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GEORGIA



## KHONI MUNICIPALITY CITY HALL

Santiago Cafiero  
Government of Argentina  
Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers

Young Chin  
Minister of the Interior and Safety  
Government of the Republic of Korea

Robin Hodess  
Director of Governance & Transparency  
The B Team

María Baron  
Global Executive Director  
Directorio Legislativo

Dear Co-chairs,

On behalf of the Khoni Municipality I am honored to express our interest in joining the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local Program.

Khoni is a small and less-resourced municipality located in western Georgia, far from the capital, having the lowest municipal budget across the region. Population is of 23,570 inhabitants, mostly living in the rural areas. Around 10% of the inhabitants are marginalized communities such as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), religious minorities, and ecological migrants.

Being a small city with diverse community and a high priority to enlarge its resources, we are widely recognized as a local reformer, committed to upholding the principles of open and transparent government. We believe that our commitment to promote transparency, fight corruption, empower citizens and support civic participation is a key to successfully achieving greater prosperity, well-being, and dignified life of our constituents.

In close cooperation with non-governmental stakeholders, we have identified priority policy areas for our municipality and intensified our efforts to ensure transparency, public participation, quality service delivery, and access to information:

To develop Transparency and Integrity Building Strategy

Within the current OGP National Action Plan, we adopted the first Transparency and Integrity Building Strategy and Action Plan together with indicators and Monitoring Framework addressing ethics and integrity mechanisms, HR management, and civic engagement that were identified in response to the findings of the situation analysis.

To improve Public Service Delivery



In 2019, we allocated additional internal resources from the City Hall budget and launched the first Citizen Center offering a new single-window to our citizens to receive public services. Furthermore, in collaboration with local CSOs we have introduced a new hot-line service delivery that resulted in easier access and higher quality of services that is being particularly important during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

To establish civic participation platforms

We have established a functional platform for civic participation such as Council of Civil Advisors, Gender Equality Council, and General Assemblies of Settlements. Reflecting Khoni's commitment to inclusive governance, initiatives that are generated from the Councils and Assemblies are reflected in the annual action plans and reported back to citizens.

To implement efficient and transparent social programmes

We have committed to implement efficient and transparent social programmes and initiatives. In cooperation with the international NGO "People in Need," a survey was conducted to study the needs of the citizens and ensure citizen participation in the design of healthcare and social care policies.

To develop the Social Engagement Strategy

Based on the survey results, we developed a Social Engagement Strategy with the active involvement of the Council of Civil Advisors. During the formulation of the Strategy, we have introduced new approaches to service delivery and improved access to services for the marginalized communities – PWDs, IDPs, women and elderly.

To participate in global networking and institutional development programs

Khoni proactively participates in global networking and institutional development programs, building capacity and exposing staff to best-practices around open self-governance. Our successful participation in the SiDA funded "Local Governance with a Rights-Based Approach" program is a recent example of the municipality's commitment to such development.

Fully believing, that OGP local provides unique opportunity to further pursue and accomplish open governance goals, we are motivated to introduce new and ambitious, innovative and lasting open government initiatives. In particular, we plan to enhance inclusive, citizen-centred and transparent public service delivery by reinforcing existing mechanism and introducing new tools reflecting the best practices. This would include strengthening the capacity of the 'Mayor's Representative', expanding the scope of the 'single-window service delivery', and service-center practices. Also, we plan to expand the scope of existing civic participatory mechanisms - the Council of Civil Advisors, and General Assemblies of Settlements. These measures stand to increase access to the municipal services, encourage higher quality service delivery, and improve citizen participation in local policymaking. Hence, I am confident it is the perfect timing for our municipality to join the OGP Local Program, expand the horizon and take new ambitious commitments.

We believe that OGP Local will not only allow Khoni to consolidate these efforts but also provide the necessary momentum to ensure success. In case of joining, with support of UNDP and the OGP Georgia Secretariat, Khoni aspires to establish a Regional Hub of smaller and less-resourced municipalities to lead and scale up open government initiatives across Georgia. In doing so, Khoni will provide a unique and potentially transformative platform for smaller municipalities to develop and foster a robust open government culture of their own.

These ambitious aspirations, backed by the technical and institutional support of the OGP Local Program, stand to stimulate and encourage transformative changes in the administration of governance in Khoni. In doing so, Khoni will be able to position itself as an example of how a small municipality with limited resources can leverage big ambitions and tailor support to foster transformative, positive change. Specifically, this small town in Western Georgia is presented with a unique opportunity to break the shackles of inhibitive historical legacies and move towards modern, open, transparent, participatory and accountable governance.



A number of benefits can be outlined while discussing the values of potential membership:

Improved knowledge, expertise, and experience in targeted thematic policy areas, namely anti-corruption, municipal service delivery, citizen participation, marginalized communities, and youth engagement. This will allow us to share peers' best practices, mitigate challenges, better plan and aim for successful reforms.

Increased availability of expertise coupled with the financial support from the partner donor organizations, will allow us to push the local OGP agenda forward.

Fertile ground for co-creation will stimulate self-governance and civil society to come together, tackle challenges, identify solutions, and leverage civil society and other stakeholders in implementing OGP reforms.

International visibility, recognition and support will allow for promoting OGP values and principles through national, regional, and global networks.

In line with its OGP aspirations, we confirm our willingness and prime to allocate a dedicated team to ensure the successful implementation of the OGP Local Action Plan.

In my capacity as the Mayor of Khoni, I will personally ensure that municipality's continuous commitment towards the full-fledged realization of the OGP principles is enshrined in every policy decision. We also reaffirm our commitment to include OGP related activities in the local budget to ensure that adequate financial resources are allocated for effective co-creation and implementation. We also anticipate that we will continue to receive the technical and financial support from the partner international organizations through programs aligned with the objectives of the OGP Local, such as UNDP's "Fostering Decentralization and Good Governance at the Local Level in Georgia program."

The municipality's experience in successfully developing and implementing its Transparency and Integrity Building Strategy and Action Plan under the OGP NAP (2018-2019) also serves as an evidence of its capacity to secure and leverage resources to ensure positive results. For example, during the implementation of the OGP Georgia Action Plan, the municipality managed to allocate financial resources from the local budget to successfully complete the sub-commitments such as establishing a service hot-line and Citizen Center, which were activities included as part of the Strategy. This serves as an example of the Municipality's strong commitment and continues efforts to improve the quality of good governance.

Additionally, the local government has extensive experience working with the local civil society organizations which bring an important added value to the correct designing and implementation of the initiatives. Dedicated OGP staff at the City Hall have been cooperating with the colleagues from the local CSOs and can facilitate successful collaboration and co-creation process.

And, by being part of the OGP Local Program, we look forward to helping build a global community of practices where we can share our experience, and at the same time, and learn from our peers and other development partners to bring us closer to our aim towards establishing Khoni as a model in-open government-oriented self-governance.

I thank you for considering us to be part of the OGP Local Program. Should you have further queries regarding our application, my OGP team and I stand ready to provide you with additional information.

Sincerely,

Lado Jurkhadze

Mayor, Khoni Municipality City Hall