



საქართველო
ახალციხის მუნიციპალიტეტის მერია



AKHALTSIKHE MUNICIPALITY CITY HALL
GEORGIA

Akhaltzikhe, September 30, 2020

Open Government Partnership Steering Committee

Honorable Members of Steering Committee,

Allow me to extend my most heartfelt appreciation for selecting Akhaltsikhe Municipality to move forward to the full Application phase for final review and evaluation.

On behalf of Akhaltsikhe Municipality City Hall, local self-government situated in the Southern part of Georgia, with a population of 39,400 (as of January 1, 2019), I am deeply honored to express our intention to join Local Program of the Open Government Partnership. As an awardee of the 2018-2019 Best Practice Program (announced by the National Association of Local Authorities, within the framework of N4ED project) of municipal service delivery among Georgian municipalities, the Akhaltsikhe Municipality City Hall acknowledges, that transparency, accountability and effective management of public resources are key factors for providing all relevant services, reducing poverty and engaging local citizens in decision-making processes.

Since 2014, our municipality has been taking all necessary measures to ensure that transparency, accountability and civic participation, the main principles of the open government, are enshrined in each policy and activity of our local self-government. This approach allows us to get closer to our community and make difference to their everyday lives.

Given the Akhaltsikhe Municipality's track record on taking up OGP commitments at the national level, joining OGP Local Program will be beneficial in gaining experience and expertise on implementing its own OGP Local action plan and ensuring co-creation process. In a close collaboration with the civil society, Akhaltsikhe Municipality City Hall shall consult with citizens to identify need-based commitments for a local Action Plan. As a member of OGP Local Program, Akhaltsikhe municipality shall have an opportunity to develop a permanent dialogue mechanism on transparency, accountability and good governance between citizens and local government to facilitate a culture of openness. In order to establish effective relationship with our citizens, it is crucially important for us to speed up the digitalization process in the Municipality.

Akhaltzikhe Municipality has been actively participating in the OGP Georgia processes. Main principles of our administration are public participation, open data, transparent governance and high quality of e-services.

In the framework of the OGP Georgia Action Plan 2016-2018, with support from the USAID's Good Governance Initiative in Georgia (GGI) and in close collaboration with one of the leading Georgian CSOs - Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) and Estonia's E-Governance Academy, the Akhaltsikhe City Hall has successfully introduced Estonian platform "VOLIS" for e-participation as well as developed new website that is equipped with tools to improve e-transparency and participation including in budgetary processes. that is being successfully implemented, enabling local citizens to decide how to allocate part of the municipal budget.

Furthermore, in the framework of the OGP Georgia Action Plan 2018-2019 Akhaltsikhe Municipality with USAID GGI's support and in close partnership with IDFI has developed and approved Strategy and Action Plan for increasing Transparency and Integrity of the City Hall. Public consultations were held to discuss a draft version of the Strategy and Action Plan. It is noteworthy that the final documents incorporated comments and feedbacks from citizens and civil society organizations. Additionally, with USAID GGI's support and in close partnership with IDFI we have developed and adopted the Open Data Action Plan in 2019 that will institutionalize open data collection and publication process. As augmented by the relevant MOU with Samtskhe-Javakheti Development Center, we worked to improve access to preschool institutions for children with disabilities and supported this process with relevant acts and systems-level changes. In addition, we worked to improve social work at the municipality level and piloted the project, which was scaled up to the national level and followed by introducing legislative and systems-level change countrywide. Lastly, we have also taken important measures to improve the full engagement and participation of people with disabilities in the political and social life of Akhaltsikhe.

Akhaltzikhe Municipality counts over 20 non-governmental organizations, which are actively engaged in the political and social life of the municipality. We have a long history of cooperation and many successful examples of co-creation on local, national and international levels. Our municipality is equipped with the necessary resources and capacity to facilitate OGP co-creation process, including dedicated staff in the City Hall who have experience working on the OGP related issues within and/or outside OGP Georgia framework. We can introduce a stronger focus on the quality of engagement and provide guidance on the ongoing dialogue between the government and civil society in all phases of the OGP cycle.

We have already taken considerable steps towards more open, responsive and transparent governance. We believe that it is important to develop the OGP local Action Plan through a multistakeholder process, with the active engagement of citizens and civil society. With this aim, we have identified our employees to ensure the coordination of the co-creation process. We are honored that the non-governmental organizations in the Municipality, including Samtskhe-Javakheti Development Center are supporting our application. Our collaboration with this organization which was founded and supported by World Vision Georgia, includes implementation of numerous

activities to improve municipal services and mainstream good governance principles in the administration.

Apart from this, we developed and implemented youth policy in collaboration with national-level government actors. We have been continuously collaborating through various platforms to ensure participation, transparency, accountability, and equality throughout the process. We are aware of the advantages of having a forum-structured policy-making process to maximize participation and cooperation between government and civil society by bringing relevant stakeholders into the discussion and ensuring that opinions of all sectors are been considered.

We are committed to sharing our experience of promoting e-participation including in budgetary processes with other members of OGP Local. We have been successfully implementing the mentioned project since 2017. It directly addresses Open Government Principles, such as transparency, accountability and civic participation, where civic engagement increases in the decision making process, while local government becomes more transparent and accountable. We can also share the lessons learned in the frames of developing the Strategy and Action Plan for increasing Transparency and Integrity, and Open Data Action Plan with the OGP Local Program members.

We are keen to take part in building a global community of practice, where we can share our experience and at the same time - engage and learn from our peers and other development partners in the international open government space, support public sector reforms that will bring our government closer to the people.

Furthermore, Akhaltsikhe municipality City Hall is a member of “Newcastles of the World” Alliance since 2016. The Alliance aims to foster friendship and exchange experience in the various fields between the cities and towns of the World sharing the same name “Newcastle”. The Alliance unites over 20 cities and town from different countries. In the framework of the Alliance, conferences and joint projects are being organized with the active participation of members both at the planning and implementation stages. Akhaltsikhe Municipality can suggest panels and separate projects dedicated to promoting the principles of open government and OGP in these cities and towns. At the same time, Akhaltsikhe City Hall is committed to utilizing all existing formats for inter-municipal cooperation in Georgia to further promote values and principles of the OGP and share its experience and best practices.

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation for considering us to be part of the Open Government Partnership Local Program. Should you have any further queries or concerns about our application, please feel free to contact us.

Best regards,

Mayor of Akhaltsikhe
Municipality City Hall



Zaza Melikidze