OGP NATIONAL HANDBOOK

Rules + Guidance for the Calendar

OGP National Handbook
Rules and Guidance for Participants

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1. The Co-Creation Process

Evidence from ten years of OGP shows that high levels of public participation in action plan design is linked to more diverse action plans and more ambitious commitments. For public participation to be meaningful, OGP national members should purposefully design the co-creation process so that it allows any interested stakeholders (citizens, civil society organizations, government departments, subnational governments, parliament, academics, private sector, etc.) to provide ideas and feedback, identify priorities, and propose commitments for the action plan.

The process should intentionally seek input from underrepresented groups to define priorities through targeted awareness-raising and outreach to broaden the circle of engaged actors. It could also seek broader input, including from other ministries, agencies, or parliament(s).

Successful OGP action plans: focus on significant open government priorities and ambitious reforms; are relevant to the OGP values of transparency, accountability, and public participation; and contain specific, time-bound, and measurable commitments. This could mean that a topic or theme is part of several action plans, as ambition is added over time or in response to key emerging issues.

Key Moments in the Co-creation Process

There are at least four key moments in the co-creation process: planning for the process, outreach, action plan development, and feedback. These are referred to as moments rather than steps or stages because, in most cases, they are iterative rather than linear. Additionally, the moments may even be embedded within each other. This will be explained in more detail in the following subsections.

PLANNING FOR THE PROCESS
Key considerations before embarking on a co-creation process, planning to plan

OUTREACH
Stakeholders are informed about the OGP, the action plan process, and how they can participate. Information can also be gathered on what they want the action plan to tackle.

ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT
Sensemaking of inputs gathered, defining problems, working on solutions, moving from problems to solutions, and drafting the commitments

FEEDBACK
Participating stakeholders will be informed of the results of their contributions to and participation in the action plan development process.

Planning for the Process

Early planning for the different activities to be undertaken during the co-creation process is crucial so that the objectives of the co-creation process are clear, stakeholders and their roles are defined, available resources are identified, and the timeline to complete the process is laid out. Planning involves determining the priorities of government and civil society, understanding the current political climate, mapping key events not directly related to the OGP process, and assessing government and civil society relations and how all these elements will impact the co-creation process.

The co-creation plan should elaborate a methodology on:

- **Raising awareness and gathering information.** This includes concrete activities to inform public and state institutions about open government, the Open Government Partnership, the co-creation process, and how they will be able to participate. This also includes activities to gather information from the public on what issues or themes they want the action plan to address.

- **Defining problems, identifying solutions, and developing commitments.** This includes activities to decide: how problems will be defined, how solutions will be achieved, and how these proposed solutions will be developed into action plan commitments. As commitments are developed, relevant government and non government stakeholders need to be engaged to assess legal, technical, and political opportunities and constraints. This may need additional outreach efforts once the process of developing commitments has begun.

- **Providing feedback to participants.** This includes concrete activities that will inform those who participated in the co-creation process about the results of their participation and how their ideas or suggestions will be dealt with in the development and finalization of action plan commitments.

Finally, the co-creation plan should be able to answer the following questions:

WHY	What are the objectives of co-creation? What does the MSF/P want to achieve?
WHO	Who will be involved in the co-creation process? What will their roles be? How will they be involved? How will the MSF/P ensure that diverse actors of different backgrounds, expertise, and locations are able to participate?
WHAT	What key activities will be implemented to realize the goals of co-creation?
HOW	How will each key activity be undertaken? What is the methodology or approach? Who will lead the process? Where will the MSF/P get the financial resources to fund the activities?
WHERE	Where will these activities be taking place? Online or offline? In key cities across the country? In the capital?
WHEN	What is the schedule of activities? What is the co-creation timeline?

Following is an example of a co-creation plan that successfully addresses each of the above questions:

	1st Month	2nd Month	3rd Month	4th Month	5th Month
Engagement Opportunities	Outreach and Idea Generation	Analyzing Inputs and Identification of Themes	Thematic Workshops	First Draft, Consultation, and Feedback	Finalization
Purpose	Information dissemination and gathering initial public inputs	Analysis of ideas generated and identification of major themes	Problem definition, solution identification, and prototyping	Public comment on first draft and revision of plans	Plan submitted to ministers for consideration
Participants	National and local CSOs, and the public	MSF with expert panel	Experts with CSOs and agencies working on the themes	Public in general, thematic working groups	MSF
Key Activities	Online open government sessions, online survey	Sense-making workshops	Thematic workshops	Online consultation Thematic workshops	Plan finalization, Plan submission
Resources	Technical team, facilitators and resource persons	Facilitators, resources persons, and workshop costs	Facilitators, resources persons, and workshop costs	Technical team, facilitators, resources persons, and workshop costs	Technical team
Space	Online	Face to face workshops at the capital	Face to face workshops, venue to be selected by working groups	Online, face to face workshops	Finalization meeting, face to face

Information is necessary for participants in the co-creation process to participate meaningfully and effectively. Providing information about the timeline, process, methodology, and how people can participate will enable the public to select avenues of participation and processes they are interested in. Advance notice should be given to stakeholders of meetings, events, and other related activities so that participants are sufficiently informed and ready to participate in OGP processes.

The two relevant minimum requirements for co-creation planning outlined in the Participation and Co-Creation Standards are:

3.1 The MSF where established, or the government where there is no MSF, publishes on the OGP website/webpage the co-creation timeline and overview of the opportunities for stakeholders to participate at least two weeks before the start of the action plan development process"

2.1 A public OGP website dedicated to the members participation in OGP is maintained. (See Section 5).

Outreach

Part of ensuring meaningful participation in the co-creation process is the conduct of outreach activities to raise awareness of open government, OGP, and opportunities to get involved. Outreach activities also ensure the OGP process is inclusive. To ensure inclusive participation, efforts must be made to provide opportunities to as many and as diverse stakeholders as possible. It is particularly important to invite marginalized and habitually-excluded groups to participate in OGP and other public policy processes. This means:

1. **Conducting outreach activities to the public** to inform them of OGP and the co-creation process, timeline, processes, and opportunities to participate. This may include:

   a. Activities to ensure that any interested member of the public is able to provide input to the co-creation process. For such engagement to be meaningful, basic information on open government, OGP, the action plan process, timelines, and synchronous and asynchronous mechanisms for participation at different stages of co-creation should be clear. Inputs solicited from members of the public should not require specialized or technical knowledge of open government issues.

   b. Activities targeted at the initial group of stakeholders identified in the co-creation planning stages. These may include: government departments, different branches of government, civil society groups, representative organizations/networks of traditionally-marginalized groups, the private sector, and specific beneficiary groups, among others.

2. **Designing processes to allow opportunities to participate** either physically or remotely, depending on context. A combination of online and offline engagement may be needed to address gaps in access, especially for people located in areas remote from where face-to-face activities are taking place.

3. **Analyzing barriers to participation** for some groups and addressing these barriers through inclusive methodologies. Knowing barriers to participation will help those designing the co-creation process find better ways to engage a diverse range of participants.

4. **Initiating targeted engagement and designing participation channels** to habitually-excluded groups. MSF/Ps may consider recruiting individuals or organizations to serve as liaisons to specific underrepresented communities to support their engagement and consultation in the process, including targeted outreach to relevant groups such as women, youth, or disability organizations.

The MSF/P can use the outreach activities as an opportunity to gather information from participants regarding issues in transparency, accountability, and citizen participation that they would like addressed, as well as problems they want the action plan to tackle, or open government concerns they would like the action plan to consider. This can be done in several ways: asking participants a focus question (or a few) during outreach events or activities, issuing an open call for ideas online, or circulating an online survey.

The questions to be asked and the process of collecting responses needs to be designed according to the objectives of the co-creation process. It is also important to ensure that the responses and contributions of participants are recorded and documented in a way that will help facilitate the subsequent process of collating or summarizing them and providing a reasoned response (see page 2.1.c for more information on reasoned response).

The two relevant minimum requirements for outreach outlined in the Participation and Co-Creation Standards are:

The MSF where established, or the government where there is no MSF, conducts outreach activities with stakeholders to raise awareness of OGP and opportunities to get involved in the development of the action plan.

The MSF where established, or the government where there is no MSF, develops a mechanism to gather inputs from a range of stakeholders during an appropriate period of time for the chosen mechanism.

Action Plan Development

With initial inputs from the outreach process, the MSF/P may proceed with action plan development by focusing on identifying commitments that will be included in the action plan.

Analyzing Inputs. Depending on the type, quality, and volume of the inputs gathered from the outreach process, there needs to be a suitable way to make sense of the contributions collected. For example, if during outreach activities, stakeholders are asked what issues the action plan should cover, then there needs to be a way to categorize and cluster similar ideas and find the common theme that binds them. They may be categorized by: sector or theme (e.g., health, education, environment); jurisdiction for implementation (e.g., government ministry, parliament, supreme court, local government); or public governance themes (e.g., transparency, civic participation, digital governance). In this way, numerous ideas may be narrowed to a few that will become the basis for moving forward in the next steps.

ANALYZING INPUTS

IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS

REASONED RESPONSE

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

DRAFTING COMMITMENTS

FINALIZATION

Defining the problem. Strong and transformative commitments clearly articulate the problem that the commitment seeks to address. Thus, it is important that the problem experienced by citizens or specific target groups of beneficiaries is appropriately identified, analyzed, and articulated. Essential questions will answer: what the problem is about; who is affected by it and how; what the root causes are; and what aspects of the problem relate to or are compounded by the lack of government information, public accountability mechanisms, or opportunities for public participation and monitoring. It is also important to identify what has been done so far by government and other stakeholders to address the problem identified.

Thematic working groups may be convened to undertake the task of problem definition. For example, suppose ten issues were identified from the sense-making process, one of which is related to open contracting. In that case, a thematic working group may be convened to explore the issue further and undertake the problem definition exercise. The working group may be composed of agencies involved in the public procurement process, civil society organizations working on procurement reform, scholars researching the topic, and private sector organizations representing supplier and contractor groups. In this way, the problem definition exercise is solid, relevant, and comprehensive, and engages the right stakeholders.

Also, at this stage, targeted public engagement can be done on specific issues or concerns identified during the sense-making process. For example, if the problem is related to improving educational facilities and services, the MSF/P may involve groups of students, parents, and teachers in the problem definition and in the subsequent phase of solutions identification.

Identifying solutions. With the problem articulated, potential solutions can be explored. It is important to explore various solutions and select those which most appropriately address the problem identified and build on activities that the country has attempted in the past to address the problem, if any. It is also important to articulate how the OGP platform can effectively respond to identified issues and whether the proposed solutions are relevant to the OGP values of access to information, civic participation, and public accountability.

It is important to note that even where inputs are solicited in the form of proposed commitments, it is still valuable to go back to the problem definition process to ensure that proposed solutions address the problem and assess whether different commitment proposals could tackle the same or similar problems.

Drafting commitments. The process of drafting the commitment should ideally only start after the problem has been clearly defined, potential solutions have been explored, and one (or more) specific solutions have been selected as proposed commitments to explore. Specific activities and milestones should have also been identified, and stakeholders relevant for the implementation of the commitments should have been engaged to ensure feasibility and buy-in for implementation.

OGP member countries draft commitment proposals in a commitment template prescribed by OGP. The commitment template contains a commitment description, a narrative on how the commitment is aligned with OGP values and the wider strategic goals of the country, milestones and deliverables, and stakeholders who will be involved in the implementation of the commitment.

In addition to the commitment templates, the action plan needs to include an introduction, a description of government efforts to date, and an elaboration of the action plan development process, for which the writing process may begin in parallel to commitment planning and design, and can be finalized after the list of commitments to include is completed.

In the process of drafting the commitments and preparing the action plan, a new set of necessary ideas may emerge requiring the consultation of another set of stakeholders. This might require additional outreach. The MSF/P should be quick to recognize these opportunities and implement steps for outreach and consultation.

Finally, a country may consider prioritizing commitments when several commitment proposals have been identified. Considerations have to be made regarding: the urgency and magnitude of the problem to be addressed; political and operational feasibility given timeframes and resources; and potential impact of the commitments on transparency, accountability, and citizen participation.

2.1.d Feedback and Reasoned Response

Ongoing dialogue, whereby ideas received and decisions made are communicated back to stakeholders and then further refined through additional rounds of engagement, can help ensure genuine, high-quality conversation and ultimately greater buy-in of the action plan. The greater the depth of dialogue, the greater the potential impact of commitments, the better the mutual understanding of ideas and reasonings, and eventually, the more likely it is that genuinely co-created commitments will be effectively implemented.

A reasoned response is the government's or the MSF/P's reply to stakeholders who contributed to the action plan and to the public in general, which contains the reasoning behind decisions made on their contributions. Reasoned response can be made for each of the following 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 that are not considered in drafting or finalizing commitments

Reasoned response to stakeholder input and feedback is highly correlated with ambition, completion, and early results. Providing a reasoned response as to why specific priorities, ideas, or activities were or were not included in the action plan can also help ensure accountability and overcome resistance from those whose proposals were rejected.

The MSF/P or the government should also present the reasoning for selecting commitments, including justifications for commitment proposals not adopted and other feedback as appropriate. The basis for decision-making should be published, and all results in the decision-making process should be made publicly available.

Response to stakeholders who contributed to the action plan development should include: (1) the input that was collected in the consultation/engagement; (2) how decision-makers considered the input; (3) how the input influenced the outcome of the decision; (4) whether the input was included/not included and why; and (4) in what ways the input will be considered beyond the current action plan, if at all.

Reasoned response must occur before the action plan is finalized. It can occur at several points during the development of the action plan, including during crafting the co-creation timeline when stakeholders give comments, during the idea generation process, and even during the selection of commitments to be included in the action plan. Reasoned response can be provided in several ways, for instance, in a document published in the OGP repository that contains contributions and how these are dealt with or during meetings called for the purpose of defining and selecting commitments. What is important is that the process of providing a reasoned response is documented, communicated to stakeholders, and described in the action plan.

Finalization. After reviewing the commitments and other contents of the action plan (see Section 3) and providing a reasoned response, the government or MSF/P will finalize the action plan, securing required government approvals, and submit it to the Support Unit.

Once the plan is finalized, it is important to also provide closure to the co-creation process by sharing next steps and information about how stakeholders will be engaged in the implementation of the action plan or can stay informed of progress. Presenting the action plan in a public event with high-level participation can help kickstart the implementation process and provide support.

The two relevant minimum requirement for Action Plan Development outlined in the Participation and Co-Creation Standards are:

4.1 The MSF where established, or the government where there is no MSF, documents and reports back or publishes written feedback to stakeholders on how their contributions were considered during the development of the action plan.

2.2 A publicly available document repository on the OGP online site which provides access to documents related to the OGP process, including, at a minimum, information and evidence of the co-creation process and of the implementation of commitments is maintained and regularly updated (at least twice a year). (See Section 5 for more information on repositories.)

Submission of Action Plans to OGP

Action plans must be submitted to the OGP Support Unit in both the administrative language of the country and English. This is a mandatory requirement. Submitting action plans in English ensures that the wider OGP membership can read about your open government reforms and learning across borders can take place.

The official version of the action plan is the one published on the OGP website. If a participating government wishes to amend any part of their action plan, they must do so within one year of the original due date for submission (June 30 or December 31). OGP members may not submit draft action plans, but do have the opportunity to make amendments after submission. To make amendments to the action plan, the participating government must send an updated version that clearly outlines all changes, in English and in the administrative language (if applicable), to the OGP Support Unit. Note that in this case, the IRM Action Plan Review will assess the action plan as originally submitted, but the IRM Results Report will assess the amended action plan.