

Multi-stakeholder Forum readout

Wednesday 17th July 2024

Aim of the meeting

The aim of this Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) was to review the monitoring and implementation of the Sixth National Action Plan for Open Government (NAP6) and open an initial discussion on co-creation planning of the Seventh National Action Plan for Open Government (NAP7). It included an announcement of Machinery of Government (MOG) changes concerning the creation of a digital centre for government followed by facilitated discussion and feedback.

Attendees

There were a total of 37 attendees, of which 21 were government representatives and 16 from civil society. There were a further 18 apologies received, 13 from government representatives and 5 from civil society.

Slide-deck

A comprehensive slide-deck <link> was used to facilitate this meeting, which contains a substantial amount of information which will not be duplicated in the read-out. The slide-deck is available in PDF format.

Welcome

The meeting was co-chaired by Dr Matt Donnelly, Open Data and Transparency Lead in CDDO (Central Digital and Data Office) and Kevin Keith, Chair of the UK Open Government Civil Society Network (UK OGN).

Machinery of government changes

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) will expand in both scope and size bringing experts in data, digital and AI from the Government Digital Service (GDS), the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO) and the Incubator for AI (i.AI) to create a digital centre for government. The move to DSIT was [announced](#) on 8th July on behalf of Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, [Peter Kyle MP](#).

Matt Donnelly explained that in the light of these and other changes government officials may be limited in their contributions whilst awaiting instructions from Ministers. The MSF was asked to be appreciative of this position.

Part One: NAP6 Monitoring & amendments

Civil society and government leads worked together to provide updates on NAP6 commitments and expression of building capacity

Commitment 1: Open Contracting

Activities related to [Transforming Public Procurement](#), including the civil society-government Open Contracting Advisory Group, are paused following the announcement of the general election. Civil society looked forward to resuming with government representatives and the opportunity to consider ideas for the new government. They reiterated the importance of work still to be done regarding implementation of the secondary legislation expected to take effect in October 2024.

Commitment 2: International Aid Transparency

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has delivered substantial progress on one of their NAP6 commitments to re-join the 'Very Good' category of the independent [Aid Transparency Index](#) published by Publish What You Fund. Civil society welcomed this achievement to strengthen transparency of Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending. Other reflections included a shared desire by civil society and government to continue to champion transparency efforts, including by working through the Bond Transparency Working Group.

Commitment 3: Engagement on anti-corruption

The UK Anti-Corruption Coalition continues to meet with government officials and these discussions have been positive. Publication of the UK anti-corruption strategy has paused following the announcement of the general election.

Commitment 4: UN Convention Against Corruption

Whilst civil society welcomed representation as part of the UK delegation to the Conference of States Parties to the UN Convention Against Corruption in Dec 2023, they also reflected on there being no Anti-Corruption Champion since the resignation of John Penrose in June 2022. Civil Society expressed a desire to see the strengthening of transparency by appointing someone to this role as an opportunity for the new government.

Building Capability

Digital Governance

Given the new government, and the move of CDDO, GDS and iAI to DSIT, there is a need for a period of reflection on approaches to developing future plans including a strategy for open data. CDDO recently sponsored and attended Open Data Camp #9 in Manchester as part of general stakeholder engagement, which focused on our intent on re-engagement with members of the open data community as a first step towards the relaunch of this agenda and its vital importance to improve openness of government in the UK.

Freedom of Information

The Information Rights User Group held its first seminar for FOI users (on Cabinet Office records) and has taken feedback from members on the format as well as themes for future seminars. Civil society reflected on the positive steps taken to convene the group and expressed a desire for future work to be undertaken in this space. Follow up questions around the potential for amendment to UK NAP6 or inclusion within the Seventh National Action Plan Open Government (NAP7) were also expressed.

Beneficial Ownership

Following the announcement of the general election officials said publication of the UK anti-corruption strategy had been paused. The possibility of a future commitment on BENO in the NAP will be reassessed during the co-creation of NAP7.

Open Justice

Outcomes of the [Open Justice consultation](#) are being analysed and processed to be shared with new ministers. While this development was welcomed, civil society highlighted concerns regarding HM Courts & Tribunals Service, which focused on the challenge of resources. They reiterated the importance of sustained civil society-government engagement moving forward and welcomed the creation by the Lady Chief Justice of the [Transparency and Open Justice Board](#). The judicial-led board will lead and coordinate the promotion of transparency and open justice across the courts and tribunals of England and Wales.

Government Transparency Returns

In December 2023 the Cabinet Office issued new transparency guidance relating to Ministers, Special advisers and Senior Officials, which may be accessed via [GOV.UK](#). Officials welcomed their discussions with the Institute for Government (IfG) and Transparency International (TI) which helped inform the new guidance.

Open Government collaboration

The UK government is continuing to develop its approach to sharing with and learning from other parts of government to improve collaboration and coordination. This includes our colleagues in central government, the devolved administrations and Glasgow City Council and Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The UK plays an active role outside of NAP6

as a member of the OGP Steering Committee, Thematic Leadership Subcommittee, and the recently concluded Governance Review Task Force to help guide the positive development of the partnership in the common interest of national and local OGP members.

Participatory Methods Forum

The Forum is a cross-government network established to understand and unlock the potential of participatory methods to improve policy outcomes and impact by understanding the evidence; building systemic awareness and capability; and working with experts to deliver impact and value through their use. Officials noted the [Citizen's White Paper](#) published by Demos, in collaboration with the participation charity Involve, as an example of growing interest in these methods to support policy making and delivery. The UK's civil society expertise, including in applying these approaches, offers an opportunity to improve public value and impact, particularly in complex policy areas which require a collaborative, systemic effort to understand and address them like climate change or immigration.

Part Two: Updates across all levels of government and civil society

Members from either civil society or government representatives provide open government updates

UK Open Government Civil Society Network

The UK OGN noted the [Joint Letter to the UK Prime Minister](#) advocating for the role of open government in rebuilding trust, supporting reforms, and driving efficiency. The letter signed by domestic and international signatories contains opportunities to support the new mission-driven government such as by restoration in public trust, anti-corruption, economic growth, and artificial intelligence. A local transparency event between the UK OGN and Birkbeck, University of London took place on 25th April with some 70+ attendees. It focused on reviving the Audit Commission and investment in local journalism.

OGP Steering Committee

Lucy McTernan, a member of UK civil society and former OGP Scotland co-chair, has been a member of the OGP Steering Committee for the past 6 years. As Lucy approaches the end of her second and final term, she provided some updates and reflections and noted the sense of a genuine new energy from the UK MSF meeting in stark contrast to 18 months ago.

Recent progress in OGP includes the [OGP Strategy](#) refresh and the introduction of the [OGP Challenge](#) as opportunities to improve global collaboration on common issues. The [Nordic+ event on fiscal openness](#) hosted by Scotland was cited as an example of working across different countries and levels of government.

The recently concluded Governance Review Task Force has made a range of positive recommendations, signifying real progress in the partnership. Lucy felt that this process

doesn't yet feel fully complete and the recommendations did not go far enough with respect to supporting OGP Local, as more subnational voices were needed in OGP. There is an opportunity to go further at the 3 year milestone review. Lucy thanked the UK government for voicing this view at the [recent OGP Steering Committee](#).

There are many opportunities to take advantage of the improved governance arrangements, through observer involvement in standing OGP subcommittees. These opportunities include bringing UK expertise to the reformed Programmatic Subcommittee (formerly Thematic Leadership Subcommittee), the (effectively permanent) OGP Local Task Force, and getting involved in the creation and work of time and task-limited task forces.

Kevin Keith thanked Lucy for her substantial contributions to open government.

Central Digital and Data Office

The [Open Government collection](#) on GOV.UK has been refreshed and a new [National Action Plan collection](#) has been introduced. A planned new 'group' on GOV.UK will include the updated Terms of Reference for the UK MSF. The UK government has successfully been elected to serve a second term on the [OGP steering committee](#). Matt Donnelly explained the pre-election period has delayed sharing the draft self-assessments for the UK National Action Plan for Open Government (NAP5) and NAP6. After the initial review of the OGP Action Plan Review for NAP6 by key stakeholders, OGP have published an updated [version](#) through an online platform for public comment to close on 7th August 2024.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The FCDO provides ODA funding to ten partners (Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Indonesia, DR, Armenia, Ukraine, Colombia, the Philippines and Zambia) through the OGP's programme on digital governance. The workshop in Nairobi in March 2024 brought together representatives from the multi-stakeholder OGP process in these countries to develop a roadmap for delivery of their national development plans' commitments on digital. This was co-hosted by the Government of Kenya and OGP Support Unit. The UK was invited to attend as a recognised global leader in the responsible use of data, and was represented by civil society and government officials who presented on digital governance from domestic and international perspectives.

Northern Ireland

Civil society highlighted the development of a terms of reference for a new Multi-Stakeholder Forum as recent progress, and thanked involvement from officials in the UK Cabinet Office and Scottish civil society for their input to the review. It was noted that civil society awaits a government update regarding next steps following a staffing change at the Department of Finance Corporate Services Division which is responsible for Open Government.

Scotland

Scotland has published its Open Government Action Plan 2021-2025 [mid-term assessment](#) and has progressed with its [Participation Procurement Framework Agreement](#), the latter of which aims to create a coordinated approach to commissioning participatory work with adults

at the Scottish Government, learning from an earlier initiative around youth participation. A civil society-led commission on open data is also underway as a forerunner to a future open data strategy. Lastly, a warm welcome was made to [Jamie Hepburn MSP](#) appointed Minister for Parliamentary Business in May 2024 whose responsibilities include open government.

Wales

Recent staff changes have been made to the open government team in the Welsh Government.

Glasgow

Civil society and government officials were unable to attend and made their apologies.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

[GMCA has successfully applied to become a member of OGP Local](#) through the 2024 cohort and the support of Open Data Manchester, CDDO and Glasgow City Council was acknowledged in making a successful application.

Part Three: Co-creation planning

Introduction to considerations for co-creation

Kevin Keith explained the need to develop a clear understanding of what resources civil society needs to enable effective cocreation in future, and that the remainder of the meeting would focus on this through a facilitated discussion. The MSF went into virtual 'breakout rooms' for small group discussions between mixed groups of civil society and government, and these discussions were then fed back to the main room. Each group was asked to discuss two main issues: what was needed to specifically support the co-creation of NAP commitments, and what was needed to support civil society open government coordination in general?

Co-creation

There was recognition of the need to ensure that civil society involvement was sufficiently representative of the general public to inform good policy making. Future action plans should seek to include a broader range of voices to make the most of the wealth of knowledge and experience. Future outreach would benefit from the deployment of a broader set of methods, be better resourced, and take place over a longer period of time. In parallel, there was a recognised need to ensure civil society representation within the UK OGN, on the UK MSF, and in thematic stakeholder groups that sufficiently reflects the interests of wider society, whilst recognising the practical limitations of such groups. Importance was placed on enabling those with different needs or insights to have the opportunity to have their voice heard, and that UK OGN needed to develop its approach to support this as a civil society 'network-of-networks'. Discussion also considered whether action plan development could be strengthened by the involvement of a third-party between government and civil society. This approach could be applied to formally facilitate the creation of future action plans and

play a role in implementation monitoring. Civil society and government officials recognised both the merits and limitations of this approach, and the resource cost in doing so.

Coordination and building civil society network (UK OGN)

Clear government and civil society interest was expressed in finding ways to sustain and grow the capability of the UK Open Government Network. Examples of challenges to overcome included the need to improve the diversity of voice, improving the availability of resources to support public participation in open government efforts, promoting UK OGN's flagship appeal as part of the NAP process, and improving the involvement of other civil society organisations. Enabling the UK OGN to further develop as a network-of-networks was suggested as a way to harness existing communities where government and civil society already interact, and in-turn address these issues. Reflections also identified the recent combined efforts of civil society involved in writing letters, blogs, and articles celebrating open government as generating public interest in this space. By contrast, the expected level of support from the OGP Support Unit remained unclear, whilst there was an open question as to how civil society-government engagement could be supported in the absence of future resources or access to training.

Building capacity for future co-creation

The development of an open government strategy - the vision, values and approaches to drive openness across the UK - was discussed as an opportunity for the new government. It could provide a golden thread that underpins complementing national and subnational open government efforts in the UK to improve open and responsive governance. Currently, however, factors such as missed opportunities to better align civil society-government efforts, uncertainty of long term open government political sponsorship, and the issue of civil society representativeness constrain progress on a shared vision for the UK. Where civil society-government communities do flourish they highlight the value of this approach and need to raise awareness of open policy making approaches at all levels of government. There is an opportunity to reflect on co-creation efforts since the UK endorsed the Open Government declaration in 2011, to share insight on what works well, what doesn't, and what could be explored in future.

Resources

The reinvigoration of the UK MSF and the successful development of NAP6 are signs of positive progress in government-civil society relations, however two key issues of resourcing were acknowledged. The first is that the healthy co-creation at scale requires dedicated funding both for the government teams involved and for civil society contributors. The second is that the UK OGN recognises the need to be more representative of society at large, such as more even geographical representation from across the nations and regions of the UK. This requires resources to facilitate coordination of civil society outside of the co-creation process itself to build a 'network-of-networks'. Two examples of approaches to funding were highlighted: direct government grants to civil society organisations, and pooled government funding administered at arms-length. There is concern that the former could have implications for the independence of civil society organisations, whilst the latter potentially addresses this issue but could introduce further complexity. This needs to be considered further.

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The MSF was reminded that engaging with government can be time consuming, technical, and should not rely solely on the goodwill of volunteers. Civil society representatives were clear that progress towards greater government engagement should be focused on making use of civil society insights and expertise, whilst not creating an administrative burden for civil society. Officials reflected the shared desire to improve civil society resourcing, whilst noting the importance of having a strong business case to secure investment in future co-creation. The challenge of accessing resources amongst civil society organisations was also raised, including the disparity of funding opportunities in different parts of the UK.

Thank you and next steps

The provisional date for the next MSF was noted as Wednesday 23rd October. [Post meeting note: this has been postponed]

Kevin Keith thanked everyone for their contributions, the civil society conveners and noted the interesting breadth and depth of discussion.