OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP
SUPPORT UNIT

A FORWARD-LOOKING RESEARCH AGENDA

Overview: The need for evidence-based learning on the Open Government Partnership (OGP)

OGP's entry into the space of governance reform three years ago and rapid growth is an indication that the demand for open and accountable governments is very much alive. Through the extensive country-level data collected by the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM), OGP is now in a position to ask how well its model – the process, incentives and actors involved - has worked so far to generate ambitious open government reforms? This agenda outlines how OGP, in partnership with interested research organizations, can begin to answer this question. The findings from the research will help OGP strengthen its model and four-year strategy, and highlight OGP's contribution to this field thus far.

In the first round of OGP Action Plans, over 60 countries made more than 1,000 policy commitments to make their governments more open and accountable to people. So far, 270 commitments have been completed[1] and 188 were found to have potentially transformative impact[2]. If we were to look for the story behind these numbers, we would find that in Mexico, the OGP consultation process went from including eight CSOs to over 100 actors from civil society, government, private enterprise, and academia. We would find examples in Brazil, Croatia and Georgia, where the OGP Action Plan process paved the way for new Right to Information laws. And side by side with these stories, we would also find that many countries did not even consult with civil society, or that a number of action plans tend to commit to initiatives that could be labeled "low-hanging fruit".

The significance of all this is that while we do know of the variation in performance among OGP countries, we don't know enough about why this is, how OGP can provide better incentives to influence positive change, and what impact OGP is likely to have in the long term. The research agenda proposed in this memo outlines three levels of analysis that we hope to advance drawing on existing OGP data and research. For each of those levels, it highlights specific research questions that need greater attention. The purpose of this is to provide a starting point for both OGP's partner organizations as well as independent researchers who are interested in investigating OGP's impact over the short and long-term.

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[1] The IRM has only evaluated the first year of a two-year action plan cycle. This number is expected to increase, as many additional commitments are on track to be completed in the next year.

[2] OGP countries are expected to make ambitious commitments (with new or pre-existing activities) that stretch government practice beyond an existing baseline. To contribute to a broad definition of ambition, the IRM researcher judges how potentially transformative a commitment might be in the policy area. This is based on researcher's findings and experience as a public policy expert.

In this section we outline specific research questions under the following three levels of analysis: 1) Compliance with OGP process requirements and completion of National Action Plans 2) "Drivers of Change" to unpack the factors driving a more or less successful National Action Plan (both in terms of level of ambition and completion) and 3) Long-term impact of OGP Action Plans and OGP's contribution to resulting changes. We also outline any existing research efforts by OGP where relevant.

1. Compliance and Completion: What kinds of initiatives are countries implementing as part of their OGP National Action Plans? What do we know about countries' compliance with OGP process requirements and their completion of OGP commitments?

One of the first steps after joining OGP is to make sure that countries 'get the basics right' – in other words, governments are required to engage with civil society in drafting and implementing an ambitious Action Plan, and submit to independent reporting on its progress. Because this is so critical to accountability for progress, OGP has established an Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) to report regularly on compliance with process requirements and progress toward delivering commitments. It is therefore at this first level of analysis that OGP has a wealth of evidence to share with the broader community. It provides a valuable starting point for researchers on where to look for answers to more analytical questions stated in sections 2 and 3.

1.1 Available data and existing research efforts by OGP

- IRM Progress Reports

  - Every year, an IRM researcher in each OGP participating country measures progress on each country's OGP national action plan and looks at how well a country has met OGP process requirements. Findings are published in a [Progress Report](#) which shows progress at the one-year mark (of a two-year action plan) and gives concrete recommendations to governments and civil society to improve the implementation of the current action plan and to design the next two-year action plan.[3]

    In addition to producing these reports, the IRM team publishes [disaggregated data on each commitment or action](#) – for example commenting on their potential impact, relevance to OGP values and level of completion. It also collects data on whether each country complied with the requirements of the [OGP process](#), and data on the [type of institution](#) that hosts the OGP membership of each country.

    The IRM is designed to assess, as close to real-time as possible, the inputs (form and content) of action plans, and the outputs (in terms of commitments

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[3] Moving forward the IRM also plans to issue end-of-term reports which would assess progress at the end of a country's implementation of a two-year Action Plan

completed). It is not the IRM's mandate to assess longer-term outcomes or impacts, whether on the practices of public administration or on end-users of each of the action plan commitments.

- o In addition to the IRM products, OGP countries themselves produce a self-assessment report summarizing progress on their Action Plans.

- IRM Technical Paper: This year the IRM published a technical paper called "What the IRM Data tells us about OGP Results", which aggregates and presents trends from 43 OGP countries.

- 'IRM Unpacked' Series: Using their own data, the IRM is currently doing further analysis on OGP countries. The first of the series is on Which branches of government are involved in OGP? Forthcoming issues will include: Does having the President in charge matter? and Does more civil society involvement mean better implementation?

- Synopsis of 2nd Action Plans: The OGP Support Unit has produced a report titled "What's in the New National Action Plans?" on 35 countries developing their second action plans. The report presents an overview of the noteworthy policy commitments that can be found in these action plans.

- OGP Commitments Thematically Tagged: The OGP Support Unit has recently reviewed and tagged around 900 commitments from 48 new action plans. The new set of 42 thematic tags covers key horizontal (e.g. Open Data, Capacity Building, etc) and vertical (e.g. Education, Asset Disclosures, etc.) open government topics.

- Data visualization platform: Using the IRM datasets and reports, OGP will create a platform on its website which will include tools to manipulate and visualize the datasets in different ways.

1.2 Key Research Questions

The IRM datasets and progress reports are ripe for deeper statistical analysis and data visualization. Researchers can filter, mash-up and visualize the data in ways that could point to areas for a deeper in-country investigation. Some potential questions are:

- Who are the strong and weak performers of OGP (eg. a country-by-country ranking to identify those who have the highest number of ambitious and completed OGP commitments)? Are there patterns within or across regions that could help explain variations in OGP performance?

- In what thematic areas are OGP commitments clustered? (e.g. filtering commitments by thematic areas, such as Access to Information, and assessing the different stages of implementation in each country using the Carter Center's Implementation Assessment Tool – such as legislative changes, awareness-raising of citizens, capacity building of public servants etc.)

- Are there relationships between OGP performance data and other development indicators such as democracy, human rights, and quality of life indicators?

- Is there a relationship between conformity to OGP consultation guidelines and the level of completion and/or ambition of the commitments in the Action Plan?

2. Drivers of Change[4]: What explains the variation in OGP performance between countries? What factors drive the development and completion of an ambitious Action Plan?

As we identify patterns across the data, we will need to unpack the 'how' and 'why' factors that are driving or impeding progress in different country contexts. What changes in behaviors, relationships or actions are we seeing among country-level actors that help explain the development and completion of OGP commitments?

In order to dissect these factors, it is helpful to start from OGP's [Theory of Change](). While OGP Action Plans serve as the vehicle and organizing framework for a country's open government reforms, the key challenge is to ensure that each set of actors involved in the process at the country-level is effectively playing their role. For example, senior political leaders provide leadership and a mandate for challenging reforms to be enacted. Mid-level civil servants must then have adequate tools and support to design and implement meaningful reforms. And civil society leaders must be involved in the process to advocate for increasingly ambitious reforms and to monitor progress on implementation.

Since OGP seeks to support each of these actors, it is important for us to better understand whether they are playing their roles effectively, and to what degree this seems to influence the outcome. If each of these three actors is playing its role effectively, this should build the top-down, mid-level and bottom-up support to advance ambitious open government reforms.

2.1 Existing Research Efforts by OGP

OGP is working with U4 at the Chr. Michelsen Institute to undertake cross-cutting research on drivers of change in the context of OGP. U4 will be investigating a set of starred commitments[5] from five countries, unpacking the factors that led to their development and implementation, and documenting uptake of these policy initiatives by citizens.

2.2 Key Research Questions

In addition to OGP's current research efforts on unpacking drivers of change, the questions below propose areas that we believe merit further investigation:

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[4] Drivers of Change (DoC) is an approach developed by DFID which focuses on power relationships and the institutional and structural factors affecting the lack of political will. It is based around a three-part conceptual model of structures, individual agents, and mediating institutions, and is coupled with an emphasis on how to effect change. It is being utilized here as a broad conceptual framework.

[5] The IRM assigns "stars" to country commitments that are clearly relevant to OGP values, have at least a substantial level of completion, are specific enough to be measurable, and have a moderate or substantial potential for impact. Starred commitments are a proxy for significant accomplishments being made through OGP action plans. Of the 775 commitments evaluated by the IRM using this methodology, [198 (almost 25%) of OGP commitments were starred](). More rigorous longitudinal research on these starred commitments could help to make an assessment of their long-term impact.[5]

2.2.1 Senior Political Leaders

- What factors increase high-level political interest in OGP [e.g. personal reform interest, political ambitions]? Why and how do senior political leaders choose to prioritize OGP on the domestic policy agenda?

- What factors help ensure that OGP successfully weathers domestic political transitions, and that high-level political leadership for open government reforms is sustained?

- What sorts of 'accountability mechanisms' seem to be of most relevance to senior political leaders: the findings of IRM reports, domestic political pressure and advocacy, international 'peer pressure', e.g. by OGP Steering Committee members (particularly from neighboring countries), or others?

2.2.2 Mid-level Government Reformers (civil servants)

- Are there structural and/or political factors (e.g. existence of a permanent dialogue mechanism with civil society, OGP chairmanship or Steering Committee membership, reform champions) that result in more politically ambitious Action Plans vs. "housekeeping" Action Plans?

- How does the mandate and capacity (e.g. administrative and legal powers, level of decentralization, resources, experience) of the OGP coordinating agency compared to rest of government affect the level of ambition and completion of the Action Plan?

- Does involving different levels (e.g. subnational) or branches (e.g. legislative or judicial) of government in the OGP process seem to affect the success or sustainability of OGP action plans?

2.2.3 In-Country Civil Society Organizations

- What counts as a 'good' consultation process with civil society and how does it drive the ambition of an Action Plan? Are there certain models of consultation that lead to a larger number of civil society priorities being reflected and/or implemented in the Action Plan?

- How do a country's contextual factors (bureaucratic maturity, tradition of participatory policy making, etc.) influence government and civil society interaction? How does this legacy affect the OGP consultation process?

2.2.4 Cross-cutting Research Questions

- Why are commitments in the same thematic area successfully implemented in one context but are not completed in others?

- Which countries seem to be regressing on their OGP commitment and why? Which of these factors can be influenced by OGP's work?

- How do OGP countries define and understand "open government" and how does it reflect on the content and ambition of their action plans?

3. Long-term Impact: In how many countries have OGP reforms improved the effectiveness, efficiency and/or responsiveness of government? How has OGP contributed or not contributed to this change?

OGP's strategy outlines a [set of metrics](#)[6] that will track our progress over the next four years. The metrics give us a framework to capture what difference OGP is making over the short and long terms, both at the country and at the initiative levels. In the short term, we want to capture how our efforts as an international initiative are ensuring that the three key actors identified in our Theory of Change are effectively playing their role. In the long term, we want to understand how these efforts are translating into country-level reforms.

3.1 Existing Research Efforts by OGP

Based on the metrics mentioned above, OGP will periodically commission a third party evaluation of its progress. The first evaluation will take place mid-way through the four-year strategy (i.e. end of 2016) and will review how well OGP's institutional policies, structures and activities are working to advance its strategic objectives. This will allow OGP to adjust its Theory of Change if needed for the remainder of the strategy period. The final evaluation will take place at the end of the four-year strategy (i.e. end of 2018) and would assess the degree to which the OGP framework, support and incentives are helping to catalyze meaningful open government policy commitments.

3.2 Key Research Questions

The third party evaluation, while assessing our progress on a set of indicators, will necessarily have to rely on the findings generated by rigorous, longitudinal research conducted by OGP and its partners. We will benefit immensely from research studies that undertake to unpack OGPs impact - in terms of the extent of our contribution to reforms on the ground, under what conditions, and for which set of stakeholders. Specifically, findings on the questions below will provide critical evidence to facilitate the third party evaluation.

- In which countries do we see substantive changes in policy, practice and services that have come about as a result of "starred commitments" and how has the government's participation in OGP facilitated or not facilitated these?

- In how many countries has OGP stimulated a noticeable improvement in the quality of dialogue between government and civil society? What incentives and support has OGP provided to bring about this improvement?

- Are there examples where citizens and/or civil society have held the government *accountable* following the completion of an OGP commitment (e.g. did a commitment

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[6] See Chapter 7: Monitoring and Evaluation

to make budgets transparent enable citizens/civil society to ultimately hold government actors to account on policy or services)?

Looking Ahead

OGP is keen to work with individuals and/or organizations to undertake research on one or more of the areas that have been outlined in this agenda. Based on the nature of the research, we are willing to facilitate communication with relevant OGP actors if required. Researchers may be invited to OGP organized events to present the implication of their findings on OGP's work.

Annex 1 shows the list of OGP participating countries by region. Annex 2 shows a mapping of on-going and planned research activities – both undertaken by OGP as well as those undertaken by other organizations. These are living documents that will be updated regularly.

For questions and requests for further information, please contact Munyema Hasan, Program Officer, Open Government Partnership at munyema.hasan@opengovpartnership.org

ANNEX 1: OGP PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe
Ghana	Argentina	Azerbaijan	Albania
Liberia	Brazil*	Australia**	Armenia
Kenya	Canada	Indonesia*	Bosnia & Herzegovina**
Malawi**	Chile	Israel	Bulgaria
South Africa*	Colombia	Jordan	Croatia
Tanzania*	Costa Rica	Mongolia	Czech Republic
Tunisia	Dominican Republic	New Zealand	Denmark
Sierra Leone	El Salvador	Philippines*	Estonia
	Guatemala	South Korea	France**
	Honduras	Turkey	Finland
	Mexico*		Georgia
	Peru		Greece
	Panama		Hungary
	Paraguay		Italy
	Trinidad and Tobago		Ireland
	United States*		Latvia
	Uruguay		Lithuania
			Macedonia
			Malta
			Moldova
			Montenegro
			Netherlands
			Norway*
			Romania
			Serbia**
			Slovak Republic
			Spain
			Sweden
			Ukraine
			United Kingdom*

* Founding OGP country
** Developing Action Plan

For more information visit: http://www.opengovpartnership.org/countries

ANNEX 2: MAPPING OF CURRENT AND PLANNED RESEARCH ON OGP

Levels of Analysis	Product	Topic	Researcher / Institutional Lead	Date of Completion
Compliance of OGP Process and Completion of Action Plans	IRM Progress Reports and Databases	43 Progress Reports till date + Disaggregated data on commitments from each OGP country – measuring relevance to OGP values, ambition, completion	IRM	Ongoing
	"IRM Unpacked" Series	Which branches of government are involved in OGP?	IRM	September 2014
		Civic participation in Latin American OGP commitments	IRM	March 2015
		Aligning Supply and Demand for Better Governance: Open Data in the Open Government Partnership	IRM + World Wide Web Foundation	May 2015
		Are OGP commitments around petty corruption or high-level corruption?	IRM	Early 2016
		Is OGP performance improving as a result of better compliance with OGP processes?	IRM	Early 2016
	IRM Technical Paper	Meta-analysis of 43 IRM progress reports, identifying lessons learned and trends across OGP member countries	IRM	September 2014

	"OGP Explorer"	[A platform with all IRM datasets, reports and analyses around OGP, including tools to manipulate and visualize the datasets](#)	OGP Support Unit / Civil Society Engagement (CSE) team	June 2015
	Trends Analysis	[What's in the new OGP National Action Plans?](#)	OGP Support Unit	September 2014
	Thematic Trends Analysis	[Fiscal Transparency in OGP countries and the implementation of commitments](#)	Murray Petrie / Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT)	May 2014
	Thematic Trends Analysis	[Access to Information commitments in OGP National Action Plans](#)	Alvaro Herrero, funded by the World Bank	June 2015
	Regional Trends Analysis	[The progress of Open Government Policymaking in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)	Alvaro Ramirez and Nicolas Daassen / Inter – American Development Bank	April 2014
	Regional Trends Analysis	[State of OGP in Latin America](#)	LSE funded by OGP and Hivos	January 2015
	Trends analysis	[Are OGP Member countries actually more open? Insights from the World Justice Project and Open Government Index](#)	Alejandro Ponce	March 2015
	Qualitative Country Case Studies	[When and how are pro-reform actors able to leverage OGP to pursue improved government responsiveness and accountability?](#) (Costa Rica, Mexico, Tanzania,	Global Integrity	February 2016

		Philippines, Albania)		
Drivers of Change – *how* and *why* factors driving OGP implementation in participating countries	Qualitative Country Case Studies	Unpacking the implementation process behind successful and less successful OGP reforms in same thematic area across countries (Tentative: Uruguay/Guatemala on Procurement reform, Slovakia/Estonia on Open Data Portals, El Salvador/Peru on Integrity Pacts, Peru/Kenya on strengthening Judiciary	Innovations for Successful Societies, Princeton University	December 2015
	Qualitative Country Case Studies	Do a country's contextual factors (bureaucratic maturity, tradition of participatory policy making etc) influence government and civil society interaction? How does this legacy affect the OGP consultation process? (Peru, Honduras, Chile, South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana, Croatia, Romania, and Armenia)	OGP Support Unit (CSE team)	July 2015
	Qualitative Country Case Studies	Investigate a set of "starred commitments" on transparency and citizen engagement in five countries; analyze the factors leading to their development, implementation and uptake (Croatia, Georgia, Chile, Uruguay and Ghana)	U4 / Chr Michelsen Institute commissioned by OGP Support Unit	October 2015
	Mixed methods	A comparison of 'open government'	Amanda Clarke &	Draft under review by a

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	research	[definitions across seven OGP countries](#)	Mary Francoli	peer-reviewed journal
	Mixed Methods Research	[Gaps and Opportunities for Standardization in OGP members' Open Data Catalogs](#) [Identifying recommended standards and best practices for open data](#)	Open North Administered by ODWG/Web Foundation, funded by IDRC	May 2015
	Mixed Methods Research	[The Social Impact of Open Data](#)	Sunlight Foundation / funded by OGP Open Data Working Group	May 2015
Long-term Impact of OGP	Longitudinal Research	Third-party evaluation of OGP's progress on its four-year strategy	External Reviewer commissioned by OGP Support Unit	First review: End of 2016 Second review: End of 2018
		Evaluate long-term impact of open government reforms; and contribution of OGP		To be determined
	Think Piece	[Reflections on the impact of international Transparency and Accountability initiatives](#)	Jonathan Fox	January 2014