Guidance

Co-Creation and the Development of Action Plans

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Open Government Partnership

Overview

The OGP Action Framework offers different pathways for OGP members to achieve their open government objectives, with OGP action plans as the main pathway. All of the different pathways are underpinned by co-creation, which embodies the partnership between governments, civil society, and other actors in driving open government reforms. This collaborative process makes sure that open government initiatives are context-specific, responsive to citizen needs, and supported by a broad range of stakeholders.

Co-creation is guided by the OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards (for more details please consult the OGP National Handbook).

This guidance document offers practical tools and strategies for government POCs, civil society stakeholders, and members of the space for dialogue required in Minimum Requirement 1.1, to develop action plans effectively using co-creation. Based on the experiences of OGP members throughout the years, a proven approach has been to create a multi-stakeholder forum or platform, referenced as the **Multi-Stakeholder Forum** (MSF).

Key Moments in Developing the Action Plan

When developing action plans using co-creation, there are at least four key moments to keep in mind: planning for the process, stakeholder engagement, action plan formulation, and giving feedback and reasoned response. These are referred to as moments rather than steps or stages because, in most cases, they are iterative rather than linear. Additionally, they may even overlap or be embedded within one another.

Planning for the Process

Key considerations before embarking on a co-creation process, planning to plan

Stakeholder Outreach & Engagement

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

Action Plan Formulation

Sense-making of inputs gathered, defining problems, working on solutions, moving from problems to solutions, and drafting the commitments

Feedback

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

Crucially, **co-creation** is the foundational principle underpinning each of these steps in the entire process of developing an action plan. Because the four key moments are iterative, co-creation should be applied throughout the entire process.

1. PLANNING FOR THE PROCESS

Early planning for the different activities to be undertaken during the development of action plans is crucial so that the objectives of the process are clear, stakeholders and their roles are defined, available resources are identified, and the timeline to complete the process is laid out.

It is important to involve the MSF and the spirit of co-creation to develop the plan itself. The two relevant Standards and corresponding minimum requirements for the development of action plans are below.

Standard 2

Providing open, accessible, and timely information about activities and progress within a member's participation in OGP.

Minimum Requirement 2.1

A public OGP website dedicated to the member's participation in OGP is maintained.

Standard 3

Providing inclusive and informed opportunities for public participation during development of the action plan.

Minimum Requirement 3.1

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

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

1.1   Analyzing the State of Play

To establish a plan that guides the development of an action plan, it is important that OGP members analyze the current state of play, which may include the following:

- The current political climate (see Section 1.3 of this document for information on political transitions)
- Relevant ongoing reform processes
- Government and civil society priorities
- Government-civil society relations
- Relevant events, meetings, or other moments, which could impact the OGP process

Understanding the state of play and how these different elements may contribute to or impact the action plan development process will help OGP members shape the timelines and activities of their plans, ultimately leading to more effective co-creation.

1.2   Structuring the Development of an Action Plan

The planning phase should lead to a clear and structured plan that guides the development of action plans, developed among members of the MSF. Such a plan should outline the methodology for the following.

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

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

- **Providing feedback to participants.** This includes concrete activities to inform those who participated in the process of developing an action plan about the results of their participation and how their ideas or suggestions will be addressed in the development and finalization of action plan commitments. (Refer to Sections 4 and 5 in this document for further information about feedback and reasoned response.)

CO-CREATION

The plan should address key questions that guide action plan development and implementation.

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

CO-CREATION

The following example provides some high-level ideas for a plan on the development of action plans that addresses some of these key questions.

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

1.3 Political Transitions and Elections

Political transitions and elections present clear challenges to co-creation and the timely development of action plans, as well as their subsequent implementation. In advance of and during transitional periods, it can be difficult to secure high-level political support to develop or implement ambitious commitments. Additionally, changes in administration may lead to shifts in priorities, affecting the continuity of commitments.

Countries can consider different strategies for delivering action plans during political transitions, each with its own implications. Based on past experiences, countries could consider the following.

- **Delivery of a regular action plan:** Some countries have chosen to develop regular action plans during transitions. In the publication "Why OGP Commitments Fall Behind," the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) highlights that beyond lack of capacity or coordination, a common cause for commitment failure is "discontinuity from one administration to another during political transition." Therefore, if this option is chosen, a participating government should ensure clear communication channels with the incoming administration (and with civil society) and a thorough handover process.

- **Limited action plan:** One option is to develop a more limited action plan, with fewer or less ambitious commitments. This subsequently allows the new administration to carry out an additional, more streamlined process of action plan development to add new commitments (while acting in accordance with action plan amendment rules outlined in "Development of Action Plans and Commitments" in the OGP National Handbook) after assuming office. This allows OGP members to maintain momentum and avoid acting contrary to process. However, the commitments from the initial development of the action plan might not be very ambitious, or they might not be completed, depending on the priorities of the new administration. Note that in these cases, only the first process of developing an action plan will be assessed by the IRM.

Regardless of the option chosen, the different approaches should be discussed within the government and the MSF, and with the OGP Support Unit representative. The MSF plays a crucial role during political transitions, particularly in countries with a higher rate of government employee turnover, as it can provide important institutional memory.

2.   STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

With planning in place, the next key moment in the process of developing an action plan is stakeholder engagement. Effective outreach ensures meaningful participation by raising awareness of open government, OGP, and opportunities for involvement, helping to make the process more inclusive.

The relevant Standard and two minimum requirements for outreach are below.

Standard 3

Providing inclusive and informed opportunities for public participation during development of the action plan.

Minimum Requirement 3.2

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

Minimum Requirement 3.3

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

2.1 Conducting Inclusive Outreach Activities

For participation to be inclusive, efforts must be made to provide opportunities to as many and as diverse stakeholders as possible. It is particularly important to invite marginalized and habitually excluded groups to participate in OGP and other public policy processes. This involves the following.

Conducting outreach activities to the public to inform them of OGP and the action plan development process, timeline, processes, and opportunities to participate. This may include:

- Activities to allow any interested member of the public to provide input into the development of an action plan. For such engagement to be meaningful, basic information on open government, OGP, the action plan process, timelines, and both synchronous and asynchronous mechanisms for participation at different stages of developing an action plan should be clearly communicated. Inputs solicited from the public should not require specialized or technical knowledge of open government issues.

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

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

Analyzing barriers to participation for some groups and addressing these barriers through inclusive methodologies. Knowing barriers to participation will help those developing the action plan find better ways to engage a diverse range of participants.

Initiating targeted engagement and designing participation channels to habitually excluded groups. MSFs may consider recruiting individuals or organizations to serve as liaisons to specific underrepresented communities to support their engagement and consultation in the process, including targeted outreach to relevant organizations working with key groups, such as women, youth, and people with disabilities, among others.

2.2 Gathering Initial Inputs from Stakeholders

Beyond creating opportunities for participation, outreach activities also serve as a way to gather input from participants on key issues. The MSF can use these activities to collect information on transparency, accountability, and citizen participation concerns that stakeholders want to see addressed. This includes identifying problems they want the action plan to tackle or open government concerns they would like it to consider. This can be done in several ways, including:

- Asking participants a focus question (or a few) during outreach events or activities,
- Issuing an open call for ideas online, or
- Circulating an online survey.

The questions to be asked and the process for collecting responses should be designed according to the objectives of the action plan development process. It is also important to ensure that participants' responses and contributions are recorded and documented in a way that facilitates the subsequent process of collating or summarizing them and providing a reasoned response (see Section 4 for more information on reasoned response).

3.   ACTION PLAN FORMULATION

With outreach complete and initial inputs gathered, the next key moment in the process of developing an action plan is formulating the action plan itself. At this stage, the focus shifts to reviewing inputs, defining problems, identifying solutions, and drafting concrete commitments for inclusion in the action plan.

The three relevant Standards and their respective minimum requirements for action plan formulation are below.

Standard 2

Providing open, accessible, and timely information about activities and progress within a member's participation in OGP.

Minimum Requirement 2.2

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

Standard 3

Providing inclusive and informed opportunities for public participation during development of the action plan.

Minimum Requirement 3.3

The MSF where established, or the government where there is no MSF, develops a mechanism to gather inputs from a range of stakeholders during an appropriate period of time for the chosen mechanism.
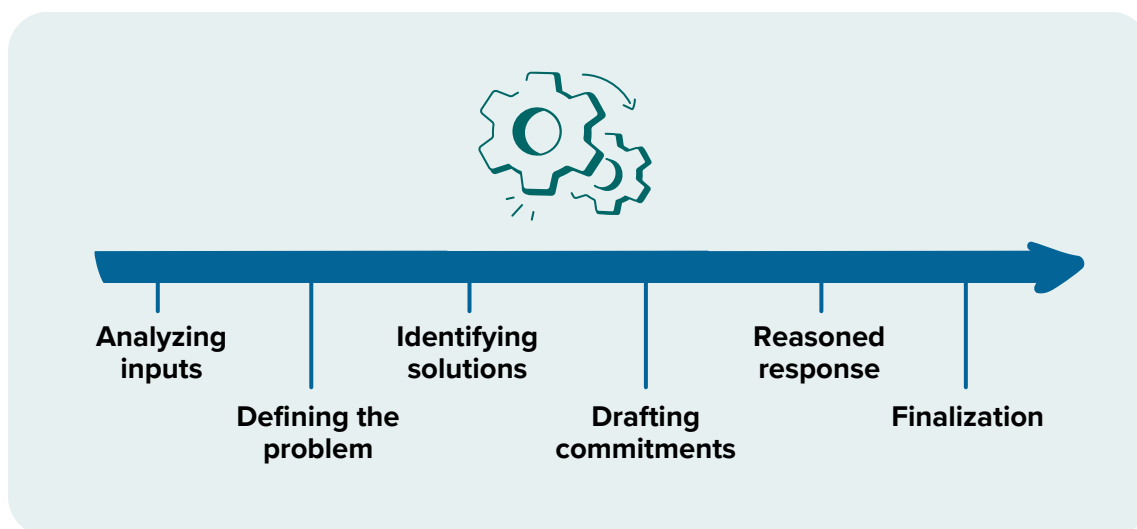
Standard 4

Providing a reasoned response and ensuring ongoing dialogue between government and non-governmental stakeholders during co-creation of the action plan.

Minimum Requirement 4.1

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

CO-CREATION

The process of action plan formulation involves several key steps, each building on the previous one to ensure that commitments are well-defined, relevant, and feasible. The following diagram illustrates the main steps, from analyzing inputs to finalizing the action plan.

Analyzing inputs — **Defining the problem** — **Identifying solutions** — **Drafting commitments** — **Reasoned response** — **Finalization**

3.1 Analyzing Inputs

Depending on the type, quality, and volume of the inputs gathered from the outreach process, there needs to be a suitable way to organize them. For example, it can be helpful to categorize the inputs in the following ways:

- sector or theme (e.g., health, education, environment);
- jurisdiction for implementation (e.g., government ministry, parliament, supreme court, local government); or
- public governance principle (e.g., transparency, civic participation, digital governance).

In this way, numerous ideas may be narrowed to a few that will become the basis for moving forward in the next steps.

3.2 Defining the Problem

Strong and transformative commitments clearly articulate a problem to address. Thus, it is important that the problem experienced by citizens or specific target groups of beneficiaries is appropriately identified, analyzed, and articulated.

Essential questions will answer:

- What is the problem?
- Which aspects of the problem relate to or are compounded by a lack of transparency, citizen participation, or public accountability? (This question is crucial to ensure relevancy of commitments to the OGP principles.)
- Who is affected by this problem and how?
- What are the root causes of this problem?
- What has been done so far by the government and other stakeholders to address the problem?

Thematic working groups may be convened to undertake the task of problem definition. Existing sectoral or working groups that have been set up for other policy or reform processes could be leveraged for this step. If, for example, open contracting is identified as a key issue during the input analysis, a thematic working group on open contracting may be convened (or a pre-existing group leveraged) to explore the issue further and undertake the problem definition exercise and subsequent steps. The thematic working group could be composed of:

- agencies involved in the public procurement process,
- civil society organizations working on procurement reform,
- scholars researching the topic, and
- private sector organizations representing supplier and contractor groups.

At this stage, targeted public engagement may also be conducted on specific issues or concerns identified during the input analysis, in addition to setting up thematic working groups. For example, if the problem is related to improving educational facilities and services, the MSF may involve non-expert groups of students, parents, and teachers in the problem definition and in subsequent steps.

3.3 Identifying and Selecting Solutions

With the problem clearly articulated, potential solutions can now be explored. It is important to explore various solutions and select those which most appropriately address the problem identified, building on activities that the country has attempted in the past to address the problem.

Potential solutions can vary depending on the problem identified and the country context. Solutions can come in the form of projects, platforms, policies, legislative change, and more. Whichever solutions are selected, it is important to articulate:

- How the OGP platform can effectively respond to the identified problem, and
- How the proposed solution is relevant to the OGP principles of transparency, civic participation, and public accountability.

3.4 Drafting Commitments and the Action Plan

DRAFTING COMMITMENTS

OGP action plans contain a series of commitments. OGP commitments are promises for reform and typically include a description of the problem, concrete actions that will be taken to address the problem, and individual milestones that will be completed as part of the commitment. Drafting commitments should ideally begin only after:

- The problem has been clearly defined,
- Potential solutions have been explored,
- Specific solutions have been selected,
- Specific activities and milestones have also been identified, and
- Stakeholders relevant for the implementation of the commitments have been engaged to ensure feasibility and buy-in for implementation.

Often, countries must prioritize commitments when several commitment proposals have been identified. Considerations have to be made regarding:

- the urgency and magnitude of the problem to be addressed,
- the political and operational feasibility given timeframes and resources, and
- the relevance to the OGP principles of transparency, accountability, and citizen participation.

OGP member countries draft commitment proposals in a commitment template provided by OGP. The template includes:

- A commitment description,
- A narrative on how the commitment aligns with OGP principles and the country's wider strategic goals,
- Milestones and deliverables, and
- Stakeholders involved in implementation.

The responsibility for drafting commitments may vary depending on the context. In some cases, thematic working groups may jointly draft commitments, whereas in other cases, the lead implementing government agency may take the lead in drafting. Whoever is responsible should continue to implement the spirit of co-creation through ongoing dialogue and be open to feedback.

DRAFTING THE ACTION PLAN

In addition to the commitment templates, the action plan must include the following elements (please see in "Development of Action Plans and Commitments" in the OGP National Handbook for further information):

- an introduction,
- a description of government efforts to date, and
- an elaboration of the action plan development process.

Typically, the lead OGP ministry or agency will assume responsibility for writing the action plan. Writing may begin in parallel to commitment drafting and can be finalized after the list of commitments to include is completed.

In the process of drafting the commitments and action plan, new ideas may emerge, requiring further outreach and consultation. The MSF should be quick to recognize these opportunities and implement steps for outreach and consultation.

Once the commitments and action plan are drafted, it is recommended to publish the draft for a final round of public comments.

4. FEEDBACK AND REASONED RESPONSE

With the action plan and commitments drafted, the process of developing an action plan moves into its final key moment: providing feedback and reasoned response. At this stage, stakeholder contributions are acknowledged and addressed, and the action plan is finalized with government approval.

The relevant standard and respective minimum requirement for feedback and reasoned response is below.

Standard 4

Providing a reasoned response and ensuring ongoing dialogue between government and non-governmental stakeholders during co-creation of the action plan.

Minimum Requirement 4.1

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

A reasoned response is the government's or the MSF's reply to stakeholders who contributed to the action plan and to the public in general, which contains the reasoning behind decisions made on their contributions. Reasoned response can be made for each of the following decisions.

- **Inclusion:** Suggestions or comments that are considered in drafting or finalizing commitments
- **Amendment:** Suggestions or comments that are considered in drafting or finalizing commitments, but with some modifications
- **Rejection:** Suggestions or comments that are not considered in drafting or finalizing commitments

A reasoned response to stakeholder input and feedback is highly correlated with ambition, completion, and early results. Providing an explanation for why specific priorities, ideas, or activities were or were not included in the action plan can also help strengthen accountability and address concerns from those whose proposals were rejected.

The MSF or the government should also present the reasoning for selecting commitments, including justifications for commitment proposals that were not adopted and other feedback as appropriate. The basis for decision-making should be published, and all results from the decision-making process should be made publicly available. Response to stakeholders who contributed to the action plan development should include:

- the input that was collected in the consultation/engagement,
- how decision-makers considered the input,
- how the input influenced the outcome of the decision,
- whether the input was included/not included and why, and
- in what ways the input will be considered beyond the current action plan, if at all.

Reasoned response must occur before the action plan is finalized. It can occur at several points during the development of the action plan. Examples of when to provide the reasoned response are below.

- During the crafting of the timeline to develop an action plan when stakeholders are involved
- During the first gathering of inputs
- During the selection of commitments to be included in the action plan
- During the final round of public comments

A reasoned response can be provided in different ways, such as through a publicly available document in the OGP repository (see "Ensuring Information Transparency" the OGP National Handbook for more information on repositories) that contains contributions and how they were addressed or through meetings specifically called to define and select commitments. Regardless of the format, it is important that the process of providing a reasoned response is documented, communicated to stakeholders, and described in the action plan.

5. FINALIZATION AND SUBMISSION OF THE ACTION PLAN

After carrying out a final review of the action plan and providing a reasoned response, the government or MSF will finalize the action plan, secure required government approvals, and submit it to the Support Unit (see "Development of Action Plans and Commitments" in the OGP National Handbook) for information about how to submit an action plan).

Once the plan is finalized, it is also important to provide closure to the process of developing an action plan by sharing next steps and informing stakeholders about how they will be engaged in the implementation of the action plan or how they can stay updated on progress. Presenting the action plan in a public event with high-level participation can help initiate the implementation process and build support.