



بلدية الكرك الكبرى Greater Al Karak Municipality



Dear Open Government Partnerships Co-chairs,

On behalf of the Greater Karak Municipality, which is a singular entity that was formed after the merger of 11 different municipalities in 2001, I write to join the open government programme. Karak is located South of the Amman and has a population of (350,000). We commit to meeting OGP values and criteria. aim to create an inclusive governance system in Karak so that our local communities can benefit from our policies and provide valuable feedback which will be taken into consideration while making decisions. Our interest in joining OGP arises from the alignment of our values such as transparency and accountability that we would like to enhance within the framework of Greater Karak municipality. Our existing local governance is faced with weak citizen integration in public decision-making. Through being part of OGP local, we seek to correct the anomalies in our local governance and enhance citizen participation which is a cornerstone for justice and trust-building.

The program will benefit us as it represents a set of important standards that relate to developing the municipality's work, providing an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences, view-points and ideas with other municipalities while also addressing the SDGs, in particular sub-goal of SDG 16 – 16.10, to “*Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels*”. The value proposition for local jurisdiction in joining OGP local will be to benefit from the expertise of other members to enhance municipal performance, acquire additional knowledge and skills from the OGP and promote inclusive citizen participation in local governance, enable higher ethical standards in municipal performance through the program, develop the policies to fulfil the needs and priorities of the citizens, build the capacities of our members and staff on OGP values and practices, create innovative and efficient systems of open transparent and accountable governance, respond to people needs, build trust between the municipality and the local community, encourage public responsibility through enhanced participation in decision-making, improve service delivery through regular feedback from public, learn about and introduce innovative tools for improving the municipality's ability to support the Citizens' Budget development, engage and collaborate with NGOs to implement local based initiatives that can be integrated within existing budgets, be accountable towards commitments that as per OGP action plans have to be fulfilled within two years, independently be evaluated against our work and abide by commitments that we have set for ourselves, learn about digital and SMART tools for consultation with local communities, improve the access to information within the municipality to increase transparency, and accountability while reducing corruption.

Our ambition of future direction for open government action is to ensure that the Greater Karak Municipality supports all citizen's including women's and vulnerable groups' equal civic participation in decision-making and policy formulation. Their participation will result in creating more government openness, strengthen transparency in all functions of the local government and promote accountability from elected representatives. It will also bridge the gap between local government and its constituents. The municipality aims to create innovative technical tools to enhance openness and accountability and encourage local citizens to actively participate and influence the decision-making process at all levels which will inadvertently lead to the efficient and effective implementation of the policies and laws that are created. It is also more likely that citizens will abide by the laws and policies that

they have helped create and implement. Furthermore, it will increase the trust between the local government and the citizens whose input and feedback will improve the ability of the former to deliver better services and create a model local system of governance.

The following factors will enhance the capacity and resources for co-creation and implementation; the municipality has approved a strategic plan for enhancing public participation which will be of great value in encouraging stakeholder engagement in creating and implementing the OGP plan, the council has a database of volunteers, CSOs, INGOs, official and popular bodies in Karak who will provide their opinions and views to support co-creation and implementation, our experience in holding townhall meetings and open discussions with stakeholders will help the OGP plan's co-creation process through public engagement, our active Facebook page can be used to disseminate important information about the municipalities decisions and activities and to receive valuable feedback from the constituents and hold the municipality accountable, this page will be used in the OGP work to ensure maximal exposure and outreach. The Main non-government stakeholder partnering with Karak Municipality, Al-Hayat Center-RASED, also has extensive experience with OGP work as since 2012, Hayat-Rased has enhanced government scrutiny through monitoring Jordan's first and second Open Government Partnership (OGP) Plans 2012-2016. Hayat has been designated the position of the local Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) by the IRM unit of the OGP. Hayat Also is engaged with different OGP activities and has attended all of it summits since 2012. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) who has experience with OGP process and is well-versed with co-creating and implementing OGP NAPs will support us in co-creating and implementing OGP plans while complying with OGP standards. OECD which has provided critical support to Jordan in implementing its OGP plans since 2011, has also shown interest in supporting local governance organizations as well in implementing OGP's local action plans and we will seek support if required from them. Our active network of youth including the shadow council will support the co-creation and implementation of the OGP plan ensuring the engagement of young new voices. Our well-functioning infrastructure facilities will support the implementation of consulting activities needed for OGP plan's co-creation and implementation. Finally, our good relationships with INGOs, who support OGP and have already created partnerships to implement projects on local development and public participation will also be harnessed for co-creating and implanting OGP plans.

Our track record on open government with non-governmental stakeholders includes our local priorities guide which is a tool that through a set of activities/exercises engages the local community to identify their needs and priorities for the next fiscal year. This guide was created after more than 40 meeting with different stakeholders. The process of creating the guide was initiated by identifying different stakeholders who were engaged in the implementation of the exercise. They included community leaders, CSOs, women, youth and minority representatives who were further desegregated based on their age, background education qualifications and economic status to ensure everyone's needs and priorities were identified. These stakeholders were engaged in consultation sessions, brainstorming exercises and open discussion to determine their needs. Post concluding the local priorities and needs report; the stakeholders and the public were given 21 days to provide feedback on it to validate its accuracy. This feedback was used to develop projects and allocate budgets to directly address the needs and priorities of the people. This participatory process was highly critical and has contributed to creating numerous projects that directly respond to people's needs. The municipality also created an advisory Council which consists of more than twelve sectors that include the Environment and Energy Committee, the Youth and Women Committee, the Legal Committee, etc. Each committee includes a group of specialists from the local community who are engaged in discussions and have to provide advice to the Municipality as per their expertise. Moreover, a shadow youth Council was established of 24

young men and women which mirrored the actual municipal council and its systems to create a simulation for young people to learn the functions, ways of working and decision-making process within the municipal council. It also worked towards enhancing the transparency and promoting participation and integration of young people in their local community.

The main thematic policy areas where we can contribute with good practices and lessons learned for other cohort members include creating an efficient tool that can be used to identify the needs and priorities of citizens through engaging with them in constructive dialogue and discussion, such as the aforementioned exercise. Recruiting a group of experts from within the community to seek advice from on different topics to address different challenges is also another good practice to share. Additionally, we can contribute with different innovative ways in which municipalities can enhance the integration of youth within their local communities and introduce them to local governance through practical exercises that are engaging. This will prepare the next generation of leaders who can take the reins of local governance to new heights through a combination of time-tested, effective passed down knowledge from the previous generation and through their innovative fresh ideas, thus making sure that local governance is consistently evolving and adapting to respond to newer challenges and times.

The Greater Karak Municipality is highly committed to participating in peer learning and sharing experiences both within the cohort and with other local locals in Jordan, and thematic circles with other potential cohort members. We believe that only through consistent learning, improving and passing on our knowledge can we create a model system of local governance not only within our municipality and Jordan but across the world. Peer learning and sharing of experiences is a time-tested way of learning as it reinforces ones' own learning by instructing others and because peers at the same level are much more likely to interact and learn from their peers as they share a similar discourse which allows for greater understanding.

There are several ways through which we can spread the practice of open local government amongst other locals in our jurisdictions, some of which include; creating a model municipality in Jordan which inspires other municipalities to follow our path, create exchange programs where officials from other municipalities can be invited to our municipality to observe our way of working and officials from our municipality can travel to other municipality to impart knowledge on good practices and lessons learned. We can also use several platforms that we are part of to impart knowledge and good practices such as; The Strong Cities Network, CITIES Network, MENARET Food, Water and Energy Project Network and Al-Hayat Center-Based Coalition to support decentralization and local development to share our experience of the OGP and how the process improved our transparency, accountability and the citizens' trust and engagement in our actions.

We hope the above information will inspire you to consider our application for joining the global space for OGP in order for us to learn from our peers, exchange relevant knowledge to serve the best interests of our people. We assure you of our high commitment to this process and look forward to sharing and contributing with our good open practices that will make local governance in the global space more transparent and accessible.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards,

Ebrahim Al-Karaki

Mayor

Greater Karak Municipality

