

Independent Reporting Mechanism

Liberia
Co-Creation Brief 2022

Open
Government
Partnership



Independent
Reporting
Mechanism

Introduction

This brief from the OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) serves to support the co-creation process and design of Liberia's fifth action plan and to strengthen the quality, ambition, and feasibility of commitments. It provides an overview of the opportunities and challenges for open government in Liberia and presents recommendations. This brief does not constitute an evaluation of a particular action plan and its purpose is to inform the planning process for co-creation based on collective and country-specific IRM findings.

The Co-Creation Brief draws on the results of the research and recommendations in [Liberia's previous IRM reports](#). The brief also draws on other sources such as the [OGP National Handbook](#), [OGP Participation and Co-creation Standards](#), IRM guidance on [online OGP repositories](#) and the [minimum threshold for "involve"](#), to ensure that recommendations are up-to-date in light of developments since those IRM reports were written, and to enrich the recommendations by drawing on comparative international experience in the design and implementation of OGP Action Plan commitments, as well as other context-relevant practice in open government. The Co-Creation Brief has been reviewed by IRM senior staff for consistency, accuracy, and with a view to maximizing the context-relevance and actionability of the recommendations. Where appropriate, the briefs are reviewed by external reviewers or members of the IRM International Experts Panel (IEP).

The IRM drafted this Co-Creation Brief in May 2022.

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Section I: Action Plan Co-Creation Process

Snapshot of previous co-creation processes in Liberia

Iterative dialogue between civil society and government				
Government provides reasoned response				
Civil society could provide input				
Civil society was informed of the plan				
No consultation				
	Action Plan 1	Action Plan 2	Action Plan 3	Action Plan 4

Liberia has participated since the Open Government Partnership’s (OGP’s) founding in 2011, with a dedicated OGP Secretariat and Steering Committee since 2018. Over the last decade, ambitious reform initiatives have frequently encountered political and financial constraints and have been carried over subsequent action plans. The Secretariat works to coordinate open government efforts despite inadequate funding. Notwithstanding these challenges, Liberia’s action plan co-creation process has become increasingly inclusive over time, with some grant support from the Multi-Donor Trust Fund and OGP. The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) recommends that the OGP Secretariat and Steering Committee consider the following recommendations to align co-creation of the fifth action plan with the updated [OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards](#) and to design feasible commitments that build towards ambitious long-term reforms:

1. Maintain an up-to-date repository to strengthen public information around Liberia’s open government process and progress.
2. Provide inclusive and informed opportunities for public participation during development of the action plan.
3. Document and respond to stakeholders on how their contributions influenced the action plan’s content.
4. Strategically design commitments to balance ambition with feasibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Maintain an up-to-date repository to strengthen public information around Liberia’s open government process and progress.

Liberia has made notable efforts to strengthen the OGP ecosystem and implement ambitious reforms over the last decade. However, limited information on OGP process and progress is available online despite an [OGP website](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#). The IRM recommends that the Secretariat **identify procedures and resources to maintain the OGP website and repository**. Online documentation is essential to capture Liberia’s achievements and lessons, enable inclusive and informed participation, and demonstrate Liberia’s compliance with the updated [Standards](#).

The Secretariat should identify whether there is a government, civil society, or partner with the resources to directly maintain or fund the maintenance of the OGP website. If there is not, the Secretariat should consider using a free platform, such as [Trello](#), to publish information. While a functioning website is being established, **the Secretariat could maintain a public [Google Drive folder](#)**. Under the new minimum requirements, the Secretariat and Steering Committee must demonstrate that:

- The OGP website contains the latest action plan.
- The OGP website includes the co-creation timeline, with information on opportunities for stakeholders to participate that is published at least two weeks in advance.
- The basic rules of participation in the Steering Committee are public.
- The repository includes at least one piece of evidence of co-creation and one piece of evidence of implementation from the last six months.
- Any stakeholder input regarding the action plan is documented.

Recommendation 2: Provide inclusive and informed opportunities for public participation during development of the action plan.

Liberia's co-creation process has broadened over time to include a wider swath of civil society and government institutions. The IRM recommends that the Steering Committee continue efforts to create inclusive opportunities for public participation. The IRM also recommends that the co-creation process be designed and documented with the minimum requirements of Standard 3 in mind:

- On the OGP Facebook and other appropriate spaces, publish the co-creation timeline and information on opportunities in which stakeholders can participate at least two weeks in advance.
- Conduct outreach to stakeholders beyond the Steering Committee to raise awareness of OGP and opportunities to get involved.
- Develop a mechanism to gather inputs from a range of stakeholders during an appropriate period for the chosen mechanism. Seek to include input beyond the usual participating CSOs in Monrovia by, for example, by building awareness through a media campaign in advance of regional consultations, as exemplified by [Sierra Leone's 2019 co-creation process](#).
- Consider supplementing in-person consultations with free online tools, such as [CONSUL](#), while being mindful of including communities with limited internet access.

Recommendation 3: Document and respond to stakeholders on how their contributions influenced the action plan's content.

[Ten years of OGP data](#) demonstrate that the best predictor of strong open government results is the existence of ongoing dialogue between government and civil society regarding how feedback is incorporated into the action plan during development. During the creation of the [fourth action plan](#), the Government of Liberia responded to civil society feedback in Steering Committee meetings.

The updated Standards now require countries to **document input gathered and report back or publish written feedback** to stakeholders on how their contributions were considered before finalization of the action plan. To do so, the OGP Secretariat or Steering Committee could publish on the OGP Facebook and Google Drive either i) Steering Committee meeting minutes and/or emails in which civil society input is addressed and/or ii) a report on

input received with an explanation of why suggestions were or were not incorporated into the action plan (examples include [Morocco](#) or [Canada's](#) "What We Heard" report).

Recommendation 4: Strategically design commitments to balance ambition with feasibility.

In previous action plans, Liberia's OGP Steering Committee has worked to secure government buy-in for ambitious commitments. However, a lack of resources has remained a significant impediment to carrying out reforms. The IRM recommends that the Steering Committee prioritize reforms that align with existing government and civil society work plans to increase the likelihood that necessary resources will be available. For example, the action plan can serve as an opportunity to strengthen the open government lens or broaden the range of stakeholders involved in a project with an existing budget. The Steering Committee can **review where funded government and donor projects overlap with open government priorities to design a strategic and feasible action plan.** The action plan should also have commitment milestones that are achievable within the implementation period. Commitments can prioritize feasible activities while building toward ambitious reforms in the long term.

For example, the Steering Committee could use the co-creation process to determine whether and how to design a feasible open contracting commitment that considers the obstacles that inhibited implementation of commitments made in [2017](#) and [2020](#). The Committee could meet with the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission and Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative to discuss their work plan and budget as it relates to the [eProcurement Platform](#). Stakeholders could identify i) whether planned activities could be strengthened or expanded through inclusion in the action plan and ii) whether there are sufficient resources to advance reforms. Stakeholders could also meet with the [Open Contracting Partnership](#), which has expressed interest in supporting Liberia's efforts, and other civil society partners to determine opportunities for additional technical and financial support. These factors can be considered in the strategic design of an action plan that balances ambition with feasibility.

Section II: Action Plan Design

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMITMENTS

The recommendations below are avenues that Liberia can use to continue ongoing reforms through a strategic focus on feasible activities that build toward ambitious long-term change. Specific opportunities for open government reform include beneficial ownership transparency, fiscal openness, medicine supply chain transparency, open parliament, and youth participation.

AREA 1. Beneficial Ownership Transparency

The Government of Liberia has reiterated its commitment to beneficial ownership transparency in [previous OGP action plans](#), to the [International Monetary Fund](#), and by joining the [Open Extractives program](#). The fifth action plan is an opportunity to advance these commitments and operationalize the 2020 Associations Law and Business Corporation Act. As described in

the [Opening Extractives Scoping Report](#), the Liberian Business Registry and civil society partners could commit to:

- **Collaboratively develop the regulatory framework** for the collection, verification, and publication of beneficial ownership information.
- **Acquire and roll out the software** to collect and publish data according to the [Beneficial Ownership Data Standards](#).
- **Develop guidance documents and training** for public officials, the business community, and the public on the benefits of having data on beneficial owners and its uses.
- Build and partner with **a coalition of private sector allies** by communicating the business case for transparency of beneficial owners, as [demonstrated by Nigeria](#).
- **Establish sanctions** that are [sufficiently comprehensive](#), proportionate, and dissuasive; these sanctions could include both monetary fines and other penalties.
- Start with the transparency of **beneficial owners in the extractives sector** before expanding to other sectors.

There is ample opportunity for peer learning in the region. Under the 2017 action plan, Nigeria [introduced](#) a [beneficial ownership register](#) in the extractives sector. Nigeria has since [expanded](#) the register to all sectors, which is expected to be fully launched in the summer of 2022. Other countries in the region working to implement beneficial ownership registers include [Kenya](#), [Ghana](#), and [South Africa](#).

AREA 2. Fiscal Openness

The Government of Liberia and civil society partners have aimed to increase budget transparency across all four previous action plans. The Ministry of Finance continues to produce Citizens' Budgets and conduct outreach under the [Open Budget Initiative](#). However, the government does not consistently produce [key budget documents](#) in a timely manner, and there are few formal channels for citizen participation in budget processes. In the next action plan, the IRM recommends that the Ministry of Finance prioritize activities that lay a foundation for citizen participation in budget processes in the longer term, such as:

- Establishing processes and resources to **consistently publish key budget documents** in an accessible and timely manner, as highlighted by [CENTAL's 2021 report](#).
- Collaborating with civil society to **formalize and publicize moments for participation** in the budget cycle, as noted in the [2022 Budget Call Circular](#). For example, Côte d'Ivoire has worked to strengthen participatory budgeting [over multiple action plans](#), which has resulted in at least 10 municipalities using participatory budgeting. See People Powered's "[Participatory Budgeting via National Law](#)" report for more recommendations.
- Convene government, civil society, and partners to **review and provide recommendations that strengthen the legal and regulatory framework** around fiscal openness, as demonstrated by [Ghana's commitment on fiscal transparency and accountability in their 2017-2019 OGP Action Plan](#).
- Following the 2023 elections, the OGP Steering Committee could **strategically engage parliament to support and identify champions** toward strengthening the legislative environment for budget transparency and civic participation in the long term.

Previous commitments have also sought to address timely publication of audit documents. The Steering Committee and General Audit Commission should consider where there are sufficient financial and human resources to pursue a standalone commitment to address transparency of audit reports and recommendations.

AREA 3. Medicine Supply Chain Transparency

The Ministry of Health [committed to](#) increase transparency and accountability in healthcare service delivery through a broad commitment in response to citizen input on the 2020 action plan. In the next action plan, the IRM recommends that the Ministry of Health continue to respond to citizen priorities by collaborating with civil society to develop a focused commitment to strengthen medicine supply chain transparency. Such a commitment could provide a foundation for future reforms that introduce public accountability mechanisms in medicine supply chain management. As recommended in the 2020 [Action Plan Review](#), the Ministry of Health could undertake the following transparency measures:

- **Publish the resource allocation formula** that guides supply and budget distribution to counties and the **Monitoring and Evaluation Unit's findings**.
- Partner with iLab or other organizations to **publish and visualize information** like medicine expenditure, availability, delivery, expiration, and distribution.
- **Empower county health boards or another body to assist in data collection and verification** and raise recommendations and concerns around drug supply and delivery.

As an example, Liberia can look to the Department of Health and Sanitation in Elgeyo Marakwet, Kenya. In 2018, the county [committed to](#) publish daily the medical drugs available in health facilities on public notice boards and provide quarterly summaries with the dates that drugs were received and quantities in stock. [During implementation](#), the Department adapted the reform to align with the countrywide rollout of a standardized tool to record drug movement in health facilities in a publicly accessible portal.

AREA 4. Open Parliament

Stalled legislation in parliament has hindered full implementation of many of Liberia's more ambitious open government reforms. The IRM recommends that the Steering Committee use Liberia's 2023 elections to reinvigorate [parliamentary commitment](#) to open government by building understanding and support for open government within the new parliament. In the longer term, these efforts should aim to facilitate the passage of long-awaited legislation, such as the [Whistleblower and Witness Protection Acts](#) and legislation to establish a [special anti-corruption court](#). Activities that build a foundation for parliamentary engagement in open government efforts could include:

- The Steering Committee, could partner with parliamentary staff, and civil society to develop a **parliamentary engagement strategy** before the 2023 elections.
- Parliamentary staff and civil society could provide **workshops and briefing materials** on open government efforts in Liberia to raise awareness among the new parliament.
- The Parliament could **establish an Open Government Caucus or a working group** with civil society representation to advance and monitor open government reforms. This group could receive periodic updates on implementation of the national action plan.

The OGP Secretariat can look to examples from the region. Members of Parliament have been represented on Ghana's OGP Steering Committee since its inception. In the 2021-2023 action plan, Ghana aims to [deepen parliamentary engagement](#) through a Parliamentary Open Government Steering Committee and an Open Parliament Plan. In 2019, Sierra Leone [committed to](#) strengthen parliamentary involvement in open government efforts, following up with [a commitment](#) to increase civil society–parliamentary engagement in 2021. The Moroccan Parliament has also undertaken an [Open Parliament Plan](#) to open its own processes. More guidance can be found in the [2021 OGP Memorandum on Parliamentary Engagement and Menu of Options](#).

AREA 5. Youth Participation

Liberia's [2020 action plan](#) introduced a new reform through the Ministry of Youth and Sports' Commitment to increase youth participation in policy-making. As most activities have not been completed, the IRM recommends that the Ministry of Youth and Sports **prioritize feasible activities that build toward a long-term goal of youth participation that directly informs policy change** in the next action plan. Several examples of commitments that build toward greater youth participation in government decision-making include:

- Jamaica [is undertaking](#) a multistakeholder approach to review and provide recommendations on youth participation across policies and platforms.
- Senegal [is assessing](#) the presence of women and youth across government decision-making bodies and building their capacity for civic and political engagement.
- Morocco [is creating](#) educational materials and communication channels between youth and the parliament.
- With assistance from the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Tunisian government [is facilitating](#) the design and implementation of a dozen youth action plans at the municipal level.
- Countries such as [Papua New Guinea](#), [Tunisia](#), and [Romania](#) have commitments to establish youth councils at the local level. In Tunisia, five pilot municipal youth councils were received enthusiastically by youth and began working with municipal councils on joint projects. However, this commitment's limited lifespan demonstrates the importance of ongoing support from the relevant ministry to assist municipalities in maintaining youth councils.

The Steering Committee can also encourage youth participation in the co-creation process through consultations or by appointing Open Government Youth Ambassadors, as [South Cotabato, Philippines](#). Nigeria is currently establishing an [OGP Nigeria Youth Network](#) to mainstream participation at both the federal and state level. In particular, **youth representatives should be invited to help shape, implement, and monitor the youth-oriented commitment** in partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Commitment drafters can also stay tuned to the [OGP website](#) in the coming months for a forthcoming OGP Youth Toolkit.