

# Multi-stakeholder Forum Read-out

Wednesday 24th January 2024

## Aim of the meeting

The aim of this Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) was to review the monitoring and implementation of the Fifth National Action Plan for Open Government (NAP5) and co-creation of the Sixth National Action Plan for Open Government (NAP6). It included an announcement on the NAP5 final status update, followed by facilitated discussions and feedback.

## Attendees

There were a total of 44 attendees, of which 25 were government representatives and 19 from civil society. There were a further 10 apologies received, 8 from government representatives and 2 from civil society.

Alex Burghart MP was needed in Parliament to respond to an Urgent Question on Wednesday morning and was unable to attend the meeting as planned.

## 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 first part of the meeting was co-chaired by Sue Bateman, CDDO Interim Chief Digital Officer (Central Digital and Data Office, part of the Cabinet Office) and Kevin Keith, Chair of the UK Open Government Civil Society Network (UK OGN). Dr Matt Donnelly, Open Data and Transparency Lead from CDDO co-chaired the second part alongside Kevin Keith.

## IRM researcher

Kevin Keith explained the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) provides three reports during the National Action Plan cycle: NAP6 Co-creation brief (received); NAP6 Action Plan Review (upcoming); and Results Report (upcoming). The OGP IRM has appointed Thelma Obiakor as a researcher for the latter two.

# Part One: Feedback on NAP5 implementation and monitoring

## Introduction to NAP5 self-assessment report

Matt Donnelly announced the NAP5 self-assessment report will be based on feedback on implementation and monitoring processes, and include NAP5 final status updates. It will be informed by discussion on shared learning, experiences and ideas for improvement.

## Facilitated discussion: NAP5 implementation and monitoring review

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 facilitated by civil society or government representatives and provided with aspects to consider: process; engagement; timing considerations; and expectations.

## Process

There was mixed feedback around the utility of NAP5 processes - from developing commitments through to monitoring - and further conversations are needed on how to make these more flexible to improve the effectiveness of the UK National Action Plan cycle. The balance of resources, time and capacity often placed significant demands on officials to extend existing roles and responsibilities in pursuit of the NAP implementation. Officials highlighted concerns regarding monitoring, which focused on: quarterly updates lack sufficient context regarding long-term objectives; and the challenge of reporting on milestones that are due outside the timeframe of the NAP. By contrast, civil society highlighted more information and meaningful discussion of resources was a prerequisite for improving accountability. There was a shared desire for civil society and government to improve collective responsibility for providing progress updates on commitments through thematic stakeholder groups.

## Engagement

Civil society and government reflected on mutual collaborative experiences using technology to overcome the impact of covid on engagement as well as the digital-divide between those with and without access to modern technology. The UK's challenges in trying to meet OGP's minimum participation requirements during co-creation when developing NAP5 was identified as a strain on civil society-government relations. It set the tone for future engagement and was noted as demotivating for government representatives. The impact of circumstance - such as COVID and changes to the Minister for the Cabinet Office - during the life of NAP5 was identified by civil society as disrupting political sponsorship. There was also recognition that the expected level of support from OGP was unclear, whilst there was an open question as to how civil society could be best supported to engage with government in the future, such as through the provision of resources and access to training.

## Timing considerations

Clear government and civil society interest was expressed in better alignment of domestic and democratic timetables, in which the National Action Plan cycle was widely perceived as

operating on an altogether separate and artificial timescale. Additional factors ranging from the scarcity of open government training resources, personnel changes, and differing timetables for the development of policy areas during a term of office, constrained the delivery of some commitments. By contrast, successful commitments received high praise where there was clear delivery predicated on having a strong shared purpose and time management from the outset. The rigidity of deadlines within the NAP cycle was noted as a considerable challenge.

## Expectations

There was strong recognition that conversations about expectations needed improvement. A shared purpose was noted as fostering the foundation for successful co-creation, implementation and monitoring. Discussion centred on identifying areas for improvement, which included: trust, relationship building, and meeting the practicalities of the co-creation process. A comparison was made with the case of UK NAP6 co-creation, where there was greater opportunity to exchange points of difference in a collaborative manner. Other reflections included a shared desire by civil society and government to clarify what level and type of support should be expected from the OGP Support Unit.

## Updates from devolved nations, local governments and HMG

Members from either civil society or government representatives provided updates regarding open government activity.

### Scotland

The [Scottish Government Open Government Action plan 2021 to 2025](#) will come to an end in Autumn 2025 and the coproduction of the next action plan, which will run throughout the next parliament, is underway. It was noted that the reappointed independent reporter will run a workshop with Government and civil society colleagues and the focus of this will be to align the future Scottish Local Action Plan with the OGP [Open Gov Challenge](#). The Participation Procurement Framework Agreement to support a coordinated approach to commissioning participatory work by public services in Scotland was highlighted as progressing and to note that the [Nordic + group](#) of OGP countries are visiting Scotland for an event on the theme of fiscal transparency in April 2024. Finally, a warm welcome was made to the new Scottish Civil Society Chair Juliet Swann.

### Northern Ireland

Civil society reaffirmed their efforts to work with government officials to establish a new Multi Stakeholder Forum and press ahead with open government commitments, as recent progress. A Terms of Reference was underway following the workshop, which benefited from reflections from the UK government and the Scottish civil society co-chair.

### Wales

The [Welsh Government Open Government Commitments 2022-2024](#) will end in January 2024 and a self-assessment exercise has commenced. It was noted that the next focus

would turn to consider future open government commitments. Separately, it was noted that the New First Minister is expected to be announced in March 2024.

## Glasgow

An update to Glasgow's [Open Government Action Plan 2021 to 2023](#) is currently underway following completion of the city's first action plan.

## Greater Manchester Combined Authority

GMCA emphasised their strong interest to become a member of OGP Local and have subsequently submitted an Expression of Interest for the latest call for new members. They have identified specific alignment between open government principles and their [GM Information Strategy](#), with specific interest in exploring how best to share experience and collaborate on areas of good practice amongst OGP Local members to help further progress key areas of their Information Strategy agenda.

## The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is providing new Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding for the Open Government Partnership. This was announced at the OGP Global Summit during the Democratic Renewable Roundtable event. Funding to OGP for £2.5m will occur over 18 months to promote open government reforms, in particular the open and accountable use of emerging digital technologies. Improved FCDO-Cabinet Office collaboration on the OGP international agenda for open government was also noted.

# Part Two: review of NAP6 Co-creation

## Welcome and introduction

Matt Donnelly gave apologies for the Minister (Alex Burghart MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Cabinet Office), as he had been called to Parliament unexpectedly to respond to an Urgent Question timetabled the same day. The MSF was reminded of the important messages provided as part of the NAP6 ministerial and civil society forewords including the UK's role in open government agenda and the importance of civil-society collaboration.

## Review of NAP6 co-creation process

Matt Donnelly explained the NAP6 co-creation review will focus on how well civil society and government collaborated so that we can improve the approach in future. A brief overview of the NAP6 co-creation timeline was presented, followed by updates since October 2023 MSF, and NAP6 summary of commitments and building capacity.

## Facilitated discussion: NAP6 Co-creation

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 facilitated by civil society or government representatives and provided with the following aspects to consider: What can we learn to improve future co-creation? Are there better approaches to the process overall?

## Process

The action plan development stage, where thematic stakeholder groups of civil society and government work closely together to develop individual commitments, received positive feedback from all parties, and was noted as coherent and a significant improvement on NAP5. A reinvigorated UK MSF was noted for regularising co-creation, and improving clarity of UK NAP structure and process. The combined efforts of civil society and officials involved in drafting commitments were celebrated as a demonstration of just how far co-creation has come. However, civil society representatives were clear that the public outreach was the weakest stage: the challenge of wider public engagement remained an unanswered question, which is dependent on sufficient time and resources. Reflections also included a shared desire to further streamline OGP processes, recognising that parallel progress was being made to mainstream open government outside the development of a National Action Plan.

## Engagement

Civil society and government reflected on a shared understanding of purpose and engagement, partially as a result of honest and robust conversations. It set the tone for more constructive conversation and efforts by the UK government to engage in open dialogue were commended. In some cases it was thought that NAP6 could have been better used to promote the next steps for existing government policy, and that the commitments were not

as extensive as they could have been. The visibility of open government efforts was identified as an area for improvement, and this had an impact on the representativeness and diversity of civil society engagement. Other reflections include that there is a need to improve the capability of civil society and government to engage in effective co-creation, including through having sufficient resources to do so. Whilst [Government Transparency Returns](#) is a component of building capability articulated in NAP6, the wider theme of political integrity was noted as absent from commitments.

## Timing considerations

The timescale of co-creation received mixed civil society-government feedback as a considerable challenge to navigate. Civil society-government thematic stakeholders worked at pace to deliver commitments and it was noted as a considerable demand on time and resources. A comparison was made with the development of the previous NAP, where there was a longer lead time for the co-creation of commitments which allowed for a more manageable pace. The increased pace was driven by two factors: an unavoidable delay to the start of the co-creation process and a hard deadline of 31st December imposed by OGP rules by which to publish NAP6. It was also noted that it was challenging to monitor the implementation of NAP5 and oversee the co-creation of NAP6 at each MSF given the two hour duration.

## Expectations

It was recognised that the expectations of civil society and government regarding the co-creation process were clearer for NAP6 than for NAP5, yet there was still an opportunity to improve this in future through training and induction to the NAP process. This improvement was enabled by strong coordination by the Cabinet Office and the UK OGN Steering Committee and feed-in from wider civil society and government representatives. In contrast, the limitations created by time and resources on the public outreach phase, combined with perceived inaccuracies in elements of the [OGP IRM UK Co-Creation Brief 2023](#), led to an initial misalignment between civil society and government expectations. These could be avoided in future by a clearer and better resourced outreach phase, and by the OGP IRM checking their report with relevant UK stakeholders prior to publication. The final stage of co-creation whereby minimal textual change was made to the NAP publication was highlighted as example collegiate working and widely praised.

## Thank you and next steps

Kevin Keith thanked everyone for their contributions and noted the interesting breadth and depth of discussion. The approach of using breakout rooms for facilitating discussion was widely welcomed.

The MSF was reminded that contributions from the meeting would be collated as part of UK NAP6 feedback and will inform a separate and forthcoming OGP Action Plan Review. The shift from NAP6 review to NAP7 forward planning is the primary focus for the remainder of 2024 in readiness for the next NAP cycle which will take place during 2025.