



TOWARDS
TRANSPARENCY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How the Open Government Partnership (OGP) can contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Vietnam

Hanoi, February 2019



Context

The government of Vietnam adopted *“The National Action Plan (NAP) on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”* in May 2017, which includes **17 SDGs and 115 specific targets** for Vietnam towards 2030.

Table 1. Brief summary of Vietnam’s sustainable development goal (VSDG 16)

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Target 16.3: Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

Target 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Target 16.9: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements (the global Target 16.10)

Source: The Government of Vietnam¹

Vietnam’s high economic growth and inclusive policy have allowed the country to achieve many Millennium Development Goals (MDG) although some targets were achieved only partially (World Bank and MPI 2016).² However, moving from MDGs to SDGs reflects a paradigm shift in development thinking. SDGs are more comprehensive tasks that require not only government’s efforts but also the contribution from the whole society, in terms of ideas, human and financial resources. It is not just the resource constraint but also the ability to introduce effective policies to mobilize social resources to tackle development problems that constitute hurdles to the achievement of the SDGs.

Achieving SDGs will thus not be an easy task for the Vietnamese government. First, the government must now keep up with its past achievement in terms of growth and poverty reduction in the new context of declining financial support from multinational and international donors as the country reached a lower middle country status. Second, the government must deliver its commitment under the new global paradigm which shifts towards more comprehensive development goals. Third and most importantly, there are structural shortcomings in terms of institutional quality and governance effectiveness which reflect the on-going transitions from a centrally-planned to a market-based economy, from a lower-income to a middle-income country, and from an agriculture-based to a manufacturing-based economy. In this new context, the Government has recognized the role of communities, private sector and civil society in achieving the ambitious SDGs, and has called for the participation of all stakeholders. The government has also called for stronger measures to fight and prevent corruption.

1. Decision No. 622 /QĐ-TTg dated 10/5/2017 of Prime Minister on the National Action Plan (NAP) to implement the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. Available at: http://vanban.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/chinhphu/hethongvanban?class_id=2&_page=1&mode=detail&document_id=189713

2. World Bank and Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam (2016). Vietnam 2035: Toward Prosperity, Creativity, Equity, and Democracy. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23724>

Why Towards Transparency conducted this study?

Founded in 2011 by eight national leaders (the UK, Norway, the USA, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, the Philippines, and Indonesia) and nine civil society leaders, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) is currently the most prominent international initiative to promote transparency, accountability and citizen engagement. 79 countries and 20 local governments are OGP members and are using it as an effective tool to promote good governance and anti-corruption. OGP grounded in transparency, accountability and citizen engagement, is argued to help countries achieve the SDGs, in particular the SDG 16 which seeks to promote societies with justice, peace and inclusiveness for all through accountable institutions.

Towards Transparency (TT), with its aim to contribute to the fight against corruption, has introduced OGP to Vietnam since 2014. Since then TT together with a number of individuals and local CSOs have collectively built local evidence on the benefits and potentials that OGP can bring about to Vietnam. As an integral part of open government advocacy efforts in Vietnam, the study “How the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Initiative can contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Vietnam” was conducted by TT so as to provide concrete evidence of political and socio-economic benefits that OGP can bring to Vietnam in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires the government to be more effective and responsive to citizens. For this to happen, government and civil society must cooperate to embed transparency, accountability, and participation across all institutions. Moreover, good governance has been increasingly recognized as central to achieving inclusive growth, social justice and sustainable development – both as an enabler as well as a goal in its own right (OECD, 2016).³



3. OECD (2016) Policy Shaping and Policy Making: THE GOVERNANCE OF INCLUSIVE GROWTH, <https://www.oecd.org/governance/ministerial/the-governance-of-inclusive-growth.pdf>.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) provides a readymade vehicle for countries to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thanks to its built-in domestic policy platform and accountability mechanism (i.e. the OGP national action plans and the Independent Reporting Mechanism). First, OGP national action plans are at the core of a country's participation in OGP. They are the product of a co-creation process in which government and civil society define ambitious commitments to foster transparency, accountability and public participation. They can be used to adopt and deliver concrete commitments compatible with SDGs. Second, the Independent Reporting Mechanism ensures a focus on results by holding governments accountable for implementation. As members of OGP, countries can also benefit from support from OGP Support Unit and various OGP working groups' experts, in a wide range of areas such as anti-corruption, improving government-civil society interactions, natural resource governance, inclusive society, or a very practical one like how to develop an effective national action plan.

Table 2. Open Government Partnership (OGP) and its principles⁴

OGP is currently the most prominent international initiative which seeks to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, accountability and citizen engagement, and to fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.

OGP's goal is to promote quality of governance around the world in order to promote sustainable and inclusive development. OGP upholds and advocates the following open government principles:

1. Increase the availability of information about governmental activities by:

- Promoting increased access to information and disclosure about governmental activities at every level of government.
- Increasing efforts to systematically collect and publish data on government spending and performance for essential public services and activities
- Pro-actively providing high-value information, including raw data, in a timely manner, in formats that the public can easily locate, understand and use, and in formats that facilitate reuse.
- Providing access to effective remedies when information or the corresponding records are improperly withheld, including through effective oversight of the recourse process
- Seeking feedback from the public to identify the information of greatest value to them, and pledge to take such feedback into account to the maximum extent possible

2. Support civic participation through:

- Making policy formulation and decision making more transparent
- Creating and using channels to solicit public feedback
- Deepening public participation in developing, monitoring and evaluating government activities
- Protecting the ability of not-for-profit and civil society organizations to operate in ways consistent with commitment to freedom of expression, association, and opinion
- Creating mechanisms to enable greater collaboration between governments and civil society organizations and businesses

3. Implement the highest standards of professional integrity throughout governments by:

- Setting-up robust anti-corruption policies, mechanisms and practices
- Ensuring transparency in the management of public finances and government purchasing and strengthening the rule of law
- Maintaining or establishing a legal framework to make public information on the income and assets of national, high ranking public officials
- Enacting and implementing rules that protect whistleblowers

4. For further information on OGP, see <http://ogpvietnam.vn/>

- Making information regarding the activities and effectiveness of our anticorruption prevention and enforcement bodies, as well as the procedures for recourse to such bodies, available to the public, respecting the confidentiality of specific law enforcement information
- Increasing deterrents against bribery and other forms of corruption in the public and private sectors, as well as to sharing information and expertise

4. Increase access of new technologies for openness and accountability through:

- Developing accessible and secure online spaces as platforms for delivering services, engaging the public, and sharing information and ideas
- Seeking increased online and mobile connectivity, while also identifying and promoting the use of alternative mechanisms for civic engagement
- Engaging civil society and the business community to identify effective practices and innovative approaches for leveraging new technologies to empower people and promote transparency in government
- Supporting and developing the use of technological innovations by government employees and citizens alike

Source: Open Government Partnership Declaration, 2011⁵

Vietnam is not yet a member of OGP and must first make a number of improvements before being eligible for OGP membership. This report elaborates and illustrates how OGP could help Vietnam in achieving its ambitious development goals as reflected in SDGs. The report argues that **Open Government Partnership (OGP)'s approaches and principles** are very much **complementary to the SDGs** and offer great opportunities for its members to accelerate the process towards fulfilling the SDGs. **OGP** sets goals and targets specifically focused on openness and **restates SDG Goal 16**, which seeks to promote societies with justice and inclusiveness for all through accountable institutions. OGP also recognizes the central role played by **good governance and open government** in achieving inclusive growth, social justice and sustainable development, and links this openness to the improvement of the lives of the poor and vulnerable groups worldwide. Finally, OGP provides instruments to monitor and evaluate the SDGs implementation in an accountable and transparent way.



OGP recognizes the central role played by good governance and open government in achieving inclusive growth, social justice and sustainable development, and links this openness to the improvement of the lives of the poor and vulnerable groups worldwide.

5. See <https://www.otvorenauprava.me/en/ogp-declaration/>

Methodology

This report, commissioned by Towards Transparency, **aims to provide the Government of Vietnam and other stakeholders with evidence on “How OGP can contribute to achieving the SDGs”**. A mixed approach was adopted to conduct this study, combining an extensive desk study and primary data collection through over 30 in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders. The preliminary study findings were discussed and consulted with multi-stakeholders in the validation workshop organised in May 2018.

Key findings

The key findings of the study are summarized as follows:

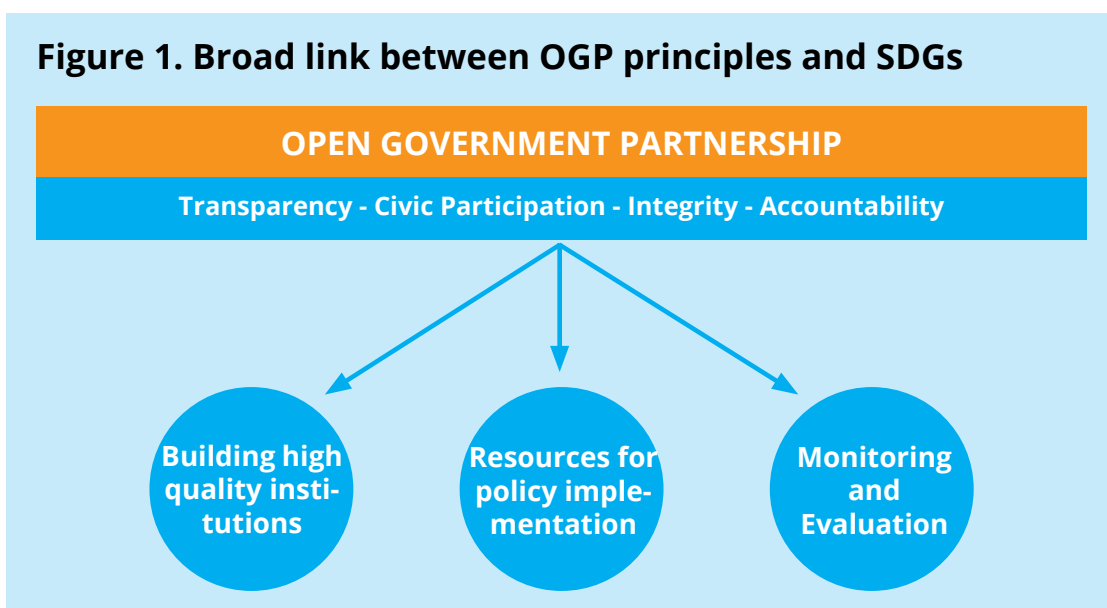
- (i) The report demonstrates that **OGP principles and approaches are not something totally new in Vietnam**. Indeed, the Vietnamese policies and regulations already contain certain components and elements that are compatible with OGP. There are many OGP-congruent initiatives, projects and policies currently being implemented in Vietnam at various levels. Also, the 17 Vietnam SDGs (VSDGs), their 115 sub-targets and many policy actions are OGP-congruent and can readily benefit from following OGP principles. In particular, the report shows that there is a high level of compatibility between OGP principles and Vietnam’s policies, laws and regulations. The paper highlights the fact that **Vietnamese laws, regulations and policies on governance do contain substantial OGP-congruent elements in all aspects of OGP principles** including: accessibility and availability of information; civic participation; anti-corruption; laws and policies to increasingly adopt new technologies for openness and accountability. The report also provides concrete examples of how OGP-compatible practices, such as the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI) and the Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI), adopted in Vietnam, have contributed to improving the governance of Vietnam.
- (ii) The **OGP principles can help raise the quality of governance and institutions** which in turn help promote economic growth and prosperity. OGP principles, in general, can have a positive impact on governance and institutions by building high quality institutions and improving quality of public institutions; generating resources to implement policies; and creating a mechanism to monitor and evaluate (M&E) progress towards SDGs. Concrete examples of how OGP-congruent initiatives are provided, which include the People’s Score Project in Quang Tri Province and the IDGREEN project.
- (iii) The **OGP principles can assist Vietnam to achieve the 17 VSDGs**.
 - a. OGP can help Vietnam achieve its **SDG economic goals** by creating business opportunities and promoting investment directly. Upholding integrity and fighting corruption can play a crucial role in promoting investment and increasing local people’s income. OGP also helps to improve governance, thus contributing to promote sustainable and inclusive growth.
 - b. **OGP can help Vietnam to achieve its SDG socio-political goals** by helping build good institutions and mobilizing social resources, as SDG’s ambitious goals require resources that go way beyond government financial and human resources. **OGP would also support the fight against corruption in Vietnam**, currently strengthened with the revision of the Law on Preventing and Fighting Corruption.

The paper highlights the fact that Vietnamese laws, regulations and policies on governance do contain substantial OGP-congruent elements in all aspects of OGP principles

- c. **OGP can help Vietnam to achieve its SDG environmental goals** by mobilizing the involvement of the whole society and the collaboration between the government, enterprises, consumers and the civil society. Adoption of modern technologies, open data and civil society involvement (OGP principles) can make a difference in protecting the environment and in ensuring the livelihood of local citizens.⁶
- (iv) Many Actions proposed by the Vietnamese government and agencies under the National Action Plan are OGP-congruent. The NAP is already calling for participants of social political organizations and associations to implement SDGs.

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Figure 1. Broad link between OGP principles and SDGs



Recommendations

The report concludes with recommendations for the government and local NGOs as follows:

- The government needs to take concrete actions to improve its eligibility scores. The study by Toward Transparency (2017) shows that there is high possibility for Vietnam improve its score to meet the minimum standards. The government can work with relevant partners who have been working on open government for the past few years to form a multi-stakeholder coalition and allow for the OGP-congruent projects and initiatives to be scaled up and duplicated.
- Joining OGP is not an end in itself but a means for Vietnam to achieve its ambitious development goals. While joining OGP is important, implementing OGP principles is even more important. The government should therefore develop national action plans in line with OGP.
- CSOs in Vietnam have been playing an important role in improving governance, they should be encouraged and given proper space to scale up good practices.

6. The National Strategy on Climate Change calls for funding from organizations, individuals and enterprises, domestic and foreign, to help communities cope with climate change.

Towards Transparency (TT) is a Vietnamese non – profit consultancy company founded in 2008 to contribute to prevention of and fight against corruption. In March 2009, TT became the official National Contact of Transparency International (TI) – the global movement with more than 100 national chapters worldwide. TT's vision is a Vietnam free of corruption where people enjoy social justice, accountability and transparency in all aspects of life. TT's mission is to reduce corruption in Vietnam by increasing demand and promoting measures for transparency, accountability and integrity in government, business and civil society at large.

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