

Advancing Localisation in OGP

A closer look at the role of funders, intermediaries and local actors

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Localisation, put simply, is an initiative to ensure that local people and communities have the power and agency to drive their own development. Depending on who is using the term, 'local' in the global South can mean communities or community members, organizations operating at the local level, organizations operating at the national level, local governments, national governments, and more. Localisation is best understood as the journey towards locally led practice— i.e., what it would take to get us to get there.

The Localisation agenda has three main dimensions:

Agency: For localisation to truly shift power, local actors should retain decision-making power, in coming up with solutions to the problems they've identified.

Ways of being: Large project-based funds can reduce local actors to become implementers of externally constituted, upwardly accountable projects. In this process they may be forced to "look" or operate like Global North actors, such as grassroots movements becoming formalized into NGOs.

Resources: Less than 1% of Official Development Assistance (ODA), which accounts for most donor government and philanthropic support globally, and only 0.4% of humanitarian assistance, reached local actors directly in 2018. A new analysis estimates that local actors could deliver programming that is 32% more cost efficient than international intermediaries such as the UN or INGOs.

While the movement to mainstream localisation is well-underway, the international development field is still searching for models of what it has looked like in practice, and its implications for a path forward. In our own bid to answer these questions, we scanned the existing research and evidence for how OGP countries are advancing localisation. What we found and have articulated below, is a common thread across all of these cases of the open government model in (i) leveling the playing field between government and civil society actors, (ii) enabling civil society actors to gain more political access and influence in decision-making, as well as (iii) facilitating access to resources to create stronger local coalitions and strengthen civil society advocacy goals.

Localisation in OGP

In a partnership which has 77 countries and over a 100 local governments from across the economic divide, OGP inspires localisation at scale. The OGP model requires governments to co-create policy reforms with civil society at the country or local government level, and requires an equal seat at the table for civil society actors at the global governance level. The reforms contained in OGP country/local action plans are the priorities that emerge from local civil society - government dialogues, not ones that come top-down from external sources which is particularly important in efforts to tackle highly contextual governance challenges. To date 4000+ commitments have been made through OGP action plans, addressing over a breadth of issues ranging from inclusion to public services to anticorruption.

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Agency: Local articulation of priorities in OGP

'Civil society organizations have used the OGP platform to identify and collaborate with government reformers, taking a systemic and collective action approach to addressing national policy priorities. Governments, in turn, have found innovative partners in civil society who can facilitate engagement with diverse voices and mobilize local communities, thereby sharing the burden of participatory decision-making in policy.

The Power of Partnership in Open Government', a recently published book by the MIT press has shown that in OGP, civil society organizations have full parity of representation and innovative models of cocreation between governments and their citizens. Not only are civil society organizations encouraged to formally participate within the organization and throughout the action plan development process, but OGP "also encourages domestic reforms focusing on public participation broadly defined to include not only civil society but other actors, like companies, citizens, associations, and so on." Beyond the formal representation, the partnership also empowers civil society groups with new forms of informal power through networking, information provision, and agenda-setting.



The National Treasury of South Africa and IMALI YETHU collaborate to make Vulekamali, an online platform to make budget information more accessible.

An independent evaluation of OGP found that the platform enables more collaborative engagement between participating government agencies and civil society, and in some cases nurtures government reformers' belief in the benefits of such collaboration. In the Philippines for example, a caucus of CSOs established a Civil Society Secretariat that acts as a direct counterpart to the government Point of Contact (PoC).

The evaluation found that in part due to the OGP Support Unit's efforts to foster a partnership between government and civil society and provide a crucial space for tripartite discussion of strategies and challenges in Philippines' action plan, the secretariat now regularly engages government line ministries to monitor the implementation of reforms, and co-create strategies on how to onboard new political leaders for example. Some CSOs even described OGP as one of the few remaining 'safe spaces' for dialogue with the government in the face of wider civic space closure. At the level of the local government in South Cotabato, Philippines, government and civil society stakeholders saw value in greater integration to facilitate political support, additional partnerships and funding, alongside the benefits of the interoperability of the national and local open contracting platforms.

OGP's own research also shows that the level of civil society influence in co-designing policies with the government has increased significantly. In most countries, government officials no longer just inform or consult civil society, they engage in back-and-forth dialogue to design policies. We found statistical evidence that the strength of this civil society engagement predicts more ambitious commitments, higher rates of implementation, and stronger early results.



Civil society collaborate at the OGP Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting in 2018.

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Ways of Being: Local civil society coalitions driving OGP reforms

A portfolio evaluation conducted by the Transparency and Accountability Initiative looked at the role of funders in advancing beneficial ownership (BO) transparency in several countries. In May 2016, Nigerian President Buhari announced a commitment to create a beneficial ownership register and included it in Nigeria's OGP Action Plan in December 2016. Four years following the initial commitment, President Buhari signed the Amended Companies and Allied Matters (CAMA) Bill, including the requirement to disclose persons with significant control of companies in a register of beneficial owners to enhance corporate accountability and transparency.

OGP played a critical role in Nigeria as a global, purposeful, multi-stakeholder partnership that connects governments to local civil society and the private sector. OGP enabled a broad based civil society coalition to form and amplified the agendas that Nigerian civil society partners such as CISLAC (Transparency International's Nigeria Chapter) and other civil society actors had established for themselves in agenda setting, awareness raising, research and advocacy around BO. The support of funders such as FCDO, MacArthur Foundation and OSF, including the OGP Multi-Donor Trust Fund were critical in channeling resources to both government and local civil society actors to keep the momentum going on BO reforms.

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Resources: Funding civil society for stronger engagement with OGP governments

Practically, and specially at the country level OGP has invested significant resources in building the capacity of local civil society actors - through vehicles like the OGP Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) and our own mini-grants - to meaningfully engage governments, local communities and citizens in designing and implementing reforms that spoke to local priorities. 19 civil society organizations from 183 countries in the global South received close to \$1.2 million in grants from the OGP MDTF. The awards ranged from \$50-75K. An additional 28 organizations received over \$600K directly from the OGP Support Unit in the form of mini-grants over the past two years.

By being part of the OGP platform, these organizations also had access to real-time technical support and peer-to-peer learning for context and problem analysis, how to build alliances inside and outside of government, and mechanisms for civic engagement in action plan design and implementation. The early outcomes of these grants show that local civil society organizations gained more influence in decision-making with government counterparts, and were able to engage historically



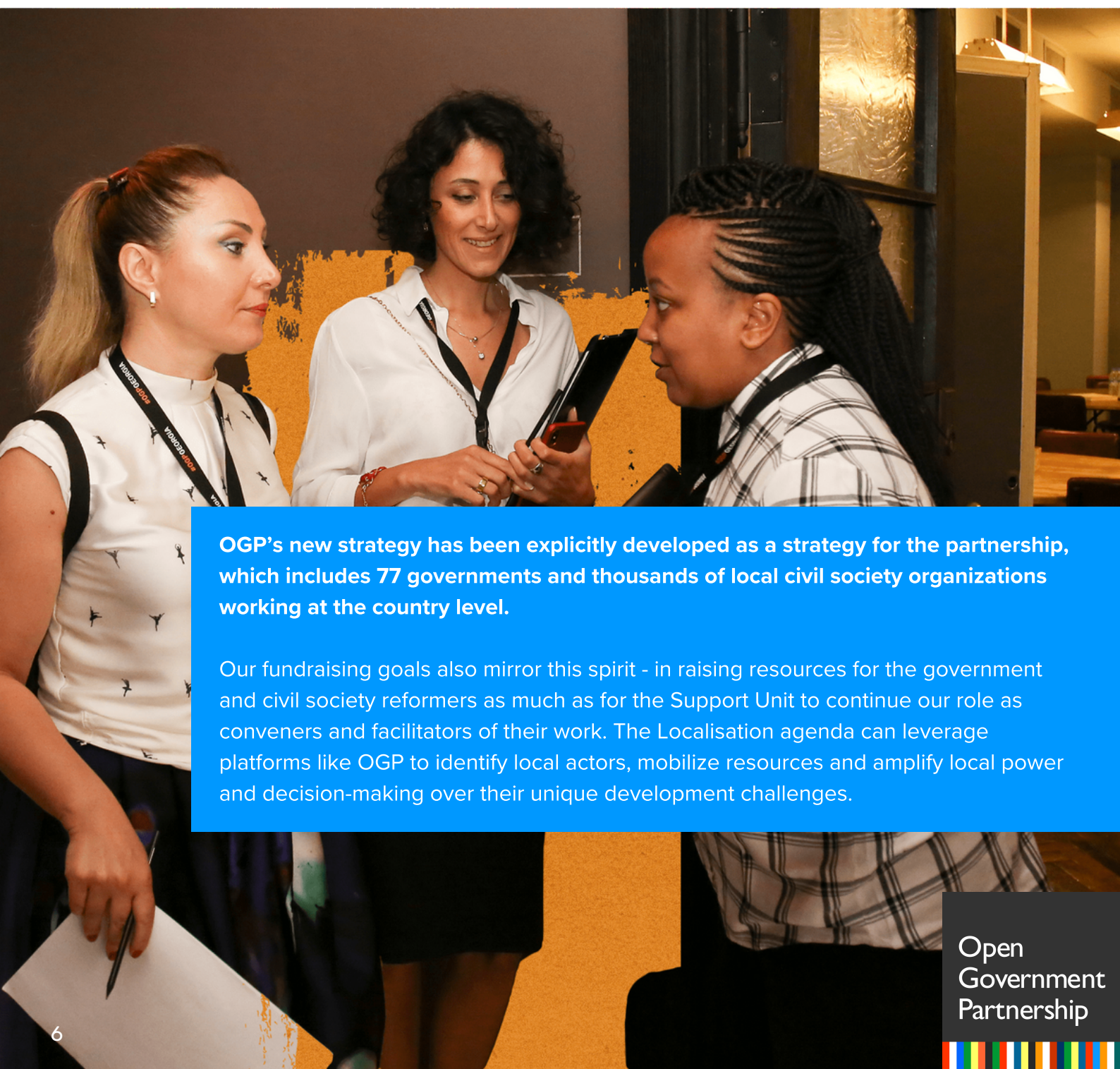
Government and civil society meet during the 2022 Europe Regional Meeting in Rome, Italy.

marginalized voices into the action plan design than before. For example ACCESA (Costa Rica), Armavir Development (Armenia), CODE -NGO (Philippines), Open Burkina (Burkina Faso) and Accountability Lab (Liberia) were all able to use the resourcing to hold wide-ranging consultations in administrative regions with target groups of citizens from rural areas, youth, women, civil servants and the media.

Open Burkina noted the first-time participation of at least 11 political parties and CSOs, including the Alliance for Democracy and Federation–African Democratic Rally (ADF/RDA), Burkina Youth, The National CSO Council, and the Women’s Council of Burkina, and over 800 citizens from rural areas. ACCESA held “accountability sessions” with 20 public servants from 18 government institutions and over 120 citizens, highlighting the important mindset and behavioral shifts in traditionally “closed off” government agencies that were now welcoming citizen feedback. Accountability Lab noted refining and tailoring their advocacy on open government to appeal to government actors in the health, legislative and judicial sectors thereby getting the crucial buy-in and political will to implement commitments in the action plan. The action plans from Burkina Faso, Costa Rica and Liberia all were objectively assessed to have higher quality commitments with greater potential impact.

Of course resourcing is only one contributing factor in what leads to shifting power and decision-making for local actors and the inclusion of marginalized voices in a meaningful way. But it is an influential factor nonetheless - particularly when we consider that many of these local CSOs which received funding used the resources to address inadequate staffing, develop strong institutional models that defined terms of partnership, roles and responsibilities with the government and create meaningful spaces and mechanisms through which local communities could have a say in policymaking.

Local government and civil society actors rooted in their local communities have been the driving force of open government reforms since its inception. But in a landscape where resources that truly enable them to take ownership of their unique development challenges are so thin - the progress they make cannot be sustainable.



OGP's new strategy has been explicitly developed as a strategy for the partnership, which includes 77 governments and thousands of local civil society organizations working at the country level.

Our fundraising goals also mirror this spirit - in raising resources for the government and civil society reformers as much as for the Support Unit to continue our role as conveners and facilitators of their work. The Localisation agenda can leverage platforms like OGP to identify local actors, mobilize resources and amplify local power and decision-making over their unique development challenges.