



Final Learning Exercise Summary Report

Yerevan, Armenia - Action Plan 2023- 2024

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Section 1. Local Context

The section is fulfilled by Anahit Gharibyan

External Factors Affecting Commitment Implementation: Throughout the implementation of the commitment, both external and internal factors significantly influenced its effectiveness. In general, external factors affecting the implementation of the commitments primarily include tensions at the country's borders, ethnic cleansing, and displacement of the population in Artsakh, the low morale and psychological state of the population within the country, Yerevan city council elections, the municipality's historically closed working style, the lack of public trust in the municipality, and the need for capacity development for CSOs, among others. Specifically, security issues led to a decrease in civil society's interest and passive citizen participation in municipality discussions. Additionally, the results of the mayoral elections show a notable decline in citizens' trust in current authorities and political processes. Under the influence of external factors, the implementation of this commitment has not only slowed down but also at times lost its effectiveness. According to the interviewees, it is challenging to clearly identify which of the aforementioned external factors influenced citizen participation. However, their presence correlated with noticeable passiveness in citizens' involvement in public discussions within the framework of the OGP.

Internal Factors Affecting Commitment Implementation: Simultaneously, internal processes that could impact are associated with the engagement of the responsible person in other duties and the tight deadlines for commitment completion. However, as per the responsible person, the impact of this factor was not significant, but in the future, it would be appropriate



to develop the work plan for a longer period. The primary concern regarding internal factors is frequent personnel changes and new appointments, which diminish program stability and create challenges in ensuring continuity in the implemented measures. The low level of visibility of the commitments also affected the results, as CSO representatives complained about the scarcity of information sources, and many people were not informed about it. From the standpoint of commitment implementation, it was problematic that, according to experts, senior officials were often uninformed about such commitments due to elections or official changes. However, middle-tier officials were highly active and proactive in their work. Nevertheless, they lacked support from the higher echelons.

Another internal issue pertains to the inflexibility of community workers and their challenges in accepting provided information. The problem lies in the fact that most community workers, who underwent the course, are primarily middle-aged men with different perspectives on their work. They operate with the inertia of the Soviet years and are largely guided by those values and principles. Additionally, the uncertainty regarding inter-departmental powers related to the approval of the code of conduct for community workers by the Ministry of Territorial Administration created obstacles in the implementation process.

According to information obtained from the partner NGOs, the municipality's responsible person invested all her efforts to maximize the effectiveness of the commitments. However, objectively, it was not possible to achieve some of the planned results to the intended extent. Specifically, the preparations for launching the Green Platform are still ongoing and have not been completed.

Lack of Engagement from CSOs and Organizational Issues: Regarding the implementation of the 2nd and 3rd commitments, although a small number of meetings were held with representatives of CSOs, they did not have any influence or participation in the fulfillment of the commitment. The reason, according to representatives of the implementing partners, was due to the specifics of the programs and the necessity not to direct the participation of any organization/expert and to maintain neutrality. On the other hand, the Municipality also attempted to involve all parties participating in the process but did not compel their participation in any commitment. However, this approach caused CSO representatives, who could have contributed significantly to the commitments, to feel neglected and isolated, as there were no separate invitations and follow-ups for additional meetings and collaboration. Particularly, the implementing partners of the 2nd commitment noted that due to the uncertainty created, the project was implemented intermittently, primarily stemming from communication issues with the Anticorruption Commission. Additionally, the absence of the Ethics Commission was also an obstacle, which, although planned to be established by the 2nd commitment, was not possible to form due to the uncertainty and underdevelopment of the legislative field. Thus, the implementation of the commitment has significantly deviated from the initially planned action plan. However, following the changes implemented in the 2nd commitment, it can be stated that a 90 percent result was achieved.

Public discussions on the establishment of the Integrity system have taken place, but experts note that the frequency and dissemination of these discussions are not sufficient to yield more tangible results. In particular, representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs)



participated in some meetings after being informed about the process but did not engage in any other meetings or awareness activities. Among the NGO sector participants listed in the commitment's action plan, both TIAC and the Freedom of Information Center explicitly stated their non-participation in the commitment's implementation. In light of this, they requested the removal of their names from the action plan. On the other hand, the primary representative from the CSO was the Ecolur Information Center, a key organization actively involved in implementing the program. However, there is no information about them in the Action Plan. Similarly, representatives from the Freedom of Information Center mentioned that they played a minor role in the program and had limited participation in the organized meetings and discussions.

At the same time, although the municipality distributed the Code of Conduct for Community Servants among the beneficiaries (i.e., employees), experts interviewed suggest that not all community servants are aware of it. According to the experts, municipal employees frequently make inquiries and seek clarifications regarding its implementation.

Also, during the performance of the task, there were suggestions by TIAC to have the contact information of the Integrity specialist on the webpage for external reporting, but the suggestion was rejected. However, the contact information of the individuals holding the position is not available on the website, and only some knowledgeable internal staff members have access to it. Representatives of civil society have expressed several complaints on this matter, emphasizing that the person responsible for integrity should be accessible in case of any dissatisfaction or grievance.

Overall, within the framework of the commitment's action plan, several activities were not carried out due to the aforementioned reasons and the factors influencing them. These factors encompassed a range of internal and external challenges, including personnel changes, organizational hurdles, and external socio-political dynamics. As a result, certain planned actions faced delays or were left incomplete, impacting the overall progress of the commitment's implementation. Addressing these challenges and mitigating their effects will be essential for future endeavors to ensure smoother execution and more effective outcomes.

Section 2. Action Plan Co-creation Process

The section is fulfilled by Arpine Hakobyan

2.1 Co-creation process review

The co-creation process for the Local Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative in Yerevan underwent a comprehensive review, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses. One notable strength was the commitment to an iterative dialogue and co-creation, involving diverse stakeholders. The formation of a working group with representatives from government and civil society demonstrated a collaborative approach to decision-making. The involvement of civil society implemented by both online and offline meetings further enhanced the inclusivity of the process.

The process was marked by effective communication through official announcements on the municipality's website and social media platforms, fostering public engagement. The working



group, consisting of government officials and civil society partners, played a crucial role in formulating the action plan. The creation of dedicated OGP sections on the municipality's website and social media platforms contributed to information dissemination.

However, challenges emerged during the co-creation process. The community website was identified as an inadequate platform for disseminating information, impacting the formation of the working group after the first announcement. The absence of media representatives in the working group raised concerns about diverse stakeholder representation. Moreover, the lack of proactive efforts by the municipality to make information available to various stakeholders hindered the initial gathering of the group.

The eligibility criteria for participation in the action plan development, such as a minimum of five years of specialized work and familiarity with the OGP initiative, raised concerns about inclusivity. Despite the efforts to involve different entities, particularly in the environmental platform commitment, some stakeholders felt that full participation was not ensured due to a lack of information and the inactivity of the civil society sector.

In summary, the Yerevan municipality's co-creation process demonstrated commendable efforts in promoting collaboration and transparency. However, challenges related to information dissemination, platform effectiveness, and the inclusivity of eligibility criteria need addressing for further improvement in future iterations of the co-creation process.

2.2 Co-creation process recommendations

Enhance Information Dissemination: Improve the effectiveness of information dissemination by diversifying communication channels. While the community website is one platform, consider using additional channels such as community meetings, NGO's bases, or targeted outreach to ensure a wider audience is reached.

Inclusive Eligibility Criteria: Revise the eligibility criteria for participation in the action plan development. While expertise is crucial, ensure that the criteria do not inadvertently exclude potential contributors. Consider expanding participation criteria to encourage a more diverse range of individuals and organizations, ensuring a broader representation of community perspectives.

Proactive Engagement with Media Representatives: Actively involve media representatives in the working group to enhance the diversity of stakeholders. Media plays a crucial role in disseminating information and fostering public awareness. Their inclusion can bring a broader perspective to the co-creation process and help bridge the gap between the government, civil society, and the public.

Strengthen Engagement with New Entities: Develop targeted strategies to engage new entities, particularly those interested in specific commitments. Address the challenges identified, such as lack of information and inactivity in the civil society sector, by organizing awareness campaigns, workshops, or partnering with local organizations to ensure a more comprehensive and inclusive participation.

Section 3. Action Plan Commitments

The section is fulfilled by Anahit Gharibyan

3.1 Commitments implementation review



Shifts in Citizen Behavior and Increased Motivation: CSO representatives noted some noticeable changes in the short period of commitment implementation. However, these commitments present a significant challenge for Yerevan Municipality, which has operated under different rules for years. Within the OGP commitment framework, there have been shifts in citizen behavior and increased motivation, as citizens now have a platform to discuss and address longstanding issues with the municipality. Many people have found working with the OGP toolkit beneficial, as it facilitates dialogue and problem-solving that was previously lacking. However, pessimistic views prevail among both CSOs and individual experts, who believe that these commitments represent small measures toward achieving open governance.

Challenges in Website Improvement: In response to feedback and recommendations, the municipality initiated efforts to upgrade its official website and enrich existing information. This aims to make information more accessible to citizens and other interested parties. However, experts note that despite changes to the website, there has been no improvement in the quality or targeting of information.

Challenges in Implementing Integrity Commitment: In terms of second commitment implementation the most important challenge is that the Integrity organizer of the Municipality is involved in other work besides managing the integrity of the staff, and struggles to fulfill the responsibilities of the position due to the huge number of community workers exceeding 2000. As a solution, a suggestion was made to either create an ethics committee or increase the number of specialists responsible for this area. Some expressed the view that the formation of an Ethics Commission is urgent, but there are still insufficient legal grounds for its creation, including its composition, participants, and operational basis. Despite the workload, representatives of the municipality point out that the position lacks sufficient leverage and mechanisms to influence the establishment of the overall Integrity system. Currently, there are no effective mechanisms to handle Integrity issues and reports received by staff. The organizer of integrity issues raises this concern, asserting that the chief specialist is not adequately equipped to address such problems. As a result, there is a belief that the organizer of integrity issues should either hold a higher position or be an independent body to influence the behavior of higher echelons and officials. This institutional challenge is compounded by the fact that official classification does not empower a specialist in a lower position with broad powers to hold superiors accountable. Conversely, this classification restricts the person in charge, limiting their ability to act independently and freely.

Need for Training and Support: The changes should set a precedent among high-ranking officials so that the lower echelon, witnessing integrity from superiors, can follow suit. Therefore, representatives of the municipality believe there is an urgent need for training for high-ranking personnel of the municipality. Although they intended to conduct separate training within the commitment framework, it was not carried out after the recent change in the HRM department. Nevertheless, the adopted code of conduct for community servants enables considering the general profile of community workers and appointing appropriate personnel. CSO representatives and municipal administrative employees believe that this commitment should be continued. Strengthening the principles of Integrity among Municipality employees has been at the core of various discussions and meetings for years. Despite existing difficulties, the work should be expanded to bring about behavioral changes and cultivate a culture of integrity. Many people hold superficial ideas about integrity, and the lack of knowledge hinders their ability to advocate and promote its ideas, according to



program implementers. It is incorrect to claim that this idea has already been fully accepted in the municipality, especially in the upper echelons.

Another problem was the municipality's ambition in this commitment. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, being the authorized body, only adopted the code of conduct for municipal servants in 2023. A year prior, the municipality aimed to implement the integrity system, while the necessary foundations were missing and still needed to be filled. As a result, the training course for trainers was conducted only after the adoption of the code of conduct. The lack of support from the ministry to the municipality in implementing this commitment, when the Anti-Corruption Commission insisted on its leadership, delayed the process and had a rather negative impact on the implementation of the system. The ministry could claim with the same success that it can take the lead in implementing the Integrity system in the municipality.

High Staff Turnover: During capacity building, one of the challenges was the high staff turnover among the participants of the courses, which, according to municipality representatives, has recently reached a very high level. Often, any member who participated in the training and was approached by community servants with questions had already been fired, resulting in the loss of institutional memory and resources.

Coordination Challenges and Interdepartmental Cooperation: Experts also highlight the issue that the law on community service is still from 2005, and there's a gap in reality regarding the formation of ethics commissions, despite changes in the Public Service Law of 2018. Last year, changes were made in the new community service law, specifying which body is responsible for violations related to ethics, examining the cases, and providing an appropriate assessment. In this regard, during the 2nd commitment implementation, coordinating across various state departments proved to be a significant challenge, taking months to resolve. The scarcity of interdepartmental contacts and limited communication among state bodies has led to many state officers being unaware of the multitude of parallel projects, resulting in occasional project repetitions. In this regard, the exchange of experience is vital for balanced development. Thus, the inefficiency of interdepartmental cooperation results in incomplete project executions and unnecessary delays. According to the implementing partners, it's important not to make overly ambitious plans within the framework of any commitment. Often, enthusiasm leads to presenting plans that are impossible to implement due to various reasons which was actually true for the 2nd commitment implementation.

Concerns about Visibility and Communication: Although nearly all actions planned to fulfill the commitments have been implemented or are nearing completion, some CSO representatives express concerns about the visibility of the Municipality's commitments. They claim that the progress and results of the commitment were not adequately communicated to them. The representative of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures, also the authorized body for fulfilling this commitment, noted that while the municipality attempted to make the implemented measures visible to the general public, they require further



expansion. While they attended some meetings during the fulfillment of the commitment, not all of them were adequately informed about the subsequent processes and struggled to recall the content of the commitments.

Importance of Expert Involvement and Political Will: As stated by CSO representatives, serious expert involvement from NGOs is crucial during the implementation of such actions. In other words, it's crucial that the expertise of the NGO sector is not overshadowed by that of state or community organizations and management bodies. If NGOs lack these capabilities, they may find themselves directly involved in the process but unable to exert influence due to a lack of knowledge and experience.

CSO representatives also stress the importance of political will from city authorities to adopt more open and transparent practices. Specifically, concerns are raised about the lack of political will enabling citizen and CSO participation in Council of Elders meetings, despite them being broadcasted. Consequently, individuals in high positions are perceived as insufficiently transparent and accountable to the public in their decision-making processes. On the other hand, the absence of public reports on expenses compensated by Yerevan city councils is also problematic. While councils mainly receive compensation as a royalty, there's no public accountability regarding the use of these funds. According to civil society representatives, although there have been a few exceptions, this lack of financial transparency is systematic.

In sum, CSO representatives note that OGP principles have yet to become a priority for high-level municipal officials, hindering advocacy efforts for change based on these principles.

3.2 Commitments recommendations

- **Appointment of OGP Officers:** A recommendation was made to appoint OGP officers in all administrative areas of Yerevan or allocate specific time periods for employees to focus solely on OGP matters. This approach aims to mitigate the risk of losing momentum if the responsible person changes and to prevent physical overload for one individual handling all OGP actions.
- **Tailoring Citizen Engagement Initiatives:** All commitments align with the core principles of OGP and aim to address citizens' needs at the local level. Since citizen engagement at the community level is more tangible and active, they play a more direct role in participation. Therefore, it's crucial to tailor citizen participation initiatives to specific target groups. For instance, distributing information through social media platforms may engage younger populations, while traditional methods like SMS messages or postal letters may reach a more passive audience.
- **Enhanced Collaboration with CSOs:** There is a call for the municipality to conduct larger-scale meetings with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to comprehensively address public problems. Several representatives from NGOs view the initial steps taken by the city administration to incorporate OGP principles as satisfactory but



emphasize the need for a significantly increased frequency of meetings with CSOs. To ensure the success of commitments, it has been suggested to expand the participation of CSOs and individuals involved in fulfilling the commitments.

- **Regular Meetings with CSOs:** Experts highlight the need for regular meetings with CSOs to foster collaboration. Currently, there's a lack of systematic quarterly meetings with CSOs, which hampers collaboration. A proposal is made to establish a working group or involve other partners to hold regular online meetings and fulfill commitments more effectively.
- **Lobbying and Advocacy Efforts:** Many individuals believe that lobbying and advocacy efforts are essential to bolstering OGP ideas within the municipality. They note a lack of interest in these principles across various circles, particularly evident in meetings with the mayor and deputy mayors.
- **Participatory Council of Elders Meetings:** Suggestions have been put forward to make Council of Elders meetings not only public but also participatory, involving citizens and civil society organizations in raising issues that concern them.
- **Transparency and Dissemination of Information:** CSO representatives propose that information about commitments should be disseminated to everyone inside the OGP network, regardless of their membership status. This includes details about the action plan, achievements, progress, challenges, and completed tasks, emphasizing the importance of transparency.
- **Establishment of an Integrity System:** In terms of the 2nd commitment implementation, there is an urgent need for integrity checks among community servants and the establishment of an Integrity system. Suggestions include capacity building, developing a toolkit for checking behavior and establishing a body with the authority to investigate arising cases.
- **Recognition and Incentives:** Being recognized with an award serves as a strong incentive for the implementing organization to maintain their hard work. It is suggested to organize competitions among other cities in Armenia that are members of the local OGP to foster cooperation and enhance recognition of the program.
- **Online Carbon Footprint Calculator:** It was also suggested to have an online calculator on the municipality's website to calculate citizens' carbon footprints. This would allow citizens to input their information and see the environmental impact of their emissions on the city.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation focused on ensuring that the information needs of evaluation users are met. It considered both the OGP Action Plan of the Yerevan Municipality and intervention results chains. The social, political, and legal contexts of the country were integrated. The main source of information was gathered through qualitative data, including facts and perceptions, which were collected and assessed.



Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy is designed based on the level of engagement with various stakeholders and the reported impact across project outcomes up to the project's completion. Purposive sampling is employed for conducting in-depth interviews for overall evaluation; and focus group discussions (FGDs) for the evaluation of the Co-creation process, considering the spread of beneficiaries and partners.

The proposed sampling strategy outlines the framework for sampling and provides the rationale and process for sample selection. Sampling also ensures representation from diverse stakeholders, facilitating the identification of key respondents and ensuring inclusivity, participation, and respect for all stakeholders.

Particularly, in-depth interview participants are listed below:

1st Commitment

- 1) **Meri Harutyunyan**- Yerevan Municipality/ Deputy Head of the Department of Development and Investment Programs
- 2) **Ani Harutyunyan**- Armavir Development Center NGO
- 3) **Mane Madoyan**-Freedom of Information Center NGO
- 4) **Lilya Afrikyan**- OGP Secretary of the RA Prime Minister's Office/Armenian contact person
- 5) **Tigran Mughnetsyan** - Transparency International Anticorruption Center
- 6) **Nvard Minasyan** - Transparency International Anticorruption Center
- 7) **Levon Barseghyan** - Journalists Club Asparez NGO
- 8) **Marina Mkhitarian** - AGBU Armenia Executive Director

2nd Commitment

- 9) **Arsen Manukyan** - Team leader, USAID'S ARMENIA INTEGRITY PROJECT (AIP)
- 10) **Natali Mkrtychyan** - USAID'S ARMENIA INTEGRITY PROJECT
- 11) **Syuzanna Soghomonyan** - Program Coordinator at the Armenian Lawyers Association
- 12) HPM Department of Yerevan Municipality
- 13) **Meri Harutyunyan**- Yerevan Municipality/ Deputy Head of the Department of Development and Investment Programs

3rd Commitment

- 14) **Inga Zarafyan** - "EcoLur" Informational NGO president
- 15) **Viktorya Burnazyan** - "EcoLur" Informational NGO
- 16) **Nune Saqanyan** – "Women in Climate and Energy"