

# AFRICA: OGP KICKS OFF

by Sarita Ranchod

**In May 2013, the first Open Government Partnership Africa Regional Meeting took place in Mombasa, Kenya.**

**With six African countries<sup>1</sup> having joined OGP, there is much scope for raising awareness about the OGP, as well as highlighting the broad civic rewards of the grounding pillars of the OGP.**

**Sarita Ranchod** spoke to some of the key African players including **Gilbert Sendugwa** of the Uganda-based African Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC), **Mukelani Dimba** and **Alison Tilley** of the South Africa-based Open Democracy Advice Centre (ODAC), **Gladwell Otieno** of the Kenya-based African Centre for Open Governance, **Rakesh Rajani** of Twaweza, based in Tanzania, **Malcom Joseph** from the Centre for Media and Peace Studies in Liberia, **Vitus Azeem** of the Ghana Integrity Initiative, Minister **Norris Tweah**, Information Minister in Liberia, and Minister **Ayanda Ndodlo**, South Africa's Deputy Minister for Public Service and Administration.

They were asked to update us on the state of play.

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<sup>2</sup>Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Malawi, the most recent applicant, currently in the process of developing commitments.

## AN AFRICAN OGP AGENDA? MAKING IT REAL

When asked about a common OGP agenda for Africa that is shared by governments and civil society across the vast continent, Gilbert Sendugwa of AFIC argues that an African OGP agenda would focus on enhancing services to citizens, an OGP guiding principle. "This is an area where civil society has a particular strength, and where government often has the resources, or access to the resources to make things happen," Sendugwa says.

Mukelani Dimba of ODAC concurs, saying that in making OGP more widely known and understood in Africa, it needs to be linked to people's actual realities. "It needs to be linked to education, shelter, jobs, the environment, housing. These are the issues. How will OGP help me access public services? We need to show how greater transparency will improve access to public services for people."

Improving services to citizens, particularly relating to health and education is a priority challenge for the Liberian government, according to its lead minister on OGP, Norris Tweah. Its OGP ambitions and fiscal priorities therefore need to reflect this. "Citizen ownership is very important and we need our initiatives to speak to their realities. We are trying to ensure that our participation in the OGP has added value for citizens," he says.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AT THE CENTRE

Civil Society (CS) advocates argue that the OGP provides a strategic platform for creating a more open Africa; a platform for government accountability, budget transparency, and citizen engagement in policy making. Leveraging the multi-focal OGP agenda could therefore result in benefits across several sectors, and fundamentally, in how governments provide services to citizens, and the extent to which citizens are able to engage and participate in the decisions that impact their lives. They agree that the OGP's niche is its recognition of the centrality of civil society and the meaningful inclusion of civil society and citizen voices and perspectives for improving accountable and transparent governance.

Prior African and global initiatives – including the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP), the African Peer Review Mechanism<sup>2</sup> and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – do not integrate civil society representation and citizen participation for

securing meaningful change to the extent that OGP does. This difference of citizen and civil society engagement may be the key ingredient for building ownership of an OGP agenda in Africa, a vital ingredient missing from prior developmental initiatives.

## AWARENESS RAISING

Rakesh Rajani of Twaweza says that citizen awareness-raising of OGP is the responsibility of both civil society and governments. Stressing the common ownership of OGP, Rajani said: "It's ours. If you believe OGP is a powerful platform for civil society, grab it! Let's make it work."

Dimba adds: "OGP needs a high level of public awareness. People should know what government is doing, and what government is committed to. The first step lies in creating public awareness of country commitments."

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Dimba's core work focuses on access to information (AI) on the African continent. He notes that only 11 African countries have adopted AI laws, a strategic gateway for promoting an OGP agenda in Africa.

Both Dimba and Malcolm Joseph of Liberia's Centre for Media and Peace Studies, and civil society representative on Liberia's national OGP Steering Committee, attest that CSOs active in AI issues interested in fostering access to information and concomitant state accountability and transparency agendas, provide a mobilised civil society constituency for OGP on the African continent.

## 🇰🇪 KENYA

Gladwell Otieno points out that Kenya has received significant positive attention for its open data and other technology-led OGP-related endeavours, with its Information Minister as the OGP lead. She warns that assumptions of openness, participation and transparency based on the country's new Constitution need to be closely monitored as "there is much room for progress."

## 🇹🇿 TANZANIA

Turning to his native Tanzania, Rajani indicates that, as in other African countries, there are several ongoing

<sup>2</sup>The APRM is a mutually agreed governance instrument voluntarily acceded to by Member States of the African Union as a self-monitoring mechanism. It aims for conformity regarding political, economic and corporate governance values, codes and standards among African countries, and the objectives of socio-economic development within the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) ratified by the African Union in 2002.

national development initiatives, of which the OGP is one. He notes that the local context is one of an already overloaded bureaucracy. On the up side, OGP has support at the highest levels in Tanzania, with the country's Presidency acting as the lead agency.

## GHANA

ODAC's Alison Tilley points to Ghana's approach to civil society engagement as a case study of good practice. Vitus Azeem, a CS representative on the Ghana OGP Steering Committee (SC), said CS consultations took place across Ghana's 3 geographical regions covering 10 administrative areas. The Ghana National Action Plan integrated findings of these consultations and benefitted from validation processes that included traditional authorities, media, civil society and government agencies. Both Tilley and Azeem note that the World Bank's support for OGP engagement in Ghana assisted in ensuring a relatively thorough consultation process focused on meeting the minimum standards for joining OGP; clear plans and resources allocated to implement plans; and government assigning high level leadership to OGP.

## LIBERIA

According to Liberia's Minister Tweah, the OGP agenda closely reflects ongoing efforts to boost fiscal transparency and state accountability. Liberia was the first country in West Africa to adopt an Access to Information Act. An Open Budget Initiative launched in 2012 is being pioneered by the Ministry of Finance and includes the publication of a citizens' guide to the budget in plain English. Plans to use mobile technologies to communicate budget information to citizens have also been set in motion.

"Talks are underway with the World Bank to support Liberia's Open Data Initiative, an OGP deliverable of its first action plan," Tweah said.

Like Ghana, Liberia's approach to civil society inclusion in the OGP has been to include equal numbers of civil society and government representatives in national OGP SCs, mirroring the global OGP SC. In both countries CS groups were actively involved in developing OGP national action plans.

## SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's Deputy Minister for Public Service and Administration, Ayanda Dlodlo's approach to civil society engagement included a door-to-door campaign undertaken by grassroots community development workers, to raise awareness of South Africa's OGP service delivery commitments. South

Africa's second national action plan, focusing on addressing the needs of women, in particular the high levels of violence against women in South Africa, was launched in October 2013.

Dimba is deeply concerned that South Africa's actions on proposed secrecy laws have clear implications for growing the OGP movement on the African continent. "In a meeting with civil society partners and government counterparts in a neighbouring country, a minister pointed out that South Africa is not doing well on transparency, citing the Secrecy Bill. Officials in neighbouring countries are playing on that fact," he said.

## MALAWI

In Malawi, both ODAC and AFIC are working to increase awareness of the OGP following Malawi's announcement of its OGP intentions. ODAC is assisting civil society partners to translate the constitutional guarantee of access to information into something meaningful. "We are supporting Malawian civil society to take advantage of what is in their Constitution by sharing with them how we have used our constitutional AI provisions. Now that the Malawian Government has expressed its intention to join the OGP, this work becomes even more critical. It means engaging more with civil society partners to ensure they are actively engaged with the OGP processes. So far there is not much that has been done in Malawi to create public awareness of its OGP intentions," Dimba said.

Sendugwa, who recently undertook a visit to Malawi to engage with civil society and government players, concurs that there is very limited knowledge of the OGP in Malawi at CS and government level. His mission was to create awareness of the OGP and to advocate for the creation of an OGP platform in Malawi that could ensure structured and coordinated government and civil society engagement on OGP based on lessons learned to date.

## MONITORING GOVERNMENTS

Tweah expects that relationships with civil society will change during the implementation of OGP action plans. "We would like civil society to continue to monitor us and to put pressure to ensure things get done. Civil society can play a constructive role as watchdogs and bring to our attention things we are not aware of," he said.

For Dimba, lessons learnt in the context of his AI work have bearing for monitoring governments on what they say and what they do. "What is on paper often doesn't translate into reality," he warns,

noting that passing OGP enabling legislation is a starting point, not an ultimate objective.

With the OGP Independent Review Mechanism report on the implementation of South Africa's first OGP action plan noting tensions between government and civil society, and the need to build trust between the two, Dimba notes that "it is important that we are able to work with the state, but that doesn't mean we won't be critical."

## CONCLUSION

By changing how governments do what they do, increasing state accountability through access to information held by the state that is relevant to citizens and civil society; increasing transparency, including fiscal transparency; improving the delivery and quality of much-needed public services; actively engaging civil society as a development partner and ensuring meaningful participation of citizens in the decisions that affect them, the OGP agenda clearly holds great promise and potential as a tool for addressing many African development challenges.

## KEY OGP AFRICA ISSUES AT A GLANCE

- ➔ Limited knowledge of OGP at country level and at organised civil society level.
- ➔ Improving service delivery is an OGP-related priority in Africa.
- ➔ Several ongoing developmental initiatives overlap with OGP agendas, prompting a need to harmonise and/or mainstream OGP into existing activities and initiatives without sacrificing ambition and stretch.
- ➔ Organised civil society active on access to information issues provide an obvious entry point for engaging broader organised civil society.
- ➔ The clear need for awareness-raising of OGP at citizen and civil society level is a responsibility of both civil society and governments.