

IRM Quality Assurance Framework

Summary of IEP Session 4: Quality and consistency of Key Observations

October 9, 2024

In attendance

- **IEP members:** Maha Jweied, Rocio Moreno, and Snježana Bokulić
- **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 fourth quality assurance session on October 9, 2024. During the 1.5-hour session, IEP members examined the quality and consistency of Key Observations of IRM Results Reports. The IEP examined a sample of 12 *Key Observations* sections from Results Reports from the 2020-2022 and 2021-2023 action plan cycles. Each sample section contained 3-5 Key Observations. IRM staff considered regional diversity while selecting the samples, with four samples from each of the four main regions (Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Europe).

Discussion

During the session, the IEP provided their opinions on the quality and consistency of the Key Observations from the samples. The IEP generally found the *Key Observations* section useful as a summary of the main learnings from the action plan cycle, particularly for a reader who may not know the full background of the OGP process in the country. The IEP found that most observations could be understood on their own without having to read the full report to understand what was being discussed. The observations were generally easy to read and captured the “big picture” takeaways from the action plan, including what worked and what could have been done better. They were adequately balanced between describing what happened during the action plan and offering forward-facing recommendations. They found that the most effective observations provided background information, summarized the findings from the research, and finished with examples of good practices from other countries that could be emulated.

The IEP noted a few inconsistencies in how the observations are formulated. The IEP noted that some observations had recommendations to the country, while others did not. They pointed out that, with a primary target audience of the OGP Support Unit and country stakeholders, it could be helpful to include recommendations with examples from other countries for observations that point out gaps in the OGP process. The IEP found some individual observations cover multiple, separate issues, while for others, the lessons were platitudes and not specific to the action plan. Some were entirely descriptive and did not go deeper into the reasons behind the observation. They noted that some were perhaps too self-evident, such as the importance of engaging civil society to deliver strong results and could have benefited from being formulated in a way that was more specific to the country’s context. The IEP noted that it would be better to avoid using the commitment numbers in the *Key Observations* section, as this requires checking the report. For some observations, the heading did not clearly match the description in the text.

Recommendations for the *Key Observations* section

The IEP and the IRM staff discussed ways to improve the Key Observations going forward. The IEP suggested the following recommendations for the IRM to improve the observations:

- Use the observations to look at bigger topics like the institutionalization of OGP reforms, the levels of collaboration between government agencies, and expansion of the OGP process to more agencies and branches of government.
- Providing a deeper analysis of the factors that may have impacted the successes or failures of the action plan, such as the allocation of budgeting and resources for the commitments or broader political considerations for opening government.
- Similar to Co-Creation Briefs, providing examples of good practices from other countries, particularly on ways to overcome a gap in the OGP process.

Action points for improving the *Key Observations* section

The IEP agreed on the following action points for the IRM to implement in the *Key Observations* section going forward:

- Writing the observations in plain language so that the section can be understood by a wider audience (heading and supporting paragraph) and avoid using acronyms of public institutions.
- Making sure the *Key Observations* section can be understood on its own, separate from the rest of the report, and without requiring an in-depth understanding of the OGP process in the country. For example, the observations should avoid using the commitment numbers so that the reader does not need to check the rest of the report.
- Providing more structured guidance to the IRM researchers on how to think about the major conclusions from the action plan.
- Tailor each observation's headings and text to the context of the country and avoid headings that may be self-evident or universally applicable.

Moving forward

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