

3 THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP AS AN INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTION

To better understand the Open Government Partnership, in this chapter, we place it in the context of both other transnational multistakeholder initiatives and international institutions more broadly. International institutions are “sets of rules meant to govern international behavior” (Simmons & Martin, 2002, 328). These include formal intergovernmental organizations with international legal status, such as United Nations bodies, international financial institutions, and treaty organizations in domains such as trade, public health, the environment, human rights, and anticorruption. But even informal governance arrangements without formal legal status can be considered international institutions when they are based on sustained mutual understandings and practices that shape the behaviors of states and other actors and endure over time, such as international regimes (Haggard & Simmons, 1987) or decentralized policy coordination and legal harmonization on the basis of mutual policy changes (Drezner, 2007).

Transnational multistakeholder initiatives are a particular form of international institution, characterized primarily by their more diverse membership but often also with more flexible and/or informal rules. Raymond and DeNardis (2015, 573) define multistakeholderism as “as two or more classes of actors engaged in a common governance enterprise concerning issues they regard as public in nature and characterized by polyarchic authority relations constituted by procedural rules.”¹ Brockmyer and Fox (2015, 11) more specifically define transnational multistakeholder initiatives as “voluntary partnerships between governments, civil society, and the private sector.”

Multistakeholder initiatives offer important contrasts with more traditional international institutions like intergovernmental organizations. The latter tend to be state-centric, painstakingly negotiated through formal treaties, and grounded in international law. But multistakeholder initiatives, as their name implies, incorporate stakeholders of multiple types—usually including some combination of states, firms, civil society groups, local governments, private foundations, or other international bodies. Multistakeholder initiatives also often emerge more quickly and flexibly than do traditional intergovernmental organizations. As such, the rise of transnational multistakeholder initiatives in global governance is often seen as complementing and filling gaps left by more traditional forms of international institutions (e.g., Mueller, 2010; Duncan, 2015; Andonova, Hale, & Roger, 2017; Kahler, 2018; Reinsberg & Westerwinter, 2021), particularly through their abilities to overcome some of the traditional constraints, limitations, and conflicts of “hard law” institutions (Abbott & Snidal, 2000).

MULTISTAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Multistakeholder initiatives have thrived across many different domains, reflecting a general trend toward networks and away from a strict market/hierarchy distinction in global governance. Prominent examples seek to set private standards or otherwise govern the practices of firms in contested areas such as labor, human rights, and the environment, including the Fair Labor Association, the Forest Stewardship Council, the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights, the United Nations Global Compact, and the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. Other multistakeholder initiatives seek to coordinate public and private efforts toward complex global challenges, such as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, the Global Partnership for Education, or the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Still, others aim to govern policy areas that are fundamentally global and multisectoral, such as the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in the domain of natural resources governance.

In many ways, the Open Government Partnership clearly resembles these other transnational multistakeholder initiatives. Its governance structure features states and civil society representatives with formal parity in their representation and authority on the Steering Committee, and other international bodies and donor organizations also play more informal stakeholder roles. Its rules are not legalized in the form of international treaty agreements, pose relatively flexible obligations, and have little direct enforcement. And like most multistakeholder initiatives, the origins of the Open Government Partnership stand in stark contrast to the slow, formalized, treaty-centric formation of most traditional intergovernmental organizations.

However, the Open Government Partnership is also distinct from many other transnational multistakeholder initiatives in that it does *not* count firms among its formal members or governing body participants. Only states (and, more recently, local governments) are direct members of the Open Government Partnership. Further, as Brockmyer and Fox (2015) discuss, the Open Government Partnership is one of several multistakeholder initiatives focusing specifically on public sector reform itself, alongside others such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and Open Contracting Partnership.

This chapter places the origins and design of the Open Government Partnership in the context of key concepts in the study of these features of international institutions overall—both traditional and multistakeholder. The guiding motivation of this chapter is to assess which set of dynamics the Open Government Partnership most exemplifies—the old politics of traditional intergovernmental organizations or the new flexible and entrepreneurial models of transnational multistakeholder initiatives. After first reviewing the broader literature in brief, this chapter tells the Open Government Partnership’s origin story in detail, from its beginnings as an idea among United States White House staff in 2010 to its launch alongside the United Nations General Assembly in September 2011. Finally, this chapter then presents an overview of the structure and functions of the Open Government Partnership as of roughly 2019 to provide the background for the rest of the book’s empirical evidence.

The Creation and Design of International Institutions

Why are institutions created in the first place, and what shapes their design? In this section, we summarize three different theoretical approaches to these questions, emphasizing alternately functional explanations, the agency of policy entrepreneurs, or power and conflict. This draws on past research in international relations but with a particular emphasis on the implications for multistakeholder initiatives like the Open Government Partnership. This focus on institutional design is crucial for later understanding of how different design features enable or constrain different pathways of impact on governance reform.

First, functionalist accounts of creation and design emphasize the specific problems to be solved and governance tasks to be accomplished. That is, they explain the creation and design of institutions by their functions. These may be the direct issues to be governed or second-order problems, such as collective action problems, transaction costs, and information asymmetries that otherwise impede effective governance (e.g., Keohane, 1984). Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal (2001) argue that the design features of international institutions—namely, their membership rules, issue scope, centralization, control rules, and flexibility—are rational responses to the structures of the problems they aim to address, the number of actors involved, and uncertainty about behavior. Reinsberg and Westerwinter (2021) explicitly relate these factors to multistakeholder initiatives, suggesting that particularly complex global issues make their more flexible institutional designs more attractive. Similarly, Abbott and Snidal (2000) emphasize how key institutional design choices are rational responses to different problem structures, issue types, and levels of uncertainty over future changes, as well as to differing preferences, which we discuss subsequently.

More recent research, often applied specifically to multistakeholder initiatives and other less formal international institutions, takes a more meta-level or “ecological” functionalist view emphasizing how existing arrays of institutions relate to one another and the potential resulting overlaps or gaps. Thus Abbott, Green, and Keohane’s (2016) organizational ecology approach suggests that new institutional forms will emerge in “niches” of low organizational density. Green (2014) sees forms of private authority by

nonstate actors as emerging where powerful states cannot agree on a course of action and thus leave an absence of governance. Similarly, Gehring and Faude (2014) emphasize divisions of labor across institutions; Andonova, Hale, and Roger (2017) emphasize complementarities; and Reinsberg and Westerwinter (2021) argue that new institutions will avoid duplicating tasks of existing ones. These perspectives suggest another functional motivation for multistakeholder initiatives as fulfilling certain governance functions by *filling gaps* in existing global governance regimes.

A second approach instead emphasizes the agency of key governance entrepreneurs, who strategically seek to create and design new institutions in order to achieve their policy goals. Many scholars have emphasized transnational activists and civil society groups as norm entrepreneurs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998) or policy entrepreneurs (Stone, 2019). But Andonova (2017) emphasizes the key role played by *existing* intergovernmental organizations—such as the World Bank or United Nations bodies—as entrepreneurs leading the establishment of new institutional forms like multistakeholder initiatives. And similarly, Abbott and Snidal (2010, 317) see transnational governance initiatives as emerging primarily through “orchestration” by intergovernmental organizations themselves.

Third, other perspectives place greater emphasis on the roles of politics, power, and conflict in the creation and design of international institutions. Longstanding realist critiques expect international institutions to accomplish nothing that would not have happened anyway and suggest that they primarily serve the interests of powerful states. Notably, however, the early realist prediction that international institutions cannot outlive the global structural circumstances of their creation already does not seem to apply to the Open Government Partnership, given that it endured and outlasted the waning of US leadership and interest after 2016. Others suggest that powerful states prefer more informal governance forms that place fewer constraints on their behind-the-scenes influence (Stone, 2013; Vabulas & Snidal, 2013).

In terms of the design of institutions, many more conflict-oriented perspectives emphasize the preferences and bargaining power of key actors, with institutional design decisions reflecting necessary compromises among the interests of different stakeholders competing for influence. For Abbott and

Snidal (2000), states tend to resist “hard law” characteristics of precision, obligation, and delegation and, in particular, are concerned about the “sovereignty costs” of institutions—the loss of domestic authority over decision making. Other scholars posit a tradeoff between stringency and membership in the design of institutions (Prakash & Potoski, 2007; Berliner & Prakash, 2012; Bernauer et al., 2013). As the depth of institutions increases—incorporating stronger monitoring and enforcement provisions—fewer members will wish to join, resulting in less breadth.

For multistakeholder initiatives, these conflicts can play out on multiple levels. The first is between civil society actors—whose participation is essential for the legitimacy and expertise that they bring—and the participating states or firms who agree to undertake some new or different action. Civil society generally prefers greater precision, obligation, delegation, and more stringent monitoring and enforcement provisions. Participating states or firms generally prefer weaker such rules so that they can enjoy the benefits of membership while bearing less in the way of adjustment and/or sovereignty costs. But there can also be contention *among* different types of stakeholders. Some states (or, in other contexts, perhaps even some firms) may be genuine reformers for either principled and/or internal reasons and thus prefer more stringent design features than other states. Different stakeholders may vary in their preferences along the depth-breadth frontier. Some, even in civil society, may prefer an institutional design featuring weaker rules in exchange for the potential benefits of larger membership. Berliner and Prakash (2012) document these types of tensions at play in the design and ultimate membership of the United Nations Global Compact, with states and intergovernmental organizations largely championing the multistakeholder initiative for its breadth of membership, while civil society networks were much more critical of its weak monitoring and enforcement rules.

We highlight several different theoretical perspectives—not necessarily mutually exclusive—that are potentially relevant to the creation and design of multistakeholder initiatives. Functionalist approaches see multistakeholder initiatives as responses to complex global problems, gaps in global governance, and limitations of traditional institutional models. Agency-based approaches emphasize entrepreneurship and orchestration by key

actors, particularly nonstate actors and intergovernmental organizations. Conflict-based approaches emphasize the institutional design as a matter of bargaining among different sets of actors—often but not always states and civil society—with different preferences over stringency of rules and breadth of membership.

The Membership of International Institutions and Multistakeholder Initiatives

Why do potential members *join* international institutions? In the first place, they balance expected future costs and benefits. As noted already, these costs include both the adjustment costs of any required changes in policy and/or behavior and the sovereignty costs of lost authority over decision making. The benefits most straightforwardly include the expected value of the governance tasks to be accomplished or the international cooperation to be institutionalized. Such benefits are most visible in economic domains such as trade policy or regulatory coordination.

But many international institutions are concerned with not only economic policies but also states' internal practices, particularly in terms of human rights, democracy, and corruption. In these cases, scholars have turned to broader conceptions of the potential benefits that international institutions can offer. Many liberal perspectives, for example, emphasize domestic political goals of membership in international institutions, such as locking in democracy or good governance (e.g., Moravcsik, 2000) or satisfying key interest groups (e.g., Simmons, 2009). Institutionalist perspectives emphasize how membership can make commitments more credible to external audiences (e.g., Simmons, 2000; Simmons & Danner, 2010). More constructivist approaches emphasize less material external dynamics, including the symbolic force of global norms, the pursuit of international legitimacy, or even pure isomorphic pressure to imitate others (e.g., Meyer et al., 1997; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wotipka & Tsutsui, 2008).

Similar approaches are relevant for membership in transnational multistakeholder initiatives. Some members—whether states or firms—may be sincere reformers who value the explicit goals of the initiative. Others may be responding more to external normative or isomorphic pressures. Still

others may be attracted by a range of benefits—such as symbolic legitimacy, a reputation for reform (David-Barrett & Okamura, 2016), or even potential direct material benefits like increased investment or aid. Of course, in some cases, members may calculate that they can enjoy such benefits of membership without actually making any costly adjustments (e.g., Berliner & Prakash, 2012, 2014, 2015). A final possibility, however—and one that emerges as particularly relevant in the evidence that follows—is that at least some members have actually *miscalculated*, anticipating that membership requires less adjustment than is actually the case. This is a similar dynamic to what Schnell (2018) documents in the case of domestic transparency and anticorruption reforms in Romania.

The Impacts of International Institutions and Multistakeholder Initiatives

Turning to the *effects* of international institutions, a long literature in international relations—only briefly summarized here—debates what effects they have and how. Some scholars see the most important roles of institutions in their abilities to provide information, set standards, reduce transaction costs of collective action, and contribute to dispute resolution, while others see their most important roles as spreading and institutionalizing global norms and spurring processes of social learning. For Abbott and Snidal (2010), international institutions can also “orchestrate” by mobilizing and coordinating actions by other public, private, and international actors.

But a more specific question is of utmost importance for the many membership-based institutions that incorporate formal or informal rules and standards with which members ought to comply: How and why do states comply—or not—with these commitments? For those institutions—including many transnational multistakeholder initiatives—whose governance goals require behavioral and/or policy change by members, this compliance question is paramount. Chapter 1 summarized some of the key existing approaches to this question, particularly as applied to traditional international institutions. Importantly, many of these perspectives suggest that only stringent monitoring and enforcement can ensure member compliance, otherwise many members instrumentally seek only window-dressing

membership. But other perspectives see broader opportunities for compliance through learning, socialization, or capacity-building.

These questions are clearly relevant to the Open Government Partnership, given its limited monitoring and enforcement provisions. In the case of another transnational multistakeholder initiative—though with firms rather than states as the key members—Berliner and Prakash (2015) reach pessimistic conclusions on compliance with the United Nations Global Compact. They find that while members do undertake more superficial corporate social responsibility efforts than nonmembers, members actually fare *worse* in terms of more costly, meaningful adjustments.

We return to this debate in chapter 4, where we advocate looking beyond compliance alone and instead emphasize the potential for *indirect* rather than *direct* pathways of change.

THE ORIGIN STORY

Motivations and Methodology

In telling the Open Government Partnership's origin story, we sought to go beyond existing public accounts through in-depth reviews of contemporaneous documents and accounts and interviews with several participants. This approach enables us to pay close attention to the questions discussed in the previous section. In particular, we sought to uncover key moments of uncertainty or contention that may have shaped the trajectory of the Open Government Partnership's creation and design and the goals, preferences, and contributions of the different actors involved. Importantly, it is the resulting institutional design that shapes our subsequent discussion of the potential pathways of impact for membership in the Open Government Partnership.

We drew on an array of different sources in the research for this section. First, we conducted an in-depth review of contemporaneous coverage and discussion of events as they unfolded, particularly emphasizing reporting and commentaries by participants and observers. The authors themselves also followed these developments contemporaneously beginning in 2011, both via social media and email lists as well as through many in-person discussions

and attendance at some events. Second, we drew on several published retrospectives, including a 2013 special issue of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Third, we drew on official government and Open Government Partnership documents themselves. Fourth, we conducted interviews with several participants across multiple sectors and in multiple countries.

Interviews included multiple current and former government officials, representatives of different Open Government Partnership secretariat functions, and representatives of nongovernmental entities, whether civil society groups—from several different countries—or foundations. Interviews were conducted in 2018 and 2019. All interviewees were assured that they would only be identified by sector and/or country without naming individuals or identifying specific organizations. As such, we attribute quotes below only to the relevant sector and, in some cases, country. We reference these as GO for current or former government officials and NGO for nongovernmental organization representatives, whether civil society or foundation.

Setting the Stage

The idea for what became the Open Government Partnership first emerged in the Obama administration's National Security Council, where Samantha Power—well known for her work and writing on human rights—was senior director for multilateral affairs and human rights, and Jeremy Weinstein—taking leave from his academic position at Stanford University—was director for development and democracy.

Two main background developments set the stage for this idea—the emergence of the open government movement and growing dissatisfaction with existing models of international cooperation and governance promotion.

First was the emergence of the open government movement as a specific priority of the Obama administration, an emerging new model of public sector reform (the focus of chapter 2), and as a frame to potentially link multiple existing reform agendas. The Obama administration had famously issued an Open Government Directive—emphasizing transparency, participation, and collaboration in government—on its first day in office. This established open government as a major priority for the administration and something that could increasingly be linked to global reform efforts.

Further, although many of the constituent themes of open government—such as transparency, participation, and technology in government—had long featured in both domestic and global advocacy, the years leading up to 2010 saw increasing tendencies to link their distinct issue areas, policy proposals, and advocacy networks under the common heading of “open government.” Officials saw this, too, as an opportunity and a chance to further catalyze these linkages across issue silos. A former government official said:

We had a whole emerging kind of intellectual and experimental and experiential movement around transparency and accountability reforms that had not been knitted together in any concrete way. So, you had your FOIA people, you had your participatory budgeting people, you had your technology and citizen engagement people, civic tech. You had traditional human rights and civil liberties kinds of folks. You had your natural resource transparency community. . . . There was a whole set of organizations pushing around ideas related to governance reform . . . that could be potentially knitted together and harnessed. (Interview, GO)

The second background development was a growing fatigue with existing models—of international cooperation, good governance efforts, and democracy promotion—and a search for new possibilities. Traditional international institutions were seen as too slow and bureaucratic. Traditional international treaties were seen as leading to lowest-common-denominator standards in order to gain near-universal ratification and increasingly difficult to gain political support domestically. Traditional aid conditionality and democracy promotion were often seen as top-down Western impositions lacking in domestic buy-in and often leading to only superficial reforms. On the other hand, new ideas about multistakeholder cooperation, learning networks, soft power, and international norms all offered the potential for new approaches.

One past government official said:

We were totally informed by the experience of all the prior UN kinds of efforts where governmental peer review is meant to drive progress, but that’s a process that yields nothing, right? Or relatively little. And so . . . the idea was that change is going to come from inside the country. (Interview, GO)

Another noted:

A lot of democracy programming tends to be funding for projects. Some of which is quite good. There's less focus sometimes on how do you really get to the governance that gives you the institutional foundation that over time can yield the benefits. So, you can train election observers, but how do you get the style of governance? . . . So, I think a lot of it was, "How are we going to approach democracy in a developmental fashion as opposed to in a project?" (Interview, GO)

In 2013 in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Jeremy Weinstein discusses these issues at length and presents them as having been key motivations for the creation of the Open Government Partnership. He notes a tradeoff between the "legitimacy and authority" of international institutions with "broad or near-universal membership" with the fact that "to secure agreement among a diverse set of countries, significant compromise is typically required." He also notes frequent critiques of international institutions as "opaque, highly bureaucratic, and resistant to change" (Weinstein, 2013, 3).

Weinstein also hails the potential of new forms of multilateral cooperation, which he calls "mixed coalitions," drawing on examples like the Global Fund Against AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria and the International Campaign to End Landmines. He praises such models for their successes as "tackling issues that are not being adequately addressed by existing institutions" and for their abilities to "rely on voluntary and collaborative means of generating action, prioritizing meaningful actions over binding commitments that are routinely ignored," and to "incorporate the expertise and active participation of nongovernmental players" (Weinstein, 2013, 5).

"Get That Paragraph"

On the basis of these background developments, officials in the National Security Council began putting together an idea for some form of global, multistakeholder effort focused on open government and gauging potential interest from others. These included many of the foundations involved in supporting advocacy work in open government and related issue areas around the world, several of which had recently joined with government aid agencies to form a donor collaborative called the Transparency and

Accountability Initiative. According to a 2011 retrospective by Nathaniel Heller, then of the US-based NGO Global Integrity, “At this point, no international multilateral initiative as such was envisioned—the idea was to convene a brainstorming discussion between a small group of leading open government practitioners from government and civil society to discuss possibilities for collective action, whether in the form of a declaration, experience sharing, and/or a more formal initiative” (Global Integrity, 2011).

A former government official noted that:

[We] then began to convene internally, with folks from the White House, both on the domestic side and the international side, around what was a proposal that would include a kind of compact of some form, a set of principles, a process for generating kind of national commitments and then some accountability mechanism. And the idea was that we would . . . participate as well, and make our own commitments. Which, of course, is quite different than most of the things that came before. . . . So, what did we think that Obama could uniquely do? Well, he could get any head of state that he wanted around the table. (Interview, GO)

Officials in the National Security Council sought to use a speech by President Obama at the September 2010 UN General Assembly meeting as a starting point by ensuring that the speech included a specific emphasis on open government and issued a challenge to other governments to return to the topic in a year’s time.

A foundation representative stated that:

[In] the summer of 2010, we heard sort of whispers around something that Jeremy Weinstein and Samantha Power, then at the National Security Council, were up to. And I hadn’t realized it, but they were really busy trying to get that paragraph in President Obama’s speech at the General Assembly. . . . Jeremy was saying, “Look we’re really trying to get this through, I really don’t know what shape it will look like.” (Interview, NGO)

As stated by a former government official:

What we did was use the UN General Assembly speech, and that paragraph in the UN General Assembly speech, to give us the political imprimatur that we needed to drive a process and the establishment of this partnership. And so, we carefully constructed that paragraph . . . that said, “Next year I want to gather.” And that

was a totally intentional effort, because we knew one of the hardest things to do in government is get the President's time. And so, we knew that if we could build that into the speech, to pre-commit him to a meeting the next year, that that would solve our bureaucratic problems internally, but also enable us to go to any head of state that we wanted with a clear signal of what we were trying to do. So, that paragraph sort of became the structure for engagement. (Interview, GO)

The speech itself offered the first public hint of the idea that would later grow into the Open Government Partnership. In President Obama's speech to the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2010, he challenged other countries to return the next year with specific commitments in hand:

And when we gather back here next year, we should bring specific commitments to promote transparency; to fight corruption; to energize civic engagement; to leverage new technologies so that we strengthen the foundations of freedom in our own countries, while living up to the ideals that can light the world. (White House, 2010b)

Following this speech, the White House issued a fact sheet on "U.S. Support for Open Government," detailing its own efforts to make government more transparent, participatory, and collaborative, reviewing some existing international efforts, and finally returning to emphasize the reference from the speech. The document reiterated that "President Obama challenged those in attendance to build on this progress" and "invited Leaders to join him next year in making specific commitments to promote transparency, fight corruption, energize civic engagement, and leverage new technologies to strengthen the foundations of open government" (White House, 2010a).

For the officials in the National Security Council attempting to create some kind of global initiative on open government, this speech gave them a deadline of one year—until the 2011 UN General Assembly meeting—to craft *something* that might realize this vision.

The Path to the White House

During the fall of 2010, US government representatives, along with members of the Transparency and Accountability Initiative, began approaching key advocates and policymakers around the world to assess interest in

moving forward. These efforts would ultimately result in a January 2011 brainstorming meeting held in Washington, DC, the attendees of which largely became the founding members and Steering Committee of the Open Government Partnership.

At a key meeting in October 2010, the US government officials in the National Security Council first recruited the support of the donor collaborative Transparency and Accountability Initiative, who were able to provide staff support, resources, and a global network of civil society organizations. According to one foundation representative:

Immediately after [Obama's September 2010 UN speech], Jeremy [Weinstein] and Samantha [Power] contacted us, and they were keen to help us help them think it through. . . . In the sense of, "How can we bring together the best of governments . . . with the best of what philanthropy and civil society has to bring?" So, for example, in the early days, Jeremy was very much saying, "Look, we can use the bully pulpit of the White House, we can see if we can get influential people in the United States government to call their counterparts. . . . But we don't know who to reach out to, we don't have the network. And our embassies don't really have that network either, it's a very specialized network." But, for obvious reasons, the philanthropic community does. (Interview, NGO)

According to a past government official:

[We] said, look, we have this extraordinary opportunity, here's the concept that we have in mind. . . . We need your help if we're actually going to pull this off. And that's when Martin [Tisné, with the Transparency and Accountability Initiative] got pulled in and we went through this exercise of trying to figure out, who were the governmental champions, who were the civil society champions and how could we staff this thing? Because I was just a government official on the inside with no bureaucracy underneath me to deliver this. (Interview, GO)

The effort, spearheaded by Martin Tisné and supported by the Transparency and Accountability Initiative, then sought to produce a spreadsheet of champions from both governments and civil society groups around the world to invite to a January 2011 meeting at the White House. Those involved

explicitly sought to invite bureaucrats from outside foreign ministries who would not traditionally be involved in such efforts.

Describing the process, one foundation representative noted:

It was a fairly mammoth undertaking. And what we needed to know was how are the countries doing on open government on various indices, and just according to hearsay as well. . . . Using everyone in that Transparency International network, Open Society Foundations, the Right to Information network, the budget transparency network, the extractives transparency network; just to get as many names as possible. And then we ended up with I think 41 or 43 countries in that list. And so, on the basis of that, we then whittled it down to . . . 9 countries to invite to the meeting in January. And then . . . I mean they worked the phones, and Samantha Power was working the phones to get the right people from the different governments to attend. . . . We had a lot of pulling power from the White House to help set this up. A huge amount of political commitment on their part, you know, putting sweat equity in it. (Interview, NGO)

Another civil society representative explained that:

These very famous spreadsheet exercises, literally just trying to ask all our friends, “Who are the greatest reformers that we know of, both in and outside of government, civil society, who work on this thing that we were sort of maybe starting to call open government?” . . . And a lot of work ended up going into those spreadsheets, and versions of those spreadsheets ultimately led to a meeting several months later at the White House conference center. (Interview, NGO)

And one former government official stated:

Intentionally, the goal was not to find foreign ministry officials. We were trying to find the senior-most officials in government that we could politically access, who were close to the head of state. And we were bypassing foreign ministries very intentionally. Because foreign ministries are excellent at delivering talking points that are produced by other parts of their government, but they’re deeply conservative and they’re not the substantive leads. (Interview, GO)

Ultimately, this process led to a decision to invite representatives of nine governments—Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, South Africa, the United States, and the UK—and nine civil society groups

from around the world to a meeting to be held at the White House over two days in January 2011.

The “Magical Meeting”

Writing two years later in 2013, Jeremy Weinstein highlighted the importance of this meeting, writing:

There are days that stand out from the blur of time on the White House staff—when the power of what’s possible at the highest levels of government is visible in the kernel of a new idea. I remember one of those days very clearly: January 21, 2011. We were gathered in the Secretary of War Room, seated around an ornate mahogany table. We had cleared our schedules for what seemed like an unprecedented day and a half of time, just to think. And we were joined by an amazing cast of characters from across the developed and developing world—government ministers shorn of their staffers and talking points, leaders of international movements with networks spanning the continents, and grassroots activists carrying their experiences of pressing for social change into the halls of power. (Weinstein, 2013, 3)

Others later echoed the special nature of this meeting. One civil society participant said, “Everybody describes it as a magical meeting.” One former US government official said, “This wasn’t the kind of thing where governments went in one room and civil society went in another room and then they came together over lunch and then tried to negotiate a way forward. . . . It was governments and civil society, in the same room, saying, ‘How do we do this?’” Martin Tisné (2016) later wrote:

We walked into the meeting thinking we were exchanging ideas, learning about innovations from around the world, and walked out of it having constituted the founding steering committee of a major global initiative. The memory of that meeting will stay with me for a long time. From my perspective, it was the enthusiasm in that room, the deep sense that innovations really do come “from everywhere” that laid the foundations for what would then become OGP.

On the first day, participants shared examples of open government innovations from their own respective countries. One civil society participant said, “It was like kind of a show and tell. Tell us what you have achieved, regarding

accountability and transparency, and what countries could learn from the experience.” One former US government official recalled the following:

When one of the countries participating or when one of the civil society leaders would tell their story, you could start to imagine it, and see it, and people started comparing notes. . . . And the light bulb there, to me, was governments seeing that civil society—it may be, you know, they hold you accountable and they press you and all that, but you can actually enlist citizens in this thing called government. (Interview, GO)

Building on this inspirational beginning, the organizers of the meeting then moved to propose some form of international open government initiative. According to one foundation representative, a concept note circulated to the participants had outlined a possible “notion of some set of national commitments and some accountability mechanism” (Interview, NGO). This note presented the possibility—according to the same foundation representative—that “a diverse coalition of governments could gather on the margins of the UN General Assembly in 2011 to embrace a set of high-level principles around open government, pledge country specific commitments to put them into practice, and invite civil society to assess their individual and collective progress” (Interview, NGO).

To some extent, the organizers already had a vision of the type of outcome that they hoped would emerge, but this remained uncertain and would be shaped by the discussion in the meeting. As one former US government official recalled, “I think it’s fair to say that we went in with a pretty developed framework, but it wasn’t one of those things where you go in with a developed framework and say ‘You all really like this, don’t you? You endorse it so I can go out there and say that this was a collective effort?’ It was more genuinely the product of collective deliberation” (Interview, GO).

Another elaborated:

We had put a lot more thought into what we wanted to get out of it than anyone else who was coming to it for the first time. . . . We had a sense of where we wanted to get, but we didn’t know whether it was possible. We didn’t know what people would buy into. . . . It was a collaborative process. The whole thing was not cooked and designed before anyone was brought in. The idea was that we

had some intuitions about what we wanted to do, but there was no declaration that was written, no bureaucratic structure that was fully designed, no envisioning of the IRM process. There were just the principles that might make for an initiative like this that could work. (Interview, GO)

But the discussions would not necessarily be easy or straightforward. Participants were initially unsure, and many raised concerns over the scope of membership and the extent of accountability mechanisms. One foundation representative recalled:

There was a moment where the meeting had got a little tense in the afternoon. . . . It was starting to emerge that we were looking at this more as an initiative. It wasn't clear how long it would last or not, but it wasn't just a one-off. And it was certainly starting to emerge that there would be some sort of a membership. And so, the question was then, "Well who are we going to ask to do this?" Obviously it's us, and everyone's bonding, but it can't just be us. (Interview, NGO)

They added that different governments disagreed over different models:

There was a real divergence between a group, I'd say more led by the United Kingdom, that wanted this to be a small elite group. . . . Small and sort of a band of brothers and sisters, sort of leading the pack. On the complete opposite end of that you had Brazil. And the Brazilian perspective was, "Everyone should be included. We should be inclusive. We're all part of this together." (Interview, NGO)

Others were cautious, given the novel setting, without traditional diplomatic representation. But a key moment in reaching consensus to move forward with an initiative came with the Brazilian representative, Jorge Hage, head of the country's comptroller general, agreeing to jointly cochair the initiative along with the United States. In particular, this helped reassure the other developing country participants that the resulting initiative would have broader support and leadership beyond just the United States alone.

The attendees agreed to create an initiative on the basis of the key features that remain part of the Open Government Partnership today—a multistakeholder initiative based on a partnership between governments and civil society; membership on the basis of eligibility criteria, endorsement of a declaration, and voluntary commitments; and some form of accountability

on the basis of independent monitoring. Yet the details of these remained to be defined. What would the eligibility criteria be, and who would be eligible? What was the precise role of civil society in the initiative's governance structure? Would the ostensible founding members' governments and foreign ministries support the endeavor? Would anybody show up at the September 2011 UN General Assembly, answering President Obama's call the year before to bring new commitments to open government?

"A High-Wire Act"

Moving forward from the January meeting, the organizers faced the substantial task of filling in these details, building a nascent initiative, and attracting members, all in time for a September 2011 launch at the next United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York City. In the words of a former US government official:

Getting from January to an event in September with heads of state, announcing an initiative, was like a high-wire act. Every week I felt the whole thing was going to collapse because of something. (Interview, GO)

Through a series of events—first in Brazil in March 2011, where Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff publicly agreed to cochair the initiative, and then in Washington, DC, in July 2011—the organizers sought to solidify and formalize support from the existing founding members and work through the difficult process of establishing more precise rules governing membership. These efforts were led by the same officials in the US National Security Council along with Transparency and Accountability Initiative—supported work by Martin Tisné and Julie McCarthy. The State Department then officially joined these efforts and began publicizing the plans for the initiative. On July 12, 2011, an event in Washington, DC, intended to reintroduce the initiative, present it to potential member countries, and make the effort broadly public for the first time, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave a speech encouraging countries around the world to consider joining the new initiative, including offering an economic logic for open government:

And we've also seen the correlation between openness in government and success in the economic sphere. Countries committed to defending transparency

and fighting corruption are often more attractive to entrepreneurs. And if you can create small and medium size businesses, you have a broader base for economic activity. At a time when global competition for trade and investment is fierce, openness is not just good for governance, it is also good for a sustainable growth in GDP. (U.S. Department of State, 2011)

A key concern over the spring of 2011 was establishing the rules for membership and eligibility criteria. This posed two challenges. The first challenge was in obtaining agreement among those involved who preferred a larger, universal initiative with less stringent requirements and those who preferred a smaller initiative with more stringent requirements. The second challenge was that, given that the initiative began with the eight founding member countries already in place, the ultimate eligibility criteria had to be designed to ensure that those founding members would, in fact, be eligible.

As noted by a foundation representative:

One of the interesting things was that . . . because the eight governments were in some ways handpicked, because they were great leaders and they were doing great things, it wasn't very robust in some ways. There wasn't a quantitative methodology behind it, in some ways you could say it was almost a qualitative methodology, but it became really difficult from a more quantitative perspective, to figure out what they all had in common on paper, in order to develop the membership criteria that even fit the eight founding members. (Interview, NGO)

A past US government official described the challenges and tradeoffs involved in determining eligibility criteria:

How do you structure a club? How do we think about who's in and who's out, and do it in a way that doesn't make it look like the decision of this exclusive group that was brought together? . . . You needed to establish a set of indicators that were credible, that allowed for room for movement, so that countries could become eligible, if they weren't already eligible. That needed to include the set of countries that were already there, so they all had to meet whatever criteria you came up with. . . . But if you look at the spreadsheets, it's a little bit like the "you know it if you see it" kind of line. There were countries below the threshold that, if our structure included them, people would immediately say, "This is not a serious initiative." (Interview, GO)

A civil society participant described that, for many civil society groups involved, their preference would have been for a smaller size initially, with more stringent requirements:

There was some disagreement on what would be the threshold conditions, and who was a no-go. . . . We weren't on the side of "let's let 60 countries in to start off." I think the civil society saw kind of a 20–30-country [size]; you know you'd need a fairly high bar and a fairly high commitment to being a champion. (Interview, NGO)

Even before the Open Government Partnership's launch, some observers also criticized some of the founding members for gaps in their own open government records. One challenge was that Brazil had still not passed a freedom of information law—envisioned as one of the core eligibility criteria for membership—despite years of campaign promises, civil society pressure, and nearly adopted legislation. In response, in April 2011, President Rousseff “stated her support for a FOI bill, and work on the stalled bill in the legislature was resumed to meet a May 3 deadline she set” (FreedomInfo, 2011). However, she shortly thereafter yielded to political pressure from several powerful politicians, delaying passage of the law—leading to further criticism from freedom of information advocates. Two Brazil-based academics asked, “Is Brazil fit to lead the OGP?” and explicitly raised the credibility issue, writing that without freedom of information passage, “Brazil will not only put into question the credibility of its government, but also that of the newly minted Open Government Partnership” (Michener & Pereira, 2011).

Under the ultimately decided eligibility criteria, however, Brazil remained eligible even without an adopted law, given “3 points” for a constitutional provision for access to information (versus “4 points” for a law in place).

Yet another challenge for the nascent initiative was to ensure that the founding members had initial action plans to announce at the September 2011 launch event. This led to rushed processes that in many of the founding countries incorporated much less civil society involvement than in later rounds. This process in Mexico will be discussed in chapter 5. In the United

States, the development process was criticized not only for being insufficiently participatory (Judd, 2011; OpenTheGovernment, 2011) but also for some of the specific commitments being proposed.

One civil society participant called it “basically a grab bag of stuff they had announced two years earlier. It wasn’t anything new. ‘Now wait a second, this was supposed to be raising your game.’” But they also noted that although “at that encounter, just about the first impulse of the US bureaucracy was not that encouraging; it got better. And especially with some of the decisions they made that really did overcome internal opposition from people like the Interior Department and elsewhere, to join [the] Extractive Industries [Transparency Initiative].”

Finally, the launch day came, with a total of forty-six countries, including both the founding members and those signing letters of intent to join. A launch event was held on September 20, 2011, at Google’s New York City offices, following that year’s UN General Assembly sessions, featuring high-profile speeches from President Obama, President Benigno Aquino of the Philippines, the Head of the Office of the Comptroller General of Brazil Jorge Hage, eBay founder Pierre Omidyar, World Wide Web creator Tim Berners-Lee, and Celtel founder Mo Ibrahim. The founding members announced their National Action Plans. And a photograph captured the leaders of member governments and the founding civil society members standing together on stage as equals.

“A Leap of Faith”

Yet, for both the governments and the civil society groups considering participation in the nascent initiative, their willingness had been far from a foregone conclusion. Both governments and civil society groups had real concerns about the risks and costs of participating in such a partnership that put them on an equal footing.

First, civil society groups feared cooptation by governments and a loss of credibility from working with them. Many participants spoke to these concerns. A civil society representative said:

There was some risk involved, right? Because in a way we were putting our reputations and the reputations of our organizations around an idea that we

were going to strike a deal with a set of governments. And at the same time, there were many other governments that we knew that were going to join that weren't as friendly. So, there was some risk involved in it. (Interview, NGO)

A different civil society representative stated:

I had this argument in [domestic civil society coalition]. My cofounder . . . said, "No way, it's a diversion of our real issues here." (Interview, NGO)

And another noted:

Was it really the right thing to do, or the more effective thing to do, to partner with governments in this sort of kumbaya way? As inefficient and frustrating and incomplete as it often was, we knew we could generate change through antagonistic approaches, sometimes. Sometimes you fail, but you also had stories of success, that you knew were somewhat replicable. . . . Is it better to kind of give that up, and walk in lockstep with government counterparts, if I'm still after the same sorts of change in the world? And it's a very different set of tactics, and different set of trade-offs you have to make. . . . It's like, really? You want us to pretend all this bad blood away, and sort of get into bed with these people? And that's a very fair concern or critique. (Interview, NGO)

A former US government official also recalled these concerns:

For them [civil society members], to even participate in this first round, was taking a leap of faith, right? You're going to be a credible non-governmental organization, you're an activist out there in the space of governance, and you're going to walk into a den with eight or nine governments, and start talking about, "Oh let's have a partnership that's about you governing?" It's like, yeah right! So, there's a leap of faith to come into the room. (Interview, GO)

Second, participation required substantial staff time on the part of civil society groups, who were often under-resourced. One civil society representative summarized these concerns:

Civil society put a lot of sweat equity into this, and took some risks. And I think that's worthwhile mentioning. Our time, our organization's time wasn't covered in any of this, right? So, you know, my organization agreed that I would spend substantial amounts of my time on this, and would in a sense take whatever

credibility or name or whatever we had into this process. And the same should be said for all of the others. (Interview, NGO)

Another agreed and also noted the potential biases in participation that this might yield:

And part of it was like, who's willing to donate in-kind time, which was non-trivial. It's why it skewed at the time, and probably still skews today, towards larger INGOs [international nongovernmental organizations] or networks, because they have the fundamental operational liquidity to donate time. . . . I spent *way* too much of my life on OGP, literally, I got paid zero dollars. . . . So, can a grassroots group in like Oaxaca really do this? No, realistically, and so it's an interesting bias that creeps in pretty quickly, even though it's not the usual bias of "we're paying you to do something, so you do what we want." It's the inverse, like "who's willing to just donate time, and not just a day or two but like years of time." And it's only more resourced, typically INGO types that can do that. With few exceptions here or there, but not many. (Interview, NGO)

Civil society groups thus brought real concerns to the process of designing the Open Government Partnership and exercised a very real threat of departure as debates proceeded about the stringency of membership rules and accountability mechanisms. However, governments had concerns of their own, both traditional and novel. Their traditional concerns reflected a common wariness of governments about any international institution—over the potential loss of authority, intrusive monitoring, or exposure to international criticism. But less traditionally, governments also faced the novelty of a multistakeholder initiative featuring true parity between themselves and civil society, and one where participation focused on bureaucrats outside of foreign ministries.

A former US government official explained that:

People didn't necessarily know how to incorporate this different type of innovation into whatever their department was. It's very difficult to get bureaucracies to move. . . . It's very hard to get people to understand and break out of their boxes and embrace this sort of new way of engagement. (Interview, GO)

In an interview, a civil society participant noted:

I think governments have to mind much more the consequences of their actions . . . much more than we in civil society have. For me, if the Russian Government gets pissed off, well, who cares? But for a government official, it's like they could see a line of dominos falling down much more easily than we did. (Interview, NGO)

Another echoed this, saying, “You know the governments are always super sensitive to equities that we care less about.” They also emphasized more traditional concerns over international criticism:

Most of the governments have a huge aversion to anything that could be perceived as public criticism or shaming or grading of them that's not an A-plus. Which is of course why civil society groups do this all the time. (Interview, NGO)

The potential concerns of governments were most fully realized when, on the eve of the July 12, 2011, US State Department event, India announced that it was withdrawing from the planned initiative. Toby McIntosh, who was reporting on the Open Government Partnership's progress for FreedomInfo.org, wrote that:

The prospect of having its “action plan” commitments reviewed after a year by local and international governance experts was a key factor that caused India to withdraw, sources said. . . . India was concerned about the Independent Review Mechanism that would accompany government self-assessment, preferring not to have outsiders pass judgment on Indian affairs, according to those familiar with the situation. . . . In addition, the Indian government may be reluctant politically at this point to engage in a public consultation on transparency, observers said. (McIntosh, 2011)

India's minister of state for external affairs in Parliament offered a justification based on the principle of parliamentary supremacy:

The government had conveyed its concerns to the US and others that new and additional commitments on governance should be made before the national Parliament, and not in an ad hoc international forum, and that the decision-making process for the government as also performance report and evaluation are also the prerogatives of national Parliament. (Bhaumik, 2011)

One past US government official, reflecting on this setback, said:

That was really painful. . . . There was just real nervousness about the institutionalization of some mechanism that would shed, both internal and external light on what the Indian government was doing. And so, India preferred universality to exclusivity, and they preferred peer review to vertical accountability. And we tried to open them up. I mean, we engaged at very, very high levels to try and get India back in, but we couldn't. (Interview, GO)

This departure left only eight founding countries and raised questions over whether the ambitious initiative would be able to get off the ground and overcome entrenched opposition. On the other hand, the departure also suggested that the initiative might indeed yield more than just superficial promises if the intended processes had proved unacceptably intrusive to a country that, as recently as a few months earlier, had seemed at the core of the endeavor.

This departure also highlights the very real concerns over sovereignty costs held by many governments—even among the founding members. Participants at the time suggested that similar concerns also emerged among other founding members as well but were ultimately ameliorated. Thus, despite membership in the Open Government Partnership not holding the same international legal status as formal membership in an intergovernmental organization, prospective members approached it with many of the same sovereignty cost concerns in mind.

“The Cool Kids’ Club”

In light of the departure of one of the founding governments, it may seem surprising that by the time of the Open Government Partnership's launch in September 2011, twenty-eight more countries had submitted letters of intent to join. This brought the total to forty-six, including the eight remaining founding members. Indeed, many participants were surprised by this level of uptake. Under Secretary of State Maria Otero emphasized at the time that this level of participation was “beyond what we had expected” (FreedomInfo, 2011b). Several more countries indicated that they hoped to join, including several noneligible countries such as Botswana, Mauritius, and Tunisia (FreedomInfo, 2011c). This suggested that the prospect of joining might serve as an impetus for countries to improve their performance on the eligibility criteria.

What attracted so many governments, so quickly, to join this new initiative? Most participants suggested variants on three main explanations: First, for reform-minded governments—or individual officials—participation was motivated by a genuine commitment to drive new open government innovations and to learn from peers around the world. Second, for many participants, motivations may have been largely symbolic, drawn particularly by President Obama’s star power, or shaped more cynically by a hope for an easy opportunity for window-dressing participation in a low-cost initiative. And third, whether the motivation to join was more substantive or more symbolic, many new participants may have simply not fully understood the requirements of the process they were signing up to and the extent to which they would bind them to a repeated cycle of National Action Plans and civil society interaction. And in all cases, contributions were also made by substantial outreach by US diplomats, officials from the founding countries, and the civil society and foundation networks involved.

According to a former US government official:

It was a very modern thing to do, so I think there was an appeal to the event. And look, governments are going to look good if they’re there for the launch of something called the Open Government Partnership. . . . I think most of them knew what they were getting into. But I think there were a few who did not. It’s the kind of thing where you can look at it, and if you don’t read the rules carefully, you can think, “Oh I just signed up to say I will do these things, and then I’ve got to do a National Action Plan, but I can just issue a report.” But then when you realize that, no there’s an IRM, and you’ve got to meet with civil society, then it’s a bit more laborious than that, and you can’t actually fake it. And that’s when, you know, there were a number that joined and then after a year, 18 months or so, it was pretty clear that there were some that they were just trying to fake it. (Interview, GO)

And another explained:

I had no idea how many would sign up. . . . I had no idea whether people were going to go for it. . . . I mean, I was surprised by how many initially signed up, and I really wondered whether they knew what they were signing up for. And I think some did and some didn’t. And that’s the reality of these things.

Governments are making strategic choices about what kinds of signals they want to send, and people wanted to signal that they were engaged. . . . What government, what head of state doesn't want to say, "I'm for making my government better," right? That was a very easy sell politically. (Interview, GO)

As explained by a different US government official:

Definitely the star factor. Cameron, Obama, the pull of the star factor, the mix of countries that was there, the way it was highlighted. Definitely the "cool kids' club" because it was something different. . . . But there was also a significant diplomatic outreach effort. We wanted more countries to join. We specifically wanted to get countries that were on the cusp of some of these reforms, to act as a catalyst to make some of these reforms. They had a list of countries they wanted to push. . . . There was such a coordinated push. . . . Between the UK and the US they have a large diplomatic presence around the world. There were demarches that went to pretty much every embassy. If you trace pretty much any large summit around the world, OGP was mentioned. (Interview, GO)

In the words of one civil society participant:

That's one of the big mysteries [why so many countries joined by the launch]. You know, so what are the factors. Having Obama champion it, I think everybody agrees that was a big thing. . . . He had big reach and pull. The US, separate from Obama, had big reach and pull. . . . There were a number of presidents around the world that had an open government agenda and that they were reformers, and they saw this as getting some wind in the sails . . . or there were champions in government that could bring their presidents on board. . . . Some, like the founding eight, knew very much what they were taking on. You know there were some that were hoping to do something real, and there were some that . . . thought they could get something good out of this without investing too much, without it being too uncomfortable. (Interview, NGO)

A similar theme was raised by another:

Well, because President Obama. It's like a rockstar and you want to be around the rockstar and well, if he says it was cool, you want to be in the picture. . . . They knew they were getting . . . an opportunity with the president of the United States. Beyond that, I don't think they were very clear. (Interview, NGO)

When interviewed, a different civil society participant succinctly stated:

It was a lot of US diplomatic capital that went in to just selling something. And they were selling a pipe dream, like, “Hey trust us, this will be worth it, can you show up so we can take you off the list and count you?” (Interview, NGO)

For President Aquino of founding member the Philippines, the launch event offered an opportunity to signal both business-friendly reform and political closeness with the US president. At a speech the night before the launch, Aquino “said the Philippines’ being chosen to be part of the OGP affirmed that it was ‘a good place to do business in and a good country to do business with,’” while coverage of the launch event in Philippines media prominently included a photograph of Obama putting his hand on Aquino’s back, with the caption heading, “PAT ON THE BACK” (Avenidaño, 2011).

Although many participants at the time emphasized the draw of being on stage with President Obama in 2011, it is notable that the Open Government Partnership continued to attract new members for years after. New members continued to join even after the functioning of the National Action Plan process and Independent Reporting Mechanism were much more visible. Thus, even if some of the initial wave of the decision to join was not fully rational, later decisions can be considered much more so. Reflecting on the later, more fully developed attractiveness of membership, a former US government official said, “It’s credible enough, and it’s a known enough thing, that if you say you’re a member of OGP, that gives you some actual credit . . . like, ‘I want to be seen to be in that club.’”

Discussion

In many ways, the Open Government Partnership’s founding exemplifies the transnational multistakeholder model—particularly in its speed, flexibility, and aim of overcoming limitations of existing diplomatic and governance approaches. But other elements suggest interesting departures—particularly in the key role of state officials themselves as entrepreneurs and in the politics of institutional design focused on contention over depth and breadth of membership.

To summarize some of the key conclusions from the story of the Open Government Partnership’s origins, we find the following:

- Like many multistakeholder initiatives, the origins of the Open Government Partnership were shaped by a desire to overcome the limits of more traditional intergovernmental institutions and to *fill gaps* in existing governance arrangements.
- Unlike many multistakeholder initiatives, it was transnational entrepreneurship by *state* officials themselves—rather than nongovernmental organizations or existing international organizations—that played the initial leading role in orchestrating action by funders, civil society groups, and other states’ officials.
- The creation and design of the Open Government Partnership were characterized by their extreme speed, with less than nine months elapsing from the January 2011 White House meeting to its formal launch at the UN General Assembly in September 2011.
- Even though the design of the Open Government Partnership was outside the hands of traditional diplomats and foreign ministries, there were clear *politics* of institutional design focused particularly on contention between depth and breadth of membership.

Of course, even after the formal launch of the Open Government Partnership, much still remained to be done even in terms of developing the core elements of its institutional design—in particular, the crucial details of the operation of the independent reporting mechanism and the establishment of sufficient staff and funding to operate the Support Unit. These would be developed largely over 2012 and 2013. Within its fundamental institutional framework, however, the Open Government Partnership continued to exemplify the flexibility of transnational multistakeholder initiatives through continued iterative developments. These included increasing institutionalization over time, new ways of balancing competing demands from different stakeholders, and new patterns of leadership, such as thematic priorities that often rotated with each new cochair.

However, here we depart from the detailed origin story and transition to elaborate the key elements of the Open Government Partnership’s functioning. The remainder of this chapter reviews the key elements of the Open Government Partnership’s rules and functions as they stood once they were

clearly developed and as they played key roles in shaping the direct and indirect pathways of impact that are the main focus of this book.

OVERVIEW OF THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

This section presents an overview of the structure and leadership of the Open Government Partnership, a discussion of both national and subnational memberships, an overview of the organization's finances, and an introduction to the global and regional summits. While the focus of this book and this chapter is largely on the national-level government, it should be noted that since 2015, the Open Government Partnership has also included subnational members through its Open Government Partnership Local initiative to encourage commitments relevant to the values of transparency, participation, and accountability with a focus on technology. This is a growing component of the organization that will likely see further expansion in the future. We present a snapshot of the structure and functions of the Open Government Partnership from 2019 and early 2020.

Open Government Partnership Budget and Expenditures

As an organization, the Open Government Partnership's budget has continued to grow over time. In 2013, the Partnership's total budget was just under \$2.5 million.² In 2019, the Open Government Partnership's total budget was just under \$10 million—nearly a four-fold increase. Funding for the Partnership comes from private foundations, bilateral agencies, and some member governments. Table 3.1 summarizes the Partnership's income from private foundations and bilateral aid agencies. Many of the foundations and bilateral aid agencies gave multiple times over this period, with many awarding multiyear grants, making a year-over-year analysis breakdown impossible.

Since 2014, the Open Government Partnership has placed emphasis on participating countries contributing to the Partnership's income (Frey, 2014). In 2013, the total per country contribution was \$1.5 million, and in 2019 it increased to \$2.7 million. In 2018, the country contributions were roughly the equivalent of 27 percent of the total expenditures for that year. Thirty-six countries contributed between \$10,000 and \$200,000 in 2019.

Table 3.1

Open Government Partnership total funding from private foundations and bilateral aid agencies, 2013–2021

Funding from private foundations	
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	\$8,090,000
Ford Foundation	\$5,400,000
Luminate Group (formerly Omidyar Network)	\$4,800,000
Open Society Foundations	\$3,300,000
Hivos	\$2,600,000
Institute of International Education	\$79,612
Private foundations total	\$24,269,612
Funding from bilateral aid agencies	
Department for International Development (UK)*	\$11,722,598
US Agency for International Development (US)	\$2,199,946
Department of State (US)	\$493,826
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)**	\$485,717
French Embassy to the US	\$40,000
Bilateral aid agencies total	\$14,942,086
*Grants were in GBP and converted to USD using the exchange rate on January 1 of the year the grants were made.	
**Grants were in euros and converted to USD using the exchange rate on January 1 of the year the grants were made.	
Note: Open Government Partnership funding sources data is current as of March 1, 2020.	

The Open Government Partnership's 2018 budget was nearly \$10 million. The largest portion of the budget went to the country and local support unit (25.7 percent); followed by the Independent Reporting Mechanism (21.7 percent); operations (19.9 percent); the global campaign, Steering Committee, and events (14.7 percent); communications (8.6 percent); knowledge, learning, innovation, and capacity (7.6 percent); and lastly, development and fundraising (1.8 percent) (Open Government Partnership, 2018d). The budget data is difficult to analyze over time since what goes into the individual budget categories has changed.

Current Structure and Leadership

The structure and leadership mechanisms of the Open Government Partnership have evolved over time, and the below descriptions explain the

state of the various organizational units as of April 2020. As explained below, the organization is governed by an international Steering Committee but has a full-time staff that plays a key role in managing and directing the organization.

The Open Government Partnership is led by a twenty-two-member Steering Committee, with an equal number of government and civil society members. While the government seats are held by the governments—not specific individuals—the civil society members are elected as individuals to represent civil society’s interests broadly. Open Government Partnership’s own leadership changes and is voted on by other Steering Committee members, with both a government and a civil society member leading the Steering Committee at any one time. On October 1, 2019, the government of Argentina and Robin Hodess from The B Team, a global nonprofit focused on business practices centered on climate and humanity, assumed the roles of cochairs of the Steering Committee (Open Government Partnership, 2019e). The committee has responsibility for fundraising and budgeting and has broad authority to decide organization policy and matters concerning member entry, participation, and disciplinary action. The Steering Committee has three subcommittees within which it conducts work: Governance and Leadership, Criteria and Standards, and Thematic Leadership.

The Open Government Partnership is incorporated as a United States not-for-profit organization with a board of directors that provides fiduciary and legal oversight. The board of directors can have anywhere between three and six individuals as members. As of April 2020, the board of directors has five members, with a mix of government and civil society backgrounds.

The Open Government Partnership utilizes ambassadors and envoys to interface with the public and outside organizations. As of April 2020, there are four ambassadors whose job is to raise Open Government Partnership’s profile and complement the work of the Steering Committee. The ambassadors are individuals with high-level positions in other organizations who advocate for the Open Government Partnership. The envoys are a larger group of individuals, comprising more than twenty members, who have played significant roles in the development of the Open Government Partnership and continue to represent the organization.

The Open Government Partnership has a significant number of full-time staff, jointly referred to as the Support Unit, distributed over a range of core areas, including leadership, global, analytics and insights, learning and innovation, operations, country support, Open Government Partnership Local, thematic policy areas, and communications.

There is a five-person leadership team, led by Dr. Sanjay Pradhan as chief executive officer since May 2016. As of April 2020, the Global, Learning & Innovation, Analytics & Insights, Operations, and Communications teams have all had between four and five staff members. The Country Support group is the largest and employs twenty staff members, most of who are full-time. These members are based around the world. The Country Support group supports governments' and civil society groups' local efforts to further transparency, accountability, and participation. The Country Support group is led by Paul Maassen, who has been with the Open Government Partnership since 2012. The Open Government Partnership also employs consultants to work on individual projects.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism, discussed further below, is a small group composed of five full-time staff members. The Independent Reporting Mechanism relies heavily on local and national-level researchers contracted to complete the country assessment reports. The International Experts Panel oversees the Independent Reporting Mechanism. However, the International Experts Panel is an independent body guided by the Steering Committee, but it is not directly accountable to them. The number of International Experts Panel members has varied over time. In early 2020 it consisted of five Steering Committee members and a number of quality control advisors but by the end of 2020, the International Experts Panel consisted of only five members. The changing structure of the International Experts Panel is consistent with the constantly evolving nature of the Open Government Partnership generally.

Joining and Maintaining National-Level Membership

As of April 2020, there were seventy-eight Open Government Partnership member countries: thirty-one in Europe, fifteen in Asia-Pacific, eighteen in the Americas, fourteen in Africa. (In chapter 1 of this book, we include

a table with all member countries.) Prospective member countries must meet specific requirements to join according to four eligibility criteria: civic engagement, access to information, fiscal transparency, and public asset disclosure. To evaluate its four eligibility criteria, the Open Government Partnership uses a points-based system that relies upon an array of data sources from third-party cross-national indices of transparency, governance, and democratic performance.

- The civic engagement criterion is measured using the *Economist's* democracy index indicator of civil liberties, such as media freedom, personal and religious freedoms, and freedom of association (maximum 4 points).
- The access to information criterion is measured using a combination of assessments of freedom of information acts by the Open Society Institute Justice Initiative, the Centre for Law and Democracy, and Access Info Europe (maximum 4 points).
- The fiscal transparency criterion is measured using data from the International Budget Partnership's open budget survey tracker on the availability of two specific fiscal documents—a national executive's budget proposal and its audit report (maximum 2 points).
- Finally, the public asset disclosure criterion is measured using the World Bank's financial disclosure law library to determine whether the country has a law requiring officials to disclose their assets and whether the disclosures are made publicly accessible (maximum 4 points).

Beginning in September 2017, new member countries are required to pass an additional test of having adequate democratic values. This criterion is measured according to the Varieties of Democracy project's considerations of civil society organization entry and exit and civil society organization (non) repression. According to the Open Government Partnership's website, this additional requirement was an “effort to ensure that new countries joining the Open Government Partnership adhere to the democratic governance norms and values set forth in the Open Government Declaration” (Open Government Partnership, 2022, para. 1).

If a country achieves at least 75 percent of these eligibility points and passes the democratic value check, it is considered eligible to join. The Open Government Partnership maintains an updated list showing how each country in the world stands in regards to the criteria. However, eligibility itself is not enough to join the Partnership. It is up to the country to go through a formal process of joining, which begins with the process of developing a concrete action plan. Practical details, such as who the country designates as its lead ministry, must also be in place. Often the lead ministry is the central executive—the president or prime minister’s office—but other central ministries, such as public administration and management agencies, treasuries, or foreign affairs and development agencies, are also frequently given the formal leadership role. The government point of contact must then submit a letter of intent to the Open Government Partnership cochairs.

There are a number of things members must do to be in good standing. For example, members must agree to have their progress on commitments assessed by an independent researcher as part of the Independent Reporting Mechanism action plan process. As part of the action plan process, countries must also produce yearly self-assessment reports. Countries are supposed to work in consultation with a range of interests, including civil society organizations, relevant businesses, academics, and individuals, to develop their reports. The action plans are due every two years; however, the 2020 *Open Government Partnership Handbook* acknowledges the difficult nature of making this timeframe fit within domestic election cycles. Countries have done a variety of things to accommodate this reality, including delaying the release of action plans for a year or releasing a second, streamlined action plan once the new administration is in place.

As noted in the 2020 *Open Government Partnership Handbook*, countries must also commit to having a government point of contact in a lead ministry to take the lead on the action plan development and assessment process domestically. Governments agree to participate in a multistakeholder forum to develop and implement the action plans. The multistakeholder forums must have members of both government and civil society and are required to meet every three months.

It is possible for a country's membership to be withdrawn for not meeting the Open Government Partnership requirements, and these requirements have increased over time. Currently, some reasons a country's membership may be withdrawn include not producing action plans in a timely manner, not adequately involving civil society, not publishing relevant material, and not making *any* progress toward implementing *any* of their commitments. However, countries found acting contrary to these are given two full action plan cycles before being placed under procedural review, and then they are still given further chances to improve before being deemed inactive or withdrawn. Membership can also be reassessed through a review by the Steering Committee via the response policy, formerly known as the Policy on Upholding the Values and Principles of Open Government Partnership. There have been three countries, to date, that have had their membership fully withdrawn by the Open Government Partnership (noted here is their year of withdrawal): Azerbaijan (2016), Trinidad and Tobago (2019), and Turkey (2016). Additionally, Hungary (2016) and Tanzania (2017) chose to withdraw. In 2020, Pakistan was made inactive, and Bulgaria, Ghana, Ireland, Israel, Malawi, South Africa, and Jamaica were placed on procedural review.

Action Plans

Since the Open Government Partnership initially focused only on national-level governments, all action plans produced were designated as National Action Plans. As the Partnership and Independent Reporting Mechanism has evolved, though, these plans have become known simply as action plans. However, in this book, the term *National Action Plan* is still used when referring to a national government's action plan. The substance of National Action Plans for countries has changed over time. At one point, all countries were encouraged to be guided by the Open Government Partnership grand challenges when developing their National Action Plans. The five grand challenges were improving public services, increasing public integrity, effectively managing public resources, creating safer communities, and increasing corporate accountability (Open Government Partnership, 2019d). The emphasis on the grand challenges has waned over time, though. In 2015, the requirement to organize National Action Plans around grand challenges was removed, and

they are no longer a key component (Open Government Partnership, 2015a). Though the requirement was removed, each commitment currently included in a country's National Action Plan should reflect at least one of the four core open government principles: transparency, citizen participation, public accountability, or technology and innovation for transparency and accountability (Open Government Partnership, 2019d). With that said, if a commitment is associated with the value of technology and innovation, it must also reflect one of the other values. Stated another way, a commitment should not focus on technology without also focusing on one of the other substantive values.

Open Government Partnership admits that the quality and presentation of the National Action Plans widely varies (Open Government Partnership, 2014a). After the first round of National Action Plans was developed and assessed, there were a few main takeaways. First, the countries that produced good plans were largely the countries that had been out-front with the open government movement generally—Brazil, Canada, Israel, Croatia, and Moldova. There were some surprises, though, with Jordan and the Dominican Republic also putting out strong first National Action Plans (Global Integrity, 2012). Second, countries had very different approaches to what a commitment was, with some making grand statements and others providing specific, actionable goals. Much of the subsequent revisions to the National Action Plan and Independent Reporting Mechanism process have been aimed at fixing this problem. Third, the term *open government* was not widely understood in 2012 (Global Integrity, 2012). The Open Government Partnership has struggled to find a proper way to assess the National Action Plans. At one point, the Partnership launched a pilot National Action Plan review with a color-coding scheme (Open Government Partnership, 2012b) to better understand the limitations of the process.

There is a wide range of commitments that governments include in their action plans. While hard to nail down the extent of the practice, it is assumed that many countries include commitments for initiatives they are already working on. For example, the commitments in the first South African National Action Plan were largely seen as an extension of work already being done by the South African Department of Public Services

and Administration (Open Government Africa, 2012). The Open Government Partnership felt that some governments were including commitments that were either not on topic, too broad in scope, or already completed. To counter this trend, the Open Government Partnership instituted what are called “starred commitments.” Commitments receive a star designation if they are exemplary and have the potential for transformative impact. Joe Powell, then deputy director of the Open Government Partnership Support Unit, elaborated, “OGP was always designed to create a race to the top in action plans, so by adding an assessment of ambition it rewards countries who make difficult to implement commitments which may be of transformative impact” (Mckenzie, 2014).

The practice of starring commitments has both supporters and detractors. Martin Tisné, then the director of policy for the Omidyar Network’s government transparency initiative, offered an assessment of the role of the Independent Reporting Mechanism in general:

The Independent Reporting Mechanism—the independent body that monitors progress of OGP national action plans—has “starred” those government commitments that have significant social impact, are substantially or fully completed, and relevant to OGP values. 24.7% of OGP commitments from the most recent 35 OGP countries to have completed their action plans are starred. This means that out of the 783 government commitments that were recently assessed (those 35 countries from OGP’s “second cohort”), 194 commitments were ambitious, in line with OGP values and mostly or fully completed. From a funder’s perspective, I think this makes OGP one of the best returns on investment we’ve had. I can’t think of any other program I’ve been involved in that has led to almost 200 instances of change in 35 countries around the world in less than 3 years. (Tisné, 2014a)

Tisné’s blog post and glowing conclusion were critiqued in another blog post on Techpresident.com. In the Techpresident.com post, the question of whether starred commitments were a good indicator of Open Government Partnership’s success was raised. A Partnership staffer quoted in the post concluded that it was open to interpretation what the appropriate percentage of starred commitments should be. The staffer also responded that “the

percentage of its commitments that were starred is a decent proxy for a country having understood the OGP guidelines and accomplished a good deal during its first year of implementation” (Tisé, 2014a). While it is not clear the extent to which the Open Government Partnership contributes to more open government, it does seem to be getting better at guiding countries to produce and complete commitments that meet the criteria they lay out.

The Role of Nongovernmental Actors in the Action Plan Cycle

Just as within the Open Government Partnership as a whole, individuals and organizations from civil society play a key role in the Independent Reporting Mechanism process. Civil society participation begins with the selection of the country researcher. Per the initial Independent Reporting Mechanism proposal, civil society groups in the member countries have the opportunity to provide informal feedback on the local research candidate shortlist. The in-country researchers who do not already have contacts with civil society are given formal introductions through the Independent Reporting Mechanism.

The public, including relevant civil society groups, should have a role in both the development of action plans and during the implementation (Open Government Partnership, 2019d). In practice, this is not always the case. In Uruguay, some civil society members were more active in the process than others, specifically those that were younger and more adept at information and communications technology. A report assessing the state of participation in the Uruguayan open government National Action Plan development process found that for full cocreation to be achieved, strong political endorsements are imperative (Rivoir & Landinelli, 2017).

The Open Government Partnership 2015 National Action Plan Review found that “opportunities for civil society to be involved in creating or implementing action plans also often don’t appear to be spilling over into genuine collaboration or empowerment” (Hughes, 2015). In other words, civil society was given some avenues for input, but, in reality, access was very limited, which affected the final National Action Plans in countries.

In addition to governments, community-based groups and international organizations also play roles in the Open Government Partnership

more generally and in the Independent Researching Mechanism process—specifically, academics and the private sector. Academics continue to be involved in the Open Government Partnership in several ways. There have been side events to the Open Government Partnership Global Summits focused on this group, including at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, in 2019 (Open Government Partnership, 2019c). In Uruguay, academic actors have become involved in the National Action Plan process. This involvement is in the early stages but is seen as a positive development (Rivoir & Landinelli, 2017). Academics have also served as Independent Reporting Mechanism national assessors (e.g., the UK, United States, and Canada) and have served on the international experts panel.

Like academics, the private sector plays a role in the global summits as well. At the 2019 global summit in Ottawa, the exhibitors were overwhelmingly private sector organizations. The 2019 Articles of Governance explicitly mention the private sector as having a role in the Open Government Partnership to develop, monitor, and support action plan development. With that said, actual engagement with the private sector has been limited. A 2017 working paper commissioned by the Open Government Partnership Support Unit and written by the Basel Institute on Governance at the University of Basel in Switzerland found that the Open Government Partnership is not well known in the private sector, and, so far, the Partnership's private sector initiatives have failed to gain traction (Adjami & Wannenwestch, 2017).

Civil society organizations are not the only actors influencing the development of action plans. Representatives of international organizations and funders also play a key role at times, as they did in Azerbaijan's National Action Plan (Trend News Agency, 2012). In Tanzania, the Open Government Partnership National Action Plan was largely drafted by Twaweza (Dufief et al., 2017). Twaweza is an East African initiative funded by Sida, UK Department for International Development (DFID), Hewlett Foundation, SNV, and Hivos (Twaweza Ni Sisi, n.d.). In 2016, the United States Agency for International Development, through their Facilitating Public Investment project, worked with the Philippines Department of Budget and Management to conduct an intensive country-wide consultation for the Philippines' fourth National Action Plan (Verzosa, 2017). Not surprisingly,

we find that international organizations and funding organizations are playing a much larger role in the Open Government Partnership than is identified in the articles of governance. These outside organizations are using their influence to impact the development of National Action Plans and possibly the content of these plans as well.

Overview of the Independent Reporting Mechanism

The action plans that governments produce center on a list of commitments that, if done well, focus on improving transparency, accountability, participation, and innovative use of technology. These commitments are notable for their flexibility in terms of scope and focus, including a wide range of potential issue areas related (and sometimes not so related) to open government. The Open Government Partnership Articles of Governance also place various expectations on governments that serve to guide the participation process. Thus, governments must develop their action plans in consultation with civil society, and they must be relevant to one of four principles (transparency, accountability, public participation, and technology and innovation)—that part has always been around and remains in place. The articles convey that the civil society consultation process should be timely, transparent, serious about dialogue, and it should take the form of a regular forum enabling “regular multi-stakeholder consultation on OGP implementation” (Open Government Partnership, 2015a, 19).

In principle, each member produces a new National Action Plan every two years, thus leading to a cycle of policy commitments and, in some cases, policy fulfillment pushing the open government agenda forward. Local country researchers, overseen by the Independent Reporting Mechanism, assess progress made on the commitments in the plans. The Independent Reporting Mechanism selects the local country researchers based on their research expertise and gives the researchers special training on how to carry out their review of their country’s National Action Plan. The Independent Reporting Mechanism researchers come from a variety of backgrounds, with some having university affiliations, others affiliating with local civil society organizations, and others having no formal affiliation at all. The review is normally wide-ranging and ideally draws on broad consultation

with governmental and civil society actors who are involved in implementing or monitoring the action plan. At the end of this process, the researcher produces a country progress report. The Independent Reporting Mechanism, which initially only evaluated country-level reports, also evaluated subnational initiative plans at one point but no longer does.

In 2019, the Independent Reporting Mechanism produced 110 reports but believed that it would be unsustainable to continue to produce this number of reports given the limited resources available to the independent body. A report commissioned by the International Experts Panel in 2017 on the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of the Independent Reporting Mechanism offered a list of possible recommendations for supporting the independent body (Blomeyer & Sanz, 2017). The process of reworking the unit is called the IRM Refresh and was approved by the Open Government Partnership Steering Committee in February 2020. The new processes were beginning to be implemented in 2020 (Miranda, 2019; Open Government Partnership 2020a). The IRM Refresh planned to focus on products and processes that are simpler, more fit for purpose, results-oriented, and prioritized. Some key differences between the new model and the older model are that the new model will provide input during the cocreation phase; the Independent Reporting Mechanism will provide a review of the action plan at the policy or thematic level; instead of having researchers in each country, a smaller pool of Independent Reporting Mechanism researchers will complete all the reports; and the action plan reports will focus on results. The plan was for the first products from the refreshed Independent Reporting Mechanism to come out in 2021 for 2020–2022 Action Plans (Open Government Partnership, 2020a).

Independent Reporting Mechanism program management team

The number of Independent Reporting Mechanism staff and the roles they play has changed over time. As of April 2019, there were five full-time staff members. The staff report to the chief of the Independent Reporting Mechanism (in the past, this role was referred to as the director of the Independent Reporting Mechanism). The chief oversees the hiring and training of local researchers, all that goes into the publication of the progress reports, the

subsequent publication of Independent Reporting Mechanism reports, and works with the International Experts Panel to ensure quality in the process. This independent body also employs consultants and copy editors to produce the country assessment reports, when necessary, to meet deadlines (Open Government Partnership, 2014a). The primary takeaway here is that, like the Open Government Partnership generally, the number of Independent Reporting Mechanism staff has grown from two, initially, to five. This number does not take into account the number of consultants, editors, and local government researchers for whom the Independent Reporting Mechanism is responsible.

Criteria and standards subcommittee oversight

The criteria and standards subcommittee of the Open Government Partnership Steering Committee plays an oversight role of the Independent Reporting Mechanism. This sub-committee oversees the selection and vets the International Experts Panel members. It also oversees the hiring of the Independent Reporting Mechanism staff and the drafting of the government self-assessment reports (Open Government Partnership, 2012b). As of November 2017, the criteria and standards subcommittee consisted of eight members—four individuals from civil society and four individuals representing their governments. Similar to the other subcommittees, it is cochaired by one civil society and one government member.

International Experts Panel

The International Experts Panel is the body responsible for overseeing the Independent Reporting Mechanism process. The panel members are intended to broadly represent the Open Government Partnership participating countries, but panel members are not required to be from member countries. The International Experts Panel was initially set up to have ten members—five of who are technical or policy experts and five of who are high-profile senior advisors. The panel members are appointed by the Open Government Partnership Steering Committee (Open Government Partnership, 2012b). The technical advisors play a direct role in the quality control of the reports and are compensated for their time. The senior advisors play a larger role in strategic advice and outreach on the Independent Reporting Mechanism reports.

An early critique of the Independent Reporting Mechanism, which came out of the London summit, was that it needed “more high-level political advisors to provide researchers with ‘political cover’” (Vila & Wilson, 2013). The mechanism has struggled to find the right balance of people to serve on the International Experts Panel to provide both the technical feedback and the political cover it needs.

Recognizing the politically sensitive nature of these roles, the Independent Reporting Mechanism has a conflicts of interest policy that applies to both the International Experts Panel members and the individual in-country researchers. With this policy, the mechanism attempts to avoid any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, like working for the government that they are assessing.

Country researchers

Country researchers or local researchers are the individuals responsible for researching and writing the country assessment reports. The local researchers are identified through an open recruitment process and by recommendations from existing networks. Ideally, candidates have ten years of experience publishing research, a background in academia or public policy, and have experience working on relevant policy issues, such as governance, transparency, accountability, or participation (Open Government Partnership, 2012b). However, in practice, the level of experience of the researchers varies greatly. In the past, all Independent Reporting Mechanism researchers were encouraged to go to a multi-day in-person training meeting, but virtual trainings were also an option. Events at the global and regional summits were also developed for Independent Reporting Mechanism researchers to exchange ideas and knowledge. If a researcher does not meet the terms of their contract, they can be removed from the project.

Independent Reporting Mechanism Reports

Within the Independent Reporting Mechanism reports, sometimes referred to as country assessment reports, a country’s progress on its National Action Plan is evaluated. The country assessment reports are written by the in-country researcher and incorporate a wide range of input from different stakeholders (Open Government Partnership, 2012b). The Independent Reporting Mechanism does not assess countries comprehensively on their

governance but rather focuses only on the National Action Plan development and implementation of commitments in each country's individual context. The initial Independent Reporting Mechanism proposal stated that the reports would be reviewed by the International Experts Panel, and the governments would have a chance to comment and offer feedback (Open Government Partnership, 2012b). The governments cannot veto any part of the report, but they can offer feedback to correct factual errors or provide more information to clear up any confusion if needed. The reports are published in both English and the relevant local language. The International Experts Panel works with the local country researchers to adhere to the guidelines developed. In 2014, the criteria and standards subcommittee endorsed the Independent Reporting Mechanism in developing a procedures manual to include operational definitions (e.g., relevance) to aid in-country researchers in making their assessments (Open Government Partnership, 2015a).

Per the initial approving document, the Independent Reporting Mechanism report would be prepared every year for each of the participating governments. The reports for the founding eight countries were to be done by September 2013, and the remaining fifty country assessment reports were to be completed in rounds after that (Open Government Partnership, 2012b). All reports have an executive summary to allow for easy comprehension and comparison. The number and scope of Independent Reporting Mechanism reports have changed over time. Per the September 2017 mechanism procedures manual, the Independent Reporting Mechanism produces two reports for each country—one at the end of the first year of implementation of a country's National Action Plan (the country assessment progress report) and the second at the end of the two-year implementation cycle. The end-of-term report was required beginning in 2016 (Open Government Partnership, 2015a). Again, this model is likely to change with the IRM Refresh.

At the February 2016 meeting of the criteria and standards subcommittee, the International Experts Panel told the subcommittee about a new assessment in the end-of-term report that evaluates whether a country's commitments measurably opened government. This additional assessment is consistent with the general trend of more reports and assessments required as part of the Independent Reporting Mechanism process. The big picture

takeaway is that the Independent Reporting Mechanism began with one required report (midterm assessment) and now has two required reports (midterm assessment and final assessment). Both of these reports are much more extensive than originally conceived. As a result, there has been a rather quick increase in the assessments done for each country in the action plan cycle.

The underlying data from the Independent Reporting Mechanism reports are available to the public either in downloadable form or via an interactive website called the OGP Explorer (<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/explorer/all-data.html>). After using the OGP Explorer interface, you can export the data into a comma-separated values (CSV) text file.

OGP Local

In 2015, there were discussions on how the Open Government Partnership could continue to evolve to include not only national-level governments but also subnational governments. It was said at the time that “hundreds of governors, mayors and other local officials are knocking down OGP’s door to sign up and begin sharing their experiences and accessing new international peers and ideas” (Tisé, 2015). In 2015, speaking at the Open Government Partnership Global Summit in Mexico, Samantha Power, US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, spoke about the integration of subnational actors and urged the Open Government Partnership to think about ways to facilitate this integration outside of a summit environment (Power, 2015). However, at that time, there was also concern that a subnational initiative would distract from the Open Government Partnership’s focus and that local governments, particularly cities, already had established networks (Heller, 2016). In the end, it was decided that the initiative would go ahead as a pilot project. The OGP Local program, which began as the subnational government pilot program in 2016 with fifteen participating governments, has been growing. Five of the original local members are based in Europe, four are based in Asia-Pacific, seven in the Americas, and four in Africa.

Initially, the local governments went through a similar action plan development cycle as national-level governments, with a focus on action plans that included commitments centering on transparency, accountability,

and participation with the use of technology. However, the program has since evolved. Most notably, changes were made to the required process for local governments when joining the Open Government Partnership. These changes, including the removal of the formal assessment by the Independent Reporting Mechanism, were approved at the Steering Committee meeting held in May 2019, with the goal of allowing the OGP Local program greater flexibility in hopes that more governments can be included.

In May 2020, formal recruitment for the next round of OGP Local members began. Key components of the OGP Local program include an orientation and learning program, a formal mentorship program, learning circles, and office hours with Open Government Partnership staff members (Open Government Partnership, 2020b). While this book is primarily focused on national-level governments, civil society groups, and the corresponding impact the Open Government Partnership has had, we acknowledge that the OGP Local program is growing and has the potential to change the nature of the Open Government Partnership itself. In October 2020, another fifty-six local jurisdictions joined the OGP Local program, bringing the total up to sixty-four-member local governments (Open Government Partnership, 2020d).

In the next chapter, we take our analysis further and look more closely at how not only the structures, rules, governance of the Open Government Partnership but also the related practices, operations, and intended and unintended consequences of these have affected the direct and indirect pathways of change.

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The Power of Partnership in Open Government

Reconsidering Multistakeholder Governance Reform

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