Speech of Mariam Sikharulidze, IRM researcher

Open Governance Partnership, otherwise referred to as - OGP, is a voluntary international initiative and platform, aiming to commit its members to empower citizens, promote transparency, fight corruption, and introduce e-tools for enhanced democracies. Established by 8 founding members in 2011, currently it counts 79 member states. OGP has adopted a unique partnership model, as Governments and NGOs jointly implement initiatives and activities in the member countries. Georgia became OGP member state in 2011 and has implemented 4 action plans since then. Along with national, country-level membership and initiatives, local OGP Programs started in 2016 with 15 participants, including Tbilisi as one of its pioneers.

Independent Reporting Mechanism – IRM, is OGP's accountability mechanism to hold OGP governments to account and learn, and track OGP progress in respective countries. IRM is interested in particular whether:

- Formulation, implementation and monitoring of action plans is collaborative and open;
- Action plans are relevant, accountable and verifiable; and
- More ambitious actions are getting done.

OGP in Tbilisi

Tbilisi is one of pioneers to join OGP through the subnational Government Pilot Program in 2016, and implemented its first Action Plan in 2017. It was a one year, pilot Action Plan, which saw limited completion. At the end of the first action plan, the second Action Plan for years 2018-2020 was launched, which is currently being implemented and the design of which was assessed by IRM last year.

How was Tbilisi Action Plan 2 Developed?

Along with the local CSOs, Tbilisi City Hall is the key government agency responsible for overseeing OGP activities at a subnational level. The Action Plan was developed by OGP Multi-stakeholder Forum, which is a permanent coordination mechanism for OGP in Tbilisi. It is jointly managed by CSO and Government representatives. It is noteworthy that together with the City Hall, a CSO representative was elected to co-chair the forum, with the purpose to make the Forum more balanced. During the development of the second

Action Plan, 6 multi-stakeholder forum meetings and 12 public consultations were held with roughly 300 citizens in Tbilisi. It should be noted that, there were 3 unfinished commitments carried forward from the first Action Plan, with 2 new additional initiatives proposed by the CSOs during the forum meetings. Overall, the action plan development was a collaborative process, where citizens were allowed to engage in the Action Plan development.

However, along with ensuring public consultations and stakeholder meetings, the following gaps and areas for improvement were identified in the Action Plan development process:

1. The Need for higher level political engagement in the multi-stakeholder forum work, by participation of at least the deputy mayor in at least some of the working group meetings, to ensure high level presence and recognition of open governance;
2. There is low general awareness on OGP and relevant activities among public, and there is need for stronger communication and public relations activities; So, Tbilisi City Hall could benefit from raising awareness on specific commitments and OGP in general, targeting both CSOs and citizens.
3. The research showed that Tbilisi residents lack information and feedback on how the outcomes of public consultations were reflected in the Action Plan.

OGP in Tbilisi

Main themes of both Action Plan 1 and 2 are the same, which include: enhanced civic participation in the decision-making, introduction of electronic mechanisms for increased access to information and public services, and increased transparency in governance practices. Both of the Action Plans have 5 commitments, however there were 3 uncompleted commitments from the first action plan, which were incorporated and carried forward to the second. One of the most successful initiatives and milestones of the Action Plan 1 was "Your Idea for the City Mayor" – which allowed citizens to submit proposals to the City Hall, with 8,604 proposals submitted since 2018.

Action Plan 2 includes the following commitments in particular:

1. Mobile app – SMART MAP – It will be an Interactive map, which will provide information on construction projects, green cover - tree cutting or planting, and infrastructural projects. The mobile app incorporates "Fix Tbilisi" – a tool to submit appeals, and "Tbilisi Forum" – to discuss issues among the citizens.
2. Participatory Budgeting Portal was designed to support evidence-based budgeting. It aims to allow citizens rate thematic budget areas, identify citizens budget priorities and voting characteristics, and to support evidence-based budgeting.
3. Web portal for increased access to the City Hall services – includes multiple services and information from different City Hall departments in a single location.

Users will be able to register online through a personal account and modify and select services based on their interests. Portal will allow users to submit feedback for the City Hall to improve its services. And, consequentially, the City Hall will summarize and publish analysis of citizens' feedback.

4. Strategy to Improve Transparent Governance - The initiative was proposed and implemented by CSOs; The document aims to define transparent governance standards and entails development of an action plan and monitoring framework.

5. Open Data Portal and User-Friendly City Hall Web Site – similarly to the previous commitment, this initiative was also proposed and implemented by a local CSO. It foresees an update of the City Hall Web Site and introduction of new version of Public Information Page. It also involves creation of a new Open Data Page to publish government-held information.

Unlike the first Action Plan, in the second one, two CSOs share the responsibility together with the City Hall to implement two commitments, which is a positive step for strengthening the co-creation process and the collaboration between the government and the civil society organizations.

Based on identified gaps and areas for improvement, IRM has developed number of recommendations regarding the Action Plan 2, which include:

- Publicity events and distribution of promotional materials, in order to increase public awareness on OGP in general and particular activities within the action plan.
- It is important to have detailed management system and clearly defined OGP roles at the City Hall, which will ensure long-term sustainability of commitments and smooth management.
- It is important to increase transparency and public engagement in decision-making processes, especially in important infrastructural projects, to increase trust and transparent governance practices.
- High-level political engagement in the OGP processes, to ensure commitment and sustainability of commitments as well as OGP.
- Invite other Civil Society Organizations not currently involved in the OGP to become members of the Multi-stakeholder forum and to expand the scope of OGP.
- Effective communication with Public and CSOs on feedback and comments provided by them is critical to develop meaningful process and sense of continuity among public.
- Use OGP as an opportunity to showcase important initiatives at the City Hall and make sure that important initiatives implemented within the frames of OGP do not go unnoticed.

The full IRM Design report for Tbilisi 2018-2020 is available online: https://bit.ly/2YCD8wi where you can read recommendations and the analysis in detail.

<u>Looking Ahead: next is the production of Tbilisi Implementation Report 2018-2020</u>

Implementation of the on-going Action Plan will end in August 2020 and the evaluation will follow.

<u>Key points for assessment will be:</u>

- Completion status of the Action Plan – if all the activities were implemented on time;
- To which extent were citizens empowered and allowed increased access to public information;
- If there is enhanced Civic Participation and Public Accountability as a result of implemented commitments;
- To which extent was there the use of new technology and innovation for Transparency and Accountability;
- Did the commitments open government?

The final assessment report is expected to be available in December 2020.