

**OGP-UNDP Local Roundtable**

# **Driving Open Government Action and Ambition in Asia and the Pacific**

---

Outcome Document



## Introduction

On 7 February 2025, the Open Government Partnership's (OGP) Support Unit Local Program and UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub co-hosted a high-level roundtable during the Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting. The session brought together 18 representatives from local governments, civil society organizations, and key development partners in the region. It provided a space for exchange between local government and civil society leaders from OGP Local members and non-member jurisdictions on how they use open government to build a lasting legacy that improves the quality of life in their communities, fosters resilience, and promotes inclusion.

Local governments are critical in addressing today's most pressing challenges—economic inequality, climate change, and poor service delivery. Through transparency, citizen participation, and accountability, local leaders can co-create innovative, sustainable solutions alongside their communities to tackle these issues. OGP provides a framework to support local governments in implementing open government reforms that enhance their capacity to address local communities' challenges and improve people's lives. While OGP Local currently counts over 150 members globally, 13 are from the Asia and Pacific region, signaling an opportunity to expand open government values across the region.

UNDP has over 30 years of experience supporting people-centered, accountable, and effective local governance. At the core of UNDP's support lies local ownership and stakeholder agency. The UNDP reinforces open government through participatory planning and digital solutions, improving service delivery and building accountable, inclusive, and resilient governance structures.

This outcome document captures key takeaways from the roundtable discussion, focusing on cases of success and emerging trends shaping local open government. It outlines the primary challenges facing local actors, as identified by their leaders. It concludes with a call to action to scale and sustain open governance efforts in local governments across Asia and the Pacific.

## Progress in Open Government Reforms



**“Since the early days, local open government has been a source of innovation and action within OGP, and it continues to be that way. Each of you is a leader in this field, and you have so much inspiration and experience to share about how open government is transforming your people and communities.”**

**Aidan Eyakuze, CEO of OGP**

The roundtable reaffirmed the participants' commitment to open government, highlighting promising practices and identifying areas for collaboration and support to strengthen local governance across the Asia and the Pacific Region. Leaders shared compelling stories of progress, particularly in three key areas: digital innovation, fiscal openness, and citizen participation.



“... [A]chieving the SDGs depends on local action. Nearly 65% of the SDG targets require local implementation, making cities and municipalities frontline actors in poverty reduction, education, public health, and climate resilience.”

Diana Torres, Regional Governance Adviser, UNDP's Bangkok Regional Hub

**Cities in the region are implementing digital platforms that enhance public access to services and facilitate community engagement.**

**Quezon City's eServices** platform allows residents to access 100 services online, significantly improving service delivery and reducing corruption risks. In **Semarang (Indonesia)**, the city developed a digital citizen reporting application providing an inclusive and open participation channel. Based on 2023 data<sup>[1]</sup>, there were 6,000 reports from the community, and the government resolved 80% of them. In the **Philippines, Baguio City** leverages digital innovation to enhance its resilience and collaborate with local communities. The Digital Twin City uses simulations in infrastructure planning and for climate risk response, and the Livability Index tracks sustainability and quality of life indicators across all barangays. Both are open data sources, improving citizens' access to information and empowering them to hold governments accountable. These initiatives have earned recognition for their contributions to sustainable urban transformation at the recent [CityNet SDG Awards](#).

**Initiatives toward fiscal openness have proven popular and impactful.** Leaders showcased participatory processes that empower citizens to influence budget allocations. For example, in **Madiun City (Philippines)**, participatory budgeting improved maternal health and community engagement, reducing maternal deaths. In **Armavir (Armenia)**, a participatory budget involved community members in public projects, resulting in a new playground and a revitalized recreational space. At the same time, **Yerevan (Armenia)** launched an accessible Citizens' Budget project, which helped the public understand the benefits and impacts of planned spending. Local governments can better align resources with public priorities by involving the community in decision-making, enhancing overall government effectiveness.

**Establishing citizen councils and direct dialogue platforms that foster strong civil society-government partnerships enables diverse community voices to be included in the policy-making process.** This collaborative approach encourages trust and ensures that various perspectives inform local decisions. **Larena (Philippines)** is committed to inclusivity and establishing citizen councils and direct dialogue platforms that foster strong civil society-government partnerships, enables diverse community voices to be included in the policy-making process. This collaborative approach encourages trust and ensures that various perspectives inform local decisions. Larena (Philippines) is committed to inclusivity and engagement with diverse community voices by partnering with a local NGO to conduct a Rapid Needs and Resources Assessment. The municipality ensured that the concerns of various sectors, including women, farmers, fisherfolk, and youth, were taken into consideration in their Executive and Legislative Agenda.

In **Kulhudhuffushi (Maldives)**, the local government holds drop-in sessions every Monday where citizens can speak directly with council members to share concerns and ideas. And, in **West Sumbawa (Philippines)**, an open community forum brings citizens face-to-face with local government officials, including police, military, land, and health offices, to share their complaints and feedback. This practice has helped build trust and improve service delivery. It makes the government feel more accessible, and the people feel heard.

These examples demonstrate that open government principles are actionable and impactful. Whether through digital platforms that increase transparency, participatory budgeting that empowers citizens, or inclusive forums that elevate diverse voices, local governments are finding innovative ways to make governments more accountable and responsive. When communities are meaningfully involved, government becomes more resilient, equitable, and trusted.

## Trends in Open Government at the Local Level

Engaging youth, harnessing digital tools, and prioritizing sustainability are some innovative trends that surfaced during the discussion. There is an increased focus on involving youth in governance processes, with tailored programs that empower this demographic to participate actively in public policy. It reflects a shift towards fostering a future-oriented leadership approach. For example, programs like Young Ambassadors in Metsamor (Armenia) and initiatives in Balanga City (Philippines) establish learning hubs for youth engagement and foster a new generation of informed citizen leaders.

Digital innovations are increasingly integrated into local governance through platforms that promote open data, eServices, and digital communication channels, enhancing public access to government services. Local governments are leveraging digital innovations to improve community engagement, accountability, and service delivery (reporting applications and online platforms for transparency). Bishkek's (Kyrgyz Republic) plan to develop a digital tool for

citizens' feedback to assess the quality of municipal services and improve public service quality demonstrates how digitization can streamline operations and enhance transparency.

Local governments worldwide are increasingly prioritizing sustainability and climate initiatives. By embedding transparency, participation, and accountability into climate action, they are responding to ecological challenges through inclusive and citizen-driven approaches.



**“[Thanks to the Quezon City eServices platform] you can now get assistance or do business with the city without setting foot in City Hall. This has drastically reduced red tape and eliminated discretionary opportunities for corruption.”**

**Joy Belmonte, Mayor of Quezon City, Philippines**

In **Fuvahmulah (Maldives)**, an Environmental Defenders Group has been formed, engaging 30 young participants in environmental data collection and community monitoring efforts. This reflects a broader trend of aligning sustainability goals with open governance to ensure long-term, locally anchored climate solutions. **Yerevan (Armenia)** co-created the “Green Seal Green Deal” with civil society, encouraging municipal institutions to go green and save costs.

Another growing trend is the adoption of community-centered policies, where public services are tailored in close collaboration with the community's needs. This model, grounded in participatory planning and budgeting, ensures that government programs respond directly to local needs while strengthening accountability and trust.

In **Baguio (Philippines)**, for instance, the institutionalization of the Baguio City People's Council has formalized public participation in decision-making processes. In **Vanadzor (Armenia)**, local authorities established meaningful partnerships with civil society organizations, thereby reinforcing the role of citizens as active contributors to local governance.

These emerging trends reflect a dynamic shift in how local governments operate, placing citizens at the center and responding to pressing global challenges, such as climate change, and embracing digital innovation.

## Challenges

Despite growing momentum for open government, local actors continue to face challenges that can hinder progress and implementation, such as political resistance, limited resources, leadership transitions, and digital divides. Local leaders highlighted these obstacles, offering insights into how they impact reform efforts and potential ways to overcome them.

### **Resistance to change remains a significant barrier to advancing open government at the local level.**



“Many local chief executives are reluctant to give up what I’ll call their ‘special perks and privileges’... That’s the biggest challenge.”

Mayor Benjamin Magalong of Baguio City

Many elected and public officials are hesitant to embrace transparency and participatory governance due to rooted cultural norms, a fear of losing discretionary authority, or reluctance to disrupt long-standing practices. **Addressing this resistance requires strengthening political commitments and promoting a culture of openness.** Initiatives such as regional cooperation and capacity-building platforms, which highlight the benefits of open governance and innovation, can help shift attitudes and build the political will necessary to drive reform.

Leadership gaps and a lack of capacities remain key challenges for the adoption of open government initiatives, particularly when political continuity is disrupted. In places where mayoral transitions are frequent, these changes can derail ongoing OGP efforts. In addition to political shifts, while citizen and civil society engagement is

increasingly institutionalized, many civil society organizations (CSOs) and community groups face a lack of technical skills and resources, which prevents them from engaging effectively in governance processes. This is where ongoing training and support from peers and experts become essential, ensuring that citizen and civil society participation is sustained. Local governments can reinforce leadership continuity by actively engaging mayors in open government initiatives and establishing clear succession strategies that safeguard long-term commitment to reform.

Limited resources continue to be a challenge to the implementation of open government reforms. Municipalities operate with limited financial and human resources, making it difficult to invest in technology, public engagement programs, or capacity-building efforts. Underinvestment can stall progress, even when political will is present. To overcome this, multi-level governance is imperative. A more coordinated approach from the national, regional, and local levels will enhance open government capabilities at all levels. Local governments must form strategic partnerships with civil society and international organizations, enabling them to access technical support and capacity-building resources. This collaborative approach can help sustain open government efforts without placing excessive pressure on local budgets, ensuring the sustainability of open governance reforms.

Digital barriers and access to technology present significant challenges for many local governments attempting to implement open government tools effectively. Limited digital infrastructure and unequal access to technology can obstruct the rollout of platforms, excluding marginalized populations from participation. This digital divide can result from limited access, skills gaps, or even resistance to technology from both officials and the public.



**“True progress depends on collaboration across sectors and across borders. We need to bring in civil society, the private sector, innovators, and especially youth. As partners, we can help strengthen these networks and co-create sustainable solutions.”**

**Laure Beaufile, UK Ambassador to the Philippines**



**“Most of your work involves managing teams and delivering results. But I urge you to look beyond that. Be intentional in creating space for others to follow. Build genuine team buy-in so your reforms are sustainable beyond your term. Invest in peer learning and collaboration with neighboring local governments.”**

**Stephanie Muchai, OGP Steering Committee Member, Kenya**

As local governments manage resistance, resource gaps, and digital inequality, the importance of building partnerships, peer exchanges, and long-term support becomes ever more evident. Addressing these challenges requires more than technical solutions; it necessitates a sustained commitment and solidarity from stakeholders. With stronger partnerships, clearer leadership continuity, and targeted capacity-building for both officials and civil society, open government at the local level can continue to evolve.

## Looking forward

The discussion emphasized the need to adopt tangible strategies to translate open government principles into practical applications. Across Asia and the Pacific, local governments and their partners are encouraged to scale effective models and address persistent barriers by strengthening political commitment, sharing resources, investing in leadership, and leveraging digital innovation for more inclusive governance.

Building political will and awareness is essential to overcoming resistance to opening governments. Local leaders must be vocal advocates for open government, drawing on their own experiences. They can share their progress and impact stories to help dismantle reluctance rooted in outdated governance practices and highlight the concrete benefits of open governance. Leadership development also plays a pivotal role: continuous training and exposure to open government values among elected and public officials equips current and future local leaders to carry reforms forward and navigate complex governance challenges.

At the same time, leadership must extend beyond the top tiers of government. Ongoing support for local government officials, citizens, and civil society fosters the conditions for transparency and participation to thrive. Peer learning and regional collaboration, such as those promoted through OGP Local, support governments in exchanging practices, adapting successful models, and building mutual support. Inter-sectoral partnerships, with civil society, the private sector, and educational institutions, enhance capacity development and lend legitimacy to open governance efforts.

To embed these approaches sustainably, resourcing should be institutionalized within planning and budgeting processes. Allocating dedicated budget lines for citizen engagement, co-creation and transparency ensures governance processes remain responsive to local needs. Strategic partnerships with civil society, international development partners, and the private sector, often facilitated through the OGP network or UNDP programmes, can provide the additional resources and expertise required to sustain reforms



**“[Local governments] often face limitations like scarce resources or weak institutional frameworks. It's essential to empower local actors with the right tools, legal frameworks, and political support. These reforms must be institutionalized.”**

**Wilford Wong, DBM, Steering Committee Member, Philippines**

At the same time, leadership must extend beyond the top tiers of government. Ongoing support for local government officials, citizens, and civil society fosters the conditions for transparency and participation to thrive. Peer learning and regional collaboration, such as those promoted through OGP Local, support governments in exchanging practices, adapting successful models, and building mutual support. Inter-sectoral partnerships, with civil society, the private sector, and educational institutions, enhance capacity development and lend legitimacy to open governance efforts.

To embed these approaches sustainably, resourcing should be institutionalized within planning and budgeting processes. Allocating dedicated budget lines for citizen engagement, co-creation and transparency ensures governance processes remain responsive to local needs. Strategic partnerships with civil society, international development partners, and the private sector, often facilitated through the OGP network or UNDP programmes, can provide the additional resources and expertise required to sustain reforms. Likewise, resource-sharing models between municipalities, involving civil society and the private sector, can alleviate budget pressures and foster innovation through mutual support in areas such as training, technology, and engagement.

Achieving the goal of all local governments being open requires a cultural transformation and institutional change. Institutionalizing mechanisms that consistently promote and sustain open government reforms over time can provide the resilience needed to achieve profound changes in practices and attitudes. The OGP approach, grounded in co-creation and action planning, provides the structure and support to turn those values into practice, helping to navigate the open government agenda through time and political change.

## **Conclusion**

The OGP Local Leaders Roundtable, held during the Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting, underscored the growing potential of open governance across the region, where local leaders are adopting reforms to increase access to information, accountability, and participation in innovative ways to tackle pressing challenges and strengthen public trust.

Sustaining progress in open government requires a long-term vision rooted in political leadership and community empowerment. By committing to collaboration, innovation, and institutional continuity, local leaders can build governance systems that are transparent, participatory, resilient, and responsive to the evolving needs of their citizens. As local governments continue to deepen citizen engagement, their role in reinforcing democracy from the grassroots level becomes increasingly critical. These efforts form the foundation of resilient, inclusive, and accountable governance across the region, driven by local action and collective commitment.

**Roundtable Participant list:**

Aidan Eyakuze, CEO of OGP  
Diana Torres, Governance Advisor. UNDP, Bangkok Regional Hub.  
Jose Maria Marin, Lead, OGP Local  
Stephanie Muchai – OGP Steering Committee Member, Civil Society Rep, Kenya  
Wilford Wong – DBM, Steering Committee Member, Philippines  
Mayor Joy Belmonte – Quezon City, Philippines  
Mayor Varsham Sargsyan – Armavir, Armenia  
Mayor Dr. Maudi – Madiun City, Indonesia  
Azamat Mov – Development Policy Institute, Kyrgyz Republic  
Liz Vea – UCLG Asia-Pacific  
Vahram Khachatryan, Head of the Community – Metsamor, Armenia  
Mayor Benjamin Magalong – Baguio City, Philippines  
Mayor Ismail Rafeeq, Fuvahmulah City, Maldives  
Laure Beaufils, UK Ambassador to the Philippines  
Mayor Cyrus Vincent M. Calibo – Municipality of Larena, Philippines  
Mayor Ahmed Atif – Kulhudhuffushi City, Maldives  
Suhadi – Assistant Secretary for Economic Development, West Sumbawa, Indonesia  
Arpine Hovhannisyan – President, NGO Center, Armenia, Vanadzor  
Mayor Francis Anthony Garcia – Balanga City, Philippines  
Narek Minasyan, Deputy Head of Finance – Yerevan Municipality, Armenia  
Muklis Raya, PATTIRO – Semarang, Indonesia