

# How OGP Members Can Advance Efforts to Protect and Promote Civic Space

## 18 October 2019

*Recommendations endorsed by the Thematic Leadership Subcommittee of the OGP Steering Committee*

A robust enabling environment for civil society and citizens to participate in public life, but also importantly in policymaking processes, is a necessary condition for any open government reform efforts. Civic space is a core value as underscored in the OGP Declaration and informs the OGP Steering Committee and Support Unit's efforts to advance open, inclusive and responsive government globally.

The OGP Support Unit and Steering Committee will continue to prioritize providing support to OGP members, civil society partners and collaborating with key groups, such as the private sector and the media, who are working on this topic.

Below are a few recommended steps to better leverage OGP - the platform, national process, and partners - to bolster work on civic space. These are drawn from the [May 2019 Steering Committee Call to Action](#) and findings of [OGP's 2019 Global Report: Democracy Behind the Ballot Box](#).

## Recommendations to the OGP community - governments, civil society, other partners

### At the country level

- Strengthen the structure and deliberations of multi-stakeholder forums in line with the [OGP Participation and Co-creation Standards](#);
- Consider commitments in OGP action plans that focus on defending democratic institutions and rights, especially the fundamental freedoms of association, assembly and expression, for example:
  - Related to protection of freedom of assembly, commitments could be considered on issues including: streamlining notification/ permit processes, clarifying approaches and mandate of the police, criminalization and penalties, protecting against misuse (eg surveillance) of or shutdown of digital platforms.
  - Related to protection of freedom of association, commitments could be considered on issues including: streamlining and clarifying laws around registration, functioning (including mobilizing funds), and scope of work of not-for-profit organizations.
  - Related to freedom of expression (and protecting journalists and human rights defenders against attacks), commitments could be considered on issues including: establishing accountability against officials where there is harassment, strengthening investigative and prosecutorial bodies that can redress harm, strengthening legal frameworks around whistleblower protection and mandate of independent agencies protecting the work of free press and related organizations.
- Test out new co-creation models and enhance public involvement in the implementation phase of open government reforms.

### At the regional and global levels

- Speak out at global, regional and national forums about the importance of protecting civic space and forge a stronger coalition of champions from governments and partners working towards improving civic space across the Partnership.
- Work with OGP partners organizations who can support convening, drafting and implementation of commitments, linking to global efforts on these issues - including Article 19, Civicus, International Centre for Not for Profit Law, Oxfam and multilateral efforts led by such as OECD, Community of Democracies, among others.

## Recommendations for the Steering Committee and Support Unit

- Where to focus our support strategic efforts on civic space?
  - OGP SU and SC should consider countries to engage in where we can work with partners and amplify efforts. Political transitions are major opportunities (also important to note that in advance of elections, civic space often shrinks, so important to support).
  - It is also important to consider the OGP life cycle and integrate civic space thinking through. Values check is at the start, Declaration is an affirmation, major opportunity is in the new joiners to OGP are a key target group to set up co-creation right and to inform commitments.
  - At the time of the next action plan, linking analysis of civic space to commitment development across sectors, timing release of information.
  - The OGP Steering Committee could consider developing a “watch list”, with intelligence from the SU and partners, to help to direct support to engagement, and direction of travel.
  - OGP Steering Committee should lead by example on civic space, including on excelling on eligibility metrics that assess this issue and establishing Multi Stakeholder Forums for their national processes.
- Who could we engage more on our work on civic space?
  - OGP unique in that we are government and civil society discussing civil space challenges together. We should engage both government and civil society in conversation, as each is critical to the solution. OGP’s value comes from the collective action, being able to draw champions from both government and civil society. OGP should support civil society at the government level tackling civic space challenges, but also support government reformers to make the case internally with other colleagues to protect and enhance civic space.
  - Important to engage with more and diverse groups, who may not have been part of the civic space conversation so far. For example, expanding beyond organizations that work on core “open government” issues to human rights organizations, government agencies such as tax authorities that have a role in this, etc.
- What within the broader civic space issues could OGP sharpen focus on?
  - Civic space is a topic that is very context specific as enabling environment challenges differ from country to country. That said, OGP could pick a set of strategic and policy issues to focus support on. For example, it could focus on supporting all members to institutionalize their MSFs, or if data shows that there are very few commitments related to “freedom of assembly” and that is a growing challenge in several OGP countries, OGP could focus support on that.
- What additional activities could OGP undertake on civic space?
  - In addition to support to countries on improving co-creation, making more ambitious commitments to protect key civic freedoms, and mobilization of voices globally, OGP



could also help better capture and tell stories and evidence of how civic space helps to advance open government.

