

# **OPEN GOVERNMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY**

**Opportunities for engaging women's  
rights organisations**

## ABOUT EQUAL MEASURES 2030

Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030) is a unique cross-sector partnership of leading organizations from civil society and the development and private sectors. We work to ensure that girls' and women's movements, advocates and decision makers have the data they need, and in a format they can use, to guide and drive faster progress towards the gender equality commitments in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To achieve this, we connect data and evidence with advocacy and action—using existing gender equality-related data, supporting calls to fill data gaps, and training and equipping advocates to use data and evidence in their efforts to reach the transformational agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

EM2030 was formed in 2016 by a group of cross-sector partners who united their resources, skills, networks and ambition to use data and bring new and critical insights, stories and action to help achieve collective impact for girls and women. The current partnership is a joint effort of leading regional and global organisations from civil society and the development and private sectors, including: the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CLADEM, Data2X, the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), KPMG International, ONE Campaign, Plan International, and Women Deliver.

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*Cover photo: Yannes Kiefer, Unsplash.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The broad vision of the open government agenda is that governments that are more transparent, accountable, and responsive are better positioned to improve the lives of their citizens. Critical to this theory of change is that open government processes reach *all citizens*. The inclusion of diverse voices in open government processes and the consideration of the needs of different population groups in the design of action plans are fundamental to the long-term success of the agenda. And the benefit of inclusion in open government works both ways: cooperation between constituencies in open government processes—for example, women’s rights organisations (WROs)—can strengthen groups’ positioning, bring attention to issues they care about, and draw in other constituencies to learn and act.

In 2019, Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030) undertook qualitative research, supported by the Open Government Partnership (OGP), to explore avenues for engagement between WROs—including grassroots WROs—and existing open government processes in three OGP member states: Colombia, Indonesia, and Kenya. Building upon emerging conceptual frameworks and applied research, focus groups and key informant interviews were used to further map the barriers that women’s organisations face in accessing open government processes and explore the potential for leveraging common policy themes and advocacy linkages between gender equality advocates and open government actors.

Convening partners from across EM2030’s network of WROs, and building on the Feminist Open Government Initiative’s (FOGO) findings from a first phase of research, the research validated findings about the extent to which WROs are aware of their countries’ OGP commitments and action plans, and barriers to their participation in OGP processes; examined the priority issues for gender advocates and how ongoing advocacy could potentially align with current OGP plans and processes; and mapped how gender equality advocates might play a role in gender mainstreaming open government processes in the future.<sup>1</sup>

The resulting research paper a) lays out a framework for learning across different regional contexts and starting points; b) synthesizes findings of three country case studies; and c) provides recommendations on the next steps for governments, civil society actors, and the Open Government Partnership in scaling up potential opportunities for engagement between WROs and open government processes. The framework for analysis proposed (drawing heavily on the conceptual elements of the FOGO initiative) provides a structure to interrogate research findings across different country contexts, target interventions to improve WROs engagement in the open government agenda, and guide approaches to future research.

## THE OPPORTUNITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE OPEN GOVERNMENT AGENDA

The concept of open government has emerged in recent decades as a “big tent” idea that captures a range of reforms across all domains of government and relies on a multi-stakeholder approach for implementation.<sup>2</sup> From the burgeoning citizen-led movement around open government concepts, government leaders and civil society advocates from around the world came together in 2011 to create the Open Government Partnership, designed to promote accountable, responsive, and inclusive governance. The partnership has grown to include 79 national governments—as well as an increasing number of subnational and local governments—and more than 4,000 commitments have been co-created between governments and civil society.

Commitments relate to processes such as participatory decision-making and budgeting, public service provision (such as improving access to education or health services) and strengthening existing laws or policies (for example, calling for improved enforcement of a gender quota in decision-making bodies). Member governments of the Open Government Partnership are intended to shape a body of commitments into a two-year National Action Plan (NAP), appoint lead and secondary ministries and civil society organisations (CSOs) for each commitment, identify concrete steps to implement reforms, and provide public accountability on the implementation of the plan.

### Inclusivity and gender equality within the open government agenda

One intent of open government’s “big tent” model is to enable CSOs to shape and oversee progress on government reforms proposed in a National Action Plan. But the wide-reaching nature of the model and diffuse ownership over open government processes also pose challenges—including fostering inclusion throughout the life cycle of an action plan.

Anecdotal evidence—both from a first phase of Open Government Partnership-supported research across 12 countries and from three country case studies conducted as part of Equal Measures 2030’s research—suggests that meaningful participation in open government by women’s rights organisations (particularly grassroots groups) is incidental rather than strategic and deliberate in most country contexts.<sup>3</sup> Notably few commitments in action plans address gender and even fewer focus solely on a gender equality issue. As of September 2019, 89 commitments in National Action Plans around the world include mentions of women, girls, or gender—this represents just 2 percent of the nearly 4,000 commitments made to date by national and local governments.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) that tracks country progress and implementation has found that commitments that do address women or gender have below-average completion rates. Of the fourteen gender commitments assessed by the IRM, just two have been starred as having “gender-transformative potential impact.”

This underscores the challenges facing the OGP agenda: metrics on gender commitments are helpful to signpost gender gaps or areas of progress by country or across OGP efforts, but the vision of full gender mainstreaming must extend beyond simply improving participation and toward new bridges between constituencies. It demands a new kind of partnership to leverage in this space.

The Open Government Partnership’s secretariat has been on the leading edge of encouraging members to be more ambitious in making co-creation processes and commitments more inclusive. The Feminist Open Government Initiative, for example, focuses explicitly on making open government more inclusive by improving design and implementing gender-responsive approaches, and a *Break the Roles* campaign set a modest goal of at least 30 percent of OGP member countries taking meaningful action on gender and inclusion.<sup>5</sup>

### Why focus on gender equality within the open government agenda?

Gender equality is an increasingly prominent thematic area of focus in the open government community. There are valid normative reasons behind this: women constitute half of the world’s citizens and including women—particularly diverse and intersectional voices—in all levels of governance is the right thing to do. There is—as the Feminist Open

Government Initiative's 2019 report lays out in detail—also a strong strategic case to be made about the value proposition of making OGP processes more inclusive.<sup>6</sup>

Existing research highlights the risks associated with failing to include a focus on gender equality within the growing open government movement: for example, women are already under-represented in nearly every type of government role (in high-income and low-income countries alike, as found in the SDG Gender Index)<sup>7</sup> and excluding women from open government could exacerbate gender gaps in governance instead of fulfilling the potential for open government approaches to help close gender gaps (see Box III, Examples of commitments related to women's participation).

This research supported by the Open Government Partnership—building on EM2030's programmatic experience over the past two years—finds that a promising and yet under-explored approach to ensuring that gender equality is better woven into the open government agenda is increased engagement with women's rights organisations (WROs) and movements.

This assertion—that women's rights organisations could accelerate progress across the open government agenda—draws on a body of research that demonstrates what gender equality advocates and activists have known for a long time: that women's rights movements are an important and consistent factor leading to progressive policy change. The largest statistical review ever conducted about the drivers of policy change, for example, shows this empirically: data from 70 countries found the presence of autonomous feminist movements to be the single most important factor, more strongly correlated even than a country's wealth, presence of left-wing parties, or the number of women in government, in advancing policies to address violence against women and protect women and girls' rights.<sup>8</sup> At the national level, thriving women's rights organisations and movements are able to change standards, laws, institutions, budgets, and practices like few other actors or conditions can. The rationale for OGP member governments to more deliberately engage with women's rights organisations and movements as part of open government processes includes:

- **Broadening the base of stakeholders with "ownership":** OGP can catalyse the inclusion of more voices around the open government table as a proposition to strengthen the movement, build consensus around OGP principles, and draw in other individual and organisational resources and influence.
- **Creating pathways to greater inclusion:** Many WROs and movements already have strong intersectional partners (e.g. focus on advocacy for racial or ethnic minority, disability, elderly, or LGBT+ groups) and are plugged into national or regional networks. Co-creation with WROs could open pathways for member governments to better take into account a range of different population groups' specific needs within open government commitments.
- **Connecting technical processes to lived realities:** Meaningful engagement with grassroots organisations—particularly women's rights organisations and movements—can help open government processes better reflect the needs and concerns of citizens. This is particularly relevant given the findings from OGP-supported research (including EM2030 focus groups) that open government is currently seen by many citizens across regions as a capital city-driven agenda led by technical experts.
- **Tapping into deep thematic knowledge:** WROs are best-positioned to input deep knowledge about the real challenges facing women and girls in their communities, including guidance on how women and girls engage differently with government services, or with broader transparency and accountability mechanisms. WROs bring substantial expertise and advocacy approaches for thematic issues areas (e.g. on gender-based violence or women's political participation) that could inform stand-alone gender commitments.

## How could WROs benefit from engaging in open government processes?

There is a strong case for the value proposition for the Open Government Partnership and member governments to prioritize gender equality, and for the value in WROs potential contributions to the process. But does the value proposition work in both directions—what might WROs find in deepening their engagement with the open government agenda? The rationale for WROs to more deeply engage includes:

## Box I. Aligning open government and gender equality advocates' priorities

This research was designed with previous EM2030 work in mind, including the 2018 Advocates Survey,<sup>9</sup> a global survey of 613 gender advocates asking about the issues they prioritize in advocacy and how they use data and evidence, and the 2019 SDG Gender Index, the most comprehensive tool to track gender equality issues across the Sustainable Development Goals (covering 129 countries and 95% of the world's girls and women). Both can be used to assess whether countries' open government National Action Plans are looking at relevant gender issues, or to develop criteria for assessing which issues should be included in future action plans.

In EM2030's Advocates Survey, the three issues that emerged as top priorities for advocates were **gender-based violence**, **sexual and reproductive health and rights**, and **economic empowerment** (including land and financial inclusion).

The survey results are helpful to shape an understanding of the policy priorities and possible future points of engagement for WROs in open government: it may make the most strategic sense for women's rights organisations' to engage on issues that align with their own priorities.

Comparisons between advocates' policy priorities and current gender commitments show that there are already some strong linkages: for example, advocates in Latin America reflecting a high priority on gender-based violence is a theme evident in the inclusion of commitments related to femicide and gender-based violence in Argentina and Colombia.

There are also gaps. Looking at the Advocates Survey and SDG Gender Index together, there are a number of issues that did not make it high up on the list of priorities in the survey are nonetheless critical to creating an enabling environment for women and girls to thrive. Many of these issues are highly relevant to the open government agenda – including public finance, budgeting and tax issues, and openness of gender statistics. The open government agenda is a promising avenue to drive progress on these issues, but consideration should be given to which actors are best positioned to lead on commitments in these areas versus offer consultations.

- **Interacting with government through new channels:** Open government processes provide an opportunity for WROs to create new touch points with government and build networks with government officials. Feeding into processes that already have institutional leverage, resources, and plans for implementation can open new opportunities to small organisations with limited access to decision-makers.
- **Connecting advocacy between the global and local levels:** The open government agenda has the benefit of extending between levels of government—the framework has international buy-in, national-level plans, and many regional and local actors implementing and monitoring commitments—which could offer WROs an opportunity to stretch the reach of their advocacy.
- **Creating an enabling environment for gender advocacy:** There is a growing body of evidence that shows that open government processes foster better outcomes across a variety of areas—including areas that are fundamental to creating an enabling environment for strong gender equality advocacy and for girls' and women's empowerment.<sup>10</sup> Strong civil society, free press, improved channels for public engagement, better government service provision, and more open data, for example, all contribute to a strong enabling environment.
- **Using accountability for government commitments:** Engaging in open government allows WROs to plug into a broader ecosystem of accountability and potentially situate existing issue-specific advocacy within the agenda's mechanisms for public monitoring and reporting.



## EQUAL MEASURES 2030'S RESEARCH APPROACH

Equal Measures 2030's research—led by input from grassroots gender equality advocates—aims to contribute to the knowledge base on gender equality and open government being built by the Feminist Open Government Initiative. It analyzes the value proposition of inclusive co-creation for both governments and WROs and creates a cross-national framework for analysis of the pathways and intervention points for inclusive engagement.

The qualitative research conducted between February and September 2019 evaluated the extent to which women's organisations have been involved to date in open government processes and possible avenues for involvement in three focus countries (Colombia, Indonesia, and Kenya) through primary desk research, in-country focus groups, and expert interviews with girls' and WROs, organisations involved in open government processes, and government offices (see Box II).

The in-country phase of the research was conducted through participatory methods, including small focus groups. Structured focus group discussions in each country convened 12-18 participants from WROs, national or regional gender equality advocacy groups, and CSOs that have acted as lead or secondary institutions on National Action Plan commitments. Focus groups in each country included representatives from at least seven organisations (including at least one EM2030 partner in each location) and three to five key informant interviews were conducted per country subsequently.

This approach allowed for greater contextualization in each of the three regions, recognizing nuance and guiding discussions based on national context. The resulting framework for analysis, though, is intended to serve as a replicable template that could be used to shape focus group interviews in other countries or applied in interviews in order to understand barriers and opportunities for leveraging open government approaches towards gender advocacy (and vice versa) across countries of different income levels and at different stages of inclusivity in their OGP process.

### Box II. Participating organisations

The project undertook qualitative research (focus groups and expert interviews) among the following girls' and WROs, organisations involved in open government processes, and government offices:

**Colombia:** Asociación red de mujeres Víctimas y Profesionales, Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM), COALICO, Datasketch, Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, Seamos, Somos Mas

**Indonesia:** ARROW, Bappenas Ministry of National Development Planning, Indonesia's National Commission on Violence Against Women, INFID, Kapal Perempuan, Open Government Indonesia, PATTIRO, Plan International Indonesia, Transparency International

**Kenya:** Article 19, Centre for Community Development and Human Rights, FEMNET, Forum for African Women Educationalists, GROOTS Kenya, Local Development Research Institute, Plan International Kenya, and Women's Empowerment Link



Photo: Ruta Pacífica



## Framework for analysis

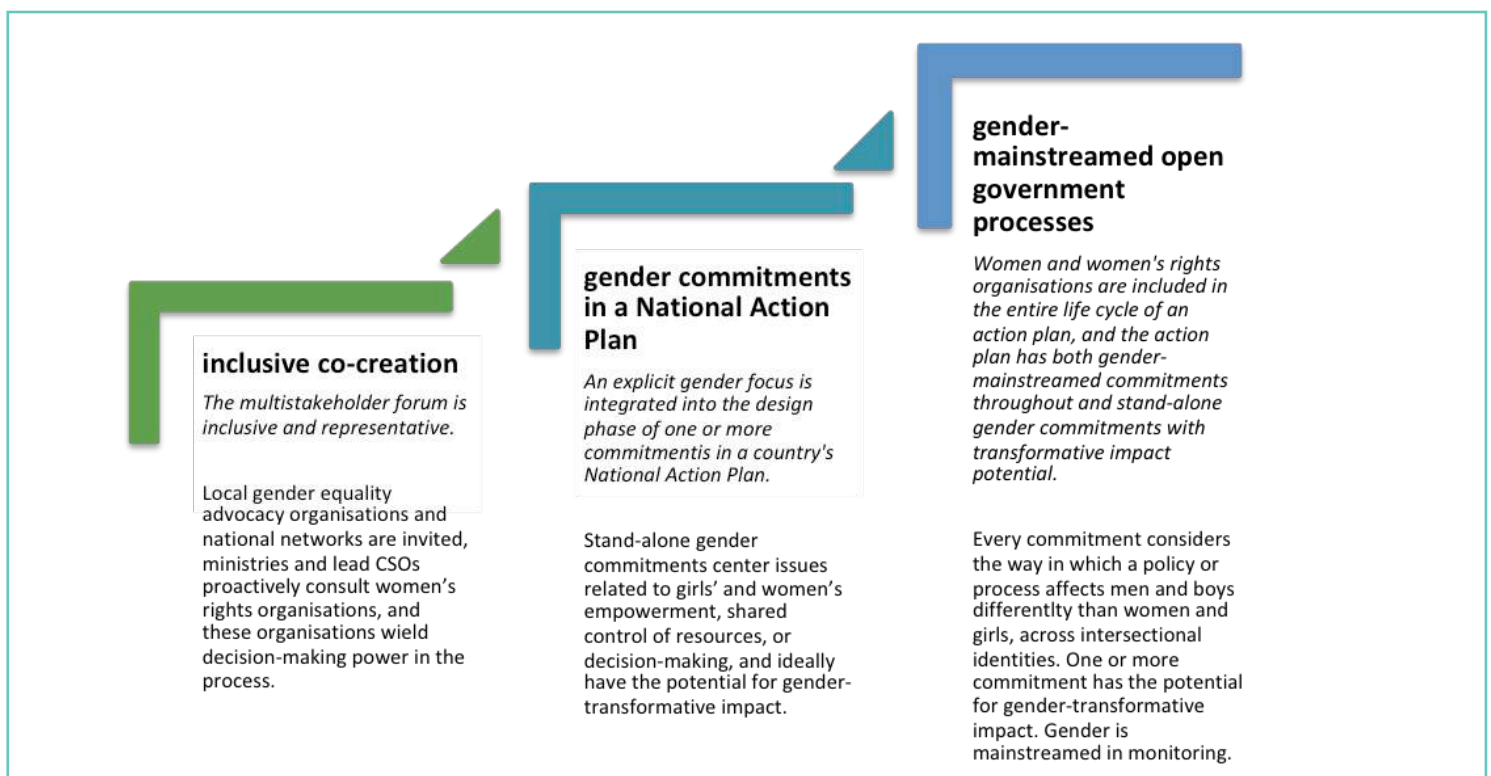
This research was shaped around a framework for analysis (see Figure I), that draws on the conceptual elements of the FOGO initiative, and separates co-creation, gender commitments, and gender mainstreaming into distinct (though inter-related) elements for focus group questions, analysis of findings, and recommendations. The framework provides a protocol to guide research, and also provides a structured framework to analyze research findings across different country contexts and different stages of National Action Plan development.

The focus groups and expert interviews conducted by Equal Measures 2030 were grouped into three broad categories of inquiry that align with this framework. Questions (see Annex I) related to: a) inclusive co-creation, including the extent to which women's organisations were aware of and/or involved in co-creation; b) gender commitments in a National Action Plan, including the extent to which commitments did/did not consider gender, and c) possible opportunities for new commitments and envisioning of what gender mainstreaming in open government processes would look like, and what tools, resources, and pathways would be necessary for gender mainstreaming.

The three elements of the framework roughly align to key stages of the life cycle of a National Action Plan, from when it begins to take shape in multi-stakeholder forums, consultations, or other co-creation process to its active state with commitments in implementation and monitoring stages. The three elements are related to each other, though not necessarily sequentially—it can be viewed less as a linear process (which can result in symbolic or technical actions and commitments) and more as a scaffolding for meaningful gender inclusion across all three elements.

The first element, inclusive co-creation, can be understood as a necessary enabling environment of the other two elements: the hypothesis being that more inclusive co-creation processes with more WROs consulted will result in more gender-specific commitments in an action plan, and across a broader range of issue areas (going beyond open data, although that is a plausible entry point).<sup>11</sup> If a co-creation process is not inclusive and representative of diverse policy priorities, it is unlikely that a resulting action plan will have stand-alone gender commitments (and if they do, they may be symbolic rather than substantive, and unaligned with WROs priority areas for action, or ineffectively monitored by constituents with a stake in their achievement). The last element, gender mainstreaming, is at this point aspirational, as no OGP member government has fully gender mainstreamed a National Action Plan (the three countries evaluated in this research had all made some progress in one or both of the other elements of the framework).

**Figure I. Key conceptual elements for gender in open government processes**



## FOCUS COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT: COLOMBIA

Colombia is currently in the process of implementing 25 commitments in its third National Action Plan. This action plan features commitments related to citizen participation, gender-based violence, peace building, open budgeting, open data and access to information, and anti-corruption.

### Inclusive co-creation:

- Some women's rights organisations (none in EM2030 focus group) have been involved in multi-stakeholder forums and provided input on the design of commitments as support institutions, particularly on the stand-alone gender commitment on sexual violence in the second NAP and current plan.

### Gender commitments:

- Five commitments to date have mentioned women, girls, or gender.
- There is a stand-alone gender commitment in the current NAP related to sexual violence: *Commitment 1, Territorializing Guidelines Sexual Violence Prevention in Women and Girls, Lead Institutions: Dirección de Política Criminal and Penitenciaria-Ministerio de Justicia del Derecho.* The commitment recognizes the high percentage of female victims of sexual violence perpetrated by armed actors during the civil conflict and aims to translate the Constitutional Court sentences guaranteeing the rights of women survivors to territory-level guidelines in 13 territories, 5 in 2018 and 8 in 2019, which are in the implementation phase of the peace agreements. The commitment suggests that guidelines will be jointly constructed by the Ministry of Justice and Law, academia, and women's rights organisations. The commitment has not yet been reviewed by Independent Review Mechanism.



The framework allows for the clearer definition of potential pathways for inclusive participation in different contexts. It helps hone questions: Who needs to be in a multi-stakeholder forum in order for gender-specific commitments to emerge? Where are blockage points? What can mitigate the blockages and open pathways for inclusion?

The framework can be applied to different country contexts. The framework could also help guide the creation or later evaluation of a country's co-creation process or action plan (see Recommendations). And it could be used to identify how different factors (e.g. robustness of civil society, mechanisms for inviting participants to multi-stakeholder forums, policy priority areas for WROs) facilitate or hinder pathways of gender inclusion in OGP. This type of mapping could better facilitate cross-national comparison for in-country constituents (including grassroots groups) interested in learning from other country best practices or regional patterns (a need that was identified by EM2030 focus groups in all three countries).

## KEY FINDINGS

### Cross-national findings on co-creation processes

Findings from Equal Measures 2030's qualitative research help to validate a hypothesis put forward by the first phase of FOGO research that found "that inclusion of women in OGP processes are incidental, if not accidental."<sup>12</sup> Across the three case studies, WROs were only sometimes represented in co-creation processes or consultations on National Action Plans. Both WROs and CSOs acting as leads on commitments validated many of the barriers previously identified to inclusive co-creation, including limited knowledge about open government outside of actors already working in the space, the ad hoc nature of invitations and lack of clarity in communication from government ministry leads about multi-stakeholder forums and other consultation opportunities.

#### *Existing knowledge of the open government agenda*

WROs in the focus group discussions were asked to assess their (and their organisations') level of familiarity with open government processes broadly, and, specifically, with their country's National Action Plan. Most respondents had some familiarity with general open government concepts (particularly in Colombia, where participants were also familiar with regional OGP

efforts) but limited awareness of the specifics of their country's open government processes or commitments, or the pathways for participation for CSOs or WROs. Few participants in each focus group were familiar with the Open Government Partnership secretariat or knew that their country had a National Action Plan; no participant from a grassroots WRO knew where in the life cycle the current action plan stood.

- The low level of awareness was noteworthy in Indonesia, which has been deeply engaged with OGP since its outset and has crafted five action plans to date. Participants were universally familiar with one highly-publicized commitment from the last action plan (LAPOR, a public complaint mechanism), but had not situated the commitment within a broader action plan and cross-government agenda—they cited it as a possible case study for how to elevate and publicly promote future gender commitments.<sup>13</sup>
- There was greater awareness amongst WROs in Kenya, as OGP CSOs have been reaching out to WROs, but the awareness also highlighted some negative perceptions about engaging with OGP and lack of awareness of the value proposition for their engagement.
- Participants in all three countries recognized that there was relatively little knowledge of OGP processes among WROs, but, after discussion around the topic, largely agreed on the two-directional value proposition for the inclusion of more women's organisations in OGP's co-creation processes. They suggested that better communication was needed from OGP and member governments, as well as from peer CSOs or WROs, about the potential benefits of involvement in multi-stakeholder forums and other opportunities for dialogue, as well as pathways for participation (e.g. in Colombia, WROs knew several organisations working explicitly on gender-based violence or on accountability to the peace accords had been invited to consult, but were unsure of the pathways for those organisations' participation).

### **Barriers to women's rights organisations' participation in co-creation**

The focus groups were presented with the research findings on barriers to inclusive co-creation that were mapped by the first phase of FOGO research, and largely validated those research findings. In all focus groups, respondents assessed the extent to which (if at



### **FOCUS COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT: INDONESIA**

Indonesia—one of the eight founding governments of the Open Government Partnership—is currently in the process of implementing 14 commitments in the 2018-2020 action plan, its fifth action plan. This action plan features commitments related to bureaucratic reform, access to public information, data management, village-level governance, and public service innovation.

#### **Inclusive co-creation:**

- The inclusion of women in multi-stakeholder forums has been incidental: some women's organisations have received invitations to forums and some representatives have participated in multistakeholder forums and consultations, though none had leadership roles in the design of commitments. Women's rights organisations have no presence in the Indonesian Core Team and no government agency or body that focuses explicitly on gender equality (e.g. the Indonesia Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection) are involved in open government planning processes.

#### **Gender commitments:**

- Indonesia has never had a stand-alone gender commitment in a NAP. However plans have had commitments related to an enabling environment for gender equality, and the current NAP has one commitment that references inclusion: a commitment mandates implementation of the National Health Insurance's Health Contribution Assistance program for the poor with data accessible for users, "This commitment also encourages the involvement of women groups, marginalized community, and indigenous people."



## FOCUS COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT: KENYA

Kenya joined OGP in 2011, and has implemented three National Action Plans; it is currently implementing the 2018-2020 plan and in the process of co-creation of the fourth National Action Plan (2020-2022). Neither of the first two Kenya national actions plans had specific commitments that addressed the inclusion of women or issues specific to women. With respect to public participation, the first two NAPs specifically prescribed that it should be “open and inclusive.” Yet this was not further elaborated upon to show which groups are expected to be targeted or influenced by this commitment.<sup>1</sup>

### Inclusive co-creation:

- OGP stakeholders in Kenya have held consultations with WROs and one organisation (Article 19) received support to coordinate these efforts. More recently, there have been plans to enhance this efforts by a full-time post funded by the Luminate Group.

### Gender commitments:

- The only gender commitment in the current National Action Plan is related to open contracting: *Commitment 2, Open Contracting, Lead institutions: National Treasury and Public Procurement Oversight Authority*. The commitment sets an ambitious target that that 30 percent of public procurement opportunities should be set aside for youths, women, and persons with disabilities to benefit these categories of “disadvantaged groups,” and the commitment should be “actively monitored by citizens.”

all) women’s organisations had knowledge of or had been actively involved in open government processes, how women’s organisations first became involved, what the structures and processes of engagement looked like, and what barriers hindered participation.

Participants agreed that participation in the open government agenda is contingent on responsive and proactive governments that invest effort in inclusion. Resourcing was a particularly common theme across all focus groups—as meaningful engagement from WROs, which are often already chronically underfunded and over-extended, requires time, expertise, and financial resources. Women’s rights organisations’ involvement in co-creation is also constrained by:

- a lack of existing relationships between WROs and government officials;
- a poorly articulated connection between open government concepts and women’s work on the ground;
- a lack of translation of concepts or documents, including the National Action Plan, into non-primary languages (e.g. over 300 languages are spoken across Indonesia but the National Action Plan is only available in Bahasa and English);
- poor dissemination of information about open government concepts at the county or regional level outside of the capital city;
- logistical barriers around multi-stakeholder forums related to the capital city-driven processes (related to challenges around mobility and child care), when multi-stakeholder forums are held can clash with gender-related advocacy events and crowd out engagement.



Participants in Colombia and Indonesia disagreed with one suggestion in the base of evidence generated by the first phase of FOGO research that a lack of technical expertise is a barrier to WROs engaging in open government processes or National Action Plan commitments. They suggested that this framing could actually be used to justify the further exclusion of WROs, despite their deep expertise in thematic issue areas and familiarity with the advocacy landscape—governments tend to prioritize engaging civil society groups with technical expertise in co-creation, with little thought to the benefits of a diversity of types of organisations and expertise. Participants instead thought that WROs may provide a bridge between technical, expertise-driven commitments and local constituencies with less capacity to engage directly in open government. In Indonesia, for

example, participants noted that women's groups operating at the grassroots level already actively engage in local budgeting and policy creation.

### *The vulnerability or "thinness" of existing opportunities for women's engagement*

A number of issues emerged in focus group discussions related to different dimensions of fragility in the existing pathways of engagement in co-creation for WROs (and CSOs more broadly).

- Participants across countries cited anecdotes that demonstrated how the nature of ad hoc invitations to multi-stakeholder forums and consultations leaves inclusion extremely vulnerable to government turnover.
- Participants in Indonesia strongly advocated for the inclusion of more women's organisations in formal mechanisms at the front end of co-creation processes to ensure sustainability. One WRO pointed to the loss—through spring 2019 elections—of a strong relationship they had built within a government ministry involved in the open government action plan.
- In Indonesia, the limited institutional capacity of Open Government Indonesia also hampered their ability to proactively bring in women's organisations in the development of the last National Action Plan and play a coordinating role between CSOs—though the will was there within all parties to improve mechanisms for outreach and engagement. Participants discussed what mechanisms (e.g. a rotating volunteer gender coordinating chair role) might enable better engagement in the upcoming national multi-stakeholder forum.
- In Kenya, there were considerable efforts to engage WROs, including fund a coordination post which would play an information clearinghouse and convening role, but it was still limited in terms of outreach and was only funded for a short time.
- In Colombia, participants cited deep mistrust of the government among some peer WROs and uncertainty over the government's priorities (particularly in rural areas) as deterrents from engagement. In Kenya, participants noted that they had limited leverage with government partners.

## **Cross-national findings on gender commitments in National Action Plans**

Gender commitments in an action plan are one simple and observable way to gauge a government's intent to integrate a gender focus into a national open government agenda (see Box III).

But findings from focus groups suggest that there is reason to be cautious about over-emphasizing the importance of gender-sensitive commitments, or even stand-alone gender commitments at the expense of setting broader goals around gender mainstreaming. There is little evidence that commitments that nominally mention gender, women, or girls consistently make good on aspirations. Stand-alone gender commitments can run the risk of remaining isolated from other government priorities across an action plan if they are not integrated into a broader prioritization of gender equality. This may be particularly true if WROs or other stakeholders cannot see their advocacy priorities reflected in gender commitments—another argument for increased engagement of gender equality advocates at the design stage of co-creation processes.<sup>14</sup>

The focus groups also revealed interesting differences between countries as to how commitments are generated—i.e., whether they originate with civil society, through backchannels or existing personal relationships between CSOs and government officials, or are shaped through a top-down approach by lead government ministries. This could be more thoroughly mapped in order to formalize creation elements and ensure pathways for WROs and other groups are accessible to meaningfully engage in design and implementation of commitments.

- In Indonesia, representatives from WROs spoke about the need for pre-convenings before a multi-stakeholder forum, during which peer organisations could hold extensive dialogue—bringing in priorities from the grassroots level and from intersectional identity groups—in order to find consensus on potential gender

### Box III. Examples of commitments related to women's political empowerment

Commitments related to women's political empowerment can take many forms. Commitments can: support an enabling environment for women's political empowerment, build women's capacity or skills needed for participation, propose mechanisms for inclusive or participatory governance, or strengthen a law or policy explicitly calling for increased women's participation (e.g. quota):

Ivory Coast, Commitment 14: Aims to engage local communities from five communes in the budget development and implementation process, in particular bringing women into participatory budgeting and bolstering consultation mechanisms around "gender planning."

Malta, Commitment 1: Aims to increase women's participation in public service by focusing on more family-friendly and work-life balance initiatives (e.g. teleworking, reduced hours, job sharing).

Sri Lanka, Commitment 2: Aims to increase the number of women participating in Sri Lankan politics by enforcing the amended Local Government law, which includes a 25% quota for women.

commitments, prioritize issues, and map the feasibility and pathways for stand-alone gender commitments or engaging broadly in gender mainstreaming efforts.

- In Kenya, women's organisations felt that there was an effort and outreach to include them in consultations and formal technical groups, however it was not always clear how to engage and scale up efforts, especially with the limited presence of gender in existing commitments or opportunities for engaging on procurement. This approach to inclusion is being reconsidered in preparations for the next National Action Plan.

- In Colombia (unlike in Indonesia or Kenya), there was a strong regional identity—participants were aware of the progress of other Latin American countries on gender inclusion in open government (though they questioned if the potential impact was overstated), and knew of other stand-alone gender commitments across the region, particularly related to combating gender-based violence. Participants from both WROs and CSOs leading on commitments were interested in sharing good practices.

## Cross-national findings on gender mainstreamed open government processes

A true feminist open government would have inclusive, representative co-creation and a gender lens applied to every commitment within an action plan—whether related to open data, participatory budgeting, infrastructure, natural resources, anti-corruption, or access to education and health services. "Gender mainstreaming" is not always framed as such by grassroots organisations—but concepts related to it were readily proposed in all focus groups, particularly among WROs, as the area needing the most articulation, awareness-raising, and goal-setting from CSOs, governments, and the Open Government Partnership alike.<sup>12</sup> All participants saw the need to ensure that gender is truly mainstreamed, not siloed in "lost commitments" buried within National Action Plans that "tick the box" on gender.

- Participants in Indonesia felt that gender mainstreaming across action plans was dependent on gender commitments that target the village level and place monitoring power within local leaders (who can then be held directly accountable by grassroots groups, including WROs).
- Participants in Kenya saw the value of gender mainstreaming across the action plan, but also recognized the limitations and difficulty of doing so for commitments such as open procurement or public participation. There was support amongst Kenyan participants to also work immediately to have standalone commitments with a clear gender focus.
- In Colombia, participants placed much more value on prioritizing gender mainstreaming across open government processes—even if the process is relatively new and there are not yet case studies or best practices to evaluate and share learnings from—than on stand-alone gender commitments.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

What is needed act on the findings from the Equal Measures 2030 focus groups—to improve WROs' meaningful contribution to the open government agenda and make progress towards more gender commitments and gender-mainstreamed action plans?

Looking at the research findings—including those from FOGO's first round of research involving case studies from 12 countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia—there is a clear need for additional mapping and awareness-raising about the barriers to inclusive co-creation, and mechanisms that can ensure pathways through them. There is opportunity to enable potential synergies between governments, CSOs, and girls' and women's rights constituencies that could align strategically around gender commitments. There is a desire among many actors involved in open government—as well as those situated outside, looking to join in—to better define and set goals around full gender mainstreaming in open government. And there is significant need for a structured framework for analysis and a clear baseline from which to judge future progress in each of these areas.

### Recommendations for the OGP secretariat and regional leads

- **Communication about the value proposition:** grassroots organisations need greater clarity on the value for participating in OGP, and need to see commitment to their participation in decision-making roles, and government, OGP, or external donor resources dedicated to their engagement.
- **Target-setting:** OGP should set clear (and clearly communicated) targets for numbers of gender commitments and mainstreaming to be reached, for example in 2-year and 5-year time horizons.
- **Example-setting within OGP:** While the secretariat has made significant strides—including launching FOGO and investing in gender-related action research—there is room for even better example-setting. The OGP Secretariat can further demonstrate its commitment to gender equality by ensuring women's representation in OGP decision-making roles, identifying gender focal point or chair people for each OGP Working Group, and implementing mechanisms for communication and the sharing of learning.
- **Action-oriented research and case studies:** OGP can invest in additional research to:
  - Identify linkages between gender advocacy and thematic focus areas in OGP action plans;
  - Highlight successful strategies for WROs' engagement through case studies disseminated to regional leads or through webinars or other online communities of practice;
  - Test pathways between steps in the framework to see if assumed pathways (e.g. an inclusive multi-stakeholder forum will result in more stand-alone gender commitments) hold in different contexts;
  - Back up the value proposition with country-specific evidence and compile case studies showing how more inclusive participation in OGP processes yields better open government outcomes relative to gender blind approaches;



All participants saw the need to ensure that gender is truly mainstreamed, not siloed in “lost commitments” buried within National Action Plans that “tick the box” on gender.

- Evaluate how other constituencies work in collaboration with limited resources and how to mitigate open government processes stretching grassroots women's organisations too thin;
  - Better understand the demand side that could contribute to sustainable co-creation– (e.g. what are benefits to both sides, what is the value proposition and how could that be better enhanced);
  - Review how the practice of gender markers are used by multilateral organisations or INGOs to see if this could inform the review process in design or evaluation by the IRM;
  - Map if gender is part of the policy and planning process in member governments (e.g. are commitments related to what is already being considered or implemented).
- **Mechanisms for increasing women's participation in the OGP lifecycle:** OGP could consider:
    - Setting mandatory requirements for participation of women and diverse groups in multi-stakeholder forums, on national committees, or among lead institutions on commitments;
    - Setting up an incentive structure for member countries to design and monitor gender in commitments (e.g. recognition at an OGP Summit or placement into a cohort of member countries leading on gender equality);
    - Setting up structures (or guidelines) for member countries that give grassroots WROs resources and responsibilities in OGP processes; including peer review or structured gender review of commitments.
  - **Framework for analysis:** OGP could utilize the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) to assess not only the gender sensitivity of certain commitments, but to conduct a life-cycle review (Figure I) of inclusivity in all open government processes, and develop metrics to assess countries' performance in each step of gender mainstreaming.
  - **Grading tool:** Drawing on the framework presented in Figure I, a gender inclusivity grading tool could assess success, or progress towards a defined goal, within each element (similar to how the IRM grades commitments by evaluating potential impact). This could, looking as reference to gender inclusion practices across other fields, inform a comprehensive gender review process or gender checklist tool for OGP member countries.
  - **Technical guidance to member governments:** OGP should insert gender language and requirements into its existing multi-stakeholder guidelines. Much in the guidelines already implicitly deals with gender equality, but this should be strengthened to include a structured framework for analysis and practical examples from different country contexts. This could feed into a new operation manual solely dedicated to engaging WROs in co-creation processes
  - **Gender-specific support to CSOs:** Training modules or other resources should be shared with CSOs acting as lead or secondary institutions on commitments (stemming from focus group participants' input that, though there are some gender champions within some of these organisations, few technical experts have had gender bias training or structured learning around gender mainstreaming).

**OGP budgets should include financial and logistical support for WROs to engage in multi-stakeholder forums and consultations.**



- **Support to WROs:** OGP budgets should include financial and logistical support for WROs to engage in multi-stakeholder forums and consultations. OGP should also engage women’s groups and movements—framing the value proposition to strategically build relationships—with a focus on opening pathways for participation rather than “capacity building.” Many WROs are well-skilled themselves in “capacity building” approaches for constituents at the grassroots level, including in rural, indigenous, and historically marginalized communities—networks that could feed into OGP processes.
- **Facilitation of regional learning:** OGP should lean into the strengths of a regional approach to gender mainstreaming (e.g. economies of scale, shareable tools or public goods, learning, and support networks) and consider focusing on outreach to regional gender advocacy networks as a first step in building momentum behind the agenda.

## Recommendations for governments

- **Consultations beyond multi-stakeholder forums:** Member governments should move beyond the minimal requirements for inclusive consultative mechanisms and create more strategic plans to develop invitation and recruitment lists (relying on existing civil society networks, including national gender advocacy networks). This could involve a mapping exercise in collaboration with a WRO, and thinking about different types of consultation opportunities, including events outside of capital cities, web-based events, or consultative forms distributed through networks in rural areas.
- **Requirements for participation:** Member governments should—in consultation with OGP—set mandatory minimum requirements for participation of women on national committees and minimum numbers of gender-sensitive or gender-transformative commitments in action plans.
- **Support to WROs:** Member governments should seek to support local WROs and feminist movements, which are in need of agile, cross-sectoral, and long-term funding.
- **Flexible and sustainable structures:** Member governments should consider creating mechanisms that mitigate vulnerabilities in the agenda caused by political turnover, for example by setting a permanent home for the national steering committee within a government agency or informal multi-year chairpersons overseeing commitments grouped by thematic areas and facilitating communication across stakeholders.

## Recommendations for CSOs

- **Opportunities for inclusive co-creation:** CSOs should, at the front end of co-creation, conduct assessments of commitments to evaluate possibilities for more inclusive co-creation, and map organisations or individuals in their civil society networks who could bring expertise on gender equality and inclusion to the commitment.
- **Bridges between open government experts and women’s rights policy and advocacy leaders:** The focus groups conducted across three countries suggested that there is substantial appetite among CSOs leading on open government commitments for collaboration with gender equality advocates, even if informal, and even if with collaborators outside of their networks or previously unknown. CSOs should build bridges with WROs, for example by appointing staff to act as an informal liaison.
- **Internal learning:** CSOs involved in the design of commitments should commit to internal learning, including on the different effects that policies can have on women and men, and on how to better include gender and intersectional perspectives in commitments. Where there is interest, WROs can also commit to internal learning about the status of their country’s National Action Plan, how to use open government tools, and what potential advocacy linkages they might share with the open government agenda.



## ANNEX I: SAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

I: Assessing existing familiarity with OGP concepts and National Action Plans, perceptions of the OGP agenda, and inclusive co-creation	
Questions directed toward CSOs involved with OGP commitments	Questions directed toward WROs
<p>Do you see gender equality issues as relevant or important to Open Government processes?</p> <p>How familiar is your organisation with your country's NAP, and what is the level of familiarity with specific commitments?</p> <p>What would you say is the level of familiarity among most CSOs and government lead agencies/ministries or individuals on the open government steering committee with gender equality issues in your country?</p> <p>Some barriers to women's organisations participating in open government processes have been identified by previous research (the process is technical and requires specialist knowledge; content is not seen as relevant to WRO issues, lack of technical capacity; lack of resources). Do these barriers sound accurate? Are there other barriers to participation that are not identified here?</p> <p>Describe the process for your organisation's participation in a multi-stakeholder forum or consultations. Was gender equality a topic that came up in the co-creation process?</p>	<p>Do you see open government processes as relevant to your own work?</p> <p>How familiar is your organisation with your country's NAP, and what is the level of familiarity with specific commitments?</p> <p>Some barriers to women's organisations participating in open government processes have been identified by previous research (the process is technical and requires specialist knowledge; content is not seen as relevant to WRO issues, lack of technical capacity; lack of resources). Do these barriers sound accurate? Are there other barriers to participation that are not identified here?</p> <p>What kinds of resource (staff and funding) challenges are there for small organisations to engage in the OGP agenda?</p> <p>Was your organisation (or peer WROs) aware of or invited to participate in a multi-stakeholder forum or consultations? How could the process better ensure the participation of WROs?</p>
II: Exploring how OGP commitments are generated/potential areas for WRO engagement on commitments	
<p>Where did the commitment you are part of originate: did the government have a proposal and approach you?</p> <p>What are the steps to engaging on a commitment? What are possible points of entry?</p>	<p>What types of commitments are most relevant for your organisation/gender advocates more broadly?</p> <p>What criteria should be used to assess a commitment (e.g. alignment with advocates' priorities, feasibility of completion, potential for transformative impact)?</p>
III: Exploring the potential for gender-mainstreaming across OGP processes	
<p>Is there appetite to better mainstream gender issues in OGP processes, including through existing or new commitments?</p> <p>What are ways OGP and other organisations could make entry points for engagement on NAP commitments easier for WROs?</p>	<p>What do you think WROs could bring to the open government processes? What would a potential collaboration on a commitment look like?</p> <p>What are ways OGP and other organisations could make entry points for engagement on NAP commitments easier for WROs?</p>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See resources from EIGE, the ILO, or UN Women for definitions and best practices around gender mainstreaming. UN Women defines it as “The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetrated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”
- <sup>2</sup> A helpful primer on definitions of open government and open government concepts from various sources can be found at: OpenGovLab, “What’s In A Name?” (2013), <http://thegovlab.org/open-government-whats-in-a-name/>.
- <sup>3</sup> While this paper focuses specifically on gender equality advocates’ engagement, similar barriers to participation in open government and lack of inclusion in action can be found among other groups’ (e.g. advocates for ethnic/racial minority groups, disabled, elderly, LGBT+); even fewer National Action Plan commitments address issues of sexual identity or orientation than address gender, for example.
- <sup>4</sup> Open Government Partnership, “Gender Commitments Fact Sheet,” (2019), [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/OGP\\_Fact-Sheet\\_Gender\\_November2018.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/OGP_Fact-Sheet_Gender_November2018.pdf).
- <sup>5</sup> Open Government Partnership, “Break the Roles,” (2019), <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/how-together-we-can-break-the-roles/>.
- <sup>6</sup> Open Government Partnership, “Feminist Open Government: Addressing Gender Equity Challenges in Government Co-Creation Processes,” (2019), [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/fogo-main-report\\_web.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/fogo-main-report_web.pdf).
- <sup>7</sup> Less than 25 percent of members of lower houses of parliament and cabinet-level ministers globally were women in 2018. In EM2030’s SDG Gender Index, the global average scores for both of these critical indicators on women’s participation were failing scores, with every region (including Europe and North America) receiving failing scores on both. Yet many of the top performing individual countries on both indicators were middle or low-income countries from Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Learn more at: EM2030, SDG Gender Index, (2019), <https://data.em2030.org/>.
- <sup>8</sup> Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon, “The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective,” Cambridge Press, American Political Science Review, Volume 106 Issue 3, (2012), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/civic-origins-of-progressive-policy-change-combating-violence-against-women-in-global-perspective-19752005/810036AC92E6A7E245A083E3EEE4EFA0>.
- <sup>9</sup> Equal Measures 2030, “Gender Advocates Survey,” (2018), <https://www.equalmeasures2030.org/products/advocate-survey/>.
- <sup>10</sup> Open Government Partnership, “Micro-level evidence on impact,” (2018), <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/campaigns/global-report/collective-results-open-government-ogp/>.
- <sup>11</sup> Open Government Partnership, “Feminist Open Government: Addressing Gender Equity Challenges in Government Co-Creation Processes,” (2019), [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/fogo-main-report\\_web.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/fogo-main-report_web.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> GovInsider, “Inside Lapor, Indonesia’s complaints unit”, (2015), <https://govinsider.asia/innovation/inside-lapor-indonesias-complaints-unit/>.
- <sup>14</sup> Open Government Partnership, “Feminist Open Government: Addressing Gender Equity Challenges in Government Co-Creation Processes,” (2019), [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/fogo-main-report\\_web.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/fogo-main-report_web.pdf)

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