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May 2023

Action Plan OGP ASTURIAS 2022-23

Final Evaluation Report

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GRUPO DE INVESTIGACIÓN EN GESTIÓN PÚBLICA GESPUB

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ACTION PLAN OGP ASTURIAS 2022-23

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

1. LOCAL CONTEXT.

Implementation of the OGP Asturias 2022-23 Action Plan was impacted by the upcoming municipal and regional elections, scheduled to be held in Spain in May 2023. This required timings and deadlines to be adapted to ensure the entire Plan design and implementation process was finished one month prior to the date of the elections. Therefore, following acceptance of the Principality of Asturias into the OGP Partnership in May 2022, 1 April 2023 was set as the deadline for this initial experience with the OGP Action Plan. Therefore, the commitment co-creation process only lasted three months given that the Plan design that was ultimately chosen had to be presented to the OGP on 30 November 2022. As a result, implementation of the commitments had to be adapted to a four-month period in order to comply with the expected deadline.

These time constraints could be seen in a positive or a negative light. In the latter case, since the current government of the Principality of Asturias made a firm commitment to transparency years ago, its inclusion in OGP represented a milestone and an opportunity to take an ambitious step forward in both its policy and objectives. From this point of view, the scope of the implemented Plan had to be downsized more than the regional government would have liked were it not for the proximity of the upcoming elections. However, this also had a positive aspect to it in that the 2022-23 Plan functioned as a pilot project. It served as an initial experience from which to extract valuable conclusions regarding the design and implementation of future plans that are designed with longer deadlines and goals.

2. ACTION PLAN CO-CREATION PROCESS.

The design process together with the Action Plan took place over the course of 4 months, from 30 June 2022, when the Principality of Asturias Open Government Forum was formed, until 30 November, the OGP deadline for the definitive Action Plan. Good decisions from this phase that can be highlighted include the creation of the Forum, adaptation of the commitment designs, and easy and dynamic collaboration with the monitoring body:

- The Open Government Forum, in representation of Asturian civil society, was formed early on and provides diverse and inclusive representation of various regional civil institutions, together with representatives from the Principality of Asturias government. The creation of three works groups, grouped by topic, had a very positive effect, though the efficacy of their involvement in the process did not fully meet expectations, undoubtedly due to the speed of the process.

- The commitment design processes were adapted to the time constraints, content, and goals of open government. The three definitive commitments were relevant and aligned with the OGP goals, and their adaptation subsequently allowed for them to be implemented according to the initial estimates.
- Collaboration with the monitoring body was satisfactory for both parties. Despite the handicap of its delayed appointment and incorporation due to the tight public tender deadlines (final weeks of November), the interactions between the monitoring body and the various civil and governmental agencies consulted were smooth, continuous, and effective. As a result, all the desired information sources have been made available for review in little time and in a flexible manner. All of this had an effect of the ongoing feedback process between the monitoring body and the government, enabling immediate improvements to certain aspects of the process.

The following are highlighted as aspects that could be improved in future experiences or challenges:

- The main issue to be improved, as pointed out during the final learning exercise, was the little to no contribution from civil society during the co-creation process. While participation from the Forum work groups was successful, as the representative body for civil society, attempts by the Principality of Asturias government to gather suggestions and contributions from individuals or other civil agencies were not productive. With this lack of results, it was possible to confirm the lack of efficacy of the interaction tools used (specifically digital ones: transparency web portal, emails, social media, etc.) as well as the little interest among individuals to participate when not directly interested in the topic at hand.
- Only one plenary meeting of the Forum was held, that being the meeting when it was formed. Though we are talking about very short deadlines and a body that will continue operating, if at least one more meeting had been scheduled when finalising the Plan co-creation, it would have had more explicit and consistent support (in this group it was implicit via work groups). All things considered, at least one upcoming meeting of the Forum is expected to take place for the final consideration of this initial OGP experience.
- Promotion and publicity of the OGP process was not given the importance that we believe it should have been. Despite multiple press releases sent to the media and all the information posted publicly on the governmental website, we believe that greater proactivity is needed in this regard to inform society of the work being done and to ensure society is aware of the activities being implemented.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN COMMITMENTS.

The three commitments taken on by the Principality of Asturias government for this initial OGP Action Plan included the creation of a digital law library with all the regional regulations consolidated by topic, the creation of a public information catalogue of the regional Administration, and the expansion and improvement of the Asturias-related open datasets

available on the central government's online portal. Below we discuss the main findings and challenges encountered for each separate commitment, without prejudice to the subsequent general recommendations from the monitoring body for this portion of the process:

3.1 Consolidated digital Law Library.

Participation by the Open Government Forum work group assigned to this commitment was constant and resulted in effective collaboration with the associated governmental specialists. The most significant obstacle during implementation was the initially planned and unsatisfactory collaboration with a private company to conduct the coding tasks. Ultimately, this work had to be completed in its entirety by Administration staff.

The natural path for continuing this commitment involves classifying the Library by professional profiles, which would greatly increase its utility, however more time and human resources are needed than were originally provided for in this first Plan.

3.2. Catalogue of regional public information.

In terms of this second commitment, for future experiences we can recommend as an initial requirement enhanced coordination between the different transparency units involved in the regional governmental structure. Likewise, taking into consideration more than one format for the digital files could increase the proportion of potential users.

Should a continuation of this commitment be considered in the future, this should involve a more ambitious expansion of its content.

3.3. Improvement of Asturias-related open databases on the government website.

This commitment progressed as originally planned without major incidents, however excessive dependence on the SADEI body was detected, this being the public company responsible for regional statistics.

As an extension to the commitment, we propose creating a pathway of links to the original sources, which would surely improve the problems inherent to this issue of dispersion and lack of global systematization of the information.

4. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE CONCLUSIONS FROM THE FINAL LEARNING EXERCISE.

After finalising implementation of the Action Plan on 1 April 2023, the following month the various final commitment reports were drafted and sent to the OGP by the monitoring body. Having done that, it was possible to share the content with the other agents involved in the Asturias 2022-23 Action Plan within the context of a final learning exercise that took place on 2 May 2023. As a result of this sharing of findings, opinions, and conclusions, we wish to highlight

the following recommendations for local government representatives with regard to future OGP experiences:

1. The most important aspect to bear in mind in the future is how to improve participation by civil society throughout both phases of the process, both co-creation and implementation. In both cases, participation by individuals and other civil institutions not included in the Forum was essentially non-existent.

In the case of co-creation, despite holding a couple of meetings with other institutions and opening a process for public participation on the government website, results for suggested content to be included in the Plan were null. As such, civil society, which was not directly represented in the Forum, did not participate in the design of the commitments, nor was there any feedback regarding their co-creation. This continued throughout the implementation process, with no continuous interaction that could allow the local government to know how regional civil agents were receiving the progress of each commitment.

It is, without a doubt, a problem with no easy solution that is inherent to the operations of societies of today. However, a more initiative-taking attitude from the regional government can be recommended, with more action taken than the passive sending of emails or digital requests for participation. This greater proactivity will surely be easier to put into practice in subsequent experiences when commitments are carried out over a longer implementation period. For this purpose, emphasis should be placed on in-person, face-to-face meetings, either with representative individuals or with social associations or institutions. Similarly, it is advisable to hold these regular in-person meetings to facilitate achieving the desired feedback processes.

2. The second recommendation in order of importance and scope is related to the need to better promote any activities conducted in relation to the Action Plan, from the beginning stages through to implementation. Despite press releases and other mentions of it on social media, it is essential that civil society follow along with the government agencies in the process, and this support is hard to gain if people are completely unaware of the initiative.

In the final learning exercise and after sharing this recommendation, it was agreed that a mixed communication strategy could be very positive in the future. That is, a strategy to incorporate both a greater presence of the Plan in traditional regional media (press, television), and the creation of an ecosystem of associations and institutions associated with the Plan that can act as networks to promote the open government policies being implemented.

3. The creation of the Forum as a representative body of regional civil society represents a significant step forward, but greater results than those obtained in this initial experience can be achieved. One immediate recommendation is the need for a regular schedule of plenary meetings, in conjunction with the standing committee. Anything

that takes advantage of the interaction between the Forum and governmental specialists will benefit the progress of the Plan contents that is more in line with the real needs in terms of Open Government.

In the same manner and in terms of longer multi-year Plans, it is advisable to schedule at least one or two meetings between the Forum and the monitoring body.

4. With regards to the monitoring body, the only difficulty that arose, which is easily rectifiable in the future, was its delayed incorporation into the process. In this case, and due to the timing of the public tender to assign the contract, its incorporation took place just a couple of weeks before the end of the co-creation process. Undoubtedly, the presence and follow-up by the monitoring body from day one would have had a positive impact on the plan in terms of the co-creation phase, particularly if the evaluation team were already experienced in the mechanics of OGP plan monitoring.

5. It should not go without saying that if the following experiences were applied to more standard multi-year plans, the increased demand in terms of objectives, content, and results should be accompanied by a similar effort in terms of the means and staff assigned to it. Over the course of the past months, it has been possible to verify a direct correlation between the means employed and the results obtained in the implemented policies. If, in the future, the aim is to achieve more but with the same resources, this imbalance could have a harmful effect on continuity and persistence in the advancement of participation and transparency policies from the corresponding government.

6. Greater ambitions for upcoming Action Plans will most likely involve the need to add transparency units from different departments belonging to the same local government structure into the management of said plans. Therefore, to facilitate coordination between public agencies, we recommend first creating interdepartmental action protocols that enable smooth and dynamic interaction and to take advantage of any synergies that arise, avoiding inflexibilities and bureaucratic delays.