



Opening Open Government

Women's Rights Organisations and the Open Government Partnership in the Philippines

Executive Summary

The [Open Government Partnership](#) is a multilateral initiative to advance open government through collaboration between government and civil society. Governments work with civil society in multi-stakeholder forums to co-create action plans that contain commitments to advance transparency, participation, and accountability.

This research¹ was funded by the Feminist Open Government Initiative – a programme established in 2017 by the Government of Canada, the International Development Research Centre, Results for Development and Open Data for Development as a platform to advance gender equality through the Open Government Partnership (OGP). The Feminist Open Government Initiative uses research and action to encourage governments and civil society to champion initiatives leading to gender advancements in and through open government, including both consideration of gender issues throughout the co-creation of OGP action plans, and the adoption of more gender-focused commitment content.

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When the [Feminist Open Government Initiative](#) was established in 2017 and the [Break the Roles](#) campaign was launched in 2019, gender-specific commitments were uncommon and existing ones were rarely ambitious or transformative and frequently lacked strong design and implementation. To begin tackling these challenges, a first round of research (2017-2018) studied [women's participation in OGP processes](#) in twelve countries. This second round of research conducted in 2019 focuses on the use of substantive tools and indicators in OGP processes to advance gender-focused commitments. The Feminist Open Government Initiative has already contributed to change: [gender](#) is now one of the fastest growing areas in current OGP action plans and, as of October 2020, 41 OGP members were advancing gender reforms through their OGP action plans.

As part of the second round of Feminist Open Government research, this case study of the Philippines' fifth action plan co-creation process asked: **Does targeted support to women's rights organisations improve gender integration in OGP co-creation processes and action plans?** Specifically, the study sought to investigate whether targeted intervention supports:

- the participation of women's rights organisations,
- the participation of women's rights organisations from marginalised groups,
- better quality participation,
- more gender-related commitments, and
- better quality gender-related commitments.

The researchers used an action research design, supporting the participation of women's rights organisations in the co-creation process and studying the effects of the intervention. Primary and secondary research was conducted between February and September 2019 and include surveys with participating women's rights organisations, observation of OGP Philippines multi-stakeholder dialogues and document analysis.

Research Findings

The action research demonstrates that, in the case of the Philippines, **targeted support to women's rights organisations improves gender integration in OGP co-creation processes and action plans.** Logistical and financial support led to a greater presence of women's rights organisations and activists in the commitment consultation process. Representatives of women's rights organisations actively participated, contributing new perspectives and priorities on gender equality and inclusion.

The research intervention addressed some barriers to participation, by purposefully inviting women leaders from marginalised communities to commitment consultations and funding their travel and providing targeted inputs during a preparatory workshop for women's rights organisations to facilitate their meaningful participation during the multi-stakeholder consultation. The preparatory workshop improved the understanding of women's rights organisations of OGP processes and provided an opportunity for them to collectively analyse draft commitments. However, several barriers outside the scope of the intervention inhibited effective participation in co-creation of the OGP Philippines Fifth Action Plan (2019-2020), such as the exclusion of women's rights organisations from the agenda setting phase of the action plan co-creation process and an imperfect consultation format.

Ultimately, the intervention resulted in the use of a gender and inclusion lens in the fifth action plan. Although there are no gender-specific commitments, more than half of the commitments incorporate recommendations made by women's rights organisations during the consultation. The intervention also increased the knowledge of women's rights organisations of OGP and, for some women rights activists, optimism towards engaging in OGP processes, which bodes well for gender inclusion in future Filipino action plans.

Participation

While women are well-represented in the Philippines action plan co-creation process, women's rights organisations and activists are not. Invitations to participate have been historically limited to strictly 'governance'-related civil society organisations. Only 7 of 26 study participants from women's rights organisations were aware of OGP prior to the research intervention. Only two women's rights organisations had participated in previous OGP events and both were well-connected and based in urban areas.

Women's rights activists from marginalised groups were not aware of OGP – such as those representing indigenous women, women farmers and fisherfolk, Muslim women, women from BARMM and the LGBTIQ+ community. The research found the main factors that limit the participation of women's rights organisations are a lack of invitation and resources to attend events, limited awareness of OGP, elite and male capture of regional events, marginalisation of indigenous and Muslim women, and difficulty accessing urban event locations.

The research intervention increased the presence of women's rights organisations and activists in the co-creation process through financial and logistical support. As a result of the intervention, 9 women's rights organisations participated in regional consultation events, two in the final action plan consolidation workshop, and 26 in a preparatory workshop and multi-stakeholder dialogue targeting women's rights organisations.

Quality of Participation

The intervention resulted in better quality participation of women's rights organisations and activists in regional commitment consultations. The study measured quality of participation based on whether participants were active, informed, and had actual influence over outcomes. While women's rights organisations were more active and informed as a result of the intervention, various contextual factors significantly inhibited their influence over the final commitment outcomes. Women's rights activists from marginalised communities faced additional barriers to participation.

Participant engagement and makeup

Researchers observed the frequency and content of all participants' contributions during regional consultations. In terms of frequency, women were equally likely to speak up in discussions as men. However, female participants were significantly more likely to raise points related to the likely impact of commitments on women and other marginalised groups. **Women's rights organisations actively participated in consultations, contributing new perspectives and priorities on gender equality and inclusion to the commitment dialogues.**

However, unequal power dynamics and use of English inhibited equal participation of women's rights organisation representatives from marginalised groups. Participants who benefited from experience working with the government, ties to established organisations, higher education, comfort working in English, and those located in urban centres had an advantage engaging in consultations. Women from marginalised groups, such as Muslim women, women from the BARMM region, women farmers and fisherfolk, and individuals from the LGBTIQ+ community, faced greater barriers to participation.

Understanding OGP processes and trust in government responsiveness

Prior to the intervention, the women's rights organisations had very limited awareness of OGP and a high level of scepticism towards the state of open government in the Philippines and government responsiveness to consultations. However, **participants were significantly more optimistic about their participation and likely influence within the OGP process following the three-day dedicated workshop for women's rights organisations.** Participants felt that they were more prepared and could leverage their collective strength and, overall, had greater confidence the government would be receptive to gender and inclusion issues. Additionally, the workshop helped the women's rights activists build connections that may be beneficial to future coordination.

“If all of us come together – the more, the better. If you’re alone, you won’t be paid attention to. But, if there’s many of you and you have good objectives, you will be listened to.”
— Women’s rights activist

Consultation process

Two factors prevented women’s rights participants from having significant influence over the content of the fifth action plan. First, **they were not included in the early agenda setting stages of the consultation process.** Women’s rights organisations are not represented among the OGP leadership in the Philippines and were not explicitly invited to submit commitment ideas during the Citizen’s Agenda phase. The research intervention – and therefore participation of women’s rights organisations – began during regional consultation events when the commitments were already largely decided. Moreover, events where commitments were decided mostly took place in urban centres, excluding participants from rural and remote areas.

Second, the **consultation format presented several barriers to meaningful participation.** Participants reported that government officials used morning town hall events to convey information rather than engage in dialogue. Afternoon consultations did not offer enough time for dialogue, minority groups were side-lined, and government representatives often dominated the discussion. Additionally, participants highlighted insufficient time dedicated to explaining OGP to new organisations and the government’s failure to circulate the most recent commitment drafts prior to discussion.

Participation Outcomes

The participation of women’s rights organisations in regional consultations led to greater use of a gender and inclusion lens in the Philippines’ fifth action plan. There were no commitments specifically dedicated to gender and inclusion. This is likely a result of the absence of women’s rights organisations from earlier stages of the commitment consultation process. However, the application of a gender lens to commitments is a significant improvement from past action plans.

The fifth action plan reflects recommendations made by women’s rights organisations in the consultation process. Of the 11 commitments total, 3 commitments include gender considerations in their problem analyses and 4 include gender indicators. Most inputs from women’s rights organisations were reflected in changes to one commitment, while several other commitments responded to a small portion of recommendations. Three commitments remain gender blind despite the inputs of women’s rights organisations, while two commitments were removed from the action plan based on feedback from women’s rights and other civil society actors.

Unfortunately, the fifth action plan does not address a central concern raised by women’s rights activists regarding gender in emergencies, gendered impacts of conflict and security issues, and women in peace processes. However, **participants expressed appreciation for the mock commitment co-creation exercise** using gendered political economy tools held during a dedicated workshop for women’s rights organisations prior to the consultation event with government. In particular, the participants viewed the activity as an opportunity to prepare for earlier engagement in future action plan consultations, suggesting future action plans will go even further to reflect women’s rights organisations’ priorities if repeated.

Recommendations

The research team proposes the following set of recommendations for key actors in the Philippines and for OGP globally.

OGP (Global)

- Clarify organisational messaging on gender equality values, to help staff distinguish between imposing sectoral priorities on country members and upholding core values within co-creation processes.
- Provide training for OGP Support Unit staff on gender mainstreaming and links between the women's rights/gender equality agenda and open government.
- Provide member countries with terms of reference templates or recommendations for gender and inclusion responsibilities within the national OGP leadership structures.
- Revise the multi-stakeholder forum handbook from a gender mainstreaming perspective, integrating recommendations and options for:
 - including women's rights organisations and wider social movement actors,
 - having a gender working group for action plan co-creation,
 - introducing guidance/requirements for the responsibilities of multi-stakeholder forums related to overseeing gender and inclusion in co-creation processes and action plan content, and
 - introducing strategies for planning a co-creation process that explicitly integrates gender and inclusion concerns.
- Share and popularise the use of the toolkit provided as companion to this paper, as a support to member countries to assess how they might better support women and women's right organisations to participate in the action plan co-creation process.
- Encourage member countries to have dedicated workshops with women's rights organisations and organisations representing marginalised groups as part of the co-creation process, including by sharing and popularising sample workshop agendas provided in the companion toolkit to this paper.
- Create a set of minimum standards, coupled with guidance, for mainstreaming gender and social inclusion considerations in commitment drafting, including:
 - relevant gender problem analysis,
 - explicitly inclusive/affirmative language (beyond 'neutral' terms that often result in certain groups getting overlooked),
 - gender-disaggregated data,
 - gender-specific targets and indicators.
- Incorporate gender and inclusion criteria into IRM review processes, to incentivize member countries to look more seriously at these issues.

OGP (Philippines)

OGP leadership structure and responsibilities

- Explicitly incorporate roles and accountabilities related to gender and inclusion into the terms of reference for the OGP Steering Committee (and the separate terms of reference for the non-government Steering Committee) and both the government and non-government Secretariats. Specifically:
 - The terms of reference for the Steering Committee (and non-government Steering Committee) should include formal oversight responsibilities for how the government and non-government Secretariats integrate gender and inclusion concerns into action plan co-creation processes, and
 - The terms of reference for government and non-government Secretariats should include the role of developing a gender and social inclusion plan for each action plan co-creation process, including women's rights organisations and social inclusion activists in the co-creation process from the agenda-setting stage, and maintaining an up-to-date database of gender and social inclusion organisations to invite to co-creation events by region.
- Consider reserving a seat on the Steering Committee for a women's rights or other social inclusion activist organisation, who could proactively convene actors from grassroots social movements and support on how to ensure the action plan reflects the interests and priorities of social movements;
- Create a gender working group as part of the technical working groups that support action plan co-creation.
- Given the central role of the non-government Secretariat in planning the consultative process for action plan co-creation, it may also be useful to formally elect the non-government Secretariat (alongside or subsequent to the election of the non-government Co-chair), rather than have the non-government Secretariat role appointed by the Co-Chair.
- Whether elected or appointed, the Steering Committee should put in place criteria for the selection of the non-government Secretariat that includes their capacity to integrate gender and inclusion issues in the action plan co-creation and implementation processes, or the ability to draw on other resources, partners or networks for this.
- The Steering Committee (and particularly the non-government members) should proactively share the responsibility of fundraising for the non-government Secretariat (as per their current terms of reference), including seeking funds to support the gender and social inclusion plan for action plan co-creation.

Co-creation process

- Actively pursue more diverse civil society participation in the co-creation process, beyond traditional NGOs and governance actors, to include a wider set of actors including those working within key social movements focused on aspects of gender equality and social inclusion.
- Actively include women's rights organisations in opportunities to influence the early agenda for the action plan, including the first round of suggested commitments (the Citizens' Agenda or similar) and the shortlist (first draft of the action plan).
- Consider holding dedicated workshops (possibly using sample workshop agendas in the accompanying toolkit) for women's rights organisations and organisations representing marginalised groups, at agenda-setting and action plan refinement stages. These would be aimed at creating dedicated spaces for these actors to forward priorities most critical to their agendas, form coalitions to work on OGP with others and develop collective strategies, and identify government allies critical to getting their commitments short-listed.
- Proactively engage Philippine Commission on Women to better share OGP's opportunities and

challenges and consider a possible role for Philippine Commission on Women in action plan co-creation and implementation processes.

- Consistently set aside time to address gender and social inclusion issues in commitment design workshops and in all aspects of the commitment design, from the problem analysis onward.
- Improve stakeholder understanding of OGP and the NAP through:
 - consistently creating time ahead of all citizen/civil society consultations to introduce OGP, its purpose, structures, and processes, in simple, visual form,
 - the prior circulation of draft commitments, with reasonable lead time, ahead of any consultation with citizens/civil society,
 - the consistent use of the most complete versions of any drafts, including avoiding holding consultations based on skeletal or limited versions of commitments that cannot be understood well they lack detail.
- Improve consultation spaces by:
 - considering whether aspects of the consultation process could be further decentralised, including information-sharing and feedback mechanisms being held below the regional level,
 - dedicating a full day to OGP commitment consultations i.e. not holding the wider townhall sessions on the same day as the OGP consultations,
 - including more time for introducing commitments and allowing for questions during plenary sessions,
 - extending the time for break-out dialogue sessions,
 - ensuring conducive physical spaces in which people can hear and be heard,
 - carefully selecting group facilitators and government representatives to participate in these spaces and providing an orientation to their roles ahead of time. Where possible, choose government representatives with a strong understanding of gender issues and/or experience liaising with civil society/women's rights organisations.
- Integrate a gender and social inclusion focus and prompts into the full set of guiding questions used to facilitate consultations (not just related to indicators). In the accompanying toolkit, the research team has provided an adapted version of the facilitation questions used during the Philippines' fifth action plan co-creation process, with a focus on gender and social inclusion throughout.

Commitment content

- Create a set of minimum standards, coupled with guidance, for mainstreaming gender and social inclusion considerations in commitment drafting, including relevant gender analysis, explicitly inclusive language, gender-disaggregated data, and gender-specific targets and indicators.
- Commitment drafting forms and design workshops should consistently set aside time to address gender and inclusion from the first design discussions, in also aspects of the commitment design from the problem analysis onward.
- Aim to have at least one gender equality-focused commitment in each NAP, as well as gender mainstreaming throughout all commitments.
- Further engage gender units of national government agencies, to bring in their expertise during commitment drafting.
- Either hire a consultant or designate someone from the non-government Secretariat to perform a review of full draft commitments to address outstanding gender mainstreaming issues.

Women's Rights Organisations/Gender Equality Activists

- Advocate for a seat on the OGP Steering Committee.
- Engage in early analysis, positioning and coalition-building to build support for commitment idea(s) ahead of and during the early stages of the co-creation process.
- Identify key contacts in relevant government agencies, and within the OGP leadership architecture, who might act as allies or advisors in positioning gender-related commitments in future OGP action plans.

OGP Donors

- Funding to country specific OGP co-creation processes should require recipients to develop concrete gender and inclusion strategies for co-creation, as well as measuring and reporting on related results.
- Within funding to country specific OGP co-creation processes consider dedicated funds for women's rights organisations for costs of attendance in OGP co-creation events.