Introduction & Methodology

Introduction

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) represents a partnership between 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 focused on the work of the OGP Support Unit (SU), including the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM), through deep-dive research in sampled countries and across policy themes.

Purpose & Scope

The OGP works in very different contexts on a variety of policy issues, with different cultures, enabling environments, civil society actors, resources, and governance norms. The evaluation was tasked with considering questions on the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the OGP platform and strategies, covering reform processes in different contexts and analysis of the factors that drive, distort or block reforms.

An overriding consideration was that the evaluation should contribute to OGP learning and strategy. In particular, the OGP was keen to gain insights that could strengthen their strategies and support their efforts to achieve greater and more sustainable outcomes in promoting and

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and enhancing open governance. This provided the overall framing for the evaluation and informed the decision to take a developmental evaluation approach (see methods section below). Throughout the evaluation, OPM consulted with OGP staff to identify key questions and research themes that would be of most value to them.

The change processes that OGP supports vary across contexts and policy arenas due to differing exogenous and endogenous factors. Taking account of this heterogeneity and the complexity of change processes, the evaluation sought to gain a deep understanding of OGP processes in a sample of specific countries and policy areas, rather than taking a broad look at the OGP portfolio as a whole. The evaluation covered five national contexts (Colombia, Kenya, Nigeria, Philippines, Ukraine) and local contexts (Elgeyo-Marakwet County in Kenya and South Cotabato in the Philippines), across three thematic priorities: beneficial ownership, open contracting and civic engagement. The sample was based on a number of prioritised criteria, selected in collaboration with OGP staff, oriented toward identifying cases that had some commonalities and yet also reflected the diversity of OGP's portfolio.

Evaluation Approach & Design

With an emphasis on generating insights and learning that could be used in real time to support improved performance, the evaluation used developmental evaluation (DE) as an overarching approach. DE is a highly flexible approach, well-suited to a portfolio of interventions like OGP's, operating in complex environments, where engagement is constantly adapting and innovating in response to emerging opportunities and constraints.

A DE approach fundamentally shifts the relationship between the evaluation and the programme, in this case the OGP platform. Rather than simply delivering point in time judgements and recommendations, DE positions the evaluation as a flexible resource - supporting reflection, dialogue, learning and decision-making over the lifetime of the evaluation. The evaluation team not only provides timely insights and evidence, but accompanies and supports uptake and use of findings as they emerge.

Key design features of the evaluation included:

Focus and flexibility: The original evaluation questions and sub-questions were excellent points of departure as the evaluation got underway and informed our work throughout. However, the change processes that the OGP is engaged with unfold in ways that are not predictable. To remain useful, the key stakeholders involved in the evaluation – the SU, the Evaluation Steering Committee (ESC), and the evaluation team – needed to remain flexible and able to adapt at key points throughout the evaluation. The evaluation protected space to be responsive to emerging questions and learning priorities, as OGP contexts changed and evolved, focusingon those insights that were most relevant and useful to the OGP SU.

COVID-19 was declared a pandemic less than a year into the evaluation. While it was agreed that the evaluation questions remained relevant, the flexible nature of the evaluation allowed us to compensate for dramatic shifts in the rhythms and priorities of the OGP at this time.

In response to interest around questions of OGP's efficiency, a sub-group of the SU management team convened as an Efficiency Working Group. In an evolution of the original evaluation questions, the group focussed on how OGP ensures that strategies and priorities deliver efficiently, and what could be done to adjust resources dynamically in response to learning or changes in context. The evaluation team worked with members of the OGP SU's senior management team to consider how to further strengthen and streamline OGP's annual planning processes, drawing on experience from other organisations. This enabled the OGP to reflect on their strategic decision-making processes at a time when they were designing their annual planning process.

Influenced by this work and internal reflection processes, the SU committed to reviewing and streamlining the purpose and use of Management Team and all-staff meetings and instituting a mid-year check-in for teams to enable more realistic and fact-based planning, taking into account capacity and bandwidth throughout the year.

Methods and analysis: The evaluation drew on a range of data and analytical methods - literature reviews, key informant interviews, media monitoring and participant observation, NVIVO coding etc. - and undertook a number of evaluative exercises to respond to specific questions and emerging priorities, including:

- **Location case studies** provided qualitative analysis of change processes for ten OGP action plan commitments, across the five countries. To gain real-time understanding of change processes, OPM in-country researchers engaged in OGP focal commitment processes as participant observers. They had interviews with key stakeholders, and reviewed relevant documentation, mass media and social media on an ongoing basis throughout the evaluation. Evidence and insights were shared in real time with the OGP SU to inform discussion and decisions. The location studies captured the rich detail of what was happening in each location over the course of the evaluation, including how government reformers, civil society and the private sector were engaging, and the outcomes of OGP SU support.

- **Contribution tracing studies** were used to undertake evaluative deep 'dives' to rigorously investigate causal factors where a meaningful outcome had been achieved in the focal commitments across the five countries. Given the characteristics of governance interventions, traditional counterfactual approaches to establishing causality were not possible for a range of technical and practical reasons. Contribution Tracing (CT) is one of a growing number of non-counterfactual impact evaluation designs. The CT studies sought to investigate the OGP SU's contribution claims (how it believes it contributed to outcomes) in the focal country commitments, and systematically tested the extent to which the evidence supported a causal relationship between the OGP SU work and these outcomes (see methodology section for a full description).

The team had to continually negotiate the trade-offs between levels of confidence (considerations of methodological rigour) with considerations of timeliness and utility of the data and insights they would generate – not just at the outset as the evaluation design was agreed, but throughout the evaluation.

Collaboration and partnership: The evaluation team was positioned as an embedded resource in the SU's efforts to progress more ambitious policy commitments and their effective implementation, prioritising their

information needs and the timely use of evaluation findings. Evaluation team members participated in the OGP SU's regular meetings, both as participant observers - allowing them to gain critical in-depth knowledge - and contributors, sharing insights emerging from the location studies in real time. This was an iterative, multi-directional learning process which challenged the notion of static 'research findings'. The SU did not simply receive findings, but engaged with the evidence and insights, to develop actionable intelligence that could be used to inform judgements or decisions about next steps.

Developmental Evaluation in Practice: Reflection, Learning and Sensemaking

Building trust and a shared sense of purpose. The DE approach required a new, and for some unfamiliar, approach to collaboration between an evaluator and subject. Building this partnership required good communication, investment of time, and efforts to build trust on both sides. SU colleagues needed to feel safe from judgement, open to sharing challenges, and trusting the evaluation team to support rather than judge them. The evaluation team needed to get comfortable with the value of sharing insights as they emerged, even as situations were developing. The team needed to be open to being supported by the SU/OGP in moving from analysis to implications, and to experiment with how best to engage with the OGP's '*so what*? *now what*?' questions, where actionable intelligence could be honed through dialogue with the SU and country stakeholders.

In the early days of the evaluation, the evaluation team were in learning mode -understanding the complexities of the OGP model and processes, and the roles of various OGP institutions. This took time and made the early interactions somewhat extractive. The SU team initially kept the evaluation at a distance, treating it as a separate process that required time and attention on top of other competing priorities.

Getting it right was enabled by commitment to open and frank conversation between the SU and the evaluation team. Striking this balance wasn't always easy, as the OGP SU reflects in their blog, *Learning in the face of complexity*.

The evaluation was able to offer the SU new insights because it dedicated significant time to gathering data, and offered an outsider's perspective, uninvested in the specifics of the policy issue. It was through 'collaborative sensemaking' that findings and insights gained value and informed OGP decisions to adapt and respond. This was a rich and iterative process that was critical to strengthening the evaluation team's understanding of how the SU engages with the complexities of OGP's work (Box 2).

Box 2 - Sensemaking and Adaptation

The evaluation identified strong CSO engagement in OGP action plan co-creation processes, but that this tended to decrease in the implementation phase. Discussion about this with SU staff in the Philippines led to rich conversations about entry points for civil society engagement. In some locations, such as Kenya, the evaluation identified the potential of commitment working groups (WGs), which were opening up space for civil society to engage in implementation.

The SU has encouraged new OGP members to develop commitment WGs, but the Philippines - a founder OGP member - had already developed its own processes without WGs. In working through the benefits of promoting WGs in the Philippines, the SU suggested they may be more effective if focused on thematic areas, such as public financial management, rather than specific commitments. This approach promotes interagency collaboration, as well as a longer-term vision of reforms that might evolve into commitments for the next action plan. This also furthers SU efforts in the Philippines to promote a more holistic OGP action plan.

Building on these conversations, the evaluation team and SU discussed the potential for developing theories of change (ToCs) for reforms. This was a suggestion made by some Philippines CSOs to promote longer-term visions of change, and address frustrations with OGP commitments that were overly 'technical' or 'systems' focussed, which (alongside limited CSO funding) affects their motivation to engage. The SU highlighted the time and capacities required to develop ToCs for reforms, and considered the Philippines to be a conducive context.

Box 2 - Sensemaking and Adaptation *(continued)*

These ideas, generated through collaborative sensemaking between the evaluation team and the SU country support team, fed into discussions with the Philippines MSF - which expressed interest in taking them forward in the next NAP co-creation.

Finding a rhythm. As the evaluation progressed, findings and insights emerging from the research were shared in monthly meetings with SU country support teams. These provided an opportunity to discuss and interpret the emerging insights, to consider potential implications for the SU's engagement, and next steps for the evaluation research.

Writing up quarterly reports on the emerging insights enabled the evaluation team to look across the seven case studies to identify common issues, patterns and trends. Over the course of the evaluation, the team experimented with how best to group emerging findings and issues, and to structure the reports – initially using themes or issues, before moving to structure reports around the OGP's theory of change. The quarterly reports were developed by the evaluation team, but discussed, debated and sharpened through collaborative reviews with the SU before submission to the OGP MT and ESC. While still focused on 'reporting out' from the case studies, this was an opportunity to feed back to the wider organisation. In the final six months of the evaluation, the team invested more effort in connecting the location studies and contribution tracing studies into the broader SU work.

Insights and Implications. Guided by the OGP's current strategic priorities, the team used NVivo and cross-case study analysis to identify a set of core cross-cutting issues that had emerged through the evaluation. A series of participatory reflection spaces called 'learning sprints' were

designed to support OGP staff consider the wider applicability of these issues, and to identify implications and next steps for OGP as a whole (Box 3).

Evaluation insights on the focal themes were curated to enable a broader set of OGP colleagues engage with the body of evidence gathered through the evaluation. These insights provided an overview of evaluation patterns and trends, linked to the relevant studies and quarterly reports. The process enabled the team to assess the resonance of findings with wider OGP work, and to counterbalance the evaluation design - which had 'gone deep' into only seven locations and three themes.

The learning sprints were facilitated jointly by the evaluation team and the OGP Learning and Innovation team. Key findings were highlighted, followed by discussion on questions designed to facilitate wider SU engagement in the content, and move from discussion to the surfacing of decision points and implications.

Following the Learning Sprints, the evaluation team worked to further develop these, using matrix diagrams to highlight issues for consideration by OGP in their strategy refresh process. Ideally, we would have had more time to generate next steps with the SU management team, but the extended timeframe for the evaluation meant that we were working to wrap up the evaluation just as the team were delivering their global summit. The timing was wrong, and rather than force an exercise for the sake of it, we will instead return to engage with the OGP after the evaluation has concluded and they begin their next strategy refresh process.

Utilisation focus: In wrapping up the evaluation, the focus has been on handing over the wealth of information that has been generated to the OGP SU, in ways that allow them to draw out what is most relevant for them today and identify questions and priorities for the future. A set of Issues Papers were developed following the learning sprints addressing the most significant topics that emerged through the evaluation - issues that the OGP identified as timely and the most immediately useful. These Issues Papers form an important part of 'passing the baton' from the evaluation team back to OGP to take forward.

Working with Developmental Evaluation: Reflections from the Evaluation Team

Reflecting on the past 30 months, and experience of working with a DE approach, the following lessons have emerged:

- **Promoting learning**: The team gave a lot of thought to purpose, audience and process design, and learning by trial and error. There is no one model for creating safe spaces in which learning can meaningfully happen. The team trialled *quarterly meetings with the whole SU*, which enabled some sense-making on the wider resonance of findings from specific countries, and space for decisions on evaluation direction. In their nature these were not spaces where country stakeholders could participate. We held *learning events on the different policy themes* to which all stakeholders were invited, yet the diversity of participants made it difficult to create a safe space for

potentially challenging discussions that could support next steps. The *learning sprints* varied in terms of how well they helped to move a conversation forward. In some cases, they triggered conversations that enabled development of broader insights and judgments that identified points of resonance (e.g. the concept of 'gearing', which is elaborated in the Issues Paper on Connecting Global and National Engagements). At other times, the learning sprints gave space for familiar discussions, but without bringing them to decision points. These challenges were worked through with the OGP Learning and Innovation team.

- **Blending different evaluation tools**: Incorporating the use of CT into the DE approach generated useful insights but also some challenges. It gave the OGP robust evidence of their contribution to change, and insights on the role they play in relation to others. SU colleagues found it useful to have visibility of the elements of, and their contributions to, a 'story' that they were not always aware of. In some cases, the CT process supported the SU to challenge commonly held assumptions that were not born out by the evidence. But, it was time consuming, and required almost pedantic attention to detail to unpack the individual and cumulative implications of each piece of evidence. As such, it felt at odds with the focus on emerging insights and real time use of evidence that the rest of the evaluation took as its overarching framing.

- **Time required for finalisation**: The evaluation timeline was always short for an evaluation of this nature. It was extended by eight months because of COVID-19, which provided time to explore the wider resonance of insights emerging from the case studies. However, it meant the team was concluding the evaluation at the same time as the OGP's 10th anniversary global summit. OGP colleagues created space to participate in validation workshops on the contribution tracing studies as well as the learning sprints, and to support the development of the issues papers. But time for the learning sprints was compressed, and it was not

possible to engage with the management team on co-generation of next steps, as had originally been intended.

- **Detail versus utility**: In writing up the Issues Papers, there is a difficult balance – the tendency is to want more detail and to ground the papers further in the evaluation studies, but the insights that are most relevant and useful for the OGP have evolved from them through discussion, debate, sense-making and judgements.

Finally, it is important to return to the idea of 'passing the baton' back to the OGP. The evaluation worked to support improved performance in real time for OGPs interventions, which are constantly responding and adapting to new and emerging situations. The OGPs' efforts in this space are ongoing, and while the evaluation has a contractual beginning and end, in practice, the learning needs that the evaluation served continue. Serving these needs is taken up by the OGP's Learning & Innovation team, and in wrapping up the evaluation, the focus has been on handing over to them and to the OGP more broadly.

Annex - *Ethics*

OPM ensures that all evaluations adhere to accepted international standards of good practice around ethics, including FCDO's ethical guidance for research, evaluation and monitoring activities, at every stage of the research, monitoring and evaluation cycle.

As a values-driven organisation, OPM is always respectful to the rights of the participants of research and evaluation projects, and has a policy to ensure complete adherence to research ethics. OPM follows a set of ethical principles in conducting all fieldwork and other evidence generation activities that we have developed based on our own experience as well as in accordance with the ethical policies of clients, and general guidelines such as the UNEG's Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and the UK Economic and Social Research Council (2010) *Framework for Research Ethics*). The principles of our approach are the following:

- **Informed consent**: ensuring that potential respondents are given enough information about the research, and researchers ensure that there is no explicit or implicit coercion. Respondents are informed that their participation is fully voluntary and they could withdraw from data collection processes at any time.

- **Transparency**: Researchers clearly introduce themselves to all participants and explain, in a way that is easily understood by all, the purposes of the research and what will be done with the information provided.

- **Anonymity**: Given that research respondents share considerable amounts of personal information with us, it is our responsibility to ensure that their confidentiality is maintained and personal information is protected.

- **Ensuring the safety of participants**: This means that the environment in which research is conducted is physically safe. We achieve this by ensuring that fieldworkers are familiar with areas in which they are working. Fieldwork supervisors support the fieldwork director in monitoring local security concerns.

- **Ensuring that people understand what is happening at all times**: Local enumerators ensure that research is conducted in the appropriate language and dialect, and that fieldworkers are familiar with local customs and terminology.

- **Training fieldworkers on principles of research ethics and respecting cultural sensitivities**. OPM's evaluations respect any differences in regard to culture, local behaviours and norms, religious beliefs and practices, sexual orientation, gender roles, disability, age, ethnicity, and other social differences.

At the time of writing researchers have been considering the most constructive way to close-out the country level work. In two cases this has already been concluded, with final feedback meetings to key stakeholders in late 2021. In other locations the intention is to make use of the Issues Papers once published to show what the country research has contributed to the evaluation.

Annex - *Safeguarding*

OPM is committed to ensuring that no harm comes to participants in all of our studies and that their basic human rights are protected. Particular care is taken when we are working with vulnerable people such as children and young people, marginalised groups, survivors of violence or abuse or participants with disabilities or leaning difficulties.

OPM's Safeguarding Policy and Principles for Practice prescribe the various mitigating measures which OPM puts in place when working with vulnerable people. As well as following the usual Due Diligence and recruitment guidelines, every OPM project with a safeguarding element must:

1. Conduct a safeguarding risk assessment at start-up.
2. Maintain a project risk register.
3. Ensure all team members (staff and externals) that work directly with vulnerable people have had a police check.
4. Ensure all team members receive annual safeguarding training (through OPM or their own employer).
5. Ensure all team members know how to raise a safeguarding concern and are aware of our Whistleblowing Policy.

Potential safeguarding issues are considered at the planning stage of an evaluation along with strategies to minimise or deal with them.

These include:

- Obtaining **informed consent**, including from a responsible adult in the case of minors and other vulnerable individuals without the capacity to respond for themselves.

- **Exploring sensitive and emotive issues** in the most sensitive way possible and ensuring there is support in place should participation in the research cause distress.

- Ensuring that **power relations** among participants are not disrupted in a way which could trigger violence or abuse, by ensuring that evaluators thoroughly understand the local culture and context.

- Training team members to **recognise abuse** and understand when it is appropriate to disclose to the relevant authorities; and

- Providing information or referral to participants **who present a health problem that can be treated**.

Reporting a Safeguarding concern or complaint is done in accordance with OPM's Safeguarding reporting process as set out in the Safeguarding Policy or in line with OPM's whistleblowing procedure.

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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Visit: **www.opml.co.uk**
or email: **admin@opml.co.uk**

Authors

Kate Dyer, Claire Hutchings, and Emma Jones.

With support from:

Stephen Akroyd; Natalia Albañil; Eleanor Bayley; Adam Harnischfeger; Czarina Medina-Guce; Hafsat Abdullahi Mustafa; Caroline Othim; Terry Roopnaraine.

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