Open Government Partnership (OGP) is about governance reform through transformative commitments “co-created” by governments and civil society organizations. However, the Afghan Government, so far, has failed to use this opportunity for reform and has instead opted for an old strategy of symbolic representation of civil society and a box-ticking approach in the development of reform commitments.

The OGP Multi-Stakeholder Forum is supposed to bring reformers from the government and the civil society to steer the OGP process. The OGP co-creation and participation standards require that civil society should have their own selection and rotation process, independent of the government. However, the government has manipulated the selection of civil society representatives and has deliberately left out many of the mainstream civil society organizations who have the capacity to influence the process. In addition, the government has imposed its own chair, a deputy chair (a civil society representative), and a secretary for the forum without any consultation with the civil society organizations while the standards suggest that the civil society should be allowed to select their own co-chair. The standards also require governments to jointly...
develop with civil society representatives the terms of reference, decision-making processes, and conflict management rules for the forum. The terms of reference were developed by the government and were pushed through without any substantive changes during a forum meeting.

"the government completely ignored the commitments proposed by the civil society organizations although the proposed commitments were developed through a wide-range of consultations at central and provincial level."

The OGP Multi-Stakeholder Forum is supposed to develop transformative commitments that form the National Action Plan for governance reform. The OGP standards require the government to discuss with other members of the forum its priorities for commitments and the feasibility of including civil society priorities. However, the government completely ignored the commitments proposed by the civil society organizations although the proposed commitments were developed through a wide-range of consultations at central and provincial level. The government instead pushed through a set of very weak commitments that had already been prepared by the government. Unfortunately, most of the commitments are either very vague or have already been under implementation or are not transformative. For instance, one of the commitments is to create councils to engage police with the public without clarifying at what level such councils would be established (i.e. district, provincial, or central level) and if the police would be accountable to such councils. Another commitment is about establishing special courts in 12 provinces to eliminate violence against women while the government had already committed to establish these courts in 34 provinces by end of 2018. Other commitments, such as declaration of assets by 100 government officials, are not transformative since such processes have been in place for many years but have not resulted in any prosecution or recovery of stolen assets. Unfortunately, the government has not only ignored civil society recommendations, it has not provided any feedback on why the proposed commitments have not been taken on board.

Nevertheless, there is still time to rectify many of the shortcomings if there is a genuine will on the part of the government to make OGP the vehicle of governance reform in Afghanistan. The government should immediately take the following actions: (1) Ensure government leadership’s close engagement in the process including periodic meetings of the forum with the President; (2) Include only reform-minded officials in the forum; (3) Ensure independence of the OGP Afghanistan Secretariat by bringing independent individuals to lead the secretariat and stop using the secretariat to influence the process; (4) Engage in a real dialogue with the civil society to revisit the current commitments and to develop transformative commitments to be included in the National Action Plan.

If the government is really committed to transform the fragile Afghan state into a stable and prosperous one, it must put its institutions on the right track of reform. With the Presidential Elections due in less than two years, the government should make maximum use of the opportunity the OGP presents.
Integrity volunteer kicks off book collection and distribution campaign in Nangarhar

Miranshah Loodin, Resource Center Assistant, Nangarhar

Due to lack of sufficient funds and poor management, many of the public schools in Nangarhar province continue to experience shortage of textbooks. Schools in the province struggle to supply students with school textbooks needed to improve literacy.

Recognizing this issue, Shugufa, an integrity volunteer, decided to help students facing lack of textbooks problem in her community. The book collection campaign she started to help the community was heard out by her friends who donated books to this cause. Also, the initiative was welcomed by the principal of the local school and assured her of any cooperation that would help improve the quality of education. She has collected and distributed more than forty different sets of textbooks in the last three months.

“There are things we can do, that need efforts and proper management but, not money necessarily,” Shugufa said. According to her, integrity volunteers can, through their monitoring, improve implementation of curriculum, minimize teacher and student absenteeism, and provide clean drinking water to student through community support. “There are piles of notebooks, boards, chalks and other necessary materials in stocks but it is not being distributed due to lack of planning,” she added. Important of all “lack of accountability in many schools” has contributed to low performance. These issues can be resolved through volunteer monitoring, she believes.

Shigofa along with fifteen other local monitors received a four-day training from Integrity Watch on monitoring schools to help fix problems and contribute to improving quality education in her community. The problems identified are discussed at School Management Shura meetings to find solutions.

Community-based Monitoring of Schools (CBM-S) is a program by Integrity Watch Afghanistan. It was started in July 2014. Currently, the program is operational in nine provinces across Afghanistan, including Balkh, Kapisa, Parwan, Kabul, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Kunduz and Paktia.

Integrity Watch trains local residents like Shigofa to encourage local communities to engage in monitoring
of the education services through community monitoring, collaborative information sharing and problem solving.

The program has been designed to bring more coordination between local Education departments and communities, increase transparency and enhance the quality of education.

Community monitoring contribute to quality of construction projects in Kapisa

Ali Ahmad Mashalafroz Coordinator, Kapisa

There are many schools across the country that continue to struggle for having a permanent school building with decent classrooms, clean drinking water and chairs to name a few. Qala Sahra High School for girls is one of those schools that, until recently, did not have a building with classrooms and other needed facilities.

A community member donated 400 square meters of land to the school. It still needed a building. Following efforts made by Integrity Watch’s local monitors and community residents, the school received a fund for the building from an international donor. The construction company that was awarded the contract has almost completed more than eighty percent of the work and is scheduled to complete the remaining work in the next two months.

Integrity Volunteers and community residents regularly monitor the construction of the school building to ensure it is done according to the contract. The monitoring has been a success. Local monitors and community members are satisfied with the pace and quality of the work so far.
Community monitoring is an effective way to assure proper construction of public-funded projects. Integrity Watch’s Community Based Monitoring of Infrastructure program is mobilizing local community to monitor infrastructure projects in their area. Following its success in other provinces, the program was launched in Kapisa province this year. Since then, integrity volunteers have monitored eight public infrastructure projects including a road, a Masjed, and several schools.

School in Kapisa Gets Playground Through Community Action

Ali Ahmad Mashalafrooz Coordinator, Kapisa

Ashoorkhil school for boys is located in downtown Mahmood Raqi, the provincial capital of Kapisa province. The school had no playground for its more than six hundred students. To make a flat surface playground, there was a need for using heavy machinery as the school is situated on a hillside. Therefore, Haji Malik Saeed, an Integrity Volunteer and community residents raised the issue with the Provincial Governor. Before this, School Management Shura (SMS) had met several times to find a solution for the problem. In the meeting with the Governor, Mr. Saeed explained the need for a playground which was partly built by the local residents already.

With the help of Department of Public Works, the school now has a playground. Thanks to collaboration between integrity volunteers, community representatives, and officials, the students can play in the newly built playground in their school. The next target is to prepare the ground for proper football matches.

However, this is not the end of the problems for Ashoorkhil School for boys which was established in 1951. The current land was allotted to the school after more than half a century but did not have a permanent building until recently. The problems of no building and no playground have been resolved but it still does not have a boundary wall.

Integrity Volunteers are working in their communities to resolve such issues faced by the schools. Currently, Integrity Volunteers monitor twenty schools across Kapisa province under Integrity Watch’s Community Based Monitoring of Schools’ program.
The program is being implemented in nine provinces including Kapisa covering more than 160 schools across Afghanistan. Integrity Watch enables local community to engage in problem-solving of their schools through community monitoring, collaborative information sharing and problem-solving.