**Minutes of Meeting 25th April 2013 of Civil Society members on OGP**

**(agreed by attendees at meeting of 30th April 2013)**

**Attendance:** Ivan Cooper, Paul Deane, Nuala Haughey, Nat O’Connor (Chair), Denis Parfenov, Tom Stewart, Jane Suiter.

**Apologies:**Hilary Minch, Martin Wallace

**Background:** The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the process of civil society engagement with the Open Government Partnership following:

* the discussion in our last civil society meeting (21st March 2013)
* email exchange between John Devitt (28th March 2013) and Denis Parfenov (5th April 2013) ([here](https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups=#%21topic/open-government-ireland/Ja9EWPAI7Bk))
* the letter from the Department of Enterprise and Reform (DPER) of 11th April 2013 ([here](https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups=#%21topic/open-government-ireland/2zR87uHukaA))
* the meeting on 12th April 2013 in DPER and consequent email exchange on 18th April 2013 ([here](https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups=#%21topic/open-government-ireland/ZHNvpuPGQeE))

**1.       Introductions**

**2.       General remarks:**

We noted that the purpose of the meeting was to focus on the process of civil society engagement with OGP and how we can work together to make that as successful as possible. We also discussed, without reaching a conclusion, that there is a difference between the process of civil society consultation and public/citizens consultation with Government involving town hall meetings and live streaming etc.

There was discussion about how to ensure that the civil society network coordinator is unbiased and independent and how we have an important opportunity to have an exemplary process.  Expression of public cynicism in other countries was noted in relation to what were perceived elsewhere as ‘closed’ processes between a selection of civil society organisations and Government. This risk was exacerbated by government funding of civil society. It was suggested that in order to counteract this, it may be useful to see the OGP process as an opportunity for civil society organisations to exhibit best practice by being open and transparent themselves, such as by publishing their accounts, stating who funds them, etc. Likewise, there was broad consensus that such risks could be minimised by implementing some guiding principles (see below) around openness and inclusiveness in CSO engagement with the OGP process and the role of the coordinator of the civil society network.

There was a consensus that the successful outcome of OGP will promote citizen engagement, trust, transparency and accountability, and will promote international recognition of Ireland’s proactive and forward-thinking governance.

3.       **Principles:** These were some of the broad principles upon which there was general agreement regarding how the Civil Society Network would work:

* The civil society network and will be fully open and inclusive, so that anyone could join.
* Its deliberations will be open and transparent, including a high level of visibility online (eg agendas and minutes being online for scrutiny by the wider network and interested public).
* Working groups are likely to be formed to tease out action plan wishes under the different OGP themes.
* A smaller steering group will be put in place through a process involving all members of the civil society network.

The further issue was raised whether participants of both the ‘civil society network’ and the ‘civil society steering committee’ will contribute to its workings as ‘members’ of organisations and/or civil society (rather than as ‘representatives’)

4.       **Role of Civil Society Network Coordinator:**Given that DPER intends to tender for the coordination of the civil society network, there was a discussion about the need to ensure that the co-ordinator be unbiased and independent (to the extent that ’pure’ independence is possible to achieve in any objective sense;). There was a general consensus that the coordinator should facilitate the process in a manner that is open, transparent and accountable. This would help minimise risk that the coordinator might place emphasis in a draft action plan on a topic which they had a particular professional interest in.  We agreed by consensus that by adhering to the following guiding principles the independence of this coordinating role could be achieved:

* The co-ordinator role is non-profit
* The successful candidate or organisation should have no strong bias or agenda (as discussed above)
* The co-ordinator keeps a diary of all meetings.
* The co-ordinator puts all documents online (Agendas, Minutes, Discussion, Receipts, Invoices and other documents) for public viewing and comment.
* The co-ordinator reports back to the civil society network steering group
* Draft documents will have to be approved by the steering group, in a transparent way (including documents being open for comments online)
* Decisions of the steering group will in turn need to be documented clearly and be visible and open for comments online for the benefit of the wider network and general public

[Note: As the meeting did not trying to draw up a definite list on the workings of the co-ordinator, these bullet points are not intended to be exhaustive].

5.       **Action Plan:** There was agreement that the OGP Action Plan should contain S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound) actions that actually get implemented. Recognising that the Government will only accept some part of civil society’s wish list, or less ideal versions of proposed actions, it was stressed that there needs to be an inbuilt feedback mechanism from the Government side to civil society, even if that is limited to paragraph-length explanations or justifications for why proposed actions from the wish list are being diluted or not proceeded with in the plan.

6.       **Action Plan Annex**: In recognition that civil society’s ‘wish lists’ for the OGP action plan may not all make the final cut for implementation for year one, there was consensus that there should be an official Annex as part of each year’s Action Plan, which could contain the remaining wish list and the more ideal/‘gold standard’ versions of actions that are in the plan. This would ensure continued discussion and debate about the ideals every year when the plan is reviewed and renewed for the following year.  We also discussed openness to minority reports or different views being documented, to capture the different preferences or versions of proposed actions that are likely to emerge. (Tom to dig out OGP text on this)

7.       **Next Steps:**Draft a one page letter to DPER identifying our broad consensus on the issues discussed regarding CSO engagement with OGP process.( Nuala to draft and circulate/post online for sending to DPER on Monday 29th April.)