

The Open Government Partnership in Ibero-America (2011-2021): the progress and scope of the open government agenda over the course of a decade

Álvaro V. Ramírez-Alujas

Co-founder and principal investigator of the Research Group for Government, Public Administration and Public Policies (GIGAPP) and professor at the Institute of Public Affairs of the University of Chile



Abstract

The Open Government Partnership has been the leading multilateral platform for promoting transparency, public participation and accountability around the world since 2011. A decade after its foundation, this article reviews the chief progress made within the context of Ibero-America, associated with the processes of the co-creation and implementation of action plans and open government commitments, on the way towards consolidating its position as one of the most innovative and significant approaches to the governance of public affairs currently in existence.



Introduction

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) was officially launched in September 2011 by eight governments and nine international civil society organisations, with the mission of creating a voluntary multilateral platform for organising and promoting efforts for transforming the way public institutions serve their citizens, combining the skills of different actors to foster a responsive, receptive and inclusive governance model. Today, its active membership comprises 77 national and 76 subnational governments and hundreds of organisations from civil society, the academic world and other sectors, all of which support OGP's work at both national and local levels in each country.



OGP's model and theory of change

Open government action plans are the core of members' participation in OGP. Action plans are the product of a co-creation process in which government and civil society come together to define ambitious commitments to foster transparency, accountability, public participation and the intensive use of technology and innovation to leverage institutional transformation. OGP's theory of change is associated with two components: a) *the action plan co-creation process*, which finds form in the



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formulation of a series of commitments, created within a framework of collaboration and shared responsibility, and b) *the multi-stakeholder forum*, a governance mechanism for stakeholders that acts as a platform for ongoing dialogue, oversight and monitoring of the implementation of initiatives.

OGP within the Ibero-American context

Since the founding of OGP, 19 Ibero-American countries have become members, co-creating and implementing a total of 70 action plans. As of April 2022, at a worldwide level, the cumulative initiatives in all national and subnational action plans

amount to 4,704 commitments,¹ of which some 30% relate to actions in Ibero-American countries. It is interesting to note this agenda's importance in the region, given that the sum total for the 2011-2022 period is of 1,434 commitments, without taking into account those linked with subnational governments as part of the OGP Local initiative (which, for the 2016-2020 period, comprised 65 commitments in 12 subnational action plans).

A decade after OGP's creation, the relative importance of the open government road map in the region is and will remain key to any global open government movement (Table 1). This is not only reflected in the political will to continue with the associated efforts, irrespective of the government of the moment and the political cycle, but can also be seen in the emergence of civil society organisations and the academic world, and multilateral organisations, which have prioritised specific actions to bolster and institutionalise this new form of public affairs governance globally. This is particularly the case of Ibero-American countries, which have even witnessed special emphasis on the promotion of the transition towards the Open State model (CLAD, 2016; OECD, 2017; Naser, Ramírez-Alujas & Rosales, 2017; Ramírez-Alujas, 2020).

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1 According to the OGP Public Commitment Database, which is continuously updated and can be consulted [here](#).



Table 1. Commitments and national action plans for OGP Ibero-American member countries (2011-2022)

Country	First Action Plan	Second Action Plan	Third Action Plan	Fourth Action Plan	Fifth Action Plan	Total
Argentina	19	15	44	18	-	96
Brazil	32	52	16	11	12	123
Chile	19	12	19	12	10	72
Colombia	27	19	26	15	-	87
Costa Rica	23	18	12	9	-	62
Ecuador	10	-	-	-	-	10
El Salvador*	21	35	20	14	5	95
Spain	13	10	20	62	-	105
Guatemala	3	48	22	24	12	109
Honduras	20	14	13	20	-	67
Jamaica	7	-	-	-	-	7
Mexico	55	26	7	13	-	101
Panama	5	19	9	8	-	41
Paraguay	15	9	10	38	-	72
Peru	47	17	18	21	-	103
Portugal	8	9	-	-	-	17
Dominican Republic	24	11	11	7	-	53
Trinidad & Tobago (*)	13	-	-	-	-	13
Uruguay	18	40	75	39	29	201
Total commitments	379	354	322	311	68	1,434

* Trinidad and Tobago was withdrawn as an OGP member in December 2019 and El Salvador has been inactive since March 2022, according to the Response Policy adopted by the OGP Steering Committee. The figures for action plan commitments for the two countries have been included for reporting purposes and so as not to affect the total sample at a regional level. For more details on these two cases, consult this [link](#).

Source. Own work based on OGP data available as of April 2022.

Another important aspect is associated with open government commitments regarding certain key areas (Ramírez-Alujas & Dassen, 2012; 2014). Since its very beginnings, OGP has encouraged nations to focus their efforts on five great

challenges (Table 2), which have evolved to make room for new policy areas.

Table 2. The great challenges in OGP Open Government Action Plans

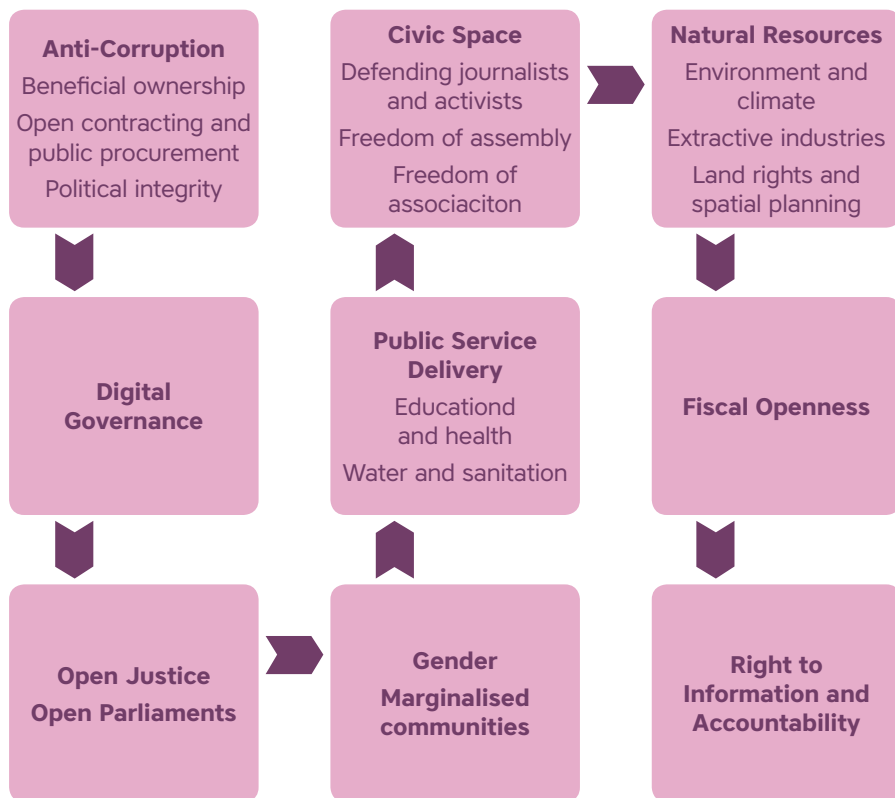
Improving public services	Increasing public integrity	More effectively managing public resources	Creating safer communities	Increasing corporate accountability
Fostering improvements and innovation in the full spectrum of citizen services (including health, education, justice, water, electricity and telecommunications, among others).	Measures to progress in public ethics, prevent and fight against corruption, ensure access to information and participation, as well as the promotion and strengthening of the freedom of civil society and the media.	Includes the proper use of budgetary allocations, internal and external financing, open budgets and transparency in procurement, the use and conservation of natural resources, etc.	Progress in public security, the response to and prevention of natural disasters, environmental risks, justice and equality, among other issues.	Promoting the responsibility of corporations and other areas of society with regard to areas such as the environment, consumer protection, community engagement and the fight against corruption.

Source. Own work, based on Ramírez-Alujas & Dassen (2012).

Among the emerging topics which have been OGP’s priorities in the formulation of commitments are the right to access information and public integrity systems (via the drawing up and entry into force of transparency legislation and specific regulatory frameworks); open data and the use of public data in fields such as health and education; promoting gender equality and inclusiveness; digital rights and the protection of the civic space, and caring for natural resources and climate change, among many others. Most of these are closely linked with achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (Figure 1).



Figure 1. OGP Open Government policy areas



Source. Own work based on OGP data (2021).

In the case of Ibero-American countries, looking at the commitments implemented up to September 2021 (1,298 in total), 48.9% cover increasing public integrity (634 commitments on issues such as access to information, regulating lobbying and the fostering of more robust accountability mechanisms); 27.4%, improving public services (356 commitments, many associated with digital transformation and simplifying procedures, clear language and the redesign of bureaucratic processes, etc.); 13.2%, more

effectively managing public resources (particularly budgetary transparency, fiscal openness and public procurement reforms, with 171 commitments); 7.3%, creating safer communities (95 commitments, many around the climate change agenda, gender, equality and open justices, defending the civic space, etc.), while just 3.2% are on initiatives associated with expanding responsibility and accountability beyond the scope of government (42 commitments) – regulating public enterprises, transparency and integrity in the private sector and recording beneficial owners, among others (Table 3).

Many of the commitments implemented in Ibero-American countries cover increasing public integrity (48.9%) and improving public services (27.4%)

Table 3. Breakdown of commitments by action plan and OGP great challenge in Ibero-America (2011-2021)

National action plan cycle	Improving public services	Increasing public integrity	More effectively managing public resources	Creating safer communities	Increasing corporate accountability	Total
First plan	102	185	67	3	15	372
Second plan	81	178	50	22	14	345
Third plan	96	164	37	19	6	322
Fourth plan	77	107	17	51	7	259
Total	356	634	171	95	42	1,298
Percentage	27.4%	48.9%	13.2%	7.3%	3.2%	100%

Source. Own work with data available up to September 2021.

Conclusions

Open government can help us bid farewell to mechanistic and unfeeling bureaucracies, isolated from the community and segregated in their workings, sealed off in a technocratic bubble spouting a faceless monologue,





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out of touch with the public. It offers us a transition to networked, relational forms of public management, with the emphasis on interaction and dialogue with people, based on trust and partnership as the means for building a collective enterprise. It therefore constitutes a universal public asset that requires ongoing nourishment, that needs to be cared for and cultivated everywhere and in every action made in its name. Open government is a shared responsibility and a way to breathe fresh air into our democracies, renewing the social contract and humanising public institutions, particularly in a region plagued by inequalities, one that advocates more public services and a better quality of life. One that still provides the hope of offering people a decent life and of delivery on the

promise of the goal of the common good, leaving no-one behind.

The co-creation and implementation of OGP action plans have had a significant impact on the culture of Ibero-American public administrations. Over the course of these last 10 years, they have made a crucial contribution to the fostering of a new model for public governance based on a logic of distributed partnerships, networking and the leveraging of collective skills and abilities. A model that creates public value from more horizontal relations stemming from co-creation, part of a renewed and innovative approach to resolving complexity and managing uncertainty. However, this alone is not enough. OGP action plans are a first step, a necessary yet insufficient condition for consolidating this opening up as a part of a whole web of practices and an institutional culture. There is a need to consolidate wider-reaching open government strategies, to guide and implement efforts to build Open States.

Lastly, open government could provide the link making it possible to shape a new model for on-the-ground public sector management, as it entails a deep-seated commitment to deliberation associated with democratic renewal processes on a territorial level. Open government is not important as an end in itself, but rather for its knock-on transformative power and its potential to become a driving force for firmly rooted, sustainable and long-lasting changes that can help create a new culture of governance for and with the citizens in the 21st century. ■

The co-creation and implementation of OGP action plans have had a significant impact on the culture of Ibero-American public administrations



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