

IRM Quality Assurance Framework

Summary of Session 5: Quality and consistency of recommendations for Promising Commitments

April 9, 2025

In attendance

- **IEP members:** Maha Jweied, Rocio Moreno, and Snježana Bokulić
- **IRM Staff:** 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 fifth quality assurance session on April 9, 2025. During the 1.5-hour session, the IEP examined the quality and consistency of recommendations for “Promising Commitments” in IRM Action Plan Reviews in the sections titled *Opportunities, challenges, and recommendations during implementation*. The IEP examined a sample of 12 Promising Commitments assessments from IRM Action Plans Reviews. The samples were selected around the OGP values of transparency, civic participation, and public accountability. IRM staff considered regional diversity while selecting the samples, with three samples from Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Europe.

Discussion

The IEP and IRM staff discussed the scope, target audience, and specificity of recommendations for Promising Commitments. IRM staff highlighted the challenges they encountered around making recommendations more actionable and relevant to the country’s national context. The IEP noted that, overall, the sample recommendations were seeking to support and advance the implementation of commitments. They found the samples to be of quality and usefulness but also that there is scope to make sure that their quality is consistent across the board. Some were action-oriented and clearly directed at a particular institution, while others were vague and lacked a target audience. Generally, the stronger recommendations clearly identified the actions to be taken during implementation and which institution (usually the lead agency) should take the actions. Recommendations that addressed the broader policy area of the commitment (not just the commitment) were often vague and were outside the mandate of the lead agency. The IEP also noted some differences in the language for recommendations. Some were prescriptive, while others used the imperative mood, making them possibly less realistic.

IRM staff and the IEP also discussed the attribution of IRM recommendations and the incorporation of recommendations from local civil society groups, third-party sources, and international standards and practices. The IEP noted the need for clarity in the attribution of the recommendations to the IRM. The IEP also found it useful when the recommendations referenced similar actions and OGP commitments taken by other countries. They noted, however, that these references did not always explain why the examples were relevant to the country under review.

Action points for improving the recommendations of Promising Commitments

Based on the discussion, the IEP recommended the following steps for the IRM to improve the quality and consistency of recommendations for Promising Commitments.

Attribution and targeting

- Recommendations should be attributed to the IRM and not to the IRM researcher.
- Recommendations should, wherever possible, be clearly directed at a specific institution, usually the lead implementing agency.

Framing

- Recommendations should use a constructive and suggestive tone based on an analysis of the commitment. They should preferably use the subjunctive mood.
- Recommendations should be framed around the potential challenges to implementation identified in the section *Opportunities, challenges, and recommendations during implementation*.

Scope and format

- Recommendations should be within the mandate of the lead implementing agency. Recommendations that go beyond the mandate of the lead agency should be separated from those that focus on implementation.
- Recommendations should focus on steps that can be completed within the action plan period. Recommendations that address the broader strategic direction of the policy area (beyond the commitment) should be separated from those that are about the implementation of the commitment under review.
- Recommendations should be actionable, specific to the country's context, and consistent with the analysis of the commitment in the Action Plan Review.

Sources

- IRM recommendations can take into consideration the recommendations from international organizations, local experts and civil society groups, and OGP sources like the Open Gov Guide and the OGP Data Dashboard. Where necessary, third party sources can be cited as influences on IRM recommendations. Researchers should have access to and/or consult a wide range of sources so that they can provide high quality recommendations even if they are not experts in the country under review.
- References to similar OGP commitments and actions taken by other countries should include information on why these actions are relevant to the country under review and what are the aspects that the country could find useful in implementing their commitments.

Moving forward

The IRM will adopt the IEP's suggestions from this QA session in its guidance and training to researchers and external reviewers. IRM staff will also take these action points into account when reviewing and editing Action Plan Reviews and other recommendations (i.e., in Co-Creation Briefs). The IRM will explain to the IEP what changes it has implemented to its guidance and methodology for formulating recommendations to Promising Commitments based on the recommendations from this QA session. The IEP will monitor the integration of recommendations.