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# MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES AND THE MEDIA

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APRIL 2018

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS .....	I
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	II
INTRODUCTION.....	I
THE AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM (APRM) .....	1
THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP (OGP) .....	2
EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE (EITI).....	3
ARE MSIS ATTRACTING PUBLIC ATTENTION?.....	4
APRM .....	4
OGP .....	6
EITI.....	7
MEDIA'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS MSIS .....	8
QUIET DIPLOMACY VERSUS NAMING AND SHAMING .....	9
HOW ARE MSIS RESPONDING?.....	11
CONCLUSION.....	14
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	15

# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APR FORUM	African Peer Review Forum
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
AU	African Union
CRM	Country Review Mission (of APRM)
CRR	Country Review Report (of APRM)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
IRM	Independent Reporting Mechanism (of OGP)
LEITI	Liberian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
MSG	Multi-Stakeholder Group (of EITI)
MSI	Multi-Stakeholder Initiative
NAP	National Action Plan (of OGP)
NEITI	Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPoA	National Program of Action (of APRM)
OGP	Open Government Partnership
PWYP	Publish What You Pay

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSIs) are voluntary partnerships between governments, civil society, and the private sector which seek to promote good governance by holding governments and corporations accountable to citizens. Although MSIs conduct a great deal of research on transparency and good governance and have produced volumes of reports – some of which are critical of governments – they tend to be known mainly to a few stakeholders and devotees. The public is largely unfamiliar with them. Consequently, the public does not believe that MSIs have achieved much real-world impact.

This report focuses on three MSIs: the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), both established in 2003, and the Open Government Partnership (OGP), launched in 2011. It examines whether their low public profiles have diminished their effectiveness and questions if greater media attention would mobilize greater public support for their aims. MSIs confront many challenges getting their messages to the public and translating them into action, from matters of media strategy to deeper political and structural issues such as media freedom or the lack thereof. Furthermore, the research reports are excessively long, complex, or not written in plain language, which makes their “translation” by journalists more difficult.

This report also examines political and structural barriers. MSIs are voluntary initiatives with no enforcement power other than that of naming and shaming governments and corporations for not complying with international commitments. Some analysts advocate “quiet diplomacy” to persuade non-compliant governments and corporations to play by the rules. Some governments and corporations have joined MSIs to gain good publicity with no real intent to withstand scrutiny or implement reforms, the so-called “open washing” phenomenon. MSIs have begun to publicly censure these governments.

Analysts identify a Catch 22: MSIs must get their message across to achieve their worthy objectives. In the end, however, their messaging will only be effective if they can demonstrate success. This leads to the conclusion that transparency and “naming and shaming” are not enough. For MSIs to gain real traction, they need to form strategic alliances with political and civil movements which can serve as vehicles for their values and demands. In other words, MSIs need not only to inform the public but also to mobilize it and take action to ensure greater transparency and better governance.

This report recommends that MSIs cultivate relationships with interested and concerned journalists, explaining to the public the real-world application of what they are attempting to achieve. MSIs’ media strategies should take into account the limited capacity the media has for analyzing and processing large volumes of data. Short, targeted pieces (press releases, blog posts, etc.) will likely get more attention. The use of widely spoken languages (rather than official languages, in many countries) can help to get messages to the general population. Radio should be used to reach rural areas and less-educated citizens. A social media presence is increasingly important. MSIs should focus attention on branding and show concrete results. MSIs should counter efforts by countries and corporations to “open-wash,” disqualifying members who do not implement reforms or which close down space for civil society organizations (CSOs). MSIs and the media should shift attention away from merely informing the public about the state of transparency and governance in member countries towards mobilizing citizens to use MSIs as levers for improving transparency and governance.

# INTRODUCTION

Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSIs) are voluntary partnerships between governments, civil society, and the private sector, intended as a means of addressing governance and developmental challenges. They hold great potential to further the cause of good governance by holding governments and corporations accountable to citizens. They produce (or have the potential to produce) powerful critiques of government and corporate performance that are valuable in their own right but which also have value to researchers and others.

In practice, however, MSIs have tended to become rather esoteric entities, largely involving the stakeholders themselves plus a few passionate devotees in civil society and specialized media. The public is generally not familiar with their work. Consequently, their worthy reports often gather dust on bookshelves or linger, unread, on the Internet. Does that diminish their effectiveness in achieving their aim of improving governance?

## A Note on Methodology

This report is based on a review of the existing published work on MSIs, supplemented by interviews with stakeholders in the various MSIs, especially those responsible for the essential tasks of communications and media outreach. The authors also used an online survey to probe the media presence of the MSIs, the results of which are described in this report.

Do they promote the bold national conversations that their proponents claim they do? Would greater media attention mobilize greater public support for their endeavors? And, if so, what should be done about it?

This report focuses on three MSIs, each involved in the governance field: the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), and the Open Government Partnership (OGP). These initiatives share principles of voluntarism, peer learning, and broad-based participation (notably regarding civil society as an important contributor to potential success). They prioritize openness and transparency through adherence to and implementation of common standards.

This report looks at the extent to which MSIs have become embedded in the public mind and are contributing to the political process, particularly to issues related to good governance and transparency. It assesses the media's level of familiarity with MSIs, as well as its willingness to raise public awareness for MSI activities.

The APRM and EITI have been in existence since 2003, but citizens of their member states – their supposed beneficiaries – remain largely unaware of them. Although the OGP was launched more recently, in 2011, observers perceive it as more newsworthy, due to its more specific and modern focus, and to the support of notable personalities such as former U.S. President Barack Obama. Yet the OGP is no household name either.

A survey of media coverage of the three MSIs from mid-2016 to mid-2017 indicates that the EITI has a greater media footprint than the other two MSIs, both in Africa and globally. Yet, as discussed in this report, a greater media footprint does not necessarily imply positive coverage or greater citizen awareness.

## THE AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM (APRM)

In terms of its scope, the APRM is the most comprehensive governance-evaluation tool of the three MSIs examined, although its focus on Africa is narrower in geopolitical terms. The APRM Secretariat is based in Midrand, South Africa. The APRM assesses four thematic areas: democracy and political governance; economic governance and management; corporate governance; and socio-economic development.<sup>1</sup> Procedurally, countries are reviewed in a five-step process that includes a participatory internal country self-assessment and a subsequent visit by a Country Review Mission (CRM) – a delegation of experts sent by the continental APRM authorities and headed by a widely respected African personality. The latter element is intended to

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<sup>1</sup> African Union and African Peer Review Mechanism, "Statute of the African Peer Review Mechanism," Nairobi (Kenya), 11 August 2016.

ensure the quality and integrity of Country Review Reports (CRRs). Countries are expected to produce National Programs of Action (NPOAs), which detail remedial actions they intend to take. Heads of state are expected to undergo a review of their CRRs before their peers (the Forum of Heads of State and Government, known as The APR Forum), during which they will, in theory, be held accountable for their commitments.<sup>2</sup>

The APRM was launched in 2003 as an adjunct to the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). It is now more closely integrated into the African Union as a “specialized agency.”<sup>3</sup> As of January 31, 2018, 37 of the AU’s 55 member states had signed up to the voluntary mechanism. Of these, 21 have completed their first reviews. Kenya and Uganda are the only two countries to have undergone second reviews. The failure to proceed beyond first reviews for all but these two countries is viewed as a serious indictment of the initiative; country reviews were supposed to have taken place every two to four years.<sup>4</sup> The APRM was conceived in the early 2000s by prominent African leaders, chiefly South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki and Nigeria’s Olusegun Obasanjo, as a mechanism for African countries to assess, critique, and improve each other’s governance, rather than allowing outside governments – mainly donor nations – to do it. It was an institutional expression of the popular slogan, “African solutions for African problems.”

Part of the original thinking was that donor countries would be guided in their funding decisions by the APRM results. South Africa’s former finance minister, Trevor Manuel, remarked: “Peer review brings risk, and that risk should be met with the reward of the early flow of capital to states that have signed up.”<sup>5</sup> However, the flow of capital or donor funding resulting from a peer review process has never been formalized, and there is no hard evidence of its application.

## **THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP (OGP)**

The OGP was established in 2011 by eight founding members and has grown to include 70 national governments and 15 sub-national governments.<sup>6</sup> OGP’s geographic scope is global. Its focus is on promoting transparency, empowering citizens, fighting corruption, and harnessing new technologies to strengthen governance by creating partnerships between governments and civil society. OGP reviews take place every two years, with the last six months dedicated to creating National Action Plans (NAPs). Through the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM), OGP assessments are produced by the government of the member state as well as by an independent governance expert in that country to ensure balance.

To participate in the OGP, a government must demonstrate a minimum commitment to open government principles in four areas: fiscal transparency, access to information, asset disclosures, and citizen engagement. The government must score at least 75% on these criteria, measured by objective governance indicators using

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<sup>2</sup> Each country appoints a minister or high-ranking official as its APRM Focal Point, and it forms a multi-stakeholder National Governing Council. Compilation of the Country Self-Assessment Report is usually contracted to Technical Research Institutions. The APRM is financed by a combination of annual country contributions (raised in 2016 from \$100,000 to \$200,000), plus funding from development partners, the African Union and the APRM’s Strategic Partners, including the African Development Bank, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and the United Nations Development Program. Like many Pan-African institutions, the APRM struggles to collect membership dues, and larger economies make “special contributions.” South Africa pays a disproportionate amount annually. The APRM’s annual budget is about \$15 million, with \$10 million from governments, \$3 million from the African Union (AU) and approximately \$2 million from other donors. Du Plessis C, “African Peer Review Mechanism: Back with a, uhm, Bang?,” *Daily Maverick*, March 16, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> African Union, Decision on the Integration of the APRM into the African Union, Doc. Ex. CL/851 (XXV), Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, 27 June 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Organisation of African Unity, “New Partnership for Africa’s Development, The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM),” AHG/235, 8 July 2002, para. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert R and S Gruzd, *The African Peer Review Mechanism: Lessons from the Pioneers*, Johannesburg: SALLA, 2008, p. 108.

<sup>6</sup> “About OGP: What is the Open Government Partnership,” undated, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/about-ogp>, accessed February 7, 2018.



public data sources. As of September 2017, new applicants for membership must also prove that civil society organizations (CSOs) can participate meaningfully in public life.<sup>7</sup>

Internationally, the OGP is overseen by a Steering Committee including representatives of governments and civil society organizations and elected by participating countries in good standing, i.e. those who have paid their dues. The Steering Committee, which is also regionally representative, ultimately decides which countries are eligible to participate in the OGP.<sup>8</sup> The OGP Support Unit and the IRM, which oversees compliance, are both based in Washington, D.C.<sup>9</sup>

At the national level, countries designate a government department to manage the OGP. There is some disagreement among representatives of OGP's Support Unit as to whether the location of this OGP contact point makes a difference in the organization's effectiveness.<sup>10</sup>

## **EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE (EITI)**

Launched by former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2003, the EITI focuses on increasing transparency of the extraction of natural resources, specifically minerals, oil, and gas. Corporations commit to publishing what they pay governments to extract their resources, while governments commit to publishing what they receive from those corporations. The aim is to ensure that these amounts are the same and that money belonging to the nation is not stolen. An independent administrator verifies this information under the supervision of a multi-stakeholder steering committee. The goal is for a country to be certified as "compliant" with the EITI's Standard.

To become an EITI candidate, a government must publicly commit to the initiative and produce a work plan towards compliance. Validation of its adherence to the EITI Standard is required every two years. Each member country manages its own EITI process, led by a senior government official and the Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG), which includes civil society.

Internationally, EITI is governed by a 20-person EITI Board, which represents the EITI's three constituencies: governments, companies, and civil society. Each constituency establishes its own selection criteria. Country representatives, for example, are elected by all implementing countries. The EITI Board decides who should be admitted to the EITI or allowed to remain a member. The International EITI Secretariat is based in Oslo, Norway.<sup>11</sup> National EITI chapters are run by MSGs and are largely self-funded.

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<sup>7</sup> Eligibility Criteria, November 1, 2017,

<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/resources/eligibility-criteria>, accessed February 26, 2018

<sup>8</sup> About OGP: Steering Committee, undated,

<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/ogp-steering-committee>, accessed February 26, 2018

<sup>9</sup> This OGP management is funded by contributions from participating countries according to their economic size, as well as by private donations. The fiscal year 2017 budget was \$9,556,658, of which \$2,803,455 comprised contributions from participating countries. The OGP struggles to collect all outstanding member government financial contributions but appears to have been saved by donations from private foundations. <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/ogp-steering-committee>, accessed February 26, 2018

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Foti, Program Director of the OGP IRM, did a study of 35 member states and found the Ministry of Foreign Affairs served as the OGP interface in four of them. According to Mr. Foti, this arrangement could create two risks. The first is that in many countries this ministry is not seen as an implementing agency, especially around issues of information disclosure and participation. "This can weaken credibility with the implementing agencies of many of the administrative reforms promised in OGP commitments." The second problem is that the OGP is located in foreign ministries because they administer foreign aid. This might make it look like OGP commitments are donor-driven, "potentially side lining the domestic dynamic of civil society and government that is the goal of OGP." However later in the same paper, Mr. Foti says he can find no actual correlation between the OGP institutional arrangements of member states and action plan outputs. Foti, J. (2014) Independent Reporting Mechanism Technical Paper (No. 1)

[https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Technical%20paper%201\\_final.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Technical%20paper%201_final.pdf), accessed March 16, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> EITI's budget in 2016 was \$5,556,642 of which participating countries and international development agencies provided \$3,002,937 (about 54%) and participating countries (mainly oil and gas and mining companies) provided \$2,546,359 (about 46%). See: Who we are, undated, <https://eiti.org/who-we-are>, accessed February 26, 2018.

There is no doubt that these three MSIs are each major, ambitious undertakings, devoting large amounts of money, time, and skill to pursuing their objectives of exposing the operations of governments and corporations to public scrutiny. But are their publics paying much attention?

## ARE MSIS ATTRACTING PUBLIC ATTENTION?

Analysts agree that the three MSIs do have some public profile but not enough. To gauge how firmly established the various MSIs are in public conversation, we utilized a survey, administered by a media monitoring platform. It recorded the number of times each MSI was mentioned in over 270,000 online publications between mid-2016 and mid-2017, across the world and in Africa. The survey tracks keywords relevant to each MSI, and it measures media's "sentiment," ranking whether the coverage was positive, neutral, or negative.

Globally the three MSIs were mentioned a total number of 13,172 times (and in Africa 3,932 times) over that period. However, it is impossible to judge objectively whether or not this indicates a high profile since there is no comparable outside benchmark.

Comparing the three, the EITI showed the most prominent media profile, followed by the OGP. The APRM lagged far behind. Over this period, the EITI was mentioned 7,447 times globally, 4,125 times for the OGP, and just 1,600 times for the APRM. Meltwater's results for media coverage in Africa follow a similar pattern. The EITI also came out ahead, with 2,113 mentions during that same period, compared to 1,120 for the OGP and only 670 for the APRM. It is perhaps notable that close to two-thirds of the mentions of the APRM came from outside Africa – despite the APRM's connection to the continent.

Whether media coverage is related to public awareness and understanding of these initiatives is a separate question. Moreover, greater media coverage of MSI initiatives does not imply positive coverage. As we discuss in detail below, the survey found that a vast majority of reports were non-committal, that is, they were classified as being "neutral" in their approach.

### **APRM**

In the case of the APRM, there is little evidence, in the survey or elsewhere, to suggest sustained traction in the public mind, even in Africa. Outside Africa, the APRM is "almost completely unknown."<sup>12</sup> Flashes of public awareness stem from sensitization campaigns which tend to coincide with country reviews. Some strategies show imagination: South Africa set up a website on which ordinary people could send their own submissions, and Community Development Workers (a special cadre of civil servants trained to convey government messages) carried out surveys – ultimately not useable – and even produced an APRM song to promote greater public awareness.<sup>13</sup>

No country has invested more in the APRM than Ghana, the first country to be reviewed. During Ghana's review, there were extensive sensitization campaigns to make various stakeholder groups familiar with the process. The country's APRM Secretariat sought to make APRM materials available to researchers, and good media coverage was arranged for important milestones in the process, such as the arrival of the CRM.<sup>14</sup> Ghana made extensive use of radio to popularize the APRM, including broadcasts in local languages. A popular

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<sup>12</sup> Quote from Jonathan Fox, Director of the Accountability Research Centre at the School of International Service at American University, Washington, February 2, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert R and S Gruzd, *op. cit.*, pp. 281, 282-285, 287.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

version of the CRR was produced, and it was serialized in the news media.<sup>15</sup> Not only did Ghana keep its APRM Secretariat operational after its review (they are typically shut down after reviews are complete), but the government marketed itself as a repository of APRM-related skills, eager to share them with other countries.<sup>16</sup> Even in Ghana, this strategy was “seen... as an academic exercise, within the elite... full of political jargon.”<sup>17</sup> The Ghana efforts were also limited by inadequate planning, budget constraints, and a focus on urban areas.<sup>18</sup>

The APRM has failed to gain more than fleeting public attention. A journalist in 2008 wrote that the APRM organizers had failed to create “hub-bub” around a process that should have been vitally interesting to the country’s population, which he attributed to the South African government’s shutting out of civil society from the country’s first peer review.<sup>19</sup> “The result was that most media reported only sporadically on the APRM process ... There was no public clamor for more [information].”<sup>20</sup> Analysts in 2014 found that the APRM continued to have a marginal public profile, attributable to uncooperative governments shutting civil society and media out of the implementation of the NPoAs. They also blamed the lengthy, cumbersome APRM CRRs (350 pages on average), the difficulty journalists had in understanding technical details, and the failure of media to assign experienced journalists to cover the review process.<sup>21</sup>

Unnecessary delays also cause MSIs to lose media momentum.<sup>22</sup> Although Tanzania’s APRM CRR was concluded in 2013 and the PDF of the report was on the APRM’s website, it was not officially launched in Tanzania until 2017. By this time, the head of state had changed from Jakaya Kikwete to John Magufuli. The delay made the APRM old news and therefore harder to generate media coverage. When SAILA conducted a workshop in Dar es Salaam in 2015, bringing a box of printed CRRs, it was the first time many in civil society had laid eyes on the report. The APRM is now not even publishing its CRRs – the essence of its work – until they have been officially launched by the countries reviewed. The APRM rules stipulate that the reports should be released to the public no later than six months after they have been reviewed by the APR Forum. But APRM CEO Maloka says it is important to allow the national governments to launch their own country’s reports to give them a sense of ownership. Some fear governments could be using delaying tactics to bury the reports or let them go stale. Another related challenge is that the APRM has made few efforts to brand reforms, which could help to send a message that the APRM is, in fact, a vehicle for policy renewal. For both politicians and the public, the APRM can appear to be a poor investment for activist energy – and by implication, not worthy of extensive media coverage.

In sum, the APRM’s administrative problems undermined its appeal to the media and the public. The APRM concedes that outside the small clique of stakeholders, the APRM is “widely unknown.”<sup>23</sup> Another official privately acknowledged that the APRM has an “unsexy mandate” from the point of view of leaders and so is a “hard sell.” Too many leaders are content just to “tick the boxes” on the APRM’s list of governance conditions, without a sincere desire to actually implement reforms.<sup>24</sup> The CEO of the APRM Secretariat agrees, “There is not much being reported on the APRM,” though he asserts that the situation has improved from when he took over in January 2016, when there was a widespread impression “that APRM [was] dead.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Asante SKB, *The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM): a decade of Ghana’s experience*, Public Lecture at the South African Institute of International Affairs, University of the Witwatersrand, Republic of South Africa, September 8, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Asante SKB, *The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) as Africa’s Innovative Thinking on Governance: A Decade of Ghana’s Experience*, Tema: Digibooks, 2013, p. 202.

<sup>17</sup> Herbert R and S Gruzd, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>19</sup> Boyle B, *Making the news; why the African Peer Review Mechanism didn’t*, SAILA Occasional Paper, No. 12, September 2008, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-12.

<sup>22</sup> Between 2013 and 2015, no country reviews were conducted, and between 2008 and 2016, the Secretariat had no permanent Chief Executive Officer.

<sup>23</sup> Personal telephone interview with Liziwe Selana, head of APRM communications, July 25, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Personal telephone interview with official who asked to remain anonymous, July 25, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Personal interview with Prof Eddy Maloka, CEO of APRM Secretariat, APRM Secretariat, Midrand, July 25, 2017.

An analysis of the Meltwater news monitoring service for the period January 2017 to January 2018 supports this assertion. In this period, there were 607 mentions of the APRM on African-based news sites and 307 mentions in media outlets based outside of Africa. The total of 914 mentions is an average of 2.5 articles per day for the entire year.<sup>26</sup>

## OGP

The launch of the OGP by then US President Barack Obama at the UN in September 2011 and the OGP's three global summits since then have given it the highest public profile of the three MSIs discussed.<sup>27</sup> The OGP is conceived of as an initiative – among other things – to increase the free flow of information and public participation. Its Open Government Declaration commits “to 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,” and “to creating mechanisms to enable greater collaboration between governments and civil society organizations and businesses.”<sup>28</sup>

Measured against these aims, OGP has had some successes. Colombia committed to producing freedom of information legislation in its 2014-2015 NAP and did so.<sup>29</sup> Ireland committed to holding referenda, including one on legalizing same-sex marriage. This set a precedent for the direct involvement of citizens in deciding constitutional matters.<sup>30</sup> While the OGP is ostensibly contributing to debate, openness, and public empowerment, the outstanding question is whether the OGP has influenced these results, whether they would have occurred anyway, or whether the OGP occupies some sort of intermediate stage as a “platform” or an “accelerant,” as one study contends.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the OGP allows countries to include in their action plans existing initiatives complicates this further. Indeed, some countries have drawn criticism for having undertaken OGP NAPs that were merely rebranded programs already underway. Their NAPs have therefore been labeled as “unambitious.”<sup>32</sup>

The evidence suggests the OGP – whatever its impact -- has not established itself in the public consciousness of the countries in which it operates. The Meltwater survey suggests the OGP lags behind the EITI in profile, globally and in Africa. A 2013 global online survey of journalists found that well over two-thirds of respondents had never heard of the OGP – even though 70% of came from partner countries.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the OGP has certainly benefited from its association with former U.S. President Obama in countries like Brazil, the Philippines, and Tanzania, but more for politicians than for the general public. “I would say EITI had a higher profile in the Philippines. OGP may have had the higher profile in Tanzania initially, but interest has really waned.”<sup>34</sup> Fox argues that neither the OGP nor the EITI has captured the public imagination because

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<sup>26</sup> SAILA research using Meltwater, 22 March 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Skype interview with Alex Howard, deputy director of the Sunlight Foundation, July 26, 2018. Other analysts, however, are not so sure. Jonathan Fox believes the OGP launch was just a blip, now largely forgotten by all but insiders. Neither he nor his colleague Brandon Brockmyer believe either the OGP or the EITI have a particularly high public profile anywhere. “That said, I think it varies quite a bit country to country,” says Brockmyer. Email interview with Brandon Brockmyer, scholar in resident at the Accountability Research Center at the School of International Service at American University, Washington, February 2, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Open Government Partnership, *Open Government Declaration*, September 2011, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-government-declaration>, accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Republic of Colombia, “Action plan of the Government of Colombia,” Open Government Partnership, 2014, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Chari R, *Ireland: 2014-2016 End of Term Report* (version for public comment), Open Government Partnership, 2017, p. 19, [https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Ireland\\_EOTR\\_2014-16\\_ForPublicComment.pdf](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Ireland_EOTR_2014-16_ForPublicComment.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Brockmyer B and J Fox, *Assessing the evidence: the effectiveness and impact of public governance-oriented Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives*, London: Transparency and Accountability Initiative, 2015, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Price S, “Progress on Open Government Partnership?,” *Scoop politics*, October 15, 2015,

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1510/S00247/steven-price-progress-on-open-government-partnership.htm>; Corruption Watch, “SA falling short on OGP commitments,” [corruptionwatch.org.za](http://www.corruptionwatch.org.za), January 13, 2017, <http://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/sa-falling-short-ogp-commitments/>.

<sup>33</sup> Media Council, *The media and open government: partners or adversaries?*, 2013, p. 12, <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/OGP-Media-Council-Report.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Brockmyer B, 2018, *op. cit.*

“they are all largely technical exercises, limited to elites in national capitals whose potential connection to most people’s concerns is many, many steps removed.”<sup>35</sup> In general, analysts agree that the wider public regards these MSIs as dealing with rather esoteric, abstract issues like corruption and transparency.<sup>36</sup>

In its mid-term report of 2016, the OGP acknowledged that, although the initiative was increasing in popularity, its champions faced “low levels of understanding of open government and the national OGP process” in government and civil society. “High-level, public political commitment has not necessarily translated to ambitious reforms at the country level.”<sup>37</sup> OGP pointed out that just 17% of commitments in 2014–2016 OGP National Action Plans were “potentially transformative.” Only 5% were transformative, relevant, specific, and completed.<sup>38</sup>

The OGP has therefore also failed to make a very visible impression. A combination of limited ambition in OGP’s commitments and ambivalence as to whether actual policy reforms are indebted to the OGP have tended to discourage public interest. So do the doubtful democratic credentials of some of the participating states, including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan.<sup>39</sup> For the OGP to emerge as a noteworthy force in public debate, it will need to make the case that it can make a significant and positive difference in people’s lives.

## EITI

Finally, the EITI tops the list of media mentions in the Meltwater survey referred to above. While it is the most narrowly focused of the three MSIs, it deals with an important niche in the world’s political economy. For this reason, it holds the attention of some very influential stakeholders, such as large resources companies and governments whose economies are tied to trade in extractives. However, it has involved civil society in its operations and in recent years has been pushing ever harder for greater transparency in relation to extractive industries and their related resource flows. Indeed, the standard used to guide the work of the EITI has a protocol on civil society participation, which leaves no ambiguity that it has a right to participate in these processes.<sup>40</sup>

There is some evidence to suggest that civil society is indeed participating in EITI assessments. The 2016 *Validation Report* on Mongolia, for example, claims that EITI has helped facilitate “public debate and increased transparency.”<sup>41</sup> The coordinator of the Liberian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI) says communities are raising questions about how money is allocated and utilized and whether communities receive a fair return for their resources. Before LEITI, “there was no real forum where these types of discussions could take place ... now ... suspicion and distrust are being reduced, helping to diffuse the tensions that led to conflict...”<sup>42</sup>

Most analysts still do not believe that the EITI is getting enough media exposure or having enough impact on the societies in which it operates, however. The EITI is largely restricted to specialized media and experts.<sup>43</sup> Brockmyer (2018) adds, “Initially, EITI was high profile in places like Azerbaijan, Nigeria, and Liberia, although

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<sup>35</sup> Fox J, 2018, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Sims A, ; “Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta resigns the day after mass protests over nightclub fire,” *The Independent* (U.K.), November 4, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/victor-ponta-resigns-live-romanian-prime-minister-quits-day-after-mass-protests-over-nightclub-fire-a6720486.html>, accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Open Government Partnership, *Strategic refresh of the Open Government Partnership*, OGP website, December 2016, p. 17, [http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/OGP\\_Strategic-Refresh\\_Dec2016.pdf](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/OGP_Strategic-Refresh_Dec2016.pdf), accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> We elaborate on this point in the chapters below on How Are MSIs Responding? And Quiet Diplomacy Versus Naming and Shaming: The Danger of “Open Washing”

<sup>40</sup> EITI, *The EITI Standard 2016*, Oslo: the EITI International Secretariat, 2016, pp. 42-45.

<sup>41</sup> EITI, *Validation of Mongolia*, Oslo: EITI Secretariat, October 10, 2016, p. 2, [https://eiti.org/sites/default/files/documents/mongolia\\_validation\\_report\\_sdsd\\_11.11.164\\_0.pdf](https://eiti.org/sites/default/files/documents/mongolia_validation_report_sdsd_11.11.164_0.pdf), accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> EITI, *Impact of the EITI in Africa: stories from the ground*, Oslo: EITI International Secretariat, 2010, p. 5

<sup>43</sup> Howard A, 2017, *op. cit.*

it proved to be difficult to sustain broad public interest, in part due to the lack of meaningful outcomes and impacts.”<sup>44</sup> EITI reports tend to be overly technical. They do not present information in a way that facilitates debate and accountability. “The types of data being produced through these initiatives are usually too aggregate-level and abstract to be especially meaningful or actionable for the public.”<sup>45</sup> A 2011 EITI review concluded that “little impact at the societal level can be discerned... largely due to [EITI’s] lack of links with larger public sector reform processes and institutions.”<sup>46</sup>

The lack of real-world reforms attributable to all three MSIs is largely responsible for scant media coverage and limited public engagement. MSIs’ newsworthiness would be enhanced if cases of impact could be made. Capturing the public imagination is also related to the issue of legitimacy. There is a difference between how the MSIs are perceived by ordinary citizens and the media and how they are perceived by African governments and the continental “intelligentsia” involved in policy research or implementation. Initiatives perceived as externally driven, such as EITI and the OGP, are seen to lack legitimacy and thus are limited in impact.

In contrast, the rationale of the APRM was that it was an “African solution to African problems” rooted in the realities of the continent and empowering Africans to be agents of their own destiny. Ola Bello, an NGO director in Nigeria, thinks that targeted local initiatives and campaigns such as those that are trying to monitor budgets in Nigeria and Kenya may be doing a better job at transparency than initiatives like the EITI. The credibility of EITI’s scorecards and assessments has been challenged in countries like the DRC, Mozambique, and Nigeria.<sup>47</sup> Fox, however, offers a different view, noting that both the OGP and EITI are voluntary, opt-in initiatives and that in some African countries, they have managed to get more traction, even though they are global initiatives. “Some African governments have become quite engaged, such as EITI Nigeria.”<sup>48</sup>

These three MSIs have achieved some public profile, though more in some countries than in others. But overall, they have not really captured the public imagination and inspired widespread civic participation, for a wide variety of reasons. Some of these are practical and logistical, such as their reports are too technical or too abstract to engage the ordinary citizen. Some are administrative or financial, such as the failure of member governments to pay their dues. The MSIs also confront deeper political-related problems of legitimacy and of choosing the right strategies and tactics to increase their impact. The array of problems they confront is daunting which is perhaps not surprising, given their ambitious goals.

## **MEDIA’S ATTITUDES TOWARDS MSIS**

Media freedom, or the lack of it, is a challenge for MSIs, given the public nature of these initiatives. The survey also gauged media sentiment towards the three MSIs. It found media coverage to be largely non-committal, classifying well over 80% of reports as “neutral.” Of the small proportion of media outlets that expressed a view on the initiatives, the attitude tended to be negative. Globally, just 3.5% of media mentions of the EITI were positive as opposed to 9.3% which were negative. For the APRM, the corresponding figures were 4.38% and 6.17%. The OGP received rather more appealing coverage, with 8.3% of mentions being positive and 4% negative. Interestingly, in Africa, sentiment towards the EITI appears to be even more negative by this

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<sup>44</sup> Brockmyer B, 2018, *op. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Scanteam, *Achievements and strategic options: evaluation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative*, Oslo: Scanteam, 2011, p. 1, <https://eiti.org/sites/default/files/documents/2011-EITI-evaluation-report.pdf>, accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Brockmyer argues that “the EITI has lacked some legitimacy because the Western countries pushing for it have not implemented it themselves (although this is changing slowly). OGP fares slightly better on the legitimacy question, as countries from the global South, including Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, and the Philippines played a pretty major role in setting it up. It does make sense that African governments would see a home-grown initiative as more legitimate. Brockmyer B, 2018, *op. cit.*

admittedly imprecise measure; just 1.6% of media mentions were positive, while a substantially larger 13.9% were negative.<sup>49</sup>

What drives these attitudes and the generally neutral stance towards the initiatives? It is hard to say whether it reflects solid, objective journalism or indifference and ignorance. If media coverage reflects public feeling towards these initiatives, however, it does not suggest great popular confidence or engagement.

However, the media are certainly not neutral or indifferent on the question of what the MSIs should be doing about media freedom. Sambrook found a schism between the media and governments. His survey suggested support by journalists for greater government transparency and accountability, unsurprisingly, but also skepticism about politicians' ability to deliver it. "A poor track record by some member countries on free speech and media overshadows their commitments,"<sup>50</sup> he concluded. Respondents noted that OGP had been loose and flexible so far to attract new members. For journalists and editors, the OGP is failing to deliver on the core issue of concern for them, undermining its own credibility.

Other evidence confirms that the public impact of the MSIs is often constrained by the restrictions many governments impose on media and civil society, despite their nominal commitment to openness and participation. This inhibits the MSIs from being truly effective. One study, focused on Africa and the APRM, showed that overall, APRM participants had shown some noticeable improvements in governance between 2003 and 2015, even though in absolute terms many of them continued to experience grave problems. Improvements in economic terms are not automatically matched by improvements in democracy and civil liberties.<sup>51</sup> Brockmyer observes that some governments seek "to limit civic participation to only a few choice organizations" - for instance, Twaweza in Tanzania's OGP.<sup>52</sup>

Howard notes that this is not a problem confined to developing states, citing the growing intolerance of diverse viewpoints that has accompanied the rise of nationalism in Western countries, including his own. The US's withdrawal from the EITI in 2017 is just one example of diminishing public access to government, he says, although curbs on freedom of expression are worse elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> Bello is more sanguine: "If governments clamp down on traditional media," he argues, "there are so many other media by which you can get out information." Fox doubts that governance reform can be driven by social media all by itself. "Is social media space unrelated to civil society space? Authoritarian governments are often very active in controlling social media,"<sup>54</sup> he adds. Bello's brave optimism aside, it seems axiomatic that these MSIs, almost by definition, can only fully flourish in an environment of free expression. They are all three, after all, dedicated to greater transparency. Greater media freedom is both a means and an end for them.

## QUIET DIPLOMACY VERSUS NAMING AND SHAMING

Is there a place in the arsenal of these MSIs for occasional "quiet diplomacy?" Can they try privately to persuade recalcitrant governments to become more open? It seems counter-intuitive; most stakeholders would prefer more rather than less exposure. But if MSIs engage with powerful interests, can they offer nothing much beyond the power of persuasion? Are there instances in which restraint is prudent? Is maximum publicity always an advisable strategy?

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<sup>49</sup> Meltwater explains that "Our system uses a natural language processor to assign a sentiment to each article. If a negative keyword is associated with the topic then the system assigns a negative sentiment (and vice versa for positive keywords). It is not a perfect science but a rough estimate based on AI learning."

<sup>50</sup> Sambrook R, 'Why journalists need the Open Government Partnership to help them', *The Guardian*, October 20, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/media-blog/2013/oct/20/journalists-open-government-partnership>.

<sup>51</sup> Turianskyi Y, *The state of governance in Africa: what indices tell us*, SAIIA Occasional Paper, No 232, May 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Brockmyer B, 2018, *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Howard A, 2017, *op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> Fox J, 2017, *op. cit.*

Eddie Rich, the EITI's deputy head, suggests that a confidential approach out of the media's glare can be more useful in persuading reluctant governments to play ball.<sup>55</sup> Alex Howard concedes that "quiet diplomacy" through trusted peers exerting behind-the-scenes pressure on those in power can sometimes be more effective than a high volume of negative media in persuading them to move towards greater transparency. "Too much sun can damage the young shoots of growing transparency and good governance," Howard concedes. Fox notes that "the OGP gently nudged Azerbaijan and Turkey for an extended period before going public."<sup>56</sup> Brockmyer believes MSIs need to go further in holding participant governments accountable when they violate the rules of participation. "These MSIs will lose legitimacy if their (already weak) rules for participation can be ignored. Countries should be given some chances to show improvement before being de-listed/de-certified, but that option needs to be used where appropriate." Fox is more sympathetic, noting that OGP has been more proactive than EITI against recalcitrant states like Azerbaijan and Turkey. But he also raises a pertinent, structural question; "What does 'holding to account' mean when these MSIs are voluntary and have no teeth?"<sup>57</sup> Even so, they can at least attract public attention and approval by taking action against backsliders. EITI received a great deal of coverage as a result of its dramatic action against Azerbaijan, which showed that the EITI was taking its duties seriously.

The EITI captured the most attention in the United States on November 2, 2017, when the US announced it was discontinuing EITI implementation while remaining a supporter of the EITI internationally.<sup>58</sup> However, most companies declined to report their payments to governments in exchange for oil, gas, and mineral concessions. The Dodd-Frank Act, which came into effect in 2010, would have compelled oil, gas, and mining companies listed on US stock exchanges to disclose the royalties and taxes they pay to the United States and foreign governments in order to extract natural resources, including those that are publicly owned. The US Securities and Exchange Commission had not yet issued the regulations to implement the legislation because of disagreements among stakeholders. In 2017, Dodd-Frank was "vacated" which meant that any disclosures of payments to governments by US companies, under the EITI, would have to be voluntary. The US subsequently decided to withdraw from implementing the EITI.<sup>59</sup> Howard complained that the EITI itself should have been more critical of the US decision.<sup>60</sup>

Eddie Rich responded by stressing that the EITI is an MSI which is trying to disclose information right across the value chain, not just creating space for civil society. Countries where repression is the highest struggle the most to have good management of the extractive sector.<sup>61</sup> If the EITI were to kick out countries with imperfect civic space, it would quickly lose its ability to dialogue with them and perhaps influence the transparency of their extractive industries and the expansion of civic space. In the case of Azerbaijan, EITI concluded that the space for civil social engagement had eventually reached a point where multi-stakeholder dialogue became too difficult. Its membership was suspended on March 9, 2017.<sup>62</sup> Brockmyer cautions, however, that although "MSIs offer space for frank discussions and problem-solving between governments and civil society... it is very easy for participating governments to use MSIs to 'open-wash.' In these cases, it is appropriate for MSIs to publicly criticize participating governments."<sup>63</sup> However, he notes that the OGP, in particular, has set the bar low enough for countries to remain members while actually doing very little to reform governance. Some APRM officials have privately said the same, complaining that unlikely countries, notably highly repressive

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<sup>55</sup> Rich E, 2017, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> Fox J, 2018, *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> Fox J, 2017, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> EITI chair statement on United States withdrawal from the EITI, <https://eiti.org/news/eiti-chair-statement-on-united-states-withdrawal-from-eiti>, accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> The EITI Chair, Fredrik Reinfeldt, expressed his disappointment at the decision, which he said, "sends the wrong signal" EITI chair statement, *op. cit.*

<sup>60</sup> He also notes that EITI "took years to suspend [Azerbaijan], which was imprisoning civil society participants." He also laments that a number of countries "which have bad records on ... good governance, human rights and press freedom" nonetheless remain within the EITI Howard A, 2018, *op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup> Telephone interview with Eddie Rich, deputy director of EITI, February 2, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Brockmyer B, 2018, *op. cit.*



Equatorial Guinea, have volunteered to join the APRM only as a public-relations exercise with no intention of actually being peer-reviewed.

Evidently then, for the MSIs, as for diplomats, trying to coax reluctant governments and big corporations to improve their governance and to become more transparent requires a delicate balance of carrot and stick for which there is no one-size-fits-all template. It demands political skill and judgment.

## HOW ARE MSIS RESPONDING?

All three MSIs are acutely aware of the need to heighten their public profile. Each is attempting to use both old and new avenues to secure media and public attention.

The APRM appointed a new communication director with extra staff and started “embedding” journalists in CRMs in order to gain more publicity. Nonetheless, the APRM lacks the resources to pursue the media strategy he envisioned. The APRM’s source of funding comes from contributions from the 37 member countries, but many simply do not pay their annual dues, so the Secretariat is constantly seeking donations from other sources.<sup>64</sup> In response to critics who complain its reports are not easily readable, the APRM plans to produce more readable reports, including four-page extracts of lengthy reports targeted for specific audiences, such as youth.<sup>65</sup>

The OGP Support Unit is trying to help its national members improve their communication work (many had limited staff) in order to reach beyond immediate stakeholders like governments, corporations, and interested NGOs to the wider public. Stephanie Bluma, the OGP’s chief communications and campaign officer, explained that the head office was providing training and tools as well as small stipends to member countries and civil society groups.<sup>66</sup> She further said that OGP is relying on social media, especially Instagram, as a more direct route to the public.<sup>67</sup> In response to criticism that the OGP should be doing more to reach the wider public, including better branding of its successes, the OGP’s 2016 *Strategic Refresh* called for a communications strategy that “should support the sharing of best practices, give credit when transformational reforms are implemented, and galvanize a movement of OGP reformers internationally, nationally and locally... If OGP is to build a movement for open government, its communications strategy needs to make a global and national impact.”<sup>68</sup>

The EITI, for its part, adopted a new organizational standard in 2013, which required national multi-stakeholder groups to submit annual work plans and activity reports. This was a measure responding to EITI’s self-critical report about its failure to reach a wider public and influence public policy. The new standard obliged EITI reports to include revenue collection by company, region, subnational transfers, and other types of disaggregated reporting. The EITI updated this standard again in 2016, with new disclosure requirements on “beneficial ownership,” i.e. an obligation to reveal who really owns assets, such as funds held by a nominee bank or shares held in the name of a brokerage firm. This was in response to the revelations in the Panama Papers and other similar leaks of information about how much money prominent political and business leaders were stashing abroad. The EITI also introduced a new validation system to recognize countries that exceed its requirements. The EITI secretariat tracks its own coverage in the media through the Factiva monitoring service. Eddie Rich, EITI’s deputy head, notes that from February 2017 to April 2017, the EITI was mentioned

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> SAIIA APRM Toolkit website, <http://www.aprmtoolkit.saiia.org.za/>, accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>66</sup> OGP website, ‘Increasing role of media and civil society in Open Government Partnership initiatives’, March 16, 2017, <http://ogp.org.az/index.php/2017/03/16/increasing-role-of-media-and-civil-society-in-open-government-partnership-initiatives/>, accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>67</sup> Email interview with Stephanie Bluma, OGP’s chief communications and campaign officer, February 2, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

in publications, web news, and blogs 1,120 times (more than double the 550 mentions in the same period in the previous year).

The EITI media coverage is closely linked to specific events. The EITI was mentioned most in the context of controversies, so Azerbaijan came up 209 times, Nigeria (where there is constant turmoil around oil and gas extraction) 185 times, and the United States 154 times. "We try looking not only at numbers, but also at countries and main news outlets. With regard to social media (Facebook and Twitter), we look at numbers but also highlight the top mention to see what people are mainly interested in."<sup>69</sup> The EITI's 2017 work plan includes initiatives to expand media outreach both directly and through the wider dissemination of the EITI's reports on its web portals.<sup>70</sup> Victor Ponsford, Communication Officer in the EITI International Secretariat, said that EITI's Twitter audience grew by more than 10% in 2017, while mentions in the national press also increased. Ponsford said the drop in global commodity prices had reduced interest in international mainstream media, though EITI's "groundbreaking" requirements on disclosing beneficial ownership and growing social media had filled the gap.<sup>71</sup>

The EITI's main contribution to the media remains its huge database that collates information from 370 financial years of extractive industry companies and about 50 countries. This is a mine of information for journalists and others to reveal the transparency, or lack thereof, of companies and governments. The EITI has made this data trove more media- and public-friendly by greatly increasing the amount of summary data, including visualizations. Two partner institutions, the Natural Resource Governance Institute and Adam Smith International, began hosting EITI reports on their data portals in 2017.<sup>72</sup>

A good system of media monitoring is an invaluable tool. Properly utilized, it can make a profound contribution to activity planning, enabling MSI officials to intervene at strategic moments to showcase their organizations' value. Dietlind Lerner noted that the OGP used Meltwater to keep abreast of media traffic. "We put together a weekly summary of the most interesting hits, which often inform our outreach as we travel."<sup>73</sup>

The three MSIs are aware of their lack of media impact and are trying hard to address it, using an array of public relations-like strategies, mainly focused on making their reports more relevant, topical, and accessible. Yet, they could and should do more. Activist Deus Kibamba argues the APRM must progress from being a mere public relations exercise to becoming "democratized" with much greater public participation. The same could be said for the OGP and EITI. He recommends writing shadow reports, instigating more collaboration among stakeholders and using local languages to inform the public.<sup>74</sup> Ousmane Déme recommended similar methods, including wider use of indigenous languages, in the formative years of the APRM.<sup>75</sup>

Analysts generally agree that these MSIs have to deal with the problem that to the public their work seems to be too far removed from their daily concerns. The public does not necessarily perceive that issues of transparency, corruption, and accountability have a direct impact on the quality of services they receive or the opportunities they have for improving their lifestyles and overcoming poverty.<sup>76</sup> Analysts mostly agree, too, that another hindrance to media coverage and public engagement is the general lack of real-world reforms

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<sup>69</sup> Rich E, 2017, *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> EITI International Secretariat, *International Secretariat 2017 work plan*, Oslo: EITI, November 25, 2016, [https://eiti.org/sites/default/files/documents/2017\\_eiti\\_international\\_workplan\\_and\\_budget\\_en.pdf](https://eiti.org/sites/default/files/documents/2017_eiti_international_workplan_and_budget_en.pdf), accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>71</sup> Email interview with Victor Ponsford, EITI Communications Officer, February 5, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Lerner D, 2016, *op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> Interviewed with Deus Kibamba, Dar es Salaam, September 30, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> Déme O, *Between Hope and Scepticism – Civil Society and the African Peer Review Mechanism*, Partnership Africa Canada, October 2005, p. 39.

<sup>76</sup> Sims A, ; Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta resigns the day after mass protests over nightclub fire, *The Independent* (U.K.), November 4, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/victor-ponta-resigns-live-romanian-prime-minister-quits-day-after-mass-protests-over-nightclub-fire-a6720486.html>, accessed February 7, 2018.

attributable to MSIs. As has been noted, the claims of the impact of MSIs are not uncontroversial. MSIs' newsworthiness would be greatly enhanced, nonetheless, if cases could be made and marketed.

But there are also wider governance constraints, some beyond the power of the MSIs to change on their own. The central question is the relationship between transparency and accountability. Although political will plays a major role in allowing the transition from transparency to accountability, the country's political infrastructure often obstructs or retards this transition. Lindstedt and Naurin<sup>77</sup> argue that "transparency" (openness of governments about information) can lead to greater "publicity" (actual coverage of government information by the media) and hence, to greater government "accountability" but only where there is freedom of the media and where accountability institutions, such as the judiciary, are properly functioning.

Fox concurs, stating that four bottlenecks hinder the translation of greater transparency (greater information about governance) into greater accountability, or actions to improve governance: in practice, government commitment to these MSIs is often weak or inconsistent; governmental accountability institutions may be too weak or too captured to act based on relevant information disclosures; it is hard to translate open data into actionable information, and MSIs are bargaining processes where CSO technical sophistication is key, but expertise is no substitute for political clout.<sup>78</sup> Brockmyer, on his part, underscores the point that MSIs are not well suited to capturing the public imagination on their own; they are simply too technocratic.<sup>79</sup> The two analysts propose that transparency and governance activists should ally themselves with mass action protests and other civic actions to mobilize greater public engagement for addressing transparency and governance challenges. Fox says that after citizen action has put serious good governance reforms on the agenda, tech-savvy MSI participants have a great deal to offer in filling in the details. "MSI participants have a great deal to offer here because of their potential capacity to check the fine print to see whether or not governments actually walk the walk. Here, the OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism sets a precedent with its progress reports on whether governments actually do what they promise in their Action Plans."<sup>80</sup>

MSIs could do more to raise their public profiles and engage the citizenry in pushing for greater transparency and better governance, but that would require them to enter strategic alliances with social action groups. Ultimately, attaining the goals of good governance and transparency requires favorable political conditions that probably lie beyond the province of the MSIs.

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<sup>77</sup> Lindstedt C and D Naurin, 'Transparency is not Enough: Making Transparency Effective in Reducing Corruption', *International Political Science Review*, 31 (3), 2010, pp, 301-322.

<sup>78</sup> Fox, J, 'From transparency to accountability? Assessing how international multi-stakeholder initiatives are contributing to public governance', <http://www.transparency-initiative.org/archive/news/from-transparency-to-accountability-assessing-how-international-multi-stakeholder-initiatives-are-contributing-to-public-governance>, accessed February 7, 2018.

<sup>79</sup> Brockmyer B, 2018, *op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Open Governance Partnership, "From transparency to accountability?," <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/transparency-accountability>, accessed February 5, 2018.

# CONCLUSION

Making MSIs more accessible to ordinary people entails a wide range of approaches, some practical and logistical, others more tactical and strategic. The former includes assiduously cultivating journalists to improve their expertise in governance issues. It could also entail sponsoring journalists to cover key events. Practical approaches should also include improving the presentation of information, such as by making reports more digestible to the public by making them shorter, using vernacular language and infographics, or by serializing key issues via in-depth newspaper reporting.

Part of this effort must include ramping up the presence of these MSIs on social media. A survey of media attention by Meltwater during May 2017 showed that mentions of MSIs in social media were about half those in conventional media. Yet social media is closer to the public, bypassing the filters of journalism so that those social media mentions are more likely to mean citizens themselves are involved in the conversation.<sup>81</sup> Reaching the public also means that these three MSIs must translate their work into terms that vividly demonstrate the impact of corruption and bad governance generally on peoples' lives, demonstrate their successes, and explain how improved accountability is related to safer, more prosperous societies.

All this will require more resources. A disquieting discovery of this inquiry has been that many APRM member countries are not paying their dues, hampering the work of the secretariat. They must face some consequences for this - by being called out at the very least. Not all OGP governments are making their obligatory financial contributions either, although donations from private foundations have so far managed to make up the shortfall. Nevertheless, such failures to pay their way undermine the commitment of these countries to the OGP values and therefore to the credibility of the initiative.

This report has also argued that political will or commitment to reform is necessary to make the transition from transparency into accountability. Countries may sign on to these MSIs without having any firm commitment to introducing governance reforms.

“Quiet diplomacy” should be the first resort in tackling such countries. But MSIs need to be vigilant about “open-washing” and call out member governments and corporations, which continue to practice it, despite being quietly asked not to. APRM officials have mused, privately, about doing so, possibly by expelling such countries from the APRM if they join but do not submit to peer review within a certain time or if they do permit themselves to be reviewed but do not make a real effort to meet their commitments. But nothing appears to have come of these ideas. Certainly, within the APRM, disqualification is probably politically impossible, but countries with no commitment to introducing governance reforms should at least be named and shamed.

These three governance MSIs all have great technical know-how, but they lack political clout. To translate theory into action, they need to hitch themselves to wider social and civic movements – even to mass protests – which do have such clout. This suggestion may go beyond the scope of this report. However, it does have some bearing on our topic – the media impact of MSIs – insofar as, ultimately, these MSIs will not capture the public imagination or really engage the citizenry in their efforts to improve governance and transparency unless they can demonstrate the success of their endeavors. That is the virtuous cycle they have to help set in motion.

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<sup>81</sup> EITI and OGP are using social media more to reach target audiences.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing conclusions, this report suggests the following recommendations for the media to strengthen public awareness and support for MSIs:

1. MSIs should cultivate relationships with interested and concerned journalists, explaining to the public the real-world application of what they are attempting to achieve.
2. Media strategies should take into account the limited capacity the media has for processing large volumes of data. Short, targeted pieces (press releases, blog posts, etc.) will likely get more attention.
3. The use of widely spoken languages (rather than official languages, in many countries) can help to get messages directly to the general population.
4. Radio should be utilized as a vital medium for reaching rural areas and less-educated citizens, especially in Africa.
5. A robust presence on social media, especially one that encourages input and interaction with the public, is increasingly important for the public to get more involved and demand governments and corporations to comply with their international commitments.
6. MSIs must focus more attention on branding and advertising their successes; they must show results, the more concrete, the better.
7. MSIs should counter efforts by countries and corporations to “open-wash.” These efforts could include disqualifying members who do not implement reform proposals or close down space for CSOs.
8. MSIs and the media should shift their attention from merely informing the public about the state of transparency and governance in member countries towards mobilizing citizens to use MSIs as levers for improving transparency and governance.

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