

Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Tbilisi, Georgia Design Report 2018–2020

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Executive Summary: Tbilisi

Tbilisi’s second action plan focuses on improving public access to information, introducing participatory budgeting, and enhancing the transparency of Tbilisi City Hall. The co-creation process saw active involvement from civil society and included broader consultations with Tbilisi residents to obtain feedback on draft commitments. Moving forward, City Hall could strengthen the OGP process by ensuring higher-level political engagement, raising awareness among the public and CSOs which are not directly engaged in OGP, and continuing to enhance transparency and civic participation around urban infrastructure projects.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a global partnership that brings together government reformers and civil society leaders to create action plans that make governments more inclusive, responsive, and accountable. The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) monitors all action plans to ensure governments follow through on commitments. Tbilisi joined OGP in 2016. Since then, it has implemented one action plan. This report evaluates the design of Tbilisi’s second action plan.

General overview of action plan

Tbilisi’s second action plan responds to issues of limited public access to government-held information, inadequate opportunities for residents to participate in decision-making processes, and limited transparency particularly in large-scale construction projects. To help address these problems, Tbilisi City Hall plans to continue previous commitments to develop the SMART MAP platform, introduce a participatory budgeting mechanism, and create an integrated web application for public services. Two new initiatives aim to introduce a Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy for City Hall and improve access to information through electronic platforms.

During the development of the second action plan, a CSO representative was selected to co-chair the OGP working group together with City Hall, which supported stronger civil society involvement in the co-creation process compared with that of the previous plan. In addition to six working group meetings, City Hall organized 12 public consultations with roughly 300 Tbilisi residents to gather public input on the draft commitments.

Three unfinished commitments from the first action plan were carried forward to the current plan with modifications based on recommendations from the previous IRM report. The other two commitments are new initiatives proposed by the working group members during the co-creation process.

This report was prepared by Mariam Sikharulidze, an independent researcher.

Table 1. At a glance
 Participating since: 2016
 Action plan under review: Second
 Report type: Design
 Number of commitments: 5

Action plan development
 Is there a Multi-stakeholder forum? Yes
 Level of public influence: Collaborate
 Acted contrary to OGP process: No

Action plan design
 Commitments relevant to OGP values: 5 (100%)
 Transformative commitments: 0
 Potentially starred commitments: 0

Action plan implementation
 Starred commitments: N/A
 Completed commitments: N/A
 Commitments with Major DIOG*: N/A
 Commitments with Outstanding DIOG*: N/A

*DIOG: Did it Open Government?



Table 2. Noteworthy commitments

Commitment description	Moving forward	Status at the end of implementation cycle.
<p>1. Information and Civic Activities Portal "SMART MAP"</p>	<p>To ensure timely implementation of the SMART MAP, Tbilisi City Hall could develop a clear internal management system for the initiative. City Hall could also expand the SMART MAP to include other issue areas relevant to residents and organize public awareness raising to ensure visibility of the tool.</p>	<p>Note: this will be assessed at the end of action plan cycle.</p>
<p>2. Budget Participatory Planning Mechanism</p> <p>Introduce an electronic participatory budgeting mechanism for citizens to rate budget priority areas and formalize processes for City Hall to provide official feedback to the public in the final budget.</p>	<p>Moving forward, City Hall could clearly define the management for operating the participatory budget mechanism and conduct enhanced public outreach campaigns to promote its use. City Hall could also consider developing policies for formalizing participatory budgeting and provide in advance the actual figures and percentages that might be influenced by the public budget voting.</p>	<p>Note: this will be assessed at the end of action plan cycle.</p>

Recommendations

The IRM recommendations aim to inform the development of the next action plan and guide implementation of the current action plan.

Table 3. Five KEY IRM Recommendations

Ensure higher-level political engagement and greater sustainability of the OGP process
Plan and conduct stronger public relations and awareness-raising activities around the OGP process
Formalize the working group meetings and work and invite other civil society actors that are not currently involved in the OGP process
Clarify the management and distribution of future commitment activities to better ensure their timely delivery
Continue enhancing transparency and civic participation in the decision-making processes, particularly around major urban infrastructure projects

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The Open Government Partnership (OGP) aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) assesses development and implementation of national action plans to foster dialogue among stakeholders and improve accountability.



I. Introduction

The Open Government Partnership is a global partnership that brings together government reformers and civil society leaders to create action plans that make governments more inclusive, responsive, and accountable. Action plan commitments may build on existing efforts, identify new steps to complete ongoing reforms, or initiate action in an entirely new area. OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) monitors all action plans to ensure governments follow through on commitments. Civil society and government leaders use the evaluations to reflect on their own progress and determine whether actions have had an impact on people's lives.

Tbilisi joined OGP in 2016. This report covers the development and design of Tbilisi's second action plan for 2018–2020.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism of OGP has partnered with Mariam Sikharulidze, who carried out this evaluation. The IRM aims to inform ongoing dialogue around development and implementation of future commitments. For a full description of the IRM's methodology, please visit <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/independent-reporting-mechanism>.

II. Open Government Context in Tbilisi

Currently, Tbilisi residents lack opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes and often have limited access to government-held information. Corruption risks are also inadequately addressed by Tbilisi City Hall, thus creating a need to develop good governance standards in order to increase transparency and credibility of the institution. As a result, with the second OGP action plan, the City Hall committed to address the mentioned issues and introduce relevant electronic mechanisms, a good governance strategy, and an open data portal in the 2018–2020 period.

Tbilisi is the capital and most populous city in Georgia with an area of 502km² and a population of 1.171 million – which makes up nearly one-third of the overall population of Georgia.¹² According to 2016 data, Tbilisi produces 49% of Georgia’s overall GDP, with most residents employed in the wholesale and retail trade, real estate, and transport and communication spheres. Tbilisi is among five cities in Georgia with independent self-governing bodies³. Self-governance is exercised through a representative branch of the Tbilisi City Assembly and an executive branch of Tbilisi City Hall.

Tbilisi’s government is composed of the mayor, deputy mayors, heads of City Offices, and governors of Tbilisi Administrative districts (Gadgebeli). Members of Tbilisi City Assembly and the mayor are elected for a term of four years. The Tbilisi City Assembly (Sakrebulo) is a representative body that monitors City Hall’s work and makes important city-related decisions such as approving the annual budget. The City Assembly has 11 thematic commissions, which discuss citizens’ proposals and complaints and monitor implementation of projects. Tbilisi City Hall is responsible for a number of public services, including preschool education, issuance of construction permits, public transportation, parking, cleaning and waste management, and social services. Apart from relevant agencies (Legal Entities of Public Law – LEPLs) delivering the mentioned services, there are 13 thematic departments at City Hall.

Tbilisi is divided in 10 administrative districts (Gadgeoba), with Gadgebeli as their heads. With the consent of the Tbilisi City Assembly, the Tbilisi mayor appoints Gadgebeli. Gadgeoba can independently address a number of issues, including fixing roads, taking care of public green spaces, and adapting infrastructure to the needs of people with disabilities⁴.

The 2014 Local Self-Government Code defines the municipal budget as independent from the state (central) budget. Municipal financial resources include income from local taxes and income tax, along with capital transfers, which are carried out from one budget to another to implement targeted capital projects⁵. Tbilisi’s 2018 budget was US\$385.4 million, and the allocated budget for 2019 is US\$389.4 million.⁶ The top three areas for spending in 2018 were housing and communal services, social protection, and preschool education⁷.

Generally, problems for Tbilisi citizens vary depending on the district of their residence. However, according to Khatuna Gvelesiani, the director of the local CSO “Walk” (Iare Pekhit), which works on issues of pedestrian rights and urban development, major issues include a lack of green spaces, renovating old houses, and lack of parking space. The IRM researcher’s focus group participants also mentioned that the city’s infrastructure and public transport still face issues of accessibility for people with disabilities (ibid.).

Transparency and anti-corruption

The Georgian constitution recognizes every citizen’s right to become acquainted, in accordance with a procedure prescribed by law, with information and official documents in public institutions, unless they contain state, professional, or commercial secrets.⁸ The right of access to public information applies to local government as well and is ensured by Article 85¹ of the Local Self-Government Code.

In 2017, Georgia adopted the Anti-Corruption Strategy 2017–2018, which focuses on preventing higher-level corruption and supporting transparency in state institutions⁹. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Georgia is a leader in Eastern Europe in combating corruption, scoring 58 out of 100 points and ranking 41 out of 180 countries.¹⁰ However, Georgia is considered a country to be monitored over the next years due to its “challenging political landscape, vulnerability to high-level corruption, lack of law enforcement accountability, corruption, and political interference in the judiciary.”¹¹ It is also believed that corruption among local government officials is inadequately addressed whereas not enough efforts are made to tackle high-level corruption¹². As a result, in 2016, the OECD recommended Georgia develop and implement anti-corruption action plans at the local level.

According to the National Assessment of Georgian Municipalities 2017, the average transparency and accountability rate stands at 21% – with Tbilisi City Hall earning 35%. Three broad assessment areas included proactive publication of public information, citizen engagement in the decision-making processes and public discussions, and tools for e-governance. The low rate underlines the need for major reforms for higher standards in the aforementioned fields.¹³ The need for reform is evidenced by the nationally representative survey on public policies conducted by CRRG Georgia, which states that only 13% of the Tbilisi population trusts the local government.¹⁴ At the same time, some of the focus group participants, who took part in the OGP consultation meetings in summer 2018, overall, positively assessed City Hall's work and engagement with citizens during the development of the second OGP action plan.¹⁵

Civic participation

Civic participation in the decision-making processes is also an important issue at the national and local levels. Traditionally, Tbilisi residents have had limited access to information on decision-making, depriving them of the opportunity to monitor and provide feedback on critical issues including budgeting, tree cutting, construction permits, and infrastructure projects.¹⁶ To increase public participation, Tbilisi City Hall introduced an online petitions portal in 2017 (“Your Idea for the City Mayor”), which was an OGP commitment in the previous action plan. The portal counts a total of 7,658 registered ideas under 13 categories.¹⁷ However, public engagement remains an issue. According to the Local Self-Government Index, the majority of Georgian municipalities do not include citizens during the budget planning process, with Tbilisi being one of these.¹⁸ Despite being part of Tbilisi's first Tbilisi action plan, the commitment on developing the participatory budget planning mechanism saw limited completion and is not currently functional. While discussions on the elaboration of the city budget drafts are open for public participation at the City Assembly meetings, interest and engagement remain low.

The recent public protest over the Panorama Tbilisi project exemplifies the lack of citizen engagement in decision-making processes. Panorama Tbilisi is a large-scale development project covering important parts of Tbilisi and its historical center and is managed by the Georgian Co-Investment Fund and funded by the chair of the ruling party, former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili.¹⁹ In 2015, despite CSO appeals against launching the project, the City Assembly (Sakrebulo) abolished Sololaki district's recreation zone status to begin construction.²⁰ There were limited public consultations during the elaboration of the project, and the government's motives for approving the project were widely questioned in the media.^{21,22} More than 5,000 signed an online petition against the project, and a number of rallies were organized, but the project continued. The project not only endangered Old Tbilisi's candidacy for UNESCO World Heritage Status but also threatens Tbilisi's architectural, cultural, and environmental integrity.

Tbilisi joined OGP through the Subnational Government Pilot Program in 2016 and implemented its first action plan in 2017.²³ However, the first action plan saw limited completion, primarily due to changes in City Hall leadership.^{24,25} Following David Narmania, a new Mayor – Kakha Kaladze was elected in October 2017. He took office prior to the completion of the first action plan, which resulted in authority transition, change in personnel responsible for OGP implementation, and delay in completion of the action plan.^{26,27,28} In 2018, the OGP working group consisting of the representatives of City Hall along with local CSOs adopted the second action plan (2018–2020). All the commitments in the second plan address and are responsive to OGP-related issues, including access to information, civic participation,

accountability, and good faith governance. Out of five commitments, three were modified and carried forward from the previous action plan due to their limited completion, relevance to the Tbilisi context, and the IRM's recommendations.²⁹

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- ¹ Statistical Information on the Regions of Georgia, 2019; <https://www.geostat.ge/regions/>
- ² Tbilisi in Figures 2018, Tbilisi City Hall: <http://tbilisi.gov.ge/img/original/2018/6/12/tbilisiinfigures.pdf>
- ³ "Parliament Reduces Number of Self-Governing Cities," <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30234>
- ⁴ Guide to Urban Activism, Walk, 2019: <http://iarepekhit.org/sites/default/files/UAG-int-ver%20%281%29.pdf>
- ⁵ Analysis of the Draft Law on Local Self-Governance, International Experience and Recommendations, ISFED: <http://old.isfed.ge/main/547/eng/>
- ⁶ Tbilisi Municipality Budget for 2018 and 2019. Tbilisi budget for 2018 was 1,052,185.7 GEL and for 2019 – 1 063 101.8 GEL, official exchange rate based on the National Bank of Georgia is for US\$1=GEL2.73, May 8, 2019.
- ⁷ Annual Tbilisi Budget: <http://tbilisi.gov.ge/page/43>
- ⁸ The Constitution of Georgia, Article 41: http://www.parliament.ge/files/68_1944_951190_CONSTIT_27_12.06.pdf
- ⁹ MikheilDarchiashvili, Good Governance Initiative (GGI), interview with IRM Researcher, March 11, 2019.
- ¹⁰ "Corruption Perceptions Index 2018: Georgia is best among East European, Central Asian countries", Agenda.Ge, January, 2019: <http://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/279>
- ¹¹ Transparency International (TI), Corruption Perception Index (CPI), 2018, "Weak Checks and Balances Threaten Anti-Corruption Efforts" https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/weak_checks_and_balances_threaten_anti_corruption_efforts_across_eastern_eu
- ¹² OECD, Anti-corruption reforms in Georgia: 4th round of monitoring of the Istanbul Anti-corruption Action Plan: <http://www.oecd.org/corruption/anti-bribery/OECD-ACN-Georgia-Round-4-Monitoring-Report-ENG.pdf>
- ¹³ National Assessment of Georgian Municipalities, IDFI, CTC, MSDC: 2017: http://www.lsgindex.org/uploadimages/adm_folder/LSGINDEX_SmallReport_Final.pdf
- ¹⁴ Survey on Public Policies, Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2016: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/ti2016ge/TRLOCGVT-by-SETTYPE/>
- ¹⁵ Focus Group with Tbilisi OGP Consultation Meeting participants, March 28, 2019, Tbilisi.
- ¹⁶ IRM Tbilisi End of Term Report, Tbilisi 2017: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tbilisi_Final-Report_2017.pdf
- ¹⁷ Your Idea for the City Mayor: <https://idea.tbilisi.gov.ge/idea-list>
- ¹⁸ "Tbilisi budget of 2018 - criticism and demands of opposition considered illogic in City Hall"- <http://web2.rustavi2.ge/en/news/91595>
- ¹⁹ DonimikCagara, "Hundreds rally against Ivanishvili's 'Panorama Tbilisi' project," Democracy and Freedom Watch, February 2016, <https://dfwatch.net/hundreds-rally-against-ivanishvilis-panorama-tbilisi-project-40538>
- ²⁰ "UNESCO vs Ivanishvili," JAMNews, November 2015, <https://jam-news.net/?p=2860>
- ²¹ TsiraElisashvili, "Panoramic threat of 'Panorama Tbilisi'", Indigo:<http://indigo.com.ge/articles/environment/panorama-tbilisis-panoramuli-saprtxe>
- ²² EkaMaghaldadze - "Panorama Tbilisi" – project without a complex assessment", Liberali: <http://liberali.ge/articles/view/4009/panorama-tbilisi--proeqti-kompleqsuri-shefasebis-mighma>
- ²³ Tbilisi to Join Open Government Partnership, IDFI, April 2016: <https://idfi.ge/en/tbilisi-to-join-open-government-partnership>
- ²⁴ Topuria, March 15, 2019.
- ²⁵ IRM Tbilisi Final Report 2017: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tbilisi_Final-Report_2017.pdf
- ²⁶ MikheilDarchiashvili&MarikaGorgadze, interview with IRM researcher, March 11, 2019.
- ²⁷ GiorgiTopuria, Transparency International Georgia, interview with IRM researcher, March 15, 2019.
- ²⁸ Khasia, March 9, 2019.
- ²⁹ Tbilisi Final Report 2017, IRM: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tbilisi_Final-Report_2017.pdf

III. Leadership and Multi-stakeholder Process

The development of Tbilisi's second action plan saw the selection of a CSO representative to co-chair the Tbilisi OGP working group with the City Hall representative. Beyond the working group meetings, City Hall organized public consultations with Tbilisi residents in 2018. However, no concrete proposals from the public were reflected in the final action plan.

3.1 Leadership

This subsection describes the OGP leadership and institutional context for OGP in Tbilisi.

Tbilisi City Hall and its thematic departments are responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of Tbilisi's OGP action plan, together with CSOs' sharing the responsibility to implement certain commitments (such as commitments 4 and 5 in the second action plan). There is no specific budget allocated for OGP at City Hall, nor are there special personnel dedicated to working exclusively on OGP. Responsibilities are shared between existing staff in relevant departments.

In May 2016, after joining the OGP Local Program, Tbilisi formally established a working group to serve as a multi-stakeholder forum under the leadership of the Tbilisi City Hall Administration (described in greater detail later in this section).¹ In April 2018, the mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze signed order 1-156 as per the Organic Law of Georgia Local Self-Government Code² to renew the OGP working group in order to develop and implement the second action plan.

There is also an assigned OGP Focal Point at City Hall who coordinates the working group meetings and public consultation. However, this person is a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) contractor and is not a regular staff member at the City Hall, which has raised questions about the sustainability of the position once donor funding is discontinued. Currently, this person is in charge of most of the administrative and communication work, which supports the effectiveness of the OGP process in Tbilisi.

The Tbilisi mayor has the capacity to assign the chair of the working group. Under Narmania's mayorship (2014–2017), Deputy Mayor Nina Khatiskatsi was directly involved in the OGP working group.³ Although the current Mayor (Kakha Kaladze) appointed the vice mayor – Irakli Khmaladze as chair, the position was later delegated to Giorgi Kiknadze – head of administration. Kiknadze mentioned that Khmaladze remains fully informed on the OGP processes to ensure high-level engagement. However, his direct participation and attendance at at least some of the meetings would reinforce and demonstrate higher-level interest and commitment to OGP⁴.

OGP-related activities were paused for more than two months after a change of leadership and the election of Kaladze as the new mayor in October 2017.⁵ Kaladze took office prior to the completion of the first action plan, resulting in changes to the personnel responsible for the commitments and thus a delay in their completion.^{6,7,8} TI Georgia attributed the failure to fulfill OGP commitments from the first action plan to the convoluted leadership transition process and the time needed for the new management to grow fully aware of the OGP process.⁹

3.2 Multi-stakeholder process throughout action plan development

In 2017, OGP adopted the OGP Participation and Co-Creation Standards intended to support participation and co-creation by civil society at all stages of the OGP cycle. All OGP-participating countries are expected to meet these standards. The standards aim to raise ambition and quality of participation during the development, implementation, and review of OGP action plans.

OGP’s Articles of Governance also establish participation and co-creation requirements a country or entity must meet in its action plan development and implementation to act according to OGP process. Tbilisi **did not** act contrary to OGP process.¹⁰

Please see Annex I for an overview of Tbilisi’s performance implementing the Co-Creation and Participation Standards throughout the action plan development.

Table [3.2]: Level of Public Influence

The IRM has adapted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) “Spectrum of Participation” to apply to OGP.¹¹ This spectrum shows the potential level of public influence on the contents of the action plan. In the spirit of OGP, most countries should aspire for “collaborate.”

Level of public influence		During development of action plan
Empower	The government handed decision-making power to members of the public.	
Collaborate	There was iterative dialogue AND the public helped set the agenda.	✓
Involve	The government gave feedback on how public inputs were considered.	
Consult	The public could give inputs.	
Inform	The government provided the public with information on the action plan.	
No Consultation	No consultation	

Multi-stakeholder forum

Tbilisi City Hall established a multi-stakeholder working group in 2016, which is a legally mandated forum for implementing and monitoring the implementation of OGP commitments.¹² The Tbilisi City Hall Administration, whose head currently chairs the working group, organized public consultations and working group meetings to plan Tbilisi’s second action plan. The Tbilisi mayor appoints the chair, and the work of the working group is regulated by the legal mandate. The document is available on the OGP repository and describes the scope of the group’s work and the frequency of meetings, among other details. The website provides news updates, but the last two news pieces were posted six months apart (September 2018 and April 2019). Meetings are held “as needed” without specific scheduling, but any member is free to initiate a meeting and propose an issue for discussion.¹³ After adoption of the action plan in September 2018, the working group met once in March 2019 to discuss the action plan progress and self-assessment and monitoring frameworks. Members of the working group have suggested meeting on a more regular basis to ensure continuity in the OGP process.¹⁴

The working group has 24 members, 12 from government and 12 from civil society and development partners (approximately a 40:60 female:male ratio).¹⁵ In September 2018, working group members nominated Natia Kalandarishvili from the architecture-oriented non-governmental organization Tbilisi International Biennial to act as the civil society co-chair.¹⁶ Kalandarishvili’s candidacy was approved, marking it the first time that representatives from both government and civil society would serve as co-chairs. CSOs can propose new members to the working group. For example, during a working group meeting in March 2019, Kalandarishvili proposed the inclusion of a CSO working on the issues related to persons with disabilities, which was approved.¹⁷

Representatives of well-established CSOs participate in the working group, including IDFI, TI Georgia, OSGF, GYLA, the network of Centers for Civic Engagement (CCE), the Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation (IDGI), and the National Association of Legal Authorities of Georgia (NALA). USAID's Good Governance Initiative (GGI) is also a member of the working group and supports Tbilisi City Hall's participation in the OGP process. According to Giorgi Kiknadze of the City Hall Administration, the members of the previous working group were automatically invited to develop the second action plan.¹⁸ According to TI Georgia, the same organizations continue to be engaged in the OGP process, and there is no interest from other organizations to participate.¹⁹ Representatives of local CSOs working on urban topics (such as "Walk" and "Urban Lab") did not receive information on OGP, demonstrating that broader awareness of OGP within Tbilisi's civil society is not high outside the "usual suspects."

There were two ways for CSOs to participate in the working group: directly when City Hall contacted potential candidates or indirectly when the members nominated candidates. Although no applicants were rejected, it would be useful to announce an open call with clear selection procedures for the working group membership in the future to extend the possibility to participate and ensure diverse CSO representation.

Participation and engagement throughout action plan development

Tbilisi City Hall supported public involvement in the development of the second action plan in two ways: through the working group meetings and through public consultations. The working group meetings were held at Tbilisi City Hall during the summer of 2018, and meeting reports and agendas were published on the OGP Tbilisi website www.ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge. The administration of Tbilisi sent agendas and relevant documents of upcoming meetings to members of the working group via email. Overall, six working group meetings and 12 public consultations were held. Roughly 300 citizens attended the consultations, including youth groups and students, private sector and business associations, persons with disabilities, socially vulnerable groups, citizens interested in gender and ethnic minority issues, and citizens living in districts newly joined to Tbilisi following the "amalgamation" reforms of local government.²⁰

Working group meetings

After the first working group meeting, CSOs had three weeks to submit commitment proposals and nominate representatives to participate in public consultations.²¹ However, by the next meeting, only USAID GGI had submitted a proposal: to develop a Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy and action plan within the co-creation format. As a result of discussions, the working group jointly adopted this proposal as Commitment 4 in the action plan. OSGF later submitted two commitment proposals in writing that were ultimately not reflected in the final action plan. An interviewed OSGF representative told the IRM researcher that City Hall did not provide any reasons for this decision while a City Hall representative stated there was no advocacy for the commitments, and only one meeting to discuss them was held but without any outcomes.²² The OSGF proposals included 1) social housing reforms to respond to the needs of homeless people, and 2) increasing public engagement in construction projects. Further, the OSGF representatives assessed the action plan as not ambitious. However, IDFI also submitted commitment proposals by writing to the OGP Focal Point, which were shared to all working group members for their comments and later adopted by the working group (as Commitment 5 in the action plan). Overall, Tbilisi City Hall allowed working group participants to provide suggestions and commitments and discuss them during the meetings. This resulted in the inclusion of USAID GGI and IDFI proposals that envisage the development of a transparency and good faith strategy for City Hall and improved access to public services and creation of a new open data portal. Unlike the previous action plan, USAID GGI and IDFI share the responsibility together with City Hall to implement these two commitments.

City Hall and CSOs also discussed the possibility of carrying forward incomplete commitments from the previous action plan. City Hall proposed modifications in terms of reducing scope of activities, considering the agencies' capacities to implement them.²³

Public consultations

Public consultations for the second action plan were announced in advance through Tbilisi's OGP website and through the network of local administrative districts (Gmgeoba), which invited stakeholders. City Hall used the public consultations to raise awareness about OGP and the initiative "Your Idea to the City Mayor" and to gather public input in the draft commitments. Some public comments were already reflected in the draft commitments, such as adding information on recreational and green zones in the "Smart Map" whereas others asked for clarifications regarding trustworthiness and legal frameworks of e-services.²⁴ TI Georgia stated that citizens' suggestions during the consultations were mostly not relevant to OGP principles, demonstrating a lack of awareness among citizens about the aims of the meetings and of OGP more broadly. The OGP Focal Point presented the results of public consultations to the working group, which included adapting infrastructure to the needs of people living with disabilities, creating a unified City Hall platform for getting services and providing feedback, and issues related to transportation. In terms of commitments, the action plan reflected no particular initiative. The results of the IRM researcher's focus group also reinforced the idea that citizens were not clear about the purpose of consultations and OGP, while they focused on social and health care problems.²⁵ The participants of the public consultations added that there was no follow-up communication.

Despite the fact that two CSO proposals were not reflected in the final action plan, the level of public input is considered "collaborate." CSOs were able to identify issues and propose concrete solutions to issue areas, and the working group discussed these solutions and decided whether to incorporate proposed commitments into the action plan. City Hall also adopted the recommendations from the previous IRM report by carrying forward three unfinished commitments with modifications. These modifications were discussed during the working group meetings, taking into consideration City Hall's capacity to fulfill the commitment within the set time frames.

Co-creation and participation recommendations throughout development

Tbilisi showed evidence of achievement and strong performance in its multi-stakeholder forum conduct along with internal communication and public consultations during development. For example, six working group meetings were dedicated to discussing specific commitments and to developing and adopting the final action plan, and 12 public consultations were organized with more than 300 citizens to gather public input on draft commitments. The co-creation process was strengthened through the inclusion of commitments proposed by USAID GGI and IDFI and through the shared responsibility of these groups to implement their proposals with City Hall. Some areas in which Tbilisi can improve include:

- Higher-level political engagement and commitment to OGP;
- Regularity of the working group meetings;
- Public outreach and awareness raising of CSOs and the general population during the action plan development along with OGP in general;
- Communication and feedback about the decisions regarding action plan development.

To improve performance on these areas, the IRM researcher suggests that Tbilisi City Hall take the following actions:

- Increased political willingness and commitment toward the OGP processes in City Hall, by participation of at least the deputy mayor in working group meetings, to ensure high-level presence and engagement.
- Introduce transparent selection procedures and announce open calls for working group membership with clear selection criteria to diversify CSO presence and allow equal opportunities for interested parties to participate in the process.
- It is important to formalize working group meetings for the working group to meet at least quarterly to report and monitor action plan progress. Currently, the working group decree defines the meeting frequency as "as needed." This can result in erratic

and infrequent working group meetings, particularly during the monitoring phase of action plan implementation.

- Tbilisi City Hall could strengthen awareness raising and public outreach of specific commitments and OGP in general, targeting both CSOs and citizens. This could be done by printing and distributing information brochures at City Hall entrance for citizens, conducting presentations and formal launch of mechanisms (as in the case of “Your Idea for the City Mayor”) within the OGP framework. Public outreach could be strengthened during public consultations, which would not require additional funds.
- Tbilisi City Hall could provide formal justifications and reasoned feedback on adoption or non-adoption of interventions proposed by CSOs to ensure meaningful co-creation process, as in the case of OSGF.

¹ Khasia, 9 March 2019.

² See the Code: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/2244429?publication=41>

³ Khasia, March 9, 2019.

⁴ Goirgi Kiknadze, Tbilisi City Hall Administration, Interview with the IRM Researcher, March 18, 2019.

⁵ Giorgi Topuria, Transparency International Georgia, interview with IRM researcher, March 15, 2019.

⁶ Mikheil Darchiashvili & Marika Gorgadze, interview with IRM researcher, March 11, 2019.

⁷ Topuria, March 15, 2019

⁸ Khasia, March 9, 2019.

⁹ Topuria, March 15, 2019.

¹⁰ Acting Contrary to Process – The government did not meet (1) “involve” during the development or “inform” during implementation of the NAP (2) government fails to collect, publish and document a repository on the national OGP website/webpage in line with IRM guidance.

¹¹ “IAP2’s Public Participation Spectrum,” IAP2, 2014.

http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf

¹² OGP legal document OGP Tbilisi website. www.ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge

¹³ Khasia, 9 March 2019.

¹⁴ OGP Tbilisi Working group meeting, Tbilisi City Hall, March 29, 2019.

¹⁵ OGP Working Group, Tbilisi OGP: <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/page/3128?lang=ge>

¹⁶ Natia Kalandarishvili, Tbilisi International Biennial, interview with IRM researcher, March 12, 2019.

¹⁷ OGP Working group meeting, March 29, 2019, Tbilisi City Hall.

¹⁸ Kiknadze, Tbilisi City Hall, interview with IRM researcher, March 18, 2019.

¹⁹ Topuria, TI Georgia, interview with IRM researcher, March 15, 2019.

²⁰ Public Consultation meeting minutes, OGP Tbilisi: <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/page/3248?lang=ge>

²¹ Public Consultation meeting minutes, <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/page/3155>

²² Khasia, March 9, 2019.

²³ OGP working group meeting, 24 August 2018: <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/page/3155>

²⁴ Public consultation meeting minutes, 06-08 September 2018.

²⁵ Focus group with the participants of Public Consultations, March 28, 2019.

IV. Commitments

All OGP-participating governments develop OGP action plans that include concrete commitments over a two-year period. Governments begin their OGP action plans by sharing existing efforts related to open government, including specific strategies and ongoing programs.

Commitments should be appropriate to each country/entity's unique circumstances and challenges. OGP commitments should also be relevant to OGP values laid out in the OGP Articles of Governance and Open Government Declaration signed by all OGP-participating countries.¹ The indicators and method used in the IRM research can be found in the IRM Procedures Manual.² A summary of key indicators the IRM assesses is included below:

- **Verifiability:**
 - Not specific enough to verify: As written in the commitment, do the objectives stated and actions proposed lack sufficient clarity and specificity for their completion to be objectively verified through a subsequent assessment process?
 - Specific enough to verify: As written in the commitment, are the objectives stated and actions proposed sufficiently clear and specific to allow for their completion to be objectively verified through a subsequent assessment process?
- **Relevance:** This variable evaluates the commitment's relevance to OGP values. Based on a close reading of the commitment text as stated in the action plan, the guiding questions to determine the relevance include:
 - **Access to Information:** Will the government disclose more information or improve the quality of the information disclosed to the public?
 - **Civic Participation:** Will the government create or improve opportunities or capabilities for the public to inform or influence decisions or policies?
 - **Public Accountability:** Will the government create or improve public-facing opportunities to hold officials answerable for their actions?
 - **Technology & Innovation for Transparency and Accountability:** Will technological innovation be used in conjunction with one of the other three OGP values to advance either transparency or accountability?
- **Potential impact:** This variable assesses the *potential impact* of the commitment, if completed as written. The IRM researcher uses the text from the action plan to do the following:
 - Identify the social, economic, political, or environmental problem;
 - Establish the status quo at the outset of the action plan; and
 - Assess the degree to which the commitment, if implemented, would affect performance and tackle the problem.
- **Completion:** This variable assesses the commitment's implementation and progress. This variable is assessed at the end of the action plan cycle, in the IRM Implementation Report.
- **Did It Open Government?:** This variable attempts to move beyond measuring outputs and deliverables to looking at how the government practice, in areas relevant to OGP values, has changed as a result of the commitment's implementation. This variable is assessed at the end of the action plan cycle, in the IRM Implementation Report.

What makes a potentially starred commitment?

A potentially starred commitment has more potential to be ambitious and to be implemented. A good commitment is one that clearly describes the following:

1. **Problem:** What is the economic, social, political, or environmental problem? This is more appropriate to consider than is describing an administrative issue or tool. (For example, "Misallocation of welfare funds" is more helpful than "lacking a website.")
2. **Status quo:** What is the status quo of the policy issue at the beginning of an action plan? (For example, "Twenty-six percent of judicial corruption complaints are not processed currently.")

3. **Change:** Rather than stating intermediary outputs, what is the targeted behavior change that is expected from the commitment's implementation? (For example, "Doubling response rates to information requests" is a stronger goal than "publishing a protocol for response.")

Based on these criteria, Tbilisi's action plan does not contain any potentially starred commitments.

Starred commitments

One measure, the "starred commitment" (★), deserves further explanation due to its particular interest to readers and usefulness for encouraging a race to the top among OGP-participating countries/entities. Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. To receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:

- Potential star: the commitment's design should be **verifiable**, **relevant** to OGP values, and have **transformative** potential impact.
- The government must make significant progress on this commitment during the action plan implementation period, receiving an assessment of **Substantial** or **Complete** implementation.

This variable is assessed at the end of the action plan cycle, in the Implementation IRM report.

General Overview of the Commitments

Key areas of the action plan include increased access to public information through web portals, creation of participatory budgeting mechanism, improvement of access to public services through development of electronic platforms, and transparent City Hall governance. The action plan incorporates three commitments carried forward from the 2016–2017 plan per the working group decision and IRM's recommendation.³ These three include:

- Multi-Profile Mechanism of Open Government and Civic Participation – Information and Civic Activities Portal "SMART MAP";
- Implementation of Budget Participatory Planning Mechanism; and
- Implementation of Mechanisms for Improvement of Access to Services and Civic Engagement.

The two additional commitments proposed and developed by GGI and IDFI, respectively, include:

- Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy of Tbilisi Municipality City Hall, and
- Development of Transparency in Tbilisi City Hall through Electronic Mechanisms.

¹ "Open Government Partnership: Articles of Governance," OGP, June 2012 (Updated March 2014 and April 2015), https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/attachments/OGP_Articles-Gov_Apr-21-2015.pdf

² "IRM Procedures Manual," OGP, <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/irm-procedures-manual>

³ Tbilisi Final Report 2017, IRM: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tbilisi_Final-Report_2017.pdf

I. Multi-Profile Mechanism of Open Government and Civic Participation - Information and Civic Activities Portal "SMART MAP"

Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan:

“Information and Civil Activity Portal (Smart map) includes an e-portal and uses as the basis the interactive map of Tbilisi. It utilizes from the base, diversifies and radically changes the interactive maps of Tbilisi, the possibilities and the purpose of their use. In particular, it not only creates on the map additional cover zones but also connects them to a number of functions that convert the standard e-map into the so-called “Smart map”, to multi-profile mechanism for civic engagement – Information and Civic Activity Portal "SMART MAP". It is important that each functionality that is described and falls under the "Smart Map" portal is a part of the unified portal and is not scattered in various portals and electronic means.”

Milestones

- I.1 Approval of accurate technical tasks and terms needed for creation of the multifunctional web portal and for the update and modernization of given municipal interactive maps
- I.2 Development of portal’s technical and contextual part
- I.3 Creating individual page for citizens and its integration with the map
- I.4 Subscription function for users to any information related to different activities on interactive map
- I.5 Implementation and piloting of the portal
- I.6 Elaboration and adoption of supportive legislative acts for the system
- I.7 Conduct trainings for the relevant staff aimed at the functioning of the map and processing of the received information
- I.8 Production of a video clip covering portal and other OGP commitments and its dissemination through social media, mass media or local units of municipalities

Start Date: January 2019

End Date: March 2020

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2018–2020 action plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information about how the milestones will be carried out. The full commitment is available here:

https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tbilisi_Action-Plan_2018-2020.pdf

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
I. Overall		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

Context and Objectives

Unregulated urban construction projects are important issues in Tbilisi. Although these projects can affect the living environment in Tbilisi, residents currently have limited access to relevant information and are often not involved in the decision-making processes.¹ One of the most notorious cases of civic absence in the executive processes was Panorama Tbilisi. This project envisaged the creation of four multi-functional areas in the city center, expanding to the

territories of the city.² CSOs expressed concern that Panorama Tbilisi could damage Tbilisi's historical center and urban life while serving the private interests of investors. The National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation did not consult the public and civil society while issuing permits for construction, despite significant public interest in the project.³ The project was also believed to serve private interests of former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili who had invested in its managing agency, the Georgian Co-investment Fund.⁴ Another major point of contention between environmental activists and Tbilisi City Hall ended in early 2019, which started with the CSO Green Alternative's discovering that then-Mayor Gigi Ugulava had issued a permit to build a hotel in one of the largest (and few) parks in Tbilisi, Vake Park, endangering its green area.⁵ After a number of public demonstrations, protest camps, and court cases, investors finally agreed to "either sell or exchange the property with the authorities," but details of this deal are not available.⁶

Urban development and green spaces were also listed among the top six major issues in Tbilisi, according to OSGF's 2017 Tbilisi Citizen's Needs Assessment.⁷ Khatuna Gvelesiani, the director of "Walk," held a public contest in the beginning of 2019 to fund citizens' urban initiatives, and the majority of 38 proposals concerned renovating green spaces.⁸ During one public meeting between Tbilisi residents and heads of Tbilisi administrative districts (Gamgeoba), green spaces were high on the agenda, but problems varied based on districts and included transportation of people with disabilities, parking, and chaotic construction.⁹

This commitment is carried forward from the first action plan with slight modifications that focus on addressing specific urban issues, such as outdoor lighting, clearing services, and phytosanitary activities.¹⁰ Considering the importance of urban projects to Tbilisi residents, this commitment aims to create an electronic mechanism – the Information and Civic Activity Portal (SMART MAP) – to provide citizens with relevant information about processes regarding their living environment. This information was previously not available in a unified platform. SMART MAP will also comprise Fix-Tbilisi and Tbilisi Forum, which are platforms on which citizens can submit appeals and discuss issues with each other. Based on territorial marking on an interactive Tbilisi map, residents will be able to obtain information regarding any infrastructure projects and green cover cutting and planting by Tbilisi City Hall or its subordinate agencies at any stage. The commitment also aims to increase civic participation in the decision-making processes through the Fix-Tbilisi portal's integration into the SMART MAP.^{11,12}

SMART MAP entails obligation by the Tbilisi City Hall to respond to citizens' issues reported through Fix-Tbilisi and develop more adequate and evidence-based services and projects based on the feedback. Though Tbilisi Forum will also allow space for discussions, there will be no formal obligation for City Hall to take these inputs into account. Relevant legal obligations for City Hall to respond to citizens through SMART MAP are yet to be determined. However, the commitment indicates that all responses, and citizen-submitted problems, will be publicly displayed. For these reasons, the commitment is relevant to the OGP values of civic participation and public accountability and furthers access to information.

The commitment consists of specific milestones to verify its degree of completion. If fully completed, the platform will stand as a unified source of information, which will make it easier for citizens to obtain information, provide feedback to City Hall, and engage in online discussions. In terms of improving government practice, City Hall's obligation to respond to and address citizen-identified problems submitted through SMART MAP within specific time frames can improve government practice. However, its potential impact largely depends on the sustainability and visibility of the project, especially as there is no designated staff to implement the commitment (existing personnel will share new responsibilities¹³). This commitment includes the dissemination of a promotional video, which can be strengthened with other outreach activities. In the case of "Your Idea for the City Mayor," launched last year, only 9% of the Tbilisi population have heard of it or used it.¹⁴ TI Georgia launched a similar project to Fix Tbilisi, "Chemikucha.ge," in partnership with the Tbilisi Municipality in 2011, which allowed citizens to submit appeals. However, that process was a one-time initiative, and the website is inactive¹⁵.

Interviewed civil society expressed varying opinions on this commitment to the IRM researcher. While the Georgian Young Lawyer's Association (GYLA) praised City Hall for carrying it forward,¹⁶ an OSGF representative did not believe it was ambitious enough to be transformative, as policy level change was needed to respond to public needs and to increase public participation in decision-making processes.¹⁷

Next steps

Considering the relevance and importance of this commitment, the IRM researcher recommends ensuring its sustainability and that it is launched on time. It is also important to elaborate on its legal basis to ensure the commitment's continuity. Nevertheless, to improve the scope of intended activities, Tbilisi City Hall could do the following:

- Ensure timely implementation and launch of the activities of the commitment, especially as it was carried forward from the previous action plan.
- Develop and include detailed management system of the commitment to operationalize the internal management of the initiative in City Hall. The design of the commitment does not explain how new obligations will be distributed within existing staff, and it states that the "the obligations of City Hall employees will be determined." The initiative, if fully completed, will increase the workload of City Hall's back office and will respond to specific appeals on-site. Therefore, it is important to have an adequate management system, which will effectively respond to citizen inputs. Presently, it is unclear who will administer the SMART MAP and provide feedback or the frequency of updating information on the platform.
- Expand Fix-Tbilisi to include other issue areas (as in Tbilisi's first action plan), such as damaged roads or sanitation, to increase citizen engagement in local governance.
- Awareness raising is an important component to ensure that citizens are knowledgeable about tools available to them and the OGP process overall. If the portals are launched, City Hall should organize a presentation similar to "Your Idea for the City Mayor." OGP's visibility and CSOs presence, especially of the working group members during the presentation, must be ensured. Together with a promotional video, it could also be useful to develop informational brochures on how to use the tools and to distribute copies at events and at City Hall.

¹ Radio Tavisupleba, "Cutting trees in the name of buildings," August 2017: <https://bit.ly/2G43cH8>

² These new territories include: Sololaki Rise, Sololaki Gardens, Tavisupleba (Liberty) Square and Erekle II Square.

³ Panoramic Threat of "Panorama Tbilisi", Indigo 2016: <http://indigo.com.ge/articles/environment/panorama-tbilisi-panoramuli-saprtxe>

⁴ Nina Jobe, "Investigation: Who are Panorama Tbilisi's Mystery Backers?" OC Media, November 2017: <https://oc-media.org/investigation-who-are-panorama-tbilisi-mystery-backers/>

⁵ "Environmental activists celebrate win in 6-year battle against Vake Park hotel," OC Media 2019: <https://oc-media.org/environmental-activists-celebrate-win-in-6-year-battle-against-vake-park-hotel/>

⁶ "Environmental activists celebrate win in 6-year battle against Vake Park hotel," OC Media 2019: <https://oc-media.org/environmental-activists-celebrate-win-in-6-year-battle-against-vake-park-hotel/>

⁷ OSGF, Needs Assessment of Tbilisi Population 2017: <https://bit.ly/2Vtazgz>

⁸ Khatuna Gvelesiani, Director of the urban NGO "Walk," interview with IRM Researcher, March 2, 2019.

⁹ Public Meeting with Representatives of Tbilisi Administrative Districts (Gangeoba), February 21, 2019: <https://www.facebook.com/events/340984443425090/>

¹⁰ Giorgi Topuria, interview with IRM Researcher, March 15, 2019.

¹¹ Topuria, March 15, 2019.

¹² Khasia, March 9, 2019.

¹³ Kiknadze, March 18, 2019.

¹⁴ Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Georgia 2018, International Republican Institute (IRI): April 2018: http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-5-29_georgia_poll_presentation.pdf

¹⁵ Topuria, March 15, 2019.

¹⁶ Salome Sagharadze, GYLA, interview with IRM Researcher, March 31, 2019.

¹⁷ Tsintsabadze, interview with IRM Researcher, March 25, 2019.

2. Implementation of Budget Participatory Planning Mechanism

Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan:

“An integrated electronic platform will be created alongside with other electronic applications enabling Tbilisi residents to rate in visually presented thematic budget each thematic priority and, thus, easily reconfigure the priorities in different sequences. Citizens will also be able to see sub-topics of each priority and will also have access to information about how the budgets of the previous years were allocated, or which distribution of the priorities was supported by the population, what was the distribution in Tbilisi or separately taken municipalities or districts. The program automatically generates the average weighted outcome from the selected priorities. This outcome will be mandatory at any stage of the drafting and approval of the budget. The Tbilisi Forum will give the possibility to leave comments on the Tbilisi Forum and present viewpoints directly to City Hall. In addition, it will be possible to interactively conduct different types of statistics (budget, year, territories, voting characteristics, etc.). In parallel with the voting process, the municipal and district departments will ensure their engagement with citizens and facilitation of voting process.

Deadlines and procedures will be established regarding when platform will open for voting; when it will close; at what stage within the framework of the government procedures of budget formation and correction processes the consideration of the weighted budget drafted by the society will take place and brief explanation about comparison result of the finally approved budget will be published. The requirement and format for informing and interviewing of the public including engagement of people with disabilities and other target groups will also be established.”

Milestones

- 2.1. Provide implementation of application content and software
- 2.2. Elaborate and approve system supporting legal act
- 2.3. System Testing, Improvement and Implementation
- 2.4. Training of City Hall employees
- 2.5. Produce a video clip regarding portal and other OGP commitments and disseminate it through social media, mass media or local municipalities’ units
- 2.6. System enactment, public engagement in planning and forming of the 2020 budget

Start Date: December 2018

End Date: February 2020

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2018–2020 action plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information about how the milestones will be carried out. The full commitment text is available here:

https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tbilisi_Action-Plan_2018-2020.pdf

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
2. Overall		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

Context and Objectives

Participatory budgeting is important for Georgia within the EU Association Agreement and for introducing good governance practices to the country.¹ Georgia ranks among the top five countries in the world, according to budgeting transparency, advancing 28 spots since 2012.² However, according to the Local Self-Government Index 2017,³ most Georgian municipalities lack citizen participation during budget planning processes, and IDFI assesses the country to be at an early stage of evidence-based policy development.⁴

Currently, the Tbilisi budget planning process is a prerogative of City Hall, with the Tbilisi Assembly Committees providing comments and recommendations on City Hall's draft budget, until the Assembly's final approval⁵. While the City Assembly meetings to discuss the budget are open to the public, public interest is usually low.⁶ Tbilisi's budget for previous years is published on the municipality website,⁷ but currently no participatory mechanisms exist and citizens lack access to the budget planning processes.

As a result, Tbilisi City Hall has committed to introduce an electronic participatory budgeting mechanism for citizens to rate budget priority areas. Following public voting, the program will generate a weighted average to determine the budget priorities. This commitment also foresees the development of relevant documents formalizing processes for City Hall to consider the weighted budget and provide official feedback on the final budget. The newly developed electronic mechanism will not only allow citizens to provide inputs on budgeting but also to gain easier access to information on budget distribution and planning processes. It will also explain through an electronic portal how the funds of previous years were allocated. The commitment is thus relevant to the OGP values of access to information, civic participation, and technology and innovation.

This commitment continues from Commitment 3 from the previous action plan, which involved conducting face-to-face interviews with Tbilisi residents for annual public opinion surveys to support evidence-based budgeting.⁸ With OSGF support, the methodology and questionnaires were developed, but this component was not included in the present action plan due to its complexity.⁹ To increase the commitment's relevance and civic participation, TI Georgia and USAID GGI suggested that City Hall allocate specific funds to be spent based on citizens' priorities. However, according to the Budgetary Department of City Hall, this is too difficult legally to implement.¹⁰ USAID GGI also suggested that Tbilisi City Hall could pursue the Estonian model for participatory budgeting which commits local governments to allocate a certain amount of funds to implement citizen-proposed projects.

This commitment is specific enough to be verifiable considering its detailed milestones in developing the software for the application and system, establishing a legal framework, testing the system, and training relevant City Hall employees. If fully completed, it could have a moderate impact, as citizens will be able to more easily submit their priorities to City Hall for consideration in the Tbilisi budget compared with their ability to do so previously. The creation of an easy-to-use tool for citizens to rate their budget priorities could better integrate the public into the budgeting process. This integration is important, as the budget process often inadequately reflects public needs whereas citizens have practically no access to the budget design process.¹¹ In terms of access to information, the mechanism will allow citizens to compare budgets from previous years in a user-friendly manner and check the distribution of funds allocated to public priorities. It could also reduce the time needed for citizens to check budgetary information. Citizens will also be able to share their comments on budgeting in the Tbilisi Forum, but the commitment does not specify whether City Hall will be obliged to respond and to reflect these comments in policies.

Although CSOs recognize participation as important for ensuring transparency in budgeting processes, TI Georgia expressed uncertainty about the potential effectiveness and sustainability of this commitment.¹² An interviewed TI Georgia representative stated that the Ministry of Finance (MoF) has a similar participatory budgeting mechanism on its website ("Plan Budget"), but it is mostly a formality. Therefore, although this new tool is potentially useful, political commitment and public awareness are needed to motivate the public to use it. Statistics from

the MoF website (www.survey.mof.ge) show that overall 89 respondents participated in the survey and submitted priority areas in 2019.¹³ As a result, the dissemination of a promotional video may not be enough to increase awareness of the new participation mechanism because the commitment requires stronger visibility and an outreach plan. Furthermore, the commitment is ambiguous about operationalization. For example, it states that “in parallel with the voting process, the municipal and district departments will ensure their engagement with citizens,” yet the ways and procedures for engagement are unclear. Finally, specific management procedures for maintaining the portal are not provided.

Next steps

Considering the importance of the commitment, it should be given priority and continued in future action plans if not implemented during the second action plan period (2018-2020). To ensure its effectiveness, the IRM researcher recommends City Hall do the following:

- Focus on the sustainability of the project: it is important to clearly define the management for operating the mechanism and to allocate personnel who will be responsible for retrieving information from the portal and providing feedback to users.
- Enhance public outreach for this commitment, as citizens should know about and be able to easily access feedback on their voting so there is meaningful engagement. City Hall should provide information on the whole process along with when and where to expect reasoned responses from City Hall on their inputs, such as through brochures, promotional videos, or website and social media updates. It could also be useful to develop policies for formalizing participatory budgeting and provide in advance the actual figures and percentages that might be influenced by the public budget voting.
- To support evidence-based policy development and increase relevance of the commitment, it would be useful to conduct public opinion surveys, which were previously part of the commitment. This would require mobilization of considerable human and financial resources.
- Consider adopting the Estonian model of participatory budgeting (proposed by UUSAID GGI during the action plan development). This process would commit Tbilisi City Hall to allocate a certain amount of funds to implement citizen-proposed projects that are identified through open public voting.

¹ EU-Georgia Relations Factsheet, November 10, 2017: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/23634/EU-Georgia%20relations,%20factsheet

² Georgia is among top 5 countries in budgeting transparency, TI Georgia, 2018:

<https://www.transparency.ge/ge/post/biujetis-gamchvirvalobis-mxriv-sakartvelo-msoplios-xuteulshia>

³ National Assessment of Georgian Municipalities, IDFI, December 6, 2017:

https://idfi.ge/en/national_assessment_of_georgian_municipalities

⁴ Assessing Civic Participation in Batumi, Kutaisi and Akhaltsikhe Municipalities, 2017:

https://idfi.ge/public/upload/IDFI_Photos_2017/idfi_general/Engagement_Practice_Assessment_in_Municipalities_of_Georgia_Final_geo.pdf

⁵ Tbilisi Assembly Committees discuss Draft Tbilisi Budget 2019, ITV, November 2018: <https://itv.ge/news/tbilisi-2019-wlis-biujetis-proeqts-sakrebulo-komisiebi-ganikhilaven/>

⁶ IRM Tbilisi, Georgia Final Report 2017.

⁷ “Tbilisi Budget”, Tbilisi City Hall, accessed April 2, 2019: <http://www.tbilisi.gov.ge/page/43?lang=ge>

⁸ Tsartsidze, Dea, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Tbilisi, Georgia Final Report 2017, pgs. 37-42, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Tbilisi_Final-Report_2017.pdf

⁹ Khasia, April 12, 2019.

¹⁰ Topuria, March 15, 2019.

¹¹ TI Georgia, Analysis and Recommendations of Tbilisi Budget 2019:

<https://www.transparency.ge/ge/blog/sakartvelos-2019-clis-saxelmcipo-biujetis-proektis-analizi-da-rekomendaciebi>

¹² Participatory Budgeting, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, 2016: <https://bit.ly/2CZDFgk>

¹³ Plan Budget, Ministry of Finance: <http://survey.mof.ge>

3. Implementation of Mechanisms for Improvement of Access to Services and Civic Engagement

Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan:

“An integrated web application will be created that will enable the citizens to have online access without leaving home to the most demanded interconnected services within the City Hall system, with the aim to establish one window principle within the scope of these services.

In the first phase, apart from the architecture and urban development directions, the following services will be subject to the inclusion in the list of online services: all services of the Environmental Protection Department and City Transport Department, as well as all functions of the Municipal Supervision Department that by their content are attributed to services used by citizens (the exact listing of the latter will be defined at the first stage of the fulfillment of this commitment, provided for in Appendix N3). Besides technical provision of the above mentioned services, an important step for the improvement of the access to full information and access to services of the City Hall system will also be the establishment of a one-window principle. Web-App will enable the citizens to create their own online account, get the services without having to go to the municipality and manage their information. Access will also be possible through the mobile app.

The format will take into account the possibility of reporting the information, the feedback by citizens on the services. This information will be subject to periodic analysis by Tbilisi City Hall, service providers will analyze and summarize the received feedback and statistical data of electronic services. This analysis will be made publicly available and will be used by Tbilisi City Hall to improve services. Legal basis will be established for the procedures related to this mechanism.”

Milestones

- 3.1. Description and documentation of work processes in Municipal Services of Transport, Environment Protection and Supervision
- 3.2. Grading of statement types and determining their movement (processing). Internal Business Process Panel – Employee Page
- 3.3. Creation of unified services public platform. Creation of feedback tools. Introduction of citizens’ personal pages in Municipality (to be integrated with other functional envisaged in commitments)
- 3.4. Elaborate and approve system supporting legal act
- 3.5. Training of City Hall employees
- 3.6. Produce a video clip covering portal and other OGP commitments and disseminate it through social media, mass media or local municipalities’ units

Start Date: March 2019

End Date: February 2020

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2018–2020 action plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information on how the milestones will be carried out. The full commitment text is available here:

https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tbilisi_Action-Plan_2018-2020.pdf

Commitment Overview	Verifiability	OGP Value Relevance (as written)	Potential Impact	Completion	Did It Open Government?
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	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
3. Overall		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

Context and Objectives

This commitment continues from Commitment 5 from the previous action plan, which saw only limited completion by 2018.¹ A 2018 study by the International Republican Institute found that only 32% of the Georgian population report they trust local government institutions and that half of Tbilisi residents hold an unfavorable view of their local government’s work.²³ This lack of trust underlines the need for the public to have greater access to information on local government institutions’ work, including the services local government provides. Tbilisi City Hall has made progress in fostering public service delivery and access to government services by introducing a number of e-portals. In 2015, with support of IDFI, City Hall launched a new centralized webpage (www.tbilisi.gov.ge) for easier access to public information and increased civic participation in polls and assessments. However, as the IRM researcher’s focus group and the Tbilisi’s OGP public consultations revealed, citizen knowledge is limited, and citizens ask for better accessibility to available e-service.⁴ Furthermore, according to CSOs, citizens often confuse the responsibilities of agencies, such as the Tbilisi mayor’s office, Gamgeoba (local administrative districts) or the City Assembly.⁵

To respond to these needs, Tbilisi City Hall plans to create an integrated web application and a mobile app based on a one-window principle whereby multiple services and information from different departments will be available in a single location. Users will be able to register online through a personal account and modify and select services based on their interests. The web portal will grant access to all services of the Environmental Protection Department and City Transport Department, functions of the Municipal Supervision Department, and Architecture and Urban development directions. Apart from obtaining information and accessing services from home, the portal will allow users to submit feedback in order for City Hall to improve its services. The commitment foresees summarizing and publishing the analysis of feedback received so that citizens will know whether their efforts were addressed. As one of the focus group participants stated to the IRM researcher,⁶ authorities are not accustomed to asking for public opinion and taking these opinions into account, so this would be a useful to improve their responsivity to the public.

This commitment is relevant to the OGP values of access to information and civic participation and to technology and innovation for transparency. A web portal using the one-window principle will make access to services easier and less time-consuming for citizens whereas the feedback mechanism could improve the public’s ability to influence the provision of services, as the commitment explicitly calls for assessing the feedback received. The commitment contains specified milestones that can objectively verify its implementation such as the service areas (including urban development, environment protection, and transportation). The milestones on developing feedback tools, training employees, approving legal acts, and disseminating promo videos are also possible to track.

The commitment’s potential impact is assessed as moderate. Launching an integrated user-friendly web portal, based on a one-window principle, could increase civic engagement in monitoring and use of City Hall services. It could also function as a platform to deliver public opinion on improving these services to the decision-makers, which will be new for City Hall. Despite the milestone specificity, the commitment does not explain how City Hall will “analyze and summarize the received feedback” and how the feedback will result in concrete actions by

the government. While 76% of Tbilisi residents use the internet every day,⁷ the IRM researcher's focus group revealed that some people prefer in-person communication instead of using electronic services because they believe that verbal communication can be more informative, effective, and results based. This underlines the need to build public trust and knowledge about the value of using e-services.

Despite these limitations, creating a centralized platform could lead to important changes. The tool could increase access to information by helping citizens learn about the available City Hall services from a single unified web portal, without having to travel. Improved accessibility to services could also increase their use. Service information currently is scattered, without a systematic source from which to obtain it. By introducing personalized accounts, citizens will be able to obtain, as well as manage, their information based on their interests.

Next steps

Considering the commitment's relevance and the fact that it was already carried from the previous action plan, City Hall should give priority to its implementation. The commitment has taken into consideration IRM's recommendation on modifying and carrying it forward and, as a result, it does not include the creation of civic monitoring groups, focusing instead on developing a unified web portal and mobile app. To increase the commitment's long-term functionality, the IRM researcher recommends the following:

- Maintain procedural clarity and specificity on handling citizen feedback. City Hall could formalize how this procedure could entail developing a concrete legal document, binding the government to follow guidelines and deadlines in responding to citizens and acting upon their inputs.
- City Hall could direct its outreach efforts toward boosting the use of e-services. While the commitment incorporates dissemination of a promo video, the public outreach component can be strengthened. This could include organizing presentation of the portal and distribution of information pamphlets at City Hall. Considering the complexity of portals, through explanatory brochures, citizens would be able to discover more about the value of the mechanism, specific services they can receive, the ways to navigate the web portal, and OGP in general.

¹ Tsartsidze, Dea, Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Tbilisi, Georgia Final Report 2017, pgs. 48-54
https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Tbilisi_Final-Report_2017.pdf

² Transparency International Georgia publishes a survey about the most trusted Georgian Institutions, Transparency International Georgia, 2018: <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/34617-transparency-international-georgia-publishes-a-survey-about-the-most-trusted-georgian-institutions.html>

³ Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Georgia 2018, International Republican Institute (IRI): April 2018:
http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-5-29_georgia_poll_presentation.pdf

⁴ Focus Group, 28 March 2019.

⁵ Gvelesiani, March 2, 2019.

⁶ Focus Group, 28 March 2019.

⁷ Frequency of Internet Usage (by settlement type), Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2018:
<https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2018ge/FROINTR-by-SETTYPE/>

4. Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy of Tbilisi Municipality City Hall

Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan:

“In accordance with the OECD recommendations, Tbilisi Municipality City Hall together with civil society representatives will develop a medium-term strategy for improving good faith and transparency of governance.

This strategic document will define the standards of good faith and transparency for Tbilisi Municipality City Hall of and the subjects in its system, whereas for the implementation of these standards, an action plan, performance indicators and Monitoring Framework will be elaborated.”

Milestones

- 4.1. Preparation of situational analysis on good faith and transparent governance
- 4.2. Preparation of the initial working version of the Good Faith and Transparency Strategy and Action Plan
- 4.3. Public discussions of the initial version of the Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy and Action plan
- 4.4. Development of a final version of the Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy and Action Plan, performance Indicators and monitoring framework
- 4.5. Approval of Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy, Action Plan, Performance Indicators and Monitoring Framework

Start Date: January 2019

End Date: November 2019

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2018–2020 action plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information on how the milestones will be carried out. The full commitment text is available here:

https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tbilisi_Action-Plan_2018-2020.pdf

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
4. Overall		✓		✓				✓			Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

Context and Objectives

Despite improvements in anti-corruption rankings, almost 60% of the population in Georgia believes that officials misuse power whereas 36% thinks that officials use their positions for personal gain.¹ For years, Tbilisi residents have raised questions regarding accountability and transparency of Tbilisi City Hall, largely due to a lack of access to financial or other relevant information about projects the institution or its subordinate agencies have implemented.²

In its 2016 monitoring report, the OECD recommended that Georgia should not only establish an Independent Anti-Corruption Agency but also develop and implement anti-corruption action plans in sectoral ministries and in local governments.³ This commitment aims to address this

recommendation by strengthening the good faith and transparent governance practices at City Hall. Specifically, it calls for developing an evidence-based strategic document to be finalized within the current action plan cycle. It is noteworthy that USAID's Good Governance Initiative (GGI) developed and proposed the commitment. USAID GGI is also responsible for its implementation, including conducting a situation analysis at City Hall.⁴ Since the adoption of the action plan, USAID GGI has selected the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) to work with Tbilisi City Hall to develop the action plan. The draft strategy will be discussed within the Working Group and at public consultations. This is not the first instance of CSOs supporting public institutions in developing the Good Faith Governance Strategy, but the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, with support from USAID GGI and in partnership with IDFI, developed a Building Integrity and Transparency Strategy 2017–2020 and corresponding action plan.⁵

The commitment is directly relevant to the OGP value of civic participation because it entails holding public discussions of the draft strategy. The commitment follows a logical structure, with needs assessment to be conducted at an initial stage. It will set a baseline for measuring progress and identifying gaps and loopholes in order to plan actions. Following the action plan development, elaboration of the monitoring framework will be important to ensure adequate evaluation of the strategy implementation. However, as written in the action plan, it is unclear what new information will be made available to the public through this commitment. In addition, although the public could use the transparency framework to monitor City Hall's compliance with the good governance strategy, the commitment does not specify the mechanisms whereby the public could hold City Hall accountable to the strategy.

The majority of milestones are specific and verifiable. However, the commitment is not specific about the format of public discussions and the degree to which public opinion will be addressed in the final good governance strategy. The initial step is to select a CSO to conduct situation analysis on good faith and transparent governance at City Hall, followed by drafting, discussing, and approving the final version of the Good Faith and Transparent Governance Strategy. According to USAID GGI, the whole process is based on a co-creation process and on involvement of stakeholders.⁶ Its potential impact is coded as minor. If the commitment is fully implemented, City Hall will have its strategy and vision, with relevant action points to increase transparency and good faith governance. The strategy could have the capacity to potentially change City Hall's culture, but its impact will depend heavily on its content points and implementation.

Although the specific action points are yet to be developed, the implementation of this commitment could lead to greater disclosure of information on internal transactions and the use of funds, as the assessment could reveal loopholes. According to TI Georgia, local governments in Georgia, such as Tbilisi, need to introduce good governance standards by addressing issues related to salaries and salary supplements; improving the rules for recruitment, promotion, and dismissal of employees; and ensuring transparency and accountability. Thus, the anti-corruption strategy could raise public awareness about corruption risks and relevant response mechanisms, which can enhance the credibility of the agency.

Next steps

This commitment is an important first step in addressing transparency and good faith governance in public sector. Moving forward, it is important that the document involves the establishment of adequate feedback and accountability mechanisms for monitoring its implementation. It would be helpful to regularly update higher-level decision-makers, such as the Vice Mayor or Deputy or Mayor at City Hall about the strategy so that they are involved and committed to the process. There should also be clearly defined roles, allocated staff, and a management system while the implementation of the commitment is being planned.

¹ "TI Georgia: Corruption Remains a Serious Challenge," Civil.ge, April 2019: <https://civil.ge/archives/302002>

² IDFI Recommendations to OGP Tbilisi Draft Action Plan 2018-2019, IDFI, 2018.

³ “Anti-Corruption Reforms in Georgia: 4th round of monitoring of the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan,” OECD, 2016: <http://www.oecd.org/corruption/anti-bribery/OECD-ACN-Georgia-Round-4-Monitoring-Report-ENG.pdf>

⁴ Darchiashvili, Gorgadze, March 11, 2019.

⁵ “The Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure Adopted the Transparency and Integrity Strategy and Action Plan,” IDFI, May 2017:

https://idfi.ge/en/the_ministry_of_regional_development_and_infrastructure_adopted_the_transparency_and_integrity_strategy_and_action_plan

⁶ Darchiashvili, Gorgadze, March 11, 2019.

5. Development of Transparency in Tbilisi City Hall Through Electronic Mechanisms

Language of the commitment as it appears in the action plan:

“The commitment integrates three directions aimed at improving e-transparency in Tbilisi City Hall and increasing access to open data. In particular, the commitment provides for the following issues:

- Update of Tbilisi City Hall Portal Taking into Consideration the Version of the Concept Prepared by the IDFI
- Elaboration of New Version of Public Information Page
- Creation of an Open Data Page of Tbilisi City Hall

Milestones

5.1. Developing technical tasks needed for upgrading of the portal based on the concept offered by Tbilisi City Hall

5.2. Integration of the public information page concept in the technical assignment of Tbilisi City Hall Portal

5.3. Adding of new functionality to the Tbilisi City Hall portal according to the technical task

5.4. Launching of the updated version of proactive publication of the information on the renovated portal of Tbilisi City Hall in the pilot mode and posting of information through it

5.5. Modification of open data portal concept and preparation of technical task

5.6. Creation of Open Data Portal of Tbilisi City Hall and its activation in a pilot mode

5.7. Posting information on an open database portal

5.8. Piloting and launching mechanism for retrieval of public information

Start Date: December 2018

End Date: December 2019

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2018–2020 action plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information on how the milestones will be carried out. The full commitment text is available here:

https://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/Tbilisi_Action-Plan_2018-2020.pdf

Commitment Overview	Verifiability		OGP Value Relevance (as written)				Potential Impact				Completion				Did It Open Government?				
	Not specific enough to be verifiable	Specific enough to be verifiable	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Completed	Worsened	Did Not Change	Marginal	Major	Outstanding
5. Overall		✓	✓			✓		✓			Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				Assessed at the end of action plan cycle.				

Context and Objectives

This commitment, similar to Commitment 4 from the first action plan, was proposed by the Georgian CSO the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)¹ and seeks to improve Tbilisi City Hall’s transparency.² The National Assessment of Transparency and

Accountability of Municipalities in 2017 rated Tbilisi City Hall at 35%, with an average rate of 21%, indicating a lack of proactive disclosure of public information, electronic governance, and citizen participation and accountability.³ In addition, a 2015 study by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre found that only 7% of Georgia's population understand how their respective local governments work, and 25% trust them.⁴⁵ Information scarcity and lack of proactive disclosure lead the media and citizens to question the trustworthiness and openness of the Tbilisi government and make it difficult for the public to monitor work quality and government efficiency.⁶

Georgian legislation ensures access to public information, with Global Right to Information granting the country 97 points out of 150 and placing it in upper-middle cohort, according to strength of legal frameworks to information.⁷⁸ Chapter 3 of the General Administrative Code of Georgia guarantees access to “public information available at the administrative body, as well as right to receive copies unless the information contains state, professional, or commercial secrets or personal data” (Chapter 3, article 10.1). In Tbilisi, it is possible to submit a formal request for public information to City Hall, with the public institution obliged to issue requested public information immediately or no later than 10 days thereafter (Article 40.1). The agency must provide justification for refusing information disclosure and introduce procedures for appeal within three days of the decision. Proactive release of information however does not free public institutions from issuing requested public information.

Georgia has developed a number of open data portals for publishing government-held information. For example, during Georgia's 2014–2016 national action plan, the government introduced the open data portal www.data.gov.ge though municipal governments often do not provide relevant information in a timely manner⁹. Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) funded another open data portal (www.opendata.ge), but it is currently inactive. IDFI operates yet another open data platform (www.DataLab.ge), which incorporates datasets on local government, including Tbilisi City Hall's revenues from tree-cutting permits, the number of construction permits, and personnel wage statistics, and so on.

This commitment aims to introduce new and improved electronic platforms to make access to information easier and less time-consuming. It contains three deliverables: 1) upgrading Tbilisi City Hall Portal to incorporate and promote the pages of local districts (Gangeoba), 2) elaborating on a new version of the public information page, which will make it easier for users to find desired information and operationalize information requests, and 3) creating an Open Data Portal, which will publish public sector data in an open and accessible format. Data will be structured by thematic category so that they are presented in a more user-friendly format, similar to Austin's Open Data Portal.¹⁰

The commitment involves concrete and verifiable milestones, including development of technical tasks for portals, launching renovated City Hall website, adding the upgraded public information portal to it, and piloting the open data platform. However, some milestones leave space for interpretation. For example, the commitment does not explain how the processes will be internalized in City Hall, whether operating the portal will require additional staff, or whether there will be standardized procedures for updating the portal.

Currently, City Hall does not have any open data modules, which makes it difficult for citizens to know whom to contact or where to find relevant information. The public Information page is also currently difficult to use and does not offer information in an open format. As a result, upgrading the City Hall website and public information portal and introducing an open data system could make it easier and less time-consuming for stakeholders to find information. However, while the renovated portal can help advance the open data principle in public administration and present information in a more user-friendly manner, the actual impact depends on the number and type of datasets to be disclosed as well as the frequency of updating the portal, which is not explained in the commitment text.¹¹ Therefore, this commitment is considered to have a minor impact on improving access to information in Tbilisi.

Introducing a new open data system will be an innovation in City Hall’s practice of delivering information. These mechanisms could enable individuals to easily receive and analyze information about City Hall’s projects, milestones, and specific areas of intervention. Presently, two designated staff members at City Hall are in charge of responding to all public information queries.¹² A renovated public information page and open data portal could help operationalize the process, increase accessibility, potentially reduce the number of official requests, and enable citizens to track request status.

Next steps

If this commitment is carried forward to the next action plan, the IRM researcher recommends the following steps be taken to strengthen its potential impact:

- As a number of examples showed, launch and introduction of mechanisms is the beginning of a lengthy process of sustaining and allowing the mechanisms to deliver results. Before launching, City Hall should adopt a system supporting legal documents and develop a technical management system description for the back office, which will define the regularity of updating information on the Open Data Portal and the public information page, as well as the responsible staff members. It is important to have clear institutional vision on the amount and type of information and datasets to be uploaded on the portal. Analyzing what kind of information citizens request most frequently could support institutionalization of administering portals.
- To expand the commitment’s scope, it would be useful to develop a public relations strategy and conduct an outreach campaign, as lack of public interest and low awareness can reduce its use. This could entail development of a promotional video, printing and disseminating brochures, and conducting public presentation in partnership with IDFI and relevant CSOs. Engaging the Public Relations Department at City Hall could also be valuable in planning such activities.

¹ OGP Global Summit in Georgia, IDFI, July 2018: https://idfi.ge/en/ogp_fifth_global_summit_in_georgia

² IDFI Recommendations to OGP Tbilisi Draft Action Plan 2018-2019, IDFI, 2018.

³ National Assessment of Georgian Municipalities, IDFI, December 2017:

https://idfi.ge/en/national_assessment_of_georgian_municipalities

⁴ Public Policy Research, Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2015:

<https://caucasusbarometer.org/ge/ti2015ge/LOCGOVTU/>

⁵ Public Policy Research, Caucasus Research Resource Center, 2015:

<https://caucasusbarometer.org/ge/ti2015ge/TRLOCGVT/>

⁶ IDFI Recommendations to OGP Tbilisi Draft Action Plan 2018-2019, IDFI, 2018.

⁶ National Assessment of Georgian Municipalities, IDFI, December 2017:

https://idfi.ge/en/national_assessment_of_georgian_municipalities

⁷ General Administrative Code of Georgia, accessed March 12, 2019:

<https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/16270?publication=28>

⁸ Global Right to Information Country scores: <https://www.rti-rating.org/country-data/>

⁹ OGP Georgia National Action Plan 2018-2019: [http://procurement.gov.ge/getattachment/International-Cooperation/Action-Plans/\(OGP\)/OGP-2018-2019-AP.pdf.aspx](http://procurement.gov.ge/getattachment/International-Cooperation/Action-Plans/(OGP)/OGP-2018-2019-AP.pdf.aspx)

¹⁰ <https://data.austintexas.gov>

¹¹ Khasia, 12 April 2019.

¹² Khasia, 12 April 2019.

V. General Recommendations

This section aims to inform development of the next action plan and guide implementation of the current action plan. It is divided into two sections: 1) IRM key recommendations to improve OGP process and action plans in the country or entity and 2) an assessment of how the government responded to previous IRM key recommendations.

5.1 IRM Recommendations

1. Ensure higher-level political engagement and greater sustainability of the OGP process

One of the crucial cross-cutting issues revealed as a result of key stakeholder interviews was placing OGP higher on the political agenda in Tbilisi. Though the head of administration of City Hall chairs the working group, the IRM researcher recommends inviting at least the deputy mayor to some working group meetings. This higher-level political engagement could help increase visibility of the OGP process and better ensure the long-term sustainability of commitments.

Currently, the coordinator for the OGP process at the City Hall is a UNDP contractor, and there is no City Hall staff member designated to organize internal OGP activities. Therefore, to ensure sustainability of OGP process in Tbilisi, it is important that City Hall assigns a permanent staff member to OGP who does not depend on external resources. This would ensure continuity of the process in case external funding is no longer available.

2. Plan and conduct stronger public relations and awareness-raising activities around the OGP process

This recommendation is carried forward from the previous IRM Report 2017. Generally, there seems to be low awareness for OGP among the public and CSOs that are not directly engaged in OGP. It is important to develop stronger public relations and dissemination of information on OGP. For example, after developing and launching services, City Hall should conduct awareness-raising campaigns, such as presentations and branded materials. It would be useful to involve the Public Relations Department at City Hall to support the action plan development and implementation.

3. Formalize the working group meetings and work and invite other civil society actors not currently involved in the OGP process

Currently, Tbilisi's OGP working group meetings are held on an ad hoc basis, which can result in delays in monitoring and implementation of action plans. It is important therefore to institutionalize at least quarterly meetings for the working group to monitor action plan progress. A formal schedule for meetings could help provide regular updates and address issues that arise in implementation in a timely manner to avoid setbacks. Furthermore, it would be useful to have formal procedures on responding to stakeholder inputs on the action plan and provide formal justifications and written feedback on interventions proposed by CSOs to ensure a meaningful co-creation process.

Finally, the call for participants in the working group should be open, and clear selection procedures should be published in advance. In doing so, City Hall could target relevant thematic CSOs, experts, and urban activists who might be interested in participating in the OGP process. This could help expand the list of "usual suspects" and diversify CSO engagement in OGP.

4. Clarify the management and distribution of future commitment activities in order to better ensure their timely delivery

City Hall modified the commitments carried forward from the previous action plan by removing the description of the internal system management of the activities. The previous action plan described in detail processes of how City Hall staff would deliver the proposed services whereas these details are mostly missing from the current action plan. However, without such information, it is unclear how City Hall plans to sustain service delivery, for example, after developing and launching e-services and portals. It is important to have a results-based, systematic approach to designing commitments (for example, commitments 1, 2, 3 and 5, where it would be good to have a management plan for operating electronic services). Thus, City Hall could incorporate the management and organizational distribution of tasks into future action plans to better institutionalize commitment implementation.

5. Continue enhancing transparency and civic participation in the decision-making processes, particularly around major urban infrastructure projects

The next action plan should further advance mechanisms for civic participation in the decision-making processes in Tbilisi. Tbilisi has recently seen public protests due to the government issuing construction permits without public engagement, even when the construction would affect people’s lives. As a result, it would be useful to introduce a policy-level reform that would oblige the government to proactively consult local residents prior to issuing construction permits. While the SMART Map aims to provide such information in an accessible manner, participatory and transparent policies could enhance proactive communication between the government and the public.

Table 5.1: Five Key Recommendations

1	Ensure higher-level political engagement and greater sustainability of the OGP process
2	Plan and conduct stronger public relations and awareness-raising activities around the OGP process
3	Formalize the working group meetings and work and invite other civil society actors not currently involved in the OGP process
4	Clarify the management and distribution of future commitment activities to better ensure their timely delivery
5	Continue enhancing transparency and civic participation in the decision-making processes, particularly around major urban infrastructure projects

5.2 Response to Previous IRM Key Recommendations

Table 5.2: Previous IRM Report Key Recommendations

	Recommendation	Integrated into Current Action Plan?
1	Ensure continuity and renewed commitment to OGP	✓
2	Continue the co-creation process and expand participation to more diverse and targeted actors	✓
3	Carry out the public awareness campaign to raise visibility of OGP and to promote new tools	✓
4	Participatory budgeting and public oversight of spending	✓

5	Leverage the opportunity of the Global OGP Summit	✘
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Per the IRM recommendation, City Hall continued the OGP process and carried forward three commitments in the second action plan due to their limited completion in 2017. Adoption of the second action plan and regular follow-up on unfulfilled commitments by the working group and its decision to include them in the new action plan demonstrate continuity and transfer of institutional memory on OGP from the first action plan. Referring to the second recommendation, in the spirit of co-creation, the government appointed the OGP working group co-chair from civil society, which diversified the process by allowing a stronger voice and higher status to CSOs. The working group also agreed to involve a CSO representative working on the issues associated with persons living with disabilities. Public consultations incorporated awareness raising to inform about Your Idea for the City Mayor and to increase the action plan relevance.

Although the commitments incorporate public outreach activities in alignment with the Open Government Communication Strategy of City Hall, the activities mainly foresee development and dissemination of short video clips, but it could be further strengthened. The action plan also incorporates the creation of a participatory budgeting mechanism. Finally, the Tbilisi Mayor hosted local governance representatives during the OGP Global Summit in 2018, but no particular follow-up agreements on future cooperation in key policy areas were made.

VI. Methodology and Sources

The IRM reports are written by researchers for each OGP-participating country or entity. All IRM reports undergo a process of quality control to ensure that the highest standards of research and due diligence have been applied.

Analysis of progress on OGP action plans is a combination of interviews, desk research, observation, and feedback from nongovernmental stakeholders. The IRM report builds on the evidence available in Tbilisi's OGP repository,¹ findings in the government's own self-assessment reports, and any other assessments of process and progress put out by civil society, the private sector, or international organizations.² At the beginning of each reporting cycle, IRM staff share a research plan with governments to open a seven-day period of comments or feedback regarding the proposed research approach.

Each IRM researcher carries out stakeholder interviews to ensure an accurate portrayal of events. Given budgetary and calendar constraints, the IRM cannot consult all interested parties or visit implementation sites. Some contexts require anonymity of interviewees, and the IRM reviews the right to remove personal identifying information of these participants. Due to the necessary limitations of the method, the IRM strongly encourages commentary during the pre-publication review period of each report.

Each report undergoes a quality control process that includes an internal review by IRM staff and the IRM's International Experts Panel (IEP). Each report also undergoes an external review in which governments and civil society are invited to provide comments on the content of the draft IRM report.

This review process, including the procedure for incorporating comments received, is outlined in greater detail in Section III of the Procedures Manual.³

Interviews and stakeholder input

The IRM researcher conducted 11 semi-structured in-depth interviews with the members of the Tbilisi OGP working group and with two urban activists who were not directly involved in the OGP process. The working group interviewees included representatives of City Hall and its subordinate agencies responsible for the action plan commitments along with key CSOs. Interviews were conducted in March and April 2019. Interviews allowed exploring multifarious perspectives, the experience of working group participants, and their reflections on action plan development and commitments.

The IRM researcher organized a focus group meeting held on 28 March 2019 with the assistance of the OGP Focal Point in Mukhiani precinct offices of the Gldani district. The focus group included nine participants from the consultation meetings held in the summer of 2018 to develop the action plan. The aim of the focus group was to gain better insight into citizens' priorities and to understand citizens' knowledge of OGP and attitudes toward City Hall.

The IRM researcher also attended a working group meeting at City Hall to observe the operational process of the forum. Some of the issues of discussion included the action plan progress, the monitoring framework, and the self-assessment. This meeting was held on 29 March 2019 at Tbilisi City Hall.

About the Independent Reporting Mechanism

The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) is a key means by which all stakeholders can track OGP progress in participating countries and entities. The International Experts Panel (IEP) oversees the quality control of each report. The IEP is composed of experts in transparency, participation, accountability, and social science research methods.

The current membership of the International Experts Panel includes

- César Cruz-Rubio
- Mary Francoli
- Brendan Halloran
- Jeff Lovitt
- Fredline M’Cormack-Hale
- Showers Mawowa
- Juanita Olaya
- Quentin Reed
- Rick Snell
- Jean-Patrick Villeneuve

A small staff based in Washington, DC, shepherds reports through the IRM process in close coordination with the researchers. Questions and comments about this report can be directed to the staff at irm@opengovpartnership.org.

¹ See Tbilisi OGP website: <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge>

² See Tbilisi OGP website: <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge>

³ IRM Procedures Manual, V.3 : <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/irm-procedures-manual>

Annex I. Overview of Tbilisi’s performance throughout action plan development

Key:

Green = Meets standard

Yellow = In progress (steps have been taken to meet this standard, but standard is not met)

Red = No evidence of action

Multi-stakeholder Forum	
1a. Forum established: There is a forum to oversee the OGP process.	Green
1b. Regularity: The forum meets at least every quarter, in person, or remotely	Yellow
1c. Collaborative mandate development: Members of the forum jointly develop its remit, membership, and governance structure.	Green
1d. Mandate public: Information on the forum’s remit, membership, and governance structure is available on the OGP website/page.	Green
2a. Multi-stakeholder: The forum includes both governmental and non-government representatives.	Green
2b. Parity: The forum includes an even balance of governmental and non-governmental representatives.	Green
2c. Transparent selection: Non-governmental members of the forum are selected through a fair and transparent process.	Green
2d. High-level government representation: The forum includes high-level representatives with decision-making authority from government.	Yellow
3d. Openness: The forum accepts inputs and representation on the action plan process from any civil society or other stakeholders outside the forum.	Green
3e. Remote participation: There are opportunities for remote participation in at least some meetings and events.	Green
3f. Minutes: The OGP forum proactively communicates and reports back on its decisions, activities, and results to wider government and civil society stakeholders.	Green

Key:

Green = Meets standard

Yellow = In progress (steps have been taken to meet this standard, but standard is not met)

Red = No evidence of action

Action Plan Development	
4a. Process transparency: There is a national OGP website (or OGP webpage on a government website) where information on all aspects of the national OGP process is proactively published.	Green
4b. Documentation in advance: The forum shares information about OGP to stakeholders in advance to guarantee they are informed and prepared to participate in all stages of the process.	Green
4c. Awareness raising: The forum conducts outreach and awareness-raising activities with relevant stakeholders to inform them of the OGP process.	Green
4d. Communication channels: The government facilitates direct communication with stakeholders to respond to action plan process questions, particularly during times of intense OGP activity.	Green
4e. Reasoned response: The multi-stakeholder forum publishes its reasoning behind decisions and responds to major categories of public comment.	Yellow
5a. Repository: Government collects and publishes a document repository on the national or local OGP website/webpage, which provides a historical record and access to all documents related to the national OGP process, including (but not limited to) consultation documents, National Action Plans, government self-assessments, IRM reports, and supporting documentation of commitment implementation (e.g., links to databases, evidence of meetings, publications)	Green

Editorial note: If a country or local “meets” the six standards in bold, the IRM will recognize the country’s process as a Starred Process.