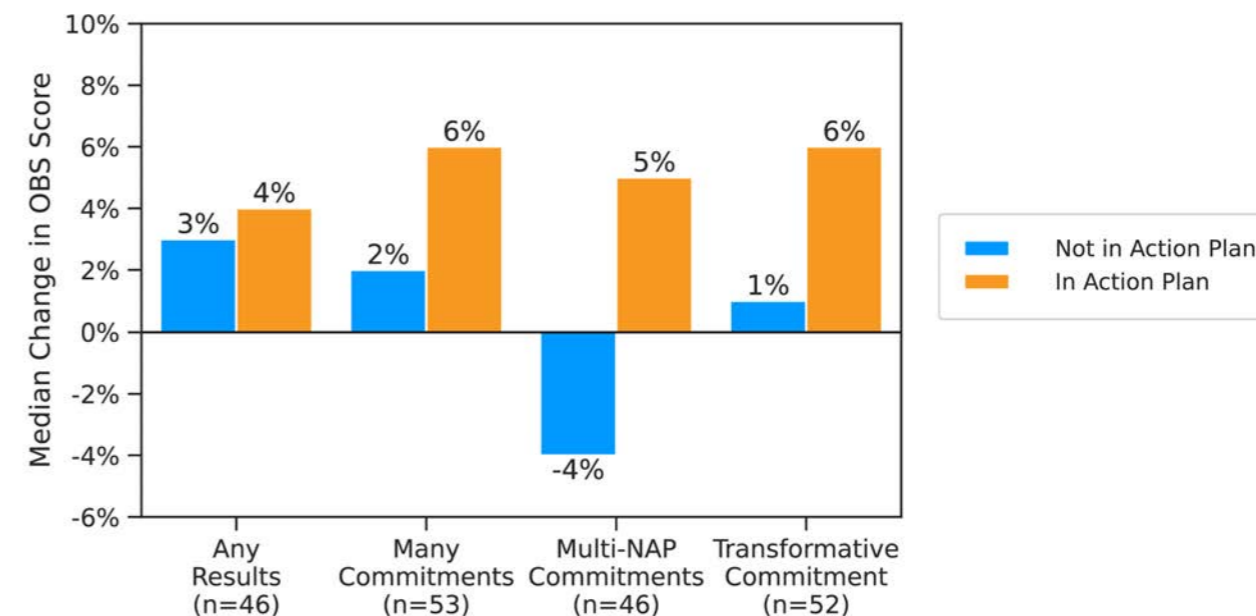
Source: International Budget Partnership, Open Budget Survey

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[122] Given the wide range in changes over time on OBS scores, the averages in this subsection are particularly susceptible to outliers. As a result, we display median, rather than mean, averages in Figure 4.15.

[123] As in the contracting subsection, nearly all OGP countries have made at least one commitment related to fiscal transparency. As a result, we use the average across countries (6.3) as an arbitrary threshold to consider whether an OGP country has made "many" commitments in the area. As for ambition, only seven OGP countries have not made an ambitious commitment related to fiscal transparency. As a result, we focus only on potentially "transformative" commitments, for which there is a wider spread.

As in the other subsections, several caveats apply. First, the sample sizes are relatively small. For example, the difference in scores between OGP countries that have made commitments across multiple action plans appears largest. However, only seven OGP countries have not had commitments in multiple action plans. In addition, and partly as a result of the small sample sizes, the differences between categories are not statistically significant.

Still, this analysis suggests that strong OGP performers on fiscal transparency have also experienced real-world, measurable improvements. Future research could look at whether this finding holds across other areas of fiscal openness, such as public participation in fiscal policy and fiscal oversight. In addition, more targeted analysis using specific third-party indicators—rather than composite scores—may yield more detailed insights.

4.6.3 Implications

The analysis in this section suggests that OGP members—and specifically members that advance key policy areas through their action plans—are more likely to see concrete improvements on third-party metrics. On the other hand, the open contracting subsection suggests that this phenomenon may be policy-area dependent. This has several implications.

- **Validating the theory of change:** First, this analysis validates the final step of the OGP action plan theory of change (i.e., that OGP outcomes such as ambitious commitments and strong early results are associated with positive real-world changes). While this does not imply that OGP is *causing* these improvements, it does also validate the OGP Support Unit's decision to focus on supporting a subset of policy areas that may be more likely to produce impacts.

- **Researching more policy areas:** The second implication is that the OGP Support Unit would benefit from understanding the link between OGP action plans and real-world changes in additional policy areas. This knowledge can inform future strategy, especially as it relates to focus policy area support.

- **More implementation-focused, independent data**: Third, to carry out the research mentioned in the second point, we need more granular third-party data. At the very least, the open contracting subsection illustrates the difficulty of drawing conclusions from data that is limited in scope. Many open government policy areas—such as lobbying, asset disclosure, and implementation of right to information laws—lack global, cross-country data altogether. Initiatives such as the Global Data Barometer will serve to fill these gaps and enable stronger analyses.[124]

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[124] OGP is a supporting partner of the Global Data Barometer.

5. Conclusion

This Vital Signs research validates the OGP model of domestically owned action plans and government-civil society collaboration. It also offers a new framework for understanding how OGP action plans work. In the previous chapters, we tested a simple OGP action plan theory of change. The hypothesis was that meaningful co-creation between government and civil society produces ambitious action plans, which—when implemented—yield early results and real-world policy changes. This paper's findings largely support this hypothesis yet point to a slightly more nuanced framework.

In particular, the findings suggest that better civil society engagement is associated not only with more ambitious action plans but with all three key OGP outcomes: ambition, completion, and early results (see Figure 5.1). These relationships hold even after factoring in other possible explanations. More limited findings suggest that these outcomes are related to real-world improvements in government openness.

This finding of how OGP works represents a core contribution of this research, but it is one of many findings with implications for OGP and the open government community. Altogether, the various findings presented in the preceding chapters point to a set of takeaways in five overarching areas.

Participants at the 2018 OGP Global Summit in Tbilisi, Georgia in July 2018. Photo by OGP.

FIGURE 5.1. **Civil society engagement in OGP predicts several outcomes**

The regression analysis in Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes," points to a simplified theory of change for OGP action plans, illustrated below.
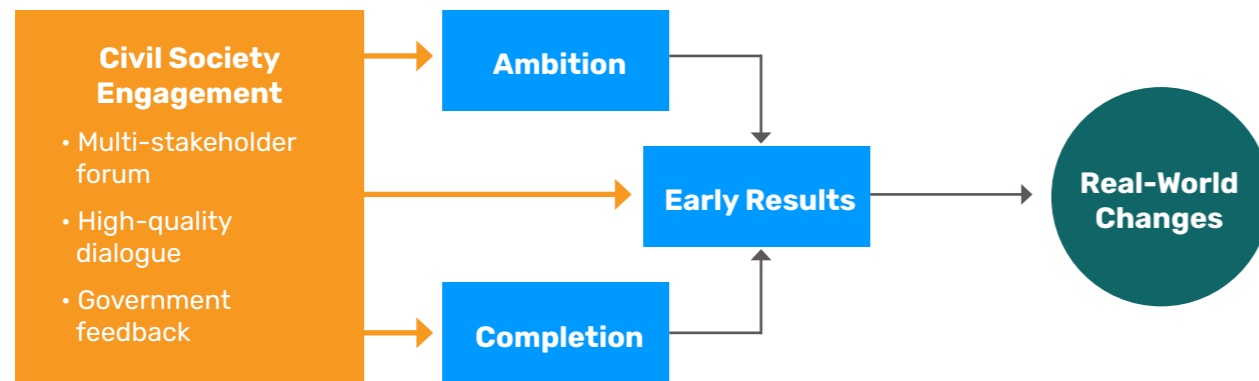
5.1 Civil society involvement in OGP

What we found:

- **Civil society involvement is associated with better outcomes.** High-quality dialogue between government and civil society predicts higher ambition, implementation, and early results. Key predictors include the existence of a multi-stakeholder forum and reasoned responses (i.e., government feedback on how civil society inputs were considered).

- **Co-creation is becoming more collaborative.** More countries are setting up multi-stakeholder forums, and the number of governments that provide a reasoned response has more than doubled since the launch of OGP.

- **Significant gaps remain.** About half of OGP countries have established a repository of proceedings and progress. Fewer than half provide reasoned responses, and a quarter of OGP processes are not open to anyone who wishes to provide inputs or be represented.

What it means:

- **Civil society involvement may help drive better OGP outcomes.** High-quality dialogue between government and civil society throughout the OGP process may be a tool that members can use to design and implement more ambitious commitments. At the same time, other factors may be driving engagement and outcomes. More granular research is needed.

- **Dialogue is improving but who can participate is sometimes limited.** One-quarter of OGP processes involve civil society but are not open to input or representation from any stakeholder. This has not improved over time. This means that while OGP forums are becoming more common and collaborative, some stakeholders remain left out.

- **Government feedback to civil society poses a challenge.** The least-implemented process requirements all relate to government feedback. These include sharing minutes, establishing repositories, and providing reasoned responses. The latter is particularly concerning, given that it is a key predictor of several OGP outcomes.

5.2 Political institutions

What we found:

- **The stability of OGP institutions predicts better early results.** Less turnover during the action plan cycle in the OGP lead office—the government agency coordinating OGP—is associated with more early results.

- **OGP institutions are becoming more stable.** The OGP lead office is seeing less turnover. In the first several years of OGP, half of the countries experienced a change in this office during the action plan cycle, compared to only about one in five today.

- **Head of government involvement in the co-creation process has declined.** Direct involvement by the head of government or their office at co-creation events and meetings peaked at 60% of countries in 2015–2016 but has since declined to about 40%.

What it means:

- **Stable OGP staffing is important.** The association between stability and early results suggests that frequent turnover may produce disjointed processes and delays. It may also point to the importance of having effective government actors leading OGP activities.

- **OGP is becoming more institutionalized.** The increasing stability of the OGP lead office, combined with the growth in multi-stakeholder forums, suggests that OGP institutions—and by extension, OGP processes—are growing more predictable and better able to weather political change.

- **More research is needed on high-level political engagement.** The decline in head of government involvement during co-creation does not imply that political buy-in for OGP is decreasing. It may point to the increasing institutionalization of OGP instead. Future research into other proxies for high-level political engagement is needed.

5.3 Action plan ambition

What we found:

- **Action plan ambition is the strongest predictor of positive early results.** On average, an action plan in which all commitments are ambitious has 33% more strong early results than an action plan that lacks ambitious commitments after controlling for other factors.

- **Action plan ambition has not improved over time.** The percentage of commitments with "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact has slightly declined over time, though the decline is not statistically significant.

- **Anti-corruption commitments are more ambitious than other commitments.** They also generate strong early results. However, they are often less frequently included in action plans than commitments in other areas.

What it means:

- **Strong commitment design matters.** Co-creating ambitious commitments is critical to ensuring that commitments translate into concrete changes in government practices.

- **Raising ambition is particularly needed in certain policy areas.** Fewer than half of commitments are ambitious in critical areas such as inclusion, access to justice, and public service delivery.

- **Anti-corruption commitments are smart investments.** Policy areas with consistently ambitious commitments like whistleblowing, open contracting, and extractive industries offer specific types of reforms that members can adapt to their own contexts.

5.4 Action plan implementation

What we found:

- **Rates of implementation have remained steady.** About two-thirds of commitments consistently see "substantial" or "full" implementation by the end of the action plan period.

- **Income is the strongest predictor of commitment implementation.** The difference in the rate of implementation between the highest- and lowest-income OGP countries is nearly 35%, even when controlling for other factors.

- **Sustained, high-quality dialogue predicts stronger implementation.** Action plans discussed regularly at a multi-stakeholder forum have a higher rate of implementation and yield more significant changes in government practices.

What it means:

- **An implementation gap exists.** Some OGP countries—particularly lower-income countries—struggle to meaningfully implement their commitments. This may be due to financial and technical constraints.

- **Civil society involvement may help to strengthen OGP implementation.** The existence of multi-stakeholder forums may predict higher implementation because they enable civil society to monitor progress, pose questions of implementers, and advise them on how to overcome challenges.

5.5 Fundamental freedoms

What we found:

- **Civic space in OGP countries continues to decline.** In recent years, the safety of activists and journalists, in particular, has worsened in more than half of OGP countries. Levels of civil society engagement are also falling. For the first time, five OGP countries fail the OGP Values Check, which measures the degree to which civil society can operate freely without government repression or interference.

- **OGP commitments related to civic space are uncommon.** Fewer than a quarter of OGP members made a commitment related to civic space in the latest round of action plans. These commitments also tend to produce fewer early results than other commitments.

What it means:

- **OGP countries are improving in specific areas of open government but declining on systemic issues.** While OGP countries are becoming more transparent on several measures—such as availability of budgetary and beneficial ownership data—fundamental freedoms remain an urgent area of concern.

- **OGP reforms run the risk of being ineffective.** Open government reforms cannot achieve their fundamental purpose without a strong enabling environment and engaged citizens to hold government officials accountable.

5.6 Avenues for future research and learning

The Vital Signs research suggests a path forward for OGP-focused research and learning. This entails two concrete activities: addressing existing data gaps and exploring new research topics. Each is described below.

5.6.1 OGP data gaps

As part of the Vital Signs research, we identified several gaps in the current data that OGP collects and publishes. The Annex describes these limitations in detail. Here, we briefly outline the two key gaps:

1. **OGP lacks structured data on who participates in the OGP process.** This includes which types of civil society organizations and government institutions participate. This lack of structured data prevents an empirical assessment of the diversity of participation in OGP, including how participating actors have changed over time, which ones are missing, and how they differ across countries. It also obscures the level of participation of marginalized groups. Given that inclusion and "broadening the base" are strategic priorities of OGP, this is an area of particular importance.

2. **OGP does not document longer-term changes in government practices.** IRM assessments of early results only consider changes that occur during the action plan period. Therefore, early results documented by the IRM represent a significant undercount of actual results, as many reforms take several years to produce tangible changes in government practices. Consequently, it is difficult to identify where the OGP platform broadly and OGP commitments specifically are producing impact.

5.6.2 Future research topics

The five main conclusions point to several areas for future research that would build on this work:

- **Investigating how collaborative OGP processes may affect outcomes:** Identifying the specific dynamics at play would help reformers tailor their processes to ensure better results. For example, more research is needed around which characteristics of forums are more conducive to better dialogue and how repositories enable public monitoring. A similar yet distinct line of research is whether participatory processes tend to produce more results in civic participation and public accountability.

- **Isolating associations at the commitment level:** This paper's focus on action plans misses nuances at the level of individual commitments. Questions remain around whether more ambitious commitments are harder to implement and if co-creation of particular commitments is associated with stronger results.

- **Benchmarking OGP implementation against other initiatives:** This paper notes the difficulty in evaluating the strength of implementation in OGP without comparing it to other international initiatives. Pledge-based models, in particular, offer an opportunity to compare completion rates and determine if the OGP model is more conducive to following through on commitments.

- **Further exploring the link between OGP outcomes and real-world changes:** This paper looked at outcomes in three policy areas, but these and other policy areas deserve a closer look. Data from the upcoming Global Data Barometer will serve as an important source of cross-country, implementation-focused insights that should enable new analyses in this area.

- **Studying the effect of the OGP Support Unit in achieving outcomes:** Due to a lack of mature data, this paper does not evaluate how the Support Unit itself influences outcomes. However, in the past year, the Support Unit has begun collecting structured data on its interventions and contributions to member-level results. Using these data to identify which interventions are linked to better results will be critical for the Support Unit to develop more targeted and evidence-based strategies.

Annex. Methods and Data

The OGP Vital Signs research relies on nearly ten years of data from IRM reports and other data-producing organizations. This Annex describes how this dataset was constructed, how it was analyzed, and the limitations of the methods used.

About the Vital Signs data

The main Vital Signs dataset contains information about 219 action plans submitted by 95 OGP members at the national and local levels. The data covers 85 fields in six categories: OGP basics, OGP institutions, process performance, action plan performance, elections, and general governance indicators. All OGP data on institutions, processes, and action plans are derived from IRM reports, which are publicly available on the OGP website. For details about the IRM's structure, method, and products, see their web page.

The main Vital Signs dataset is available online here. It was last updated in October 2021. The original sources of the data are also available online. The action plan performance data are aggregated based on IRM data on individual commitments, which is available here. The data on process performance is derived from IRM process evaluations, which are collected here.

In terms of timing, we consider commitments made (and results achieved) by members going back to 2012. Given the lag in reporting, the most recent IRM assessments date to 2019 for ambition and several process indicators and 2018 for completion and early results.

Overview of variables

Table A.1 below provides details about each of the Vital Signs metrics analyzed in the report. These are the same metrics listed in Table 1 in the paper's introduction. It is important to mention that the data sources vary in their rigor and validation. The IRM, for example, is peer reviewed and based on primary research. All reports are reviewed by staff members for consistency, an international experts panel for quality, and government and civil society stakeholders for accuracy. Where indicated as a source, the Support Unit codes data based on the narratives in IRM reports. This is not peer reviewed. Finally, see each third-party data producer's website for details about their method.

Vital Signs: Types, values, and sources

Vital Sign	Indicator	Type	Values	Source
Process: How open and participatory is action plan design and implementation?	Basic and advanced process	3-point ordinal scale	No evidence of action, in progress, meets standard	IRM
	Reasoned response	Binary	Yes, no	IRM
	Regular forum	Binary	Yes, no	IRM
	Level of public influence	6-point ordinal scale based on compound elements	No consultation, Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower[125]	IRM
Institutions: How are governments set up to implement their plans?	Head of government involvement	Binary	Yes, no	Support unit staff
	Stability of OGP lead agency	Binary	Yes, no	Support unit staff
Ambition: How well designed are OGP action plans?	Scope	Continuous	0–21 (policy areas)	Support unit staff
	Potential impact	4-point ordinal scale	None, minor, moderate, transformative[126]	IRM
	Verifiability	Binary	Yes, no	IRM
	Relevance	Binary	Yes, no	IRM
Completion: Do action plans meet their own stated aims?	Completion	4-point ordinal scale	Not started, limited, substantial, complete	IRM
Early results: Do action plans change governance practices?	Early results	4-point ordinal scale	Did not change, marginal, major, outstanding	IRM
Real-world changes: How do OGP countries perform according to third-party metrics?	Various indicators, types, and possible values. Sources for Chapter 2, "Policy Areas," are listed on OGP Eligibility Criteria page and OGP Global Report methods page. Sources for Chapter 3, "Policy Areas," include Financial Secrecy Index, Open Data Barometer, and Open Budget Survey.			

Variable construction

The IRM method changes over time. This is because the IRM is primarily an accountability and learning tool. As such, what is most important in the OGP process changes over time, as governments adapt, implementers learn, and more pertinent performance measures become available. Ultimately, the data produced by the IRM is an added benefit—not its primary purpose—though the *OGP Articles of Governance* do require the IRM to code and publish as many variables as possible in open data format. Despite the methodological changes over time, many measures have remained reasonably consistent over time. To verify this, we ran a series of correlation tests. The goal was to find the relationship between the new assessments introduced by the IRM in 2017 and the prior assessments.[127] Of course, these correlations are a crude way of measuring methodological consistency, as countries inevitably fluctuate in their performance over time for various reasons, such as new administrations, increased learning, or major events such as the COVID-19 crisis.

Only countries with multiple action plans, assessed using both new and old IRM criteria, were included in the analysis. Countries with a gap of more than two years between their latest two IRM reports were removed from the sample. Spearman's *rho* ranked tests were used to determine the correlation coefficients. The results are listed in Table A.2 below. To see all of the correlation coefficients and related visualizations, see this notebook in Google Colab.

TABLE A.2. **Correlations between new and old IRM criteria**

Measure	Change in Methodology	Correlation Coefficient	Implication
Regular forum	New metric: Uses 3-point scale. Old metric: Used 2-point scale.	.43**	Metrics are correlated enough to form a composite variable.
Level of public influence	New metric: "Involve" tier requires the establishment of a multi-stakeholder forum. Otherwise, the spectrum is unchanged.	.34**	Weak correlation despite continuity of method implies high year-to-year change across indicators.
Reasoned response	New metric: Forum responds to public comments (on a 3-point scale). Old metric: Government provides a summary of comments (on a 2-point scale).	.39**	Metrics are correlated enough to form a composite variable.
Open vs. invitation only	None	.52**	High internal consistency. Can be used for longitudinal analysis.

*Note: ** p < 0.05*

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[125] This implies that civil society has the ultimate authority to make decisions. Since this is not a reasonable expectation in the OGP model of co-creation, this tier is left out of the visualizations in the paper.

[126] This is contingent on the IRM considering the commitment to be verifiable.

[127] In 2017, the IRM modified the way it assesses the strength of the OGP process, in line with the new OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards released in 2016, available here: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/ogp-participation-co-creation-standards/.

In general, the results presented above suggest moderate correlations between new and old IRM criteria, even on metrics that have remained largely the same over time. This points to the feasibility of combining new and old IRM criteria to form composite variables for longitudinal analysis. With this in mind, the specific methods below were used to construct the variables:

- **Regular forum:** The new three-point scale was collapsed into a binary scale with countries meeting the standard designated as positive cases and those with either "no evidence of action" or "in progress" designated as negative cases. Countries with forums that did not meet the multi-stakeholder or regularity standards were also designated as negative cases to match the old assessments. These data were then combined with the old, binary forum assessments.

- **Reasoned response:** The new three-point scale was collapsed into a binary scale with members either meeting the standard or "in progress" designated as positive cases and those with "no evidence of action" designated as negative cases.[128] This was then combined with the old, binary "Summary of Comments" assessments.

- **Level of public influence:** Given the lack of changes in the specific tiers of the spectrum, the new and old versions of the assessments were combined without any need for data transformations.

About the regression analysis

The analysis in Chapter 4, "Predicting Outcomes," involves multivariate regression analysis. The following sections describe the approach, the limitations, and how to view the detailed results.

Method

The analysis involves a pooled ordinary least square (OLS) regression (i.e., an OLS regression using panel data with observations across countries and over time). Specifically, we analyze data for each OGP action plan, broken down by the member country and year

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[128] The threshold for a positive designation is different from that for the regular forum because of earlier analysis of correlations between new and old IRM criteria. For details, see this notebook.

Data limitations

The IRM data analyzed in this paper presents several limitations. First, OGP commitments and action plans are not equal. They differ in scope, sometimes significantly. This makes comparisons difficult, even within countries. For example, a country may commit to redesigning a government web page and another to pass a Right to Information law, both in the same action plan. Despite these differences, commitments and action plans remain the best units of analysis for understanding how OGP works.

Another limitation is the time lag between when action plans are implemented and when the IRM publishes its assessments. In most cases, this lag spans a matter of months, but in some cases, it can be longer. In some cases, the latest data analyzed in this paper covers action plans submitted in 2018 and implemented through 2020. More recent trends will therefore be discussed in future research.

Finally, the IRM method has changed over time. Although we have carried out "sensitivity analysis" to validate the use of specific indicators (see the previous subsection for details), this introduces a certain amount of error, especially in the longitudinal analysis in Chapters 1 through 3. Ultimately, this is not unique to this particular OGP analysis. As the IRM continues to evolve, we will continue developing new metrics to study OGP performance over time.

of submission. To determine this method, we applied a series of tests to the data and regression models:

- **Hausman test:** Not significant at the 5% level, implying that unique errors are not correlated with the regressors and that fixed effects are not necessary over random effects.

- **Breusch-Pagan Lagrange Multiplier test:** Not significant at the 5% level, implying little variance across members and therefore the appropriateness of using OLS over random effects.

These results make sense, intuitively. Besides the tests above, the following are justifications for the pooled OLS method used in the analysis:

- **Limited within-cluster variation:** The Vital Signs data covers many OGP members (74) but relatively few years (2014–2019). Given the two-year nature of OGP action plans and that many members skip years between action plan submissions, most members have either two or three action plans in the dataset. This represents a very limited cross-year sample size and points to the difficulty in drawing conclusions about how variables vary over time within members.

- **Action plan as unit of analysis:** The action plan—rather than the member—is the main focus of this analysis. This reflects a goal of identifying how action-plan-specific factors, such as the strength of co-creation, the stability of the OGP lead agency, and the quality of the plan itself affect outcomes (more so than member-specific factors).

- **Sensitivity analysis:** Despite the test results above, we implemented random effects and time-fixed-effects models, which showed similar results to the pooled OLS method (see the notebook below for the specific numbers).

- **Statistical significance of the model:** Although not a valid reason on its own, the statistical significance of the member fixed-effects model (measured by the adjusted R2 and F-statistic) is lower compared to the other models.

- **Importance of time-constant predictors:** The pooled OLS (as well as random effects and time-fixed-effects) models include several time-constant explanatory variables, such as financial commitment to OGP, region, and OECD membership. Besides being integral to the analysis, several of these variables are statistically significant predictors. They cannot be included in a member fixed-effects model, which ignores time-constant variables.

The specific results of these tests and comparison models are available online in this Google Colab notebook .

Limitations

A key downside of this approach is that we cannot identify causal relationships, as there may be

unmeasured OGP phenomena or non-OGP factors causing observed trends. One of the major limitations of this research is the so-called "endogeneity problem," where omitted variables explain both the explanatory and outcome variables.

In some cases, we know which variables may be responsible for producing OGP outcomes, but we lack the relevant data to account for them in the analysis. For example, we know that general commitment to OGP may be an important explanatory variable, but we lack a direct way of measuring this. For this reason, we use imperfect proxies such as membership in the OGP Steering Committee and financial contributions to the Partnership.

We have even less data for other important factors. For instance, we do not take into account the effectiveness of the government and civil society leads for OGP. On the government side, both the minister in charge of OGP and the working-level point of contact are critical actors whose ability to convene others may play a sizable role in achieving outcomes. We would expect the effectiveness of civil society participants to have a similar impact.

Other actors left out of the analysis include funders. Some OGP members receive external funding for OGP activities such as the co-creation process and commitment implementation. This external support may influence the direction of change, but again, we lack structured, cross-country data measuring this. Ultimately, there may be many other variables like these that are not considered in the analysis and therefore may obscure the true relationships between OGP Vital Signs.

Descriptive statistics and regression results

The body of the paper includes charts and results covering only some of the regression models. For detailed descriptive statistics tables, as well as regression result tables, see the following Google Colab notebooks:

- Regression analysis for Section 4.3, "Predictors of Ambition"

- Regression analysis for Section 4.4, "Predictors of Completion," and Section 4.5. "Predictors of Early Results"

About the Vital Signs Paper

Every few years, the OGP Support Unit or the IRM reviews existing data to determine whether OGP is working as intended. This work was previously referred to as [IRM Technical Papers](#) and was later included as a chapter of the [2019 OGP Global Report](#). This quantitative analysis complements other more nuanced reviews of OGP, including an [independent, multiyear evaluation](#) in a handful of OGP countries.

This particular report is based on several core IRM metrics. The indicators that form the bulk of the analysis are listed in Table 9, along with simple indicators for recent trends. See the corresponding sections of the report, also listed in the table, for details. The data cover nearly 200 IRM-assessed national action plans submitted between 2012 and 2020. All data included in the paper are updated as of October 2021. The data, as well as many of the calculations and results, are publicly available online. See the Annex for details.

About OGP

OGP is an international partnership that brings together reformers in government and civil society to create action plans that make governments more participatory, inclusive, responsive, and accountable. In the spirit of broad collaboration, OGP is overseen by a Steering Committee that includes representatives of governments and civil society organizations. To become a member of OGP, participating countries must endorse a high-level Open Government Declaration, co-create an action plan with the public, and commit to independent reporting on progress.

OGP formally launched on September 20, 2011, when eight founding governments endorsed the Open Government Declaration and announced their country action plans. Today, 78 OGP participating countries and 76 local governments have made more than 4,500 commitments to make their governments more open and accountable.