Parliamentary Engagement in National OGP Processes

Menu of Options

Open Government Partnership

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Executive Summary

This document complements the Memorandum on Parliamentary Engagement, adopted by the OGP Steering Committee in November 2021. It captures the approaches taken by a growing number of OGP members, illustrating how parliaments can participate in OGP and help advance the co-creation and implementation of open government reforms. In doing so, it aims to provide OGP stakeholders – executive officials, members and staff of parliament, civil society, and others – with a menu of options for parliamentary engagement.

This will be a living document, updated with new examples and commitments as they emerge. To submit additional examples or request further information, please contact: info@opengovpartnership.org, and the Senior Regional Coordinator from the OGP Support Unit covering the country.

Why Parliamentary Engagement?

Parliamentary engagement has been an integral part of the open government philosophy and a key factor in achieving ambitious open government reforms ever since OGP launched. Many of the key aspirations of the open government movement -- institutionalizing reforms, promoting and protecting civic space, and defending democratic processes, among others -- require the support of parliaments. Additionally, parliaments can play a key role in setting the agenda and creating space and support for open government reforms.

Following an extensive review and consultation process, the OGP Steering Committee approved the Memorandum on Parliamentary Engagement in November 2021. It recognizes the following roles for parliaments in the open government context:

- **Taking legislative action:** Parliaments can champion open government values by introducing, reviewing, and ratifying legislation relevant for open government, or approving budgets for open government reform. As of 2020, approximately 10-15 percent of all OGP commitments made require legislative action.
- **Ensuring parliamentary oversight:** Parliaments can hold the executive accountable for open government reforms and opening up its own oversight processes to public scrutiny.

- **Opening up parliamentary processes:** Parliaments can adopt open government principles -- transparency, accountability, participation, and inclusion -- within the parliamentary institution and its processes.
- **Creating space for dialogue:** Parliaments can foster the cross-party dialogue and support needed to advance and institutionalize open government reforms.

Engagement of parliaments in OGP -- whether through formal participation in co-creation or other means of coordination -- stands to benefit all OGP stakeholders. The 2021 review returned the following insights:

- **For the executive branch**, parliamentary engagement opens up opportunities for securing legislation that enables: executive branch commitments, resourcing for implementation, and institutionalizing reforms. When the executive branch engages citizens and civil society in their OGP national action plan co-creation processes, inputs from these groups often reflect aspirations or grievances that cannot be addressed by executive action alone.
- **For parliaments themselves**, engagement with the OGP platform domestically can provide an additional mechanism to hear from citizens and civil society between electoral cycles on how they can better serve the people they represent, and stay abreast of the commitments the executive is taking on and needs to be held accountable for. Internationally, OGP provides a global platform for peer learning, accessing expertise from OGP's vast network of practitioners, and showcasing successes.
- **For civil society organizations**, parliamentary engagement is a crucial aspect of securing the sustainability of reforms across administrations and political cycles, and for advocating for citizen interests and rights.

The 2021 Memorandum on Parliamentary Engagement

The 2021 Memorandum sets out the rationale and approach for parliamentary engagement in OGP. It provides a coherent framework to accommodate the different types of parliamentary engagement across OGP members.

The space for, and specifics of, parliamentary engagement in each OGP process are primarily determined by domestic actors involved in the dialogue. Parliamentary engagement is strongly recommended, especially where it can advance critical open government reforms, but it is not an OGP requirement for participation.

Parliaments that decide to engage with OGP have the following options:

1. Participation in the national or local OGP process
2. Participation via submission of a standalone OGP Parliament Plan
3. Promote openness beyond the OGP platform

This Menu of Options provides OGP stakeholders with further guidance for option 1, parliamentary participation in the national OGP process. Guidance for OGP Local members and local parliaments will be issued separately.

Evidence shows participation of parliament in the national or local OGP process can advance the co-creation and implementation of OGP commitments. Parliament has already engaged in the OGP process in more than 30 OGP member countries. The guidance offered here builds on their experience, as well as on the invaluable input received from government officials, members and staff of parliament, and civil society actors throughout the consultation process.

Parliamentary Engagement in the National OGP Process: A Menu of Options

Participation by parliaments in the national process offers OGP stakeholders critical opportunities to explore open government synergies across branches of government. A single national process also allows more efficient use of the time and resources allocated to co-creation and consultation, and reduces the transaction costs for civil society in engaging in OGP-related activities. This is the model of engagement already pursued in the majority of countries with parliamentary involvement in OGP.

The form and scope of parliamentary engagement is shaped by political, institutional, and legal dynamics and therefore varies significantly across OGP members. That variation is a source of strength; members are finding ways to collaborate on open government while fully respecting protocols -- formal and informal -- that govern the separation of powers. This helps ensure that open government reforms can be co-created, implemented, and overseen in full transparency and with the support of legislators.

The 2021 Memorandum states that parliaments choosing this option (i.e., choosing to engage in the national OGP process) commit to the following conditions:

- The OGP Participation and Co-creation Standards that govern the co-creation and implementation of OGP commitments and national action plans. OGP local guidance, stipulated in the OGP Local handbook, governs the co-creation and implementation of local commitments and action plans.
- Where parliamentary representatives participate in the OGP Multi-stakeholder Forum or Platform (MSF/P), they must adhere to rules and practices established by the forum.
- Where parliament participation in the national OGP process results in commitments made or supported by the parliament, commitments must be integrated within the overall action plan and adhere to the overall start and end dates for the OGP action plan.
- Parliaments must adhere to all the regular reporting and monitoring mechanisms required from all commitment implementers by the OGP MSF/P, and as established by the OGP Participation and Co-creation Standards.

- Parliamentary commitments included in national action plans will be assessed by the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM). Parliaments may convene their own multi-stakeholder working groups to determine the scope and substance of their commitments, but these processes are not separately assessed by the IRM, which will continue to focus on assessing the overall country co-creation process.

Additional details on the rules and conditions that apply to parliaments participating in the national OGP process are provided in the OGP Handbook.

Box 1. OGP Participation and Co-creation Standards (2021)

Standard 1	Establishing a space for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between government, civil society, and other non-governmental stakeholders.
Standard 2	Providing open, accessible and timely information about activities and progress within a member's participation in OGP.
Standard 3	Providing inclusive and informed opportunities for public participation during co-creation of the action plan.
Standard 4	Providing a reasoned response and ensuring ongoing dialogue between government and civil society and other non-governmental stakeholders as appropriate during co-creation of the action plan.
Standard 5	Providing inclusive and informed opportunities for ongoing dialogue and collaboration during implementation and monitoring of the action plan.

1. Parliamentary Participation Throughout the OGP Process

The following is a menu of options for parliamentary engagement in OGP, detailing opportunities at each step of the OGP cycle. This list is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive, and is offered only to inform and inspire members who wish to strengthen parliamentary engagement in OGP.

Details on how this engagement can be organized institutionally by OGP member countries are listed in the section on Institutional Set-up and Coordination.

Planning for Co-creation

Planning for the different activities to be undertaken during the co-creation process is crucial at the beginning so that: objectives are clear, stakeholders and their roles are defined, resources available are identified, and a timeline is established to complete the process. Moreover, planning involves: determining the co-creation priorities at the outset, understanding the current political climate, assessing relations between the executive and civil society, exploring the feasibility of engagement of different branches of government, and considering how all of these elements will impact the co-creation process.

- Where parliaments are already engaged in OGP activities, members or staff of parliament can coordinate with the OGP Point of Contact (POC) and/or MSF/P to determine: the need and objectives for parliamentary engagement, how participation of parliamentary staff or representatives might work, key activities parliaments will participate in or convene, and how coordination and complementarity of action will be achieved.

- Where parliaments are yet to be engaged in OGP activities, the OGP Point of Contact, with the MSF/P, and/or civil society actors involved in the co-creation planning process, should consider whether and how the process might benefit from parliamentary engagement, and factor in outreach and engagement activities targeted towards the parliament accordingly. Where the interest for engagement comes from the parliament, parliamentary actors are required to contact the OGP Point of Contact in the country to initiate engagement. Where desirable or required, the OGP Support Unit can support initial outreach activities and facilitate introductions. Contact information can be found on the OGP website's member country pages.

Outreach and Awareness Raising Around Co-creation

Part of ensuring meaningful participation in the co-creation process is conducting outreach activities with relevant stakeholders to raise awareness of open government, the OGP, and

opportunities to get involved. Outreach and awareness-raising activities are led by the OGP MSF/P and can be used as opportunities to gather information from participants regarding the transparency, accountability, and citizen participation issues that they would like addressed, as well as any other open government concerns they would like the action plan to consider. Parliaments can engage in these processes in the following ways:

> Parliaments can share the details on upcoming co-creation activities with their own (online) networks and community to promote the participation of parliamentary stakeholders and interested civil society organizations.
>
> Parliaments can include information on its OGP activities and ambitions across a variety of its communication and education channels: the parliament website, newsletter and social media, visitor tours, and educational material for schools. It can also include key messaging on its OGP activities in public statements to position the institution as a champion of the open government agenda.

With regard to the engagement of parliamentary actors themselves, outreach activities will depend heavily on previous engagement and established lines of communication. Where the OGP Multi-Stakeholder Forum includes parliamentary representatives, they will be best positioned to advise on this. Where parliament has been involved in a more limited or informal capacity, those existing or previous contacts are a natural starting point for planning additional outreach activities, based on the objectives of the co-creation process. Where no engagement has yet taken place, government and civil society stakeholders have a number of options to consider.

> The OGP Point of Contact or MSF representatives may inform the parliament of the upcoming co-creation process and invite them as observers and/or participants. This can be done in writing or through more informal means.
>
> Members and staff of parliament with direct involvement in OGP may share a formal update and/or an invitation to participate with the relevant committees, working groups, departments, etc within the parliament. Previous OGP action plans, reports, and/or commitments of particular relevance could be included for further information.
>
> Parliament may organize a meeting for interested members and staff to consider opportunities for engagement, or continued engagement, in OGP. Further options for internal information sharing and coordination are outlined in the section on Institutional Set-up and Coordination.

The **2021 Memorandum** offers parliaments the option to initiate an independent **OGP parliamentary action plan** co-created and implemented at a time of the parliament's own choosing. OGP Parliamentary Action Plans are developed independently from OGP national action plans only in the following cases:

- to provide a stepping stone for parliaments whose direct participation in the national OGP process is not (yet) feasible; or
- in addition to their participation in the OGP national plans, where this is considered desirable by parliamentary stakeholders.

Separate guidance for the development of these OPPs, including on planning for co-creation, is available in the **Guidance for OGP parliamentary action plans**.

Action Plan Development

With initial inputs from the outreach process, the OGP MSF/P proceeds with action plan development by focusing on identifying commitments that will be included in the action plan. Depending on the type of inputs gathered during the outreach phase, this may include the following processes: input analysis, problem and solution identification, drafting commitments, and consulting with additional stakeholders.
Parliamentary representatives (members, staff, or both) can participate in each of these processes. Their contribution may include the co-creation of commitments led by the parliament, as well as input, feedback, and support for commitments led by the executive branch, where appropriate.

Problem Identification, Solutions Mapping, and Identifying Priorities

OGP stakeholders may invite members and staff of the parliament to participate in co-creation meetings. This can take the form of a broader, open discussion to source solutions to problems and identify priorities or, once a clear direction is in place, through dedicated working groups.

> In **Cabo Verde**, representatives of parliament participated in the 2020 co-creation kick-off meeting. Much of the discussion was driven by a single guiding question: Where do we want Cabo Verde to be in 2030? From there, delegates worked backwards to identify priority commitments, laying the foundation for sustainable reforms.

In **Nigeria**, members of parliament (MPs) joined the OGP Nigeria thematic working group meetings on the upcoming action plan. Building on existing lines of communication and practices established for the annual budget review, MPs were invited on the basis of established mailing lists per subject. Consistent outreach by the OGP Secretariat proved practical and complimented the ongoing work of civil society, who have long advocated for MPs' engagement in OGP.

In **Chile**, the Bicameral Group on Transparency in the National Congress continues to play an integral part in the development of the national action plan. For Chile's 2020-2022 action plan, representatives were actively involved, working with civil society organizations throughout their co-creation process. They took part in early discussions on potential areas of reform, helped identify the priority themes, and informed the final development of the two legislative openness commitments. The National Congress leads on the implementation of these commitments, both of which were flagged by the IRM as notable "commitments to watch."

In **North Macedonia**, parliament did a careful review of its own strategies, but also reviewed OGP commitments made by other countries for inspiration. The final parliament chapter included in the national action plan aimed for policy coherence across the chosen commitments, and prioritized reforms that were considered realistic given the political and financial capital available.

The results of such parliamentary engagement can take the form of parliaments: adopting commitments, where relevant, as part of the nation action plan; advising on the legislative process and engagement required for commitments adopted by the executive; or undertaking complementary actions as part of the milestones of specific commitments.

Beyond the action plan, parliament can leverage its oversight powers to advance relevant issues and opportunities raised in these discussions. This can include, for example, individual members of parliament or committees laying out where the executive is falling short on implementing legislation, and/or inquiring about legislative or policy proposals that have not advanced.

Finally, where parliament does not participate in OGP national processes, or where it has opted to develop a stand-alone OGP Parliamentary Action Plan, the MSF/P may choose to share relevant commitment ideas and suggestions with parliament. Parliament can then choose to integrate these in their OGP Parliamentary Action Plan where relevant or address them through

existing mechanisms outside of OGP. Additional guidance on co-creating OGP Parliamentary Action Plans can be found here.

Co-creation of Commitments

Several parliaments participate in the OGP process by co-creating one or more commitments on legislative openness. This may involve direct engagement of legislators, or it may be done through parliamentary staff who formally represent parliament and liaise with the OGP Point of Contact on institutional reforms throughout the process. Note, where parliaments choose to adopt OGP commitments, these should be co-created with civil society.

> In **New Zealand**, the parliament has co-created commitments to publish all primary and secondary laws on a single website. To date, legislators have not been directly involved; the parliamentary administration works directly with the POC and is part of the group of officials that meet regularly to coordinate on OGP.

> In **Estonia**, parliament has taken significant and ongoing steps towards transparency and citizen participation in law-making, co-creating a number of ambitious commitments over the course of consecutive action plans. Parliament has been represented on the Estonia Multi-Stakeholder Forum throughout, currently by the Foresight Center, a think tank at the Chancellery of the Riigikogu.

Such engagement can, but does not always, expand into other areas of parliamentary engagement. For example, parliament may consider moving beyond open parliament commitments to take legislative action on open government reforms outlined in other areas of the action plan, either by co-creating such commitments or by engaging on specific milestones within those commitments.

> In **Kenya**, the Mzalendo Trust – a parliamentary monitoring organization -- leveraged the national OGP platform to collaborate with parliament across a range of long-standing civil society issues. This resulted in OGP commitments on, among others, public participation and strengthened accountability of legislators.

In **Latvia**, OGP stakeholders have been working with parliament on transparency and lobbying legislation over a number of years. Cautious yet consistent engagement by senior members and staff of parliament has helped build support for such reforms, setting up useful networks of engagement along the way. As a result, the Latvian parliament is now an active OGP partner, committed to open government values and supportive of national stakeholders to co-create and implement ambitious legislative reforms.

Where parliaments engage in the co-creation of commitments, they should provide feedback on commitments put forth for parliamentary consideration through what is referred to as "reasoned response" in OGP. A reasoned response is a reply to stakeholders which provides the reasoning behind decisions made on contributions received. A reasoned response can be made for each of the following commitment decisions:

- **Inclusion:** Suggestions or comments that are considered in drafting or finalizing commitments
- **Amendment:** Suggestions or comments that are considered in drafting or finalizing commitments, but with some modifications
- **Rejection:** Suggestions or comments not considered in drafting or finalizing commitments

Legislative Scan of (Proposed) Commitments

Evidence suggests that between 10 and 15 percent of OGP commitments require legislative action for implementation. Beyond that, a number of OGP commitments would benefit from resource allocation, parliamentary oversight, and more broadly parliamentary awareness and buy-in of proposed reform(s). For these reasons, OGP reformers are invited to consider what role parliament can or needs to play in the course of action plan implementation. Such a "legislative scan" of commitments is ideally led by the OGP Multistakeholder Forum or platform.

OGP recognizes that parliamentary engagement is not relevant for all commitments, and that (early) parliamentary engagement may not always be possible in every context. In the OGP commitment template, a specific field to indicate the role of parliament (and other stakeholders) in supporting the commitment has been added.

Ways in which the 'legislative scan' can take place during action plan development

Point of commitment selection

Where representatives from parliament are engaged in the OGP co-creation from the beginning, a legislative scan can be done at the point of commitment selection for the action plan. Parliament can then advise whether those commitments are likely to receive the legislative time and action they may need, and relevant milestones can be adjusted accordingly. This can include engaging parliamentary research services and relevant bodies (committees, working groups, caucuses) on legislation impacted by proposed commitments.

- For example, Freedom of Information reforms may emerge as a shared priority in initial co-creation discussions. Before deciding to include this as a commitment, OGP stakeholders could liaise with parliament to ensure sufficient time and support is available for any legislative changes this may require.

Once the draft is developed

Where parliament is not yet involved in the OGP process, a legislative scan can take place once a draft action plan is in place. In that scenario, the MSF can agree to take into account parliamentary procedures that will need to be followed, and/or legislative advocacy that may be needed to create awareness and cross-party support. Parliaments may be invited to adjust and/or postpone milestones for future uptake, or for action beyond the OGP action plan.

- For example, a draft action plan of 10 commitments may include three or four commitments that require, implicitly or explicitly, legislative action. The MSF can invite the relevant committee or working group in parliament to indicate what does and does not align with the parliamentary calendar, and suggest revisions that would improve implementation.

After adoption of the commitment/action plan

While significant revisions are likely to be more difficult where an action plan is already fully developed, a legislative scan is still worth considering. It may offer parliament a helpful reminder in terms of scheduling, and it may prompt engagement of relevant members and/or staff. OGP stakeholders may choose to connect with parliament on one or more commitments, or use the legislative scan as an opportunity to introduce parliament to the OGP process.

- For example, a POC may present the adopted action plan to the relevant parliamentary committee, working group, or interested members and staff. They can take note of any potential requests for legislative action coming their way and inform relevant counterparts in parliament. For the POC, such a meeting can help identify where further liaison is needed, and what parliamentary actors should be engaged and at what stage.

Implementation and Monitoring of the Action Plan

Parliaments have an important role to play during the implementation of an action plan and there are several benefits of continuing to keep parliaments engaged during this process. Their contributions can range from legislative action ensuring oversight over government progress on OGP commitments and activities to fulfilling monitoring and reporting obligations for any commitments they are directly responsible for implementing.

Legislative Action to Implement OGP Commitments

In many OGP countries, commitments adopted by the government require changes to legislation or introduction of new legislation which would necessitate parliamentary action. In some instances, this is already specified in the milestones included within the commitment and in others the need for this emerges as work on the commitments progress. Parliament can help advance OGP commitments by enacting legal provisions required for their implementation. For example:

> In **Nigeria**, domestic OGP stakeholders working on beneficial ownership transparency recognized that parliament would need to pass enabling legislation to ensure the collection and publication of beneficial ownership information. Established lines of communication between the MSF and key champions in parliament enabled a good flow of information for all parties involved, from the role of the executive to the expectations of civil society and the parliamentary calendar. Implementation of the beneficial ownership commitment was successfully completed with the support of parliament, which passed critical legal provisions. In **Armenia**, parliament played a similarly significant role in beneficial ownership reform, with implementation of the OGP commitment complete following legislative revisions.

> The parliaments of **Kenya**, **Sri Lanka**, and **Paraguay** are among those that have moved on Right to Information legislation, strengthening the enabling framework for broader open government reforms within and beyond OGP.

Parliament can also leverage its budgeting powers to ensure the allocation of required funds for the implementation of OGP commitments. This typically requires substantive and timely engagement. While some parliaments have significant amendment powers, others are much more limited in their ability to influence the executive's budget proposals. Where possible, MPs may turn to discretionary funds, though here, too, early engagement is typically desirable.

Legislative Oversight of OGP Commitments and Activities

Parliaments can advance open government reforms by monitoring the implementation of OGP commitments or obtaining critical information via parliamentary questions and reports. Parliament can advance OGP commitments by leveraging its oversight powers to acquire information, ask parliamentary questions, raise issues in relevant committees and/or working groups, and hold the executive to account for implementation. For example:

> **Kyrgyzstan** and **Liberia** have formally committed to legislative oversight of the OGP, leveraging their parliamentary powers to help advance implementation.

> **Ghana's** 2021-2023 action plan notes that parliamentary oversight of OGP activities has been a missing element in the parliament's OGP engagement. It cites that Ghana's constitutional mandates place parliament in a strategic position to support open government efforts in the country and outlines the potential impact of legislative oversight (public hearings are mentioned as a possible tool) and budgeting support to facilitate effective implementation.

Parliament can also leverage the reports produced by the OGP Independent Reporting Mechanisms for review and debate in plenary and/or committee. Additionally, parliament may opt to attend IRM report launches, follow up on questions raised in these reports, and table any pending issues for the consideration of the relevant parliamentary actors.

Fulfilling Reporting Obligations and Facilitation of the IRM Assessment

The Independent Reporting Mechanisms (IRM) is an independent body guided by, but not directly accountable to, the Steering Committee of the Open Government Partnership. The IRM produces reports that assess the design and implementation of the commitments adopted by OGP participating governments in their country action plans. This applies to all commitments, including those co-created and/or implemented, even partly with the support of parliaments. Therefore, where parliament participates in the OGP process, its engagement and commitments will be recognized and reported on alongside those of the executive, civil society, and other stakeholders. Parliaments are required to fulfill reporting obligations required by the government and/or the OGP Multistakeholder Forum or Platform to facilitate the IRM process and any additional monitoring activities undertaken by the government and/or MSF/P.

2. Institutional Set-up and Coordination

As the examples throughout this Menu of Options illustrate, parliamentary participation can range from the informal to the fully institutionalized. Evidence suggests that both can deliver results, providing the engagement is action-oriented and sustained over time. Country context is key; OGP actors themselves are best placed to identify an approach that responds to the opportunities at hand, and that respects established protocols and practices.
Effective parliamentary engagement across the OGP action plan cycle typically involves: 1) coordination with the executive, primarily through the multi-stakeholder forum; 2) coordination within parliament on the OGP agenda and activities; and 3) where relevant, coordination of the OGP Parliamentary Action Plan.

Parliamentary Representation on the Multi-stakeholder Forum

Parliamentary representatives can participate in the national or local multi-stakeholder fora, or similar spaces, to ensure a consistent dialogue with civil society. Where formal Multi-stakeholder Forum (MSF) representation is not possible, other communication and coordination mechanisms between the MSF and parliamentary actors can be explored.

In **Kenya**, OGP formally sits with the Legislative and Intergovernmental Office, so parliamentary engagement is factored into the entire OGP process. This is fully in line with Kenya's open state approach across government, which recognizes the need for legislative support for ambitious reforms. The Speaker of the House and the Senate are both involved, resulting in open parliament commitments as well as legislative engagement on the broader open government reforms in Kenya's 2020-2022 action plan.

In **Latvia**, representatives from parliament (members and staff) join MSF meetings to help co-create commitments relevant to the legislature and to ensure they are aware of (proposed) reforms that may require legislative action. This allows parliament and the executive to align calendars and ensure that co-creation and implementation timelines work for both branches.

In **Cabo Verde**, members and staff of parliament sit on the Multi-Stakeholder Forum. The opening of the 2020 co-creation process took place at the National Assembly (parliament), where representatives of the executive, parliament, and civil society stressed the importance of jointly shaping and implementing open government reforms.

Ghana has long enjoyed formal representation of the parliament on the Steering Committee, with members and staff of parliament engaged in the co-creation process of recent action plans. In March 2020, parliament further established an Open Parliament Task Team to lead future co-creation of an parliament action plan, alongside its ongoing commitment to the national action plan. Ghana's 2021-2023 action plan further details this engagement and confirms parliament's commitment to support implementation of the plan.

In **Georgia**, the parliament has championed OGP through the co-creation of an parliament chapter in the country's 2018-2019 OGP action plan. Parliament has not yet broadened its focus beyond open parliament commitments, however, and this has hindered effective coordination between government and parliament on the broader open government priorities. To strengthen mutual awareness and understanding between the two branches, representatives from parliament will be invited to observe all meetings of the government's OGP Council going forward. Such coordination, while relatively light touch, should help align calendars and opportunities, in particular in areas that require legislative reform.

Coordination within Parliament: OGP Parliament Liaisons and Leads

How parliamentary engagement in OGP is coordinated varies across countries. It depends to a great extent on: the system of government; political dynamics between and within the executive and parliament; and the availability of dedicated resources within parliament, including staff support.

To ensure effective coordination of these different elements, parliaments are encouraged to appoint an OGP Parliament Liaison. The Parliament Liaison takes charge of communication and coordination with the executive branch, other OGP stakeholders, and the Support Unit. This allows for efficient information exchange on action plan development and implementation, events, and peer exchange opportunities. The Parliament Liaison would also play a key role in coordinating and facilitating the work of any working group, committee, and/or other parliamentary body tasked with this agenda.

The selection of the Parliament Liaison is at the discretion of parliament, but the role could be successfully taken up by a senior administrative or technical officer, an advisor to the presiding officer, or a staffer for a relevant committee, for example. In addition to a liaison within the parliamentary administration, OGP also welcomes the appointment of a Parliament Lead. Here,

too, the natural choice is likely to be a member of parliament who chairs or sits on the relevant working group and/or committee(s), but the decision will be determined by parliament.

The OGP Parliament Liaison(s) and political lead(s) will be invited to share their details on the OGP parliament website page to facilitate peer exchanges.

Note that the appointment of a parliament liaison does not change the role of the official OGP Points of Contact, who remains the primary channel of communication between the Support Unit and OGP countries, and the overall point of contact with respect to the OGP process where there is a single integrated action plan. Procedural reviews of the country are applied at the level of the action plan and the overall national or local process.

The Parliament Liaison and/or Parliament Lead can facilitate parliamentary engagement in OGP by taking on the following roles:

> In **Kenya**, designated focal points for OGP in the parliament are key to the smooth coordination between government and parliament on OGP. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have a formal OGP Focal Point among their members of staff. Consistent high-level engagement has resulted in the co-creation of open parliament commitments and coordination on broader action plan reforms.

> In **North Macedonia**, the OGP Point of Contact was invited to introduce OGP to the parliament in an effort to familiarize members and staff of parliament with North Macedonia's OGP activities. These initial exchanges developed into sustained engagement thanks to sustained interest on the part of the parliament, the executive, and a proactive POC. This resulted in North Macedonia delivering the very first parliamentary chapter in the OGP national action plan in 2018. Coordination between the executive and parliament remains good, but has not yet moved to collaboration on commitments across the two branches.

In **Sierra Leone**, the Parliamentary Working Group on Open Government, chaired by Hon. Quintin Saliah Konneh, was set up to facilitate parliamentary engagement with OGP. That engagement was actively sought by both the executive and parliament in Sierra Leone's 2019-2021 action plan: "The absence of parliament in Sierra Leone's earlier action plans made it very challenging for many of the OGP commitments to be fully implemented. The Parliamentary Commitment on OGP in this third National Action Plan has paved the way for Parliament to provide annual reports on their operations to demonstrate leadership in accountability and transparency." Sierra Leone's resulting commitment on including more women and vulnerable groups in parliamentary business has been flagged as a promising "commitment to watch."

Where outreach by the executive branch to the parliament may not be possible, even after the latter's role in advancing commitments has been identified, civil society members of the OGP MSF/P or working groups can consider outreach and advocacy strategies to engage parliaments in supporting commitments in the implementation period.

Beyond the OGP Action Plan: Parliamentary Engagement on the Open Government Agenda

Parliaments can be invited to engage on thematic priorities, either through direct involvement in co-creation and implementation or, where this is not immediately possible, by lending more indirect support.

- Parliaments can consider engaging relevant parliamentary committees and staff members in thematic working groups and discussions and/or organizing briefings for parliamentary groups during action plan development.
    - In Sierra Leone, Parliament organized an OGP virtual tour with the support of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in December 2020. Over two days, members and staff took part in thematic deep dives on beneficial ownership, extractive industries, gender, and open parliament, among others. The event sought to better connect parliament with the executive's open government agenda.
- Parliaments can formally launch the OGP action plan and/or IRM reports to enable parliamentary oversight. This ensures parliament as a whole has an opportunity to engage and points interested members and staff in the right direction for further engagement.

Getting Started: Initiating Parliamentary Engagement in the OGP Process

Parliamentary engagement is long established in a number of OGP countries. In recent years, over 30 national action plan processes have seen some form of parliamentary engagement. For other members, this is a new or emerging part of their OGP activities, and could be further strengthened. Getting started can be challenging, especially where relationships between the executive and parliament are governed by strong (in)formal rules and protocols. This section outlines possible starting points for OGP stakeholders who would like to initiate such engagement, however formally or informally, and regardless of where they themselves sit within the executive branch, parliament, or civil society.

It is important to note that OGP recognizes that in the case of some OGP members, a strict separation of powers raises a number of institutional and legal questions. The OGP Support Unit will commission research on parliamentary engagement across different systems of government to better understand what is and is not possible or desirable in a given system.

Getting Connected

Where the executive wishes to approach parliament on its OGP work, or vice versa, an introductory meeting may be a helpful starting point, arranged with or by the OGP Point of Contact. Where context or preferences make such an approach difficult, invitations could be shared by the OGP Support Unit or by domestic civil society stakeholders, who often work across the two branches of government and are therefore well positioned to suggest promising areas of collaboration.

Understanding OGP: Resources and Support

Many parliaments are not yet familiar with OGP. Even where institutional engagement does take place, it often does not extend beyond a small number of members and staff. To build sustainable, cross-party support for the open government agenda, organizing a general introduction to OGP is a good starting point. Such an introduction may be pitched to the relevant working group or committee, but it could also be an open invitation to civil society stakeholders active in OGP, who are typically well placed to suggest how best to approach this.
While the OGP Support Unit has limited capacity to deliver such introductions, OGP stakeholders are encouraged to approach their regional leads for assistance. A formal letter from OGP can be

shared with parliament, and the Support Unit can suggest speakers and/or facilitators, including from parliaments participating in OGP.

As a starting point, the following resources can help shape a message, session, or workshop:

- Memorandum on Parliamentary Engagement
- Introducing OGP's Way Forward on Parliamentary Engagement
- Parliamentary Engagement in OGP: Learning from the Evidence
- Open Parliaments
- Open Parliaments Fact Sheet

A Global Network of Reformers: Networking with Peers and Partners

OGP reformers have access to a global network of open government champions across governments, civil society, the private sector, and of course parliaments. Peer exchanges and learning are at the core of OGP's success, including: bilateral meetings, Global Summits, offline and online exchanges, thematic working groups, and regional networks, among others. Strengthening the participation of legislators in these conversations can help advance solutions to the challenges facing communities, in particular the rising threats to democracy and civic space.

OGP encourages all stakeholders to consider working with parliamentary actors where relevant. The OGP Support Unit is available to advise and support where needed and will aim to strengthen the engagement of parliaments in OGP-led activities where possible. For updates on relevant examples, exchanges, and opportunities, please visit the Parliaments page on the OGP website.