OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism Concept Note

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# I. Overview of IRM

The OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) is a key means by which all stakeholders can track progress and impact among OGP participating governments, as well as promote strong accountability between member governments and citizens. In addition to ongoing cooperation and collaboration between governments and civil society, the IRM serves a key role in ensuring the continued credibility and legitimacy of OGP.

OGP will issue annual independent assessment reports for each OGP participating government. The IRM is in charge of overseeing this process on behalf of OGP to ensure its quality, credibility and independence.

The IRM will assess country on development and implementation of action plans, progress in fulfilling open government principles, and will develop technical recommendations. In each country, well-respected local researchers, drawn from the country whenever possible, will apply a common questionnaire to evaluate these areas. The actual IRM country reports will be drafted by these local researchers based on a combination of interviews with local OGP stakeholders, analysis of relevant data, and reports by governments and civil society.

The IRM will be overseen by an international expert panel (IEP) of *[10]* individuals—five technical/policy experts and *[5]* high-profile senior advisors—appointed by the OGP Steering Committee following a public nominations process. In line with the OGP’s commitment to peer support, the IEP’s efforts to ensure due diligence, quality assessment, and the application of the highest standards of research will help to ensure the quality of the Partnership. At the same time, it will also identify opportunities to strengthen OGP processes and national implementation of commitments.

The IEP will develop a common questionnaire for all local country researchers, and provide final review to ensure that the highest standards of research and due diligence are applied for every report. The IEP will be supported by a small project management team, with an IRM Program Manager and a Program Assistant. While this IRM team will operate out of OGP’s main offices, it will report directly to the IEP, rather than the OGP Support Unit or Steering Committee, to maintain full independence. The figure below shows a simple view of OGP functions.

Once drafted, IRM reports will go through a process of initial review by the IEP, and will also be provided to governments to offer their comments and feedback. No government will have the power to veto any content within IRM reports, but their initial review will offer the opportunity to correct any factual errors or offer new evidence that can inform the final report.

Once draft IRM reports have gone through initial IEP and government review, the IEP will conduct a final review of each country report for quality control purposes, resolve any outstanding questions or concerns, and finalize reports for publication on the OGP website in both English and the relevant local language.

**Figure:** Organogram of Independent Reporting Mechanism

International Experts Panel

Technical Advisors

Senior Advisors

IRM Program Manager and Program Assistant

Local Researchers

Local Researchers

Local Researchers

# II. Scope of IRM Reporting

IRM reports are intended to help promote stronger accountability between citizens and their governments, and ensure Governments are living up to the commitments made in their OGP country action plans, as well as OGP process requirements. In essence, they provide a “snapshot” view of the national action plan development and implementation process.

Accordingly, IRM reports will provide insight into several areas, with emphasis on development and implementation of action plans:

* The extent to which the action plan and its commitments reflect, in a country-specific way, the OGP values of transparency, accountability, and civic participation, as articulated in the OGP Declaration of Principles and the Articles of Governance.
* Wherever relevant, IRM reports may reflect actions or measures relevant to the country’s participation in OGP that were not originally reflected in the action plan.
* The degree to which OGP governments are following OGP process requirements and guidance in the development and implementation of their plans, in keeping with the Articles of Governance - Addendum C.
* Progress made on the articulation and implementation of each commitment and the plan as a whole, according to milestones laid out by the government in its action plan.
* Technical recommendations regarding how countries can improve implementation of each commitment and the plan as a whole, as well as how to better realize the values and principles of OGP, with specific reference to the OGP Articles of Governance and the OGP Declaration of Principles. Recommendations are to cover all of the preceding bullets under scope.

In September 2012, OGP decided to begin strongly encouraging participating governments to adopt commitments that stretch beyond current practice in relation to their performance in the OGP eligibility criteria. From 2014 onwards, the IRM will document steps to improve country performance on OGP eligibility criteria as part of their action plans. The OGP Support Unit’s annual review of eligibility criteria will remain the primary authority for determining and discussing OGP country performance on eligibility criteria. The IRM reports will have a more limited discussion of the context surrounding progress or regress on specific criteria at the country level each year, based on citizen feedback.

Starting in the second year of assessments, reports shall also include a section for follow-up on recommendations issued in previous reports. This follow-up process will also be carried out in accordance with the principles set out in this document.

*Overall Reporting Approach*

The IRM report templates will incorporate the above criteria, and the IEP will work with local researchers to ensure that they strictly adhere to these guidelines in their reporting. The IEP will establish quality-based guidelines to inform the IRM report preparation process, allowing it to highlight achievements and best practices, as well as challenges and substantial weakness in the above areas.

The IRM reports are meant to complement and support independent monitoring of the commitments by civil society in each country, and provide useful recommendations to enhance government performance. For example:

* IRM will listen to and take into account on-going citizen, civil society and related multilateral monitoring efforts;
* Reports will be produced in a form that facilitates easy monitoring and comparison over time – e.g. commitment by commitment; recommendation by recommendation.
* Reports will be written in in such as way that makes them easily understandable by the broader public in each country. Consistent with the OGP Articles of Governance, IRM reports are to be made publically available in the local language(s) as well as English.

The IRM reports will be informed by consultations with a wide range of different stakeholders. The IRM’s primary role is to listen to as many people as possible, and make an overall assessment based on these views, information provided by governments (including self assessment reports), and the expertise of the IEP. Wherever possible, the IRM should provide for review and input of assessment findings by members of civil society before and after publication.

# III. IRM Outputs

## IRM Reports

IRM reports will be prepared every year for each participating government. Starting in 2013, Governments will first be assessed one year after presenting their OGP action plan, and each IRM report will be published no later than 4 months after the end of the 12 month implementation period being assessed. For the first year, the 9 first IRM reports will be launched at least 1 month prior to the OGP plenary. Given the enormous task of setting up the IRM, publication of IRM findings for OGP’s founding 8 countries will occur in September 2013. The remaining 50 countries will be assessed in several additional rounds of reporting, as soon as feasible following the initial round of assessments in September.

The IRM assessments will highlight successes in achieving action plan objectives, detail opportunities, challenges and any weaknesses in each of the three substantive areas, and include specific recommendations for improvement. The IEP will endeavor to prepare reports in a way that is complementary to independent monitoring efforts by civil society and other related multilateral mechanisms. The reports will be easily understood by the various publics within each country (NGOs in both rural and urban areas, as well as citizens, the media, etc).

## IRM Report Executive Summaries

IRM assessments will feature an executive summary, in a common format to be established by the IEP. The executive summaries will offer the basis for cross-country comparison and progress over time on the elements set out in the Scope of IRM Reports above. Executive summaries should allow for easy comprehension by a large international audience, both in content and visual terms. The executive summaries will offer a quick, visually compelling and pithy sense of each IRM report, providing the basis for rapid evaluation of country performance over time and across countries.

# IV. International Experts Panel

The IRM will be overseen by an International Expert Panel—nominated through an open, public process and selected by the OGP Steering Committee. As part of the critical function of quality control, the IEP will establish guidelines for the IRM to incentivize governments and civil society to “race to the top.”

These experts will be split into two categories with distinct roles in the IRM process—five Technical Advisors and a group of high-profile Senior Advisors. The Technical Advisors will play a direct role in overseeing the quality control process for IRM report production, including reviewing and approving final reports for publication. The Senior Advisors will provide strategic advice during the initial development of the IRM’s overall assessment approach, and will then play a major role in international and regional outreach on IRM report findings and implications.

The IEP will be broadly representative of OGP participating countries, with experts that represent a diversity of regions and thematic expertise related to open government. IEP members are not required to come from OGP participating countries to sit on the panel.

Initial term members for International Expert Panelists will be two years, with the possibility of a one-year extension. Technical Advisors will be compensated for their time, and Senior Advisors will be compensated for expenses.

## Responsibilities of International Expert Panel Members

### Technical Advisors:

Due to the complexity of the role and the large number of countries that must be assessed, Technical Advisors should have substantial experience in the transparency, accountability and civic engagement field in a number of regions, as well as experience managing multi-national research projects. They will have the following responsibilities:

* Develop the overall assessment guidelines and the assessment template for local researchers to use
* Work with the IRM Program Manager to identify respected locally based researchers in each OGP participating governments to draft the independent reports.
* Review draft country reports and work with local researchers to incorporate inputs from IEP and government review
* Provide final approval for report publication

### High-Profile Senior Advisors:

* Participate in initial strategic discussions about the IRM assessment approach
* Participate in outreach events and activities following the publication of IRM reports at the international, regional and/or country level

# V. Local Researchers

The Criteria and Standards Sub-Committee will work with the IEP and IRM program manager to identify a process for selecting local country researchers, drawing on IEP members’ substantial governance and research experience.

The process will begin by drawing upon contacts within existing partner networks that have conducted similar research, allowing OGP to draw on quality researchers who have performed at a high level in a similar role. There will also be an open recruitment process for local researchers, based on transparent public criteria. This open recruitment will supplement the existing pool of researchers that OGP partner organizations have already identified. Candidates will be short-listed after an open call based on this broad set of qualifications by the IRM project manager, overseen by the IEP. This short-list will be made available to OGP participating governments and other stakeholders, as requested.

The IRM Program Manager (see below) will then oversee a process of conducting interviews, checking references and working with IEP technical/policy experts to make a final selection of local experts for each country. Further details on the local expert selection process will be finalized by the Steering Committee after the IEP is constituted and has had a chance to make final recommendations.

Whenever possible, local researchers should be from, and currently working in the country of study. Candidates should have a background in academia or public policy, with approximately 10 years of demonstrated experience conducting research for publication locally, regionally, or internationally.  They should ideally have specific experience working on public policy issues related to governance, transparency, accountability, or public participation more broadly, as well as experience working with and engaging civil society, the government and the private sector. Finally, they should have a demonstrated capacity and willingness to engage this broad range of stakeholders in a neutral, apolitical and objective fashion.

# VI. Governments, CSOs and Other Stakeholders in the IRM

While governments will not have veto power over any particular expert, they will be invited to provide feedback on the shortlist of local researcher candidates for the sole purpose of identifying any information that might present a conflict of interest for or draw into question the expertise of particular candidates. Civil society will also be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the local researcher candidate shortlist.

During the research process, local researchers will use a variety of methods to gather data. Among the most important will be participatory research, such as focus groups and interviews, to solicit the broadest possible feedback of relevant stakeholders, especially civil society and the private sector. At a minimum, it will include stakeholders involved in the drafting of the OGP plan and those directly affected by commitments. Through these processes, CSOs and other stakeholders will be able to evaluate the focus, development, and progress of the action plan.

Governments will also be invited to review IRM reports in draft form before they are finalized. While Governments will not have veto power over any section of these reports, they will have the opportunity to offer additional information, clarifications and other evidence that IRM experts will then take into account before finalizing the draft reports for publication. Once published, there will be a space on the OGP website for broader public comment on reports.

All countries will respond to IRM reports by leveraging IRM recommendations to improve performance and implementation of current action plans; countries will also report on their reform and action plan progress within the next annual self-assessment reporting cycle. In line with OGP’s commitment to peer support, these countries will also benefit from OGP’s community of extensive technical assistance providers and peer support as they work to implement their OGP commitments and analyze and implement IRM recommendations.

# VII. Criteria and Standards Sub-Committee in IRM

The Criteria and Standards (C/S) Sub-Committee of the OGP Steering Committee will oversee the selection and vetting process for the IEP. This includes identifying the selection criteria and having them approved by the Steering Committee, short-listing and interviewing nominees after an open nominations process, and providing a final set of recommendations on IEP panel members to the full SC for approval.

The C/S Sub-Committee will also oversee the hiring of the IRM Program Management team.

The C/S Sub-Committee will create a set of guidelines for the IRM that the IEP and IRM Program Management team to abide by. It will provide input into the IEP’s work drafting the IRM questionnaire and template for the IRM reports. It will also oversee the drafting of guidance for Government Self-Assessment Reports, which will be approved by the full Steering Committee.

Finally, the C/S Sub-Committee will maintain a watching brief over the IRM to ensure that the IEP, project management team and local researchers are able to publish their reports, achieve objectives, and that the reports maintain a high standard of quality and accuracy.

# VIII. Staff Support for the IRM

The IRM will be supported by a full-time IRM Program Manager, along with a full-time IRM Program Assistant. Both positions will be physically housed within the Support Unit, but will report to the IEP, specifically to a person on that panel designated as the IEP coordinator, to ensure their complete independence. While the Program Manager will not have a reporting relationship to the director of the Support Unit and the Sub-Committee on Criteria and Standards, they will maintain a strong working relationship with both in order to keep the Support Unit and the Steering Committee informed of the progress. The Criteria and Standards Sub-Committee will also oversee the Program Management team’s hiring.

The IRM Program Manager will work to convene the IEP in person/by phone and staff for ongoing business (in tandem with CS sub-committee as appropriate), including creating process for identifying local researchers; developing IRM template and detailed guidance for local researchers and; identifying and rolling out tools to help local researchers collect IRM inputs within OGP countries. This position will also ensure that Criteria and Standards sub-committee is well briefed and substantively engaged with work of IEP/IRM as appropriate. Finally, this position will support identification and briefing of local researchers in 55+ OGP countries, including collecting draft IRM reports from local researchers on deadline, and trouble-shoot any questions/concerns that arise, as well as facilitating the IEP review and finalization process for these reports in tandem with the IEP. The Program Assistant will support the IRM Program Manager in all of their duties, particularly in identifying and liaising with local researchers and IEP reviewers to collect and revise reports, and assisting on report publication, translation and dissemination among other tasks.

# Guiding Principles of the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM)

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) IRM is a key means by which all stakeholders can track progress among OGP governments, as well as promote strong accountability between member governments and citizens. The IRM serves a key role in cooperation and collaboration between governments and civil society and in ensuring the credibility of OGP, and for promoting accountability for carrying out commitments outlined in national action plans. The IRM will issue annual reports that assess each OGP participating government’ progress towards implementation of its National Action Plan. The IRM is in charge of overseeing this process on behalf of OGP to ensure reports are credible and independent.

The IRM shall develop its functions in accordance with the below guiding principles. These guidelines were developed by the Criteria and Standards Subcommittee of OGP and were approved by the Steering Committee of OGP. They derive from the internal deliberation and evolving consensus among the members of that group and the public comment period carried out on the IRM Concept Note in July and August of 2012. These guidelines form the basis for the ~~e~~laboration of the assessment methodology and questionnaire by the International ~~E~~xperts Panel (IEP) and the IRM staff, drawing on their extensive experience and expertise.

**Objectives**

* The independent reports will be elaborated in a transparent, objective, non-intrusive, impartial, and apolitical manner. IRM researchers will have access to key decision-makers within assessed countries.
* The independent reports will contribute to advancing open government internationally by encouraging dialogue between citizens and their respective governments, and by sharing best practices, achievements, and challenges in the implementation of country action plans among all stakeholders.
* Key measures of success for the IRM will be (1) public dialogue on IRM findings by governments and civil society; (2) whether and how much progress was made on recommendations contained previous reports.
* The IRM reports will not define standards for use as preconditions for cooperation or assistance, or to rank countries.
* The IRM and IEP’s work in developing their methodology will be open and participatory with relevant stakeholders.

**Scope of research**

Consistent with the IRM Concept Note, the independent reports will assess implementation of the commitments adopted by OGP participating governments in their country action plans. As such, they will include an assessment of the following areas, with emphasis on development and implementation of action plans:

* The extent to which the action plan and its commitments reflect, in a country-specific way, the OGP values of transparency, accountability, and civic participation, as articulated in the OGP Declaration of Principles and the Articles of Governance.
* Wherever relevant, IRM reports may reflect actions or measures relevant to the country’s participation in OGP that were not originally reflected in the action plan.
* The degree to which OGP governments are following OGP process requirements and guidance in the development and implementation of their plans, in keeping with the Articles of Governance - Addendum C.
* Progress made on the articulation and implementation of each commitment and the plan as a whole, according to milestones laid out by the government in its action plan.
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Starting in the second year of assessments, reports shall also include a section for follow-up on recommendations issued in previous reports. This follow-up process will also be carried out in accordance with the principles set out in this document.

**Research Process**

* All research for the elaboration of the reports will be conducted in a way that incorporates the views of different public and private national stakeholders involved in, impacted by, and interested in the development and implementation of the country action plans
* Local researchers will work in culturally, locally, and contextually appropriate ways to convey information and to engage all relevant stakeholders in the elaboration of independent reports.
* In order to be able to incorporate all different domestic views in the independent reports, the IEP will strive to make use of any relevant information and communication technology tools available.

**Publication**

* The independent reports will be made publicly available in the local language(s)

and in English.

* Taking into account budgetary constraints and translation costs, the length of the independent reports should be limited to a maximum number of pages.
* The independent reports will be comprised of an executive summary and the full independent report, with any annexes the IEP deems appropriate.
* Data collected during the IRM process appropriate for a database should be

available through a tool following open data principles.

**Executive Summaries of Independent Reports**

* The independent reports will feature an executive summary, in a common format to be established by the IEP. The executive summaries will offer the basis for cross-country comparison and progress over time on the elements set out in “Scope of Research” above.
* Executive summaries should also allow for easy comprehension by a large international audience, both in content and visual terms.

**Governance, Independence, and Accountability:**

* The IRM will maintain transparency policies including requests for information in keeping with OGP’s broader disclosure policy. The IEP will aid the IRM staff in developing clear, public guidance for any divergence from this policy for sensitive documents
* The IRM will adopt appropriate protocols for maintaining the credibility and the independence of IRM process with respect to the OGP Steering Committee and Participating Governments, such as conflict of interest policies for IEP members or codes of conduct for local researchers.
* The IEP will aid the IRM staff in developing a robust and transparent system for addressing complaints from OGP countries and other stakeholders.
* No more than once annually, the C/S Subcommittee will revisit, and where necessary, revise the IRM Guiding Principles Document as well as provide official guidance to the IEP and IRM staff, subject to approval of the Steering Committee.

**Timeline for producing reports:**

* The independent reports will be issued on an annual basis.
* Each independent report will be published no later than 4 months after the end of the 12-month implementation period being assessed. For the first year, the 9 first IRM reports will be launched at least 1 month prior to the OGP plenary.