



Implementing SDG16+ Through the Open Government Partnership

Stories and Commitments
to Watch

July 2019

Open
Government
Partnership



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Introduction

The challenge of building peaceful, just and inclusive societies is at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These global goals, agreed at the United Nations by all countries in 2015, are designed to provide a roadmap for a better world by 2030. The Open Government Partnership (OGP) can be a vital partner to achieve these goals.

Four years since the SDGs were agreed, there is widespread concern that implementation is so badly off-track for most targets that a dramatic shift in action will be needed to make significant progress by 2030. It is vital that 2019 is a year where people are inspired to take more ambitious action and commit to making the 2020s a decade of delivery.

Open government can be a strategic tool to help with implementation across the 17 SDGs. Government is better when it is transparent about its activities and with its data, when it proactively encourages public participation, when it is responsive to citizen demands, and when it is prepared to be held accountable for successes and failures. Within OGP, countries are experimenting with open government innovations that could help accelerate progress on the global goals. These include a range of innovations that give citizens a greater say over how they are governed: whether it be how public services in water, health and education are provided, where and how infrastructure projects are built, or how budgets are allocated.

Since OGP was founded in 2011, there have been almost 4,000 of these open government commitments from the 79 member countries, and an increasing number of local government participants. This briefing paper looks at some of the most relevant examples. It spotlights innovations across Goal 16+, the cluster of SDG targets that seek to achieve peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and accountable institutions. These are by no means an exhaustive list of examples of relevant open government reforms happening in OGP, but they are designed to showcase the potential of countries using their membership to more proactively link their commitments at the global level to national implementation. It includes work in South Africa to make budgetary information more accessible and participatory, in Colombia to make the legal system more accessible to citizens, in Sri Lanka to expand on access to information and in the UK to reduce opportunities for money laundering and corruption.

OGP's mechanism is well suited to be the link between global commitments and national implementation because of its unique design elements. OGP members are required to submit concrete commitments every two years that are co-created between government reformers and civil society organizations. The discussions take place in an OGP forum, typically co-chaired by a government minister and a civil society leader, and are designed to be open to inputs from citizens as well as organized non-governmental organizations. Every year, an independent assessment of progress is conducted by OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism. These reports are public, and provide a vital learning and accountability tool that ensures progress is tracked and OGP is not a talking shop.

The examples in this briefing paper show that even on the toughest SDG targets, progress is possible and that innovations are taking place in OGP members that can be adapted and adopted by other countries. However, these examples are too few and far between. Strengthening the link between OGP and the SDGs could be a helpful way to accelerate the use of open government as a tool to deliver on priorities for governments and citizens at two levels.

First, OGP members should consider their biannual open government action plans as tools for committing to reforms that help the country meet their SDG targets. This was first outlined in the 2015 OGP Declaration on the SDGs that was agreed at the [Mexico Global Summit](#), and is already underway in some OGP countries. In places where the link has been established governments could include it in their Voluntary National Review which for example the [UK has done in 2019](#), and ensure that the relevant Ministry leading on SDG coordination has a seat at the table in their OGP forum. There may also be opportunities to make progress on open data and data management reforms that help SDG monitoring, so that better decisions can be made on where to allocate resources to meet the goals. The OGP forum can also bring in more diverse civil society voices working across policy areas reflected in the SDGs.

Second, OGP can incubate new open government norms that will help deliver progress on the SDGs. For example, on anti-corruption over 70 OGP members have commitments on open contracting and public procurement, helping governments save money, reducing state capture by well connected elites and increasing access to government business for small and medium owned enterprises. Open contracting is an example of a new open government norm that could help countries improve on basic service delivery for health, education and water provision, supporting progress across many of the SDGs if well implemented. Similar new norms are emerging on open budgets, access to information, ending anonymous companies and giving citizen's options to provide feedback on public services.

This briefing paper shows that it is possible to achieve results, even in difficult circumstances and on challenging goals, by working together with reformers in and out of government, and having a strong focus on accountability. If the 2020s are really to be a decade of delivery for the SDGs, a stronger partnership with the open government community will be essential. OGP's focus on national implementation, cross-country learning, and incubating new policy norms that could help make progress across the SDGs means there is potential for far more strategic collaboration in future.

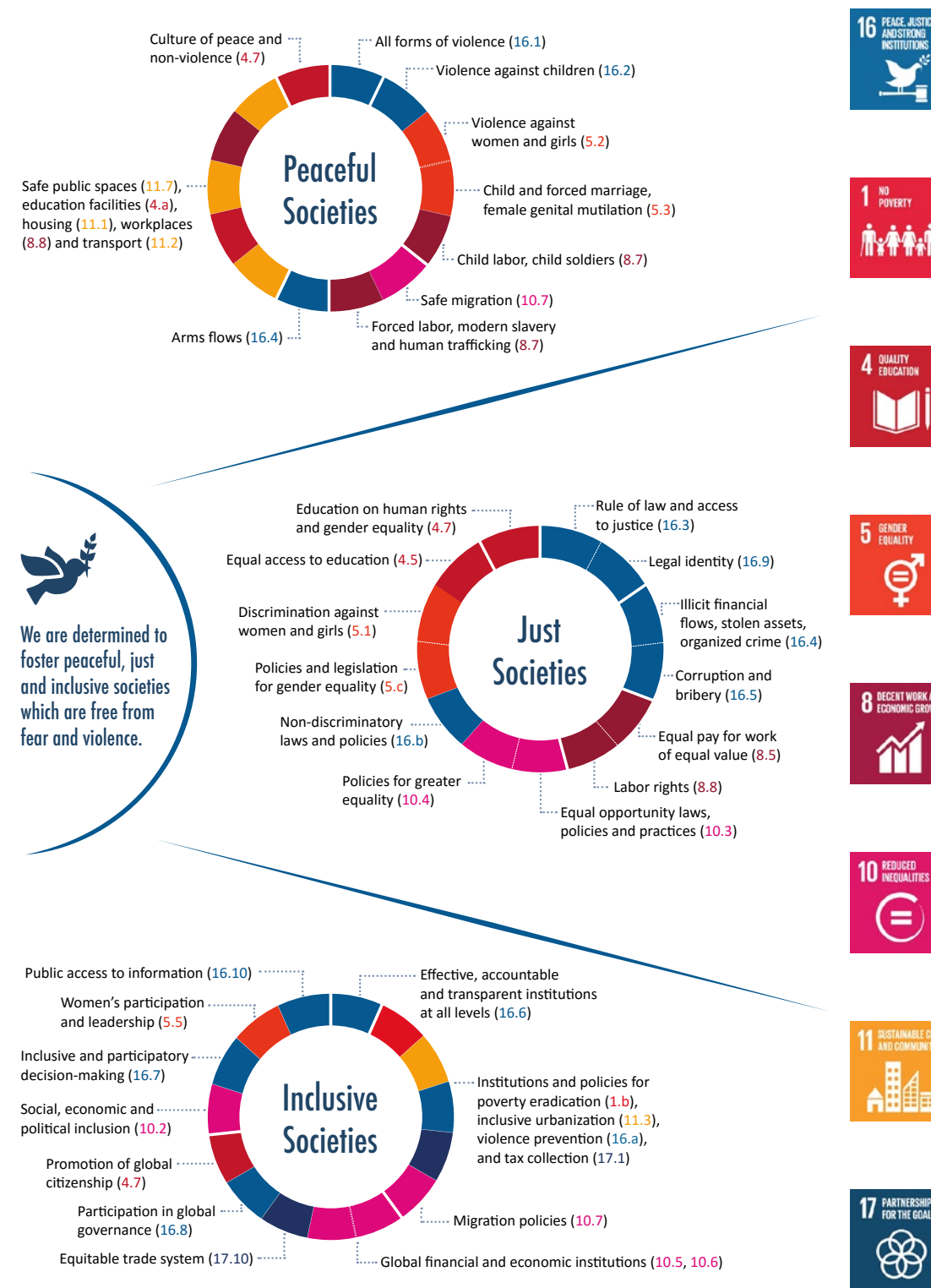


The SDG16+ Framework

This briefing paper uses the SDG16+ framework established by the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, which aims to ensure SDG 16 is not addressed in isolation from other relevant goals and emphasizes the strong interlinkages between different SDG targets.¹

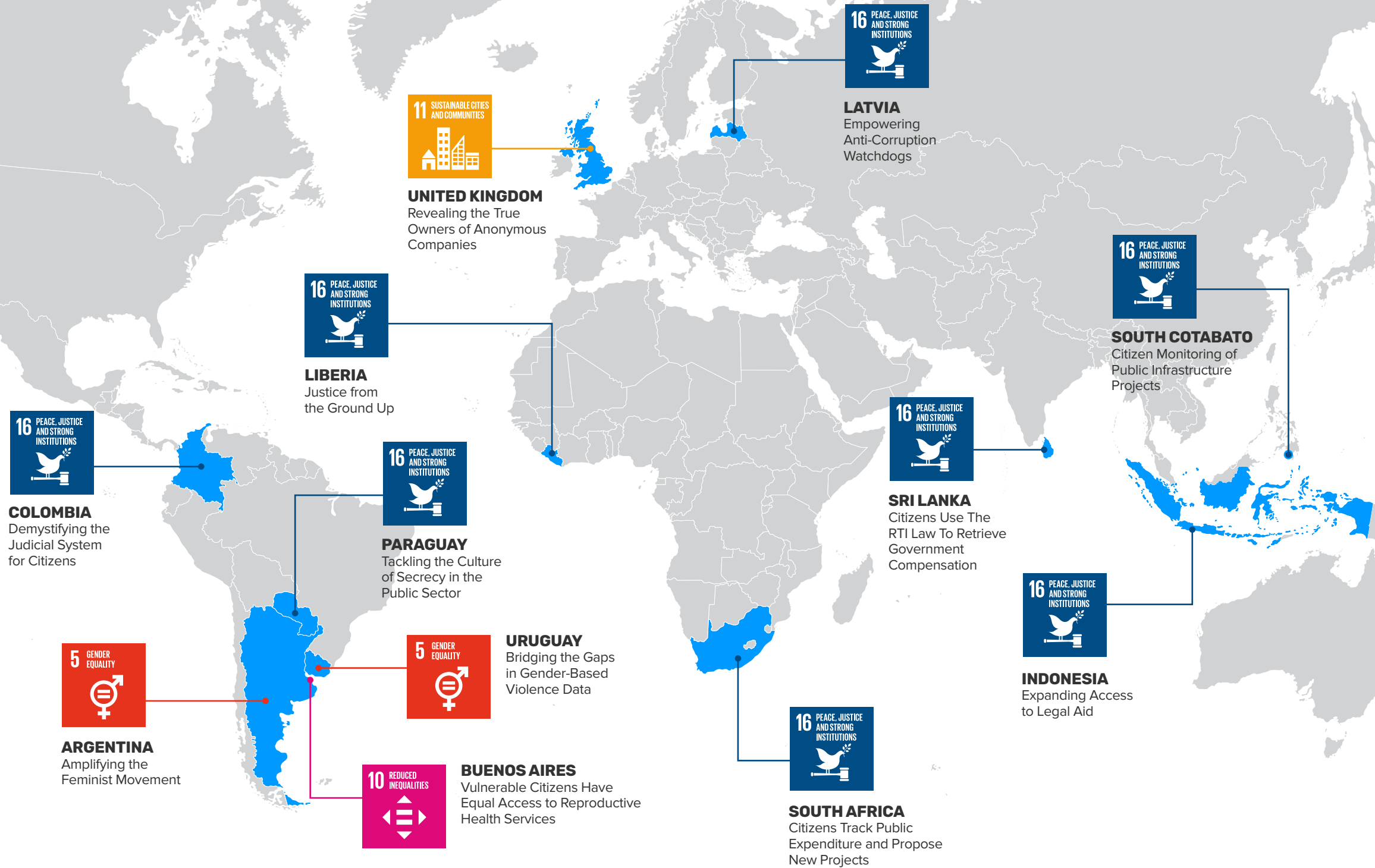
Many OGP members have made open government commitments relevant to the SDG16+ framework. This briefing paper looks at a selection of those commitments across a range of themes, including anti-corruption, access to justice, inclusion, access to information and gender equality.

OGP action plans are also being used to advance reforms that help achieve a number of other global goals, including those related to improving basic public services on health, education and water. Those are not addressed in this briefing paper, but open government approaches are a powerful tool to make progress across the 17 goals. Approximately 30 national and six local OGP members have proactively recognized this link by directly referencing the SDGs in their OGP action plans, or in specific open government commitments.



We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence.

SDG16+ Reforms



Buenos Aires

Vulnerable Citizens Have Equal Access to Reproductive Health Services



In Buenos Aires, access to sexual and reproductive health services is guaranteed for all residents by law, yet there is a stark gap between quality and availability of those services depending on where one lives. The disparity in access and education resulted in a rise of HIV diagnosis among youth outside the city center. As a result, most Argentinians with HIV who live in the 24 districts outside the city of Buenos Aires end up traveling to the city center to seek treatment.

Leveraging their OGP action plan, the Buenos Aires government in collaboration with the Huésped Foundation developed the digital platform *Dónde*. Among its many functions, the platform reduces obstacles and inconsistencies in sexual and reproductive health services and provides information on the availability of sexual and reproductive health services throughout the city. It has enabled vulnerable citizens to access georeferenced information on condom delivery points, family planning information, HIV testing, vaccinations and infectious disease centers.

Now, citizens can better locate centers, rate their experience and lodge complaints on clinics performing poorly or violating women's rights.

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Colombia

Demystifying the Judicial System for Citizens



Colombia's legal system is complex and its citizens often complained of its inaccessibility. As part of their second OGP action plan, Colombia's Ministry of Justice and Law committed to developing a platform to help citizens gain better understanding and access to the judicial system. LegalApp contains information about the legal system for every Colombian municipality and covers many areas including civil and administrative to criminal and environmental law. The application outlines more than 260 "routes of justice" (steps citizens must take to resolve legal issues) and notes whether procedures require a lawyer and involve fees.

In addition to information on how to proceed with legal issues, LegalApp offers a glossary of legal terms, a directory of judicial institutions, and a list of approximately 20,000 public officials to consult for guidance. Visitors can schedule appointments via the app to receive personalized advice. Its legal document templates save citizens time.

To date, the app has had more than nine million visits. In 2019, the most popular inquiries pertained to property ownership, the reporting of crimes, vehicle sales, parental rights, and social security.² To ensure accountability, visitors can submit petitions, complaints, and claims. At the end of each search, visitors can take a satisfaction survey to give feedback on the maintenance of the app.

The app has been well received by civil society and was nominated for the 2016 Award of Excellence in Justice from the Excellence in Justice Corporation (part of the monitoring committee for the OGP process). The app sealed Colombia's place as a leader in the Justice Studies Center of America's Index of Online Judicial Services. LegalApp also gained the number one ranking among 130 websites from 32 countries assessed by the Justice Studies Center of the Americas in its Index of Online Judicial Services.³

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Paraguay

Tackling the Culture of Secrecy in the Public Sector



In 2014, Paraguay became the 100th country in the world to pass legislation that grants citizens access to public information. The work to open government, data and budgets began locally with one reformer determined to improve his community and the lives of his fellow citizens.⁴

José Daniel Vargas-Télez is a radio host and news website reporter in San Lorenzo, Paraguay. In 2007, his followers began to complain about government corruption and poor service delivery issues in the municipality. Concerned for his community, José Daniel began to investigate the allegations and contacted the municipality to request information about staff positions and salaries. Citing privacy concerns, the municipality denied his request.

Not knowing where to turn, Daniel contacted civil society groups to take the case to court. The case was litigated for seven years and eventually made its way to the Supreme Court. In 2014, the court ordered the disclosure of government officials' salaries stating it is the fundamental right of all citizens to have access to public information. The court's decision made way for the enactment of the Citizen Access to Public Information and Transparency Law.⁵

As part of its OGP commitments, Paraguay's government committed to the implementation of the law. The commitment called for the creation of a Directorate of Access to Public Information within the Ministry of Justice, Access to Public Information Offices, and Citizen Information and Attention Centers. With this commitment, the government will train public officials on how to use the system to help fulfill citizen requests. In 2016, 700 officials were trained on how to use the portal.

Citizens can now access public information in person at these offices or via computer, tablet, or smartphone. As of April 2018, more than 10,000 requests had been entered, and 80 percent had been answered. Most requests pertained to the ministries' of justice, education, and finance.⁶ In addition to getting information on public officials' salaries, trip expenses and active government contracts, visitors can also request information on other topics such as public health, public works, and the penitentiary system.

Civil society has expressed optimism about the advancements. The civil society think tank Institute of Law and Environment Economics — which called the commitment's standards "cutting edge"⁷ — has been enlisted by Congress to train Attention Center officials on access to information.⁸ The law has been tested and affirmed in court twice,⁹ and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has observed that it has "considerably altered the preeminent secrecy culture in the public sector."¹⁰

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TERESA TORRES FOR USAID



South Africa

Citizens Track Public Expenditure and Propose New Projects



Coined the rainbow nation to encapsulate the coming together of many different people, South Africa has been a global leader in budget transparency. The work to make the government's expenditures publicly accessible did not happen overnight. It was the result of government reformers and civil society actors working tirelessly to make the government more transparent and curb corruption.

While the government made budget information available, citizens felt that they had limited access and involvement in the budget decision process that would ultimately impact their daily lives.

South Africa committed to creating a portal that would be more accessible and increase citizen participation. Prior to this commitment, the information the government made public was static, unintegrated, and not conducive to engaging public interaction.

Working with a network of civil society organizations, the government launched Vulekamali – loosely translated, it means open money – a web portal that houses both national and provincial department budgetary information, budgets and actual expenditures for programs and subprograms within departments. Additionally, the portal equipped citizens with learning resources on the budget process, and external databases (including those with civil society analyses). The government holds “Civic Information Drives” to explain how to use Vulekamali.¹¹

The National Treasury and civil society actors have held hackathons and “Data Quests” to promote the use of the data to advance social change.¹² The Data Quests engages civic actors, social workers, public officials, and budget and data analysts on analysis and advocacy needs. The hackathons encourage developers, students, entrepreneurs, and data experts to use the data to create solutions to social issues. The new portal is already proving to be fruitful. Using the portal, citizens have already created proposals for more housing,¹³ equal opportunities for women,¹⁴ and road maintenance and infrastructure.¹⁵

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BEYOND ACCESS, MASIPHUMELELE LIBRARY, SOUTH AFRICA



Sri Lanka

Citizens Use The RTI Law To Retrieve Government Compensation



After decades of failed initiatives to promote the right to information, Sri Lanka finally enacted its Right to Information Act (RTI) in 2016. The law allows Sri Lankans to scrutinize their government more closely, more effectively participate in decision-making, and exercise active citizenship beyond elections.

Implementation of the new law had significant impact across Sri Lanka, particularly in Koomankulam, a village located in the Northern Province of the country. After the Sri Lankan civil war ended in 2009, villagers struggled to rebuild their lives. To provide relief, the government announced villagers could apply for compensation. As villagers submitted their applications, they either received letters promising to pay a certain sum or nothing at all from the government. However, things started to change in 2016. Citizens began to hear about passage of the RTI law and its implementation through OGP. Leveraging the new law, villagers began inquiring about the status of their compensation by appealing to their designated officer. The day after the appeal, one villager received a portion of their compensation. The next day more villagers started getting money deposited in their accounts. After fighting for years, the villagers of Koomankulam finally began to get the justice they had fought so long for.

To increase citizens' knowledge of the new law across the country, the Sri Lankan government launched awareness campaigns, targeting social welfare recipients and women, and began broadcasting a weekly television program that discusses key RTI cases, activists and their accomplishments, and current debates surrounding the new legislation. The campaign aims to strengthen the enforceable right to information and empower citizens to exercise it. Information officers and the country's RTI Commission are acting to ensure that citizens can lodge requests for information and that the government fulfills those requests.

Like the villagers from Koomankulam, citizens across Sri Lanka have already used RTI to change their daily lives and their communities and hold government officials accountable.

The campaign aims to strengthen the enforceable right to information and empower citizens to exercise it.



United Kingdom

Revealing the True Owners of Anonymous Companies



Whether helping criminals launder cash, allowing terrorists to shift money, or providing a vehicle for the fantastically wealthy to avoid taxes, anonymous companies are the go-to tool for hiding money. The World Bank estimates that 70 percent of corruption cases involve such structures. The City of London, described as one of the best places in the world to set up a company and hide who owns it, has been a key node in this nexus of secrecy.

To untangle the mess, the UK government passed beneficial ownership legislation requiring companies to disclose who ultimately owns and controls them. As part of its 2013-15 OGP action plan, the UK government created the “People with Significant Control” (PSC) register, a database that publicly lists information on individuals who own or control companies. The government took a collaborative approach to building the registry, holding consultations with civil society and business, while using the wisdom of the crowd to spot errors in the registry and drive improvements. The registry is now accessed more than twenty thousand times a day. Activists and journalists have uncovered widespread malfeasance, exposing scores of senior politicians, seventy-six people on the U.S. sanctions list, and hundreds of others who are barred from owning UK companies.

According to the UK’s Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) report, the beneficial ownership register had a ‘ripple effect,’ with over twenty countries now having made beneficial ownership transparency commitments through their OGP action plans, including Norway, Nigeria, Armenia and Kenya. In December 2017, the EU agreed on amendments to the 5th Anti-Money Laundering Directive (5AMLD), which included a requirement that all member states make beneficial ownership information available via a public register (although a small fee might apply). Finally, a crucial milestone was the vote by the British Parliament in April 2018 to require the UK overseas territories (BOTs) to establish public registers of beneficial owners. In June 2019, the islands of Jersey, Guernsey, and the Isle of Man announced that they would introduce public registers by 2023.

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DEUTSCHE BANK



Argentina

Amplifying the Feminist Movement

2017 - 2019 OGP ACTION PLAN, COMMITMENT #23



In Argentina, women experience higher unemployment, earn lower salaries for performing the same jobs as men, and do twice the amount of unpaid work as men.¹⁶ These issues motivated protests at Argentina's National Congress in the early months of 2018.¹⁷ The “Ni Una Menos” (“Not One Less”) movement, which began in 2015, focuses on reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and gender inequality and has forced the government to think about issues that matter to the people. As part of Argentina's third OGP action plan, the National Women's Institute worked with a variety of government ministries and civil society organizations to draft a new Plan for Equal Opportunity and Rights Unveiled on March 13, 2018 by President Mauricio Macri. The plan's 35 proposals focus on three priorities — physical autonomy, financial autonomy and economic empowerment, and gender-based violence — and aim to provide public information about gender equality challenges and policies to address them.¹⁸



INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE LAS MUJERES, ARGENTINA

Indonesia

Expanding Access to Legal Aid

2018 - 2020 OGP ACTION PLAN, COMMITMENT #14



Many Indonesians currently face barriers to justice — stemming from the limited national budget for legal assistance, an increase in the number of legal cases, low quality and limited availability of services from the Legal Aid Organization, and lack of legal knowledge in Indonesian communities. To address these challenges, the National Law Development Agency will expand city and provincial regulations that guarantee government support for legal aid, increase and improve current legal aid services through the Legal Aid Organization, and increase citizens' awareness of their legal rights through education programs. In addition, the Agency will establish a community legal center where people can obtain legal information. The government hopes these measures will improve the satisfaction levels reported by legal aid service recipients.



OPEN GOVERNMENT INDONESIA



Latvia

Empowering Anti-Corruption Watchdogs

2017 - 2019 OGP ACTION PLAN, COMMITMENT #6



In an effort to strengthen the current law, the State Chancellery and the

Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau created mechanisms to make it easier for individuals to report potentially unethical activity by the government. These authorities will promote awareness of reporting mechanisms and conduct research on best practices for whistleblower protections. Working with civil society organization like Transparency International, this commitment has the potential to restore trust in public institutions, help prevent corruption and abuses of power, and promote workplace openness and democratically responsible behavior.



INGUSK, ADOBE STOCK

Liberia

Justice from the Ground Up

2017 - 2019 ACTION PLAN, COMMITMENT #4



In Liberia, citizens often lack a clear understanding of how their justice system works. In an effort to build trust in the judiciary, the

Chief Justice's Office of Liberia will improve government capacity in the justice sector and grow the capability of citizens to recognize their role in it. In their 2013 - 2014 action plan, Liberia amended its jury laws to ensure that citizens serving on juries are well informed about cases, so trials can be conducted fairly. Liberia's third action plan from 2017 - 2019 will build on these reforms. The Chief Justice's Office will establish jury offices in more counties, train magistrates in all counties, and create systems for citizen monitoring of local court performance. The commitment's guarantee of access to information on laws and regulations and citizen engagement at the local level will promote accountability.

Already, there is evidence of progress reflected in the number of judicial facilities constructed throughout the country, the programs and policies initiated to build capacity and improve systems, and the employment of additional judicial workers to deal with the growing number of court cases.



MORGANA WINGARD FOR OGP



South Cotabato, Philippines

Citizen Monitoring of Public Infrastructure Projects

2018 - 2020 ACTION PLAN, COMMITMENT #3



Inefficiencies in South Cotabato's procurement process led to delayed completion or hold up on implementation of 95 percent of planned infrastructure projects in 2017. A lack of

publicly accessible information on the real-time status of projects hindered accountability on the issue. Historically, the status of projects has only been reported quarterly to a few civil society organizations and members of the government's Provincial Project Monitoring Committee. However, citizens cannot access information on completion or repairs of infrastructure projects, which hinders their ability to plan their commutes, transport goods, and access social services. This disproportionately impacts citizens living in rural communities in South Cotabato and presents challenges for rural-urban integration.

After consultations with contractors, the business sector, and civil society, South Cotabato aims to proactively disclose the status of infrastructure projects on a near real-time basis through the provincial government website and social media channels. These initiatives will create opportunities for citizens and civil society to provide feedback and post recommendations so that issues on project implementation delays, quality concerns, and poor use of public funds may be addressed. The online and offline mechanisms seek to bolster citizen engagement to hold concerned government officials and contractors accountable for delays in project delivery.



SOUTH COTABATO FACEBOOK PAGE

Uruguay

Bridging the Gaps in Gender-Based Violence Data

2018 - 2020 ACTION PLAN, COMMITMENT #2



The Uruguayan government and civil society are working together to bring more

awareness and clarity to the issue of gender-based violence against women. Together, they plan to combine and publish the fragmented information available on gender-based violence and streamline standards for agencies that work in this area. The Inter-institutional Commission — comprised of the Office of Budget and Planning, the Ministries of Interior and Social Development, the National Institute of Women, and the Uruguayan Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence — will create an observatory on gender-based violence against women. It will document the use of public resources about the Gender-Based Violence Against Women Act and publish the second edition of the *National Survey on Prevalence of Generation- and Gender-Based Violence*.



UN WOMEN/SAHAND MINAE



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