

Final Learning Exercise

Vanadzor Summary Report

Section 1. Local Context

Vanadzor, as one of Armenia's key regional cities, operates within a socio-political context shaped by local governance structures and ongoing socio-economic development challenges. The OGP Local initiative in Vanadzor was implemented during a period affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited in-person engagement, and by the broader geopolitical challenges, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which influenced public attention and priorities.

The implementation of Vanadzor's OGP Local Action Plan took place in a complex political and administrative environment that significantly affected the pace and consistency of activities. Implementation was delayed twice due to political and administrative instability. For long periods, Vanadzor had no mayor, and city council meetings often lacked a quorum, preventing timely budget allocations. As a result, the municipality relied entirely on donor funding to ensure continuity of planned actions. Overcoming these obstacles was possible thanks to strong cooperation between the municipality, civil society, and international partners, which jointly secured the necessary resources to sustain implementation.

Another challenge was the initial underestimation of timeframes. Implementing five commitments within a single year proved unrealistic in an unstable political context, and deadlines had to be extended twice.

Despite these constraints, Vanadzor's municipal administration demonstrated a commitment to transparent governance and citizen participation. The establishment of a local working forum and the adoption of digital tools facilitated engagement and supported the co-creation and implementation of the action plan, even under restrictive conditions.

Section 2. Action Plan Co-creation Process

2.1 Co-creation process review

The co-creation process for the Vanadzor-Gyumri Local OGP action plan had several notable strengths. First, the initiative successfully established a multi-stakeholder forum, including government officials from both municipalities, civil society organizations (CSOs), pedagogues, and representatives from international partners. The forum conducted multiple meetings, both online and hybrid, allowing stakeholders to collaboratively propose and refine commitments.

Second, the process was inclusive in terms of idea collection: 30 proposals were received from CSOs and municipal representatives, and these were systematically consolidated into fifteen commitments, and five of them were prioritized. Feedback mechanisms were effective, as contributors were informed about how their suggestions were considered and integrated during the hybrid meeting.

Third, the co-creation process incorporated capacity-building initiatives. Training sessions organized with UNDP and other partners helped CSOs and municipal staff understand OGP principles and open governance tools, improving their ability to contribute meaningfully.

However, there were limitations. The forum lacked full sectoral diversity: private sector actors, media representatives, and residents were minimally involved, partly due to pandemic restrictions. Additionally, the absence of offline, community-level outreach limited wider citizen engagement. Some proposals were rejected or consolidated, and while feedback was provided, formal mechanisms like public hearings or votes were not conducted.

Finally, while the co-creation process adhered to recommended practices for iterative dialogue and shared ownership, the absence of a dedicated OGP Local web portal hindered public visibility and continuous stakeholder engagement. Overall, the process demonstrated both strong collaboration among key actors and the need to expand inclusivity and transparency in future cycles.

2.2 Co-creation process recommendations

- Establish a dedicated OGP Local web page to systematically share updates, proposals, meeting outcomes, and final commitments.
- Expand outreach to include the private sector, media, and local residents to ensure broader multi-stakeholder participation.
- Organize offline meetings and community-level workshops to complement online engagement, particularly in times of limited in-person interaction. For example, organizing at least one **town hall** or **open space-style discussion** in each settlement of the enlarged community would help ensure that residents from all areas have the opportunity to share their perspectives and propose ideas. Such an inclusive approach would strengthen community ownership of the commitments and improve the overall quality and relevance of the action plan.
- Implement formal approval mechanisms for commitments, including public hearings and council votes, to enhance legitimacy and accountability.
- Continue capacity-building programs for all stakeholders to improve understanding of OGP principles, iterative dialogue, and proposal evaluation.

Section 3. Action Plan Commitments

3.1 Commitments implementation review

The action plan for Vanadzor laid out five core commitments that sought to advance transparency, participation, innovation, and inclusivity in local governance (fiscal openness, access to information, public transport, and marginalized communities).

One of the major highlights is the **introduction of digital tools and mechanisms** that did not exist previously. For example, the initiative to **create a unified community-resource register and to introduce a participatory budgeting system** marked clear advances. These tools have the potential to strengthen transparency and accountability, giving citizens not only access to data in more user-friendly ways but also be part of decision-making. The plan thus achieved meaningful progress toward the strategic vision of open governance in Vanadzor by modernizing key practices and enabling new citizen-government interactions.

It should also be noted that, in some cases, the municipal department responsible for a given commitment does not fully grasp the underlying philosophy of the commitment and focuses primarily on carrying out specific activities. This is exemplified by the **“green transport” commitment**. Interviews revealed that the municipality largely perceived the commitment as a technical task: the mere introduction of four electric buses, rather than as part of a broader transition toward sustainable, environmentally friendly transport. The subsidy proposal was developed to purchase 50 additional buses, but the proposed vehicles were not electric, underscoring that the local government has not yet internalized the philosophy and long-term vision of a comprehensive “green transport” policy.

Nevertheless, the implementation also faced significant challenges. A recurring issue was the limited engagement of all stakeholder groups, especially the private sector, media, and the broader public. While the commitments were well designed in many cases, their uptake and embedding into daily practice were hampered by factors such as limited awareness campaigns for the new tools and sometimes a lack of clear usage metrics. For example, some commitments lacked strong indicators for the measurement of outcomes (such as the number of users of the online map or the number of mapped accessible facilities), which makes it harder to assess the full impact.

Further, although the commitments were largely aligned with the strategic vision and were realistically designed, in some cases, they could have benefited from stronger institutionalization and better clarity on sustainability. The end-of-commitment reports point to the need for ongoing updates, continuity of digital tools, and better integration of stakeholder feedback and monitoring mechanisms. Without stronger follow-through, some innovations may remain pilot or underused rather than fully transformational.

3.2 Commitments recommendations

- **Develop public awareness campaigns to promote the use of digital tools** such as the participatory budget voting system, accessibility maps, and transport applications. These campaigns should target different population groups, including youth, people with disabilities, and other marginalized communities, to ensure that all citizens are aware of, understand, and are able to actively engage with the tools provided. Incorporating workshops, online tutorials, and community events can help maximize outreach and usability.
- **Introduce mechanisms to monitor and measure the effectiveness and impact of implemented commitments** using clear, measurable indicators. This includes establishing baseline data, defining key performance indicators, and regularly collecting

and analyzing data on user engagement, service coverage, and satisfaction. Transparent reporting of these metrics will support evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.

- **Consider carrying over and expanding successful commitments** in future action plans, such as participatory budget systems and digital resource registers. Expanding these initiatives could include adding new features, scaling them to additional sectors, or integrating them with other municipal systems. Ensuring continuity and evolution of successful commitments reinforces the long-term impact of the action plan.
- **Strengthen inclusivity by integrating feedback from residents, the private sector, and the media** in the design and iteration of commitments. Establish structured channels for public consultation, open data submission, and stakeholder dialogues, ensuring that diverse voices contribute to shaping policies and initiatives. This approach enhances transparency, accountability, and legitimacy, while promoting civic ownership of local governance processes.
- **To enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of future commitments**, it is essential to strengthen the conceptual understanding of each commitment among municipal departments. Beyond the mechanical implementation of activities, responsible units should internalize the underlying principles and long-term objectives — such as environmental sustainability in the case of the “green transport” commitment. This can be achieved through targeted capacity-building sessions, thematic workshops, and continuous dialogue between technical staff, policymakers, and civil society representatives to ensure that implementation reflects not only compliance but also genuine alignment with OGP values.