



საქართველო  
ოზურგეთის მუნიციპალიტეტის  
საკრებულო



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N 198  
30/09/2020

198-06-2-202009301454



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Director of Governance & Transparency  
The B Team

**María Baron**

Global Executive Director  
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Dear Co-chairs,

As the Chairman of the Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly, it is my honor to express our willingness and commitment to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local Program. We believe that together with the civil society and guided by the values and principles of the Open Government Declaration we can deliver positive changes to our community.

Ozurgeti Municipality is the administrative center of Guria Region situated in the western part of Georgia with a population of 60 632 people. We were one of the first local self-governments to join OGP Georgia national process in 2016 and pledged commitments to strengthen open governance at the grassroots level. Since then, Ozurgeti Municipality was engaged in the implementation of the last two OGP Georgia action plans.

Through engaging in the OGP Georgia process, we established active cooperation with the local civil society organizations (CSOs) with the aim to ensure OGP principles are realized in policy planning and implementation. As a result of joint actions and successful collaboration, Ozurgeti Municipality is among the top performers in the Local Government Index of Georgia. However, there is more to be done and, in this light, we would like to strengthen our efforts to achieve sustainable results for citizen participation, introduce innovative solutions that guarantee transparency and counter corruption, and utilize digital tools to improve public service delivery. Joining the OGP Local Program will help us to institutionalize the co-creation process encompassing a broad area of public policy. Hence, the reforms delivered through the joint actions will have greater sustainability by design.

Ozurgeti Municipality has extensive experience in accomplishing innovative projects in partnership with the local CSOs and international organizations. Based on the lessons learned, we could share a valuable experience with the other members of the cohort on how to achieve positive results with scarce resources but due diligence and joint efforts of the different stakeholders:

- Ozurgeti Municipality ensured **citizen participation and transparency** by live transmitting Municipality Assembly sessions on its website. To make the engagement more active we introduced comments section where users can interact with the decision-makers and ask questions. Additionally, citizens can receive thematic SMS updates, based on their selected interests regarding the Assembly sessions
- **Online petition system** has been introduced to create **digital civic space**. Based on the citizen feedback, procedures were altered over the time requiring a reduced percentage of signatories to register the petition in order to boost participation. Despite the small population, 24 petitions have been submitted on the community development matters from 2018 to 2020.
- We have also created **Online Platform for Participatory Budgeting** through which citizens are engaged in the planning of the municipal budget and can fund infrastructural projects of Ozurgeti City by using online vouchers (1 voucher (100 GEL) per citizen) from the dedicated municipal budget. At this point, the percentage of citizen engagement level reaches up to 40%.
- We have conducted **awareness-raising on the local governance and OGP literature** to spread knowledge among the communities about local governance and existing civic participation instruments. Our Municipality has created dedicated cyberspace combining all the available information in one repository that is accessible from the other municipalities' website and includes a separate field dedicated to searching for information on the CSOs' websites.
- We have developed **Transparency and Integrity Building Strategy and Action Plan along with the rigorous M&E framework** in close collaboration with the local NGOs and support from OGP Georgia Secretariat and USAID/GGI. This is an important milestone for our municipality to strengthen transparency and good governance standards and fight against corruption. Additionally, developing comprehensive policy documents with the active involvement of the SCOs is a valuable experience that can be shared with our peers and utilized in the future.

Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly has a dedicated staff who is well equipped to coordinate the effort for co-creation and implementation of the OGP local action plan. This is a result of the Municipality's participation in two national OGP action plan implementation and a long-standing track record in cooperating with the local CSOs, other municipalities, international organizations and the OGP Georgia Secretariat. The Assembly staff plays an active role in coordinating the co-creation process with the local civil society organizations. Our staff have been invited to participate in various local and international training programs and workshops on open governance and have shared their experience with colleagues from other municipalities in frames of different working meetings. They have been participating in the regional CSO Forum which aims to support civil society development in Western Georgia. Assembly staff have conducted workshops and trainings for other municipalities to introduce citizen engagement tools and ensure transparency and accountability of the local government.

We are honored that our application is supported by the prominent NGOs: Guria Youth Resource Center, Center for Innovations and Civic Development "Progress House" and Democratic Development Union of Georgia who have extensive experience in working to advance OGP values and principles. It should also be noted that the Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly communicated the willingness to join the OGP Local Program with the CSOs actively engaged in the OGP process. It is a recognition of our strong partnership that all of them expressed their eagerness to support our application and readiness to engage in the OGP local process.

We are eager to disseminate the information and knowledge we acquire in the framework of the OGP Local Program through various means. Ozurgeti Municipality has built international networks where we could promote principles of open government and OGP. We plan to join forces with our partner

municipalities across Europe to design projects which promote OGP principles. Moreover, Ozurgeti Municipality is the member of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG), which is a non-governmental, nonprofit and non-political organization uniting all entities of local self-governance. This is a very important platform where we work on further developing the local self-governance system in Georgia. We can further promote development of the local self-governance institutions and democracy at the local level through open, transparent and accountable governance.

Ozurgeti Municipality has developed active bilateral cooperation with different municipalities of Georgia in terms of exchanging experience and sharing the expertise on the citizen participation and different innovations implemented in Ozurgeti. IRM Georgia Reports recognize the initiatives of Ozurgeti Municipality as the best practice and example for the other Georgian municipalities. IRM Georgia Design Report 2018-2019, referred to Ozurgeti as “a hub for using technology to increase the transparency and effectiveness of local governance”. Being a member of OGP Local Program we could disseminate information and best practices accumulated by this unique international platform, and advocate OGP principles in other municipalities of Georgia. We plan to utilize existing communication tools to continue sharing our experience on the open government matters.

Ozurgeti Municipality has a long history of working to introduce the open governance principles coupled with our commitments undertaken within the recent two national OGP action plans. We have made efforts by designing innovative mechanisms for civic engagement and transparency in partnership with the local non-governmental and international organizations. However, there is more to be done with regards to achieving higher citizen participation and increasing the capacity of the local municipal bodies to be able to respond to the modern challenges, having in mind principles of open government. As demonstrated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization of the public services is a pressing issue globally and we are not an exception. Dealing with the public health crisis requires us to seek more knowledge and know-how to build resilience and be responsive to our citizens’ needs. Being a member of OGP Local Program will grant us a unique opportunity to get targeted knowledge and seek the guidance of experienced colleagues from around the world.

We are eager to learn more about the innovative methods on how to co-create and design policies together with the citizens. OGP Local provides an exceptional platform to exchange open government solutions and build a strong network of entities who set an example of collaboration. Additionally, the peer support will help us to adapt different solutions to our local context in a way which is the most suitable, sustainable and successful.

We would like to express sincere gratitude for considering our candidacy to join the OGP Local Program and reiterate our strong commitment to the values of open government. Membership of this unique platform will grant us an opportunity to further reaffirm the good governance principle in our community and develop citizen-oriented policies in cooperation with the civil society.

Sincerely,

David Darchia

Chairman of the Ozurgeti Municipality Assembly

დავით დარჩია

საკრებულოს თავმჯდომარე



ოზურგეთის მუნიციპალიტეტის საკრებულო