

IRM Quality Assurance Framework

Summary of IEP Session 3: Quality and consistency of coding early results

May 22, 2024

In attendance

- **IEP members:** Maha Jweied, Rocio Moreno, and Snjezana Bokulic
- **IRM Staff:** Tinatin Ninua, Andreas Pavlou, Matthew Tramonti, and Mia Katan

Summary

The International Experts Panel (IEP) oversees the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) to safeguard its independence and to ensure consistent application of the IRM methodology and quality research standards in its products. In 2023, the IEP approved the Quality Assurance Framework, an essential tool for ensuring that the IRM assessments meet the highest standards of quality, due diligence, research and controls to safeguard its objectivity, independence, and credibility.

The IEP held the third quality assurance session on May 22, 2024. During the 1.5 hour session, IEP members examined a sample of nine commitment assessments, including three samples for each of the three early results codings (no notable results, moderate early results, and significant early results). The samples were selected from the 2021-2023 Results Reports, the first countries assessed using the new early results indicator. The IRM staff considered regional diversity while selecting reports, as well as how far along the reports were in the review process.

Discussion

During the quality assurance session, the IEP looked at the accuracy of the codings of the samples in line with the IRM's methodology, guidance and definitions of the codings for early results. The IEP examined the justifications and evidence presented in the samples to support the coding for early results, such as a balanced view of involved stakeholders, sufficient analysis of information, and use of third party data. The IEP also examined if the early results indicator was applied consistently across regions and whether the definitions of the indicator's codings are easy to understand and apply to commitments.

The IEP found that the codings and analyses in the commitment samples were generally consistent with the IRM's definitions and guidance for early results, while requesting clarifications on differences between some of the codings of "moderate" early results and "no notable results".

Depth of results and sustainability of commitments

The IEP asked how the IRM assesses the "depth of results" and "sustainability" of the commitments. The IRM staff clarified that for a commitment to achieve significant early results, there must be evidence that it will be sustained over time. On the other hand, commitments

that achieve moderate early results may have a limited depth of change but could be sustained over time, or may be sustained over time but the depth of change is not deep. The IEP also asked what evidence might contribute to the institutionalization and sustainability of commitments.

Evidence

The IEP found a degree of potential subjectivity in the evidence that qualifies for “moderate” early results and “no notable results” codings, and inquired about how the IRM staff accounts for this risk. The IEP noted that the countries where the IRM had a researcher who is based in the country under review helped improve the level of detail in the assessments of early results, particularly in gathering stakeholder input. The IEP recommended the following:

- The evidence of the early results indicator should clearly capture the changes that build on past OGP commitments (in cases of continuations), considering that it can be difficult for governments to implement ambitious reforms in two year-action plan cycles.
- To overcome potential biases of relying on interviews with stakeholders (in government and civil society) who are involved in implementing the commitments, the IRM could try to supplement findings with input from neutral stakeholders.
- Editorially, the IEP noted a preference for a clear explanation of the commitment’s coding justification based on available evidence, in the beginning of the narrative, as opposed to at the end of the section.

Clearer definitions

The IEP mentioned the concept of the enabling environment to build trust between citizens and state could benefit from a clearer definition and measurements. The IEP noted that some commitments assessed positively the enhancement to this enabling environment based on the input from one or more involved stakeholders, even when civic space more broadly has been found to be narrowing by third-party assessments, such as the World Justice Project and CIVICUS. This indicates a degree of subjectivity in the understanding of how the IRM defines building trust between citizens and the state and a need for clearer definition and guidance for this terminology. In most cases, what is being assessed is building of trust and improving the dialogue within OGP structures and stakeholders, not the overall civic space in the country. The IEP recommended the following:

- Further clarify in the IRM’s guidance the definitions of enabling environment, institutionalization and sustainability.
- When assessing changes to the enabling environment to build trust between citizens and state, the IRM should consider changes (or lack of) to the broader context, not just the narrow scope of the commitment, for some of the commitment’s related issues.
- Add real examples of commitments coded in the three early results codings, now that such examples are available.

Moving forward

At the next Quality Assurance Session scheduled for September 2024, the IRM staff will explain to the IEP what changes it has implemented to its guidance and methodology for assessing early results based on the recommendations from the third quality assurance session. The IEP will monitor the integration of recommendations.