



Final Learning Exercise Summary Report

Ozurgeti, Georgia - Action Plan 2021

What do we need to know about Ozurgeti?

Ozurgeti is the administrative center of the Guria, a small region in Georgia, in the western part of the country, bordered by the easter end of the Black Sea. Ozurgeti is a relatively small municipality with around 61,305 inhabitants located far from the capital with limited resources and one of the lowest municipal budgets in the country.

Despite the economic struggles and limited resources, Ozurgeti is known as an “*Open Star*” when it comes to open governance. Both local and international organizations recognize Municipality as a local reformer committed to upholding the principles of open and transparent government. But the question is why? What has triggered to achieve this? The short response would be strong local civil society organizations and local public servants committed to promoting open government values and principles across the Municipality, thus, improving inclusive, citizen-oriented local governance. That ends up in a very close dialogue process and co-creation spirit during the policy design and implementation process in the municipality

What have we achieved? Before OGP Local

Ozurgeti was one of the first local self-government to join the OGP Georgia national process in 2016 and pledged commitments to strengthen open governance at the grassroots level. Since



then, the municipality's path toward open governance has remained unchanged. During this period, the following key achievements were observed:

- Initiation of **Live Transmissions Municipality Assembly sessions** and posting full video recordings on the Ozurgeti Municipality website and official social media pages. According to the final report of the IRM, the Ozurgeti Municipality has introduced a live broadcast service of Sakrebulo sessions - "Manage from Home," which allows citizens to follow the decision-making process at the local level. In addition, the Ozurgeti Municipality created a service of short text messages (via SMS) to remind the local population of the sessions and thus, foster their better participation.

In this line, to make the engagement more active, Municipality introduced a comments section where users can interact with the decision-makers and ask questions over social media.

Implementing these initiatives resulted in a transformative change in the culture of participation in the municipality, where the local population's involvement in the Assembly sessions was low. But, after this introduction of the initiation, it drastically increased to hundreds. Participation by years: 2022 – number of website unique users: - 2,296; average visitors per day – 109; viewers of archived videos exceeds 5000. Further, several examples of the ideas initiated by local inhabitants of the municipality during the sessions prove the increased engagement in the municipality.

- Developing **Transparency and Integrity Building Strategy** along with rigorous **Monitoring and Evaluation** framework. This was an important milestone for the Municipality to strengthen transparency and good governance standards and continue to fight against corruption. The initial version of the strategy documents has been developed by the local CSOs and presented to the local government, which has been adopted without any major changes in the documents. The experience of developing comprehensive policy documents with CSOs was a valuable experience as part of the municipality's co-creation spirit – self-governance and civil society come together- to recognize the importance of having a tool to monitor the implementation of the action plan, and thus, introduced the monitoring and evaluation mechanism that institutionalizes CSO's participation by providing a tool to assess the action plan implementation process and report on early results.
- Launching an **online petition platform**. Ozurgeti Municipality has introduced an online petition system to create digital civic space. Based on the citizen feedback, procedures were altered over time, requiring a reduced percentage of signatories to register the



petition to boost participation. Despite the small population, 30 petitions were submitted from 2018 to 2022.

- Conducting **robust awareness-raising toward open governance** at the local level. The municipality has undertaken awareness-raising on the local authority and OGP literature to spread knowledge among the communities about local government and existing civic participation instruments. Ozurgeti has also created dedicated cyberspace combining all the available information in one repository accessible from other municipality's websites.
- The municipality has established active **cooperation** with the **local CSOs** such as Guria Youth Resource Center, Center for Innovations and Civic Development “Progress House,” and Democratic Development Union of Georgia with the aim to ensure that open government principles are undertaken in policy planning and implementation.

What have we achieved? - After OGP Local

- For better **access** to public service for **vulnerable groups** and **improved response to their needs**, the municipality conducted two (2) **comprehensive research** for better needs analysis. In particular:
 - The study aimed to identify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women.
 - A combination of qualitative and desk research aimed to identify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized communities and the availability of public services in the municipality.

Based on the findings of both studies, recommendations were developed and approved by the municipality. As part of the next stage, the local government developed and approved the action plan to enhance the municipality's reaction to the needs of a marginalized community. The action plan includes four main priorities, 11 objectives, and 33 activities, including indicators to measure the achievement of the results. More importantly, the local Municipality's Budget for the year 2022 considers expenses for action plan implementation.

- Preparation of the **Corruption Risk Methodology** addressing the Municipality's needs. Corruption risk assessment is based on methodology prepared by the national anti-corruption council, and it was adjusted to the local government specifications. Therefore, the corruption risk assessment methodology was developed; as a result, the meetings with representatives of the City Mayor's Office and agencies under the City Hall. The methodology identified corruption risk assessment stages, risk identification



instructions, and risk management actions. Based on the methodology, the corruption risk internal registry was developed for Ozurgeti municipality in the next step. Following this methodology, the City Hall agencies and non-commercial legal entities carried out the corruption risk assessment and prepared a report identifying all the key risks relevant to the municipality. However, the report is not yet approved by the Ozurgeti municipality.

- Improvement of **public finance management processes** in the Municipality by Budget Priority Document budget. The Priority document was developed for the budget years 2022-2025, and public meetings with the participation of stakeholders and interested parties were held. At the same time, the medium-term action plan for the priority document was prepared along with the program budget document and citizen handbook approved by Municipal Sakrebulo and shared on the municipality's official website.

With the purpose of increasing citizen awareness and fostering results of the commitment, the municipality prepared **a visual budget** within the AP implementation timeframes. Based on stakeholder evaluation, a visual budget only adds to the opportunity and enables citizens to acquire information about the municipal budget in an easy-to-comprehend way. The visual budget is uploaded on the municipality's official web page.

The introduction of specific tools for managing public finances resulted in budget-related information and processes being more accessible and widely available to local citizens in Ozurgeti municipality. Specifically, the priority document for 2020-2025 and the medium-term action plan became publicly available to citizens (the budget handbook and visual budget were uploaded on the website as well as several consultation meetings were organized).

- Within the framework of OGP Local, the innovative initiatives in open government and successful cooperation with civil society were the basis for the selection of Ozurgeti. Examples of this innovation are the new online budgeting platform introduced in the municipality - **"Be a Co-ruler,"** a form of participatory budgeting, which entails the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process by presenting initiatives and identifying priority projects.

What have we learned?

Based on the findings of independent monitoring review, inception, and end-of-term commitment assessments of the 2021 OGP Local Action Plan of Municipality, the major preliminary points have been identified as lessons learned and for refinement of the next OGP Local Cycle.



- Continued capacity building of public servants contributes to the long-term perspective enabling the municipality to conduct a needs assessment and design policy documents as well as support during the implementation phase.
- Continued awareness-raising activities to push forward the initiated actions for better performance and better-sustained results
- To achieve the long-term outcome and form sustainable local policies and practice against corruption, it is essential to develop internal regulations that will outline the intensity of assessments, timeline, identification of units responsible for carrying out the assessment of corruption risks, etc. This action is necessary for institutionalizing the conduction of corruption risks at the local level.
- For achieving the long-term outcome and forming sustainable local policy to improve the budgetary process, it is mandatory to continue actions after completing the OGP Local Action Plan cycle.
- It is of utmost importance that the practices of budget planning discussions are continued in order to achieve long-term outcomes and ensure an engagement spirit throughout the entire process.
- The municipality should take continued action steps to have a robust system to support citizen engagement.