

Open Government, the Sustainable Development Goals and Citizen Involvement

A Synopsis from OECD (2016) '*Open Government: The Global Context and the Way Forward*'

Chapter 6 - Open government: A tool for an effective implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

The approval of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015 provided an important occasion to explore how countries' multi-lateral reform and development initiatives, such as those in the areas of open government, can support and advance the ambitious aims of the SDGs.

The SDGs

Consisting of 17 goals and 169 targets, the SDGs cover a wide range of topics that will help shape countries' priorities for public governance reform in the coming years.

The SDGs deepen and expand upon the Millennium Development Goals and set out an ambitious agenda that aspires to be universal, integrated, and transformational.

By being designed to apply to all countries regardless of development levels, countries will set their own national targets according to their circumstances, capacities and priorities.

Finally, the goals are designed to be transformational, which will require the mobilisation of a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organisations and the private sector.

Open government principles and the SDGs

By promoting the principles of accountability, participation and transparency, open government strategies and practices can inform the process by which countries pursue the SDGs throughout the policy cycle (namely, during their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation).

Engaging citizens, civil society organisations and the private sector as partners in the policy cycle helps ensure that their needs are identified and responded to, thereby leading to higher user satisfaction.

For example, by ensuring that all interested parties have a chance to contribute to policy design, governments can reinforce the legitimacy of the decision-making process and its final results and reduce the likelihood and costs of non-compliance. Furthermore, collaborating with citizens at every stage of policy and service planning and delivery is critical to ensuring sustainable quality improvements that respond in more targeted ways to nuanced public needs. Given the problems arising from poorly designed and implemented policies and the relatively short timeframe to achieve the broad and ambitious goals laid out by the SDGs, governments should keep in mind that not engaging with citizens can create higher costs through policy failure in the short term, as well as loss of trust, legitimacy and policy effectiveness in the long term (OECD, 2001).

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Beyond the design and adoption of policies, citizens are also an essential component in the implementation of public policies, which cannot be done effectively without public understanding and support. This is where processes such as co-production, in which citizens engage in partnerships with service professionals in the design and delivery of a public service, can be particularly useful.

Finally, the monitoring, evaluation and reporting phases allow governments to understand the extent to which their policies were successful, thereby helping to create new policies or redesign existing activities. The SDGs will require significant investment in statistical capacity, new types of data measurement and reporting instruments and closer co-ordination between governments and citizens to ensure data relevance (OECD, 2015d).

Many of the goals that countries are pursuing through their open government initiatives will also support their efforts to implement the SDGs:

1. Accountability

Open and inclusive policy making supports accountability by broadening citizens' influence on decisions and helping to prevent governments from concealing their activities and decision-making processes. This helps ensure that policies reflect public needs and helps guarantee that governments use resources appropriately. For example, involving citizens in aligning financial incentives and monitoring financial flows can improve efficiency and accountability, especially in the case of services designed and delivered by users themselves (OECD, 2011).

The role that open government initiatives play in increasing accountability and preventing corruption is particularly relevant, for example, in infrastructure and procurement activities, such as those reflected in Goal 9. Open and inclusive government policies can also help ensure that the public sector responds to the needs of potentially marginalised communities. By bringing these populations into the policy-making cycle and ensuring that their needs are responded to, open government initiatives can lead to more inclusive public governance for all segments of society, and in the process respond to the targets that seek to, for example, ensure that all men and women have equal rights to economic resources, access to basic services, etc. (Target 1.4) and ensure equal access to education and vocational training (Target 4.5).

2. Transparency

Ensuring transparency and access to public sector information, and that the public is able to use public information effectively, is a cornerstone of open government initiatives. Increasing transparency and access to information will simultaneously support a number of the SDGs, including those concerning increasing access to technology (Target 9.c); ensuring access to information for sustainable development (Target 12.8); and increasing the availability of development data (Target 17.18).

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Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data

Launched in 2015, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data aims to strengthen the case for open data as a mechanism to fulfil the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.

www.data4sdgs.org

It is a multi-stakeholder group composed of governments, private, social, academic and international organisations.

The partnership aims to increase the availability and two-way reuse of high-quality data in order to help governments make better decisions towards the achievement of the SDGs, and increase data-driven initiatives that could contribute to fighting poverty, inequality and climate change.

It focuses primarily on:

- supporting multi-stakeholder data initiatives that connect the data revolution in achieving the SDGs
- focusing on building a capacity to generate, share and use available data at local level
- contributing to filling data gaps, using original data as well as new data in achieving the SDGs
- helping to develop and build support for international principles tying together the data, including sharing and leveraging the current, privately held data
- organising local, regional and global data events to advance increasing connectivity, collaboration and innovation towards achieving and measuring the SDGs

3. Participation

Many countries are already pursuing activities to increase participation, another key component of Goal 16, and specifically of Target 16.7.

For example, 72% of all respondent countries (66% OECD countries) have launched initiatives to involve citizens in policy making, and 68% have implemented citizen consultation initiatives (rising to 80% in OECD countries).

In addition, 57% of all countries surveyed (same result in OECD countries) launched initiatives to involve citizens in service design, and half of them provide for initiatives on citizen participation in service delivery (Figure 6.2).

Together, these initiatives provide governments with feedback and new ideas and allow stakeholders to offer inputs, thereby enhancing both the quality and capacity of policies to achieve the intended outcome. As countries move beyond consultation toward more advanced forms of participation, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, citizens and businesses have the opportunity to be involved in the co-design and co-delivery of public services.

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These practices improve the responsiveness, inclusiveness and participatory nature of public sector activities, and respond specifically to a number of the Targets, including those that seek to increase women's participation in public decision making

SDGs and the Open Government Partnership

The link between open government principles and the SDGs has also been recognised by the Open Government Partnership Joint Declaration on Open Government for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/OGP_declaration.pdf

The OGP Joint Declaration calls for endorsing countries to:

- promote the Open Government Partnership as a platform for voluntary co-operation and peer exchange and learning across the policy cycle
- draw on the experience of its participating governments and civil society organisations to encourage transparent, accountable, participatory and technology-enabled implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It also commits OGP signatories to use OGP National Action Plans to adopt commitments that serve as effective tools to promote transparent and accountable implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Co-ordination

The breadth of Agenda 2030 and the interconnected nature of the issues it addresses demand a high degree of policy co-ordination and coherence horizontally (across ministries and agencies), as well as vertically (across levels of government).

The complexity and integrated nature of the SDGs also complicates the decision of where to assign responsibility for action, both across ministries at the national government level and between national and sub-national levels.

Notably, 77% of OECD countries (including GB but not ROI) have established an office responsible for horizontal co-ordination of open government initiatives.

Countries will be expected to set their own paths for realising the SDGs.

And no meaningful national implementation plan can be developed without an inclusive, government-led process to interpret the SDGs.

In these conditions, the Centre of Government is best placed to play this role, as it is often responsible for setting standards, providing guidance to departments and agencies, and monitoring and evaluating outcomes and levels of compliance (de Mello, 2016).

The Centre of Government is therefore also well placed to apply the capabilities built by its implementation of other multidimensional initiatives, such as open government, in the service of the SDGs.

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The Centre of Government must respond to the SDG goals of developing effective institutions (Target 16.6) and ensuring responsive, inclusive and participatory decision making (Target 16.7) by:

- co-ordinating public policy
- supporting open data and information and communication technology (ICT) platforms
- co-ordinating monitoring, evaluation and knowledge management
- conducting public outreach and communication
- co-ordinating the country's SDG implementation
- laying the groundwork for the implementation and mainstreaming of the SDGs into development planning at the national and sub-national level

Conditions to ensure that open government contributes to achieving the SDGs

Countries seeking to link open government and the SDGs could:

- Develop the links between open government reforms and the design, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.
- Promote the use of open data for reporting on SDG achievements. This would not only support the role of CSOs as watchdogs, but it would foster the reuse of public sector information in a way that is relevant for the implementation of the SDGs.
- Increase the involvement of citizens in the policy cycle of the SDGs to ensure that the initiatives are inclusive and that they fully reflect public needs. This could be achieved by ensuring that CSO actors and government representatives familiar with the country's open government activities and OGP reporting cycles play a role in the design of the national SDG strategy, as well as in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the activities.