
Distinguished participants— I am honored to be here.

Last year, I was sitting next to a woman— let’s call her Lydia— on a bus ride through rural Uganda when suddenly she called out: "Look at that school. It has a new roof now because the community complained about the previous one." Several miles later, she cried out again, "Now look at this bridge! The public contractors used an inferior cement mix."

I asked her if she was from the office of public works. "No," she said proudly, "I have been trained as a community budget monitor. It has changed my life. When I take the kids to school, I monitor. At my village clinic, I monitor. I’m always looking, asking questions, reporting problems. I make sure the government does not waste my money."

Lydia’s role grew out of a partnership between government and civil society that tracks public money from the central government to local governments and that has greatly reduced public corruption.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need more Lydias all over the world. They have a better sense of what their villages need and how to deliver it than people in far-away capitals.

We need them not only to monitor public resources but to help develop and execute solutions to poverty and inequality.

The era of accountability has arrived.

Over the past decade, we have seen a powerful global civil society movement for open government emerge, with citizens, independent organizations, and the media leading campaigns for public access to information, for natural resource revenue transparency, and for opening budget and aid decisions to public scrutiny.

These campaigns have often succeeded where civil society and champions in government work together. This kind of collaboration is the core of the Open Government Partnership vision.

Transparency and Participation

Making OGP partnerships work will depend on public information and public participation both of which can be boosted through technology.
Lydia couldn’t hold Uganda’s government accountable if the government did not make timely public information available and accessible.

But, that’s not enough. Greater access to information must come with participation opportunities so that citizens and civil society organizations can use it to improve accountability.

OGP countries have committed to working with civil society organizations on developing and implementing country action plans. These commitments must be fully realized, and we will hear about the progress so far over the next two days. We can learn from:

- Indonesia, which brought the major civil society federations into a forum as partners in developing the first action plan
- Mexico, which is reaching widely into civil society by enabling multi-stakeholder negotiating forums for each commitment.

But we must go further by integrating participation opportunities into the action plans themselves. For example,

- In Brazil, a massive national consultation is planned to ignite a dialogue on transparency and accountability.
- In the Philippines, action plans include citizen audits and participatory budgeting at the national level.
- Tanzania’s plans enable citizens to give feedback on service delivery and other critical issues with a guaranteed response time from government.

Effective, meaningful participation can produce better policy choices and a more efficient implementation of those policies.

But, what is even more exciting:

Participation energizes citizens, turning them into vital actors in shaping their countries’ future. It knits them into the fabric of governance and recognizes the important role that their knowledge and skills can play.

Lydia proudly told me that being a citizen monitor has, quote, “changed my life.” The more Lydias we can engage, the more they can help change the lives of their countries.

**Challenges**

But these benefits won’t be easy to achieve.

Governments generally do not have extensive experience in engaging citizens between elections.
Governments will not necessarily get their action plans right the first time, and they will need to admit and correct their mistakes.

Civil society organizations will need to recalibrate their relationships with governments.

They have to become allies of government in this venture, while retaining the right to be independent and critical.

They will also face the challenge of reaching deeply into civil society, well beyond the organizations in this room.

Payoffs

So the challenges are great, but imagine what we can do if we succeed.

We have a critical decision to make. We can continue to conduct governance and development as we have for decades, or we can take a different path.

The issue is whether we continue to see ourselves as opposing actors, or we see development as a partnership where success depends on the knowledge and capacity of all of us.

OGP is about this fundamentally new vision. Through it, we can create the victories and relationships that boost development and build a new approach to public policy and governance. (Our work can be the defining initiative of a generation.)

OGP already covers more than a quarter of the world’s population. Together, we can improve the lives of millions of people.

Let’s get to it.

Thank you.