

Multi-Stakeholder Forum Read-out

Wednesday 18th October 2023

Aim of the meeting

The aim of this Multi-Stakeholder Forum (MSF) was to review progress across the implementation of the Fifth National Action Plan for Open Government (NAP5) and co-creation of the Sixth National Action Plan on Open Government (NAP6). This included verbal updates by civil society and government leads on NAP5, followed by a session co-chaired by Kevin Keith (UK OGN Chair) and CDDO Interim Chief Digital Officer Sue Bateman on progress with NAP6 co-creation.

Draft NAP6 commitments were circulated ahead of the MSF. A final mature draft for aid transparency was available, and initial drafts for anti-corruption, whilst other themes were not yet able to share draft commitments.

Attendees

There were a total of 42 attendees, of which 25 were government representatives and 17 from civil society. There were a further 12 apologies received, 10 from government representatives and 2 from civil society.

Slide-deck

A comprehensive slide-deck 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 Dr Matt Donnelly, Open Data and Transparency Lead from CDDO (Central Digital and Data Office, part of the Cabinet Office), and Kevin Keith, Chair of the UK Open Government Civil Society Network (UK OGN). Sue Bateman, Interim Chief Data Officer from CDDO joined to co-chair the second part alongside Kevin Keith.

Part one: Progress Updates

Civil society and government leads worked together to provide updates on NAP5 commitments.

Commitment 1: Open Contracting

Implementation is ongoing and progress is being made despite delays caused as a result of the Procurement Bill progressing through Parliament. The importance of the timely release of contracting data was emphasised by civil society.

Commitment 2: Open Justice

NAP5 commitments are considered complete.

Commitment 3: Algorithmic transparency and accountability

Improvements to the implementation of the Algorithmic Transparency Recording Standard are ongoing and the appeal mechanism for algorithm-assisted decisions is being worked on. CDDO will engage with the Centre for Data Ethics & Innovation (CDEI) for an update on its Advisory Board following a request from civil society.

Commitment 4: Health

Good progress is being made to deliver NAP5 commitments across all health objectives and conversations on health data are ongoing between government and civil society. Standards for public engagement on health data use and interoperability are underway and proposals to update and improve clinical trial legislation will be laid before Parliament next year. These proposals will include new legal requirements to embed research transparency in the regulation of clinical trials.

Commitment 5: Anti-corruption and international illicit finance

Implementation is ongoing and the [UK Anti-Corruption Coalition](#) continues to meet with government. Civil society recognised positive progress to champion the adoption of public registers of company beneficial ownership and expressed a desire to see the continued strengthening of asset recovery and return.

Commitment 6: Aid transparency

Good progress has been made across all commitments (specifically, 8 of the 10 commitments already delivered and the remaining 2 commitments ongoing but on track) with further improvements to data quality a continuing priority. Civil society welcomed positive steps taken across HMG to strengthen transparency of Overseas Development Assistance spending and expressed a desire for a clearer communication of changes to the structure of government departments responsible for ODA spend.

Commitment 7: Diversity and inclusion

Implementation in this area is ongoing and the civil society-government Diversity and Inclusion Working Group is working to ensure broad representation from across the UK brings a range of views to future national action plans. The group is reviewing four recommendations regarding NAP6 draft commitments that highlight barriers to progress and opportunities for improvements as part of the NAP6 co-creation process.

Commitment 8: Freedom of information

Implementation of the civil society-government Information Rights User Group is ongoing and civil society echoed the positive group work already undertaken in this space.

Local Transparency

This outline commitment has been picked-up by CDDO and the focus is now on considering recommendations for developing stakeholder capability for the development of NAP7, working with some key contacts from local and central government.

Updates from devolved nations and local governments

Members from either civil society or government representatives provided Open Government updates.

Northern Ireland

Civil society highlighted the independently facilitated workshop to agree formation of a new Multi Stakeholder Forum, now scheduled for December 2023, as recent progress. Following recent restructuring in the Department of Finance, responsibility for Open Government has moved to the Corporate Services Division.

Scotland

The next civil society-government steering group will take place in the week commencing 23rd October and the focus of this will be to align future Scottish Local Action Plan with the [OGP Strategy](#).

Wales

The [Welsh Government Open Government Commitments 2022-2024](#) will end in January 2024 and a self-assessment exercise is due to commence. Civil society have written to the First Minister Mark Drakeford MS regarding a proposal for OGP Local Membership, and the government noted a response will be made in due course.

Glasgow

CDDO highlighted that Glasgow City Council won the Europe Local category in the [2023 Open Government Partnership Awards](#), tied with Aragon, Spain.

FCDO ODA funding

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) announced renewed 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. Follow up questions around the impact on civil society and greater HMG collaboration across open government were expressed.

Part two: NAP6 co-creation status updates

Introduction to NAP co-creation

Kevin reminded the MSF of the UK Co-creation brief, including the importance of improving the co-creation process.

Refresher on NAP6 Action Plan Development

Matt Donnelly presented a recap on the six stages of the NAP co-development process: analysing inputs; defining the problem; identifying solutions; drafting commitments; reasoned response; and finalisation. The MSF was reminded that the purpose of the rest of the meeting was to understand where each theme was along the co-creation process and to assess ability to meet timelines for successful UK NAP6 publication.

NAP6 co-creation updates

Civil society and government leads worked together to provide updates on the progress of NAP6 co-creation.

(1 of 5) Aid transparency

Civil society and government reflected on positive mutual experiences drafting NAP6 commitments together despite the tight timescales. It was agreed that this theme would proceed to the next stage of co-creation and details provided in the form of the draft commitment circulated ahead of the MSF remain unchanged.

(2 of 5) Open Contracting

There was strong civil society-government support to proceed with developing a commitment in this area, but the relevant government team recognised the challenge this demand posed for completion in-time for the December 2023 deadline for NAP6 publication. It was agreed that despite the challenge, the delivery of a draft commitment could be achievable and that the UK Open Contracting Advisory Group will continue its delivery of this objective.

(3 of 5) Anti-Corruption strategy & Beneficial ownership

Clear government and civil society interest was expressed in the development of two commitments; one on civil society engagement connected to the UK Anti-Corruption Strategy and another to improve the transparency and inclusiveness of the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) country review mechanism. Both were noted as being worked on in good faith by civil society and government, recognising that parallel progress was being made on these issues outside of the NAP6 process. It was agreed that before a final decision could be made around inclusion in NAP6, a mature draft was required in the near future. A separate and third potential commitment on beneficial ownership required significant efforts within the remaining time for NAP6 delivery and further consideration is needed as to whether this is part of the initial publication of NAP6 or could be an amendment.

(4 of 5) Freedom of Information

It was agreed that a final decision on this theme would be made in the new year and subject to review by the relevant government team. The team would also consider whether to highlight ongoing activities in this area as part of the NAP6 publication, even if a commitment was not included.

(5 of 5) Open Justice

The [“Open Justice: the way forward call for evidence”](#) (CfE) was recognised as a priority and it was agreed that a commitment in this area would not feature as part of NAP6 publication by December 2023. The relevant government team will continue to review whether the outcomes from the CfE could feed into a planned amendment to NAP6 during 2024.

Capacity Building update: Digital Governance

CDDO have proposed several changes to the NAP6 publication which includes a concerted effort to recognise and highlight updates on capacity, especially in areas parallel to NAP6, with a view to both mainstreaming Open Government and preparing for commitments in NAP7.

In particular, digital governance is an important area for the UK government and one of several ideas identified by OGP in their [Open Government Challenge](#). As part of regular business planning, CDDO has expressed an interest in generating closer civil society-government cohesion and readiness for NAP7 on the topic of digital governance. The MSF welcomed this and agreed to support efforts for future engagement.

Discussion: Next steps

Progress as part of NAP6 co-creation was widely welcomed. It was recognised that the amount of work remaining to achieve more mature commitments appeared to be smaller than recently understood.

Likely outcomes

Matt Donnelly presented on the new model of OGP co-creation which for this year only compels the UK to publish its NAP by 31st December 2023. Two options were outlined: the first was to publish by the required date irrespective of the number of mature commitments; and the second was to lengthen the drafting phase and publish at the later date of 28th February 2024. The pros and cons of each option were covered.

Discussion and consensus: Next steps for NAP6

Discussion centred on concerns of not meeting the NAP6 publication deadlines and how this would detract from the positive efforts undertaken as part of the UK re-engagement in OGP and renewed approach to NAP6 planning and co-creation. Efforts by the UK government to

regularise the MSF and engage in open and constructive dialogue were commended. Follow-up questions on the consequences of using 'placeholders' commitments to signal future effort and resource allocation was raised. A comparison was made with NAP5, where some 'placeholder' commitments have not matured as intended and it was agreed that it would be preferable to include such other areas of activity as supporting background information within NAP6. The common desire to do what was in the best interests of the UK was highlighted, and civil society and government agreed to deliver NAP6 by the December 2023 publication deadline.

Reflections on discussions about assessed themes

Reflections centred around the preferred approach chosen by consensus and the practical steps required to achieve NAP6 publication by end of December 2023. CDDO will provide support to thematic stakeholder groups as requested to support civil society and government partners towards achieving mature draft commitments to this end.