

AKHALTSIKHE, GEORGIA

# Action plan – Akhaltsikhe, Georgia, 2021 – 2021

6th August 2021

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## Overview

### At-a-Glance

Action Plan: Action plan – Akhaltsikhe, Georgia, 2021 – 2021

Action Plan Submission: 2021

Action Plan End: October 2021

Lead Institution: Legal and Administrative Department, Mayor's Office

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## Description

### Duration

Oct 2021

### Date Submitted

28th July 2021

### Foreword(s)

Since Georgia became a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011, the country has made significant steps towards transparent, accountable, and participatory government at the national

and local level. Akhaltsikhe Municipality was one of the first five municipalities to join the National Action Plan (NAP) of 2016-2018, implementing commitments on increasing public participation in municipal spending. In 2018-2019, Akhaltsikhe Municipality took a commitment to adopt a strategy and action plan for improving transparency and integrity, as well as to advance open data practices, and support participation of persons with disabilities in political and social life. A member of the OGP Forum, Akhaltsikhe has actively collaborated with the governmental agencies and civil society organizations (CSOs) in a multi-stakeholder format to support co-creation process both in drafting, implementing, and monitoring of the NAPs.

In accordance with the OGP process, Georgia underlined fight against corruption and strengthening democratic governance at the local level as one of the top priorities under the 2019-2020 National Anti-Corruption Strategy and the 2020-2025 Decentralization Strategy. The latter emphasizes the importance of increasing transparency, accountability, public participation and strengthening evidence-based policy-making. We express our readiness to show our commitment to Georgia's strategic priorities by joining OGP Local cohort along with two other municipalities (Ozurgeti and Khoni). We are committed to reflecting the priorities outlined in the two strategic documents on eradicating corruption at the local level and increasing transparency and integrity of the municipal government by taking two commitments under the 2021 OGP Local Action Plan. Together with its partners, Akhaltsikhe will ensure the multi-sectoral collaborative process around the implementation and the monitoring of the 2021 OGP Local Action Plan.

## **Open Government Challenges, Opportunities and Strategic Vision**

### **What is the long-term vision for open government in your context and jurisdiction?**

Akhaltsikhe Municipality is committed to strengthening democratic governance at the local level through improving transparency, accountability and integrity of its institutions. Improving the existing system of accountability and integrity primarily entails establishing tools for rapid and efficient response to corruption risks and strengthening anti-corruption standards and practices in the Mayor's Office and its affiliated institutions. In addition, the Municipality strives to improve the relationship between the local authorities and the public and to strengthen public trust in governance by making ambitious steps towards more openness and inclusion. In the era of technological innovation, the Municipality envisions improving the quality of service delivery by introducing e-services and ensuring better access to municipal programs. In short, the municipality has three priority directions:

- Eliminating corruption risks and strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms at the local level;
- Increasing accountability and transparency of local authorities;
- Increasing citizen participation in the decision-making process.

**What are the achievements in open government to date (for example, recent open government reforms)?**

Within the framework of OGP National Action Plans (NAPs), Akhaltsikhe Municipality made significant steps towards open government. Under the Georgia's 2016-2018 OGP NAP, the Municipality successfully introduced Estonian e-participation platform "VOLIS", which allows the citizens to submit proposals to be funded from the municipal budget. The platform was introduced with support of USAID's Good Governance Initiative in Georgia (GGI) in partnership with the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI).

Akhaltsikhe adopted a 2019-2020 Transparency and Integrity Strategy and Action Plan of the Mayor's Office with the help from the civil society sector. The Strategy underlines six main directions including enhancement of transparency standards. In line with one of the priority areas, the Municipality adopted an Open Data Action Plan in 2019. The Municipality continues to publish more information in open data format on the municipal website and train the relevant staff. The Mayor's Office also made active steps to improve participation of people with disabilities in the political and social life of the Municipality.

Additionally, the Internal Audit Unit of the Mayor's Office developed training modules on ethics in public service for the staff and the employees of the subordinate legal entities. While COVID-19 pandemic interfered with the capacity-building activities, the Municipality plans to continue the process.

**What are the current challenges/areas for improvement in open government that the jurisdiction wishes to tackle?**

While Georgia achieved considerable results in fighting petty corruption and addressing elite corruption, corruption risks remain one of the main challenges both at the national and local level. Specifically, identification of corruption risks at the local level remains a challenge. Akhaltsikhe Municipality plans to address this challenge by adopting efficient corruption risks assessment methodology, along with a corresponding mechanism for rapid response to such risks.

Another challenge to open governance in Akhaltsikhe Municipality relates to collecting and processing data in open format, which is the main predicament to increasing transparency and public trust. The situation analysis conducted prior to adopting Transparency and Integrity Strategy and Action Plan of the Municipality showed that only part of the municipality's public information on the website is in open format. The main problem is the collection and processing of the data in open format, which would require improving respective standards and practices within the Mayor's Office in accordance with the Open Data Action Plan, including by building the capacity of the relevant staff.

**What are the medium-term open government goals that the government wants to achieve?**

Akhaltsikhe Municipality plans to achieve the medium-term goals by strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms and practices at the local level and increasing transparency and accountability of the municipality by improving open data management system. The medium-term goals are directly in line with the long-term strategic vision of the municipality and respond to the challenges to open government identified in the previous section.

### **How does this action plan contribute to achieve the Open Government Strategic Vision?**

Akhaltsikhe's 2021 Action Plan for OGP Local lays out two commitments, which are directly in line with the strategic vision of the municipality:

- Improvement of Corruption Risk Management in the Akhaltsikhe Municipality;
- Improving open data management practices in Akhaltsikhe Mayor's Office.

The first commitment entails improving the corruption risk management system by developing and approving corruption risk assessment methodology, as well as ensuring the launching of the assessment to establish the practice of detecting and responding to corruption risks, which would contribute to improving public trust in the institution.

The second commitment entails standardization of collection, processing, and publishing of public information in open data format for the benefit of the interested stakeholders (civil society organizations, private sector). While Akhaltsikhe already adopted the Open Data Action Plan, the Municipality will identify the categories of relevant public information, and will collect, process, and publish the information in open format on the municipal website.

### **How does the open government strategic vision contribute to the accomplishment of the current administration's overall policy goals?**

The overall policy goals of the Akhaltsikhe Municipality are to carry out efficient reforms to strengthen democratic governance by increasing transparency, accountability, and participation in the decision-making, improving access to municipal services for all members of the society, and ensuring efficient use of public resources for the public good. The OGP strategic vision of the Akhaltsikhe Municipality is based on the administration's overall policy goals, which are in line with the government of Georgia's 2019-2020 National Anti-Corruption Strategy and the 2020-2025 Decentralization Strategy. Both documents emphasize the importance of increasing transparency, accountability and public participation at the local level, along with strengthening evidence-based policy-making, hence, constituting to Akhaltsikhe's policy directions. While the municipality has made big steps towards achieving its overall policy goals, it continues to use OGP nationally and locally for advancing its democratic reforms.

## **Engagement and Coordination in the Open Government Strategic Vision and OGP Action Plan**

**Please list the lead institutions responsible for the implementation of this OGP action plan.**

- Legal and Administrative Department, Mayor's Office

**What kind of institutional arrangements are in place to coordinate between government agencies and departments to implement the OGP action plan?**

The two main departments in Akhaltsikhe Municipality Mayor's Office leading the implementation of the 2021 OGP Local Action Plan are the Legal and Administrative Unit and the Internal Audit Unit. While other relevant departments will be involved in the implementation of the Action Plan, the two units will in charge of the implementation based on the connected of their respective fields of work the two commitments in the 2021 Action Plan. In order to facilitate the coordination among the relevant government units, Akhaltsikhe Mayor's Office will establish a working group under the supervision of the Deputy Mayor of the municipality. The working group will be comprised of minimum of five members. While the working group will meet at minimum once a month, other procedural rules will be determined by the corresponding legal act.

**What kind of spaces have you used or created to enable the collaboration between government and civil society in the co-creation and implementation of this action plan? Mention both offline and online spaces.**

Akhaltsikhe has actively involved local CSOs in developing the 2019-2020 Transparency and Integrity Strategy and Action through a multi-stakeholder roundtable and soliciting feedback from the stakeholders. The municipality has a close collaboration with CSOs at the central level both within the OGP Forum, as well as independently.

In drafting the two commitments in the Local AP, the Municipality actively collaborated with USAID GGI and Samtskhe-Javakheti Development Center. That said, the involvement of a wider group of CSOs was stalled due to COVID-19 outbreak restricting economic and social activity in the country. In order to ensure the participation of the wide range of stakeholders in the co-creation process, the Municipality published the draft of the Action Plan on its website available for public comment for 14 days, which allowed the wide range of CSOs to provide their feedback. Additionally, a roundtable discussion was held with the Citizen Advisory Council a multi-stakeholder body under the Mayor's Office to solicit feedback prior to approval of the AP. The Council will be the main collaborative body during the implementation of the AP.

**What measures did you take to ensure diversity of representation (including vulnerable or marginalized populations) in these spaces?**

Akhaltsikhe has around 20 active civil society organizations, some of which represented in the Citizen Advisory Council. The Municipality has a history of collaboration with them in various aspects, including through the Citizen Advisory Council representing the diverse civil sector. The organizations represented vary in their line of work and represent interests of vulnerable and marginalized social groups including women, ethnic minorities (Akhaltsikhe has ethnically mixed population ethnic Georgians and ethnic Armenians), and persons with disabilities. While in the development of this specific action plan the communication with the CSOs was limited due to COVID-19 outbreak, Akhaltsikhe Mayor's Office plans to revive collaborative process with a diverse set of partners in the implementation and monitoring phase of the 2021 Local Action Plan.

### **Who participated in these spaces?**

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the accompanying regulations imposed by the government of Georgia, Akhaltsikhe Mayor's Office had to switch to online communication channels similarly to other government agencies and CSOs. For that reason, the main communication channel for the CSO partner Samtskhe-Javakheti Development Center was the Zoom platform and telephone conversations (at least five official meetings have been held not including telephone conversations). Due to the health crisis and the following regulations, the Municipality did not have an opportunity to create specific spaces in the development of the 2021 OGP Local Action Plan, which would include a wider range of organizations. However, the commitments reflected in the Action Plan reflect the priorities identified by the partner CSOs in previous years. That said, the municipality plans to actively involve civil society organizations in the implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan.

### **How many groups participated in these spaces?**

1

### **How many public-facing meetings were held in the co-creation process?**

3

### **How will government and non-governmental stakeholders continue to collaborate through the implementation of the action plan?**

Akhaltsikhe Mayor's Office plans to continue an active collaboration with the civil society sector throughout the implementation of the 2021 OGP Local Action Plan with the help of the Citizen Advisory Council, the existing multi-stakeholder body under the Mayor's Office. The Municipality will engage the Citizen Advisory Council in monthly coordination meetings to support the implementation of the Action Plan. The municipality will keep the record of the meetings and publish transcripts online on the website of the Mayor's Office. The Mayor's Office will put specific emphasis on raising awareness about the OGP

process in order to reach wider audience through various communication channels such as municipal webpage, Facebook page, and the municipal building. The Mayor's Office will invite the CSOs to submit feedback on each stage of the implementation of the Action Plan, and will ensure to respond to any recommendations and suggestions made by the civil sector in order to close the feedback loop.

**Please describe the independent Monitoring Body you have identified for this plan.**

Akhaltsikhe Municipality will actively work with development partners to carry out independent assessment of the implementation of the 2021 Local Action Plan. The Municipality and its collaborative multi-stakeholder body, Citizen Advisory Council, will provide all the necessary documentation and information to the party implementing the assessment to ease the process of monitoring and assessment. Based on the findings and recommendations developed as a result of the assessment, the Municipality and the Council will adjust its approach in the upcoming action plan cycles.

**Provide the contact details for the independent monitoring body.**

- Maka Beridze, Member of Citizen Advisory Council, [makaberidze@gmail.com](mailto:makaberidze@gmail.com)

**What types of activities will you have in place to discuss progress on commitments with stakeholders?**

Depending on the epidemiological situation resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak and the ongoing vaccination in the country, Akhaltsikhe Municipality hopes to engage with the stakeholders through in-person meetings and roundtables to discuss progress on the commitments. The meetings will be held at least once a month, where the stakeholders will be informed about the progress on commitments, and asked to provide feedback. If the epidemiological situation interferes with in-person meetings, the Mayor's Office will employ online platforms to invite interested stakeholders to discussions. Additionally, the municipality will report to the public using Facebook lives, as well as using local media outlets.

**How will you regularly check in on progress with implementing agencies?**

Considering that the leading implementing units of Akhaltsikhe's 2021 OGP Local Action Plan are subordinate units of Akhaltsikhe Mayor's Office, the Municipality will easily check in with the relevant departments on the progress of implementation. Notably, the municipality will establish a working group for coordinating the implementation of the Action Plan with the primary involvement of the Legal and Administrative Unit and the Internal Audit Unit, along with the representatives of other relevant departments. The working group will meet at least twice a month to provide updates on the progress of implementation and to better coordinate implementation with other relevant departments.

**How will you share the results of your monitoring efforts with the public?**

The Mayor's Office has a Public and Media Relations Unit responsible for communicating with the general public and informing the population about projects ongoing in Akhaltsikhe Municipality. The Mayor's Office will use the existing Unit to inform the public regarding the results of the monitoring efforts, including utilizing the municipal webpage and Facebook page. The Municipality will use opportunities to engage with the local media to inform the public regarding the progress on the commitments. Additionally, the Mayor's Office has village trustees in all administrative units, who communicate with the population. The municipality will use the resource of the trustees to inform the population in the villages, especially considering the low level of internet penetration in the villages, where citizens rely more on the word of mouth rather than internet sources.

### **Endorsement from Non-Governmental Stakeholders**

- Nino Lomidze, Director, Samtskhe-Javakheti Development Center

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**No comments yet**