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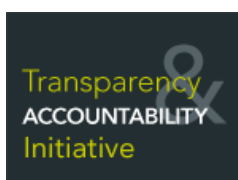
# LEARNING TO OPEN GOVERNMENT

Findings and reflections on how the Open Government Partnership is playing out, in practice, in five countries

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Florencia Guerzovich & Michael Moses, June 2016



## About Global Integrity

We support progress toward open and accountable governance in countries and communities across the world. Our approach is informed by three key insights: First, progress toward more open governance is inherently political; second, actors within a given governance context play the primary role in driving governance reform; and third, there is no universal blueprint for governance reform. We put these insights into practice by conducting research and generating data, by supporting the work of country-level reformers, and by influencing global conversations on open governance.

For more information on who we are, what we do, and the issues on which we work, visit [www.globalintegrity.org](http://www.globalintegrity.org) or email [info@globalintegrity.org](mailto:info@globalintegrity.org)

## About the Transparency and Accountability Initiative

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# I. Introduction

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This paper summarizes and synthesizes the findings from five in-depth case studies that explore when and how pro-reform actors have been able to leverage the Open Government Partnership (OGP) — its processes, spaces and resources — to pursue improved government responsiveness and accountability at the country level. It is one of a number of recent efforts to explore the contribution of OGP to more open and effective governance.<sup>1</sup> Our research, undertaken by teams of local open government experts in five countries, covers Albania, Costa Rica, Mexico, the Philippines and Tanzania.

This paper, and the case studies that serve as its source material, are not an evaluation of OGP, nor do they speak to OGP's role in motivating a global movement toward openness, something that is an important part of OGP's overall approach but which was not part of our assignment. Rather, we focus on lessons and reflections distilled from case studies about how OGP is playing out, in practice, in five particular contexts. Our aim is to contribute to a richer understanding of whether and how national reformers use OGP in their efforts to make progress toward more open government, in order to inform action by OGP stakeholders at the global and country levels.

As is to be expected with any initiative that intends to tackle deep-seated governance challenges, questions about the effectiveness of OGP are being asked<sup>2</sup> and considered.<sup>3</sup> Evidence from our country case studies indicates that OGP processes in these countries, to date, are contributing only marginally to efforts to open government. At least some pro-reform actors are leveraging OGP to achieve more open government at the country level. However, the extent to which their use of OGP enables them to rebalance power or apply lessons learned in OGP processes to increase the effectiveness of their efforts in other areas of work remains limited. There appear to be risks in relying too heavily on investments in high level political support. And perhaps unsurprisingly, pro-reform actors seem to make more of OGP in countries where they are able to link OGP to pre-existing political, institutional and organizational conditions that are already favorable to substantive collaboration between segments of the state and civil society. OGP as yet seems to have little purchase on those conditions. These findings are in line with recent research on the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder initiatives,<sup>4</sup> and transparency and accountability initiatives more broadly.<sup>5</sup>

This synthesis paper proceeds as follows: in Section II, we introduce our approach and analytical framework, laying out three plausible, though unstated (by OGP), pathways through which pro-reform stakeholders both in and outside of government at the country and international levels, might leverage OGP inputs to drive progress toward more open governance. The pathways are:

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, [Francoli, Ostling, and Steibel \(2015\)](#); [Montero and Taxell \(2015\)](#); [Montero \(2015a\)](#); [Montero \(2015b\)](#); [Schneider \(2015\)](#); and [Berliner \(2015\)](#), among many others.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, [2015 blog post](#) by Suneeta Kaimal, OGP Steering Committee Civil Society co-chair.

<sup>3</sup> See [2016 blog post](#) by Kitty von Bertele, special assistant at the OGP Support Unit.

<sup>4</sup> [Sterns, Kingston and Ke \(2015\)](#); [Brockmyer and Fox \(2015\)](#); [World Bank \(2014\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> [McGee and Gaventa \(2011\)](#); [Fox \(2014\)](#); [McGee and Edwards \(2016\)](#).

- a) High level political leadership;
- b) Collective action to rebalance power;
- c) Learning to navigate politics.

By investing in these pathways, OGP could reasonably expect to contribute to meaningful open government reforms. As such, the pathways provide a lens for framing and distilling the evidence from the case studies, allowing us to better understand and compare how OGP is playing out in different contexts.

In Section III, we examine the evidence from the case studies with respect to each pathway. For each, we first lay out the hypothesis under which OGP could expect to contribute through that pathway, and in doing so enable reformers to more successfully agitate for open government reforms. Second, we present lessons, derived from the cases, on how a given mechanism is functioning in practice. Third, we provide reflections on how OGP might more successfully deliver on its goals. Our hope is that these reflections can enable learning and adaptation that help lay the groundwork for OGP to maximize its impact and effectiveness. We conclude in Section IV.

## II. Methods

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Founded in 2011, the Open Government Partnership is a multi-stakeholder initiative that brings together reformers from government and civil society, as well as the private sector, to work for improvements in the transparency, accountability and responsiveness of government. Having grown from an initial set of eight member countries to 69 today, OGP occupies a prominent position in the open government landscape.

At the country level, OGP's domestic policy mechanism, the National Action Plan cycle, aims to support governments and civil society as they collaborate to design, implement and monitor commitments to open government. At the global level, OGP provides a framework for international networking and intends to incentivize governments to compete in a race to the top and implement ever more ambitious reforms. Through the combination of these mechanisms, OGP means to empower and connect pro-reform actors at various levels, and support them in working together on meaningful open government reforms.

The flexibility of the OGP approach is meant to help each of its diverse member countries and the pro-reform actors in those countries leverage the multilevel support OGP provides in their attempts to drive progress on open government. This flexibility and OGP's "big tent" approach to reform mean that pro-reform actors in different countries can define and pursue open government reform in ways that are relevant in their contexts. Openness can be an end in itself and a means of making progress on other goals, from reducing corruption to improving service delivery. Regardless of how openness and reform initiatives are defined, action and results are front and center in OGP.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1 presents OGP's Theory of Change and lays out how OGP expects to provide pro-reform actors with the resources, processes and spaces in which to push for meaningful open government reforms.<sup>7</sup> Upon joining OGP (point A in Figure 1), civil society organizations and public officials, are expected to:

- Plan, consult on and agree to priority reforms in an OGP National Action Plan (F);
- Implement those commitments (B);
- Use the OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) to evaluate and learn from the success or failures (G)
- And apply that learning in subsequent National Action Plan cycles, improving the quality of the process and, eventually, fostering meaningful open government reform (B).

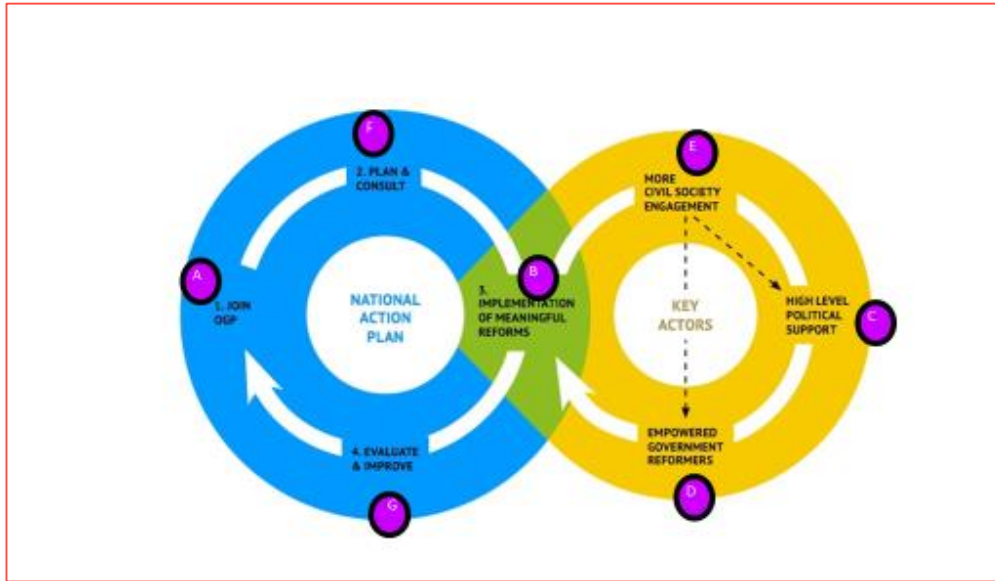
Throughout, this process will create a space in which high level political leadership commits to reform (C), midlevel reformers are empowered (D) and civil society actively participates (E).

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<sup>6</sup> See the comments of Maria Otero, in [Howard \(2011\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> This figure has been pulled and adapted from the [OGP Four-Year Strategy 2015-2018](#) (2014).

Figure 1: The Virtuous Action Plan Cycle



The idea is that as the commitment of high level officials expands, the power of government reformers grows, and the engagement of civil society organizations increases, the National Action Plan cycle will also grow stronger — as a resilient well-oiled machine, these actions will trigger a virtuous cycle that, over time, culminates in the implementation of meaningful, sustainable open government reform.

Drawing on this Theory of Change and the relevant literature, we developed a conceptual framework that would allow us to systematically examine and explore our basic research question: whether and how pro-reform actors have been able to leverage the Open Government Partnership — its processes, spaces and resources — to pursue improved government responsiveness and accountability. The virtuous cycle laid out in Figure 1 focuses primarily on the National Action Plan and omits the other resources that OGP makes available, and that pro-reform actors might potentially leverage for the purposes of reform — open government awards for good performers, technical resources and guidance, international events, peer learning exchanges, and more.

We incorporate such resources into our analysis of how OGP is playing out, in practice, in different contexts. We identify three concrete pathways through which OGP and the resources it provides might plausibly be expected to support progress toward more open government.<sup>8</sup> Exploring and comparing how these pathways are functioning in practice helps us draw insights across the five cases and more effectively identify the ways in which OGP is providing pro-reform actors with leverage at the country level (or not). The three pathways we explored are:

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<sup>8</sup> On the relevance of pathways (also called causal mechanisms) and context for comparative, causal inference see Falletti and Lynch (2009). They also identify a number of causal mechanisms frequently used in social science analysis, including the three mechanisms we adapted here to the OGP context.



a) *High level political leadership*

OGP awards, international events and other resources can incentivize high level political leaders – from presidents to ministers – to commit to ambitious reforms. This, in turn, will inspire midlevel government reformers and civil society actors to follow the example of senior political leaders and take advantage of OGP resources, processes and spaces to advance open government.

b) *Collective action to rebalance power*

OGP's various processes and resources – in particular, the National Action Plan cycle – create spaces and incentives for pro-reform actors to work collaboratively. OGP provides a common framework for cooperation that mobilizes and consolidates disparate reform initiatives, actors and networks under the OGP banner, and strengthens the relationships among pro-reform actors. The collective bargaining power of participating stakeholders thus improves, enabling them to exercise more influence than they would otherwise, and helping pro-reform actors to more successfully promote open government.

c) *Learning to navigate politics*

OGP's processes, spaces and resources foster new political experiences, giving government officials and civil society activists the opportunity to collaborate, engage in joint-problem solving and pursue reform. Over time, the lessons, practices and norms that emerge from these experiences can help pro-reform actors to more effectively navigate the politics of governance reform. The lessons learned through cooperation on OGP can be taken forward into other areas of work, helping reformers to more effectively collaborate in addressing governance challenges beyond OGP.<sup>9</sup>

The case studies cover Albania, Costa Rica, Mexico, the Philippines and Tanzania – all intentionally selected, less-developed countries that are members of OGP.<sup>10</sup> The selected countries, though diverse in many respects, provide the basis for the systematic exploration and comparison of how OGP is playing out, in practice, in different contexts.

The case studies were researched and drafted by teams of local open government experts, with close oversight from Global Integrity, between May and December 2015. They are based on scores of interviews, document reviews and other sources of evidence. Each case begins by situating OGP in the broader open government landscape of the country. The cases also explore how pro-reform actors leverage OGP inputs, or not, to institutionalize the open government agenda, as well as how country-level reformers leveraged OGP to influence a specific priority reform. Throughout, the cases

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<sup>9</sup> OGP's "[Changing the Culture of Government \(2015\)](#)" Youtube video makes this point and links to the previous argument about coalitions.

<sup>10</sup> We applied four additional considerations in our country selection: One, some existing evidence indicated that pro-reform actors had been leveraging OGP to drive progress on more open government in those countries for several years, which meant we could potentially trace the dynamics that may have been less observable in a more representative sample; two, the experiences of those countries provided a basis for systematic comparison; three, Global Integrity had the local research capacity to carry out the highly demanding and nuanced research necessary for this project; and four, the research in these countries was likely to generate new insights relevant for OGP stakeholders.

pay close attention to the three pathways outlined above and unpack whether and how those pathways are operating in practice.

In the remainder of this paper, we explore each of the defined pathways in turn. We lay out the lessons that emerge from the diverse OGP experiences tracked in the case studies, providing insights into the challenges and opportunities pro-reform actors face in leveraging the resources provided by OGP. Some of the lessons are not surprising. But by making them explicit and exploring their implications, we hope to inform discussions about how to improve the impact and effectiveness of OGP.

In consideration of these lessons, we also offer reflections on the way forwards for OGP. How can the experiences and lessons drawn from our five country case studies enable OGP stakeholders — donors, the Steering Committee, the Support Unit, governments and civil society organizations in OGP countries — to take steps to ensure that open government reformers can more effectively leverage the processes, spaces and resources of OGP in order to drive progress toward more open government?

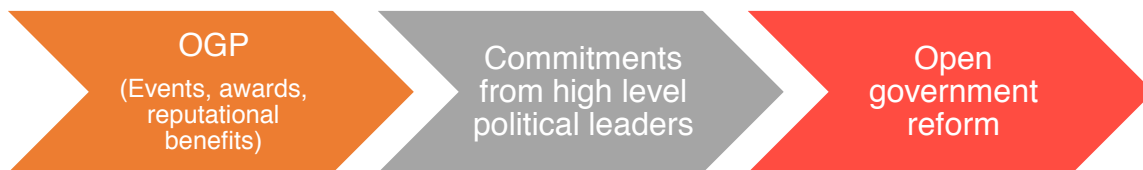
### III. Learning from the Evidence

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#### A. High level political leadership

##### i) *The Pathway*

The OGP platform provides incentives, including high profile summits, events and awards, for high level political leaders to commit to ambitious reforms.<sup>11</sup> The idea is that by securing the support and endorsement of high level political leadership, OGP can enable and motivate midlevel government officials and civil society reformers to take advantage of OGP's processes, spaces and resources to drive progress toward more open government. Visually, the causal chain assumed in this pathway, in its simplest form, would look something like this:



The five cases we researched are very different across a number of contextual factors, but share one common condition relative to OGP: A relatively high degree of resources, financial and otherwise, were in place to secure commitments from presidents, prime ministers and other high level political leaders. As research for this project was underway, Mexico, an OGP co-chair, was preparing and hosting the 2015 OGP Global Summit; the Philippines and Tanzania have served on the OGP Steering Committee and have, respectively, hosted a regional event and received OGP awards; Costa Rica and Albania have also hosted OGP regional meetings. If this pathway is to function effectively in any OGP members, one might reasonably assume that it would do so in these countries.

With this in mind, what does the evidence say? What can the case studies tell us about whether and how investments in political leadership are supporting progress toward open government?

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<sup>11</sup> This is a recurring topic at OGP Steering Committee meetings, as per public minutes, especially in the lead up to OGP Global Summits. According to Martin Tisne, OGP has grown from eight to 69 countries in its four years, in part because of the participation of key heads of state at signature events, including U.S. President Barack Obama at its annual meeting. See [Mendoza \(2015\)](#). As Molly Elgin-Cossart notes, in just four years, “the partnership has been able to create a global movement.” See [Elgin-Cossart, Sutton, and Sachs \(2016\)](#), pg. 3.

## ii) *Lessons from the Case Studies*

- **Our country case studies provide little evidence that OGP investments<sup>12</sup> meant to encourage high level political leaders to enact ambitious change, and to open up space for midlevel officials and civil society to do the same, are as yet leading to politically meaningful reforms.**

None of the cases suggest that commitments from high level political leaders, including those made at OGP events, are yet translating into the space that midlevel reformers and civil society groups need to advance contested open government reforms. For example, in Tanzania, former President Jakaya Kikwete repeatedly promised to enact access to information legislation at OGP international events. Nevertheless, due to a variety of other factors, including ministerial changes and intransigence from government officials, no such law has yet passed. A similar experience has played out in the Philippines. In Costa Rica, despite commitments from the former president to reform the country's procurement system, the midlevel officials charged with implementing the reform did not do so, which meant that the planned change did not occur. This is not to say that investments in leadership do not ever pay off, especially when they lead to membership in a global movement like OGP, or when they interact with other potential pathways of change — our research simply does not speak to such issues. Currently, however, such investments do not appear to have created space and incentives for government officials and civil society organizations to pursue politically sensitive, complex reforms in our five research countries.

- **OGP events and awards do not appear in these five countries to have inspired a “race to the top.” As noted by other researchers, the race to the top may more closely resemble a nonlinear “crawl.”<sup>13</sup>**

OGP's bright-spot competitions, awards, success stories, case studies and other resources, including the stage provided by global and regional events, all aim to create incentives for countries and political leaders to engage in reform. These carrots, according to OGP documents, mean to inspire a “race to the top,” in which political leaders and countries compete to implement more and more ambitious reforms.<sup>14</sup> The idea is that rewards can “motivate senior government officials in their own country to undertake and sustain ambitious reforms that will put them in the running for the Awards.”<sup>15</sup>

The contribution of international and regional events, as well as awards, to the global visibility of OGP and its member countries and to the coordination of a global movement toward openness is outside the scope of our research. In terms of the five national open government journeys we covered, however, there is not evidence to support the idea that OGP is inspiring political leaders to engage in a race to the top in the way envisioned by OGP's founders. Pro-reform actors do not appear to ratchet up the strength of their open government commitments in response to reforms elsewhere. Instead, in

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<sup>12</sup> Note that by “investment” we mean more than just the OGP Secretariat's financial resources; we mean all of the time, political capital and support, financial or otherwise, from OGP partners that go toward events, awards and more.

<sup>13</sup> [Elgin-Cossart, Sutton, and Sachs \(2016\)](#).

<sup>14</sup> See [Frey \(2014a\)](#). On the competitive dynamic as a driver of the race to the top and one plausible mechanism for OGP's effectiveness, see [Brockmyer and Fox \(2015\)](#).

<sup>15</sup> [Frey \(2014a\)](#). See also [Frey and Maassen \(2013\)](#).

some cases our researchers point to improvements at the margins. At the country level, when pro-reform actors have leveraged OGP's investments in leadership, they have won minor victories. In Costa Rica, for instance, OGP summits and meetings enabled the Support Unit to facilitate sessions in which some members of civil society connected with government officials for the first time. Further, hosting a Regional Summit in San Jose brought extra scrutiny to the Costa Rican OGP process. This enabled CSOs that were unhappy with the government's approach to OGP to threaten to publicly walk out of the meeting, and therefore extract concessions about the formal composition of the country's Open Government Commission.<sup>16</sup> After the event's conclusion, however, researchers report that CSOs struggled to hold the government accountable for the promises that had been made.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, in Tanzania, CSOs protested the government's draft access-to-information bill at the Africa Regional Meeting in 2015, but were unable to translate those protests into agreement on an acceptable bill. We observe similar dynamics in other countries hosting OGP events, including Mexico,<sup>18</sup> with the exception of Albania, where CSOs largely avoided a high level OGP regional meeting. In fact, only three Albanian CSOs attended the meeting. Seen in this light, investments in leadership, including awards, events and other elements of the "race to the top" strategy, are not leading to a cross-country cascade of changes — wins are minor, and the inspiring potential of OGP's competitive dynamics envisioned by its founders<sup>19</sup> is yet to play out in practice in the five countries we researched.

- **Because OGP has limited resources, investments in securing high level political support — while arguably important for creating space for action by midlevel reformers — necessarily reduce the resources that can be directed toward supporting midlevel government officials and civil society engagement in OGP processes. There is also a risk that investments made in high level political support may not deliver returns once political leaders leave their posts, and that these investments, if they do not pay off, may have negative consequences for OGP's legitimacy in the eyes of pro-reform actors.**

When the Support Unit and the Steering Committee devote scarce resources to targeting high level political power structures, and focus less on supporting lower-level reformers, OGP's potential long-term contribution may be fleeting. Indeed, the cases make amply clear that there are risks to heavily depending on the interests of a select group of individual political leaders instead of supporting coalitions and institutions that may have more sticking power. For example, in Costa Rica, when power changed hands after a presidential election, the OGP process stalled for more than a year. As of this writing, it remains to be seen how new administrations in the Philippines and Tanzania will respond to the incentives offered by OGP. It is clear, however, that variations in political mandates, and the nature of democratic elections in OGP countries, pose challenges for OGP investments in high level political leaders. As the research team in the Philippines states,

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<sup>16</sup> [Eyakuze \(2015\)](#).

<sup>17</sup> [Howard \(2015\)](#).

<sup>18</sup> [Howard \(2015\)](#).

<sup>19</sup> [Frey \(2014b\)](#).

*“Despite laws and mechanisms that support governance reforms, their sustainability can easily be threatened and frustrated by a sudden change of priority by the sitting (or new) president, the general elite composition of the legislature, and the political instability of a given period...To date, none of the commitments and reform initiatives carried out under OGP have been adopted into law, or otherwise turned into an irreversible government program.”<sup>20</sup>*

It is notable that where OGP engagement is concerned, electoral transitions in Mexico and Albania were, relative to Costa Rica, Tanzania and the Philippines, less disruptive. Despite changes in the parties holding power in these countries, political leaders maintained their (in the case of Albania, relatively low) interest in OGP. This is explained by contextual factors unlikely to be present in many other OGP countries. In Mexico, the country’s role as host of the 2015 OGP Global Summit made compliance with OGP processes attractive, as did pressure from unusually influential and technically capable CSOs in the country. In Albania, the country’s drive for EU accession made OGP a useful tool by which to signal its compliance with EU mandates, regardless of the party in power.<sup>21</sup>

Even in such favorably disposed cases, however, when commitments by high level leaders do not lead to demonstrable changes on the ground, OGP’s credibility, and the initiative’s potential for contributing to open government reforms in the future, may be damaged. The experiences in the five countries studied raise doubts about the extent to which high level political commitments to OGP (and the investments that elicit them), in the words of the Mexico case,

*“...have been put into practice beyond intent and rhetoric.”<sup>22</sup>*

- **Governments and especially high level political leaders appear to use the credibility conferred by OGP to strengthen their reform credentials and demonstrate to certain domestic and international audiences that they actively support open government.**

In the countries we studied, OGP can provide an identifiable, verifiable means of displaying the sincerity of a government’s reform credentials to certain domestic constituencies. In the Philippines, for example, the Aquino administration has taken advantage of OGP awards and recognition to entice more people, inside and outside the government, to support its political agenda. This includes the administration’s strong emphasis on a new good governance framework, for which OGP’s investments in enticing high level political support, including awards, became both a sign of Aquino’s reform credentials and a means of sustaining a political agenda over time by bringing more reformers into government.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> John Sidel has argued that multi-stakeholder developmental leadership by coalitions, rather than executive leadership by the president, accounts for important reforms in the country. [Sidel \(2014\)](#).

<sup>21</sup> Though they do not appear in our cases, there may be other means of maintaining OGP engagement across electoral transitions. In Argentina and Chile, for example, open government reformers in local government and civil society appear to have joined OGP processes despite being in the opposition at the national level.

<sup>22</sup> Gerson and Nieto (2016), pg. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Note, however, this is a highly context-specific result. As an outlier in our research, we should resist the urge to draw generalizable lessons from the Philippines case. Other research supports this reservation. See, for example, [Elgin-Cossart, Sutton, and Sachs \(2016\)](#), pg. 17.

Where international audiences, including donors and foreign partners, are concerned, OGP's resources and processes can also serve as a proxy for commitments to good governance. In each of the countries we researched, specific international actors play a role in the national political context (see Table 1). Awards, events and other OGP resources have been deployed in two ways: first, as a means for governments to demonstrate their reform credentials; and two, for international actors to anchor and/or catalyze their own reform agendas at the country level. Nevertheless, pro-reform actors in various countries question OGP's value add relative to other platforms and initiatives, both international and domestic. In Albania, for example, government officials wondered whether compliance with OGP generated meaningful benefits where reform was concerned. Despite these doubts, and others like them in the other countries researched, the evidence indicates that for many political leaders the credibility conferred by OGP can have uses both at home and abroad.

*Table 1: OGP and International Credibility*

	<b>International actor/agenda(s) that matter in the country and are perceived to be interested in OGP (even when evidence to this effect is often scarce)</b>	<b>Examples of behavior to which the OGP-international actor linkage contributed</b>
<b>Albania</b>	<i>Albania is seeking entry to the European Union and welcomes signals to show it is in line with the EU and its accession requirements – even though these requirements are not formally tied to OGP.  External partners in the accession process, including the U.S. Embassy and the UNDP.</i>	<i>Continuity of OGP processes and priorities despite changes in administration.</i>
<b>Costa Rica</b>	<i>Costa Rica is seeking entry to the OECD and welcomes signals to show it is at the forefront of democracy and transparency.</i>	<i>Enter OGP to improve standing vis-à-vis the OECD.  Concern over negative IRM report.</i>
<b>The Philippines</b>	<i>Credit rating agencies and International Financial Institutions (IFIs).</i>	<i>Focus on commitments/issues of interest to these stakeholders, in particular IFIs that may be interested in supporting and showcasing wins.</i>
<b>Tanzania</b>	<i>Donors and investors concerned with good governance reforms</i>	<i>Embarrassment due to the negative IRM report, including in the Local Steering Committee of Ministries linked to foreign investment and aid priorities.</i>
<b>Mexico</b>	<i>International actors challenging the country's legitimacy in light of human rights crisis and ineffective policies that tarnish the country's image.<sup>24</sup></i>	<i>Continuity of OGP commitments and processes. Investments in visible OGP leadership.</i>

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, a recent press release from the White House: ["Joint Statement: 2015 US-Mexico High Level Economic Dialogue"](#) (2016).



- **At the same time, governments may use the validation provided by their participation in OGP, and their successful completion of OGP processes, to deflect deeper reforms.**

Researchers found that the international recognition supplied by OGP’s investments meant to secure high level political commitments, including awards and events, along with other factors may unintentionally interfere with domestic dynamics that support open government on the ground (see Box 1). Pro-reform actors working in the countries we researched report that political leaders use the validation of their good governance credentials provided by such resources to deflect attention from scandals and stall more ambitious reform.<sup>25</sup> For example, in Albania, our researchers found that the government publicizes its successes in OGP, rather than its performance on EU accession commitments, because OGP mechanisms and constituencies are less stringent, and positive reviews are relatively easier to achieve. The Filipino researchers argue that the Aquino administration has taken advantage of the cover provided by its performance in OGP to dilute pressure resulting from a scandal centered on irregularities in the use of public funds. Similar events recur in the Mexico case. For some, therefore, OGP’s investments in high level political leadership can be a shield that dilutes pressure on the government.

*Box 1: Accountability Politics and OGP*

*OGP is a global initiative that seeks to strengthen, not distort or supplant, the accountability of governments to their own citizens through local accountability mechanisms (directives from political leadership; oversight by other branches of government; and monitoring by civil society organizations). The presumption is that OGP will do so by providing a framework for dialogue without trying to shape the outcome of that dialogue.*

*Researchers’ findings in five countries suggest that when the process is put to work and appropriated by pro-reform actors, accountability dynamics are more complex. In some cases, they raise concerns given the political and organizational dynamics described in this paper: Few civil society groups and national accountability institutions are part of the process, and certain international actors leverage the process vis-à-vis governments and civil society groups in OGP processes and, in some cases, in the broader open governance journey. These issues are more salient in Albania, a country where citizens historically support governments in part on the basis of their pro-EU credentials, which entails strict adherence to requirements set by international partners and donors. And funders have a prominent role in OGP processes, instead of civil society organizations. They are less salient but also appear in Costa Rica when an international funder that is not accountable to citizens financially supports OGP-related processes, does not disclose information about its private support and appears to exert “profound influence on OGP processes.”<sup>26</sup>*

*These normative issues are not the subject of our research and merit a longer discussion than we can afford here. The accompanying case studies provide additional food for thought for those interested in this issue.*

*iii) Reflections*

- **Review the allocation of resources.**

To more effectively support domestic actors working for change on the ground, OGP should review the balance of investment between global summits, awards, etc., and country-level support, and give

<sup>25</sup> Other research into OGP, and into MSIs in general, points toward the existence of open washing as well. See [Fox \(2014\)](#), and [Brockmyer and Fox \(2015\)](#).

<sup>26</sup> For a critical view on OGP-related processes and funders’ agendas, see [Belbis \(2015\)](#).



further consideration to how investments at multiple levels might be made complementary to maximize returns on OGP's (and related) investments in open government.

This is not to say that investments intended to secure commitments from high level political leaders should be completely downsized. However, the evidence in the cases suggests that the visibility, excitement and buzz created by such investments, though potentially useful, seem to be insufficient for opening up spaces and processes in which midlevel reformers and civil society can pursue deep reforms. This is especially so when high level leaders act without broad political support or coalitions, or fail to follow through on the commitments they make. These findings are consistent with the literature on the role of leaders in reform.<sup>27</sup> They also overlap with recent candid reflections from the OGP Support Unit about the importance of making sure OGP is a vehicle for getting things done, not just “a public relations opportunity.”<sup>28</sup>

Contextual political factors such as the timing of elections, the credibility of political leaders, and foreign policy issues, including dynamics with donor countries and agencies, can all shape, inform and affect the ability of pro-reform actors to translate high level political commitments made through OGP into change on the ground. This is especially so when, as in the countries we researched, there may be trade-offs between engagement with OGP and other potential avenues of reform. Consistent failures to achieve reform, moreover, may damage the legitimacy of OGP and diminish the support that its resources can provide domestic reformers.

In light of these lessons, devoting more resources to encouraging and supporting pro-reform actors in the bureaucracy and civil society, while still maintaining some efforts to incentivize buy-in by high level political leaders, might be a more productive means of providing leverage for driving progress on open government reform. A more balanced blend of investments and careful attention to the ways investments in particular resources interact with varied features of open government landscapes in various places could well help OGP and its supporters more effectively support domestically defined and domestically led open government reforms.

- **Consider when, where and how OGP and its international supporters can most effectively encourage incentives that are conducive to country-level reform.**

International actors, including donors, foreign governments and multilateral organizations, feature frequently in the open government journeys of the countries we studied. There are often strong links between OGP and these actors. This means that at the country level, high level political leaders in some countries appear to leverage their commitments to OGP to obtain international support and/or funding. In these circumstances, OGP investments in political leaders may encourage them and other

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<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of political will, see Marquette and Peiffer (2015). See also [Thornton and Cox \(2005\)](#), as cited in [Hudson, Marquette, and Waldock \(2016\)](#): “Usually, we have a good idea about what needs to be done to achieve poverty reduction, but are much less clear about why it’s not happening. All too often, we attribute slow or no progress to a lack of political will...It’s this black box of lack of political will that DoC analysis unpacks. Source: [Thornton and Cox \(2005: 2\)](#).” Also, see [Brinkerhoff \(2010\)](#): “Quite often, ‘lack of political will’ is identified as the culprit for poorly performing anti-corruption programmes. Yet despite the frequency with which it is used to explain unsatisfactory reform outcomes, political will remains under-defined and poorly understood. Further, assessments are often conducted retrospectively, looking back at failed programmes.” Focus on this variable is generally criticized by the literature that supports the coalition/collective-action approach addressed in Section B.

<sup>28</sup> [Powell \(2015\)](#).

pro-reform actors to expend political capital and other resources on complying with the OGP process, rather than channeling those resources into other reform efforts. Adopting and complying with the procedures of OGP, therefore, entails trade-offs. And the evidence in the cases indicates that, in some countries, those trade-offs do not always lead to politically meaningful reform, and might actually distract from it by building formal processes that are not enmeshed with local realities and dynamics. We discuss this issue at length in the remainder of this paper.

More evidence is needed on the trade-offs of engaging with OGP instead of pursuing reform in other arenas, as well as on the dynamics that shape OGP incentives, the results they generate in practice, and the conditions in which particular outcomes may emerge. Given the narrow scope of our research question (when and how can pro-reform actors leverage the OGP – its processes, spaces and resources – to drive progress on open government), our country case studies cannot chart a path by which OGP and its supporters at the global level can navigate the challenges the initiative presents in this regard.

We can, however, present some questions that merit further consideration by OGP's supporters and can serve as a platform for reflecting on how they can most effectively help OGP deliver on functional open government outcomes in practice. For example, should OGP link its work to that of multilateral organizations like the OECD and the EU? Might it attempt to mobilize various international actors in pursuit of common goals?<sup>29</sup> When and how can doing so affect the accountability and sustainability of open government that OGP intends to support? Can OGP and its global backers take concrete actions, including adjusting their funding strategies and timelines, on a country-by-country basis, to more effectively support open government efforts?<sup>30</sup> And if international funders decide to support the implementation of OGP commitments, how should they do so? By targeting all commitments in a given action plan? Just those marked as ambitious by the OGP IRM? Or those that are linked to structural challenges in a country? Encouragingly, discussions on how OGP can learn to support open governance in and across contexts, and how it interacts with and shapes the incentives, processes and institutions available to pro-reform actors at the country level, are already underway and should continue as more evidence emerges in the future.<sup>31</sup>

## **B. Collective action to rebalance power**

### *i) The Pathway*

OGP processes, and in particular the National Action Plan cycle, provide spaces for reformers in and across government and civil society to work collaboratively, strengthening the collective power of pro-

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<sup>29</sup> This approach has been implemented in anti-corruption reforms. See [DAC Network on Governance \(2007\)](#). For an in-country process, see [Kaufmann, Gallina, and Senderowitsch \(2015\)](#); see also [Guerzovich and Giraudy \(2011\)](#).

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. a recent [announcement of an Open Government Impact Research Coalition](#) from Steve Davenport and the World Bank ([Nogueira-Budny and Davenport 2015](#)), as well as a [recent call for proposals](#) from Making All Voices Count that intends to support civil society engagement with OGP. It's also important to note that other recent work has argued that short-term, simplistic funding strategies, prevalent in the transparency and accountability field, can constrain the capacity and incentives of grantees to adapt and learn. See, for example: [Ross \(2015\)](#). [Halloran and Flores \(2015\)](#) also argue that funding strategies need to focus on supporting accountability ecosystems, rather than siloed tactical approaches, in order to be most effective.

<sup>31</sup> See multiple blog posts at <https://tisne.org/tag/open-government-partnership/>

openness advocates and their ability to jointly pursue reforms. By consolidating different reform efforts under a common framework, OGP can enable pro-reform actors to consolidate their influence, and work together. In doing so, they will be able to collectively overcome obstacles and roadblocks, and push forward more effectively on open government reform.



Governance reform is always political. This means that to understand how reforms happen, or do not, it is important to think about and work with politics and power dynamics in specific contexts.<sup>32</sup> The literature argues that atomized actors working in isolation are unlikely to successfully mobilize coalitions.<sup>33</sup> As such, comprehending whether, how and/or why the state and civil society are engaging in joint problem solving and change making, and whether and how OGP can most effectively support such processes, is crucial for maximizing the initiative's impact and effectiveness.

To what extent is OGP supporting the emergence of successful collective action that enables change in the countries we researched? What can the case studies teach us about the ways in which OGP is helping pro-reform actors come together, collaborate and rebalance power in pursuit of openness?

## ii) *Lessons from the Case Studies*

- **Expectations about the pace of governance reform that OGP might support, and the ability of governments and civil society actors to leverage OGP inputs to act collectively to drive progress toward more open government, may be too high. Seeds of future progress may have been planted, but our country case studies reveal few signs of multi-stakeholder empowerment and collective action to date.**

Some new forms of coordination appear to have emerged in each of the five countries covered in our cases (see Table 2). For example, each country now has a steering committee of sorts in place to govern OGP processes in the country, and at least some seats on those committees are allocated to civil society. In fact, the presence of OGP processes and spaces seems to support the emergence of small, OGP-focused coalitions of elite, centralized CSOs in Costa Rica, the Philippines, Mexico and

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<sup>32</sup> We cannot cite all the literature here, see e.g., [McGee and Gaventa \(2011\)](#); [O'Meally \(2013\)](#); [Rocha and Sharma \(2008\)](#); [Guerzovich \(2010\)](#).

<sup>33</sup> Among others, [Johnston and Kpundeh \(2004\)](#); [Andrews, McConnell, and Wescott \(2010\)](#); [Guerzovich and Giraudy \(2011\)](#); [Carothers and Brechenmacher \(2014\)](#); [Marquette and Pfeiffer \(2015\)](#); [Booth \(2012\)](#); [Kosack and Fung \(2013\)](#); [Fox \(2015\)](#).

Albania. In the Philippines and Mexico in particular, there is evidence of more sustained state-civil society engagement. Some Filipino civil society advocates have crossed over and joined the government bureaucracy, which might contribute to more effective collaboration between the state and at least a select few civil society organizations.<sup>34</sup> Mexico, of the countries researched, has seen civil society take by far the most prominent role in the definition and implementation of OGP National Action Plans. Participation in OGP opened up new avenues for eight elite Mexican CSOs to engage with the state, but it is unclear whether that engagement produced reform outcomes that would not have otherwise occurred.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> We thank Rosemary McGee, in her review of an early draft of this paper, for highlighting the presence of crossovers in the Philippines.

<sup>35</sup> The 2015 Mexico IRM report reaches a similar conclusion: "Although Mexico has been an international leader in legislation on transparency and access to information, the presence of corruption, impunity, and a weak juridical framework to prevent and control conflicts of interest is increasingly a challenge to make OGP values compatible with the Mexican reality. Given the context and challenges facing the country, commitments on access to information, developing technological tools for improving government management, and opening data in Mexico may fall short in the quest for a more reliable and effective government." ([Gutierrez and Ocejo 2015](#), p.13).

Table 2: Collective Action across Contexts

	Select aspects of intrastate collective action	Select aspects of intrasocietal collective action	Select aspects of state-society collective action
<b>Albania</b>	OGP processes and inputs have not served as a platform from which to extend reform impetus past the highest echelons of power in the country. State institutions did not coordinate effectively, while failures to deploy technical expertise, as well as insufficient financial resources, harmed mobilization and engagement.	Limited participation from civil society groups, even when their projects were listed as formal OGP commitments.  OGP resources not attractive to go beyond a few joint declarations. They have not been a lever for CSO activists working on open government issues, except for in a few cases with the support of donors. The Open Society Foundations used the OGP consultation process to build its technical expertise into official government policy.	The open government agenda was run primarily by the government, which, in turn, prioritized issues that are already part of crosscutting strategies of partners, including the EU.
<b>Costa Rica</b>	Two approaches: First, leadership engaged with select areas of the bureaucracy to overcome resistance to a particular e-government initiative. Second, in late 2015, a senior official established an initiative to link 35 points of contact within different public institutions with the idea of raising awareness and training public officials to lead and manage open government policies and creating a broad public-sector platform for open government.	The civil society coalition advocating for open government has come with a high cost for a very modest long-term result. There is growing mistrust among groups and adverse incentives (from the government, consultancies, rivalries). Various NGOs have moved away from participating in the OGP process. Coordination among CSOs easier to oppose government action than to cooperate.	To date, OGP has not provided a platform for comprehensively improving or broadening the way civil society and the state cooperate on open government. Leverage from civil society is not much better than it was at the beginning of the OGP process.  Focus on the formal structure of the OGP process neglected substantive actions.
<b>Tanzania</b>	Limited bureaucratic engagement, exclusion of key ministries, and regular government reshuffles constrain the coordinating ability of the National Action Plan cycle and the relevance of the IRM process.	Twaweza has been the clear de facto leader of Tanzanian civil society on OGP issues. Others disengaged over time. Mistrust within and across CSOs is prevalent.	OGP gave a few members of civil society the opportunity to engage with and give feedback to some authorities sporadically and without much responsiveness. For the most part, power remains concentrated, and OGP has been of limited usefulness in driving progress on open government in Tanzania.
<b>The Philippines</b>	Implementation of local political strategy to mobilize career bureaucrats who will stay in government beyond this administration as a way to leverage the OGP to sustain reforms implemented by the current administration. World Bank and OGP Support Unit support to strengthen the technical nature of selected reforms.	Dominance of the administration's CSO allies, including groups historically linked to government officials that crossed over from those CSOs, creates a potential problem of discursive homogeneity in the OGP space in the country. CSO inputs are minimal.	Efforts to "co-create," but the agreed commitments were premised on what government agencies can and are willing to do.  OGP has not enabled reformers to collaborate more meaningfully with the government or to pursue more substantive reform efforts. It created information and engagement mechanisms about issues related to the action plans, but follow-up is unclear on both sides.
<b>Mexico</b>	IFAI (and subsequently INAI) plays a key role in the OGP process, facilitating the engagement of other government departments across a change in power. As an autonomous institution, IFAI links CSOs and relevant government ministries. High level leadership incentivized to support commitments in light of OGP Global Summit in Mexico City in October 2015.	8 CSOs organize their collective action and act as a single voice within the partnership. Mexican OGP became a platform, which gives specific elite civil society organizations a voice and opportunity to incorporate some of their priorities into federal policy. Coordination costs were absorbed by CSOs, which now faced collective-action dilemmas (sharing operation costs, intracoalition negotiation and turf claiming). CSOs maintain separate traditional advocacy strategies and outlets.	Establishment of a Tripartite Technical Secretariat (TTS).  OGP reduced conflict and coordination costs for the government by creating opportunities to negotiate several issues in pre-existing agendas with several CSOs within a single framework of collaboration. The model of joint decision-making allowed CSOs and government to collaborate in a way that had not been possible before; OGP, but new methods did not translate to non-OGP processes.  Joint decision-making procedures among antagonistic partners provide incentives to reach minimum consensus decisions, i.e., pro-reform actors try to maximize minimal gains (e.g., by producing less impactful, but feasible, commitments).

That said, it is clear that governments tend to exercise disproportionate control in OGP at the country level (with the exception of Tanzania, where Twaweza seems to dominate OGP engagements). Truly

multi-stakeholder ownership of reform processes has not emerged. In the aggregate, researchers generally maintain that the distribution of power between and across the state and civil society, on OGP and otherwise, has remained fairly constant in the five countries. As the Albanian research team states, OGP is not:

*“[supporting] pro-reform actors [in their efforts to] form useful coalitions with which to pursue deeper open government reforms...Power remains concentrated in the hands of the government and international actors.”<sup>36</sup>*

These findings are consistent with global insights about the nature of civil society engagement with multi-stakeholder initiatives and speak to the deeply political, contentious and long-term nature of effective coalition building.<sup>37</sup> Contrary to some expectations about the pace of change OGP might support, transformations in the ability of pro-reform actors to leverage OGP inputs to form coalitions are yet to materialize. That said, we cannot rule out that the incremental improvements found in the cases may in the future lead to bigger improvements in the ability and willingness of coalitions to come together and push for open government changes.

- **Conditions on the ground matter: Relative to Albania, Costa Rica and Tanzania, coordination between the government and civil society on OGP in the Philippines and Mexico, as well as among civil society organizations in those countries, seems to be largely the result of the interaction of strategic, operational and pre-existing contextual factors.**

*Box 2: Factors that May Explain Why Some Reformers Coordinate More Than Others*

<b>Strategic factors include:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One or more actors have an explicit political strategy to mobilize others in the OGP process, and that strategy is relevant to their vested interests.</li> <li>• There is a short-/long-term cost-benefit calculation that is persuasive for stakeholders, over time.</li> </ul>
<b>Operational factors include:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone is willing and able to pay the costs of coordination and other transaction costs, including providing tailored incentives to attract diverse stakeholders and bolster their strategies.</li> <li>• There is a broker and clear rules of the game that are credible for all participants.</li> <li>• Measures exist to manage risks entailed in pre-existing asymmetries of power and resource mobilization among civil society groups.</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-existing contextual factors include:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholders on both sides of the table are recognized as legitimate.<sup>38</sup></li> <li>• A critical mass of civil society groups has some previous experience (repertoire) of engaging with government and with each other constructively on some issues, despite competitions in others. Stakeholders have a minimum level of technical and civic capacities<sup>39</sup> – i.e., groups willing and able to work with others – to engage in the process productively and to mobilize resources (particularly from external sources of funding).</li> <li>• The presence of crossovers (advocates who have a past as government officials, or government officials who have a past as civil society activists) contributes to these capacities and dynamics.<sup>40</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>36</sup> Plaku and Gjylameti (2016), pg. 24.  
<sup>37</sup> Such as those expressed by, for example, [Halloran \(2014\)](#); [Halloran \(2015\)](#); [Guerrero and Krafchik \(2015\)](#); [Brockmyer and Fox \(2015\)](#); [Guillán \(2015b\)](#); [Guillán and Taxell \(2015\)](#).  
<sup>38</sup> [Guerzovich \(2010\)](#).  
<sup>39</sup> [Briggs \(2008\)](#).  
<sup>40</sup> We thank Rosemary McGee, in her review of an early draft of this paper, for highlighting the presence of crossovers in the Philippines.



Our research identifies three key insights about the conditions in which OGP is likely, or not, to contribute to joint action among pro-reform actors. Of the countries studied, Mexico and the Philippines enjoyed higher levels of state-civil society engagement and coordination prior to OGP. It is in these same countries that pro-reform actors have made the most progress on coordination issues – though more trust, reduced antagonism and improved harmonization of interests are still sometimes scant since joining OGP. The success of these countries, relative to Albania, Costa Rica and Tanzania, may be explained by the presence of the strategic, operational and pre-existing contextual factors outlined in Box 2.

In Mexico and the Philippines, for example, highly technical, well-resourced CSOs were working with one another and the government on transparency and accountability issues prior to the entrance of OGP in those countries. These CSOs were already proactively implementing political strategies, paying consistent attention to open government processes, mobilizing coalitions and trying to coordinate, at least on some issues, with the state.<sup>41</sup> OGP presented an additional opportunity for consolidating and formalizing their pre-existing proactive efforts, but in order to take advantage of that opportunity CSOs had to be willing and able to invest time and resources in facilitating coordination in and across sectors.<sup>42</sup>

In the absence of the described factors, however, OGP processes do not necessarily reduce coordination costs – in fact, they may increase them for some actors. The evidence in Albania, for example, indicates that soliciting broad CSO support for OGP engagement has been a challenge. The Institute for Democracy and Mediation only agreed to coordinate civil society engagement when the European Union offered funding.<sup>43</sup> In Costa Rica, Hivos (a donor and the host of the OGP Support Unit's Civil Society Engagement team) had to fill the resource coordination gap by paying consultants and CSO facilitators to broker consultations on the country's second National Action Plan. Even in these instances, other factors, including the government's administrative capacity and interests, as well as competition within civil society, can affect the potential usefulness of such efforts.

- **Sectoral and bureaucratic politics can obstruct or enable the implementation of OGP commitments and reforms. Bureaucratic buy-in and civil society influence, as well as political sensitivities and dynamics, are key aspects of successful or failed reform.**

The cases make clear that bureaucratic politics, as well as sector-specific characteristics, can obstruct efforts at reform, especially when commitments need to be implemented on the ground. Bureaucratic politics are critical for the implementation of open government changes. In the countries

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<sup>41</sup> Costa Rican researchers brought to our attention the significance of this factor by noting its absence in their case. In addition, there is research highlighting the significance of proactive strategies to build political and institutional capital to defend from likely rollbacks, and thus increase the resilience and sustainability of their efforts, including through international mechanisms. Light (2010) argues that civil society strategies rely on alliances, rather than loners, when they are successful; [Guerzovich and Giraudy \(2011\)](#) speak to the importance of being politically savvy in building political capital and acting strategically.

<sup>42</sup> We thank Paul van Massen of the Support Unit for making this point when reviewing an early draft of this paper.

<sup>43</sup> See [Rich and Moberg \(2015\)](#), for examples of how similar processes have played out in EITI.

we researched, open government champions try to leverage the financial, technical and political resources provided by OGP to engage with bureaucrats, but usually do not have sufficient support to overcome institutional resistance to change. These implementation dynamics may be external to formal aspects of OGP National Action Plans, but nevertheless affect whether and how commitments generate results – an issue that the Support Unit acknowledges as problematic.<sup>44</sup>

In Mexico, for example, sectoral differences help explain the types of open government reforms that are even feasible in the first place. Initiatives centered on transport and infrastructure were not especially costly, technically demanding or politically sensitive. They also could be achieved by the Ministry of Communications and Transport without the cooperation of other departments. OGP commitments for which the Attorney General's Office was responsible, on the other hand, faced all of these challenges. In consequence, the latter reforms were far more difficult, and the risk of failure was far higher.<sup>45</sup>

In Costa Rica, midlevel managers in the Ministry of Finance played no role in OGP, and they stalled the implementation of new open-contracting measures in order to preserve their own power. In Albania, the Philippines and Tanzania, pro-reform actors were unable to successfully leverage OGP resources to address highly complex and politically sensitive issues, including hotly contested access to information legislation and decentralization reforms.<sup>46</sup>

- **Technical capacity, funder dynamics and relationships with the government affect which civil society organizations engage with OGP, whether they do so adversarially or constructively, and whether OGP is leveraged to reinforce or reshape existing asymmetries of power.**

The missions, strategies and cultures of civil society organizations, as well as their pre-existing relationships with the government and/or funders, can affect whether and how they engage with OGP. Sometimes these characteristics appear to enable participation in OGP processes. At other times, pro-reform actors choose to disengage from OGP, or to use OGP as a means of engaging adversarially with the government. OGP resources and spaces can also reinforce existing asymmetries and competitive dynamics across and between CSOs. Box 3 maps out how and why the organizations identified in the country case studies choose to interact with the processes and spaces provided by OGP.

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<sup>44</sup> See <https://twitter.com/kfrauscher1/status/727887605111590913>.

<sup>45</sup> The challenges faced by implementing agencies are among the top obstacles to the implementation of ambitious commitments in the Americas. According to IRM staff, “when implementing agencies did not have the resources to support their work, this caused disengagement with the process” ([Miranda and Falla 2016](#)).

<sup>46</sup> Researchers in our cases focused on the politics of sector-specific problems – this sort of focus was more germane to the challenges that had to be overcome in order to implement reforms to those problems. An alternative, which seems to hew more closely to the activities of OGP Working groups to date, would be to try and drive sectoral reform through providing technical expertise and globally supported standards (see the OGP website for more information on the activities and strategies of working groups: <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/who-we-are/ogp-working-groups>). However, in our cases, researchers were unable to identify strong linkages between the OGP Working groups and the most salient challenges confronted by sectoral reformers, suggesting that future analysis of the structure and use of Working groups would be useful.



### Box 3: Civil Society Organizations and Funders: At a Glance

In **Mexico**, it seems that organizations were invited to join in the OGP process because they had a relationship with the ATI authority, further incentivized and strengthened through brokering and support from the Hewlett Foundation. These groups saw an opportunity to make proposals based on their own work agendas, without integrating or altering their traditional advocacy strategies and outlets.

In the **Philippines**, CSOs shared priorities and links with the administration, and the possibility to pursue their own organizational priorities through OGP may explain why only three out of the many civil society networks have decided to engage with OGP at all. According to one source, each of these networks “is already affiliated with groups that support the Aquino administration. The dominance of the Aquino CSO allies clearly limits the participatory nature of the Steering Committee, and of OGP in the Philippines more broadly. It also points to a potential problem of discursive homogeneity in the OGP space in the country, which may have prevented the Steering Committee from considering taking on other critical and substantive issues.”<sup>47</sup>

Researchers in **Tanzania** point to the multiple linkages between Twaweza, a sort of first among equals, and major funders of OGP. They also explain that other organizations considered the alignment of priority sectors of donors and the government and their organizational priorities before deciding to act with others, or not. As our researcher explains, the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) and Policy Research for Development (REPOA), two of the CSOs initially included on the Steering Committee, disengaged due to “their perception that OGP was not directly linked with their priorities.”

In the **Albanian** civil society context, which is characterized by problems with continuity of financing and fundamentally donor-driven agendas, mobilization around OGP fits existing patterns. CSOs develop their agenda and activities in light of available funding opportunities. Other than the Open Society Foundations, not many donors make concrete involvement in OGP a notable priority; most CSOs generally do not view OGP as a potentially useful platform.<sup>48</sup>

In **Costa Rica**, leading CSOs that engaged with OGP were motivated by the international organizations with which they were affiliated. Those that remain engaged do so thanks to the personal relationships they have with the OGP Support Unit, Hivos, or international networks (such as the Alianza, Open Data, or Transparency International). Over time, the mobilization capacity of civil society may have deteriorated as organizations competed over leadership or the prioritization of their agendas in OGP. Low levels of funding to support the process may have reinforced mistrust.

### iii) Reflections

- **Provide more flexible, politically informed assistance for pro-reform actors’ collective action.**

Supporting effective collective action, such as that envisioned in OGP’s Theory of Change, and giving reformers tools with which to rebalance power in pursuit of open government, require deep knowledge of local conditions, and highly context-specific actions.

Donors and the OGP Steering Committee may therefore want to consider piloting new approaches to supporting and learning from domestic reformers and organizations. In particular, learning how to enable pro-reform actors to effectively interact with and adapt OGP resources to coordinate in-country stakeholders should be an area of focus. This might include helping OGP’s Support Unit and Steering Committee acquire additional resources and expertise, especially new strategic and technical know-how, so that they can tailor and adapt those resources to the country level. This would enable them

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<sup>47</sup> F. Magno, interview, July 28, 2015, cited in Acheron, Aguirre and Crismo (2016).

<sup>48</sup> In fact, during the implementation of the first action plan, OSF effectively was civil society. From the Albania case: “...when the first NAP was prepared and the Ministry of Innovation and Technology consulted the CSO sector, only OSF contributed...” Plaku and Gjylameti (2016).

to step up engagement with and support to pro-reform actors, and the multi-stakeholder action that is at the heart of open government.

OGP's current National Action Plan model is intentionally flexible – however, to date, little support has been available for country-level actors hoping to better understand how to most effectively structure and engage with OGP processes in order to maximize the platform's contribution to open government reforms, new and ongoing, in diverse contexts. Instead, the standardized processes, practices and tools deployed to support National Action Plan cycles may have reduced the cross-country flexibility of OGP's model in practice. As such, expanding the extent to which political analysis based on direct engagement with country-level pro-reform actors can inform the creation and implementation of OGP commitments is a key feature of making OGP processes and spaces more resilient to the obstacles to reform in particular places at particular times.<sup>49</sup>

This means supporting pro-reform actors as they produce politically informed approaches to developing and implementing reforms, and test the assumptions, strategies and tactics behind those approaches on an ongoing basis.<sup>50</sup> This kind of political analysis, woven into the practice of OGP efforts, might be a tool with which to bridge the gaps between OGP processes and domestic pro-reform actors working on the front line at the country level.

Making this change goes beyond just allocating more resources to country-level support or providing a customized set of off-the-shelf products, for instance, a particular model of political economy analysis for ad-hoc use.<sup>51</sup> It should emphasize a pivot in the way support is conceptualized, with a focus on helping domestic actors plot, understand and act collectively in navigating the political reform landscape in their country. Promisingly, efforts to this effect are already underway, and should be taken further in the future.<sup>52</sup>

- **Tailor support to promote collective action that transforms commitments into implemented reforms at the country level.**

The Support Unit and its partners could experiment with approaches to providing support that are more closely tailored to the political context, and focus on reinforcing the ability of pro-reform actors to collectively engage with the sectoral, bureaucratic and political dynamics that shape the politics of implementing open government reforms. Accomplishing this goes beyond encouraging sector-specific reforms in OGP, and entails explicitly learning about and accounting for the ways in which all the players relevant to a given effort, including bureaucrats, government officials, politicians in the opposition and civil society groups, interact with and shape reforms, both inside and outside OGP. Attempting to obtain and work with this information can help the Support Unit and its partners more effectively develop and implement politically salient strategies for breaking down silos and facilitating

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<sup>49</sup> On this approach to political analysis beyond formal analysis see, [GPSA \(2015\)](#).

<sup>50</sup> [Hudson and Marquette \(2015a\)](#); [Hudson and Marquette \(2015b\)](#); [Hudson, Marquette, and Waldock \(2016\)](#).

<sup>51</sup> [Fisher and Marquette \(2014\)](#).

<sup>52</sup> See, for example: <https://en.ogpsummit.org/osem/conference/ogp-summit/program/proposal/21>.

commitments, as well as for coping with the obstacles and sustainability issues exemplified in the country case studies.

Points of emphasis might include whether country-level organizations already enjoy the characteristics that seem compatible with effectively leveraging OGP processes to implement reform. Where those characteristics appear to be absent, the Support Unit may need to consider how it can work with the grain to mobilize collective action. This approach, which is firmly aligned with OGP's mission, and its ongoing efforts<sup>53</sup> could also involve focusing on whether and how encouraging the emergence of those characteristics might support the co-creation and co-implementation of reforms by state and civil society actors.

These types of changes will likely entail giving more attention to the civic, political and technical capacities of pro-reform actors in specific contexts, as well as the details of intraorganizational and intrasocietal relationships, including funding flows, among which those actors operate. A shift in this direction will also mean advancing research on how those capacities can be most successfully complemented, whether their presence contributes to implementation, and whether and how OGP resources can support that process.

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<sup>53</sup> “[Co]production,” is the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not in the same organization. Footnote 30 of [GPSA \(2015\)](#). See also [Schommer and Guertzovich \(2016\)](#).

## C. Learning to navigate politics

### i) *The Pathway*

By providing spaces and resources to encourage and enable collaboration among government officials and civil society representatives, OGP encourages reformers to work together. Through participating in OGP, pro-reform actors, over time, can acquire new political experiences, develop trust and learn together how to navigate the complexities of political reform processes. Eventually, that learning can spill over into other arenas in national open government journeys, informing the implementation of meaningful reforms in and outside OGP processes. In this way, OGP aims to lay the groundwork for deep, transformative change in the culture of government in the long term.<sup>54</sup>



What can we learn from the evidence on how this pathway is playing out in practice? How in the five countries we researched is OGP supporting pro-reform actors in their work to navigate the complexities of political reform, and to apply the lessons learned in OGP to broader reform initiatives?

### ii) *Lessons from the Case Studies*

- **Confirming assessments made by the Independent Reporting Mechanism across all OGP countries, the five countries we studied are becoming better at holding formal consultations and complying with other aspects of the OGP process. There is not clear evidence, however, that improved compliance with OGP processes is leading to collaboration among pro-reform actors, trust building or improved navigational expertise.**

Recent work by the OGP's IRM indicates that, as countries go through more National Action Plan cycles, they are improving the extent to which they comply with OGP's process requirements. For instance, formal consultation procedures and country-level OGP Steering Committees are now in place in each of the five countries we studied.<sup>55</sup> From Mexico, where the initial action plan was prepared without civil society's voice but since then stakeholders have developed a complex process

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<sup>54</sup> "Delivering the OGP promise should be the name of the game for the coming years: an affective government-civil society co-creation platform capable of catalyzing meaningful, lasting reforms to the relationship between the citizen and the state and, therefore, making a definitive contribution to changing the culture of government." – from a recent OGP blog post, [Arreola \(2016\)](#); see also OGP's "[Changing the Culture of Government \(2015\)](#)" Youtube video.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, the [OGP 2015 Annual Report \(2016\)](#).

of co-creation of OGP commitments, to Albania, where consultation procedures improved marginally between the first and second National Action Plans, countries are getting better at the OGP process.

It is unclear, however, whether improvements in OGP processes are yet enabling pro-reform actors to engage in cycles of learning and collaboration that, over time, pave the way for new forms of state-society engagement and contribute to the implementation of sustainable change.

The Support Unit has expressed concern that, in some instances, the National Action Plan cycle might become more of a cosmetic exercise than a process through which to support sustainable reforms.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, some evidence in the case studies indicates that getting better at National Action Plan processes might distract from paying attention to the local nature of state-civil society engagement on open government, and from supporting processes of trust-building and learning. This means that National Action Plan processes might actually reduce the ability of pro-reform actors to navigate political challenges in some cases. In Costa Rica, for example, civil society advocates have focused so much attention on the formal particulars of the OGP process, and on competing for OGP-related resources, that they may have become less willing to coordinate their advocacy efforts – OGP may have hindered their ability to learn from and put into practice lessons from previous experiences.

In Tanzania, the presence of OGP inputs, and the ways in which country-level stakeholders interact with and leverage them, may reinforce pre-existing political dynamics that discourage collaboration and coordination between government and civil society officials. Instead of learning about how to improve their relationship, civil society reformers and government officials may be deepening and reinforcing the adversarial aspects of their interactions.

The evidence in the cases therefore raises a red flag – in at least some countries, the means of OGP may not contribute to their intended ends. Investments that focus on formal processes rather than shaping and interacting with the contextual dynamics that affect outcomes may not help pro-reform actors collaborate and engage in meaningful political learning over time.<sup>57</sup> Finding an equilibrium between standardized procedures to apply across countries, on the one hand, and supporting the development of national processes that respond to country context and encourage effective learning on how to navigate reforms, on the other, remain a key challenge for OGP.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> [Foti \(2016b\)](#).

<sup>57</sup> For another argument about the processes and pitfalls of phenomena that encourage copy-pasting institutional forms across countries even if they fail to contribute to positive change, see the original statement in [DiMaggio and Powell \(1983\)](#). For a critical take on mimicry see [Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock \(2012\)](#) and [Halloran \(2014\)](#). For a more positive take on mimicry see [Krause \(2013\)](#).

<sup>58</sup> Also see [Moberg and Rich \(2012\)](#).

- **In the countries considered, OGP seems to operate as a parallel reform arena. Government officials and civil society organizations may participate in OGP and improve their engagement with its processes and resources, but they then seem to go about their business as usual, with little evidence that they adapt their approaches or apply the lessons learned through their experience in OGP to other areas of work.**

OGP is just one of many possible avenues through which open government policymaking can take place. Pro-reform actors can and do pursue their open government goals through other, long-standing political and institutional processes. Enmeshing OGP with such processes might be a means of mobilizing reform capital, extending time horizons and generating insights about how reform happens in particular places at particular times.<sup>59</sup> This kind of approach might also mitigate the risks that OGP processes drain reform energy from other avenues that might more successfully support open government changes.<sup>60</sup> This is especially the case if, as with other multi-stakeholder initiatives, OGP is not envisioned as a permanent solution to governance challenges.<sup>61</sup>

In the Philippines, Mexico, Costa Rica and Tanzania, however, we observe that pro-reform actors engaging with OGP chose to keep OGP separate from other reform efforts. This was done so as to avoid entangling OGP processes in pre-existing political dynamics, some of which tended toward conflict. In the Philippines, for example, despite appearances to the contrary, OGP remained siloed from other reform efforts. A representative of civil society interviewed by the research team explained that

*“...there are benefits from civil society engagement with OGP, such as international contacts, access to technical expertise, and learning opportunities, but these are hardly connected to an institutional agenda.”<sup>62</sup>*

In Tanzania, access-to-information commitments made in OGP ran parallel to pre-existing dialogues on the issue, and the institutional setup of OGP, as well as the contested nature of state-civil society relations, limited the extent to which pro-reform actors thought it useful to avail themselves of OGP resources.

The two Latin American cases provide further evidence for this finding. Governments and CSOs intentionally kept OGP processes strictly separate from ongoing policy dialogues focused on structural reforms.<sup>63</sup> According to civil society reformers in Mexico:

*“We decided to keep things separate. We did not want to mix issues. OGP was not the place to discuss structural reforms...It is a bureaucratic logic...OGP*

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<sup>59</sup> Guerzovich (2010).

<sup>60</sup> This was a topic of discussion at the [2014 Wilton Park conference on MSI effectiveness \(2014\)](#).

<sup>61</sup> An observation echoed by [Moberg and Rich \(2012\)](#) with reference to EITI.

<sup>62</sup> Aceron, Aguirre and Crismo (2016), pg. 12.

<sup>63</sup> According to IRM staff, this is a broader trend in the Americas: “In some countries (with some more troubled by this than others), the scope of action plans did not correspond to national challenges. In at least 4 of the reports, the country context section referred to corruption as a critical issue not being addressed in commitments. In these countries, it was noted that the gravity of the issues overshadowed any progress made on commitments. The rest of the reports pointed to the disconnect between commitments and public policy priorities in the country” [Miranda and Falla \(2016\)](#).

*comes and tells you how to do your action plan and we cannot reduce structural reforms to short-term commitments.*<sup>64</sup>

In Costa Rica, our researchers found that two different political administrations and civil society organizations

*“Have used OGP as a parallel process to help them achieve pre-existing aims, sometimes as a project cycle related to action plans rather than as a platform to leverage old and much needed structural reforms.”*<sup>65</sup>

Albania is perhaps the lone exception to the OGP parallelism seen in the other countries – there, OGP is a small complementary piece of the government’s plan for demonstrating its compliance with European Union norms, and for making clear the ways in which it is making progress toward EU accession. The unique dynamics of the accession process, and the mandates to which Albania is subject as a result, are perhaps the best explanation for Albania’s exceptionalism in this regard.

In the countries we researched, pro-reform actors, both individuals and organizations, have participated in OGP processes and then otherwise gone about their business as usual, without adapting their approaches to reform efforts that are not directly linked to OGP.<sup>66</sup> The fact that OGP is often set up and implemented as a parallel process appears to discourage the use of what is learned in one forum in others, meaning that OGP inputs are not salient to other reform efforts.

The local priority issues researched in each case study reinforce this lesson – by and large, pro-reform actors working on diverse issues, from access-to-information legislation to participatory budgeting to decentralization reforms, did not apply lessons learned from OGP engagement in their work on these issues. Local political and sectoral dynamics were far more influential in shaping the ways that different stakeholders interacted in these reform arenas. OGP resources may have helped provide lessons that enabled some procedural behaviors among a few stakeholders that would not have emerged absent engagement with OGP, but these lessons were of limited value in areas of work beyond OGP.

Given that OGP has been in operation for only a few short years, it is too soon to say that the experience, relationships and strategies developed by actors engaging in OGP processes will not eventually spill over into other areas of work, but the current evidence does suggest that this is an issue that merits further consideration.

- **There is a risk that learning to comply with the short-term time cycles of National Action plans may distract attention from the need for deeper, long-term reform by incentivizing countries to focus on relatively minor commitments that can be met within a couple of years, rather than addressing deeper systemic challenges.**

The OGP model encourages countries to develop National Action Plans that include specific, measurable, actionable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) commitments. They are supposed to

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<sup>64</sup> See Gerson and Morales (2016), pg.12.

<sup>65</sup> Arias, et al. (2016), pg. 20.

<sup>66</sup> On the broader phenomenon, see [Guerzovich, Poli, and Philips \(2014\)](#).



implement those commitments over two years, learn from their experiences and use that learning to inform the next set of commitments. IRM reports play a key role in this process. The evidence in the cases reveals that OGP participants in the five countries have learned from IRM reports and become better at developing SMART commitments. For example, after the first IRM report in Tanzania criticized the first National Action Plan for having a broad range of 25 relatively general commitments, the second action plan was narrowed to focus on five, SMARTer commitments.

The cases indicate, however, that emphasizing the SMART approach has both pros and cons. Participants in National Action Plan cycles appear to have become increasingly concerned with making commitments that can be feasibly achieved and measured in two years. Negotiations and coordination among pro-reform actors therefore tend to focus on low-hanging fruit. This means that potentially transformative commitments are often accorded lower priority. As a result, stakeholders' expectations about what can be achieved in two-year cycles are less ambitious.<sup>67</sup>

The OGP Theory of Change encourages countries to link one National Action Plan cycle to the next, which should in theory help pro-reform actors engaging with OGP processes to acquire politically informed lessons about how to achieve reforms over time. In practice, however, the experiences of the five countries we studied do not indicate that this kind of learning is occurring. There do not appear to be clear linkages from commitments in one plan to another in these five countries, and political learning over time does not appear to take place. The SMART approach and the short-termism of National Action Plan cycles do not appear to support the political learning that is integral to deep open government reforms. Reformers interviewed in the Mexico case study put it this way:

*"I do not care about your process or whatever you learn from it. But this has to be done every two years, and every two years you need to renew commitments."<sup>68</sup>*

### iii) Reflections

- **Provide support for learning about the political as well as the technical.**

The knowledge and learning resources and materials currently produced by the Support Unit, including peer learning, direct country support and support for civil society, typically emphasize augmenting technical capacity. These resources, though useful, are not specifically designed to equip country-level actors to navigate and shape the political landscape. The Support Unit and its partners should give greater emphasis to providing tools and resources — including opportunities for cross-country learning and multi-stakeholder collaboration — that enable country-level actors to more effectively reflect on, share experiences about and improve their approaches to navigating the politics of reform.

Peer exchanges, guides, events, research and other products developed by the Support Unit and its partners should move beyond a focus on the OGP process – i.e., whether a commitment was implemented, whether a consultation was carried out, etc.—and emphasize understanding whether, why and how reform outcomes are achieved by OGP participants working in specific contexts. Pro-

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<sup>67</sup> Also see [Guillan and Taxell \(2015\)](#), for evidence of how similar lessons can be drawn from Croatia's OGP experience.

<sup>68</sup> Gerson and Nieto (2016), pg. 11.



reform actors should be encouraged (and supported in their efforts) to reflect on their reform experiences, share their reflections across countries, and engage with and adapt the approaches deployed elsewhere as they attempt to try, learn and adapt their way toward more open governance in their contexts.

Technical augmentation and procedural guidance are an important part of the Support Unit's work, but if OGP is to really deliver on its long-term vision, helping pro-reform actors learn to navigate the politics and dynamics of reform processes will be crucial.

Indeed, recent work by the Support Unit indicates that a shift in this direction may already be occurring. Research by the IRM team<sup>69</sup>, as well as lessons from others in the field, are a good first step for moving OGP's support for in-country political learning to the next level.<sup>70</sup>

In Box 3 we offer a few ideas for tailoring learning approaches to the OGP context. These ideas, and others, may help provide some options for OGP in the future.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> A recent blog post by the IRM team reflecting on the gap between ambitious OGP commitments and on the ground implementation in Africa is a signal that it is possible and desirable to adjust course, opening up a conversation that goes beyond formal commitments, efforts at creating buzz, and putting on the table issues such as time horizons and political relations. [Baesens and Foti \(2016\)](#).

<sup>70</sup> "We have known for a while that 'politics matters.' What makes OGP special is that OGP's approach is built on the idea that politics matters and that we need to use politics — both national and international — to get the organized public, elected officials, and civil servants to collaborate. In most OGP countries in Africa, that will mean making sometimes difficult, but entirely necessary decisions about who should be in charge of implementation, how to bring other agencies and sectors on board, and how to collaborate with the loyal (and sometimes not-so-loyal) opposition." [Baesens and Foti \(2016\)](#).

<sup>71</sup> See e.g. [World Bank \(2016\)](#). M. Poli and F. Guertzovich (2016). The Global Partnership for Social Accountability's Capacity Building Work. Portfolio Review. The Global Partnership for Social Accountability. Unpublished working draft.

### Box 3: Ideas for Supporting Political Learning in Practice

- Nurturing an open space at the global level for frank discussion of how things are working or not at the country level. Global summits, regional meetings, peer learning exchanges and country-level OGP processes all provide opportunities for reflecting on obstacles to change, risks and uncertainty, and whether and how pro-reform actors have the capacities, resources and incentives to pursue change. Such fora can also be home to robust discussions of when, whether and how OGP is delivering on its aims, globally and at the country level, and a means for turning challenges and mistakes made into actionable, realistic ways forward for learning about how to more effectively advance change on the ground.<sup>72</sup> Attempts at creating these kinds of spaces are already underway, as noted by the OGP Support Unit: “Now is the time to look back at the hundreds of open government reforms made via OGP in 2011 and 2012 and improve our understanding of whether they actually made a difference.”<sup>73</sup>
- In the broader field of open government, external critical analysis seems to nurture the frank discussion outlined above.<sup>74</sup> During the research for this project, local researchers took on this sort of role, and in some cases, helped stakeholders involved with the OGP process reflect on and think critically about OGP in their countries. Global Integrity has undertaken similar work in workshops at recent Global Summits and Regional Meetings.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, these sorts of activities may help promote adaptation and experimentation, and if performed on a regular basis, they could yield dividends.
- Our research has uncovered a vast amount of tacit and experiential knowledge on how pro-reform stakeholders are leveraging OGP, or not, and for what purposes, at the country level. More attention to showcasing this kind of knowledge, and on both successes and failures, could be a useful tactic for inspiring learning and for enabling adaptation in countries. Could OGP capture, disseminate, celebrate and, ultimately, legitimize national multi-stakeholder discussions (that should be happening) about what they tried, learned and adapted together?<sup>76</sup>
- In our in-country research, we found that OGP’s communication strategy, which often highlights Global Summits, awards, best practices and aspects of the OGP process, may make some pro-reform stakeholders think that OGP as an initiative is about process more than outcomes. Given this, it is important that the Support Unit and Steering Committee further enhance their efforts to incentivize and make visible other aspects of open government journeys on the ground. The team of the IRM, including in-country researchers, IRM reports and the framing of discussions around them in country and globally could also play a role in this regard.
- Investing more in learning from and about the approaches to reform taken in one context, and adapting those approaches to the political, institutional, historical, cultural and organizational dynamics of another context – this includes a diversity of topics, from methods of engaging civil society in National Action Plan processes to the design of participatory budgeting reforms, and more — are key to OGP’s attempts to support learning at the country level. This kind of analysis — which may need support from OGP, but may be best housed elsewhere — should permeate all the different ways in which OGP engages with countries: from the Steering Committee to government and civil society support, to researchers in the IRM.
- Finally, the learning that takes place due to the approaches set forth above needs to inform OGP’s global strategies and processes, helping the initiative and its supporters develop and implement realistic and strategic interventions at the country and global levels. Learning about how OGP’s global principles are playing out in practice will help the initiative strengthen the linkages between the global norms it promotes and the way those norms are put into practice at the national level.

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<sup>72</sup> [Guerzovich and Poli \(2014\)](#).

<sup>73</sup> [Powell \(2015\)](#).

<sup>74</sup> [Ross \(2015\)](#). [Halloran \(2015a\)](#).

<sup>75</sup> [Guerzovich and Moses \(2015\)](#); [Moses \(2016\)](#).

<sup>76</sup> For an effort in this direction, see e.g., [Bouhamidi, et al. \(2016\)](#).

- **Strengthen OGP’s learning function.**

The Support Unit and Steering Committee should look to strengthen OGP’s organizational learning, taking advantage of the midterm evaluation planned for 2016 to thoroughly review OGP’s Theory of Change against emerging evidence of how OGP principles are playing out in practice. This should include careful assessment of whether OGP is generating the competitive dynamics required for a “race to the top.” The Support Unit and Steering Committee should also put in place stronger processes for continuous learning, reflection and adaptation to enable course corrections and progressive improvements, which will help to maximize the impact and effectiveness of OGP in achieving its ambitious aim to make government more responsive in the design of public policies and the delivery of services over the next five years.<sup>77</sup>

This approach would involve careful monitoring of how OGP is playing out, in practice, in specific countries, as well as potentially moving toward adopting country-specific Theories of Change for OGP engagements. It will also be important to manage against the risk that OGP procedures may, in some contexts, undermine the political processes that lead to effective reforms. Investing in work that attempts to adapt and ground OGP in particular contexts and to generate functional open government outcomes, rather than simply prescribing institutional processes, may be useful in this regard.

Similarly, as evidence continues to emerge about the effects of OGP and other multi-stakeholder initiatives, both at the country and global levels, it will be important to consider expectations about what OGP can achieve, and how it can most effectively do so. Examination of the OGP Theory of Change and of the ways in which the Support Unit and the Steering Committee attempt to put that theory into action should occur on a regular basis. Using evidence to learn, adapt, and try again can help OGP and its supporters provide open government reformers with the leverage they need to drive progress on reforms at the country and global levels.

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<sup>77</sup> “... Over the next five years, the success of OGP will be measured not on volume, but on whether it makes a transformational impact in the lives of citizens.” – Sanjay Pradhan, quoted in this [OGP Blog post \(2016\)](#).

## IV. Conclusion

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To date, OGP has achieved impressive growth and attracted considerable international acclaim. The challenge in the coming years is to make sure that OGP is providing pro-reform actors with the leverage and resources they need to achieve concrete, sustainable and deep open government reforms. The evidence from our detailed exploration of the OGP experiences of Albania, Costa Rica, Mexico, the Philippines and Tanzania indicates that, currently, the OGP Theory of Change and the allocation of OGP resources may be imbalanced toward securing the support of high level political leaders at the expense of investments meant to encourage the emergence of collective action to rebalance power, as well as learning to navigate the political dynamics of governance reform.

This imbalance matters. In the countries we researched, the processes, spaces and resources provided by OGP seldom provide pro-reform actors with the leverage they need to drive open government reform in their contexts. Investments in events and awards do not consistently, in the time period covered in our cases, open up space for midlevel government reformers and civil society activists to pursue and implement meaningful open government reforms. The National Action Plan cycle, and the processes associated with it, may sometimes reinforce the political dynamics that make change difficult or distract from other avenues of reform that might be more promising. The resources made available to pro-reform actors, including peer learning exchanges, country support and more, often focus on the provision of technical capacity, which can be very useful, but do little to help open government champions reflect on, learn from and adapt to their shared experiences in and across specific political contexts. Indeed, the lessons that emerge from the five country case studies suggest that if OGP is to deliver on its promise to foster transformative reform, changes may be necessary.

Our research and analysis reviewed three pathways of change through which OGP could plausibly contribute to open government reform: high level political leadership, collective action to rebalance power, and learning to navigate politics. We discussed each of these pathways separately in order to highlight how in the countries we researched, due to the scarcity of resources, investing in one pathway entailed trade-offs. However, it is important to note that these pathways do not exist in isolation. A lack of collective action, for example, can undermine the sustainability and effectiveness of investments in securing commitments from high level political leaders, and vice versa. At the same time, pro-reform actors cannot learn to navigate politics without the trust, relationships and interaction that underpin collective action. If OGP is to maximize the leverage it is able to provide pro-reform actors at the country level, therefore, learning about these interaction effects, as well as the individual tools and processes by which to support each pathway in different contexts, will be crucial.

By building on the findings and insights from our case studies about whether and how open government principles are being translated into open government practice, and by strengthening its learning functions, OGP could further sharpen its effectiveness and impact. At the heart of this would be a more explicit focus on the ways in which OGP can support the domestic champions of governance reform as they try, learn and adapt their way toward solutions that work in the complex political environments in which they operate: in short, putting adaptive learning, with a strong political emphasis, at the center of the open governance agenda.

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