16. Transnational approaches to improving public services: the case of the open government partnership

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INTRODUCTION

Public administration scholars have hotly debated whether the inauguration of 'new' approaches to governing the affairs of public organizations and services results in a better functioning system that will improve government and the lives of citizens. Sometimes reforms seem to come about due to coalitions of the powerful rather than being intrinsically meaningful reforms (Jann and Wegrich, 2017). At other times, the costs of reform seem to seriously undermine the successes (Alonso et al., 2015; Blom-Hansen, 2016) or reforms may just place unnecessary costs and burdens on government and citizens (Wynen et al., 2019) and run into implementation problems (Hood and Dixon, 2015). Of various historic reforms such as the New Public Management or the panoply of reform ideas called New Public Governance or post-New Public Management, the track record on ultimate rewards gained by the changes is very mixed (Hood and Dixon, 2015; Ingrams et al., 2020). Research has also shown that the results of open government styles of policy reform such as transparency and public participation are ambiguous (Schnell, 2022), and technology-inspired public sector innovations have attracted criticism for being overly optimistic about underlying political incentives and institutional capacities (Cucciniello et al., 2017; Meijer, 2018; Ingrams et al., 2020).

The intractability of these puzzles about reform success and failure makes it challenging for scholars to find clear cut answers about how and when types of reform have positive impacts. However, one way to begin partially disentangling the effects is by shifting focus outside of the normal set of institutional parameters that constitutes the individual nation state, and instead to examine transnational processes. State sovereignty and the conventional decision making hierarchies of the state apparatus mean that states are natural places

to look for answers. Yet, much policy change that takes place within states is actually driven by the actions of global actors, including transnational structures that are constituted of multiple states and non-state actors, and therefore can have considerable influence. There is, for example, a rich literature on international institutions such as the United Nations or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and transnational initiatives such as the Kimberley Process and the United Nations Global Compact, that explores the design of international institutions and the behavior that those designs foster among member governments (e.g., Finnemore, 1993; Haufler, 2009; Berliner and Prakash, 2015; Grohs and Rasch, 2021). Seen in this way, the question about the success of reforms primes quite a different set of answers that links changes set in motion by the process of membership to relationships based on partnership and the activities that take place through the partnership.

The key question of this chapter is, therefore, as follows: *Can participation in transnational multistakeholder partnerships drive successful public sector reform?* To examine this question, we focus on participation of governments in the Open Government Partnership (OGP), which is a compelling and recent case of a transnational multistakeholder public sector reform initiative. The OGP was founded in 2011 and is today a partnership of over 180 national, regional, and municipal governments. Its core goal is to advance openness in governments, which it defines as transparency, accountability, and public participation. The OGP aims to counteract democratic backsliding around the world and harness information and communication technology (ICT) as a positive force for citizens. It rests on the belief that its formula, based essentially on intergovernmental collaboration, strong civil society involvement and public participation, can bring about qualitatively better public services and policies (Open Government Partnership, 2019).

The arrival and ambition of the OGP raises the question of whether this type of intergovernmental collaboration and public participation could drive successful public sector reform. Despite criticism, the approach the OGP takes to engaging governments in a multistakeholder decision making process has novel and unusual characteristics that deserve closer attention from scholars. Where public reform initiatives often sputter and stall, is there something new we can learn about the kinds of impacts that the OGP has had in member governments? We argue in this chapter that, while the OGP is a large, decentralized, and complex system that could not be classed as a complete success in all respects, it nevertheless provides a potent example of how transnational partnership structures can drive positive public service reform domestically. We address the fact that the mechanisms behind such pathways of change are still relatively obscure to public administration scholarship, and we focus on what we call an "indirect pathway" to change. We argue that this path is the one that is the least well understood though it should be critical to our

understanding of success and failure. The OGP aims to have a positive effect on public administration and its wide application across many countries and policy domains offers a way to understand whether and how it is successful.

The analysis for the chapter focuses on the role that member governments of the OGP play in facilitating open government reforms. We consider how pathways of reform set in motion by the OGP can result in varying degrees of successful changes in the public services within participating countries.[1] Different kinds of success may be similarly absent and present in the same initiative creating a multi-layered picture where identification and understanding of causal mechanisms become key for researchers (Compton et al., 2022). This aligns with the goal of positive public administration (PPA) to ultimately address questions of why particular public initiatives do much better than others in producing valuable societal outcomes (Douglas et al., 2021; Flinders, 2023; Lindquist et al., 2022). We home in on (1) the uniqueness of the OGP, and (2) the extent to which successful cases within the OGP could be attributed to those unique characteristics. While transparency and accountability reforms have been blamed for at least some of the negative attention the public sector receives (Douglas et al., 2021), the OGP is a complicated counterexample where these types of reforms have led to some cases of positive impacts.

TRANSNATIONAL MULTISTAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES AND THE OGP

Transnational multistakeholder initiatives are distinguished from other forms of international institutions in several ways (Bäckstrand, 2006; Raymond and DeNardis, 2015). First, they tend to have more diverse forms of membership, including not only states but also potentially firms, civil society actors, subnational entities, and other international organizations. Second, they tend to have more flexible requirements and rules than traditional treaty-based institutions. And third, they are generally aimed at tackling specific governance challenges, and often emerge specifically due to dissatisfaction with shortcomings of more traditional state-centric forms of international organization. Transnational multistakeholder initiatives bear many similarities to other forms of informal and collaborative international governance, such as soft law, orchestration, and regime complexes (e.g., Abbott and Snidal, 2010; Albrecht and Parker, 2019; Mitchell, 2014; Newman and Posner, 2016).

Applying Elinor Ostrom's institutional analysis perspective (Ostrom, 1990) to transnational multistakeholder initiatives is useful. Though not always addressing specifically common-pool resource problems, they can be seen as attempts to govern complex policy problems through cooperation that is neither fully state-driven nor market-driven. Yet the effectiveness of such cooperation still depends on institutional features for monitoring and enforce-

ment. The "gamble" of many such initiatives is that the risks from weaker rules on membership and enforcement will be offset by potential gains from flexibility and diversity, such as speed, innovation, learning, and norm-building.

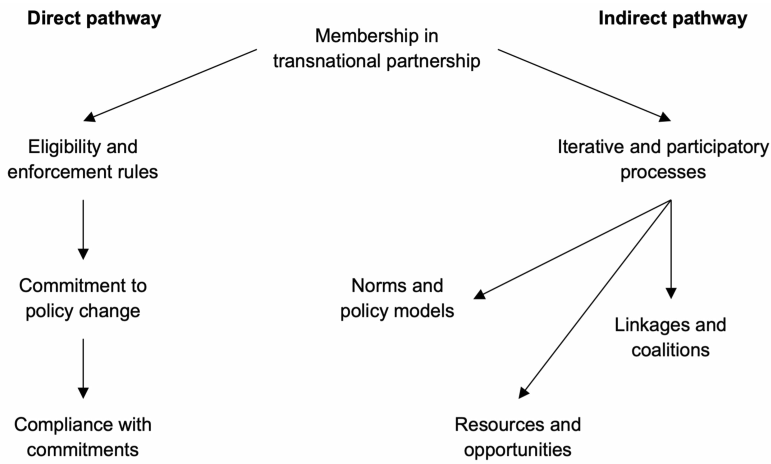
In the case of the OGP, its initial design represented a bargain between prospective state and civil society stakeholders, whereby civil society accepted weaker rules on membership in exchange for institutionalized participation and iteration at both domestic and global levels (Berliner et al., 2022). While there is a relatively "low bar" for membership and there are few sanctions for not implementing commitments, the basic requirement for continued membership is iterative collaboration between government and civil society representatives in producing new action plans every two years. The progress of reforms in such collaborations is a matter of iterative steps set in motion by both the central structure and the member governments, working in tandem. This feature is key to our understanding of success through complementary direct and indirect pathways. It also presents a new challenge as well as an opportunity for our way of thinking about public sector reform success as a transnational, multi-actor process.

The OGP was designed with a central vision of co-leadership of governments and civil society at the level of its central governance committee as well as at the top of each reform decision making process in each member government. A requirement for membership is that there is a credible partnership process in place that gives civil society organizations (CSOs) an equal role in the development of open government policy initiatives and the subsequent process of tracking and evaluating their progress. This engagement with civil society must be visible and reciprocated by both the government and civil society side. Membership eligibility requirements also stipulate that countries must possess basic features of commitment to open government practices by passing an open government 'Values Check' and demonstrating an adequate level of maturity in the areas of fiscal transparency, public right to information, disclosure of public officials' assets, and citizen engagement. Once countries have entered into the membership policy cycle – which involves crafting, implementing, and evaluating a national action plan (with the help of civil society and an independently appointed reviewer) – they are expected to show integrity and timeliness in the process of fulfilling their commitments.

The scope of the actual reform actions and initiatives (the "Commitments") that can be undertaken is not one-size-fits-all but rather is quite broad, as long as commitments fall within the definition of 'open government' or more specifically the values of transparency, public participation, and accountability. Examples of the kinds of things that could be included are publishing datasets about public service activities, engaging citizens in public deliberation, or creating an accountability or transparency watchdog. The OGP approach is remarkable given that the rise of new attention to government transparency

and accountability has more often been viewed as a response to public sector failure. While antagonism between citizens, governments, media, and business is central to these debates, the OGP's participatory, big tent approach to creating change shows a path forward that has some shown unexpected successes.

We argue that the reform impact of the OGP should be understood through a dual trajectory of reform actions that are undertaken by member countries. We call these trajectories the direct pathway and the indirect pathway (shown in Figure 16.1). Each captures different notions of public sector reform success. The *direct pathway* covers the processes of reform that are undertaken as explicit commitments. As a result of drafting commitments, members commit to them as a policy action and subsequent efforts are aimed at complying with agreements. Fulfilling these commitments is a matter of success legalistically understood as doing what is required for membership: completing action plans, designing a good plan, and delivering it on time and according to the original promises.



Source: Piotrowski et al (2022: 17).

Figure 16.1 The direct and indirect pathways of change through membership

In contrast, the *indirect pathway* encompasses the other consequences of participation that come about as a result of the work towards the direct pathway. Indirect effects are primarily process-based in that they relate to how actors (governments and civil society) behave and the relationships and norms that are reshaped and revamped in the public sector. There are three types of indirect mechanism: (1) norms and policy models, (2) resources and opportunities,

and (3) linkages and coalitions. The success of the indirect pathway comes via a dynamic process of reconfiguration in actors and structures giving an enduring quality to the reforms; the changes put in motion spark reactions that are a continuing source of political, normative, and organizational support for changes even going beyond their original target (Patashnik, 2014). For indirect pathways to work, the activities undertaken as part of the direct pathway need not even be particularly successful and they are not dependent on what happened in the activities of the direct pathway. In fact, sometimes it is the fallout from direct failures that can galvanize actors to work toward more meaningful outcomes.

IDENTIFYING SUCCESS FACTORS: ANALYTICAL APPROACH

By "uncovering the factors and mechanisms that enable high performing public problem-solving and public service delivery" in a unique transnational partnership (Douglas et al., 2021: 442), we critically assess the success factors of reform in terms of direct and indirect pathways using multi-country analyses of how the OGP's structure, governance and processes are linked with the activities undertaken in member countries where the impact of reforms is designed to come into effect. Now, over ten years since the founding of the OGP, studies of long-term success can be used to understand contributing conditions and mechanisms.

Our analytical approach to understanding these mechanisms relies on data from the large network of countries and the OGP's centralized evaluation process used by governments to focus on how to learn and imitate successes. We use multiple evaluative modes and draw on data from several different sources: (1) the OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism data which includes evaluative commentary submitted by the researcher and CSOs that were consulted during the evaluation process, (2) academic articles, (3) news reports and civil society reports, and (4) official reports and data collected by the country governments. We use this data to provide illustrative cases of the direct and indirect pathways of change.

Defining and measuring the results of public sector reforms is challenging because of the many different kinds of outputs and outcomes that come out of reform and the difficulty of comparing across different geographical and political contexts (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). Impacts of open government reform in our case will be understood as successful governmental efforts to realize public service characteristics that support the values – transparency, participation, and accountability – that underpin open government and democratic government more broadly. Such evaluations could be subjective and viewed differently by different actors. We focus on the challenge of being aware of implicit biases of current methodological approaches by looking at

the direct and indirect pathways both in the original intention of the OGP's institutional designers and through the perspective of the member governments at the front line of implementing open government reforms. Interventions by the OGP to stimulate a responsible framework of incentives for better performance may highlight shortcomings of explicit or direct influence on member governments, but these are only part of a story that includes the indirect stimulation of positive multistakeholder learning and development processes.

As the OGP is a membership-based organization, there are various levels of agency and impact where the analysis of success could focus. For example, the OGP secretariat itself as the central leadership agency of the organization plays an interesting role. Similarly, individuals involved in facilitating compliance and learning processes such as independent reviewers or the International Experts Panel are responsible for how the organization of the OGP performs as well as the kinds of results that are shown in countries. Our approach to this complex institutional picture is to limit the unit of analysis to the member countries themselves, thus considering the impacts at the level where the OGP ultimately aims to make a difference. In so doing, we do consider factors that are responsible for these effects that stem from the participatory and membership requirements of the OGP itself. It is as a result of these two things – the process that countries sign up to and the response of countries to that process – that the unique mechanisms of transnational multistakeholder participation become realized.

DIRECT PATHWAYS: LIMITED SUCCESS

Has the direct pathway of commitment development, monitoring and implementation been successful? We can show evidence from performance statistics to suggest that it has actually not been very successful. Table 16.1 shows the rates of completion and the ex ante ratings for relevance and potential transformativeness that were given to commitments by the OGP. It shows that commitments in general have not been very successful on these measures in terms of the ability of member governments to change the public sector for the better by making it more transparent, participative, and accountable. However, a closer inspection of the commitments is more revealing, both for discovering that there are some bright spots in this overall picture of mediocrity and that – among the bulk of the mediocre performers – there are some interesting stories going on within the overall narrative of underwhelming success.

For a start, there are certainly some success stories that we could pick out from within this large collection of commitments. The OGP used a 'star' system to identify highly successful commitments that were undertaken, and this is a system that we follow here. Star commitments are ones that meet all of three criteria, being (1) completed within their scheduled completion data,

Table 16.1 Open Government Partnership commitment performance (2011–2019)

Commitment Characteristics	
Number of country members	78
Withdrawn countries	4
Number of commitments	4,094
*Commitment Level of Completion**	
Complete	19%
Substantial	29%
Limited	38%
Not started	14%
*Commitment Potential Impact***	
Transformative	13%
Moderate	40%
Minor	42%
None	5%
Relevance to Open Government	
Relevant	70%
Not relevant	30%

Notes: * Not including unclear or withdrawn, not determined (ND), etc. ** Not including not available (NA), ND, etc.
Source: Piotrowski et al (2022: 127).

(2) classed as potentially of high impact, and (3) related clearly to open government values of transparency, participation, and accountability. They are an example of a minority of commitments that show the direct pathway in its best light; member governments take on a plan to reform a specific area, manage to keep to what was promised and – in the short term at least – make things substantively better in terms of openness.

As one example of such a starred commitment, the government of Ukraine began a process in 2014 of publicizing Soviet era records of USSR internal affairs bodies and secret services dating from 1917. Documents were declassified and made freely available by law with the understanding that free access to the information is an important step towards undermining totalitarianism and fostering social dialogue (Law of Ukraine, 2020). It includes nearly one

million volumes that are stored in different cities across the country and many of the files have been digitized (Security Service of Ukraine, 2023). In a similar example from 2014, the government of the Republic of Georgia launched an initiative to publish information on all government surveillance operations that had been approved by a specially designated court. Through the commitment, the government pledged annual publication of statistics on the permissions that have been given by the court to carry out covert surveillance operations in the interest of national security. Another country, Croatia, launched an online citizen participation portal in 2015, which included training sessions for officials, facilitated public deliberations on 84 different public policy items in the first 60 days of its creation. Some 1,645 comments on draft laws, other regulations and acts were submitted by a diversity of different sources including: 867 individuals, 419 companies, and 116 civic associations and cooperatives.

While our current focus is on understanding patterns of success, we also want to give a realistic picture of how representative such success stories are in the overall universe of OGP direct pathway cases. It may not come as a surprise to the reader that such successes are not at all typical of OGP member commitments. Statistically stated, about 7.5 percent of OGP commitments could be classified as "stars" (Open Government Partnership, 2019). But there are also some ways we could conceptualize a priori the possible impacts of the direct pathway. While some commitments could be classed as stars because they are completed as promised while also having strong potential relevance and transformativeness, many other OGP commitments could fall into *non-successful* classification zones where they are either not achieved or simply have low relevance or potential impact. Further, another batch of the commitments is so poorly conceived or implemented that they actually have a negative impact on open government (Piotrowski et al., 2022).

Consider the Philippines' 'People's Watch' commitment which according to its action plan would involve "participation of the people to safeguard and protect their communities" from the illegal drugs trade (Republic of the Philippines, 2017: 67). Human rights organization Amnesty International said that such an approach could actually lead to permission to commit vigilante killings which would be in direct contradiction with the principles of an open and accountable society. The commitment was fortunately removed by the government within a year of its publication. Whole countries may be considered unsuccessful too: In March 2022, El Salvador was added to a list of countries including Turkey and Azerbaijan whose membership was made inactive by the OGP for fundamentally failing to deliver or act on its action plans. In some critical respects, by passing legislation that was harmful to transparency, accountability and civil society, El Salvador fell even further behind than when it had started (Open Government Partnership, 2022a).

Given the evidence on the direct pathway, we might wonder why there has been such a mixed level of success. While we cannot tackle this question here in depth, several scholarly explanations could provide clues. First, it could be about how the OGP membership system has been designed with quite a *low barrier to entry* and a soft approach to holding members accountable (Lipscy, 2017; Ruggie, 2018). The OGP eligibility process – counting basic levels of attainment in areas such as strength of civil society, transparency, and freedom of information – does go some way towards selecting members that have demonstrated adequate ambition. However, that some countries will face a very steep learning curve and may even begin to back slide seems to be something that the designers of the OGP system were willing to accept as a necessary risk of giving weak open government countries the opportunity to climb higher at their own pace.

Second, there is the phenomenon of '*open-washing*', which scholars have observed as an unfortunate side effect of the growth of open government in global good governance practices (Chatwin et al., 2019). Such practices can frequently be vulnerable to manipulation when public leaders use evidence of (superficial) steps taken to become more open to improve their own reputation. This is especially the case when countries have strong economic or political incentives to demonstrate their open government credentials but simultaneously have low levels of political will or capacity to actually realize those things in practice.

Third, *political turbulence or instability* could also be disruptive for the direct pathway. Governments go through changes of administration or regime and even administrations that retain power for a long period of time can face political opposition to their reform agendas that makes it difficult to get stuff done (Goldfinch et al., 2013; Pollitt and Summa, 1997). For this reason, governments often falter in delivering their promises.

Finally, *capacity problems* and various kinds of design-reality gaps might emerge when governments try to undertake reform initiatives (Alam Siddiquee, 2006; Berman and Wang, 2000). Governments may often find that they do not have adequate material capacity for delivering goals or they may be unable to control complex collaborative partnerships that are responsible for implementing commitments.

INDIRECT PATHWAYS: THREE MECHANISMS

If we viewed the success of the OGP model of transnational partnership solely through the lens of direct pathways of change, we would have to conclude that evidence of how well the model works is at best highly mixed. However, the OGP model also gives rise to a different kind of change mechanism, which we need to give a more complete picture of the OGP's influence. In contrast with

the direct pathway of change, the indirect pathway does not lead to results that were explicitly accounted for in the commitments and project delivery plans of member countries. The indirect pathway does not come about by a formal agreement that can either be delivered or broken, and it does not depend on the performance of the direct pathway as members may either fulfill or fail their explicit commitments and still either inhibit or facilitate successes that come about through the indirect pathway.

The indirect pathway is driven by the process-focused characteristics of the OGP. By requiring a co-governance approach with civil society, giving considerable local freedom to choose the kinds of reforms that governments can focus on and delegating a transparent evaluation and answerability processes to independent local researchers as well as to civil society, the influences of the OGP seep deeper into the normative life and institutional practices of member countries. We consider three different indirect pathway dynamics that follow from this – *norms and policy models*, *linkages/coalitions*, and *resources/opportunities* – and we argue that these mechanisms should fall within the scope of scholarly attempts to understand the success or failure of public sector reforms driven by transnational partnerships.

Norms and Policy Models

Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) define a norm as a standard of appropriate behavior. Norms can change with older norms becoming displaced by new ones. They may spread from an initially marginal position to complement or even displace earlier norms. Perhaps the most notable cases of spreading norms and policy models are in core areas of the OGP's reform values: transparency and participation, and their application in specific policy domains. Mexico, for example, saw the novel co-creation with civil society of legislative drafts on access to information and anticorruption legislation, and a subnational open government collaboration that was independent of the OGP's own subnational program, though its approach was inspired by the OGP model (Berliner et al., 2022).

The spread of policy models was particularly notable in the areas of open data and public participation where the OGP catalyzed the spread of norms into other domains that were not part of formal actions plans or commitments. The open data movement was not founded by the OGP. However, the role of the OGP as a catalyst for the open data norm in governments has been highly significant, as the OGP and its associated processes advocated for open data reforms and raised awareness through biannual global summits. Similarly, public participation has long been integral to good governance norms. The norm of participatory government is by no means new, but it is one that has received a notable boost from the OGP's model of civil society parity in deci-

sion making and implementation. According to Fraundorfer (2017: 150), "The OGP national processes have also created channels of trust and confidence between government and civil society actors."

The OGP has also played a key role as a catalyst for gender-conscious public policymaking, beneficial ownership, and open contracting norms. Mainstreaming of gender and diversity perspectives in public policymaking has resulted in global norms becoming entwined with entire reform proposals such as in Argentina where the commitments of that country's fourth action plan were critically assessed using the question of whether they would help close gender gaps (Open Government Partnership, 2023). In 2016, at the Open Government Partnership Global Summit, Colombia, France, Mexico, the UK, and Ukraine launched the *Contracting 5* partnership and pledged to uphold the open contracting data standard. That partnership has since expanded to over 40 national and subnational governmental members and led to a proliferation of similar transnational multistakeholder initiatives that aim to advance open contracting, such as the Open Contracting Partnership and the Financial Transparency Coalition.

A similar spread of policy norms can be seen in the area of beneficial ownership. For example, in 2018, the Open Government Partnership, together with the Beneficial Ownership Transparency Network, launched new disclosure principles and "A Guide to Implementing Beneficial Ownership Transparency" (Guriev and Treisman, 2019). Later, in 2019 at the OGP summit in Ottawa saw the UK government and NGO Open Ownership launch the Beneficial Ownership Leadership Group, which aims to "drive a global policy shift towards free, open beneficial ownership data and set ambitious best practice" (Guriev and Treisman, 2019).

Linkages and Coalitions

The collaborative process between governments and civil society as well as the opportunities for international engagement is a vehicle for achieving policy commitments of OGP members, but the consequences of this way of working extend well beyond the design and delivery of commitments. To an extent, through the OGP's subnational membership category, this characteristic of OGP membership has become formally incorporated into the direct pathway of public sector reform. However, the augmentation of vertical and horizontal collaboration both within countries and between them goes much further than subnational governments.

At the national level, the civil society groups that were originally summoned to provide the nongovernmental voice in the national action plan process are typically made up of organizations that are highly motivated to achieve reform goals. As a result of their formal role in the policymaking process, it

became almost inevitable that its function would be repurposed for other kinds of national advocacy and leadership. Participatory and iterative processes of OGP membership have led to the formation of new coalitions and linkages both across civil society groups that had not previously worked together, and between civil society groups and individual reformers in government departments (Berliner et al., 2022). For example, in the United Kingdom, the group filling this role, the Open Government Network, now works far beyond this initial scope, including probing data transparency around COVID-19 pandemic regulations and shaping the civil society response around other topics on the policy agenda, such as race and gender equality. In October 2022, at the OGP Europe Regional Meeting in Rome, it was announced that the OGP had launched a memorandum of understanding with the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) to strengthen resilience in areas most affected by the Russian invasion (Open Government Partnership, 2022b).

The activities of the OGP and its member governments have also generated linkages at the international level. The OGP has given its members leverage through its work with many of the major regional and global organizations such as the United Nations, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), European Union, Group of 7, Group of 20, African Union, and the Asian Development Bank. One notable example of this is the 'EU for Integrity Program' launched jointly with the EU and the OECD, which targets "open reforms on the fight against corruption, integrity, open government and civic engagement" (Open Government Partnership, 2021). The OGP is an official consulting partner with the European Union, regularly hosts side events at the meetings of the United Nations General Assembly and co-hosted regional meetings with the African Union in 2013 and 2016. The United Nations Development Programme even offers governments training on how to effectively develop and implement the OGP commitments (OGP Support Unit, 2017).

Resources and Opportunities

New linkages, which are often created around discussion of new public norms and policy models, facilitate new possibilities for coalition building that spark ideas and shape new political realities. But they also lead to access to material and symbolic resources, including for stakeholders who may previously have been on the margins of discussions about public sector reform. In Mexico, civil society used membership as external leverage to successfully stop an attempted presidential weakening of a draft access to information law (Berliner et al., 2022). In the Mexican case, a threat of exit by civil society from domestic collaboration with government was actually exercised for a time after an outcry over the exposure of government use of spyware to surveil civil society

groups. But reformers also gained less visible forms of influence, including a more frequent "seat at the table" and greater ability to get the attention of key decision-makers. In other countries, such as Croatia, CSOs successfully halted or changed national policy proposals by merely threatening to withdraw from their OGP position (Guillán and Taxell, 2015).

Material resources such as access to new technologies or knowledge and best practices may be shared in such networks. For example, in the United States, a network of police departments for sharing technology ideas and best practices called the President's Task Force for Twenty-First-Century Policing provided a political and practical channel for police chiefs to tackle the growing issue of police bias and public trust towards the police (Ingrams, 2017). Symbolic resources obtained through collaboration were sufficient to create a gradual shift in the political opportunities that extended politically and chronologically well beyond the work planned by the United States in its action plan. But symbolic resources could also be quite a fast game changer in other circumstances. One important early case in this light is in South Africa where civil society groups used the OGP as "external leverage" in their fight to block passage of the so-called secrecy bill, and were ultimately successful (Heller, 2016). Opponents of the bill explicitly invoked the symbolic contradiction of the bill with OGP principles of transparency and accountability (Calland, 2011). According to one commentator, the OGP had provided a platform for civil society "by which to critique government inaction or reward improvements" (Eaves, 2012, para. 6).

ASSESSING OPEN GOVERNMENT REFORMS: CONCLUSIONS

While open government reforms have been offered by advocates as a way to improve the public sector, the positive impact of these programs is frequently unclear (Fung, 2013; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2020). The attention on transparency and accountability in contemporary democratic governments can in some ways encourage a negative focus on government and on finding ways to identify or preempt ways that it fails (Douglas et al., 2021). This is an inevitable risk of openness and it should not be taken altogether negatively given that visibility of problems is a necessary step towards solving them. However, open government reforms also have another side to them which is in making decision making processes in government more collaborative and open to deliberative, citizen-driven forms of governing and policymaking (Meijer et al., 2012). How successful these reforms will become is a matter of understanding and then managing the factors that explain the instances that work and distinguishing them from the dynamics that lead to poor or dysfunctional instances.

The question then is whether and how open government reforms work. The analytical challenge faced in attempts to explain success in public sector reforms is that reforms work in a complex environment of competing actors and public values (Ingrams et al., 2020; Nabatchi, 2012). At the individual government level, such is the level of complexity that the analytical difference between successes and failures can appear the result of an inexplicable chain of interrelated events or even to be random. Answering the call "to identify micro, meso, and macroconditions, and the interplay between agent and institutional context at these levels" (Douglas et al., 2021: 443) our approach to circumvent this problem is to zoom out to the level of a transnationally driven governance model and to trace the policy influences from that level to the national or subnational level and the micro-level decision making processes that result.

One established framework of success is the *programmatic* (ends–means–impacts), *process* (fairness and smartness), *political* (legitimacy and support), and *endurance* (temporal and adaptive), referred to as the PPPE assessment framework (Compton et al., 2022). Process success is marked by having an appropriate policy instrument and influence by key stakeholders, with adequate funding, realistic timelines, and administrative capacity. If conditions are met, outcomes are achieved at an acceptable cost level (Lindquist et al., 2022). In the case of the OGP, programmatic success would be seen through individual policy commitments. This is exactly where our assessment suggests mixed results, with some very successful but others less so. Yet at the same time, our assessment of indirect pathways of change points to the possibility for multistakeholder collaboration to promote policy success through process, politics, and endurance as well. The OGP's participatory and iterative processes have proved very successful and have achieved support from political actors from across the ideological spectrum. Related to both of these impacts, OGP membership has endured in nearly all countries even through major national and international political disruptions. Our analysis thus highlights how unalloyed programmatic success is not a necessary requirement in order to see some evidence of process, political, and endurance success; as well as the ways in which processes themselves can shape political and endurance success when the right "social, political, and administrative conditions" are observed. The implementation of past or future open government policies could be evaluated with this framework to better understand why some open government policies succeed and others struggle.

The history of public administration reforms is full of failures and false starts. Given the constantly shifting environment of politics, economics and society, a fully successful public sector reform is perhaps impossible to achieve. The OGP does not provide a perfect model either, but its model does result in surprising successes, and it demands that scholars look anew at how positive changes at a domestic level (whether regional, national, or local)

come about through transnational partnerships. These processes are often overlooked because the processes of change are slow moving and because our attention to policies and commitments of reform are normally focused on sovereign and elected institutions of government rather than initiatives that are led through a global, non-binding, peer-based collaboration.

We would argue that one of the major strengths of our approach is that it drives "an integrated agenda for systematic and sustained positive public administration research, and a carefully considered repertoire of impact strategies" (Douglas et al., 2021: 443). In so doing, we build upon insights from studies of international and transnational institutions. While our analysis is mainly aimed at testing a theory, our results do suggest that conditions of iterative and participative membership in transnational partnerships can be used to design real world interventions. It is a design potential that "can help students of positive public administration understand how different elements of a successful public policy, organization, or partnership hang together and what impacts redesigning and reconstituting them might have" (Douglas et al., 2021: 446). Central ministries and agencies can play a role in facilitating the kinds of highly successful intersectoral partnership effects that are seen in high performing cases of the OGP.

Will the results of OGP membership which we argue can be seen in a positive light through the indirect pathway "maintain this constructive equilibrium over considerable periods of time" (Douglas et al., 2021: 444)? The OGP has shown consistent growth in the number of members as well as the kinds of work that it does, diversifying its funding model and launching local and regional forms of membership in addition to country membership. It has also shown remarkable staying power in countries that have witnessed shifts of political power between different leaders and political parties. On the other hand, "positive outcomes can consist both of desirable things happening and undesirable things not happening" (Douglas et al., 2021: 444–445). While the kinds of collaborative partnerships and policy norms indirectly facilitated by the OGP could be seen as a net positive for the public sector given the opportunities that they present to include new prodemocratic actors, it is certainly possible that indirect pathways could lead to the spread of norms and policy models that harm society or which provide resources and opportunities to nondemocratic actors. Those interesting possibilities and their plausibility are beyond the scope of this chapter but merit further attention.

NOTE

1. The chapter builds and expands upon the arguments and evidence laid out in previous work by the authors (Ingrams et al., 2020; Berliner et al., 2022; Piotrowski et al., 2022) and makes linkages to literature on positive public administration (Douglas et al., 2021; Flinders, 2023; Lindquist et al., 2022).

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