INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM

TECHNICAL PAPER 1

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OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP (OGP) BY THE NUMBERS:
WHAT THE IRM DATA TELLS US ABOUT OGP RESULTS

OGP is a voluntary, multistakeholder, international initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In pursuit of these goals, OGP provides an international platform for dialogue and sharing among governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector, all of which contribute to a common pursuit of open government. OGP stakeholders include participating governments as well as civil society and private sector entities that support the principles and mission of OGP.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) is a key means by which all stakeholders can track OGP progress in participating countries. The IRM produces independent progress reports for each country participating in OGP. In addition to assessing governments on the development and implementation of OGP action plans and on their progress in fulfilling open government principles, the progress reports make technical recommendations for improvements. These reports are intended to stimulate dialogue and promote accountability between member governments and citizens. Further information on the IRM, indicators, and the IRM process can be found at: www.opengovpartnership.org/independent-reporting-mechanism.

In the 18 months since the formation of the IRM, IRM researchers (national experts) in 43 countries have produced 43 IRM reports. Taken as a whole, the IRM reports provide insight on how OGP is working as a platform to advance ambitious policy reforms.

WHAT DO THE IRM REPORTS TELL US ABOUT OGP ACTION PLAN COMMITMENTS?
All OGP participating countries are required to develop a biannual OGP action plan including ambitious, concrete reform commitments.

What was the rate of completion of OGP action plan commitments?
Implementation of OGP action plans was uneven. A group of countries completed or made significant progress on many commitments, but a larger group completed less than half of all commitments. See Figure A. Completion varied widely between the first and second cohort. It is almost certain that the rates of completion following IRM assessment are likely to rise, as the IRM research period did not include the final months of implementation.

Figure A | Commitments with significant progress or complete showed wide variation.
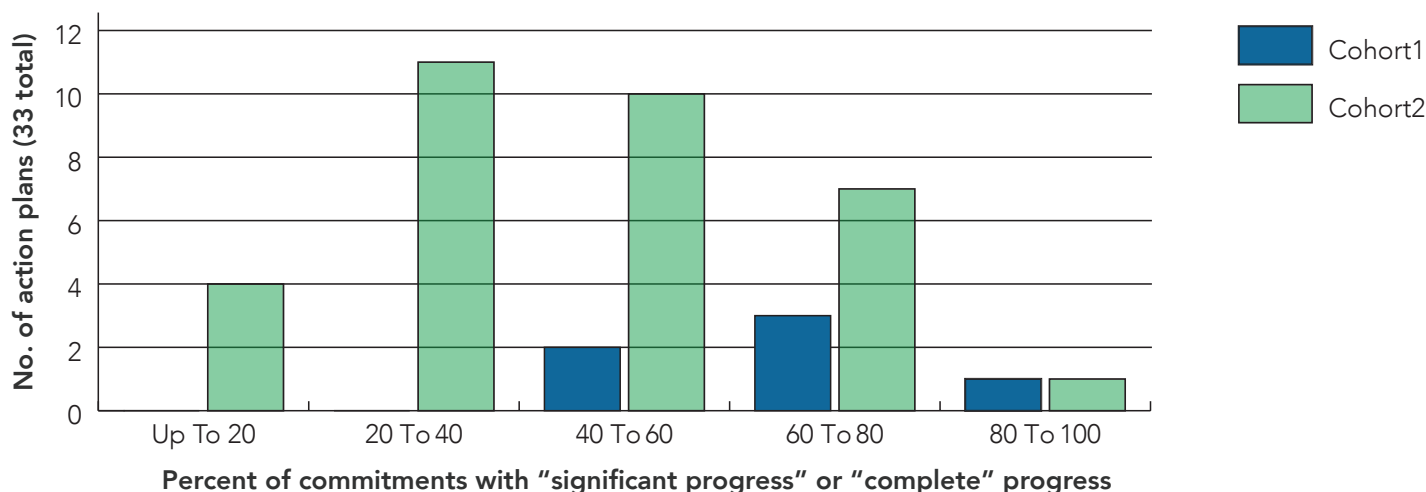
How many OGP action plan commitments were "model" OGP commitments?

The IRM assigns stars to commitments that are (1) specific enough to be measured; (2) clearly relevant to themes of open government; (3) potentially transformative or moderately impactful; and (4) have significant or better levels of completion. This is a good proxy for countries that are achieving major results through their OGP action plans. On a very positive note, 200 commitments received stars, meaning that significant results have been achieved. Most OGP countries had around 25% of their commitments starred. Although a few lagged behind, other countries saw significant achievements. Those working on OGP would do well to learn lessons from high performers. Again, as the assessment did not include the last several months of implementation, the number of starred commitments can be expected to rise.

Figure B | Distribution of action plans by percent starred commitments.

Percent of commitments with "significant progress" or "complete" progress
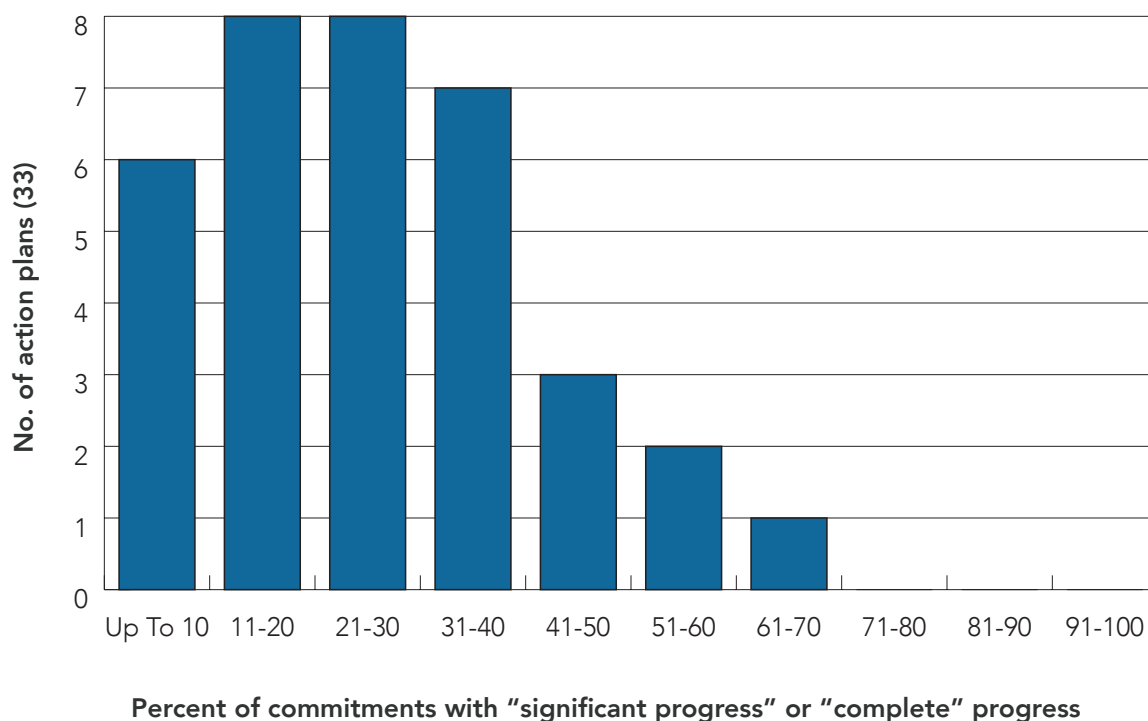
Were more ambitious action plans implemented?

More ambitious action plans are not necessarily implemented less often. While some countries with high ambition did not achieve what they set out to do in the first year, many others did. Again, lessons can be drawn from countries with high potential impact and implementation. Figure C below shows how various action plans performed relative to the mean. As can be seen, a number of countries with higher-potential impact action plans also had higher rates of completion. This is promising. Had all high-potential impact action plans remained incomplete, there would be more reason to doubt how much OGP might accomplish. Because of this, a next step for the OGP community will be to learn from countries with high levels of both potential impact and implementation.

Figure C | Action plans by ambition and degree of completion.

Percent of potentially "transformative" commitments

KEY: ■ ACTION PLAN   ••••• MEAN LINE
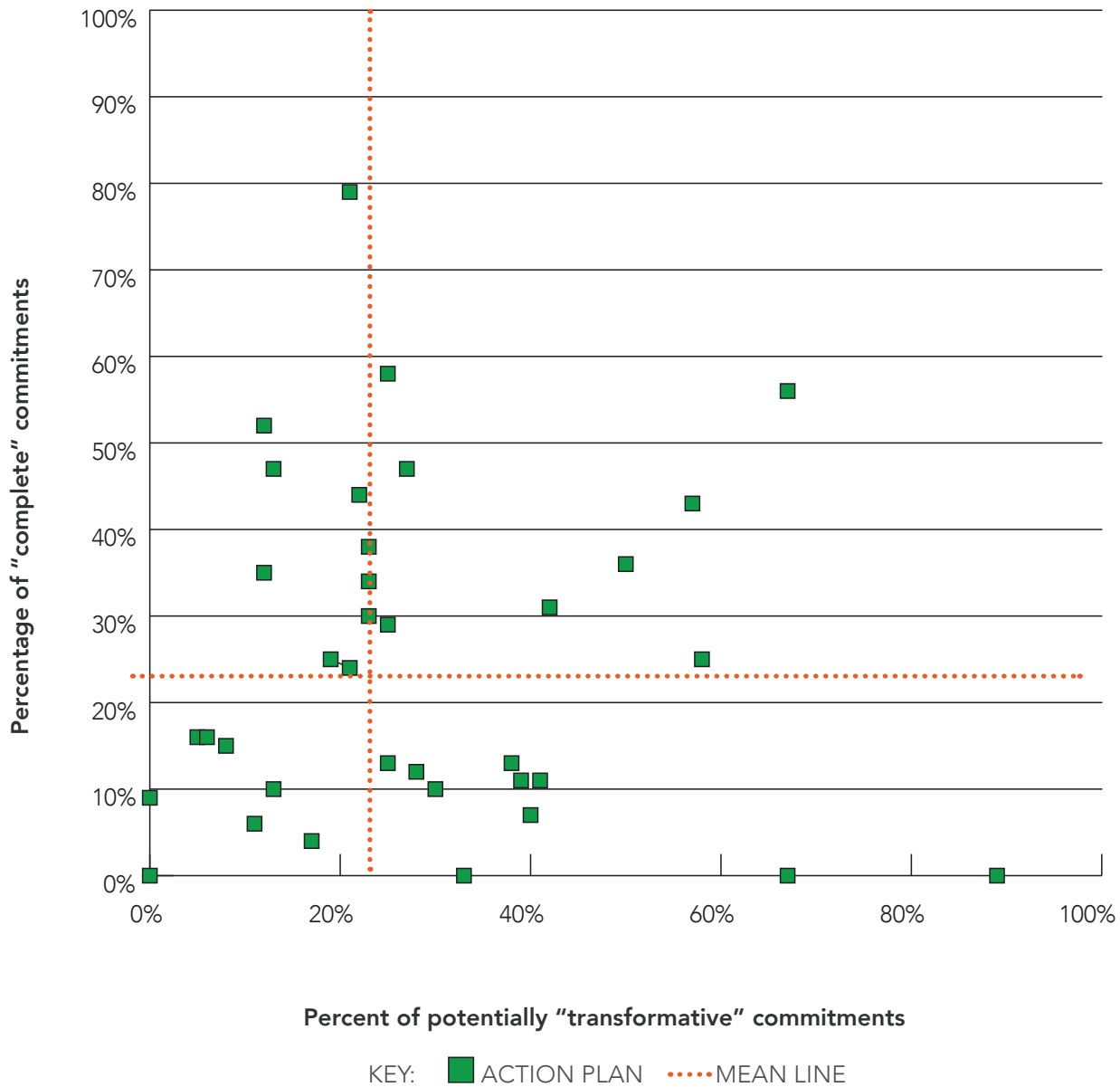
How many OGP countries followed the OGP process?

The IRM assessed governments for conformity to the OGP process for the second cohort of 35 countries joining in 2016. While most countries did not follow all of the OGP process requirements, three-quarters held in-person consultations with civil society and four-fifths completed a detailed self-assessment within three months of the due date. There was, generally, a higher rate of performance during the self-assessment phase when more OGP staff was available to provide guidance to participating countries. Nonetheless, major improvements are needed during the second round of drafting action plans.

Figure D | Which process steps were followed?

Y-axis label: Percent of processes meaning OGP requirements

Bars:
- Timeline availability: 23% (DURING DEVELOPMENT)
- Advance notice: 29% (DURING DEVELOPMENT)
- Awareness-Raising: 29% (DURING DEVELOPMENT)
- Online consultation: 54% (DURING DEVELOPMENT)
- In-person: 74% (DURING DEVELOPMENT)
- Summary of: 31% (DURING DEVELOPMENT)
- Regular forum: 43% (DURING IMPLEMENTATION)
- Self assessment: 80% (FOLLOWING IMPLEMENTATION)

Legend: ■ DURING DEVELOPMENT   ■ DURING IMPLEMENTATION   ■ FOLLOWING IMPLEMENTATION

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The IRM can serve as a learning tool in addition to an accountability tool, especially around the OGP process, action plan commitments, and institutions. The OGP Support Unit, in collaboration with other organizations, will need to carry out or commission further research to measure ultimate outcomes and impacts.

2. Completed and "starred" commitments are two key indicators of success at the national action plan level. As OGP participating countries implement their next action plans, they will need to continue to innovate and to build off countries with high potential impact commitments and high rates of implementation. Ideally this number will increase over the next round of reports.

3. While there are high performers in many of the aspects of OGP, a large number of countries face deficits with regard to their basic participation in OGP. Priorities will need to be established around which countries will need additional assistance.

4. OGP process requirements are not uniformly followed. Evidence suggests that compliance with process requirements may be related more closely to other measures of success.

5. At this time, it is inconclusive (based on IRM data) which institutional arrangements are more conducive to the successful development and implementation of an OGP action plan.

6. The OGP Support Unit will need continued investment in direct country support, peer learning, and civil society support. It has already begun this work, and future IRM reports will be able to shine light on the fruits of this labor.

ABSTRACT

The IRM examines the first two years of OGP action plans in terms of (1) form and completion of action plan commitments, (2) conformity to the OGP process, and (3) institutions in charge of OGP. Completion and "starred" commitments are two key indicators of success at the national action plan level. Key findings are as follows: (1) A number of key indicators, such as percentage of commitments completed, percentage of transformative commitments, percentage of starred commitments, and percentage of filler commitments show a high level of variation between action plans.

While some governments are not excelling in any category, there are high performers in each of these categories, and some high performers across the board. (2) Thus far, OGP process requirements are not followed most of the time. Interesting evidence suggests that compliance with process requirements may be more closely related to other measures of success. (3) At this time, it is inconclusive (based on IRM data) which institutional arrangements are more conducive to the successful development and implementation of an OGP action plan. Further research is needed to measure ultimate outcomes and impacts. The research agenda using IRM OGP data can help build a better evidence base for open government, guide OGP priorities, and signal success stories, some of which might be transferrable to other national contexts.

1 | BACKGROUND

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary, multistakeholder, international initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In pursuit of these goals, OGP provides an international forum for dialogue and sharing among governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector, all of which contribute to a common pursuit of open government. OGP stakeholders include participating governments as well as civil society and private sector entities that support the principles and mission of OGP.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) is a key means by which all stakeholders can track OGP progress in participating countries. The IRM produces independent progress reports for each country participating in OGP. In addition to assessing governments on the development and implementation of OGP action plans and on their progress in fulfilling open government principles, the progress reports make technical recommendations for improvements. These reports are intended to stimulate dialogue and promote accountability between member governments and citizens. Further information on the IRM, indicators, and the IRM process can be found at: www.opengovpartnership.org/independent-reporting-mechanism.

In the 18 months since the formation of the IRM, IRM researchers (national experts) in 43 countries have produced 43 IRM reports. Eight were on founding countries ("Cohort 1"), while 35 were on countries that submitted OGP action plans at the second OGP summit in Brasilia in 2012 ("Cohort 2").

With so many reports produced and most OGP-participating countries now developing and implementing their second action plan, the IRM has moved beyond proof-of-concept into a period of reflection and learning. Specifically, the large amount of information from the IRM process can provide insight into how OGP is working as a platform to advance ambitious policy reforms. This paper aims to stimulate debate, further research, and further use of the IRM data from the 43 reports.

The evidence base for this paper is significant:

- 43 completed reports
- 978 commitments or major actions made as part of the OGP (172 from the founding cohort and 806 from the second cohort)
- More than 3000 pages of analysis and reporting on commitments translated into more than 20 languages

These empirics can help to identify areas of strength and areas that need continued investment of energy and resources.

This paper seeks to inform curious OGP stakeholders generally (governments, civil society, and the private sector), and other data users such as academics and think tanks. IRM data can be used to learn how OGP countries are performing and to stimulate dialogue and debate on use of the recently released data.
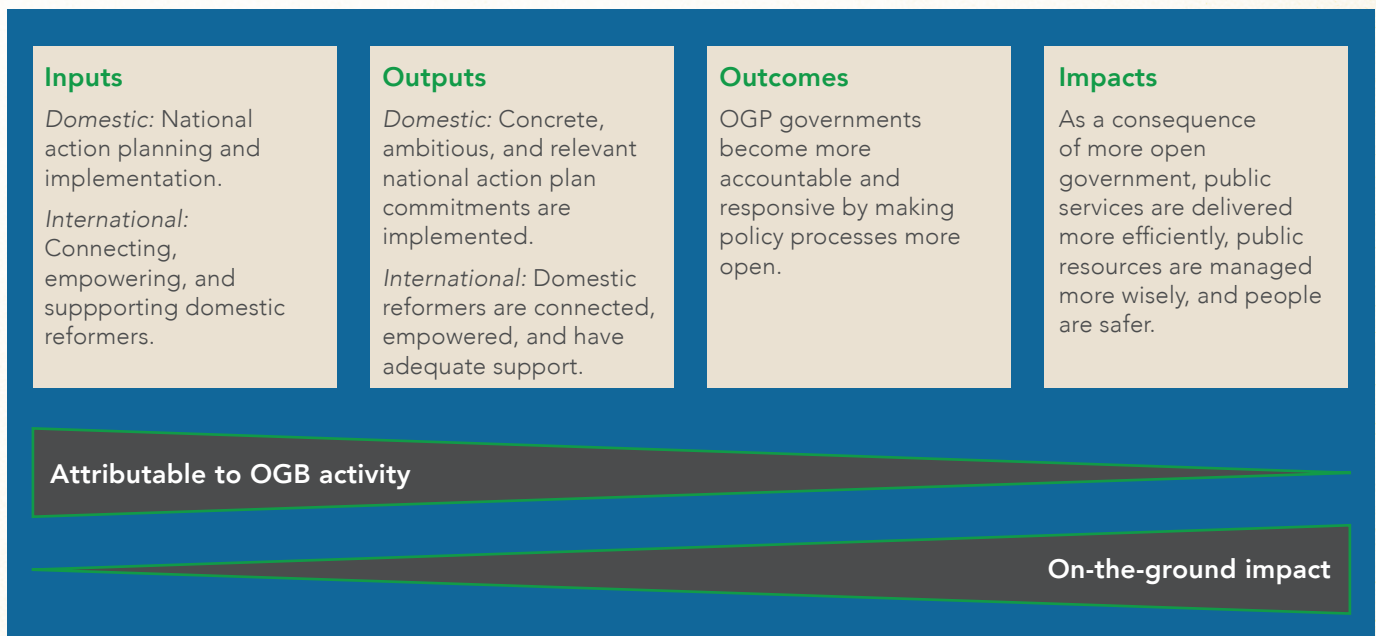
The paper proceeds as follows:

1. It outlines various definitions of "success" in OGP, including the limits of the IRM's ability to measure success.
2. It makes a preliminary attempt to describe what IRM data reveals.
3. It develops a research agenda for OGP stakeholders based on the findings of the IRM.

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2 | DEFINING "SUCCESS" IN OGP

The OGP is based on the idea that opening government can improve people's lives by making government more transparent, accountable, and responsive. At the national level, OGP introduces a domestic policy mechanism through which government and civil society establish an ongoing dialogue on the design, implementation, and monitoring of the commitments included in an OGP national action plan. At the international level, through exchange, international events, and peer learning, OGP provides a global platform to connect, empower, and support domestic reformers committed to transforming government and society through openness. What makes OGP unique is how the national action plan provides an organizing framework for the international networking and incentives that OGP provides.
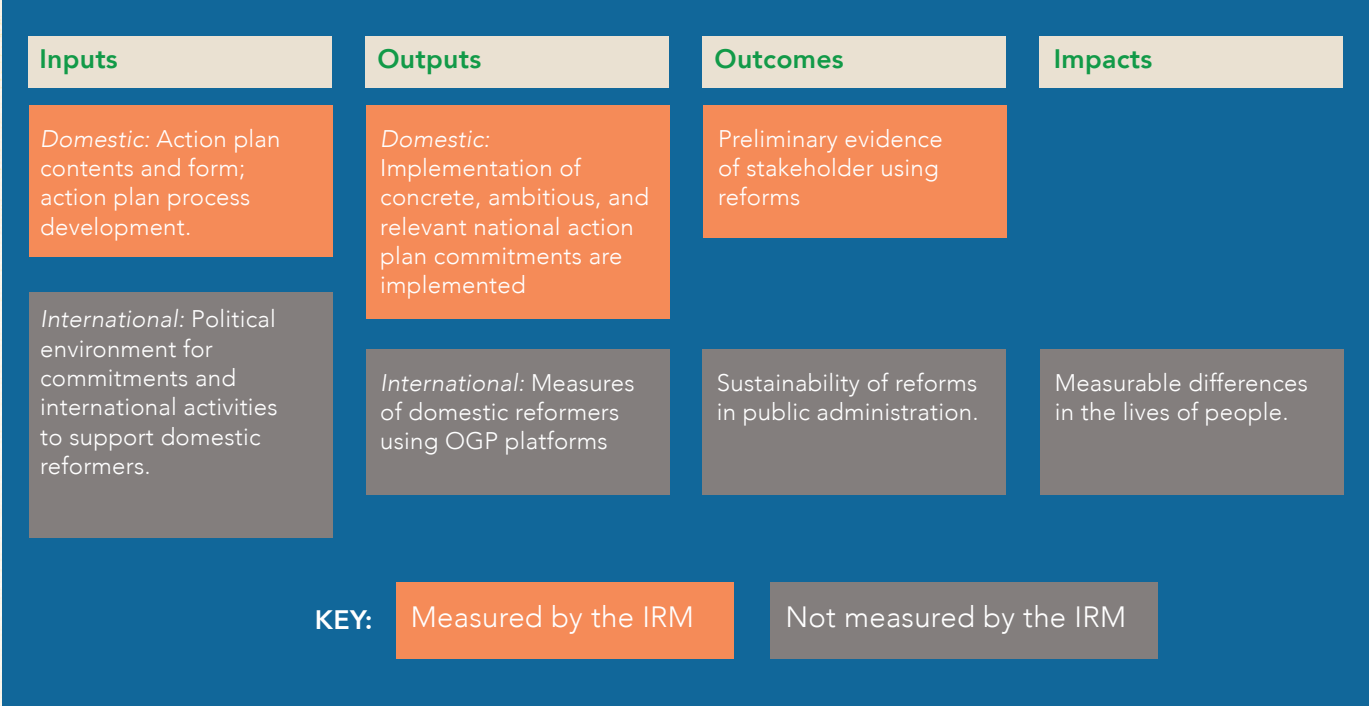
In considering "success" in OGP, one could look at varying results, ranging from **inputs** and **outputs**—whether basic OGP activities have been carried out (e.g. the development of action plans, hosting and attending high level summits)—to intermediate **outcomes**—whether OGP had a net effect on opening government—to final impacts—measuring whether opening government had a tangible impact on peoples' lives. Results that take place well after the original activities or inputs are less easily attributable to explicitly OGP-related activity. Further, the IRM research process does not explicitly identify them. This is shown in Figure 1. Attribution of impact decreases due to the inherent time lag between commitment implementation and impact, as well as other intervening causes for success or failure to deliver impacts.

Figure 1 | Defining success in OGP. Attribution of impacts becomes more difficult further from inputs.

Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Domestic: National action planning and implementation. *International:* Connecting, empowering, and suppporting domestic reformers.	*Domestic:* Concrete, ambitious, and relevant national action plan commitments are implemented. *International:* Domestic reformers are connected, empowered, and have adequate support.	OGP governments become more accountable and responsive by making policy processes more open.	As a consequence of more open government, public services are delivered more efficiently, public resources are managed more wisely, and people are safer.

Attributable to OGB activity

On-the-ground impact

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Ultimately, "success" in OGP means changing lives and changing governance structures. However, in the short term, the degree of successful implementation in terms of inputs and outputs can be measured. The IRM reports offer a basis for discussing OGP participating countries' strengths and weakness regarding inputs and outputs. Figure 2 shows what the IRM does and does not assess.

Figure 2 | What IRM reports do and do not assess.

Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Domestic: Action plan contents and form; action plan process development.	*Domestic:* Implementation of concrete, ambitious, and relevant national action plan commitments are implemented	Preliminary evidence of stakeholder using reforms	
International: Political environment for commitments and international activities to support domestic reformers.	*International:* Measures of domestic reformers using OGP platforms	Sustainability of reforms in public administration.	Measurable differences in the lives of people.

KEY: Measured by the IRM   Not measured by the IRM

Note that the IRM does not measure impacts of action plan commitments or of the initiative as a whole. This is an inherent limitation of the IRM due to its primary role as an accountability mechanism (rather than as an impact assessor), the short time lapse between implementation and the IRM assessment, and the inherent difficulty of linking impacts and outcomes.[2]

With the limits of the IRM in mind, one can still derive a bounded definition of success in order to identify what is working in OGP action plans and what is not.

2.1. KEY COMMITMENT-LEVEL DEFINITIONS

Governments participating in OGP commit to develop action plans in a participatory fashion, as well as to describe and to complete "concrete ambitious commitments." Thus, a well-formulated OGP action plan commitment (the "input" of OGP actions) has the following characteristics:

1. Concrete
2. Ambitious
3. Clearly relevant to open government values

Furthermore, in terms of "outputs," the degree of completion comprises a fourth and essential measure of performance in OGP. To be fair and consistent across national contexts, the IRM has developed definitions of each characteristic to guide IRM researchers in assessing individual commitments.

Individual definitions for each of these measures are given throughout the paper for ease of reading.

2 The OGP Support Unit (separate from the IRM) evaluates the impact of the OGP overall, as well as other aspects beyond the scope of the IRM mandate.

3 | WHAT WE KNOW

This section is an exploratory step in describing what the IRM data shows about national success in delivering the promised inputs and outputs of the OGP.[3]

In the hopes of stimulating data use and not exhausting the reader, the present paper lays out primarily descriptive statistics regarding the three areas outlined above—commitments, process, and institutions—before making a cautious analysis of the possible interrelations (or lack thereof) among these variables. This analysis can provide some basis for future verification and retesting, on later versions of the data set, in more sophisticated analyses or through deeper qualitative analyses that can unearth some of the subtleties of national contexts lost in big-picture data.

3.1. WHAT WERE THE RESULTS OF OGP ACTION PLANS?

Implementation of ambitious, concrete commitments is one of the cornerstones of the OGP national action planning process. This section describes the wide variation between countries in each of the aspects of commitments—form, ambition, and completion. In line with the IRM's governing documents, the analysis eschews country ranking, although another organization could help to enable cross-national learning by identifying strong performers and sharing models of success across context where transferable.

3.1.1 Completion

How did commitments fare at the one-year mark assessed by the IRM?

IRM researchers assess the actual level of completion of each commitment at the end of the assessment period, selecting one of the following values to code for the completion variable:

    a.   Complete

    b.   Substantial

    c.   Limited

    d.   Officially withdrawn

    e.   Not started

    f.   Unable to tell from government and civil society responses

This variable undercounts actual completion in some or many of the countries, as many commitments were not scheduled to be completed at the time of assessment. IRM assessments only covered the first year of assessment and many action plans were longer than a year. As a consequence, the IRM counted as incomplete a number of commitments that may have been completed later in the action plan period.

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[3] At the time of writing, June 2014, the IRM data was still considered a "draft" release, subject to allow for revisions and updating of the data as IRM reports are finalized and the data is are cleaned. The IRM, in the spirit of open data, has released the data early, knowing that there may be some mistakes in the data, with the hope that users can provide feedback on improving the data, whether in terms of release formats or making the contents more useable and accurate.

On a per-commitment basis, 28% of commitments saw completion within the one-year mark, while 51% saw substantial progress. On a less cheerful note, no evidence of progress could be found for 17% of commitments. (This is the total for commitments marked, "Not started," "Withdrawn," or "Unclear.") Totals, percentages, and cumulative totals are given in Table 1.

Table 1 | 51% of commitments saw substantial or better progress.

COMPLETION	COUNT	%	CUMULATIVE %
Complete	257	29%	..
Substantial progress	191	22%	51
Limited progress	296	33%	84
Not started	110	12%	96
Not applicable, unclear, or unable to obtain information	26	3%	99
Withdrawn	17	2%	100
Total	**897**	**100%**	

NATIONAL-LEVEL COMMITMENT AGGREGATES

Performance in each country can be assessed either by totaling key variables (for example, number of ambitious commitments or number of starred commitments) or by calculating the percentage of commitments that meet a particular test (e.g. all commitments that have a "high" specificity).

The total number of starred or ambitious commitments is meaningful and can be assessed for each country as a sum total. However, other variables such as "high" specificity commitments are more usefully expressed in percentages. Note that there is a large variation in the number of commitments per country (from 54 in Montenegro to three in Czech Republic and Guatemala). As a consequence, there is a limit to which percentages can be seen as meaningful.

Nonetheless, each of the key variables above can be aggregated at the national level to give a percentage of commitments that are concrete, ambitious, relevant, complete, starred, or filler. These can be extremely useful (especially starred commitments) in pointing to the relative success of a particular national action plan at the one-year mark. Also, they can help to set benchmarks with which one can judge performance at the one-year mark of each subsequent action plan.

Two cautions should be attached to this data. First, the denominator for the total number of commitments is very low in many countries. For example, both the Czech Republic and Guatemala had three commitments. Thus, a higher a hypothetical completion rate does not mean that a larger number of country commitments were completed. This needs to be taken into comparison with other countries with a higher number of commitments, but a lower rate of completion. Further, percentages should be taken in context, as percentages with a low denominator can lend an inappropriate sense of precision. For example, caution needs to be exercised when comparing a completion rate of 66.7% for a country with three commitments to a 30% completion rate for a country with 50 commitments.

This leads to the second major issue: all commitments are not equal. Consequently, any aggregate variable that is calculated based on commitments is comparing unlike things. Nevertheless, by assessing potential impact, commitments become somewhat comparable, at least within the national context. Therefore, the compound variable of "starred commitments" deals with this problem. It allows one to differentiate between low potential impact commitments and higher impact commitments, and it groups the higher impact commitments together. This allows a description of the relative weight of a commitment to be established within countries. With some care and a close reading of the qualitative information on each commitment in its national context, comparison might be made across countries.

An interesting pattern emerges when analyzing the national action plans in aggregate (rather than commitment-by-commitment). The following statistics of the 42 national reports are telling:

(1) The mean completion rate was 27%;

(2) The median completion rate was 25%;

(3) The standard deviation for completion was a considerable 21%.

These and other figures are summarized in Table 2. In all, they suggest a very wide, normally distributed bell curve. Indeed, the highest quartile of completion was above 43%, with the lowest below 11%.

Table 2 | Descriptive statistics on rates of completion suggest a very wide, normally distributed bell-curve, meaning widely varying success rates.

|	COMPLETE	SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS OR COMPLETE
Mean	27%	48%
Standard Deviation	21%	22%
Median	25%	50%
Median Error	0.01	0.01
Percentile 25% (Q1)	0.11	0.35
Percentile 75% (Q2)	0.43	0.64

Beyond measures of central tendency, Figure 3 shows a histogram split by decile with two peaks, indicating a high rate of completion among some action plans and a larger, low-performing group.

Figure 3 | Rates of action plan completion ranked by decile: split between high and low performers.

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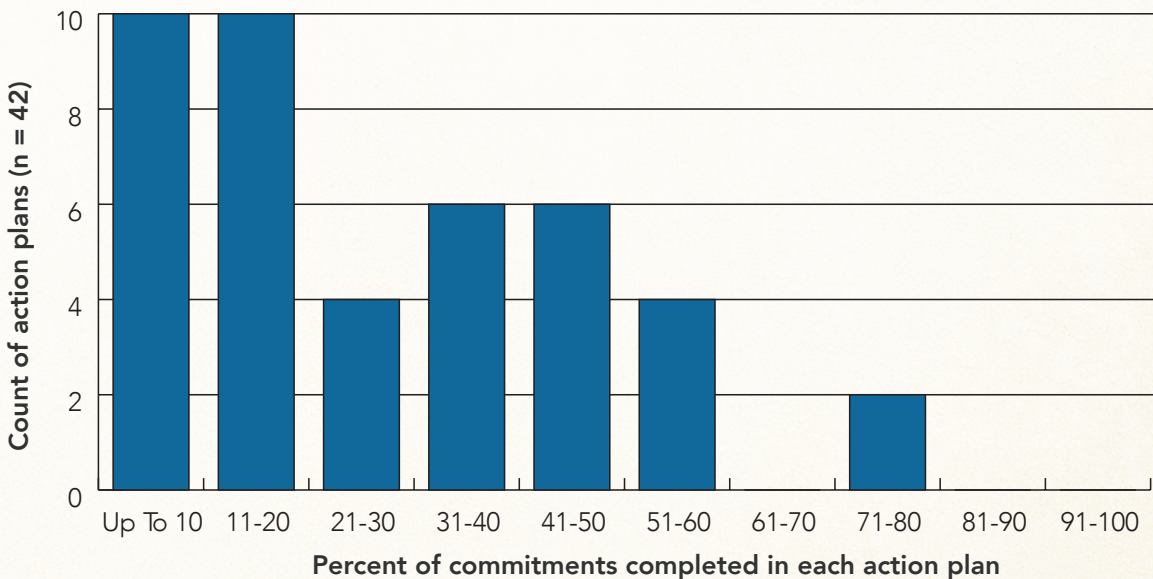
The two groups can be explained, to some extent, by separating the participating countries into the seven founding members (Cohort 1) and the 35 countries that joined in Brasilia in 2012 (Cohort 2). When separated, two different normal curves appear. The mean completion of Cohort 1 is in the 70th percentile, and the mean completion of Cohort 2 remains in the lower 20th percentile (see Figure 4). What creates the variation between these groups is beyond the scope of this paper, but high-level political buy-in, institutional awareness of open government values, stronger civil society, increased international buy-in, or an additional three months may have been contributing factors. Readers or researchers may be curious as to how some countries, in the absence of similar incentives, managed to achieve as high or equally high level of implementation. Further, this raises the question of whether the conditions for the relative success of Cohort 1 can be duplicated.

Figure 4 | Distribution of action plan completion between cohorts demonstrates different tendencies.
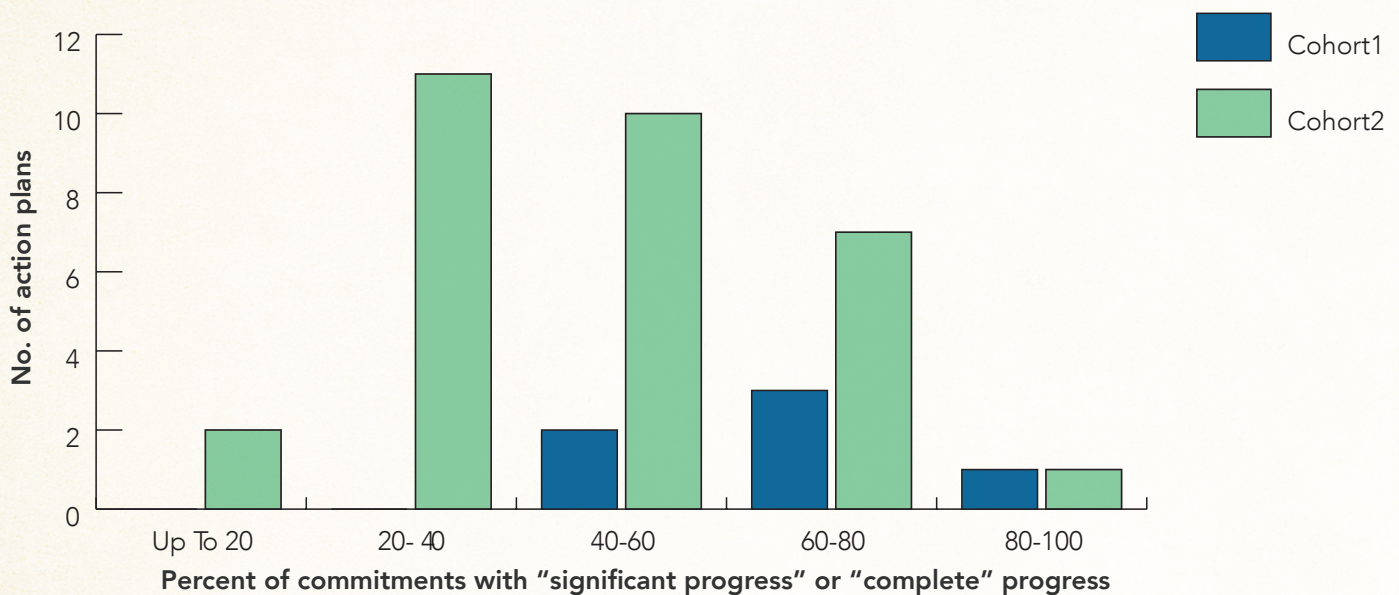
3.1.2 Ambition: How many commitments change business as usual?

Since the start, OGP action plans have been required to "stretch" government practice beyond an existing baseline. In 2013, this term was changed to require "ambitious" commitments. While the definition of "ambition" adopted by the Steering Committee had multiple elements, the IRM assesses two elements of this definition. One is "potential impact," while the other is whether a commitment is "new or pre-existing."[4]

New vs. pre-existing

When coding each commitment for the *new vs. pre-existing variable*, each IRM researcher asks, "Is there evidence that the specific actions described by the commitment language appeared as commitments in earlier policy documents?" This question refers to the specific actions, rather than the policy area in general. The possible responses are "pre-existing," "new," and in very few cases, "unclear."

The OGP does not require commitments to be new, so an action that pre-dated the action plan is not necessarily a sign of lack of ambition. Rather, this variable attempts to identify and distinguish commitments containing specific actions already in existence before an action plan from commitments that contain new results and add a level of specificity and accountability that did not exist before.

[4] Note that this data was included only in the 35 countries of Cohort 2 due to the lack of clarity before the Steering Committee adopted language on "Ambition."

A few caveats are worth bearing in mind. First, this is likely an over-count, as some of commitments may have existed prior to the action plan, but researchers were unable to identify documentation. Further, this concept of "newness" should not be conflated with attribution, namely, that these commitments would have been made without OGP. While it is fair to assume that some would have, it is unfair to assume that all commitments would have been made without the added stimulus and accountability that OGP provided. Readers should keep in mind these limitations when claiming or denying credit to OGP.

Nevertheless, the numbers are somewhat surprising, given common belief that OGP action plans "recycle" government action. Table 3 summarizes key measures of central tendency between action plans. Figure 5 shows this distribution by decile. (Note that "newness" was coded only for the 35 country action plans of Cohort 2.)

Table 3 | Percentage of commitments marked "new."

MEASURE	COUNT OR PERCENT
Count of action plans	35
Mean	36%
Standard Deviation	28%
Minimum	0%
Maximum	95%
Median	31%
Percentile 25% (Q1)	13%
Percentile 75% (Q2)	62%

Figure 5 | Wide variation in action plans' "newness."
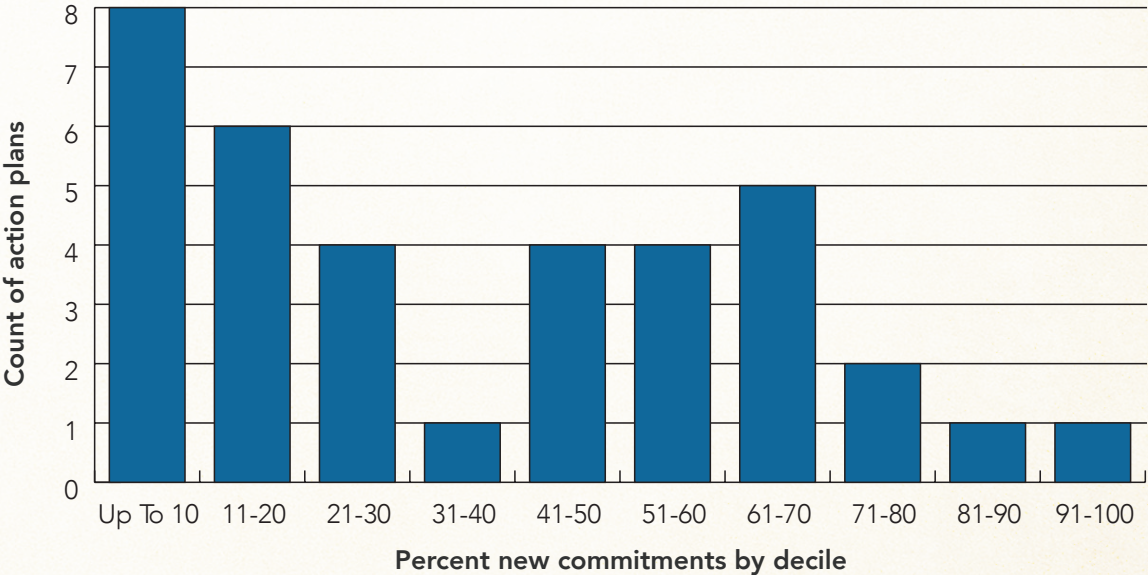
As with the level of completion, IRM reports show wide variation. While it is understandable that many action plans will contain pre-existing commitments, there should be concern for the action plans at the lower end of the spectrum, with less than 30% new commitments. Indeed, some of the most ambitious action plans seem to have only pre-existing commitments. Assuming that the process was participatory, it is unclear why civil society groups would propose only pre-existing commitments. The fact may be that, in many of these countries, the process for development was decidedly closed or proposals by civil society were deemed irrelevant or not useful. Alternately, if civil society collectively felt that government was already on a good path, participation might endorse existing plans.

Potential impact

In coding this variable, each researcher asks, "Would the commitment, if implemented, stretch government practice beyond business-as-usual in the relevant policy area – regardless of whether it is new or pre-existing?"

Researchers answer this question according to the potential effect of the commitment as written, not what actually happens. Moreover, the assessment of potential impact is a context-sensitive appraisal relative to the baseline performance in the respective policy area. Thus, the same commitment could have a different potential impact depending on which government made it. For example, an identically worded commitment to improve recordkeeping for freedom of information requests likely would have a different impact in Honduras than it would in Jordan.

There are four possible values in the IRM method for potential impact:

1. None or worsens: Worsens or maintains the status quo.

2. Minor: An incremental but positive step in the relevant policy area.

3. Moderate: A major step forward in the relevant policy area, but remains limited in scale or scope.

4. Transformative: A reform that could potentially transform 'business as usual' in the relevant policy area.

To maximize reliability, IRM researchers are to identify the baseline at the beginning of implementation. Despite the fact that coding is intentionally relative to the national context, it does attempt to provide adequate reliability between potential resources.

The data on potential impact shows that significant commitments are being made, at least within the context of the issues identified in the action plan. Again, the IRM reports do not measure whether these are the "right" or headline open government issues in the country.

Data suggest that there are a perhaps surprising number of commitments of potentially "transformative" or "moderate" potential impact commitments (see Table 4 below). But it also shows wide deviation, with a few highly ambitious action plans alongside many less ambitious action plans (see Figures 6 and 7).

Table 4 | Measures of central tendency and distribution for potential impact show wide variation between action plans.

	% OF COMMITMENTS "TRANSFORMATIVE"	% OF COMMITMENTS "MODERATE" OR "TRANSFORMATIVE"
Count	35	35
Mean	29%	37%
Standard Deviation	21%	22%
Minimum	0%	0%
Maximum	89%	100%
Median	23%	34%
Percentile 25% (Q1)	13%	19%
Percentile 75% (Q2)	40%	49%

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Figure 6 | Distribution of percent "moderate" or "transformative" commitments suggests two clusters of countries with a "long tail" of more ambitious action plans.
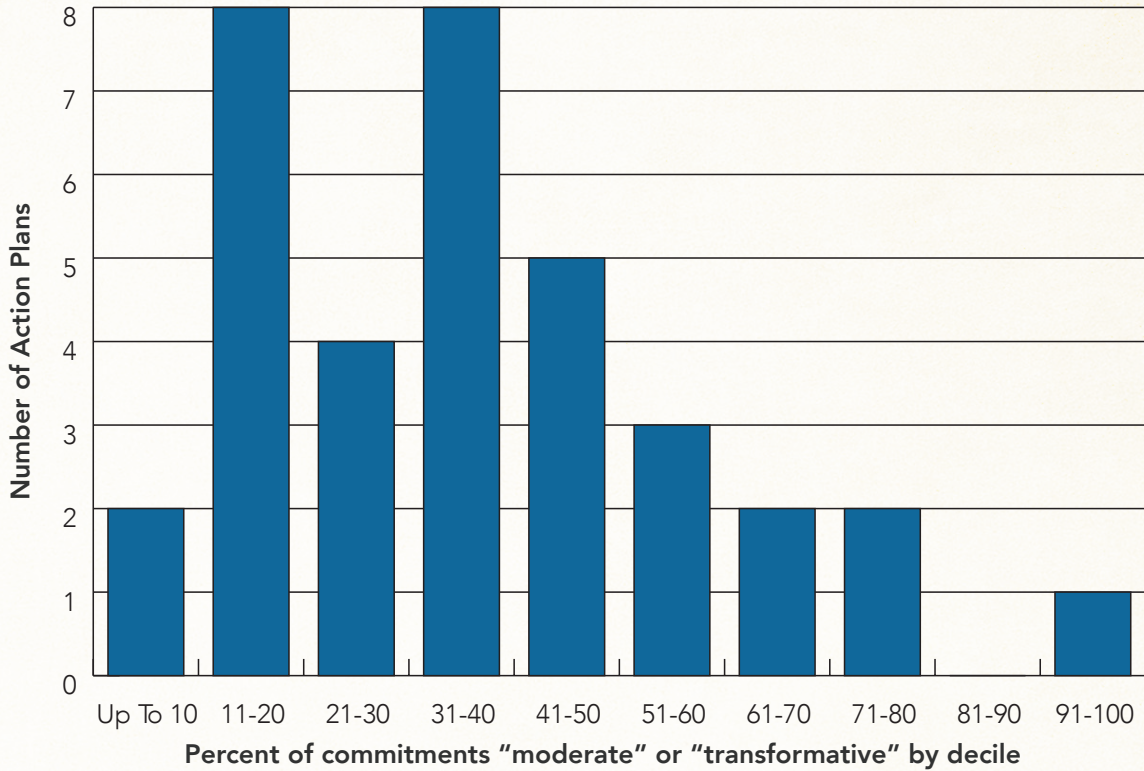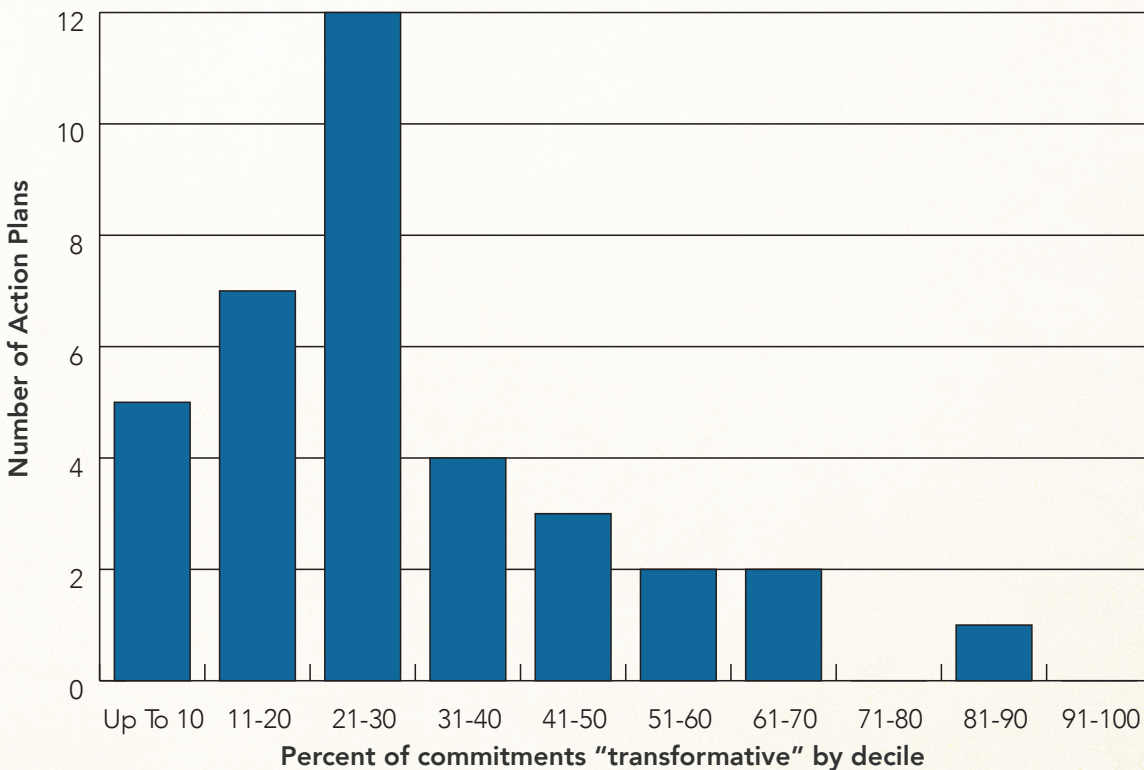

Figure 7 | The mean percentage of "transformative" commitments (29%) belies a wide distribution with a number of high potential impact action plans and a number of low potential impact action plans.

The distribution of high potential impact commitments across action plans requires further investigation, as a number of action plans seem to aim for "low hanging fruit" exclusively, whereas others aim for more ambitious, significant targets. The section below on bivariate analysis looks at the interrelation between potential impacts, on the one hand, and newness and completion rates, on the other.

The policy question for OGP is: how can certain countries with low ambition and no new commitments be incentivized to create more ambitious action plans? Yet questions remain as to what the right level of ambition is, given the unique capacities and contexts of a given OGP country, and whether there is a strong relationship between ambition and completion.

3.1.3 Were commitments relevant to open government?

The IRM researcher in each country evaluates each commitment for its relevance to OGP Grand Challenges (Improving Public Services, Increasing Public Integrity, Managing Public Resources, Creating Safer Communities, and Increasing Corporate Accountability) and OGP values (Access to Information, Civic Participation, Public Accountability, and Technology and Transparency and Accountability).

OGP Grand Challenges

OGP requires each country to include at least one commitment in its action plan on one of the Grand Challenges. Because the Challenges are so broadly defined and—individually and collectively—so wide in scope, few commitments or action plans do not clearly deal with at least one grand challenge. As nothing of great interest emerges from an analysis of the data, this paper does not focus on the OGP Grand Challenges.

OGP values

Of more interest is the widespread lack of clear relevance to OGP values in many action plans. Some OGP commitments have an unclear relationship to OGP values. To identify commitments that are clearly linked to fundamental issues of openness, the IRM researcher makes a judgment based on a close reading of the commitment text. Researchers mark the relevance of each commitment to at least one of the following three values, where appropriate:

- **Access to information** — These commitments:
  - o   pertain to government-held information;
  - o   are not restricted to data but pertain to all information;
  - o   may cover proactive or reactive releases of information;
  - o   may pertain to strengthening the right to information; and
  - o   must provide open access to information (not privileged or internal only to government).

- **Civic participation** — Governments seek to mobilize citizens to engage in public debate, to provide input, and to make contributions that lead to more responsive, innovative and effective governance. Commitments around access to information:
  - o   open decision making to all interested members of the public; such forums are usually "top-down" in that they are created by government (or actors empowered by government) to inform decision making;
  - o   often include elements of access to information to ensure meaningful input of interested members of the public into decisions; and
  - o   often include enhancing citizens' right to be heard, but do not necessarily include the right to be heeded.

- **Public accountability** — Rules, regulations, and mechanisms call upon government actors to justify their actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of them, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments. As part of open government, such commitments have an "open" element, meaning that they are not purely internal systems of accountability without a public face.

Additionally, IRM researchers may mark the following, where relevant:

- **Technology and innovation for transparency and accountability** — Commitments for technology and innovation promote new technologies or offer opportunities for information sharing, public participation, and collaboration. Technology and innovation commitments:
    - Should make more information public in ways that enable people both to understand what their governments do and to influence decisions;
    - May commit to supporting the ability of governments and citizens to use technology for openness and accountability; and
    - May support the use of technology by government employees and citizens alike.

Countries may focus their commitments at the national, local and/or subnational level—wherever they believe their open government efforts will have the greatest impact.

If the commitment is not clearly relevant to any of the first three values based on the text, then the researcher marks "unclear relevance." Readers should note that a commitment marked "unclear relevance" may be relevant to an open government value, but as written it remains unclear.

In analyzing Cohort 2 action plans, it became increasingly clear that there was a clear problem of relevance among some OGP countries. Simply put, many commitments did not advance the values of open government. Problems seem to relate largely to confusion around the term "open government." Broadly speaking, action plans showed three problems, ranked from low to high frequency:

- *Confusion of open government with good government or public goods:* Action plans had a number of commitments to provide public goods (e.g. improving maternal health, reducing police brutality) that did not have an "open" element; the commitments did not provide increased access to information, participation, or public accountability.

- *Confusion of open government with anti-corruption:* Action plans had a number of commitments that would clearly relate to the control of corruption, but lacked anything open about them. For example, internal-to-government reforms such as secret tribunals or internal-only audits—however commendable, accountability-spurring, or effective—do not meet the basic test of being "open." While many anti-corruption efforts are indeed open government, some are not. Additionally, while OGP has anti-corruption as one of the OGP's principle themes, the scope of the initiative is wider.

- *Confusion of open government with e-government:* Many open government commitments have a technology component, which, however, is not a requirement. Similarly, not all e-government is automatically an open government commitment. This confusion seems apparent in some action plans where otherwise good commitments did not clearly have an "open" component relating to access to information, civic participation, or public accountability.

What does the data show? As shown in Figure 8, action plans vary widely. Promisingly, most action plans demonstrate that respective governments understood the central concept of openness. Yet a long tail of action plans—ranging upwards from 20% of commitments—demonstrated one of the three above problems. Since the discovery of this issue, the much-enlarged Support Unit, with the aid of the OGP Criteria and Standards Subcommittee, has developed and approved clearer definitions on the core OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, and Public Accountability. Ideally, longitudinal data on the next round of action plans will demonstrate a marked improvement, as later action plans benefit from this improved clarity and the feedback provided by OGP stakeholders and the IRM.

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Figure 8 | Most national action plans showed high levels of relevance, but a striking number did not.
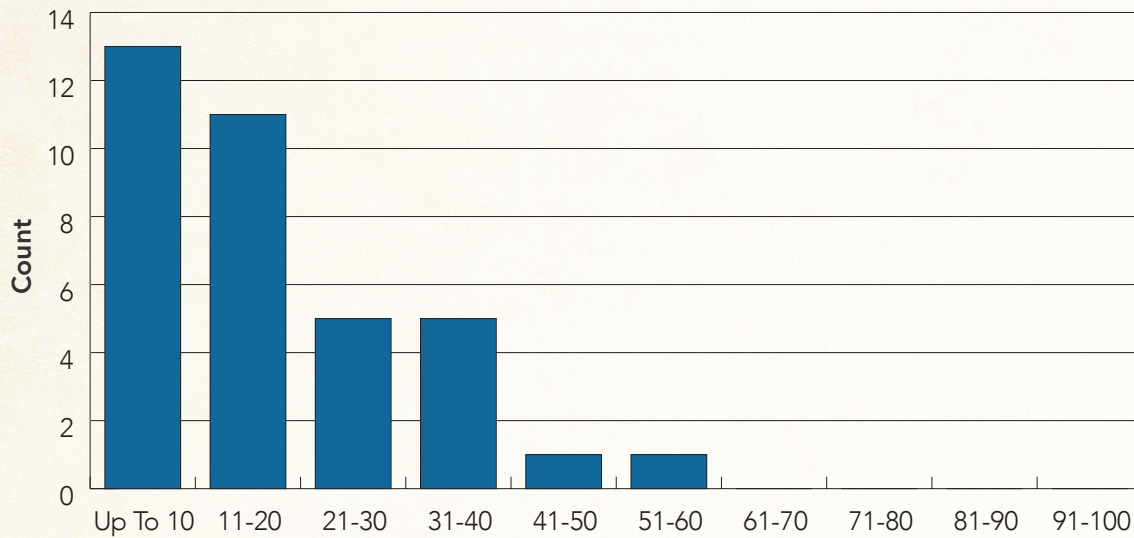
Percentage of commitments of unclear relevance to open government by action plan by decile

3.1.4 How concrete were OGP commitments?

All OGP countries are required to make "concrete" commitments. To assess this characteristic, the IRM measures how "specific and measurable" each commitment is. This variable assesses the level of specificity and measurability of each commitment based on the specific language contained in the action plan. Each commitment receives one of the following ratings.

1. High (Commitment language provides clear, measurable, verifiable milestones for achievement of the goal)

2. Medium (Commitment language describes an activity that is objectively verifiable, but does not contain specific milestones or deliverables)

3. Low (Commitment language describes activity that can be construed as measurable, with some interpretation on the part of the reader)

4. None (Commitment language contains no verifiable deliverables or milestones)

Commitment text can be highly obscure such as, "Opening up of new areas for public service development and delivery."

By contrast, some commitments may contain clear milestones with due dates and key metrics. The first action plans of Canada and Croatia are examples of action plans with highly specific commitments.

In an initiative based on principles of accountability, flexibility, and learning, a careful balance must be struck: commitments should be specific enough to promise clear deliverables or outcomes, but general enough to allow for adequate course-correction when an approach shows itself to be unsuccessful. Vague commitments cause two problems. First, some vague commitments are un-measurable or elude accountability, as almost any action can satisfy these commitments. An example of such a commitment is, "Improved access to public information. Publish the information in format that will make them easy to search, as well as in format that makes them ready to use (usable)."

Second, some vague commitments, such as those promising legislative action over-emphasize means over ends, when a number of other approaches might have met the same policy goals. This is true especially in systems where such commitments are often politically difficult to deliver.

While the IRM does not collect systematized data on the issue of over-prescriptive commitments, it reports the level of specificity and measurability of commitments. Figure 9 shows the distribution by decile of percentage of commitments with low specificity and measurability.

Figure 9 | Many action plans were highly specific, although some action plans showed very low levels of specificity, making assessment of completion difficult to assess.

Distribution of low-specificity and measuability commitments by action plans
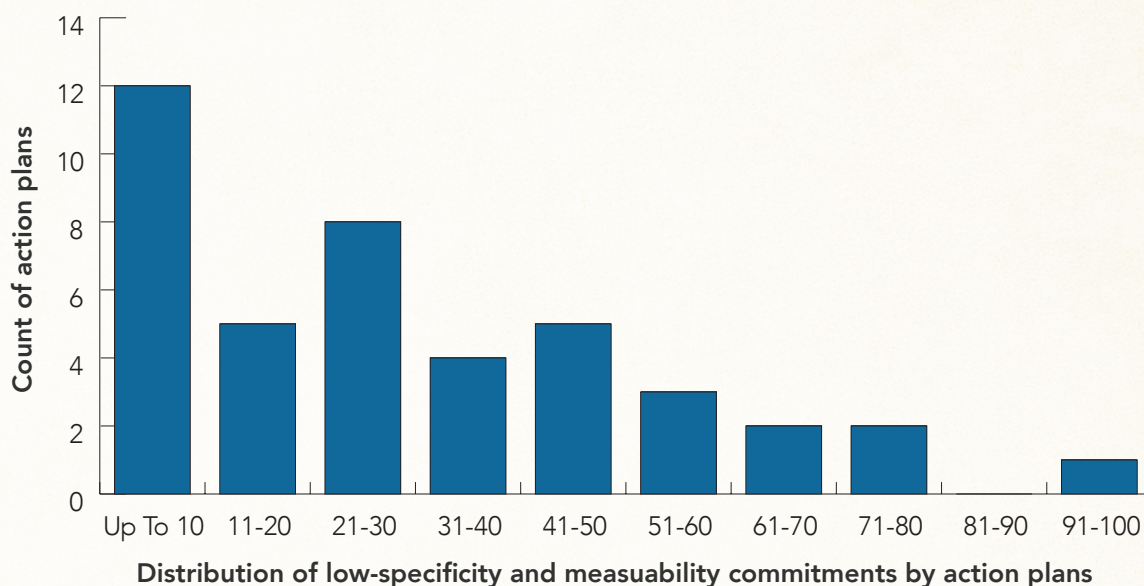
The Support Unit has made some strides in helping governments and civil society to develop new, more specific action plans. Again, longitudinal data will demonstrate the effectiveness of this push. Where officials are reticent to create lengthy documents due to specificity, options are to reduce the total number of commitments, to create official annexes to official documents, or to hyperlink to annexes available at the time of publication.

3.1.5 How many "model" commitments were in OGP action plans?

The IRM introduced the concept of starred commitments to identify strong or model commitments in OGP action plans. The formula for starred commitments is calculated after the IRM researcher assigns the above scores to each commitment. Each commitment needs to satisfy all of the following criteria:

- **Concrete:** Specific enough for ambition to be assessed ("medium" or "high" specificity).
- **Ambitious:** "Moderate" or "High" potential impact.
- **Clearly relevant:** Marked as relevant to one or more of three core OGP values—Access to information, Civic participation, Public Accountability.
- **Complete:** Commitment is marked "complete" or "substantial" progress.

It is hoped that these will incentivize government and civil society organizations to submit and realize stronger subsequent commitments and to enable peer learning between countries.

The data shows that 25% of Cohort 2 commitments were starred. In the aggregate, the mean percentage of starred commitments by action plan was 26% and the median was 24%. Sounding a more cautious note, however:

- Not all starred commitments were completed (and not infrequently, the "open" portion of a commitment was the incomplete aspect);

- Some starred commitments were nearly un-measurable and the outputs measured may not be congruent to the initial intent of the commitment;
- Not all starred commitments can be attributed to motivation provided by national participation in OGP; and
- Not all starred commitments speak strongly to core OGP values. Indeed, some e-government commitments received stars for high impact in their sector beyond opening government, despite very marginal improvement only in access to information.

As in any compounded measure of success, the specific nature of the commitment given the national context and the planned follow up to the actions beyond the first year is important.

Nonetheless, starred commitments provide shorthand to identify and highlight the major accomplishments of each government. They enable new opportunities for peer learning and can provide an incentive for a race-to-the-top in the creation of concrete, lean, ambitious action plans.

How did action plans fare in this, the most important measure?

In raw numbers, some countries produced an impressive number of starred commitments. As the first data column in Table 5 shows, one country had 16 starred commitments. However, others had none. The mean was six, with wide variation (standard deviation of four commitments). In percentages, two-thirds of action plans had between nine and 43 percent starred commitments—again, a notable spread.

Table 5 | Wide variation in number and percentage of starred commitments.

	# STARRED	% STARRED
Count	35	
Mean	6	26%
Standard Deviation	4	17%
Minimum	0	0%
Maximum	16	67%
Range	16	67%
Median	6	24%
Percentile 25% (Q1)	3	16%
Percentile 75% (Q2)	8	34%

When examined by decile, as in Figure 10, the data is consistent with the above conclusions.

Figure 10 | Most action plans at the one-year mark averaged 25% starred commitments.

Percent starred commitments by decile
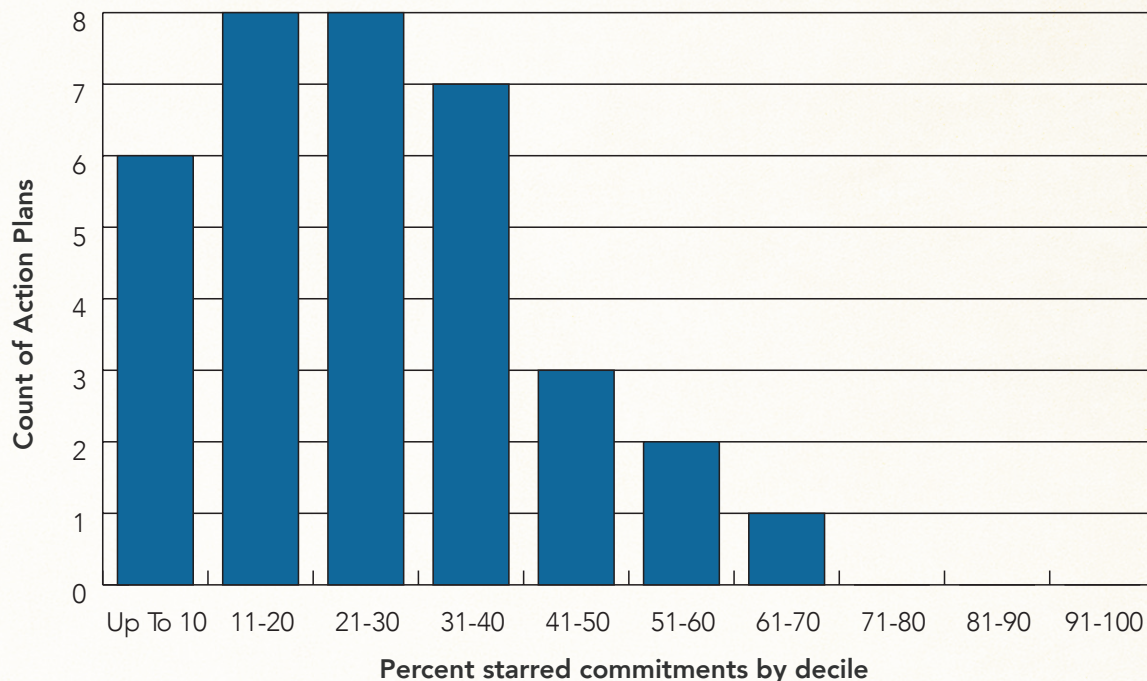
3.1.6 Filler commitments

One might consider the degree to which action plans are weighed down with high levels of "filler" commitments, commitments that add length to the OGP action plan but do not clearly advance open government values goals of OGP. This paper defines 'filler' commitments as meeting at least one of the following criteria:

- **Concreteness:** Commitments marked with "low" specificity so as to be un-measurable or unverifiable.

- **Ambition:** Commitments with potential impact marked as "none," given that they usually either have already been completed before the action plan or worsen the status quo.

- **Relevance:** Commitments with unclear relevance to OGP values, as articulated in the action plan.

Unlike starred commitments, this measure was not included in published IRM reports. It has been derived for this paper.

The numbers are somewhat startling. It seems as though a certain number of action plans may be riddled with easy victories. A few action plans were so confusing or vague as to be un-measurable. While some of this can be expected, it is hoped that the next round of action plans from each of these countries will be leaner and more targeted. Figure 11 shows this problem. Notably, a number of action plans perform well by this standard. This presents an opportunity for countries to show success in developing lean action plans.

Figure 11 | A minority of action plans were lean and targeted while the majority had a number of filler commitments—either unspecific, of unclear relevance, or with no or negative potential impact.

Distribution of percent "filler" in action plans by decile
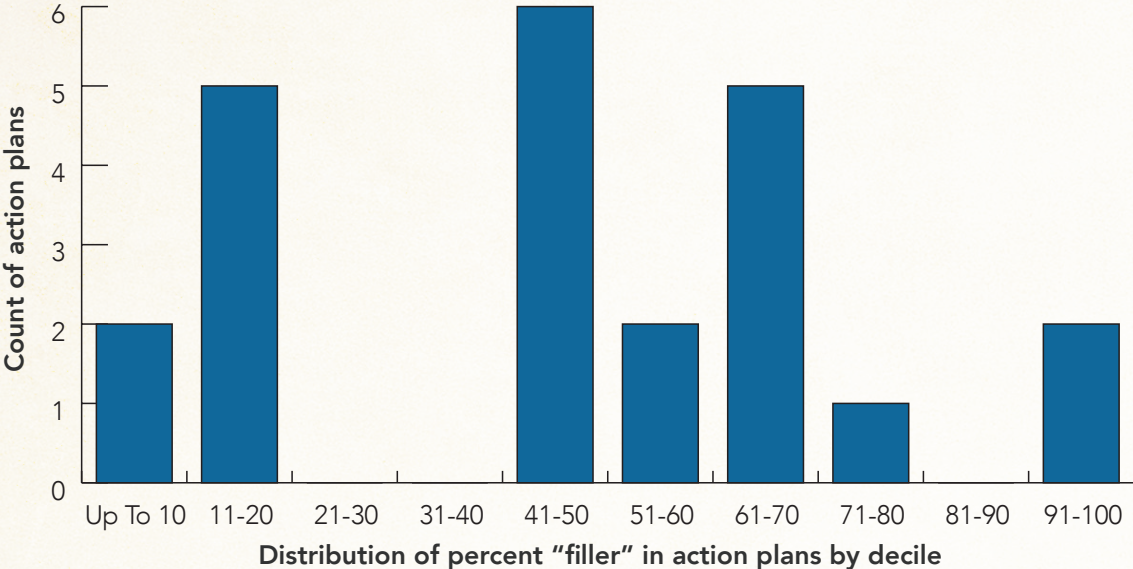
3.2. DID OGP COUNTRIES FOLLOW THE OGP PROCESS?

While OGP does not prescribe the practical content of OGP action plans, the Partnership has fairly clear process requirements before, during, and after the implementation of the action plan.

Before the action planning process, governments have the following requirements:[5]

Availability of process and timeline: Countries are to make the details of their public consultation process and timeline available (online at minimum) prior to the consultation.

Public awareness-raising activities: Countries are to undertake OGP awareness-raising activities to enhance public participation in the consultation.

Advance notice of public consultation and variety of mechanisms: Countries are to consult the population with sufficient forewarning and through a variety of mechanisms—including online and through in-person meetings—to ensure the accessibility of opportunities for citizens to engage.

Breadth and depth of consultation: Countries are to consult widely with the national community, including civil society and the private sector; seek out a diverse range of views; and make a summary of the public consultation and all individual written comment submissions available online.

The IRM researchers code each of the following variables as "yes" or "no":

1. Was the process for public consultation and timeline or schedule available?

2. Was there advance notice of the consultation process?

3. Were there awareness-raising activities?

4. Were consultations held online?

5. Were consultations held in person?

6. Was a summary of public consultation, including all individual submissions, available online?

Narrative portions of the text have more nuanced descriptions behind the coding and address other aspects of the consultations held prior to the implementation of the action plan.

[5] In the near-term, these requirements may be reworded to make them easier to understand and follow.

During the action planning process, the OGP Articles of Governance further require each government (beginning in 2012), "to identify a forum to enable regular multi-stakeholder consultation on OGP implementation—this can be an existing entity or a new one." IRM researchers code "yes" or "no" for the existence and identification of such a forum, with a narrative description of the particular forum (should such a forum exist).

Following the first year of implementation, each government is required to carry out a self-assessment covering implementation of each commitment and the process of consultation before and during implementation. The Articles of Governance require a minimum two-week public comment period on this draft before publication.

Governments varied widely in the amount of collaboration in developing the action plan, from highly collaborative (specifically around OGP) to more modest (but still commendable) collaboration to almost no collaboration.

Compliance with OGP requirements

Some governments included discussion of OGP in pre-existing processes with no dedicated consultations around OGP. This IRM only counted consultations that specifically addressed the OGP action plan. Often pre-existing consultations limited the scope of discussion about OGP. For example, one or two governments had prior consultations on themes such as control of corruption and other international initiatives. Subsequent development of OGP action plans assumed that OGP action plans would focus on corruption.

Some governments show strong evidence of learning along the way, despite little consultation early, through improved consultation during the implementation phase. Alternately, in some countries, learning may have happened as civil society groups learned better how to take advantage of participation opportunities.

Figure 12 summarizes the second cohort's (35 countries) level of compliance with the requirements set out in the OGP Articles of Governance and in the Onboarding Packet for OGP governments. These data are binary in terms of whether a requirement was met. Also, they do not have the level of detail or description of quality that is found in the full IRM reports.

Figure 12 | Consultation was generally weak during development and implementation of action plans.
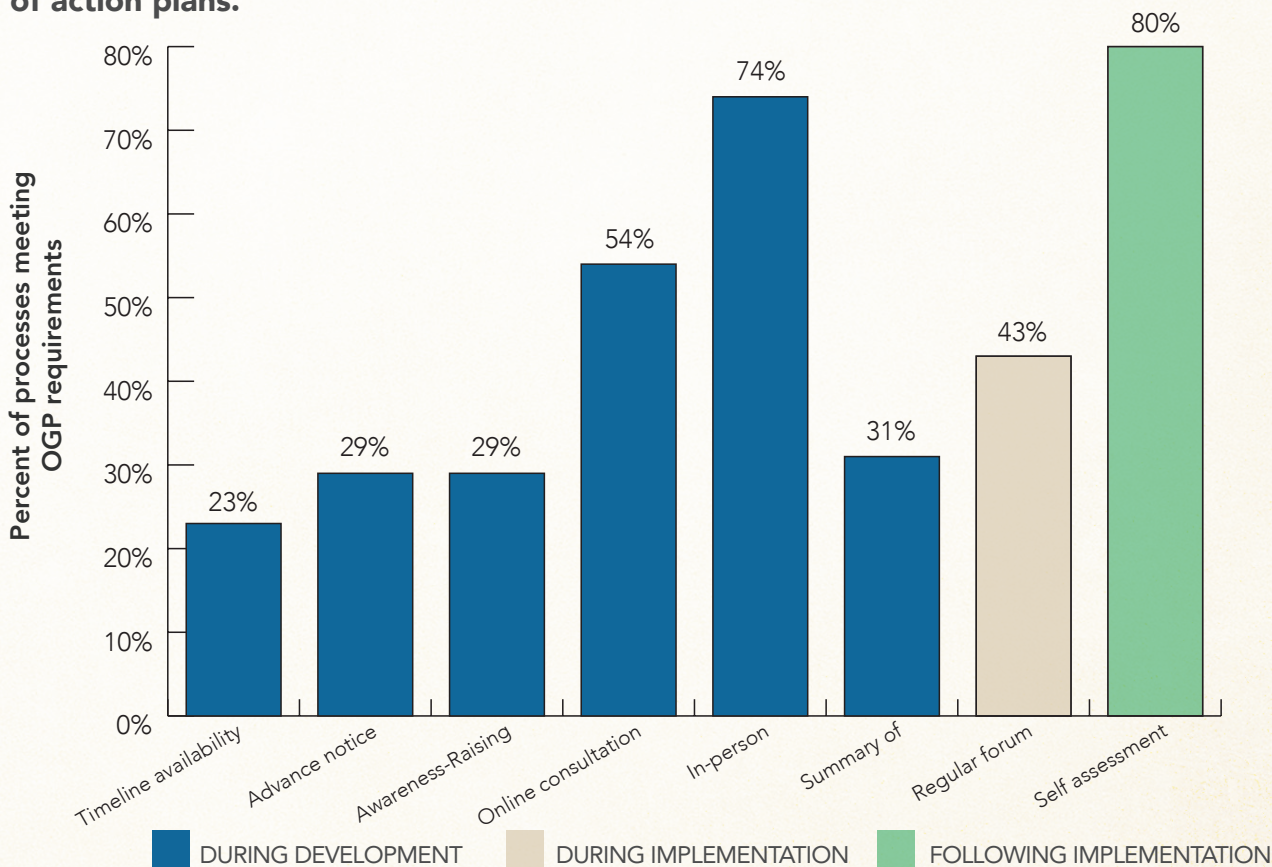
According to these findings, slightly less than 75% of governments had face-to-face meetings with any stakeholders. On a positive side, this means that many of the OGP governments met a core requirement of OGP. Yet nine of 35 governments had no face-to-face engagement. Given the "tick box" nature of the IRM's assessment, a greater number of governments had inadequate or overly managed engagement with civil society and the private sector. This is notable because, first, it is a fundamental aspect of OGP that should not be taken lightly. Second, the standard for IRM researchers to code this variable in the affirmative is so low that governments need only hold one face-to-face meeting. No standards govern the quality of this meeting, how commitments should be considered, or how proposals should be integrated into action plans.

Table 6 shows the breakdown of countries and the forms of engagement during development of the action plan. At least five governments had no consultation of any form or of any particular quality. The majority carried out at least some form of consultation, although less than half met the Articles of Government (and thus risk being found in breach of their basic OGP commitments).

Table 6 | Less than half of OGP-participating countries met requirements for online and in-person consultation.

		In-person consultation		
		No	Yes	Grand Total
Online consultations	No	5	9	14
	Yes	6	15	21
		11	24	35

Public awareness and ongoing consultation

Broadly speaking, public awareness of OGP—or promotion of OGP as an opportunity to promote social change—is lacking. While there are notable exceptions, few governments promoted OGP widely. Where exceptions exist, promotion was largely around a single commitment or group of themed commitments, rather than around OGP as a broader brand.

Across the board, OGP countries in Cohort 2 showed very weak awareness-raising activities. Only seven of the 35 governments evaluated carried out any awareness-raising activities. At the same time, many officials interviewed (often in the same countries) complained that civil society organizations have no interest or capacity to participate in OGP. Given the unhappy statistics on awareness-raising activities, pessimism on civil society capacity to participate may be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Table 7 suggests that governments that did not carry out any awareness-raising activities also tended to invest very little in ongoing platforms for participation, giving little credence to the notion that lack of civil society capacity is the binding constraint in participation.

Table 7 | Most countries that did not carry out awareness-raising activities also had no ongoing participation.

		Consultation during implementation		
		No	Yes	Total
Awareness-raising activities	No	15 Low performers	8 Improvers	23
	Yes	5 Before-hand only	7 High Performers	12
	Total	20	15	35

A second reason widely given for weak consultation is the limited time to prepare an action plan. While the IRM did not consistently record the specific timelines of internal deliberation and development of action plans, it is interesting to note that the majority of OGP participating countries in Cohort 2 joined in September or October

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2011, rather than April 2012 (when action plans were due). Thus, there was a significant time gap between joining and submission of an action plan. Although the time between the end of the first action plan and the due date for the second action plan is even shorter, ideally more governments will come into compliance with this set of requirements as supports and timelines have been made clearer.

Responsiveness

One other often-raised complaint is that participation of civil society in OGP has little impact on the contents of the final action plan. While the IRM does not measure whether this phenomenon happens (and this certainly would not constitute best practice in all cases), it measures whether a summary of public comments was published. This may be a decent proxy for whether feedback was taken seriously, although it is not a measure of incorporation or the quality of public inputs into the process.

According to IRM data, only one of the assessed countries in Cohort 1 provided summaries of commentary. Mexico provided very direct feedback to participants on how their proposals were incorporated into the widened action plan (*Plan Ampliado*). This good practice in consultation is required by OGP and is lacking. This number varied from one in eight Cohort 1 to nearly one-third of Cohort 2. While still a low number, this suggests that clearer guidance and sharing of good practices can improve the compliance with the OGP process.

3.3. WHO IS INVOLVED IN OGP COUNTRIES?

To respond to demand by participating governments and interested civil society, the IRM team in Washington, D.C. also coded the institutional arrangements for the development and implementation of OGP action plans.[6] Codes were based upon narrative descriptions laid out by the local IRM researchers in each report. While this paper does not have the space to analyze each of these elements, the database includes the following variables, coded in binary fashion:

- **Who's involved?**
  - *Single branch* of government or multiple (i.e. judiciary and parliament)
  - *Executive branch involvement*
  - *Multiple agencies or single agencies*
  - Involvement of the office of *Head of Government* (i.e. president or prime minister's office)
  - Involvement of the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* or equivalent

- **Who's in charge?**
  - *Single governmental lead* in charge (i.e. a single agency, office, or inter-agency working group or equivalent)
  - *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* or equivalent leading
  - *Implementing agency is developing agency:* Whether the agency in charge of developing the action plan is also in charge of implementation of some or all of the commitments

- **Strength of mandate for OGP**
  - *Officially mandated* through publicly released mandate
  - *Legally mandated* (or an enforceable legal equivalent such as regulation or official by-law)

- **Continuity and Instability**
  - Whether there were *multiple administrative arrangements* for OGP during the period of development and implementation of the OGP action plan (e.g. did the team in charge of OGP change)
  - Whether there was a *change of executive* during the period of development

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[6] This data is offered as "draft" data as it has not gone through the same rigorous peer review as other parts of the data.

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The IRM introduced these variables to help shed light on the reasons for varied levels of implementation across national contexts. The institutional variables can help enable governments with troubled implementation or limited scope of OGP commitments, to learn from other governments about how best to organize OGP institutionally.

IRM data can reveal interesting trends and outliers in institutional arrangements. The impact of various institutional arrangements in terms of action plan contents, implementation, and OGP process, will need to be another paper (perhaps undertaken by an interested reader). Some basic descriptive statistics for Cohort 2 are offered below.

3.3.1 Who is involved?

Who is part of OGP? The data shows that, by and large, OGP is an executive branch initiative. (The IRM's coding also includes independent commissions, assuming they are formally part of the executive. This means an "executive" should not be interpreted as necessarily only agencies and line ministries. It is understood that in some countries, these commissions have special constitutional status, so the limits of the variable should be recognized in specific contexts.) Indeed, executive branch agencies or commissions lead all OGP countries surveyed. In two of the 35 cases, there was direct involvement of parliamentarians or legislative offices. These outliers may be interesting case studies lessons for countries whose OGP stakeholders are interested in involving the legislature. While five countries included commitments on the judicial branch, it is unclear from the IRM reports whether the judiciary was aware or involved in submission of these commitments.

3.3.2 Who is in charge?

Governmental arrangements for institutions in charge of OGP vary between countries. Sounding a troubling note, eight of 35 countries did not have a clearly identified lead agency in charge of OGP. While this may not be a problem, it suggests that clear lines of accountability and coordination may be lacking for some of the commitments in an action plan.

In four of the 35 countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or its equivalent) was leading. In one Northern country, this was due to the fact that all commitments were made around aid transparency. In others, it was because the Ministry coordinates all incoming financial flows and international initiatives. While this is not necessarily a problem, there are two risks to this arrangement. First, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in many countries is not seen as an implementing agency, especially around issues of information disclosure and participation. This can weaken credibility with the implementing agencies of many of the administrative reforms promised in OGP commitments. The second risk is that OGP commitments, seen as being coordinated by the foreign aid ministry, may come to be seen as donor-driven, potentially sidelining the domestic dynamic of civil society and government that is the goal of OGP.

3.3.3 OGP mandate

The IRM collected data on whether there was a mandate for OGP. A clear definition is in order. The IRM considers a mandate a clear administrative order to complete OGP commitments. In 30 of 35 countries, the national action plan or supplementary documents provided this level of concrete direction. In five of the 35 countries, the plan did not have the force of an administrative order. In some contexts, the lack of clarity could be crippling.

On the other hand, in six of the 35 countries, OGP was legally mandated. This, according to the IRM definition, means that the national action plan had the force of law, whether through passage by the parliament, the Council of Ministers (or equivalent), or through a corresponding administrative or regulatory process. Of course, the specifics of administrative law are unique to most countries. Before making generalizations about whether this is a good thing (or even entirely important), readers should consider the specifics of each case, using the dataset as a starting point.

3.3.4 Continuity and change

Perhaps a more telling variable is the amount of change that in the 35 Cohort 2 countries. Indeed in 14 of 35 countries, the lead for OGP changed. Whether this went smoothly or was normal "growing pains" for a new initiative is unclear. Conversely, for 21 of the countries, the arrangements remained constant. Again, that may or may not be a good sign.

A key part of OGP is high-level political commitment to ensure that reformers within government can institute change. Nine of 26 countries changed heads of state between April 2012 and June 2013. This may be a particularly high number, although an expert in this area would be better placed to say whether it is usual. (Assuming elections occur every four or five years, one might assume that there would be elections in 20-25% of countries for executives each year. However, one also would not assume that they would be replaced 100% of the time, as this figure roughly suggests. Either the frequency of elections was high or the replacement rate was high. The years of 2012 and 2013 seem to be particularly rough times for incumbency.)

Areas for further research include how disruptive these changes are, what governments do to weather these storms or to bounce back quickly, and how OGP participating countries and the Support Unit can maximize smooth transitions. In particular, lessons might be drawn from other multilateral initiatives that seek to respond to and to sustain high-level political commitment.

3.4. WHAT LEADS TO SUCCESS: SOME CAUTIOUS BIVARIATE ANALYSIS

The IRM data is ripe for deeper statistical analysis and exploration. The IRM team, however, does not have the capacity to do that research in a systematic way. Nonetheless, it is worth a look at the relationship between variables coded by the IRM before someone better equipped engages with the data.

While one cannot identify what drives success, some tentative attempts are presented here. First variables endogenous to action plans (ambition, completion, relevance, specificity and measurability, and grand challenge) are considered before considering institutional arrangements, one exogenous variable set.

Within the IRM's bounded definition of success, are there links between indicators? This section looks to see if the newness of a commitment is linked to the potential impact, as well as what variables might be associated with success.

3.4.1 Are new commitments more or less ambitious?

One complaint heard about OGP is that action plans contain nothing new. As discussed above, this is probably less of a problem than many suppose, although action plans may contain fewer of the new initiatives stakeholders wish to see in action plans. A second objection might be that action plans that contain new commitments are also largely unambitious, as the time to introduce high-impact commitments may require longer political processes.

Table 8 is a two-by-two description of potential OGP commitments. OGP action plans might be divided into four quadrants with potential impact (in the aggregate) of action plans on the horizontal axis and new vs. pre-existing on the other axis. Action plans can then be characterized as fitting into one of four quadrants. What is clear from this characterization is that action plans in Quadrant II need improvement, and that those in Quadrant IV are, at least in this regard, model action plans.

It is left to the reader to decide when and whether high-potential impact, but previously existing, commitments are appropriate (III) or whether simple, small steps (I) are appropriate given a particular national context. It is clear that moving more countries to Quadrant IV is in the interest of OGP.

Table 8 | Characterizing new vs. old commitments.

	LOW POTENTIAL IMPACT	HIGH POTENTIAL IMPACT
New	I. New, low-hanging fruit	IV. New, high-impact action plans
Pre-existing	II. Pre-existing, low impact action plans	III. Pre-existing, low-impact action plans

Then what is the relationship among existing action plans? Figure 13 shows the arrangement of action plans along two axes. The median value for newness is 29%. The median value for "transformative" potential impact commitments is 22%. The mean value for newness is 36% (red), and the mean value for percent of "transformative" potential impact commitments is 29%. Values are drawn as lines.

Figure 13 | A minority of action plans were significantly newer and of high potential impact, although no relationship exists between the two variables.

KEY: ■ ACTION PLAN ·····MEAN LINE
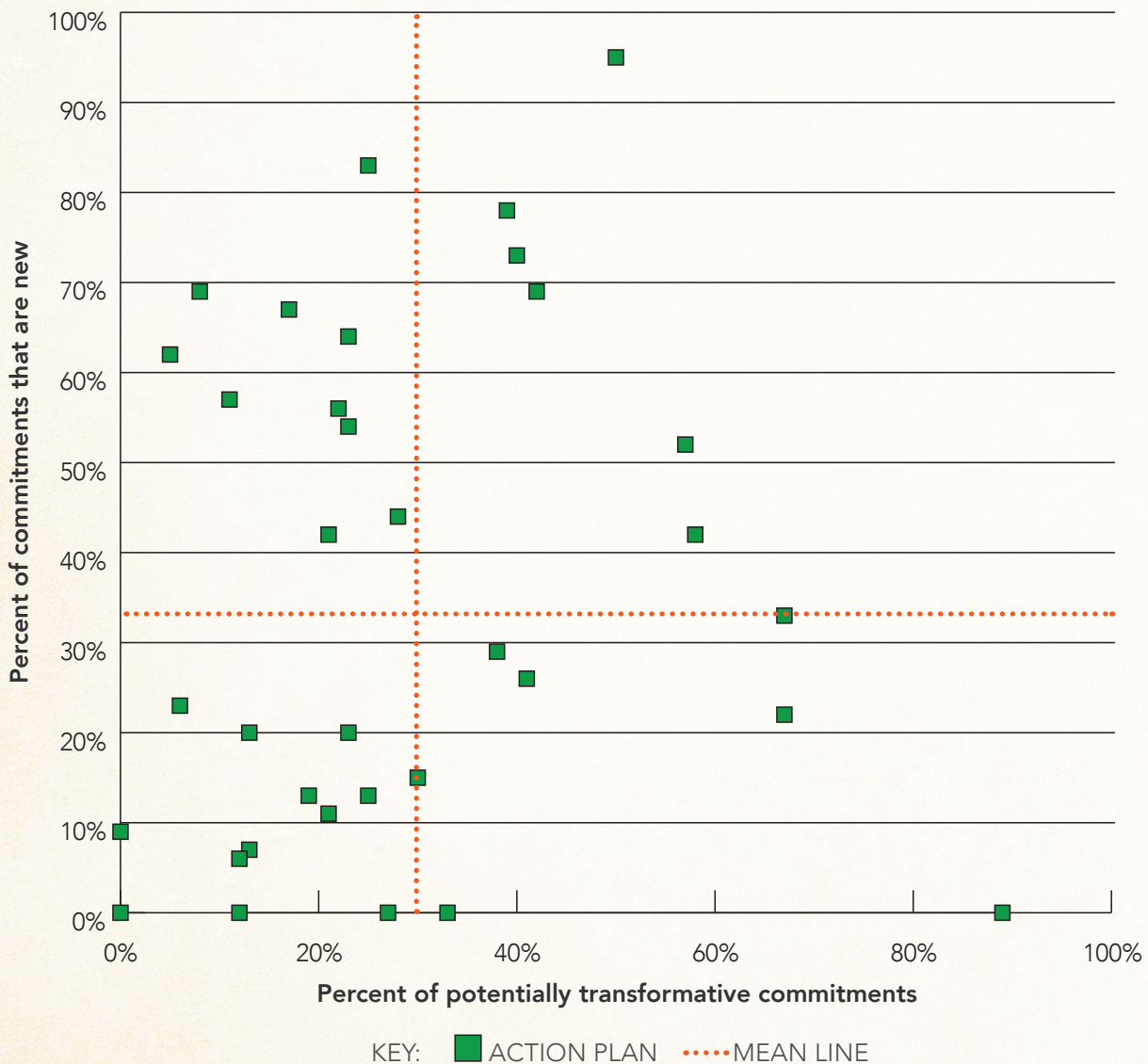
A few observations follow:

- Most of the action plans fall below the mean, with a few high-performing outliers.

- There is no statistical relationship between these two variables. With an r2 of .009, it is almost perfectly random.

- Newness is more evenly distributed than transformative commitments, perhaps suggesting that anxiety over "recycling" in OGP action plans is less significant than a certain preponderance of low ambition action plans.

- Of particular note are the five action plans with no "new" commitments, suggesting that consultation may have been limited or, at least, generated no new actions. See the section on "Ambition" above.

3.4.2 Are SMARTer commitments less likely to be completed?

This section examines whether there are evident relationships regarding completion of variables. The results of tests for significance are shown in Tables 9 and 10 in annex 1. Few, if any, of the variables are able to be associated with completion. A brief discussion of each is below.

Ambition

At this point in time, the IRM measures ambition of commitments using two variables: newness and potential impact. For action plans with relatively high levels of completion, one wonders whether more ambitious commitments were not implemented. Using the available measures, one can look for correlations with completion at either the commitment-by-commitment level or the aggregate level of the national action plan.

At the commitment level, there is no evidence of covariance between the different completion levels and the two variables. (Spearman's Rho was used to assess relationships between ordinal variables of 0.047 for newness and 0.075 for potential impact.) Nor is there a clear relationship at the national level, with r^2 values of 0.001 and 0.000 respectively.

As a whole, this is promising for OGP. It suggests that more difficult or ambitious commitments are still being implemented. The variation between countries must be explained by other factors.

Figure 14 shows the distribution of action plans according to percent of complete commitments by the percent of potentially transformative commitments. Five action plans performed at or above the mean (29% and 25%, respectively.) It is promising that these countries achieved a greater amount of their commitments. More research is needed to investigate the reasons behind their success of these high-performers.

Figure 14 | More ambitious action plans are not necessarily implemented less.

KEY: ■ ACTION PLAN ·····MEAN LINE
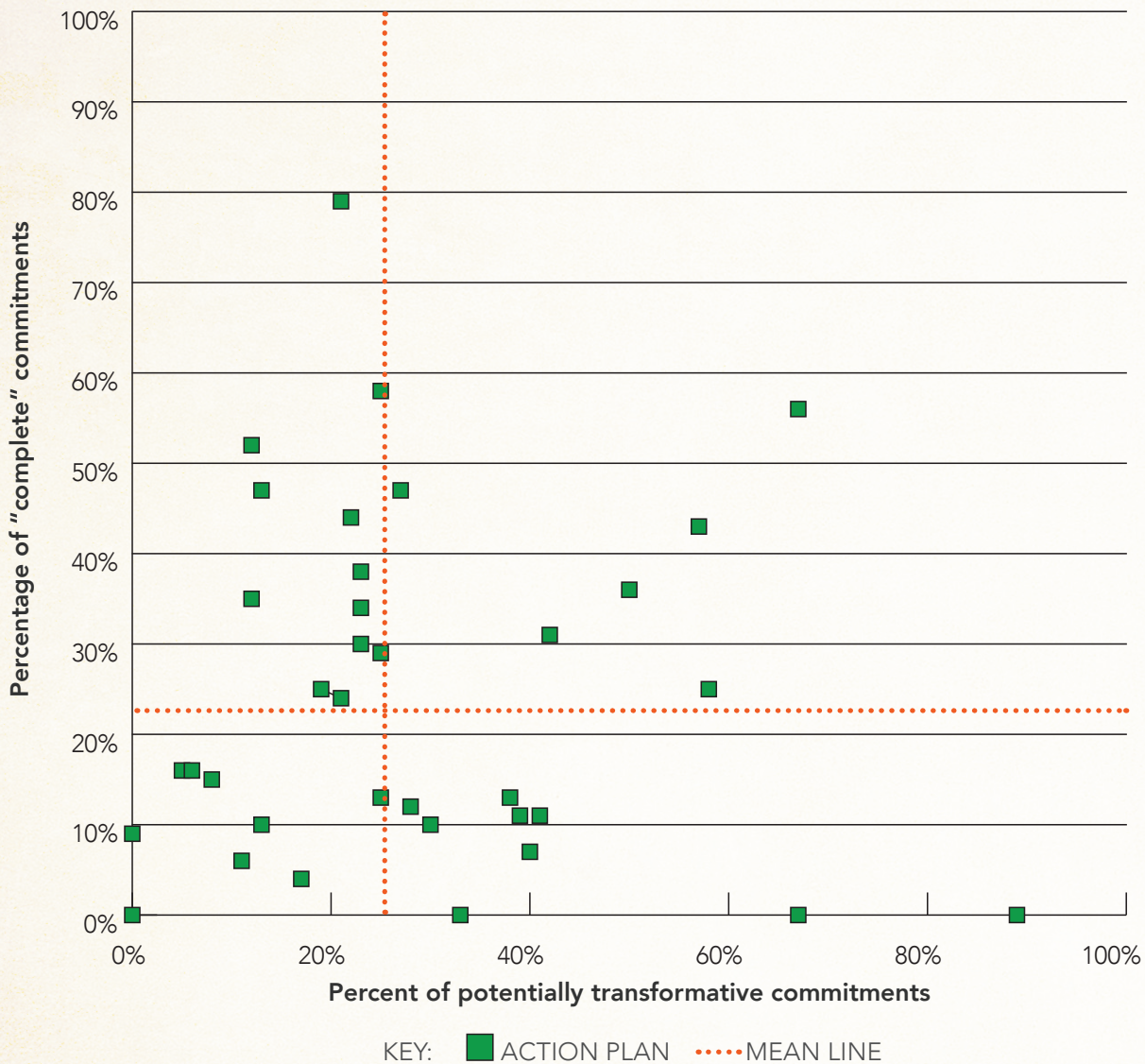
Clear relevance

There seems to be an interesting relationship between completion and clear relevance, although it may not be more than statistical noise.[7] However, with a Rho of 0.299 at the commitment level, an r^2 of 0.093, and a negative direction in both, it seems there is an inverse relationship between relevance and completion. Is this because less relevant commitments tend to be e-government solutions to problems that are less difficult politically? Or is it because many of them are delivering services directly to the public and thus are easier to complete than major governance reforms that may have winners and losers. Either way, more investigation is needed of these weak relationships.

Specificity and measurability

No clear relationship exists between specificity and measurability, with a Rho of 0.083 at the commitment level and an r^2 of 0.003 at the action plan level. This is a relatively good sign that "gaming of the system," a process of making commitments less specific and, thus, amenable to more flexible outcomes, is not widespread.

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[7] Figures 10 and 11 in Annex 1 show statistics on covariance. They have been omitted here for readability.

3.4.3 Can institutions and process explain completion?

Another area for future investigation is the extent to which a more participatory process and stronger institutional arrangements can explain the degree of implementation or the percentage of starred commitments in a country. To begin exploring these questions, the IRM made initial correlations to identify potential links (see Table 11 in Annex 1).

The analysis looked for correlations between the following:

- Each process step (1a-1h),
- A sum of the total number of process steps complied with (1i), and
- Each of the institutional variables assessed—with three dependent variables:
  - o   Percent complete
  - o   Percent complete or substantially complete, and
  - o   Percent starred.

The direction of each relationship (positive or negative) is marked as well, regardless of significance.

The analysis suggests further investigation, especially as more data becomes available. A few tentative observations follow:

- Making a timeline for development of OGP action plans available in advance may be statistically significant (and positively related) to the percentage of commitments completed and the percentage of starred commitments.
- Governments that made a summary of civil society inputs available after consultation completed their commitments more often.
- Compliance with certain OGP process requirements seems to be positively correlated with greater levels of progress, both in levels of substantial or better completion as well as completion.
- Compliance with a greater number of process requirements is weakly positively related with percent of commitments that saw substantial progress or completion.
- No institutional variable had a statistically significant or interesting correlation with action plan outputs (percent completion, percent complete or significant, or percent starred).

Of course, further modeling is needed to investigate how much power these variables have in explaining outputs. This analysis may be more powerful if multivariate models are used to explain this variation. Compliance with each of the individual steps is not likely to be the actual explanatory variable for completion of OGP outputs. Rather, it is more likely that they are spurious variables for something deeper and decidedly more immeasurable and fuzzy: the degree to which a particular government takes OGP seriously and the care with which it ensures full participation of civil society in developing an action plan.

Further, investigation can be undertaken in the explanatory power of institutional variables. Some case studies may identify more hypotheses about what determines greater high-level political buy-in. Perhaps the IRM data, as coded, captures the wrong information or applies indicators in a manner that is not adequately granular.

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4 | WHAT WE DON'T KNOW: A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR OGP

This paper is a first, tentative attempt to discuss the findings on inputs and outputs that may be key in describing and explaining success in OGP—within highly bounded definitions. Currently a mixture of academics, governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and donor organizations contribute to a wide field of general and thematic open government research. This section outlines some important questions about OGP that require further study.

4.1. OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS ANALYSIS

As stated in the Section 2, "Defining Success in OGP," the IRM is not set up to analyze impacts of OGP commitments. The IRM is designed to assess, as close to real-time as possible, the inputs (form and content) of action plans and the outputs (commitments completed). It cannot assess longer-term outcomes or impacts, whether on the practices of public administration or on end-users of each of the action plan commitments. Similarly, it is not capable of assigning attribution for the impacts of the reforms.[8]

It does, however, provide starting points for the enterprising researcher. Specifically the IRM dataset points to commitments that have been implemented as part of OGP. Researchers can filter the data to identify commitments—starred or otherwise—and to identify those high-impact commitments undertaken.

Further, the IRM data cannot make the case that open government, as defined, is a superior means of administration. Again, the IRM data can help direct researchers to possible cases of completed reforms. From there, one can begin to make the case that these reforms are better than not implementing the reforms.

How to undertake this research? The IRM is not well placed to carry out impacts analysis. The OGP Support Unit is better positioned to work with other institutions that specialize in exactly this kind of research. Specifically, the Support Unit and other interested parties can partner with impact-analysis organizations to assess attribution and ultimate effects of OGP commitments to better understand their impacts. Further, because the IRM provides a rich data set that assesses OGP-participating government reforms, the Support Unit can work with third-party organizations that advocate for open government.

4.2. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Finally, two broad areas are worth further investigation. These suggestions are not exhaustive, but rather suggestive.

4.2.1 Using tagged and sorted commitments

The IRM (along with the OGP Support Unit) receives frequent requests to identify success in various areas of OGP. To meet this demand, the Support Unit and the IRM will tag and sort OGP commitments according to major thematic areas in which existing OGP constituencies are interested. These may cover:

- Specific open government measures (e.g. citizen budgets or freedom of information laws)
- Specific modalities (e.g. open data reforms or legal reforms)

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[8] More detailed plans for assessing OGP's impacts and outcomes will be available in a forthcoming document published by the OGP Support Unit.

- Affected stakeholders or government bodies (e.g. supreme audit institutions or private sector actors)

- Sectors affected (e.g. extractive industries or public health)

This step will allow any interested OGP stakeholder to identify success stories and to identify the reforms taken (or not) by OGP participating countries. The OGP Support Unit is likely to take on this work, independent of the IRM.

4.2.2 Data filtering and mash-ups

The IRM data will be more useful if it is presented in a manner likely to be used by existing constituencies, international forums, and development agencies. One step in carrying this out may be to identify intra-regional variation. This may be especially powerful in Latin America, where existing forums may value some comparative analysis on OGP performance. Additionally, regions such as Europe have seen wide variations in OGP performance, and EU member states or associates may wish to address more directly the deeper reasons for variation. Analysis by the appropriate organizations working at these levels can help to address issues. Similarly, analysis of IRM data within countries can help to identify where certain agencies meet or exceed their commitments and where additional assistance or motivation is needed.

An additional area of importance will be exploring whether OGP data has a strong relation to other development indicators. Important indicator sets may include, democracy, governance, and human rights indicators, but also indicators on other forms of development, including level of bureaucratic institutionalization, level of development, and other quality of life indicators.

4.2.3 Identifying drivers of success

Several types of analysis of the IRM data may be useful.

- **Multivariate analysis:** This paper points to several areas where multivariate analysis may be worth further attention in determining what conditions or inputs to OGP can help to predict success.

- **Within and between tagged subgroups:** By identifying where, when, and how success is occurring within subgroups of the IRM data set, one can better identify high performers in areas key to OGP values. This can enable learning across national contexts and within such as OGP working groups. Research also will be able to draw on a set of forthcoming indicators with OGP data including: OGP Grand Challenge Areas; OGP values (or combinations of OGP values); and policy areas such as fiscal transparency, service delivery, or natural re-source governance.

4.3. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A wide variety of qualitative analysis would be appropriate using IRM data and reports.

4.3.1 Using tagged commitments

Once the tagging (see 4.3.2) is completed, a great deal more quantitative analysis on OGP commitments can be undertaken. Specifically, two analyses could be accomplished if stakeholders desire:

- A typology of commitments: Interested parties may choose to look at a subset of commitments and iden-tify where reforms are taking place and how reforms are implemented. An example is to filter only open data commitments. A researcher then might create a typology of open data commitments, distinguishing between those to build technological platforms; to establish standards, regulations, and licenses; and to release particular data sets. This would allow a better analysis of whether commitments focus on means or

ends as well as analysis of the degree to which individual commitments are sustainable and address re-al-world problems.

- Success within and between commitment subgroups: Analysis can be undertaken to identify success within particular commitment tags. Interested parties may identify where commitments are implemented, but also where they are or are not adequately ambitious given the baseline at the beginning of the OGP process. Access to information commitments, for example, might be divided into commitments that address legal issues, capacity issues, or funding issues, among others. With other tools such as the Information Access Implementation Tool from the Carter Center, the relative adequacy of such measures can be better explored.

4.3.2 Improving OGP process and national institutional arrangements

A number of case studies could identify existing process practices and institutional arrangements to better share success stories between countries. This is especially important in two process areas: describing "good" consultation during development and identifying existing practices for a forum ongoing dialogue during implementation.

Furthermore, interested readers may undertake case studies and review existing literature for two purposes. First, they can identify more descriptive variables of OGP processes for IRM researchers to use. Second, they can identify why some countries have been successful and others lag behind in implementing OGP-related reforms through "process tracing" or developing histories. Case studies also could be undertaken for individual commitments or sets of commitments that relate to the same ministry or constituencies.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

1. Success in OGP and in implementing open government should be defined broadly. The IRM can partially describe success, especially around OGP process, action plan commitments, and institutions. Further research is needed to measure ultimate outcomes and impacts.

2. Completion and "starred" commitments are two key indicators of success at the national action plan level.

3. A number of key indicators, such as percentage of commitments completed, percentage of transformative commitments, percentage of starred commitments, and percentage of filler commitments show a high level of variation between action plans. While there are high performers for each category, a troubling number of laggards do not seem to be making real strides in areas critical to OGP.

4. OGP process requirements are not followed most of the time. Interesting evidence suggests that compliance with process requirements may be more closely related to other measures of success.

5. At this time and based on IRM data, it is inconclusive which institutional arrangements are more conducive to the successful development and implementation of an OGP action plan.

6. The research agenda using IRM OGP data can help build a better evidence base for open government, guide OGP priorities, and signal where success stories, some of which might be transferrable to other national contexts. To further this research, the OGP Support Unit, with the assistance of the IRM, will need to foster usage of IRM data to address mission-critical questions for OGP.

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ANNEX 1| SELECTED TABLES

Table 9 | Completion co-variance by variable at commitment level.

Completion co-variance by variable	n	Spearman's Rho
New vs. pre-existing	672	0.047
Potential impact	690	0.075
Relevance	690	0.299*
Specificity and measurability	690	0.083

Table 10 | Completion co-variance by variable at action plan level.

Completion co-variance by variable	n	r^2
New vs. pre-existing	35	0.001
Percent potentially transformative	35	0.000
Percent potentially transformative or moderate impact	35	0.007
Relevance	35	0.093*
Specificity and measurability	35	0.011
Percent of commitments that are "filler"	35	0.003

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Table 11 | Statistical summary of correlation and coefficients of dependent variables (outputs) with independent variables (process and institutions).

		% complete		% compl. or subst.		% starred	
		r^2	n	r^2	n	r^2	n
PROCESS	1a. Timeline availability	+0.20*	34	+0.07	34	+0.11*	34
	1b. Advance notice	+0.02	34	+0.01	34	+0.01	34
	1c. Awareness-raising	+0.09	34	+0.20*	34	+0.11*	34
	1d. Online consultation	+0.11	34	+0.09	34	+0.02	34
	1e. In-person consultations	-0.01	34	+0.00	34	-0.00	34
	1f. Summary of inputs	+0.20*	34	+0.11*	34	+0.06	34
	1g. Regular forum	+0.01	34	+0.00	34	-0.00	34
	1h. Self assessment published	+0.03	34	+0.01	34	+0.01	34
	1i. Sum of process steps	+0.17*	34	+0.14*	34	+0.07	34
INSTITUTIONS	2a. Multi-agency process	-0.04	42	-0.00	42	-0.03	35
	2b. Pres. office/PM leading	-0.02	42	-0.00	42	-0.03	35
	2c. Ministry of Foreign Affairs lead	+0.05	42	+0.08	42	+0.10	35
	2d. Officially mandated	+0.07	42	+0.04	42	+0.06	35
	2e. Legally mandated	-0.08	42	-0.04	42	-0.05	35
	2f. Multiple arrangements	-0.01	42	-0.06	42	-0.10	35
	2g. Change of executive	-0.00	42	-0.02	42	-0.00	35

*$r^2 > 0.10$ may warrant further investigation, perhaps with multivariate analysis

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ANNEX 2 | IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT UNIT AND INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) has progressed well beyond the proof-of-concept phase. Most OGP countries have completed one action planning cycle. Now is a key time to identify where resources and energy are needed to better assist civil society and governments to achieve OGP's goal of a race-to-the-top.

This annex highlights a few areas for continued action and support of OGP countries in the coming several years. These steps are consistent with OGP's new four-year strategy (2015-2018) and can be implemented as part of that strategy. Exactly how and in what sequence is beyond the scope of this paper.

DIRECT COUNTRY SUPPORT AND PEER EXCHANGE

Two core parts of the work of the OGP Support Unit are the Direct Country Support and the Peer Learning teams. Work has already begun to address many of the victories and shortcomings in OGP plans. With 64 member countries, support can be resource-intensive. Consequently, prioritization and continued core support is needed in the following areas:

- **Support on writing 'SMART'-er action plans:** OGP action plans varied widely in terms of their specificity, measurability, answerability, relevance, and clarity of timelines. The OGP Support Unit will need to continue celebrating high achievers and providing assistance to those countries with unclear action plans.

- **Support on OGP consultation processes:** A number of governments said they were unaware of public consultation requirements. Continued communication on expectations and outstanding models of consultation and participation will be important.

- **Sharing experiences on successful implementation:** Two key groups of governmental actors need to continue sharing their experiences around successful implementation. These are the OGP points of contact, which are responsible for coordinating OGP for each participating government, and, increasingly, the implementers within line ministries. The government officials responsible for implementing specific OGP commitments would benefit from being more engaged in OGP and participating in international exchanges. This can be carried out especially around areas where there is already significant interest as expressed by action plans (such as Open Data, Natural Resources Governance, or Access to Information Laws). The OGP working groups and online tools, two modes of achieving this, already show a promising start.

SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY

In most OGP countries, the consultation process was relatively closed during the first part round of OGP action planning and during implementation. To better generate demand for OGP as a platform for advocacy and participation, the Support Unit can continue to provide support to civil society in the following areas:

- **Improving action plans:** Exchange of model commitments (in terms of both content and form of a well-written proposal).

- **Continued awareness-raising activities on process obligations:** Civil society groups will need to be better educated on OGP's consultation requirements for governments, and on which strategies have worked to open previously closed OGP processes.

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- **Continued awareness-raising activities on how to use the international network:** One of the benefits of OGP is that participating countries (governments and civil society) take part in an international network. This provides an additional level of accountability to augment the national level. Sharing positive experiences using an international audience to strengthen OGP domestically may help to close the gap between the aspirations of OGP and actual performance.

INDEPENDENT REPORTING MECHANISM

The IRM will need to improve its approach in several respects to continue to support an upward trajectory for OGP countries.

- **Clarity of procedures:** Continue to clarify and communicate to participating countries guidance on what will be assessed in advance of assessment.

- **Improving the scope of data gathering:** This paper shows that two areas—better reporting on context and improved variables assessing institutional capacity—will help to spur positive cross-country comparisons and identify successful models of implementation. In particular, it may help the IRM to identify countries whose commitments are of high political import.

- **Development of longitudinal research:** The IRM is well poised to help the Support Unit to identify longer-term trends such as marked improvement from action plan to action plan, marked decline in performance, or lack of political and/or civil society support.

- **Development of better indicators on the quality of process:** The IRM will need to improve process variables, including assessment of the quality of public consultation. For example, IRM researchers have suggested that the IRM adopt comparative measures of the degree of shared decision making between government and civil society for each of the phases of OGP (development of action plan, implementation, and draft self-assessment).

Open
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Partnership

INDEPENDENT
REPORTING MECHANISM