

An IRM Look Into Local Government Reforms

Key Takeaways from 2018-2021

Open
Government
Partnership

Independent
Reporting
Mechanism

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From ensuring safe water to supporting schools, local governments provide key services impacting people's daily lives.

This brief summarizes the findings from the IRM Report on Local Action Plans, which takes stock of lessons learned more than five years after the launch of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local program. It highlights three key ingredients that enable the success of local open government reforms, three common challenges to overcome when implementing them, and top recommendations for impactful reforms.

These findings come from the assessment of

77 open government reforms implemented by

16 OGP Local members from 2018 to 2021*

INGREDIENTS FOR STRONGER REFORMS

What factors enable better implementation and outcomes of open government reforms? The IRM found that the reforms that achieved the strongest results benefited from several enabling factors, such as clear policy design with realistic activities, strong political support, and strong cross-departmental and government-civil society collaboration throughout implementation.

1

Embedding government feedback leads to better results. One of the most notable areas of success is engaging citizens in prioritizing local government projects and public spending. Crucially, the governments' effort to document and provide feedback to citizens on how these proposals were taken into account strengthened accountability.

2

Participation works best when it addresses the day-to-day challenges of citizens. The area of urban planning and infrastructure has been a bright spot. Efforts address concrete problems by drawing on user experiences to inform planning decisions, allowing citizens to provide feedback on infrastructure projects, or involving citizens in plans to address specific challenges such as climate change or homelessness.

3

Open data reforms work best when they support citizen use of the released data. There has also been a strong emphasis on tools and mechanisms to open up access to government data, and improve government contracts' transparency. These reforms have produced some promising results, especially where they support citizens in using the released data, for example to uncover abandoned community projects or participate in oversight of spending decisions.

COMMON CHALLENGES

What challenges affected the implementation of open government reforms? Many of the planned reforms met with obstacles along the way, including COVID-19, changes in political leadership and priorities, poor policy design, and resource constraints. In many cases, these were exacerbated by an absence of formal mechanisms to ensure ongoing dialogue between government and civil society partners.

1

Lack of resources impedes the sustainability of open government reforms. In almost half of local jurisdictions, limited resources and capacity meant that governments could not sustain open government infrastructure once established. This is particularly notable in online platforms and portals. Responses to COVID-19 also meant repurposing activities or diverted resources.

2

Political transitions had an impact on the implementation of reforms. In some cases, incoming administrations introduced changes to local government priorities, leading to a de-prioritization of the open government agenda. This was sometimes accompanied by sweeping staff changes, leading to loss of institutional memory.

3

Design flaws limit the achievement of results. A number of reforms included technical design flaws or promised too much and did not achieve the intended results. Other reforms depended on the delivery of actions beyond the control of those responsible for implementation, which limited their feasibility.

TOP RECOMMENDATIONS

The experience of implementing these 77 open government reforms has yielded valuable lessons for local governments around the world:



Content of open government reforms

1

Ensure reforms are politically feasible, aligned with citizen priorities, and clearly connected to citizen participation, government transparency, or government accountability.

2

Align reforms' objectives and activities political and budgetary cycles, without losing sight of making structural change.

3

Design specific, measurable policy design with clear expected outcomes while allowing for a degree of flexibility in implementation.

4

Focus on the demand side of open government reforms by supporting the uptake of open data and participation tools and platforms.

5

Design mechanisms for the government to share feedback on how citizen proposals are taken into account throughout reforms.

*16 OGP Local members

Austin, United States	Nariño, Colombia
Basque Country, Spain	Paris, France
Buenos Aires, Argentina	São Paulo, Brazil
Elgeyo-Marakwet, Kenya	Scotland, United Kingdom
Jalisco, Mexico	Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana
Kaduna State, Nigeria	Seoul, Republic of Korea
La Libertad, Peru	South Cotabato, Philippines
Madrid, Spain	Tbilisi, Georgia



Process of developing and implementing open government plans

1

Build cross-government and cross-party support for open government.

2

Define clear roles and expectations for civil society engagement in open government plan implementation.

3

Create and institutionalize structures to encourage and support civil society collaboration in open government plan implementation.

4

Embed regular monitoring and ongoing learning into the OGP process to support course correction, sustain stakeholder interest, and build trust.

5

Ensure sufficient resources and capacity to sustain open government reforms on both the government and civil society sides.