

DRAFT REPORT

Evaluation of the Open Government Pioneers Project undertaken by MutualGain

Summary

In December 2017 MutualGain was selected as an independent evaluator of the Open Government Pioneers Project. This report provides an overview of the evaluation as follows:

Section 1: An introduction to the Open Government Pioneers Project, its aims and outcomes and the reasons for the evaluation

Section 2: The methodology used in stages one, two and three of the evaluation

Section 3: The key findings about the Project's four key outcomes, understanding the equality impact and capacity issues

Section 4: Our reflections drawn from the evidence of the evaluation and our own observations

Section 5: Our recommendations for:

- Creating more empowered engaged citizens, leveraging their knowledge of SDGs by
 - Strengthening communication and measurement
 - Achieving more visibility and voice
- Ensuring political representatives have greater awareness of SDGs and types of actions required by:
 - Strengthening the link between accountability and transparency and the Sustainable Development Goals in political debate
 - Creating a sustainable campaign
- Helping government officials have a better plan for involving citizens by:
 - Building an evidence base of what works and what does not
- Open government seen as instrumental, and a common good towards progressing SDGs by:
 - Promoting greater understanding and attitudinal change
 - Promoting a 'United Kingdom' message

1. Introduction

Set up in 2016, with a £500k Big Lottery Fund grant, the Open Government Pioneers Project is led by a partnership of civil society organisations:

- England: [Involve](#)
- Northern Ireland: [Northern Ireland Environment Link \(NIEL\)](#)
- Scotland: [Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations \(SCVO\)](#)
- Wales: [Welsh Council for Voluntary Action \(WCVA\)](#) and the [Electoral Reform Society \(ERS\) Cymru](#)

Linking the two key concepts of open government and sustainable development, over two years the Project is designed to:¹

- Pursue the aims of Open Government² and Sustainable Development
- Give greater voice to citizens across the United Kingdom to contribute to policy-making and service delivery
- Aid progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³

¹ <https://opengovpioneers.miraheze.org/wiki>

² The Project is officially linked to the international Open Government Partnership (OGP), which serves as a platform for civil society organisations and reformers, both inside and outside of governments, allowing them to develop, promote and implement initiatives to increase availability of information about governmental activities, support civic participation, implement the highest standards of professional integrity and increase access to new technologies. As one of the eight founding countries, the UK Open Government Network now operates across the devolved nations as part of a plan to make decisions closer to the communities they affect. For example in 2016, Scotland was one of 15 sub-nations worldwide who made commitments to open government as part of the ‘sub-nation pilot programme’, to be **“more responsive, flexible and less bureaucratic” than central government, therefore increasing the potential engagement, and as a result, overall impact.**

³ Launched by the United Nations in 2015, there are 17 SDGs focusing on poverty, health and climate change to help improve well-being, equality and sustainability. National and sub-national governments in the UK are following these goals and adapting individual targets to their own

The Big Lottery Fund grant included funding for an independent evaluator to review progress towards outcomes and inform future practice by answering the question, ‘how do we know that the Open Government Pioneers UK initiative is making a difference?’ The Project wanted to learn from its mistakes and build on its successes. ‘Is there evidence that a diverse range of citizens and civil society are any closer to engaging with the decisions that affect them as a result of the Open Government Pioneers Project UK?’

The evaluation was designed to track progress towards the following four key outcomes:

- Empowered engaged citizens, leveraging their knowledge of SDGs
- Political representatives have greater awareness of SDGs and types of actions required
- Government officials have a better plan for involving citizens
- Open government seen as instrumental, and a common good towards progressing SDGs

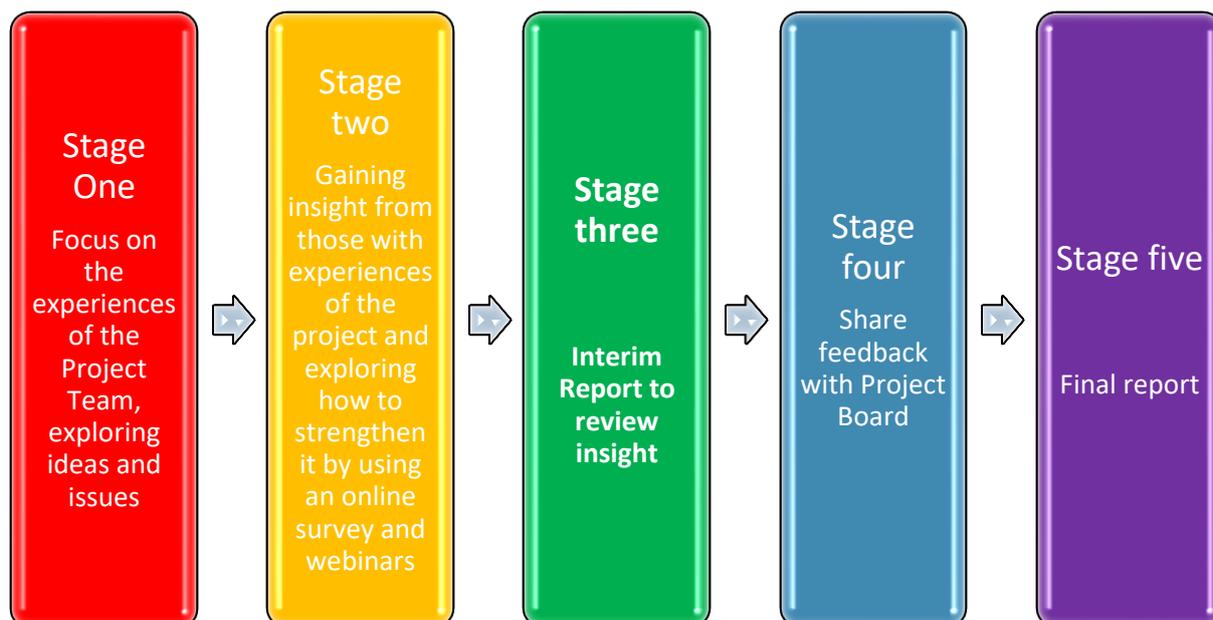
And to test if these have been achieved by:

- Using an open and agile approach to monitoring, learning and evaluation
- Assessing how successful the Project is at opening up government progress against the SDGs to citizen participation
- Informing future activities that support Open Government approaches to delivering the SDGs

2. Methodology

At the start the following five-stage evaluation plan was agreed:

national contexts, finding the best means of pursuing them to promote equality and sustainability. The Open Government Pioneers Project is tasked with making sure that citizens are part of this process, ensuring that the institutions responsible for these changes are open and responsive to the needs of different communities.



In addition the evaluation was tasked to commit to the following approach:

- Match the approach and ethos of the Open Government Pioneers Project
- Demonstrate a realistic and robust methodology (appropriate to the budget)
- Outline clear and accessible outputs
- Involve interviews with Project partners, participants and government
- Be supported by data from the Project's monitoring and discussion about evaluation priorities
- Make recommendations about how to continue and develop the engagement of citizens and civil society

See Appendix Three for our assessment of how the evaluation followed this approach.

2.1 Stage One: Focus on the experiences of the Project Team, exploring ideas and issues

At the start of the evaluation a dedicated page was created on the MutualGain website to post updates and information (<https://www.mutualgain.org/ogpeval/>). A dedicated email was created (ogpeval@mutualgain.org) supported by a Twitter account (@OGPEval).

Following discussions with the Project Board about how best to hear the views of the respective country leads, it proved fortunate that one of the MutualGain team was due to be in Scotland for other work. This meant that it was possible to organise a face-to-face focus group with key people on 8 March. As another MutualGain team member attended [the Reimagine Democracy conference](#) in Belfast on 15 March, a face-to-face discussion with the Northern Ireland leads was organised the next day on 16 March. Following the conference, discussions with the England leads were arranged and took place on 28 March and 25 May. It proved impractical to arrange a face-to-face meeting in Wales, so an on-line discussion took place on 13 April instead. Each of these encounters explored the opportunities and challenges of Open Government Pioneers and, crucially, the similarities and differences between each of the four parts of the UK. A detailed summary is provided in Appendix One.

As part of these discussions each country was asked to articulate a 'dream statement' to capture an ideal outcome for the Project, making the connection between open government and the SDGs. Subsequently these were refined and the following versions were used as part of the on-line survey discussed in section 2.2 below:

- England: Government recognises SDGs as a key national goal and introduces a programme of commitments and actions that would include Open Government, transparency and accountability.
- Northern Ireland: Have transparency for accountability in government and have an implementation plan for the SDGs.
- Scotland: Coming together to achieve the UN SDGs using the spirit and practice of Open Government to develop a plan that leaves no one behind, can fulfil everyone's potential and be fully responsible to the planet.

- Wales: Open Government Pioneers develops more robust engagement between government and society so that there is transparency and accountability about the delivery of the SDGs.

2.2 Stage two: Gaining insight from those with experiences of the Project and exploring how to strengthen it by using an online survey

Drawing on the issues that emerged from the above discussions coupled with the ‘dream’ statements’, an on-line survey, with an invitation to participate in four on-line workshops, was drafted. This was designed to explore a wider range of views about the Project’s development and success, targeted both at people who had been directly involved, either as individuals or as part of an organisation, and those who had a wider interest in open government and the SDGs. The on-line approach was taken to match the operation of the Project more generally, for example the Wiki, as well as the span and scope that a survey provides.

After consultation with the country leads, the survey was refined to strengthen the emphasis on capacity building and remove the country identifiers of the ‘dream statements’. It was also edited once during its active period, adding an ‘other’ option to question two, at the request of one respondent.

| The channels used to promote the survey and invitations to the on-line workshops | |
|---|--|
| The ogpeval webpage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linked to the Pioneers wiki |
| Forums | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDG Network Scotland (a resource located on the Basecamp platform) • Open Government Network UK • Open Government Network Wales • Following up on topics – IRM report |
| Twitter | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://twitter.com/OGP_Eval four times between 30 May to 25 June on @OpenGovNI, @OpenGovCymru, @OpenGovScot, @OpenGovUK via Twitter chat and retweets, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Local Government Association (LGA), Northern Ireland LGA and the Welsh LGA, all Government departments, the UKSSD, National Council for Voluntary Organisations, WebRoots and Digital Scots |

| | |
|----------|---|
| Facebook | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.facebook.com/OGPEVAL/, including posts on 11 and 25 June pinned to top of the page |
| LinkedIn | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including the following Groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Governance & Sustainable Development (684 members) ○ Improving UK Local and Regional Government (6394 members) ○ Sustainable Development Goals Group (1448 members) ○ Innovation in Wales (304 members) ○ Open Government (1706 members) |
| Email | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotional emails to people who have participated in the Project via country leads and organisational partners (see https://opengovpioneers.miraheze.org/wiki/Partners) |

Despite this extensive promotion there were only 22 responses to the survey during the six weeks that it was live (30 May until 11 July). In an attempt to increase participation in the survey and online workshops, the country leads agreed to link the social media channels related to the evaluation with their own specific ones. '@OGPEval' posts were re-tweeted on the main @Mutual_Gain and country-based Twitter accounts. We also worked with individual countries to make sure that they retweeted the survey link to the much larger follower base on their 'OpenGov' accounts. Eventually only one person registered to participate in the workshops.

Given the low level of engagement in the more structured activities, we decided to host a twitter chat on 9 July, designed to take a more informal (although still transparent) approach, supported by the United Kingdom (England) and the Northern Ireland accounts using the following questions:

- Can the principles of open government (of transparency and accountability) help deliver the SDGs more effectively?
- How could the idea of Open Government Pioneers make the general public and government more aware of SDGs?
- How can the Open Government Pioneers Project help to tackle inequality?

Despite the large number of followers on the 'OpenGov' accounts (2232 and 1455 for the UK and Northern Ireland respectively) there was only one response - a query about the 2018 Northern Ireland action plans.

2.3 Stages three and four: interim report to review insight and share feedback with the Project Board

This interim report summarises the findings of the evaluation to date and our reflections about these. It has been designed to help the Project Board plan and strengthen the remainder of the programme.

3. Key findings

The following section uses the evidence from our discussions and the on-line survey to explore the progress towards achieving each of the four key outcomes.

3.1 Empowered engaged citizens, leveraging their knowledge of SDGs

In our discussions we experienced a strong commitment to and enthusiasm for the Open Government Pioneers Project from all the country leads. At the same time this was matched by recognition that its size and ambition creates challenges for implementing the Project as effectively as would be ideal. In addition a recurring theme was the importance and difficulty of translating the Project's ambitions into everyday realities and using a language understood by everyone.

The challenge of empowering and engaging citizens seemed to be confirmed by the low number of respondents and their makeup. 12 participated on behalf of a range of organisations and ten as individual citizens, working with a variety of diverse communities with age and disability as the two main groups identified. There were mixed motivations for engaging with the Project - 12 respondents wanted to increase their knowledge and 10 joined to share experiences. The most popular methods of participation were the Open Government forums, meet-ups and events, followed by reading papers and articles. The least popular method was the Pioneers Wiki.

3.2 Political representatives have greater awareness of SDGs and types of actions required

The current political environment makes raising awareness about open government and the SDGs challenging both across the UK as a whole and in the individual nations. The Brexit negotiations and their fall-out have dominated the agenda leaving little room for anything else. In the current context, we heard that the UK government can appear opposed to transparency. There are no UK specific SDG targets (although the Department for International Development does have some these are only relevant outside the UK). In England the majority of both political and government activity is Westminster focussed which, coupled with the size of the country, makes it difficult to mobilise support for the Project's aims. There are also challenges in Northern Ireland, where the devolved government remains suspended, and in Wales, where there is less ministerial involvement and civil society overall does not have a strong history of activism. Scotland appears to be the exception with stronger support giving the Project more impetus than elsewhere with the participation of a leading civil servant being a key champion.

3.3 Government officials have a better plan for involving citizens

A number of related initiatives are in place involving both government officials and civil society organisations, including the UK Open Government Network and the steps towards creating the next Open Government Action Plan. In addition in Wales the [Future Generations Act](#) sets out sustainable development principles for all public organisations and local authorities have a legal duty to report on well-being (although there is little history of challenge to its actual delivery). A Plan was to be published in June with commitments to strengthen engagement and representation with involvement of both government and civil society. There would appear to be a close relationship between these kinds of initiatives and the Open Government Pioneers but it has proved difficult to articulate it precisely and gain sufficient prominence within them.

Passionate, committed and supportive civil society and NGO partners also have competing agendas (including coping with Brexit and its implications as noted above) and are often unable to connect how open government applies to SDGs and vice versa. For example the

wider Open Government Network with its many partners was used to promote the evaluation but it proved impossible to engage large numbers of respondents from this sector. Grassroots, practical issues relating to social justice for the most marginalised in society demand lots of time and effort from civil society groups. While the connection between these and the aspirations of the Open Government Pioneers Project is more obvious at a strategic level, it is harder to translate into practical change at a local level – and in turn becomes a lower priority on local agendas without the support of additional dedicated resources.

3.4 Open government seen as instrumental, and a common good towards progressing SDGs

This evaluation has shown there is a significant gap between the commitment and enthusiasm of those leading the Open Government Pioneers Project and the wider community of partners interested in open government and the SDGs – and an even greater one with citizens. This would indicate a lack of understanding about the Project on the part of wider civil society, citizens and others, with the survey highlighting the challenges of ensuring the Project has an impact. The majority of respondents felt their ability to influence and facilitate connections was ‘not very effective’. Five per cent of respondents felt they had been consulted on decisions related to the Project, 36 per cent used their participation to deliver a new project and 32 per cent had explored ideas through an online discussion. At the same time 23 per cent of respondents felt their participation had made no impact and nobody believed that they had ‘changed or adapted’ the Project, although it appears that some respondents were referring to ‘Open Government’ rather the Pioneers Project specifically.

Despite this there would appear be opportunities to articulate the importance of the Open Government Pioneers Project by relating it to other activities organised by partners. The Reimagine Democracy Conference took place in Belfast on 15 March ([see for record of the event](#)). This included a presentation about the Open Government Pioneers Programme by the SCVO, which captured the relationship between open government and SDGs. The conference was positively received with engagement from a wider audience than the ‘actively engaged’. Inevitably the main focus was on Northern Ireland which means there

were challenges in relating its conclusions elsewhere. Notwithstanding this there are lessons to explore about how to structure the debate about the Project. The first session focussed on the current situation in Northern Ireland, given a heightened relevance as the day before David Sterling, the head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, announced that not all government meetings were minuted to avoid FOI requests. This illustrated how fighting for open government does have a real (and indeed urgent) importance for the effective working of a state.

There are other examples of activities in the four countries which could be useful vehicles to inspire wider audiences. The Democracy Games at Stormont have taken place three times and build political literacy in a fun and interactive way by encouraging young people to think about manifestos and policy. Popular and over-subscribed they encourage young people do something of their own about what's important to them (for the future). In England some connections have been made with local government, for example Huddersfield has an annual conference on open democracy which includes cover of SDG 16, although it has proved harder to expand to other SDGs.

Overall Scotland has provided the most welcoming environment for the Project and its aims. As one participant commented in the discussions, the Scottish government wants to lead "the best small country in the world". The SDGs are important tools to make this happen. At the same time the 'pioneers' element of using open government to support this (as articulated in the Project title) is deliberate, creating a sense of change and optimism. Capturing at least some element of this UK-wide will be important to continue to inspire engagement from all the potential groups of participants.

3.5 Understanding the equality impact

Discussions with the country leads highlighted a commitment to strengthening the equality impact of the Project. This appeared to be confirmed by almost half of the survey respondents who believed that an extensive understanding of diversity was embedded in the Project.

There is no doubt that, in each country, the Project has engaged with equality groups and therefore creates the potential to extend the debates about open government and the SDGs with diverse communities and individuals. In Wales the Project works with [Diverse Cymru](#) to address BAME representation and disability and equal opportunities, [Youth Cymru](#) to access voluntary groups working with young people, [Interlink](#) to tackle poverty, and [Cynnal Cymru](#) on issues of sustainability in Wales. In Scotland some work has been undertaken with disabled people, and the Scottish government requires local authorities to ‘spend’ one per cent of their budget using participatory budgeting as a more open and transparent technique that engages those who are not currently heard within existing decision making processes. Connections with young people have proved more successful, including articulation of the message, ‘Young people are not the future – they are the NOW!’ Some work has been undertaken with ethnic minority communities via [CEMVO](#) who feel under resourced but have lots of enthusiasm for the work. In England the government leads have been keen to engage with women’s equality groups (SDG 5) linked to the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage. The new Open Government Action Plan has a commitment to collect data about the sex, ethnicity and other diversity indicators of local government candidates and links have been made with the [Local Government Information Unit](#) to enable this.

There is clearly more work to do as, in terms of tackling inequality, the vast majority of respondents believed that this only happens ‘to some extent’. It proved impossible to engage any equality partners in the online workshops or twitter chats which suggests that the understanding of the relationship between the Project’s aims and those of the partners needs further strengthening.

3.6 Capacity issues

Some of the difficulties around engagement with the evaluation were about the issues of capacity within the lead organisations. This was demonstrated by some delays in linking with the country leads and others due to their considerable other work commitments. This impacts heavily when drawing together the links between open government and SDGs.

Some of these challenges proved beyond the scope of the evaluation to overcome. As highlighted above the general political and government agenda, particularly Brexit and its

potential consequences, have focussed attention away from the Project. The new General Data Protection Requirements (GDPR) necessitated changes to the Open Government Pioneers forum with a significant reduction in membership numbers from 1749 to 191 people. Preparations for the [Tbilisi Open Government conference](#) appeared to distract attention from the evaluation. The membership of the Project Board also changed. In Wales responsibility for oversight changed from one organisation to another and there was significant staff sickness.

4. Our reflections

Drawing on the evidence from our discussions with the country leads and the survey results as well as our own observations, we offer the following reflections to support the Project in moving forward:

- To date the Open Government Pioneers Project has initiated useful discussions within and beyond the existing networks in which each partner operates. As yet these have just touched the surface of this extremely ambitious agenda demonstrating that a two-year project is only going to begin to raise awareness and set the ground for future work to achieve the four key outcomes initially agreed. There is a clear indication that the Project is valued and therefore could continue to build its influence and impact.
- Although covered above we feel it is worth sharing some further reflections about capacity here too – not only was it difficult to engage partners and the wider public (and possibly expected given the early stages of the work) but even those who have been working more closely with the Project found it challenging to make the time to contribute. The concept of open government is enormous, and more so when linked to the SDGs. It requires an extensive time commitment to explain the relevance, identify tangible opportunities to engage, and then understand and develop the engagement further. Those responsible for making that happen had to choose between contributing to the evaluation and delivering the Project's aspirations as there was often a lack of capacity to do both. The final evaluation should be mindful

of these issues and sufficient resources allocated to ensure the learning is not lost in progressing the agenda.

- Online engagement does not happen easily without investment. The online evaluation proved difficult despite the thousands of followers on the Open Government and related networks. During the evaluation both the face-to-face discussions with country leads produced more information, and the Reimagine Democracy conference proved more inspirational than the online contributions. The value of this face-to-face engagement therefore appears to be particularly important in the initial stages of change and transformation projects.

There are other possible reasons to explain the low level of online engagement. Potential participants may not have been engaged long enough in the Project to feel they could make a helpful contribute to the evaluation; some may not have felt they have a big enough stake to want to evaluate it; and others may be committed to open government or SDG respectively but less interested in the capacity building element that drives the Pioneers project.

There is a range of activities that the Project partners already organise and in which they participate. More specific focus on Open Government Pioneers could be included within these. In turn the messages emerging from these could be used to reinvigorate the online engagement to demonstrate the value of sharing what might seem limited experiences with evaluators.

- In the last few months it will be important to identify more dedicated resource (for example a person from one of the partner organisations) to work with the Project Board to agree some simple messages, review and update the Wiki and draft the next steps for how the Project's experience feeds into future work on open government and the SDGs (even if these continue to be separate strands of work).
- We believe the Big Lottery made a brave decision to fund the Project, especially when the experience to date underlines the difficulty of identifying tangible impact

and outcomes that are truly UK-wide. The aspirations of the Open Government Pioneers Project are important to the functioning of our democracy. Despite whatever challenges and problems have not yet been addressed there is enormous potential, and building effective open government to deliver the SDGs remains a 'dream' worth achieving. In the survey Scotland's dream statement was the most popular, followed by England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Two participants also created their own: "A fairer, greener future for all" and "Open Government promoting the SDGs." This is why we believe that the Project could think more clearly about a unified overarching message.

5. Recommendations

In the following section we outline the recommendations to help deliver the outcomes more effectively. Although these are presented under individual outcomes we believe that the making connection between them will also be important.

5.1 Creating more empowered engaged citizens, leveraging their knowledge of SDGs by:

- **Strengthening communication and measurement**

The acts of communication and measurement are themselves stimuli to better communication and measurement. The Project Board should give consideration to articulating more clearly some simple and straightforward facts and figures about accountability and transparency matched to the achievement of the SDGs. Developing the SCVO presentation at the Reimagine Democracy conference could be a useful starting point for doing this. This could also help address any confusion there may be between Open Government, the Open Government Partnership and Open Government Pioneers.

- **Achieving more visibility and voice**

The Open Government Pioneers Project has put the relationship between open government and the SDGs on the map (for example via the Wiki and the Reimagine Democracy conference). Populating the map, particularly by reinvigorating the Wiki, requires more sustained work to update and inspire interested parties. This could include short films,

animations and visuals that speak to specific target audiences with the aim of promoting them to go viral. In the final months the Project Board needs to identify a dedicated and more consistent resource to make this happen.

5.2 Ensuring political representatives have greater awareness of SDGs and types of actions required by:

- **Strengthening the link between accountability and transparency and the SDGs in political debate**

It is inescapable that the current climate is a tough one for transparency and accountability and it is therefore hard to find a place on the political agenda. Linked to the above two recommendations greater clarity is required about what is happening and/or what is changing. Reflecting specifically on recommendation one above, some simple messages about ‘what gets measured, gets done’ would be useful. The Board may want to consider specific blogs that focus on challenges to accountability and transparency and the value of a Project like this in making this relevant for citizens, politicians, government officials and others.

- **Creating a sustainable campaign**

Achieving open government and delivering the SDGs may not be fully realised until 2030, a challenge in an environment where short-termism is dominant. The Project has already provided raw material for civil society to continue campaigning and needs to maintain its own confidence. The enthusiasm of the country leads is an important asset. The individual lead organisations therefore need to ensure they have sufficient organisation development support to sustain and replenish this.

5.3 Helping government officials have a better plan for involving citizens by:

- **Building an evidence base of what works and what does not**

The Project shines a spotlight on overall policy successes and failures. The Project Board may want to challenge itself about the differences that exist between the four countries,

drawing on what works but also articulate things that are not working as well to help formulate improved planning. Hopefully this evaluation will help to do this.

Even if the work stopped now the Project has accumulated some evidence about what works and what does not in terms of engagement with aspirational concepts. Our experience has shown that the best input came from face-to-face discussions with people heavily involved in the Project, and that the sometimes esoteric nature of the open government and the SDGs means that engaging the general public is more challenging. The Project does however provide an independent assessment which could be a useful reference for government and civil society groups to help formulate arguments for legal, moral, economic and reputational thinking about effective open government and delivery of the SDGs. We would recommend a final evaluation incorporates greater levels of face-to-face dialogue to help capture insights for the future of this work. This evaluation might support country leads in identifying useful participants for the final evaluation (using the messages from these recommendations).

5.4 Open government seen as instrumental, and a common good towards progressing SDGs by:

- **Promoting greater understanding and attitudinal change**

This is diffuse and intangible but important. The evaluation has demonstrated the difficulty of reaching different audiences – politicians, government officials, other civil society groups, policy makers, students and the wider public. In considering the above points consideration should be given to articulating at least one clear set of messages for each category of participant. This would help to address the need for an everyday language about open government and SDGs articulated throughout discussions with the country leads. This would also build on engagement with different equality groups which help realise the strong commitment to diversity and equality articulated in the Project's aims.

- **Promoting a 'United Kingdom' message**

The core aim of the Project is to change practice and policy but has enough thought been given to reflect on this as a UK-wide project? Despite their historic and contemporary

differences, more consideration could be given to how each country might learn from the others and provide collective lessons for others. For instance, the 'dream statements' used in the survey suggest a unity of intent and therefore could provide a useful starting point. The Project Board should therefore give thought to its own 'dream' – one that can celebrate this particular project and provide the inspiration for its next steps.

Appendix One: Headlines from face-to-face discussions with country leads

Scotland 8 March 2018

Discussion with Ruchir Shar, Paul Bradley, Dorothea Vincent, Ruth Boyle and Doreen Green

- If you understand the agenda then it is easy to get involved, but the majority of people will find these esoteric concepts with confusing acronyms
- Linking the SDGs and Open Government process can be challenging because there are **two different sets** of stakeholders, conversations, sets of projects and agendas
- Why are they linked?
 - Open government is how we do reform (build trust, openness, etc.)
 - SDGs are one of the ways we can deliver that reform
 - When SDGs were launched – OGP recognised need to use action plans to drive them
 - There's an obvious connection for some
- The first year has needed time to discuss that – people haven't been as open as they could be – they are nervous and struggle with the scale of what could be
- It's a big agenda – if we are taking this seriously then it must be about DECISION making
- We also need to think about who else needs to be part of the discussion and ensure they are involved in an open way
- Who else would fund this type of work other than the Big Lottery – but challenge will be that it is early days and the immediate impact of this may not be felt now.
- We need to feel comfortable with openness – it will take a while to get there – it is risky to expose thinking and the challenge to achieve instant wins is difficult
- Need to build a critical mass of engagement and support which takes time but he had to do this immediately and could have been more effective later with the opportunity to build connections and networks
- Equalities is key if we are to open up power to a wider range of people – that outreach and connection takes time; opening up that power is a 2030 agenda for SDGs
- At the start the SDGs had limited traction but with the focus on equalities it became apparent that open government could be a tool to develop the SDGs
- What is success? Is it numbers or talking to experts and integrating into agendas? Is success shaping the work of others? We think so but it is hard to measure. When we do this though it has the potential to connect and reach to many more people
- I see this as an equalities project – so many people don't have access to power or able to influence decisions
- We are a small organisation with limited resources so we chose to focus on three groups: people with disabilities, young people and BAME communities
- Unintended impact of this project has been to open up the work of SCVO and the staff – a different way of operating has impacted on other projects
- Been really good to talk about the project – inspired and energised!

Northern Ireland 16 March 2018

Discussion with Johnny Bell, David McBurney, Sean Kelly and Craig McGuiken

- Reflecting on the Reimagine Democracy conference (15 March, the previous day), the event organised in three sections (i) open government (ii) SDGs and (iii) facilitating participants to make commitments for future action
- Format combined information (about some shocking issues), entertainment and the opportunity for engagement and networking well facilitated by the host and with high quality speakers supported by live stream, video link and twitter
- Good turnout with mix of individuals and organisations who were not the 'usual suspects' (helped by the link to the wider Imagine festival on in Belfast at the time)
- The conference was well-timed (and therefore may possibly achieve more mainstream attention) following statement on 14 March by David Sterling, head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, that not all government meetings were minuted to avoid FOI requests. The Sterling statement will be considered by the Information Commissioner
- First session of the conference got to the heart of NI issues, covering transparency and accountability, 'dark money' and tax justice. As well as FOI (noted that Mandy McAuley, the BBC investigative journalist, 'never had a successful FOI' was a phenomenal fact) other current NI issues discussed were the suspended devolved government and the allegations about dark money in the Brexit campaign
- These discussions should help put increased focus on open government
- The various proposals discussed in the afternoon session could be part of the project programme – exploring how the SDGs could lead to action and raise awareness about the need for government reform and greater transparency
- Government officials are involved in open government commitments
- Brexit raises challenges for agriculture – but priorities could be framed within SDGs and enable ability to compete post-Brexit
- There is a culture of secrecy within the NI civil service and no independent environment agency = a lack of accountability around environmental regulation
- Issue of equality – important to work with young people with SDGs providing a useful framework for open government
- Democracy Games events at Stormont have taken place three times and build political literacy in a fun and interactive way by encouraging young people to think about manifestos and policy. They develop a slogan under a theme and then present their ideas to their peers who then vote for the one they prefer
- Popular and over-subscribed - encourages young people do something of their own about what's important to them (for the future)
- Politicians are keen to be seen to support the project
- It is first necessary to evaluate the success of the agreed activity plan, e.g. conference webinars, blogs...
- Independence of Open Government Network is crucial
- Without OGN there would be no open government commitments

England 28 March 2018:
Discussion with Andreas Pavlou

- OG and SDGs are big agendas – often hard to relate as full of jargon and include a lots of huge issues/sectors within them
- Lack of clarity and central government interest (contrast to Scotland and Wales), difficult to engage in English-only issues at Westminster as well as UK-wide issues.
- Difficult as many English-only NGOs are local, not ‘devolved/national’, or they are UK wide.
- Difficult to include on government/media agenda due to the dominance of Brexit but there are established government leads from Government Digital Service.
- Examples of local government interest/support in doing things differently include Huddersfield (with annual conference on open democracy includes cover of SDG 16 but harder to expand to other SDGs) but austerity/financial restrictions makes this difficult too
- Option of linking with executive (English ‘metro’) mayors – but early days of thinking
- Also difficult to engage on environment, climate change etc. as they are very established sectors with processes and certain tactics to access to government.
- Government leads keen to engage with women’s equality groups (SDG 5) linked to 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage
- Potential OG Action Plan commitment on the collection of data about sex, ethnicity, other diversity indicators, etc. of local government candidates – links being made with Local Government Information Unit and potentially others
- OGN Forum – sometimes it feels like only activity on the UK Forum comes from the coordinator, but: Core group, part of the Steering Group includes Democratic Society, Institute of Government, Electoral Reform Society, TI UK
- Civil society OG Action Plan leads include MySociety, NCVO, Open Data Institute., CFI, 360Giving
- Challenge of maintaining longer standing connections and expand into other sectors by identifying the issues they may be interested in, for example introduce OG to gender-equality groups
- Reimagine Democracy conference inevitably had Northern Ireland focus but there were also participants from England
- Pleasantly surprised as had expected fewer people, packed room in the morning and 40/50 left for workshop – wasn’t just the same people as always
- Ideas useful for NI but not all specifically translatable elsewhere although certain UK-wide themes emerged, including open contracting, transparency and exploration of the link between open government and SDGs
- Making the explicit OG - SDG link is an ongoing challenge because it is not obvious, for example the representation of women and the disadvantaged does relate to the SDGs but feels closer to open government
- Many of the other SDGs – related to environment for example, already have successful or established tactics, processes and access to government, or already aware of open government.

England 25 May 2018

Discussion with Tim Hughes, Director, Involve

- Originally the Open Government Network brought together a loose coalition of international development type organisations to push long-term demands on development and linked anti-corruption initiatives and in 2011 the first Open Government action plan was published
- These plans run for two years and aim to create a cycle with the next action plan being drafted in the second year of the previous one
- The second plan included a register of beneficial ownership as an important anti-corruption tool and the last plan open contracting - but these are essentially technical subjects so thinking developed about how to broaden out its aspirations to the rest of the UK (the third was launched at the Prime Minister's Anti-Corruption Summit in May 2016 and the fourth is imminent)
- The Open Government Pioneers Programme was therefore formulated to broaden debate and think about issues such as health and social care
- However Open Government Partnership has been under threat because of Brexit and change in government
- An absence of political leadership with six different ministers (and therefore they have no time to get to grips with open government as well as it not being top of the agenda)
- No political leadership sits alongside threat from neglect, e.g. increasingly poor responses on FOI requests and lack of openness about data, and language around Brexit, e.g. the proposals for the UK to become an offshore tax haven (which would be opposed to open government)
- Sense of fire-fighting to obtain ministerial attention
- Some tension therefore within the OG Network – are they giving government an easy ride?
- How to keep the open government agenda going – and maintain a positive attitude towards a longer-term agenda?
- This battle means that the Open Government Pioneers aspirations have been somewhat side-lined
- In addition the role of the UKSSD (UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development) – assessment of current state of play re SDGs
- There is a positive relationship but (lack of) progress on SDGs is similar to Open Government
- Lack of government interest – cursory inclusion in department plans but lack of co-ordination - UKSSD has recently threatened to highlight this – appears to have had some impact
- Reflecting on the Reimagine Democracy conference was particularly relevant in Northern Ireland but perhaps there was less reach elsewhere
- Highlighted the importance of language – first session focussed on current situation in NI and illustrated how the debate could have some real meaning and made the issue of open government appear more human
- Tendency for debate to be highbrow – so challenge to articulate and inspire a wider audience

Wales 13 April 2018

Tele-conference with Anna Nicholl and Jessica Blair

- Up to April 2018, this work was supported by an Open Government Officer (2 days per week), managed by WCVA
- Scottish Government approached Welsh colleagues and a roundtable with the government and third sector, led by Doreen Grove, was organised to explore Open Government – Wales keen to be involved although there had been no previous background
- ERS Cymru was not involved in the set up but is now a lead partner in the project in Wales
- Engagement with Welsh government is via Chief Digital Officer and civil servants
- Less political engagement at a Ministerial level
- Less push from civil society – different history of relationships between the third sector and government. There is a unique statutory commitment for Welsh Government to engage with the third sector through a Third Sector Scheme.
- Open Government has less resonance as civil society has been less involved playing catch up with Scotland and Northern Ireland
- Nature of funding for third sector – often project-based or government funded (which can put some constraint on challenging the status quo) as well as practical challenges about capacity and resources
- Labour has been in power for 20 years – and consequently levels of apathy towards engagement from the public
- Not sufficient organisations to push back
- Example of the Brexit Continuity Bill – rushed through the Assembly and would have given significant powers to the Executive
- There is rhetoric about the importance of open government and its place in a devolved system but concept remains relatively new to Wales – lack of precedent
- Reimagine Democracy conference was lively and topical – challenge to draw out the relevance to other parts of the UK
- Ambitious – challenge to raise political awareness and identify clear progress
- Conflict (or tension) between open government and SDGs
- Not easy to demonstrate impact on legislation?
- Open Government is relevant to Wales – how to overcome deficit and articulate a stronger contribution to public life
- Vital to ensure people feel engaged
- Enable groups and individuals to engage with government – would we get there?
- Plan to be published in June – likely to have commitments which strengthen engagement and representation with involvement of both government and civil society
- Good equality work – Diverse Cymru (BAME representation, disability and equal opportunities), Youth Cymru (voluntary groups working with young people) and Interlink

Appendix Two: On-line survey findings

Running from 30 May-11 July 22 respondents participated in the on-line survey. ‘Total unique respondents’ is the total number of answers received; so, for questions requiring one answer this number will be 22, but for some questions respondents could provide multiple answers.

1. Has your engagement with Open Government Pioneers been as an individual or as part of an organisation?

|  | Option | Percentage | Respondents |
|---|-----------------|------------|-------------|
|  | A. Individual | 45% | 10 |
|  | B. Organisation | 55% | 12 |

Total unique respondents: 22

12 respondents did so as part of a range of organisations and ten as individual citizens.

There was a range of organisations represented:

1.1 Outline the purpose of your organisation (in no more than 25 words)

| | |
|---|---|
|  | “Environmental charity” |
|  | “We empower young people, families and communities to create positive change.” |
|  | “Through the Grassroots Challenge Project we hope to inspire and empower young people (11-24 years old) to lead their own wildlife projects, benefiting themselves, their communities and the environment.” |
|  | “I was the Open Gov officer for Wales at WCVA” |
|  | “Developing a more equitable and sustainable food system” |
|  | “A conservation charity working with people to create better places for wildlife, protect wildlife and educate in Northern Ireland.” |

| | |
|---|---|
|  | “Wildlife Conservation” |
|  | “Transparency for accountability” |
|  | “Environment education for young people ages 11-14 in Northern Ireland” |
|  | “Membership organisation for environment and heritage” |
|  | “Supporting development projects” |
|  | “Humanitarian Social Development” |

2. What kind of communities do you work with?

|  | Option | Respondents |
|---|--|-------------|
|  | A. Age (you will be asked to specify in the next?) | 13 |
|  | B. Disability | 11 |
|  | C. Gender reassignment | 3 |
|  | D. Marriage and civil partnerships | 3 |
|  | E. Pregnancy and maternity | 5 |
|  | F. Race | 8 |
|  | G. Religion and Belief | 7 |
|  | H. Sex | 6 |
|  | I. Sexual Orientation | 5 |
|  | J. Socio-economic background | 9 |
|  | Other | 1 |

Total unique respondents: 71

Respondents worked with a variety of diverse communities. Age and disability were the two main ‘protected characteristics’ identified. Of the 13 respondents who selected ‘age’, six worked exclusively with under-25 year olds and the others all age groups.

3. Why did you decide to become part of the Open Government Pioneers project?

|  | Option | Respondents |
|---|-------------------------|-------------|
|  | A. Influence | 8 |
|  | B. Share experiences | 10 |
|  | C. Increase knowledge | 12 |
|  | D. Share information | 9 |
|  | E. Other (please state) | 4 |

Total unique respondents: 43

There were mixed motivations for engaging with the Open Government Pioneers Project. 12 respondents wanted to increase their knowledge and 10 joined to share experiences.

Other responses:

| | |
|---|--|
|  | "Invited." |
|  | "Giving young people confidence and skills to speak up on environmental issues that are important to them" |
|  | "Sustainable Development" |
|  | "Commitment to the open movement" |

4. How do you participate in the Open Government Pioneers project?

|  | Option | Respondents |
|---|---|-------------|
|  | A. Wiki | 5 |
|  | B. Engagement with country leads | 7 |
|  | C. Project group (s) | 10 |
|  | D. Via your partners | 7 |
|  | F. Reading papers, articles, etc. | 12 |
|  | F. Open Government forums, meet-ups and events) | 13 |
|  | G. Other | 5 |

Total unique respondents: 59

The most popular methods of participation were Open Government forums, meet-ups and events, with 13 respondents selecting this option, followed by reading papers and articles (12 respondents). The least popular method was the Pioneers Wiki, with only five respondents selecting this.

Other responses:

| | |
|---|---|
|  | "Small community project funded by Pioneers project, engaging food poverty experts by experience in dialogue to shape workable solutions on the ground" |
|  | "Democracy Games Sessions at Stormont linked to the Grassroots Challenge Programme." |
|  | "Sustainable Development Goals" |
|  | "Collating and publishing equality information and data openly" |
|  | (Left blank) |

5. How effective are the means of participation?

In terms of the ease, the level of influence, etc.



All five options were rated between 2.36 and 2.90 with accessibility and ease of participation online judged the most effective elements of participation. The majority of respondents however felt the ability to influence and facilitate connections as being 'not very effective'.

6. What level of contribution do you feel you have had in the Open Government Pioneers process?

| | |
|--|-----|
|  A. I have delivered a new project which has enabled local people to participate | 36% |
|  B. I have worked with other organisations to generate and/or deliver new ways of working | 9% |
|  C. I have participated in an online discussion where I have been able to explore ideas | 32% |
|  D. I have been asked what I think about various decision that have been made | 5% |
|  E. I have seen and read the updates and contributions by others to the Wiki | 18% |

7. What impact do you feel your participation has made?

| | |
|---|-----|
|  A. Changed or adapted Open Government Pioneers project | 0% |
|  B. Influenced strategic direction of Open Government Pioneers Project | 18% |
|  C. Changed your own practice | 13% |
|  D. Changed the practice of others | 32% |
|  E. None | 23% |
|  F. Other (please state) | 14% |

As question 6 reveals, only 5 per cent of respondents had been consulted on decisions related to the Project. More positively 36 per cent had helped to deliver a new project and 32 per cent had explored ideas through an online discussion. 23 per cent of respondents felt their participation had made no impact. Nobody believed that they had 'changed or adapted' the Open Government Pioneers Project.

Other responses:

| |
|--|
|  "I helped facilitate young people who where learning about democracy." |
|  "Enabled young people to learn about democracy and government" |
|  "I've learnt a lot and made good contacts" |

9. To what extent do you consider an understanding of diversity is embedded within the Open Government Pioneers project?

|  | Option | Percentage | Respondents |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
|  | A. Extensively | 45% | 10 |
|  | B. To some extent | 50% | 11 |
|  | C. Not at all | 0% | 0 |
|  | D. Comment (word limit – 100 words) | 5% | 1 |

Total unique respondents: 22

10. To what extent do you consider the Open Government Pioneers project tackles inequality?

|  | Option | Percentage | Respondents |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------|-------------|
|  | A. Extensively | 18% | 4 |
|  | B. To some extent | 77% | 17 |
|  | C. Not at all | 5% | 1 |
|  | D. Comment (word limit – 100 words) | 0% | 0 |

Total unique respondents: 22

Almost half of respondents believed that an extensive understanding of diversity was embedded into the Project. In terms of tackling inequality, there is a more mixed picture, with the vast majority of respondents believing that this only happens ‘to some extent’.

11. Designing the Dream Statement about what the Open Government Pioneers Project can achieve.

| | |
|--|-----|
|  A. Coming together to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goals using the spirit and practice of Open Government to develop a plan that leaves no one behind, can fulfil everyone's potential and be fully responsible to the planet. | 36% |
|  B. Have transparency for accountability in government and have an implementation plan for the SDGs | 14% |
|  C. Government recognises Sustainable Development Goals as a key national goal and introduces a programme of commitments and actions that would include Open Government, transparency and accountability. | 23% |
|  D. Open Government Pioneers develops more robust engagement between government and society so that there is transparency and accountability about the delivery of the SDGs. | 18% |
|  E. If you prefer please create your own dream statement. | 9% |

'A' was the preferred dream statement for the Open Government Pioneers Project, 'C' the second, 'D' the third and 'B' the least popular, chosen by only 14 per cent of participants selecting this. Two participants created their own dream statements:

- "A fairer, greener future for all"
- "Open Government promoting the SDGs"

Appendix Three: The evaluation approach

| Methodology | How the evaluation was undertaken |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Match the approach and ethos of the Open Government Pioneers Project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open: contributing to networks such as the Pioneers' Wiki and the Open Government Network forums Collaborative: Worked with the country leads to create 'dream statements' Digital: Use of social media to promote surveys and webinars Agile: Demonstrated flexibility in approach and timescales, and adapted the evaluation in response to feedback from the Project Board and country leads. This included adjustments to the survey incorporated and setting up Twitter chats to encourage engagement |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate a realistic and robust methodology (appropriate to the budget) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See Section 2, <i>Methodology</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline clear and accessible outputs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See Sections 4 and 5 |

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve interviews with Project partners, participants and government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For discussions with the country leads and our attendance at the Reimagine Democracy conference, see particularly Section 2.1. Appendix One also provides more detail. • For online discussions see particularly Section 2.2 and Appendix Two |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be supported by data from the Project’s monitoring and discussion about evaluation priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement statistics from the Pioneer’s Wiki were used to target survey and webinar promotion |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make recommendations about how to continue and develop the engagement of citizens and civil society | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Section 5. Outputs captured on MutualGain website. |

How to get involved with the project

- The [Open Government Pioneer's Wiki](#) page is open for editing and contribution from the general public. No need to register or sign in, unless you want your ideas to be attributed to you. Use this site to write in your ideas on the following:
 - Develop the aims and outcomes
 - Explore the background and opportunity
 - Develop the overall plans and proposals
 - Help us work out if the project is succeeding - engage the evaluation
 - Develop the analysis and theory of change supporting this project
 - Develop and help plan activity and communications
 - Identify yourself as one of the project's prospective partners to work with or contract
- Join the [Open Government Network](#) to access forums for each nation and get details of meet ups and events
- Look at local meet up opportunities or start your own with the project's support at the [Meetup](#) page
- Contribute to each nations' action plans directly on the [Wiki](#)

