

Executive Summary

Background and Evaluation Parameters

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a platform for governments and civil society actors to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive and accountable governance around the world. In 2019, OGP funders commissioned Oxford Policy Management (OPM) to undertake an independent evaluation of the OGP's core institutions, and the efforts of the OGP Support Unit (SU) in particular. The evaluation was supported by the British Department for International Development (DFID, now FCDO), the Hewlett Foundation and the Open Society Foundations. The evaluation considered core questions of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency to support the SU, the OGP Steering Committee and its partners to strengthen the OGP platform in achieving its objectives.

Open Government Partnership

OGP is made up of many different parts, including reformers in government and civil society in member countries, the OGP Steering Committee, strategic and thematic partners, and the staff at the Support Unit (SU) and Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM). These are the catalysts and change agents who have shaped the priorities and evolution of the partnership to date, and each play a critical complementary role. The **OGP in country stakeholders** and the **SU** have been the prime focus of this evaluation, but there are potential implications for other parts of the OGP such as the Steering Committee and its strategic partners.

Taking place over more than 30 months, a developmental evaluation approach was adopted, with a focus on learning and support to the OGP's ongoing efforts to strengthen and sharpen their engagements in real time. The details of evaluation approach and design are covered in a separate paper (Introduction and Methodology). A key feature of the evaluation design was a focus on depth rather than breadth: the evaluation focused on seven locations – five national country members (Colombia, Kenya, Nigeria, Philippines and Ukraine) and two local government members (Elgeyo-Marakwet in Kenya and South Cotabato in the Philippines); and on three themes (Open Contracting (OC), Beneficial Ownership Transparency (BOT) and Civic Engagement (CE)). This enabled us to support a diversity of contexts and OGP strategies, with an emphasis on understanding contributions to outcomes. In the final months, the attention shifted to closer collaboration with the SU in identifying core issues of broad strategic importance to OGP. These have been distilled into Issues Papers which provide a summary of evaluation findings and implications, and potential ways forwards for OGP.

This executive summary covers key points from the Issues Papers, while drawing out the connections between the issues and some overarching implications for OGP and the wider Open Government community. None of the topics are new; they are already the focus of substantial engagement from the OGP, and it has much successful work to draw upon. Intensive evaluation work across the seven locations with the evaluation shedding fresh light on the issues, documenting how the constraints and opportunities are in flux as contexts change. In some cases, evaluation insights and sense making with the SU generated clear, relatively straightforward next steps, which are recorded as such in the Issue Papers. More often, they clarified implicit choices and inherent trade-offs, recognising that often the choice is between several 'good things to do'

and that there is no single way forward across diverse and changing OGP member contexts.

The Issues Papers focus on four topics:

- **Relevance and resilience** of the OGP platform in the face of internal and external shocks, and what may be done to increase resilience of the platform, such as investing in champions or promoting institutionalisation.
- **Engagement and inclusion of non-government stakeholders** with the OGP platform across the different stages of Action Plan co-creation and implementation, and in different reforms and processes. The paper challenges OGP to be clearer about the purpose and means for strengthening inclusion.
- **Ambition and Implementation:** what the SU in collaboration with country stakeholders and partners can do to enhance the effectiveness of their support to Action Plan implementation. The paper focuses on the implementation phase as much support and guidance to date has focused on co-creation.
- **Connecting global and country engagements:** exploring the challenges of working across global, national and local levels. Why s, for example some country actors feel left behind by the pace of change in the policy priorities promoted by OGP at global level. Conversely, opportunities exist for closer alignment between the levels.

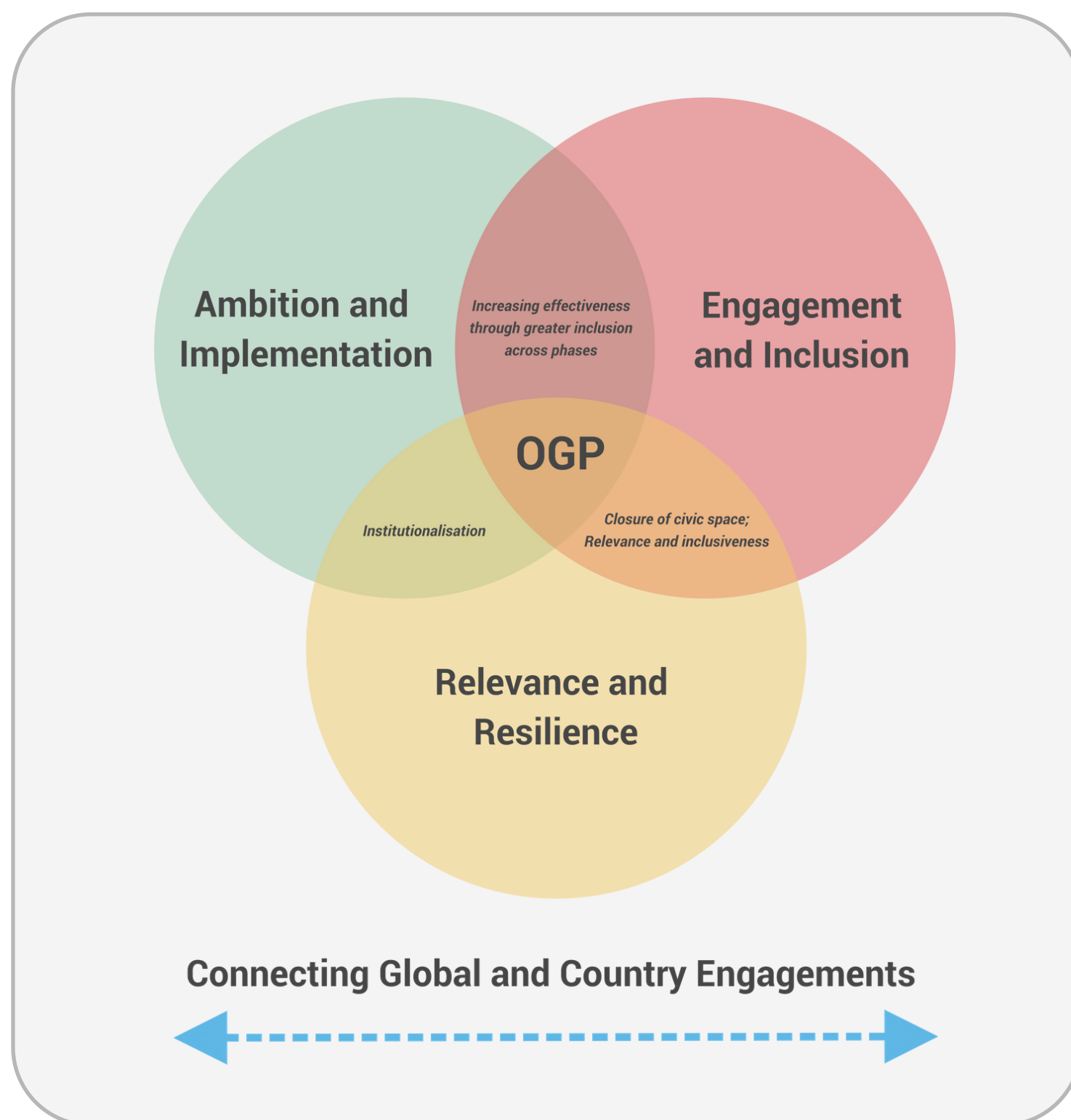
The four issues each stand alone, but also collectively point to a range of related issues which the OGP engages with on a daily basis (Figure 1). Some issues are more within the influence of the OGP, while others - such as the decline in civic space - are less amenable to OGP influence but have bearing on the relevance of the OGP model.

Connecting with OGP's Theory of Change (ToC)

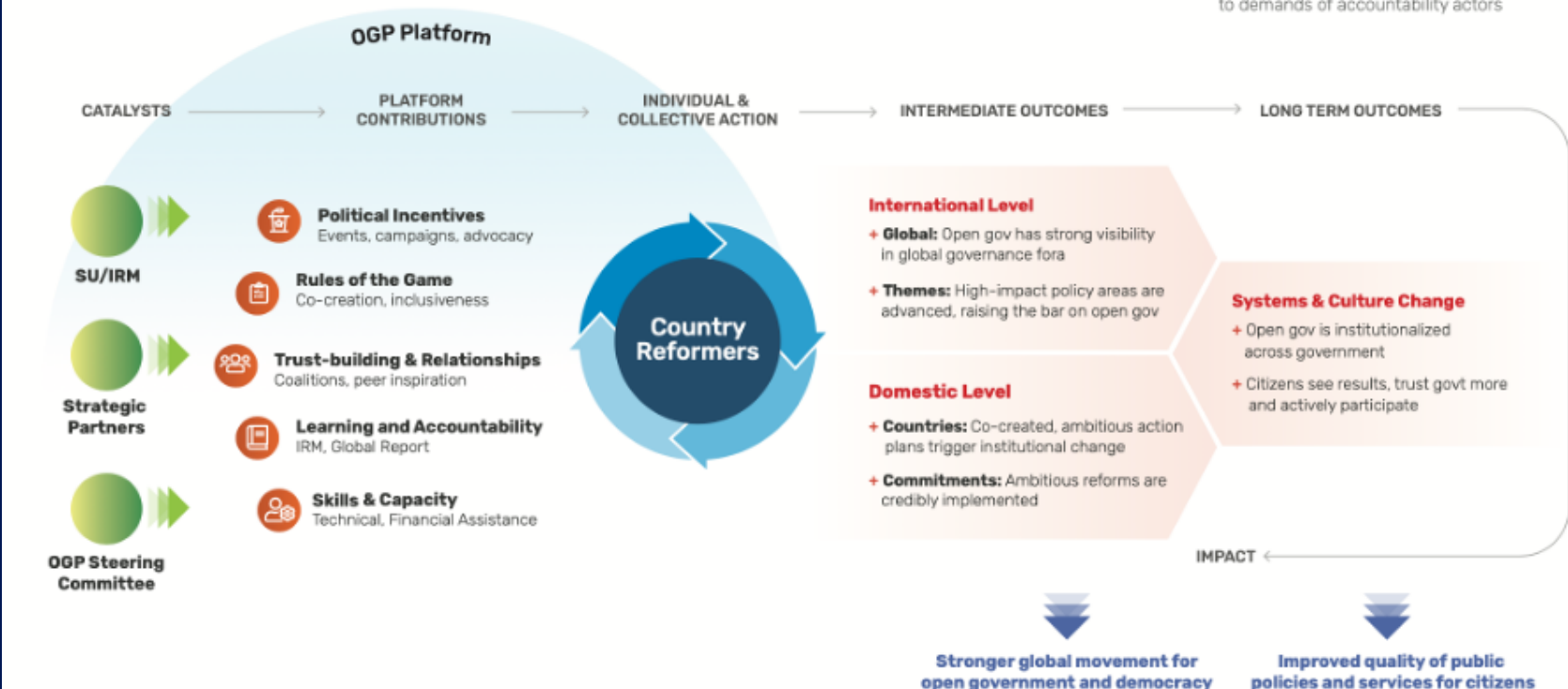
Before focussing on the issues themselves, it is useful to make the connection with OGP's ToC, illustrated below using OGP's own diagram. Overall, the evaluation found the ToC, in its current format, to be a strong communication tool which conveys a high-level overview of the variables involved in change processes. In practical terms, however, what unfolds in any one reform, commitment or action plan is highly context-specific. Some long-standing OGP supporters struggle to understand the dynamics of 'what actually happens' in OGP processes.

The TOC is useful as the basis to characterise change processes across countries, but is too high level to support thinking through the choices and trade-offs involved in particular SU support decisions at country level. Much valued support is being offered by the SU – indeed there is demand for more from country stakeholders and partners - but SU support often relies on individual staff experience, relationships and capacities. In order to leverage this experience and expertise effectively, mapping out the different strategies and causal pathways that sit under the high level ToC would be a useful next step.

The evaluation included Contribution Tracing, which assessed the OGP's contribution to specific change processes. The SU has already started its own contribution analysis work which could, over time, build up a picture of the considerations in grounding a high-level ToC in a particular context – contributing to 'mini' theories of change for particular reforms. The options and trade-offs outlined in the Issues Papers contribute to developing an understanding of these considerations.



OGP THEORY OF CHANGE



and networks are widely valued for offering inspiration, peer learning and opportunities to gain international prestige. In all locations the OGP is valued for helping to bring on board new political leaders and promoting new OG agendas.

However, with the rise of populist governments, closing civic space and broader democratic unravelling, the space for more open government is under threat. Such 'external' shocks threaten the resilience of OG reforms and OGP processes. The platform also faces on-going 'internal' shocks, such as when high ranking political OGP champions or committed civil servants leave office, which creates risks but also opportunities. Overall, these external and internal challenges raise questions about the relevance of the OGP platform, its resilience to stresses, and the measures that may foster resilience of both OG and OGP. More specifically they raise concerns about the relevance of OGP in different contexts, which affects whether and how country stakeholders use the platform to resolve the major challenges they face.



This is one of four issue papers, each focused on an aspect of strategic importance arising from OPM's evaluation of OGP, 2019–2021, to contribute to the OGP Support Unit (SU) and Independent Reporting Mechanism's (IRM) strategic thinking. The research conducted as part of the evaluation focused on seven locations – five national members (Colombia, Kenya, Nigeria, Philippines and Ukraine) and two local government members (Elgeyo-Marakwet in Kenya and South Cotabato in the Philippines); and on three themes (Open Contracting (OC), Beneficial Ownership (BO) and Civic Engagement (CE)). A developmental evaluation approach was adopted, and OPM engaged with the SU and IRM on a regular basis concerning findings, insights and their implications.

The Issues

Relevance and Resilience

OGP is premised on the value of government openness and collaboration with non-state actors. Across the sampled locations, many government and civil society stakeholders articulate the strong relevance of the OGP platform in efforts towards more open government (OG). Key to this are the OGP processes in-country, which provide mechanisms to move intent towards action, for building inter-agency collaboration and for helping to secure partner support to advance reforms. The OGP international domain

Discussion of ways forward highlights the need to find an appropriate balance between efforts to institutionalise OGP processes and rules, as opposed to focussing attention on promoting and sustaining OG values and principles. Both may be achieved through either formal approaches (such as legal frameworks) or informal approaches (such as those driven by champions and norms). In many ways, the goal is transition from 'OGP', to 'Open Government' to 'government', just working in an open, transparent and accountable way.

The paper highlights three potential options:

- **Strengthening the OG movement through investing in people:** developing skills and capacities necessary for opening government, such as through nurturing OG leaders and ecosystems.
- **Alignment of informal approaches to OG with OGP ways of working:** this approach focusses on de facto institutionalisation of OGP through adherence to rules and processes over multiple NAP cycles, drawing on commitment from country level reformers without further formalisation.
- **Institutionalising OGP:** The value of institutionalised approaches varies by context. It can provide a clear legal basis for maintaining OGP processes through political transitions, and a stronger basis for allocating public funds to OG reforms. It may also offer a stronger foundation for a whole of government approach to OGP, and a structured space for constructive dialogue between civil society and government. On the other hand, it does not provide a silver bullet - governments can and do break their own rules.

Engagement and Inclusion of Non-Government Actors

OGP is contributing to creating opportunities for inclusive civil society engagement in government decision-making on OG reforms. While OGP country platforms vary, in all the evaluation locations there is a sense of more collaborative engagement between participating government agencies and civil society. This is helping nurture government reformers' belief in OGP's benefits.

The evaluation finds a decrease in CSO engagement in the action plan implementation phase, but great potential for progress in this area. Spaces

and opportunities for engagement depends on who is engaging. The evaluation reiterates the well-established observation that non-government members of OGP Multi-Stakeholder Forums (MSF) tend to be well-funded, urban based, policy and advocacy-oriented organisations. This has delivered clear benefits to date, particularly in supporting technical reforms such as BOT and OC.

The challenge for the OGP is to develop greater clarity on the specifics of the engagement and inclusion agenda, including how to broaden the base of engagement, at what stages of the action plan cycle, and why. Also, how to support engagement by non-government stakeholders across different kinds of OG reform.

In order to progress the engagement and inclusion agenda, discussion of ways forward highlights choices between:

- **Processes which open government** – such as 'broadening the base' by enabling more diverse voices to engage with government processes, or by institutionalising more inclusive ways of working within government and promoting broad responsiveness of government to civil society and citizens.
- **Reforms which open government** – either through focussing (as a normative good) on reforms which respond to the priorities of marginalised groups, or by ensuring that reforms which are designed to open government (such as OC and BOT) are properly informed by diverse perspectives.



While there is no single answer for a given context, an awareness of the options, and what possibilities they open up, would facilitate greater precision in the choices that need to be made. Feedback from country stakeholders was that OGP needs to be clear about the purpose and value of CSO engagement and the inclusion of diverse voices in OGP processes, otherwise it risks becoming a tick-box exercise.

Ambition and Implementation

The evaluation confirms much existing OGP knowledge on the factors that affect the ambition of policy reforms. Global and regional engagements provide inspiration and motivation for government stakeholders, partners and civil society to be ambitious, as does the desire for a good review from the IRM. Strategic partnerships, often brokered by the SU, stimulate ambition through supporting capacity development and providing technical expertise. Civil society pressure can shape priorities and the relevance of reforms, but there is a need to invest more in finding mechanisms that would better enable civil society influence.

This paper explores the options for further support during the implementation phase. To date, much SU support and guidance has focused on improving the action plan co-creation process. Many of the same drivers of strong process are also present in the implementation phase, and there is potential to do more to maintain continuity and momentum into the implementation phase, particularly in terms of sustaining civil society engagement.



Four overarching ways forward are analysed, each of which builds on what OGP is already doing successfully. The boundaries between the approaches are not watertight; indeed, in important respects they are mutually supportive:

- **Focusing on domestic mechanisms** such as strengthening MSF oversight of commitment implementation and promoting more civil society monitoring and engagement in the implementation stage.
- **Using international drivers more in the implementation phase**, such as targeted use of OGP global events and communications to promote commitment implementation and leveraging the role of IRM in the implementation phase.
- **Scaling up support to OGP priority themes**, concentrating on key areas of SU added value, including brokering partnerships, and creating spaces for thought leadership and inspiration on priority policy themes.
- **SU assistance to strengthen domestic support for OGP thematic priorities**, focused on a small number of target commitments and countries/locals, through support such as expanding local partnerships, promoting domestic funding, and building reformer capacities and local civil society engagement.

Resourcing

The critical issue of resourcing is common across the Issues Papers. Limited funding is a constraint for the ambition of reforms and the extent of their implementation. It also limits the participation of civil society organisations. Sub-national OGP members located far from capital cities are particularly disadvantaged in accessing funds.

However, there are risks to OGP in taking on more of a donor profile. 'Lack of funds' sometimes appears as the problem, when actually the challenge may be weak political support or systemic problems with public financial management - which could undermine the reform. The SU has been effective in the strategic use of modest levels of funding for implementation support, such as those from the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF). Yet, across the locations, country stakeholders had expectations for more SU support to source funding for commitment implementation. It is challenging for the SU to manage such expectations.

Connecting Global and National Engagements

OGP's work has value for setting new global norms and leveraging international processes to achieve traction on national commitments. The evaluation finds that OGP provides inspiration and motivation and helps to secure engagement from political leaders whose role can be vital in supporting the translation from broad intent to traction for implementation.

However, the dynamics around OGP policy priorities often move more quickly at global than at national level, with implications for the duration of SU and partner support. The evaluation offers the concept of 'gearing' to shed light on this challenge, and the relationship between drivers of change at international, national and sub-national levels.

The dynamics of how new policy directions emerge at international level are affected by the varied influence of different actors and countries across these domains. The evaluation recognises the challenge of identifying policy themes which get traction at both international and domestic levels. There can be substantial gains when this is done successfully, as is the case with BOT - where international and national engagements are helping to promote peer learning and a race to the top.

Thinking in terms of 'gears' puts focus on the mechanisms to connect meaningfully across the levels. Central to these is OGP's track record in building relationships, incentives and motivation for different actors, making maximum use of OGP's access to, and creation of, global and regional spaces, as well as building on relationships with local and national actors to ensure that the platform responds to emerging priorities and opportunities in member countries.



About Oxford Policy Management

Oxford Policy Management enables low- and middle-income governments to bring about lasting positive change using analytical and practical policy expertise. Through our global network of offices, we work in partnership with national decision makers to research, design, implement, and evaluate impactful public policy. We work in all areas of social and economic policy and governance, including health, finance, education, climate change, and public sector management. We draw on our local and international sector experts to provide the very best evidence-based support.

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