

OGP LEADERSHIP RETREAT

Readout & Key Takeaways

The Leadership Retreat brought together members of the Leadership Subcommittee and OGP Support Unit to assess OGP's strategic direction, governance and accountability mechanisms, financial sustainability, and positioning ahead of OGP's 15th anniversary. This document summarizes the key inputs, takeaways and areas of consensus.

1. Political Diagnosis & Strategic Context

The retreat opened with a collective political diagnostic of the external environment shaping OGP's operating space over the next two years. Members discussed the main headwinds and vulnerabilities facing OGP and the open government agenda, as well as emerging opportunities for the partnership to seize. This served as an anchor for the retreat's broader discussions. Highlights of the discussion include:

Geopolitical Headwinds

- The current geopolitical environment — marked by democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, and declining trust in government — poses real risks to OGP's operating space, *but also underlines its relevance as a unique platform built for this moment.*
- The rising salience of the global security agenda presents both a contextual challenge, and a framing risk for OGP, as is growing pressure to respond to issues that fall outside the Partnership's core mandate. OGP's comparative advantage lies in supporting democratic resilience (strengthening institutions, empowering citizens, and rebuilding trust in governments). While the security agenda shapes the broader context in which OGP operates, the Partnership's most meaningful and distinct contribution remains deepening its core open government work. *The broader definition of security that encompasses defence, democratic resilience and diplomacy could be a useful framing.*
- The US departure from OGP is the most prominent recent withdrawal and could raise questions about the partnership's long-term institutional foundations in the absence of leadership reassurance to the Partnership.
- The 'sovereignty' narrative underlying recent member departures must be addressed directly; it goes against OGP's modus operandi and could risk becoming a contagion for other members.

Where OGP is Vulnerable

- Disengagement from members, including traditionally allied governments — understanding why this is happening and preventing further departures is an immediate priority.
- Spreading too thin across themes and geographies dilutes focus and weakens impact.
- Declining political will and lack of grassroots engagement can undermine OGP's relevance and claims to be demand-driven.

Where OGP Has Opportunity

- Constructive and responsible "middle-power" countries are coalescing around shared rules and values — OGP can serve as a connector and platform. There is a need to strengthen our overall intergovernmental approaches.
- OGP's convening role and diverse community of reformers remain a distinctive asset. Demonstrates power of the Partnership as a whole rather than 70+ countries acting individually.

- Explore ways to forge deeper alliances with multilateral and plurilateral organizations (e.g. EU, OECD, International IDEA, World Bank, IMF) and other thematic coalitions to amplify impact through complementary work, extend OGP's reach to governments that might otherwise be out of reach, and avoid duplication of effort.
- Invest in Local level engagement and getting closer to people.

2. Strategic Implications & OGP's Role (2025–2027)

Building on the political diagnostic, the LS turned to the strategic implications for OGP — where should the partnership focus, and what does success look like by the end of 2027? Members discussed OGP's unique niche, the importance of thematic discipline, and the political leadership required from the LS and SC to advance the transformation agenda. Highlights include:

Thematic focus and defining OGP's Niche

- There was strong consensus on the need to go back to core strengths and resist agenda-creep. OGP should focus on its core competencies and the themes where it has a genuine ability to influence, and political support to deliver.
- OGP is a convening platform and community of reformers — its value lies more in facilitating ambitious Action Commitments and their execution with governments and CSOs, than in being a technical service provider on every issue.
- Where OGP lacks a unique comparative advantage, it should smartly join forces with other actors rather than act alone. Splitting political leadership across too many initiatives reduces overall impact.
- OGP should pursue a 'catalytic' role: forging alliances, opening doors, and amplifying reformers, not just reforms.

What Should OGP strive for by End of 2027

- OGP should demonstrate scaled impact, backed by evidence on how open government delivers for people.
- Be more widely recognized. Insert OGP into mainstream media and raise the level of public profile akin to an 'UN Ambassador model.'
- The SU and SC governance structures (subcommittees, task forces) should be reviewed and streamlined — those not working should be reformed or dissolved.

Political Leadership Required from LS & SC

- LS should engage and proactively mobilize the full SC with concrete ideas focused on opportunities rather than formal engagement when procedural or accountability mechanisms are triggered.
- SC members must be more vocal and publicly visible in advocating for OGP and sharing how they use it.
- Explore a 'Brain Trust' model (time-bound advisors closely connected to OGP) for strategic outreach and thought leadership. This should connect to the OGP ambassadors and envoys.
- LS & SC should use major events (Illicit Finance Summit, G7/G20, UN General Assembly, etc.) as joint political moments to amplify OGP's voice and profile — coordinating political engagement rather than fragmenting advocacy efforts.

Consensus on the Partnership's Strategic Imperative within the Current Geopolitical Context

- OGP is made to meet the current moment of geopolitical uncertainty and momentum for ‘value-based pragmatism’ through its proven ability to support coalitions of countries advancing policy reforms in an inclusive, bottom-up and action-driven way.
- OGP's greatest value lies in its role as a convening platform and community of reformers — facilitating meaningful change through governments and civil society.
- OGP should concentrate on its core mandate, competencies and the policy areas where it has genuine ability to influence and can generate the political support to deliver.
- Where OGP has opportunities to amplify its impact, it can do so most effectively by forging alliances and joining forces with complementary actors—leveraging collective strengths to enhance coherence, avoid duplication, and strengthen political leadership.
- SC - and especially LS - members have a responsibility to lead by example — advocating visibly, mobilizing proactively, and coordinating politically around major global moments.
- The goal is for OGP to emerge from the upcoming fiscal year (FY2026-27) as a sharper, more fit-for-purpose Partnership. By 2027, OGP should be demonstrably more impactful, more widely recognized, and backed by compelling evidence that open government delivers for people. This transformation will require political leadership from the Steering Committee, and focused efforts from the Support Unit. The SU's prioritization agenda presented to LS (which is anchored in the 2023–2028 Strategy and the SC-approved FY 2025–2027 Work Plan) will advance through five mutually reinforcing priorities over the next 12 months: an upgraded action framework and service model; focused country and thematic impact; visibility and political support; sustainable funding; and a stronger, leaner Support Unit.

3. OGP@15

The LS discussed how to make the most of OGP's 15th anniversary as a moment to reinforce the partnership's relevance, rally members, and raise OGP's public profile. Conversation covered event formats, messaging, and how to mobilize the full membership around the milestone.

Highlights include:

- The 15th anniversary should carry a dual message: continuity (what has worked and the impact achieved) and change (how OGP is adapting for the future).
- 'Democracy in Action' was among the preferred taglines for OGP@15.
- Supportive of featuring the new Action Framework as a clear signal of the partnership's evolution.
- A Heads of State/Government (HoS/G) gathering at UNGA 2026 may face attendance challenges given the prevailing geopolitical context and anticipated security focus — it would be prudent to continue exploring complementary formats alongside this option.
- Strong suggestion to maximize 2026 Open Gov Week (OGW) to mobilize all 70+ members to activate domestically and raise the profile of OGP in the lead up to OGP@15.
- All SC members in particular should use OGW as a platform, including via creative domestic activations (e.g., Spain's example of using OGW as a national civic moment).
- Two letters were agreed:
 - A Troika letter (Spain, UK, Brazil + Laura, Cielo, Steph) to the full Partnership — aimed at reinvigorating the community, signaling unified leadership, reaffirming commitment to OGP, and highlighting opportunities for all members to engage during this pivotal year. Targeting late April.
 - A Ministerial letter from Brazil and UK only, to SC governments — requesting HoS/G videos for OGP@15; saving the date for OGP events around UNGA (possible HoS/G and Leaders Roundtable at Ford Foundation); fulfilling own country contributions and supporting outreach efforts; and leveraging 2026 OGW. To follow shortly after the open letter to the Partnership, and ahead of OGW.

4. MFA Engagement

The LS welcomed a proposal to deepen engagement with Ministries of Foreign Affairs as a strategic lever for mainstreaming OGP's priorities across multilateral diplomacy, where conditions allow and where it strategically adds value. LS discussed the rationale, scope, and modalities for this initiative, and reached the following points of agreement:

- MFAs can be powerful multipliers for OGP, helping to mainstream OGP's thematic priorities in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy and strengthening connections between domestic reforms and global agendas.
- The value proposition is key. The focus of this informal 'OGP MFA Network' should be on how MFAs can help catalyze the open government agenda, and not on decision-making or accountability functions, which fall within the remit of the Steering Committee. The MFA Working Group should not be a governance body or carry decision-making authority. Where representatives come from SC governments, their engagement on SC matters should flow through existing structures to avoid parallel tracks.
- A phased approach was strongly favored. Engagement in the first year should be light-touch: a dedicated newsletter and two virtual briefings for interested MFAs from across OGP membership (with SC government MFAs strongly encouraged to participate given their leadership role). At the end of the first year, the Support Unit will conduct a brief stocktaking assessing impact and recommending next steps. Engagement in the second year should be guided by, and contingent upon, findings of that stocktaking.
- While the pilot's primary audience is government members, civil society SC members with relevant experience engaging MFAs in other fora should also be consulted and engaged in shaping this initiative. The SU will share a revised note with the full SC for awareness and input.

5. Governance & Accountability Mechanisms

The LS engaged in a strategic discussion on how to ensure that OGP's governance and accountability arrangements reinforce the political direction being shaped for the coming years. This includes how OGP should position itself when members (national or local) face political or accountability challenges, focusing on principles and direction rather than a detailed review of existing policies. Discussion also touched on what roles the CEO and SC could play, and specific cases under consideration. Highlights include:

Agreed Principles on Mechanisms

- Preservation over punishment — maintain pathways for members to remain or to return.
- Action over statements — prioritize concrete engagement, not just public declarations.
- Enhance incentives for membership and engagement, not just sanctions for non-compliance.
- CEO should have measured independence to speak, but must be limited and strategic.
- Engage the SC earlier — before situations deteriorate beyond recovery.

- The overarching philosophy should shift even more from punitive to preservation — keeping members engaged and creating pathways back rather than pushing them out.
- Current mechanisms are seen as too complex, poorly understood, and politically cumbersome. The SC process for coordinating a response is unwieldy for the most time-sensitive situations.

- Focus accountability mechanisms on only the most egregious violations — do not apply the same framework or complexity to procedural non-compliance. Outstanding need to define most egregious actions at local and national levels.
- There is broad support for giving the CEO more independence to issue institutional statements without requiring full *a priori* SC sign-off for every word.
- Statements should however be limited to cases where speaking out has real potential to change the situation on the ground or protect OGP's reputation and credibility. There was consensus against OGP issuing too many statements on too many things.
- The SC should be brought in earlier — before situations become irreparable — not just when formal mechanisms are triggered.
- Domestic CSOs must be consulted when accountability mechanisms are being considered or deployed.
- Local level values: when a national government withdraws from or is removed from OGP, active local members should not be penalized for actions beyond their control. Where local members remain engaged and willing to continue, mechanisms should allow them to do so — preserving reform momentum at the subnational level even when the national situation deteriorates.
- **Next step:** The Accountability Review Task Force to resume activities with a focused mandate: to define the threshold for egregious violations and propose recommendations on streamlining existing mechanisms for the consideration of the full Steering Committee. Leverage Local Taskforce for guidance on safeguarding values at Local level.

Specific Cases: Georgia Response Policy Case & Exploring an Observer Status under the new Action Framework

- Georgia: Broad agreement to frame any action as a technical/procedural matter to avoid setting a contested political precedent. Consistency across cases is essential.
- Observer Status: LS discussed the merits of engaging prospective or transitioning members through dialogue, with a preference for flexible, informal engagement rather than establishing a formal observer category, which could add complexity to an already layered membership structure and might add pressure on the SU's capacity.

6. Financial Sustainability

The LS reviewed OGP's financial outlook and explored options for diversifying and strengthening the partnership's funding base over the medium term. Members discussed both the opportunities and the risks associated with different revenue models, with a focus on country contributions as one of the most important levers for ensuring OGP's long-term fiscal sustainability. Highlights include:

Current Outlook & Options

- The near-term financial picture is more stable than feared, though reliance on traditional funders remains a structural vulnerability and the long-term outlook for funding for OGP and the democracy and governance field is very challenging.
- Country contributions were identified as the most tangible and values-aligned funding option, but making them mandatory was not recommended — risks driving members away.
- A fee-for-service/advisory model was discussed: OGP providing bespoke technical advisory services to governments. Ambitious but potentially high-leverage if executed carefully.
- IRM data has potential commercial value (e.g., interest from credit rating agencies) — if explored it should be with appropriate safeguards.

- Multi-year partnerships with academia and passive income from certified courses were raised as lower-risk supplemental revenue streams.
- Passthrough grants to partners could compete with existing partner organizations — needs careful scoping.
- Conflict of Interest considerations: Any revenue-generating model must be assessed carefully for conflicts of interest, particularly where commercial relationships might affect OGP's independence or credibility on accountability issues.