

Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM)

Preliminary Review 2017: Tbilisi

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The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary international initiative that aims to secure commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In 2016, OGP opened to subnational participants in their own right as part of a pilot program. The OGP Subnational Pilot Program consists of 15 subnational governments who submitted action plans and signed onto the Subnational Declaration at the Paris Global OGP Summit, and will be implementing them from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017.

The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) carries out an annual review of the activities of each government that participates in OGP. As part of the pilot status of the reports, the IRM is releasing this early version of the review of process and commitment form (Specificity, Relevance, and Potential Impact). The final report will be released in the first trimester of 2018.

The early release will be reviewed by the IRM staff and the International Experts Panel (IEP). Thereafter, it will undergo two commenting periods. In the first period (14 calendar days), each OGP-participating government is invited to review the release in draft form before it is put out for broader comment. For the second phase of comments (14 calendar days), there will be a space on the OGP website for broader public comment, which may include formal responses by governments.

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Process of development of the action plan

Governments participating in the OGP follow a process for consultation during development of their OGP action plan and during implementation. This section summarizes the performance of the Government of Tbilisi during the development of their first action plan.

OGP basic requirements

Subnational Governments received the following guidance on participation during action plan development and execution:

May – November 2016: Development of commitments: Participants set up ways to work with civil society organizations and other groups outside government and use these mechanisms to identify priority areas for commitments. Specific commitments should then be developed in partnership with civil society, allowing them the opportunity to support governments in drafting them and establishing milestones. Draft commitments should be shared with the OGP Support Unit as they are being developed and for comment and advice in October-November. Commitments should be finalized and agreed by the end of November, so they can be published and announced at the OGP Summit in December.

The Government of Tbilisi met all basic requirements as set out by OGP guidelines. In July 2017, Tbilisi City Hall created a multi-stakeholder working group for support in drafting the action plan. Through this group, City Hall collected input from different stakeholders. During the formulation of the plan, the working group was composed of 20 members, including seven civil society organizations (CSOs), three multilateral organizations and ten government agencies.¹ The composition of the group kept changing slightly along the implementation process, for example two media representatives left the group while USAID, through its Good Governance Initiative (GGI) Program, added new representatives. Organizations representing journalists and the private sector displayed lower levels of engagement and participation was low, mostly, due to their low level of interest and lack of time. Through this mechanism, a diverse group of civil society organizations was involved in different phases of the development of the action plan process.

The Tbilisi City Hall first identified the action plan priority areas taking into consideration studies written by the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), a CSO member of the working group. These were shared for comments with the working group, who, in turn, held 4 meetings to provide extensive input for the City Hall to produce a draft action plan.² In addition, the City Hall, with active involvement of Tbilisi Youth Centers Unions, organized eleven additional meetings to gather recommendations from the general citizenship. The meetings allowed participants to provide input verbally while the City Hall took note. Additionally, they could also provide recommendations via email. Detailed minutes of public consultation meetings were shared with participants.³

According to interviews with representatives of CSOs involved in the process, this participatory mechanism allowed all interested stakeholders to be actively involved in the formulation of the action plan.⁴ The detailed notes of the meetings were prepared and posted on the Tbilisi City Hall website. The commitments in the final draft of the action plan include activities proposed by members of civil society, as explained in the “*Level of public input*” section of this report.

The commitments were shared for review with the Open Government Partnership Support Unit prior to finalization and the action plan was submitted before the deadline by Municipality of Tbilisi.

Table 3.1: Basic requirements

1. Participatory Mechanism: Was there a way of working with CSOs and other groups? Guideline: Participants set up ways to work with civil society organizations and other groups outside government and use these mechanisms to identify priority areas for commitments.	Yes
2. Priority identification: Was civil society able to help identify priority areas for commitments? Guideline: Specific commitments should then be developed in partnership with civil society, allowing them the opportunity to support governments in drafting them and establishing milestones.	Yes
3. Commitment development: Did civil society participate in the [development/drafting] of commitments and milestones? Guideline: Specific commitments should then be developed in partnership with civil society, allowing them the opportunity to support governments in drafting them and establishing milestones.	Yes
4. Review: Were commitments submitted for review to the Open Government Partnership Support Unit prior to finalization? Guideline: Draft commitments should be shared with the OGP Support Unit as they are being developed and for comment and advice in October-November.	Yes
5. Submission: Were commitments submitted on time? Guideline: Commitments should be finalized and agreed by the end of November, so they can be published and announced at the OGP Summit in December.	Yes

Openness of consultation

Who was invited?

To determine which stakeholders would be part of the working group, Tbilisi City Hall contacted the members of Georgia's Open Government Forum (Forum), a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism that operates at a national level.⁵ They include representatives of all main CSOs working on issues related to openness and transparency, international organizations and governmental agencies under Tbilisi Municipality and the Ministry of Justice of Georgia.

These CSOs are the most prominent organizations working in the areas of transparency and accountability, such as IDFI, Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia) and Open Society Foundation Georgia (OSGF). Two NGOs were invited to represent the media sector. The private sector has been represented by the "Georgian Small and Medium Entrepreneurism Association". While many other local NGOs and private sector representatives were invited to provide recommendations, the interest towards the OGP process was low⁶ as they did not see it as priority. IDFI suggested to extend the invitation from transparency-focused NGOs to the ones with expertise on the action plan priority areas.⁷ However, the working group jointly decided to target organizations that have positively contributed to previous projects and are relevant to the OGP process.⁸

To invite all stakeholders mentioned above, the Administration of Tbilisi Municipality sent official and personalized online invitation letters invitation to nominees and contacted them directly.

How was awareness-raising carried out?

Tbilisi City Hall created the working group in Tbilisi by sending out invitations to CSOs who are part of the Ministry of Justice's nationwide open government working group. Additionally, they sent invitations to other stakeholders they considered could be interested in the issue, such as the

German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). Seven CSOs and three multilateral organizations responded positively to the call and became part of the working group.

Upon its creation, the Tbilisi City Hall provided participants with information about the timeline, procedures and methods for consultation to be followed during the formulation of the action plan. Regular updates were provided during working group meetings. Additionally, in the scope of OGP pilot program, the government created a web-page (<http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/>) as a tool to inform and promote further involvement of the public. All the information regarding the timeline and plans were shared publicly with enough time in advance, as well as minutes, according to CSO participants. Awareness raising was also done through youth centers and meetings with different groups of citizens.

Civil society representatives noted that general public visibility of Tbilisi's involvement in OGP and public awareness of the action plan was low during the formulation of the plan and has continued to be the same during its implementation. It could be due to the lack of resources needed for a large scale public information campaign, but CSO representatives noted that City Hall's PR department could have been more proactive in raising the visibility of the project using its existing resources. For example, they could be more active through social media channels that reach a wider audience than the OGP Tbilisi website.⁹

Which parts of civil society participated?

Through the Working Group, civil society representatives were involved in the consultation process in varying degrees. The Institute for Development of Freedom (IDFI), Transparency International-Georgia and Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) actively participated in the working group meetings, and shared recommendations and suggestions during elaboration process of the Action Plan. USAID Georgia Good Governance Initiative was actively involved in the discussions and provided input during the AP development process. Other organizations representing journalists and the private sector displayed lower levels of engagement due to their lack of interest in the topic. This set of organizations represented a wider non-governmental community, considering the different types of organizations involved.

Additionally, the wider audience who participated in the eleven meetings organized by the working group represented varying audiences, such as: different age groups, social status, occupation and others including students, youth organizations¹⁰, parents of kindergarten children,¹¹ socially vulnerable people, members of Civic Councils,¹² business community representatives¹³ and others. In total, consultations involved 240 individuals.

Level of public input

The IRM has adapted the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Scale of participation for use in OGP. The table below shows the level of public influence on the action plan. From left to right, features of participation are cumulative. In the spirit of OGP, most countries should aspire for “collaborate.” (OGP subnational entities are generally not expected to reach empower.)

Public input was provided in two ways: recommendations provided through the working group members and wider public consultations with citizens. Ideas gathered through these channels were reviewed several times and most of the recommendations have been reflected in the final version of the action plan. The level of public input on the IAP2 Spectrum is set at involve; both mechanisms allowed the public and CSOs to provide specific suggestions and the Government gave feedback on how they were being considered.

Working Group meetings: During the elaboration process of the action plan, the working group reviewed several drafts of the action plan prepared by City Hall. On 27 October 2016, government of Tbilisi shared the first draft of Tbilisi Action Plan 2017 with working group members via email.¹⁴ Later, on 8 November 2016, they shared an updated draft, which incorporated inputs from working group and public consultations. Both versions were made public on the website (<http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/>).¹⁵ During the elaboration process, CSOs had the opportunity to provide recommendations to the Government of Tbilisi and discuss them. According to government members, they received approximately 6 emails and had several conversations with CSO representatives. The input provided by different stakeholders is clearly visible in the final version of the action plan when compared with the first draft, which shows the involvement of the CSOs through the working group, as confirmed by two representatives from USAID Georgia who were part of the elaboration process.¹⁶

Two specific commitments came from proposals made by CSO members of the working group. According to IDFI, leading CSO in the working group, the process developing the action plan was inclusive and the government was open to ideas proposed by the civil society members. For example, they proposed the creation of a mechanism to allow citizens to initiate discussions on problems, which was accepted and included as commitment two, which calls for the creation of an e-petitions platform.¹⁷ Additionally, the third commitment on budget planning participation, was a recommendation from the Open Society Georgia Foundation. USAID GGI representatives confirmed that the working group held active discussions and exchanges between the government and CSOs.¹⁸ According to them, they could provide ample input and the Government responded with feedback on how they would consider suggestions.

Public consultations with citizens: The 11 meetings held for consultations targeted members of district civil councils, youth organizations, students and volunteers, parents of kindergarten children, people with disability and other socially vulnerable groups, as well as house owners' associations,¹⁹ and representatives of business community. In addition, Tbilisi Youth Centers Union organized series of meetings with different target groups, such as youth, students, youth NGOs and representatives of the city government in charge of youth policy. Although in total, public consultations covered 240 individuals, it could have benefited from CSO involvement in the planning of the consultations. However, because of time issues and conflicting priorities, CSOs decided to disengage and allowed the Government to lead this part of the process.²⁰

Tbilisi government provided information about the action plan through their website <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/>. Some CSO stakeholders considered this public consultation process to be restrictive. For example, they criticized the timeline allowed to participate and provide comments, which lasted two weeks. However, the public could provide inputs and give feedback on commitments. Some of these inputs were reflected in the final version of action plan, as is the case of the fifth commitment, which was a direct result from the public consultation. Recommendations could be submitted online, via phone or in person. Detailed meeting minutes of public consultations were prepared and documented as a reference for future follow up on the suggestions made during the consultation process.

While some members of the working group expressed skepticism on the effectiveness of public consultations for generating realistic ideas,²¹ the City Hall found these consultations to be very useful in improving the content of the commitments. Specifically, commitment five of the action plan, related to the introduction of civic control and an accessibility mechanism for municipality services, came from citizen input.

Table 3.2 Level of public input

Level of public input		During development of action plan
Empower	The government handed decision-making power to members of the public.	
Collaborate	There was iterative dialogue AND the public helped set the agenda.	
Involve	The public could give feedback on how commitments were considered.	✓
Consult	The public could give inputs.	
Inform	The government provided the public with information on the action plan.	
No Consultation	No consultation	

¹ See, the list of working group members, <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/page/3128>

² See, the meeting minutes of working group, <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/page/3155?lang=en>

³ Vladimir Khasia (The Head of Deputy Mayors Office, the Administration of Tbilisi Municipality), interview with the IRM researcher, 27 July, 2017

⁴ Levan Avalishvili (Programs Director, Co-founder of Institute for Development of Freedom of Information), interview with the IRM researcher, 19 June, 2017

⁵ Khasia, interview, July, 2017

⁶ Khasia, interview, June, 2017

⁷ Avalishvili, interview, June, 2017

⁸ Khasia, interview, June, 2017

⁹ Avalishvili, interview, June, 2017

¹⁰ Meetings with representatives of the Youth Organizations, see the detailed information:

<http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/news/3057>

¹¹ Public consultation for parents of Tbilisi Kindergarten Pupils <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/news/3002>

¹² Public consultations with Tbilisi residents. <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/news/2987>

¹³ Public consultations for Representatives of Tbilisi Business Community. <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/news/3016>

¹⁴ "Tbilisi Action Plan, draft project, 2017" (Government of Tbilisi).

http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/img/original/2016/10/27/%E1%83%A1%E1%83%90%E1%83%9B%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A5%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94%E1%83%93%E1%83%9D_%E1%83%92%E1%83%94%E1%83%92%E1%83%9B%E1%83%90.pdf

¹⁵ "2017 draft Tbilisi Action Plan". http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/img/original/2016/11/8/DRAFT_action_plan_5.pdf

¹⁶ Mikheil Darchiashvili (Senior Governance Advisor, USAID Georgia Good Governance Initiative) and Mariam Gorgodze (Program Manager, USAID Georgia Good Governance Initiative), interview with the IRM researcher, 22 June, 2017

¹⁷ Avalishvili, interview, June, 2017

¹⁸ Darchiashvili and Gorgodze, interview, June, 2017

¹⁹ Public consultations with Heads of Chugureti District's House-Owners Cooperatives <http://ogp.tbilisi.gov.ge/news/3000>

²⁰ Avalishvili, interview, June, 2017

²¹ Khasia, interview, June, 2017

Early assessment of commitments

I. Multi-discipline mechanism of open government and civic participation – information and civic activities portal “Smart Map”

Commitment text

As it was explained in the introductory section [of the action plan], access to information in Tbilisi City Hall is based on minimal legal requirements, which very often does not ensure supplying information and participation of the public. Subsequently, through absence of adequate system, often execution of requests is met with difficulties as well as issuing simple public information often requires maximum period of 10 days. Members of the public are reporting their problems via hotlines and through statements. The consideration period is one month. There is no feedback and performance monitoring systemic mechanism. The citizens are participating through informal and non-proportional public councils and contest to propose their ideas for Tbilisi City Hall projects (organized by Tbilisi City Hall)

Main goals:

- *Increased access to all data available on Smart Map. This information in interactive format will be accessible for Tbilisi residents interested in what is going on in their place of residence. This will create pre-requisites for public to participate in governance and make informed decisions;*
- *There will be created results-orientated and accountable participation system. Tbilisi City Hall will have an obligation to respond to the City's issues displayed in the portal in a timely manner;*
- *System will be created, which will support Tbilisi Municipality to make their decisions through public participation and based on their needs.*

Milestones

- 1. Approvement of technical task for updating and modernization of multi-functional web portal and existing municipal interactive map, and timetable (by January 2017)*
- 2. Development of technical functions and content of the portal, agreement with interested parties, piloting and introduction: (by February 2017)*
 - 2.1 Development of portal's technical and contextual part (by March 2017)*
 - 2.2 Creating individual page for a citizen and integration with the map (by June 2017)*
 - 2.3 Function for citizen's subscription for any information related to different activities on interactive map (by July 2017)*
 - 2.4 Display of any problem by a citizen (also administrator) related to different projects covering different layers, also function for public discussion (by August 2017)*
 - 2.5 Piloting and introduction of the portal (by October 2017)*
 - 2.6 Personals training on map functional and processing the data (October 2017)*
 - 2.7 Consultation, development of supportive legislative acts for the system, approval (by February 2017)*
- 3. Making one video clip covering portal and other OGP obligation and its dissemination through social media, mass media or municipalities local units (by November 2017)*

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2017 Action Plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information on how the milestones will be carried out, assigns responsibility to specific actors and provides concrete deadlines for its implementation.

Commitment overview

Start date:	January, 2017
Intended completion date:	December, 2017
Responsible Office:	Tbilisi Municipal Services Development Agency” NCLE; The administration of Tbilisi Municipality; Municipal Legal Department; Municipal Department of Environmental and Landscaping; Municipal Amenities Department; Municipal Department of Economic Development
Lead CSO partners:	None identified in the action plan

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	

Commitment aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

Traditionally, residents of Tbilisi have had limited access to information on decision-making. There is no mechanism for feedback or to monitor government performance. Such is the case for decisions made on regards to construction permits, tree cutting and investment projects. Although, legislation prescribes the possibility to involve all interested parties in the process before any construction permits are issued, there is no proactive mechanism to involve citizens in the decision-making process and data is hard to access. Citizens usually participate through informal public councils and idea competition based individual projects (organized by Tbilisi City Hall).

The chaotic construction and development projects in the city have been a cause of public outcry. Several cases of illegal cutting of trees have been reported by the media.²² The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) has tried to follow the removal of trees in the city with difficulty. Upon requests for disclosure of permits, the City has responded with incomplete and disorganized data instead of aggregate data.²³ Among the most prominent, is the controversial case of ‘Panorama’ in Tbilisi.²⁴ Proposed in May 2014 as the Georgian Co-investment Fund’s flagship project, it constitutes a large-scale, mixed-used development project that would extend from central

Tbilisi into the Sololaki hillsides overlooking the historic city centre.²⁵ The biggest concern is that it could damage Tbilisi's architectural and cultural integrity, and endanger Old Tbilisi's candidacy for the UNESCO World Heritage Status.²⁶ In spite of spirited grassroots protests, at the time when the action plan was being elaborated, there had been limited public input on the project's approval and city government decisions on the matter were widely questioned.²⁷

These concerns triggered the formulation of the commitment, which aims to increase access to information and allow citizens' feedback through the creation of an interactive e-portal Smart Map. The Action Plan includes details on how the Smart Map is expected to function. The proposed mechanism would:

- allow the publication of government-held construction data according to geographic locations with the use of maps; Tbilisi residents would be able to view information on the initial stage of constructions, tree cutting, large scale infrastructural projects or Tbilisi investment sites,
- include data processing and user-friendly mechanisms,
- enable effective dialogue with the public by introducing a mechanism to respond to citizen input,
- allow citizens to start a discussion about specific projects in their neighbourhood and start public discussions.

Additionally, the commitment introduces the legal obligation for the City Hall to respond to citizens' concerns and questions displayed in the portal in a timely manner. As stated in the Action Plan,

"The system should assign specific feedback obligations to Tbilisi City Hall. Selected entries will be visible on the map and will become time-sensitive, with a deadline, according to the law and within the reasonable time, will be marked by administrator (e.g.: completed, checked and not confirmed, exceeds competence, problematic, not marking within the deadlines automatically assigns "neglected"). In such cases, citizens will have an opportunity to make a comment in the above-mentioned forum."

This commitment is relevant to all OGP values. Through the Smart Map portal, it seeks to release government-held data and improve its readability. The commitment specifically says that the portal should:

1. display basic construction data including: status at any stage and other related information (it should be connected to the Department of Architecture's data base);
2. provide information on tree cutting permits;
3. contain information on large scale infrastructural projects (rehabilitation projects for old streets and buildings, reinforcement and construction of bridges, large scale road-infrastructural projects and other territorially or functionally significant large scale infrastructural projects);
4. include a 'Tbilisi property map' with information related to Tbilisi owned investment sites.

The Portal is also intended to allow citizens to provide input (positive or negative) on any topic. It should also allow public to present solutions or projects related to local issues in their neighbourhoods that they identify. Finally, the commitment introduces the obligation of the Municipality to respond to public questions and complaints and these inputs, as explained above. For these reasons, the commitment is considered relevant to all OGP values.

Specificity and Potential Impact

The commitment is highly specific regarding the creation of the Smart Map platform, providing details on the technical aspects it will have. The milestones represent cumulative steps for developing and piloting the platform, training the relevant personnel and adoption of legal acts necessary for its functioning. The commitment also includes specific indicators that would allow the IRM researcher to measure the completion of its activities. These indicators, as written in the action plan, are:

- “developed the Smart Map e-portal, which contains new or/and improved covered zones for information accessibility; supportive measures and trainings completed;
- Smart Map e-portal fully contains functions described in the description [section of the action plan];
- the legislative support is created for the portal’s functions as they are described [in the action plan], which will include procedures, institutional support and the responsibilities of civil servants;
- active awareness-raising policies (campaigns) across the City [on these] participation mechanisms (making of a video [on] the portal and its dissemination through social media).”

Therefore, the IRM researcher considers this commitment to be of high specificity.

The commitment could have a significant impact on government practice. The creation of a Smart Map can change the way Tbilisi citizens access information about major infrastructure projects in the city that affect their living space and creates effective tools for them to voice their concerns to the city government. Given the lack of information about urban planning issues in the city, evidenced by the recent public outcries regarding issuance of construction permits and tree cutting, the Smart Map platform could be a result oriented and accountable participation system, where Tbilisi Municipality will have an obligation to respond to the questions in timely manner. In addition, it can support Tbilisi Municipality to make their decisions through public participation and based on the citizens needs. According to IDFI, the implementation of this commitment as whole, and specifically creating legal obligations, provides the opportunity for CSOs and citizens to raise concerns about the way Tbilisi City Hall is currently giving information which could translate in improved government practice.²⁸

However, despite its specificity, the Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) believes this commitment would not necessarily guarantee effective citizen participation or access to information.²⁹ They mentioned that in the past, the city hall used similar platforms with maps to provide information.³⁰ These were not widely known are used. Without a robust awareness-raising strategy and a user-friendly platform, the Smart Map could prove to be of little use. Additionally, regarding public accountability, they mentioned that due to specificity issues in the commitment language, there is no guarantee that government feedback would be of good quality.

²² Examples of media articles reporting the situation include, but are not limited to:

- “Mass tree felling near Tbilisi for motorway construction”, 30 June 2017, <http://oc-media.org/mass-tree-felling-near-tbilisi-for-motorway-construction/>
- “New Campaign targets illegal tree cutting for New Year” <http://agenda.ge/news/72293/eng>
- “709 trees were taken down in Tbilis in 2016” <https://jam-news.net/?p=11020>

²³ Giorgi Khatiasvili, “Statistics of cutting down trees in Tbilisi due to constructions purposes”, 10 January 2017 <https://idfi.ge/en/trees-cut-for-construction-purposes>

²⁴ “Panorama Tbilisi -Investment that kills?” <https://storybuilder.jumpstart.ge/en/panorama-tbilisi-investment-that-kills>

²⁵ Eva Anderson, “Georgian Co-investment Fund’s 2014 projects: Further Transparency needed”, Transparency International Georgia, 30 May 2016, <http://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/georgian-co-investment-fund-s-2014-projects->

[further-transparency-needed](#)

²⁶ "UNESCO vs Ivanishvili," JAMNews, 10 November 2015, <https://jam-news.net/?p=2860>

²⁷ Examples of media articles reporting the situation include, but are not limited to:

- Dominik Cagara, "Hundreds rally against Ivanishvili's 'Panorama Tbilisi' project," Democracy and Freedom Watch, 29 February 2016, <http://dfwatch.net/hundreds-rally-against-ivanishvilis-panorama-tbilisi-project-40538>
- Irakli Zhvania, "Tbilisi's Panorama project is urban boosterism at its worst," Open Democracy, 20 October 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/irakli-zhvania/tbilisi-panorama-project-urban-boosterism-at-its-worst>

²⁸ Levan Avalishvili (Programs Director, Co-founder of Institute for Development of Freedom of Information), interview with the IRM researcher, 26 October, 2017

²⁹ Vakhtang (Vako) Natsvlishvili (Open Society Georgia Foundation) and Anano Tsintsabadze (Participatory Democracy Program Project Coordinator, Open Society Georgia Foundation), interview with the IRM researcher, 27 October, 2017

³⁰ Interactive Tbilisi Mayoral Map, <http://maps.tbilisi.gov.ge/#/C=44.7807474-41.7138468@Z=14>

2. Introduction of a mechanism for electronic petitions to Tbilisi City Hall

Commitment text:

Application for Tbilisi Municipality [to make petitions] to the Mayor integrated to the City Portal. It will be possible to request it [make petitions] from “Smart map” (particularly when there is a territorial connection) as well as from a separate column. The application will enable Tbilisi residents to create petition on important issues for them and invite other people to be a signatory.

There will be a legal basis established related to number of signatories for petitions and subsequent obligations of the Tbilisi City Hall to satisfy request and provide an explanatory and documented feedback.

Milestones

- 1. Elaboration of terms of reference to create [an] integrated application in the Tbilisi City Hall portal (by March 2017)*
- 2. Development of electronic petition’s web application and integration with other systems as well as with Smart Map (final integration depends on electronic systems completion dates) (by September 2017)*
- 3. Development of electronic petition’s mobile application and integration with systems (Final integration depends on electronic systems completion dates) (by October 2017)*
- 4. System testing and putting it in to force (by December 2017)*
- 5. Training of relevant personal to process petitions (by November 2017)*
- 6. Making one video clip covering portal and other OGP commitments and its dissemination through social media, mass media or municipal entities (by December 2017)*
- 7. Legal consultancy, development of system supports legislative acts, approval (by December 2017)*

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2017 Action Plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information on how the milestones will be carried out, assigns responsibility to specific actors and provides concrete deadlines for its implementation.

Commitment overview

Start date:	January, 2017
Intended completion date:	December, 2017
Responsible Office:	Municipal Services Development Agency, (NCLE); Tbilisi Municipality Legal Department
Lead CSO partners:	None identified in the action plan

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall			✓			✓		✓			✓	

Commitment aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

Currently, there is no direct e-communication tool between the public and the Tbilisi City Hall. Citizens can make petitions to the legislative body of the city, the Tbilisi City Council, only in print form, but not to the Tbilisi City Hall, which constitutes the city's administrative body (including the Mayor's office, municipal departments and the City Council). There is no mechanism or specific legal obligation for the City Hall to respond to citizens' petitions. The commitment aims to increase public participation and engagement through an electronic petitions platform that will allow Tbilisi residents to start initiatives, gather signatures and petition any institution within City Hall to act on identified priorities.

This commitment was proposed by the IDFI, civil society organization that focuses on freedom of information issues, and was agreed within the multi-stakeholder working group. It calls for the establishment of a legal framework to regulate the e-petition system and procedures (i.e. number of signatures for petitions and subsequent obligations of the Tbilisi City Hall to satisfy requests and provide well documented explanatory feedback). E-petitions will be integrated in the Smart Map portal, tool created as part of the first commitment of the action plan.

The commitment is relevant to the OGP value of civic participation and technology and innovation for transparency and accountability. E-petitions could allow citizen mobilization and active participation in setting priorities for government decision making. The legal requirement for the government to respond to citizens' petitions aims to ensure public accountability. However, the commitment text does not specify if this legal requirement would oblige the Government to justify their actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of citizens, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments.

Specificity and Potential Impact

The commitment contains detailed and verifiable milestones, including:

- the elaboration of a technical task force for the creation of an electronic platform and mobile application integrated in the Smart Map tool within the Tbilisi City Hall portal,
- system testing,
- training for relevant personnel to process the petitions,
- the provision of timelines for adoption of legal acts necessary for the e-petition system to operate,
- public dissemination strategy.

However, it does not provide clearly measurable activities. It lacks specificity in regards to how the petition system would work, who would form the technical task force, which personnel would be trained, what will the task force consider when introducing the regulatory acts, what would be considered a satisfactory response to citizen petitions, which would be the permissible subject areas for petitions, etc.

However, despite its lack of specificity on measurable outcomes, the commitment could have a moderate potential impact, considering there is no formal mechanism in place for citizens to make requests to the City Hall and Mayor's Office. An e-petition system could become an important tool for strengthening participatory mechanisms in the city government. Given the lack of sufficient citizen participation and accountability mechanisms in city governance, the electronic petitions systems have the potential to increase and strengthen civic participation. The IDFI highlighted the importance of expanding the petitions system currently in place for the City Council and upgrading it from a paper-based mechanism to an electronic system. According to IDFI, the current paper-based is not transparent. There are no tools to observe the process itself and could be used by politicians or interest groups to legitimize their political objectives by introducing ideas as citizen petitions without an appropriate control mechanism that validates the system. Additionally, the requirement to respond to petitions represents a significant commitment that can change the way city government responds to citizens' concerns. In addition, the petitions system could also enhance transparency of government activities and decisions to further stimulate interactions between City Hall and residents of Tbilisi. However, the potential impact that can be attributed to this commitment as written, is affected by its lack of specificity, especially as it does not provide details on how the mechanism would work and the legal obligations that would be developed for processing, responding and considering petitions. Some of these details have been identified during the implementation process and will be reported on the final IRM Review for Tbilisi's first action plan.

3. Implementation of participatory budget planning mechanism

Commitment text:

An integrated electronic platform will be created with other electronic applications enabling Tbilisi residents to allocate 100 GEL [(representing 100% of the Tbilisi budget)]³¹ between thematic priorities in visually presented thematic Budget. Citizens will be able to see sub-topics of each priority and will have access to the information related to previous year(s) budget allocation(s). The program automatically calculates weighted average - a result from citizens' selected priorities. Consideration of this result will be mandatory at any stage of formation and approval of the budget. On the same portal, there will be a published comparison between the finally approved budget and the budget developed by public, and the difference will be documented. At all above-mentioned stages there will be sections for comments, discussions and direct remarks for the Tbilisi City Hall. Also statistics will be available. In parallel with the voting process, Tbilisi City Hall departments and district administrations will ensure the engagement of citizens and facilitation of voting process.

A legal timeframe and procedures will be established [to define]: when the platform will be open for voting; when it will close; when will the budget [be discussed] after budget formation and correction processes according to the government procedures that resulted in the weighted average budget; a legal framework for comparison of the two budgets and legal argumentation procedure. There also will be established requirements and a format for informing and interviewing members of the public, including people with disabilities and other target groups.

Milestones

1. Elaboration of terms of reference to create appropriate functions for budget web application (by May 2017)
2. Provide software for application (by September 2017)
3. Legal consultancy, development of system support legislative acts, approval (by December 2017)
4. System testing and introduction (by December 2017)
5. Training of District Administration civil servants (by December 2017)
6. Making of a video clip covering portal and other OGP commitments and its dissemination through social media, mass media or through municipal entities (by December 2017)

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2017 Action Plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information on how the milestones will be carried out, assigns responsibility to specific actors and provides concrete deadlines for its implementation.

Commitment overview

Start date:	January, 2017
Intended completion date:	December, 2017
Responsible Office:	Tbilisi Municipal Department of Finance, "Municipal Services Development Agency" NCLE, Tbilisi Municipal Legal Department, Districts administrations.
Lead CSO partners:	None identified in the action plan

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall				✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	

Commitment aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

Tbilisi has seen important improvements towards transparency in the budgetary process. Organizations such as Transparency Georgia, have praised developments in the process such as the inclusion of budget appendixes which provide detailed information on planned infrastructure works, social affairs spending, education and other projects.³² However, there is no effective mechanism to ensure citizen participation in the city budget planning process and information presented for public use is not easy to read, which stirred public discussions on the neglect of citizens' interests.³³ Consultations on budget drafts usually take place during City Council meetings, which are open to the public, but have low participation rates. The public does not have resources to gather trustworthy information. Additionally, according to the Local Self-Government Index (elaborated by the Center for Consultation and Training, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information and the Management Systems Development Center), the absolute majority of Georgian municipalities do not include citizen participation during budget planning processes. This is true for the Tbilisi City Hall, which scored 35% on the index.³⁴

Tbilisi City Hall committed to opening the budgetary process by publishing key budget documents and creating an electronic participatory mechanism for budget planning, to increasing cooperation between citizens and government. The action plan lays out a detailed description of how the mechanism should look like. Users would be able to create their own version of the city budget. For ease of understanding, the user is given 100GEL (to simulate 100 percent of the budget) which he or she needs to allocate according to the thematic priorities and sub-topics presented. This user-friendly platform, would also display information related to budget allocations from previous years. Specifically, as explained in the action plan, the platform would:

- give access to information on budgetary sub-topics of each priority and information on allocations from previous years,
- allow citizens to present proposals on how they would allocate 100 percent of the budget according to the thematic priorities and sub-topics presented,
- automatically calculate weighted average results from citizens' selected priorities (according to the action plan, the Tbilisi City Hall is to consider the results during all stages of the budgetary process),
- record and publish a comparison between the citizen budget and the finally approved budget,

- provide functions for citizens to leave comments, organize discussions and direct remarks to the city government.

Additionally, the commitment calls for the establishment of a legal framework that stipulates the obligation of deliberating on citizen input (through the voting process and calculations of weighted average of results). The action plan specifies that the City Hall is to establish a legal framework to define how the Government will communicate the decisions made for a final budget. It will, at least, require publishing a comparison between the budget designed by public opinion and the approved budget with supporting documentation (and legal argumentation) explaining the differences among them. The City Hall is to define the specific requirements and the format for informing and interviewing members of the public (including people with disabilities and other target groups).

The commitment is relevant to the OGP values of access to information, citizen participation and technology and innovation for transparency. Budget visualizations can improve the way citizens access and understand budgetary planning processes. In turn, the voting system on the platform allows citizens to participate in the process of development of the City budget.

Specificity and Potential Impact

The commitment is highly specific as it contains several detailed milestones with steps to develop the software for the application and overall system, establish a legal framework, carry-out the testing of the system and training the relevant personnel in district and local administrations. The commitment provides clear, verifiable activities with measurable results.

If implemented fully, the commitment could have a significant impact on citizen participation during the budgetary process, potentially ensuring meaningful dialogue between the public and the government of Tbilisi. The commitment could imply a significant increase in access to information and civic participation, considering that the mechanism is envisioned as a learning tool for citizens to understand how the budget is distributed, including comparisons with previous budgets, showcasing the citizens proposals on what they believe is a fair budget and providing a tool to communicate with City Hall on specific themes and sub-topics relevant to the budgetary process. Considering the current ongoing discussions, political debates and accusations,³⁵ promoting e-participation in the planning phase of the budgetary process to gather direct input from citizens through an effective and accessible online platform; coupled with the legal obligation to inform citizens how their voices are accounted for could significantly change the way the general public is integrated in the budgeting process.

³¹ Point of clarification: This commitment proposes to create a mechanism that allows citizens to simulate the allocation process of Tbilisi's budget. Participants would have 100GEL, representing 100% of the city's budget.

³² "2015 Tbilisi Budget: New Developments and Problems" (Transparency International, Georgia)

<http://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/2015-tbilisi-budget-new-developments-and-problems>

³³ "Budget of Tbilisi: Political Game or caring for people" (Transparency International, Georgia), 20 February 2014, <http://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/tbilisi-budget-political-game-or-caring-people>

³⁴ Center for Consultation and Training, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information and the Management Systems Development Center, "Local Self-Government Index: Key Findings and Recommendations", Page 13, http://www.osgf.ge/files/2017/Publications/LSGINDEX_English_version.pdf

³⁵ Giorgi Gogua, "The opposition does not like the new budget project of Tbilisi", 18 November 2016, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/opozicias-ar-moscons-tbilis-axali-biujeti/28125839.html>

4. Interactive accessibility to budget spending and introduction of civic control mechanism

The aim [of this commitment] is to enable the public to follow budgetary processes in a simple manner on a daily basis without specific prior knowledge and experience. Interactive publication of simplified budget spending forms to ensure governments accountability on the daily bases as opposed to an annual format. Developing interactive mechanisms of accountability, civic participation and control to simplify access to information and to increase public involvement.

[Create a] program [that] will be linked with a public electronic [mechanism], which will at least display current spending in specific budget priorities and budget codes and its related parameters. This format, with support of statistical and other tools, will enable users to filter specific elements of the information, obtain detailed information related to spending and print it out in full or partially [form] as an official document with its date and a unique code.

This [mechanism] will also include an automatic format for spending related citizen's data entries [input] and directly informing the Tbilisi City Hall's appropriate department with or without indicating individual's identity. The information will be subject to periodical analysis after which it will be summarized and the general information related to response will be made publicly available.

Registration and activities of civic monitoring groups will be taken into consideration. Tbilisi residents (also organizations) will be able to monitor budget spending. For this purpose, they will need to get registered in civic monitoring group. They will receive special cards in order to be able to have a quick access to events, activities and certain types of information. Collected findings will be shared with Tbilisi City Hall. The information will be periodically analyzed, summarized and general information related to response, will be made publicly available.

Conditions and formats of these processes will be established.

Milestones

- 1. Development and introduction of electronic system of financial management and analysis for the Department of Finance and development of terms of reference for the public e-portal interactive budget spending linked with the system (by June 2017)*
- 2. Developing software and content for the portal. Creating a mechanism to allow information to be exported from budget spending interactive system into [the portal] (function of uploading on the e- portal) (by October 2017)*
- 3. Piloting and introduction of the portal (by December 2017)*
- 4. Making of a video clip covering portal and other OGP commitments and its dissemination through social media, mass media or through municipal entities (by December 2017)*
- 5. Legal consultancy, development of system support legislative act(s), approval (by January 2017)*

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2017 Action Plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information on how the milestones will be carried out, assigns responsibility to specific actors and provides concrete deadlines for its implementation.

Commitment overview

Start date:	January, 2017
Intended completion date:	December, 2017
Responsible Office:	Tbilisi Municipal Department of Finance, Municipal Services Development Agency (NCLE), Tbilisi Municipal Legal Department
Lead CSO partners:	None identified in the action plan

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall			✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		

Commitment aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

In Tbilisi, access to information on budget spending has been an issue of wide discussion among CSOs and general citizens.³⁶ As mentioned in the action plan, Tbilisi City Hall publishes an annual budgetary report while Tbilisi City Council does so every quarter. Tbilisi City Hall constitutes the city's administrative body (including the Mayor's office and municipal departments), while the City Council is the legislative body in Tbilisi, in charge of approving the City budget. Any individual may request information to these bodies, which should be responded to within ten days. However, information is provided as excel sheets without a unified or guiding format, limiting its access and use. Additionally, the Local Self-Government Index shows that neither executive nor representative municipal bodies proactively publish information regarding administrative expenses. Although it can often be found in budget execution reports, this does not satisfy the principle of proactive disclosure.³⁷ A recent study conducted by the Open Society Georgia Foundation, shows that among interviewed respondents, the clear majority (66%) claim that they are not at all informed about Tbilisi budget and the programs to be carried out. A tiny minority (1.9%) consider themselves to be well-informed and 13.6 % consider themselves as more or less informed.³⁸

This commitment aims to open the budgetary process by providing interactive and online accessibility to up-to-date information on budget spending. The program would enable users to filter specific elements of the information and get detailed and printable reports. This e-tool would include a standardized template that automatically informs the appropriate municipal department of citizens' data requests or comment. The tool is expected to be integrated into the Smart Map (a platform referenced to be created in commitment I of this action plan).

During the elaboration of this commitment, the Government representatives considered that citizens who wanted to participate in monitoring activities would need to access sites to witness how the budget is being spent (for example, if the budgetary item is the construction of a building, the citizen would need special access granted to visit the construction site). To get this, users would need to get registered in a civic monitoring group to access the program. They would receive special cards in order to be able to have quick access to events, activities and certain types of information. The concept of the monitoring groups and registration process is better explained in Commitment 5, which focuses on the creation of these groups. The information gathered from the program (citizen requests, input from groups and government responses) would be periodically analyzed and summarized to be made publicly available.

In addition, the commitment calls for the legal basis to be established to define procedures and conditions for operating the system.

The commitment is relevant to the OGP values of access to information, civic participation and technology and innovation for transparency. The platform provides user-friendly access to budget spending information while enabling citizens to provide input through monitoring groups on regards to budget spending decisions. The government is required to respond periodically to citizen feedback, promoting public accountability. However, the commitment text does not specify what this response should contain and whether it would be enough to ensure the justification of the Government's actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of citizens, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments.

Specificity and Potential Impact

The commitment is considered of medium specificity as it contains several verifiable milestones that represent subsequent steps for developing an electronic system for financial management, develop the software and content of a portal, pilot the system and, in addition, provide legal basis to support the operation of the system. However, these activities require interpretation from the reader in order to measure its outcomes. For example, it is unclear exactly what data will be made public, what will be included in the simplified budget spending forms, how citizens will be able to inform decision-making processes or what the periodical analysis with summarized general information will include in response to citizen input and comments. Furthermore, it is intended for citizens to have to register in order to participate in the civic monitoring groups. The commitment does not explain the mechanism or criteria that would be used to screen and approve citizens.

The commitment could have an impact in current government practice, as it could change the current budgetary policy area. It could improve access to information and participation to allow Tbilisi residents to follow ongoing budget spending. Daily publication of information as well as visualization on the web page, additional statistics and electronic tools would simplify understanding and required analysis for the public. This will potentially enable more interested individuals to obtain and understand comprehensive information about the City's budget spending without specific experience and knowledge. However, the lack of specificity affects the impact of this commitment considering that it only includes details on the general functionality of the platform without a strong indication of what should be expected from the implementation of the commitment. For this reason, the IRM researcher considers this commitment, as written, to have a minor potential impact.

³⁶“No rational spending of budgets from Tbilisi budget to purchase decorations for New Year”, (Georgian Young Lawyer Association), 10 October 2017, <https://gyla.ge/ge/post/tbilisshi-3-milioni-laris-ghirebulebis-2017-2018-tslis-saakhaltso-dekoraciebis-shesiyidva-racionalurad-ar-khdeba#sthash.H7gv47k6.c50SwFYT.dpbs>

³⁷ Center for Consultation and Training, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information and the Management Systems Development Center, “Local Self-Government Index: Key Findings and Recommendations”, Page 6,

http://www.osgf.ge/files/2017/Publications/LSGINDEX_English_version.pdf

³⁸ “Tbilisi Citizens’ Needs Assessment” Open Society Georgia Foundation, (July 2017), Page 9,
[http://www.osgf.ge/files/2017/Publications/Presentation_File_English_\(00000002\).pdf](http://www.osgf.ge/files/2017/Publications/Presentation_File_English_(00000002).pdf)

5. Introduction of civic control and accessibility mechanisms for municipal services

To simplify the process of providing Tbilisi City Hall services, raise awareness and accessibility, and increase accountability, the commitment seeks to create interactive participation mechanisms in two directions: 1) to create two types of civic participation mechanisms (civic monitoring and service's feedback system) 2) to transfer services of main providers into an online platform.

1. *Civic participation mechanisms:* The first part authorizes civic monitoring groups to undertake some type of control over services in healthcare, social services, education, sport and youth affairs (homeless shelter, homecare, education, sport and youth projects – programs supporting initiatives, also educational, youth and sports services provided by organizations under Tbilisi City Hall control) and free canteen. It will also include the establishment of registration monitoring and definition of the scope of their activities, as well as setting the conditions in which Tbilisi residents (and organizations) will be able to monitor the services. They will be required to register as a member of the monitoring group and they will be given special marks to ensure their rights and easy access to see and monitor the services and activities, request and get certain type of information. The findings of the group will be communicated to Tbilisi City Hall. The information will be periodically analyzed, summarized and general information related to response actions and/or countering arguments will be made publicly available.

2. *Services on online platforms:* This second part comprises an integrated web application, which will allow online access to all services provided by the Tbilisi City Hall system. At a first stage in 2017, healthcare, social services, education, sport and youth affairs (at least 5 general services in healthcare, social care, sport, youth affairs and education which will be broke down into subcategories and fully cover services by 2 relevant largest service provider departments of Tbilisi City Hall) services will be included in web application. This will be a significant step towards establishing a one stop shop principle. It will allow and improve public access to full information on specific services in Tbilisi City Hall system. The Application will let members of the public create their online account and, without having to come to the Municipality, receive their services and manage their own information. A mobile version will also be available. Its format will enable citizens to enter service related comments. The information will be periodically analyzed, summarized and general information related to response actions and/or countering arguments will be made publicly available. Legal procedures will be established to support the mechanism.

Milestones

1. Consensus, development and integration of the civic monitoring registration's e-tool format with unified electronic portal (by September 2017)
2. Description and documentation of work processes in Municipal Departments of Healthcare and Social Services, and Education, Sport and Youth affairs (by February 2017)
3. Define procedures for citizen's application grading and processing. Develop internal work process panel – employees page (by May 2017)
4. Creation of unified service's public platform. Introduction of citizens personal pages in Municipality (which will be integrated with other obligations functional) (by September 2017)
5. Testing and introduction of system and civic monitors electronic tools (by December 2017)
6. Training of Civic monitors coordinators, employees of Municipal Department of Healthcare and Social services as well as Municipal department of Education, Sport and Youth Affairs, in how to use the system (by November 2017)
7. Making one video clip covering portal and other OGP obligation and its dissemination through social media, mass media or municipalities local units (by December 2017)
8. Legal consultancy, development of system support legislative act(s), approval (by December 2017)

Editorial Note: The commitment text above is an excerpt from the Tbilisi 2017 Action Plan. The complete text provides detailed and technical information on how the milestones will be carried out, assigns responsibility to specific actors and provides concrete deadlines for its implementation.

Commitment overview

Start date:	January, 2017
Intended completion date:	December, 2017
Responsible Office:	Municipal Services Development Agency (NCLE), Tbilisi Municipal Legal Department, departments of Tbilisi City Hall responsible for specific thematic activities (Department of Healthcare and Social Services, Department of Education, Sport and Youth Affairs, District Administrations)
Lead CSO partners:	None identified in the action plan

Commitment overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Technology & Innovation for Transparency & Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative
Overall			✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	

Commitment aim

Overall Objective & Relevance

Tbilisi City Hall has been changing their approach to service delivery in the past few years, improving access to government services and fostering a better relationship between civil servants and citizens.³⁹ For example, they created multiple websites for the provision of electronic services, such as a platform for issuing construction permits and another for disposing of municipal property.⁴⁰ However, in 2014, as reported by the Open Society Georgia Foundation, journalists, citizens and non-governmental organizations raised concerns about the limited access to information and government communication (especially, related to financial documents and information on projects from subordinate agencies).⁴¹ In 2015, the Tbilisi City Hall created a new city portal, in partnership with the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), to increase access to information through a centralized platform and encourage civic participation (<http://www.tbilisi.gov.ge>).⁴² This platform provides information on existing government services and the possibility to participate in polls and assessments of public works.

However, during public consultations for the formulation of the action plan, participants requested more civic control and accessibility to services provided by the government and third party contractors. The issue was mainly raised due to the lack of a mechanism for citizens to actively monitor the government and service providers in the delivery of municipal services. For example, participants from the consultation stated a need to monitor public spending and administration of canteens (public cafeterias) for the socially vulnerable. In Tbilisi, this has been a subject of public debate, considering that the number of beneficiaries from this program has risen from approximately 15,000 in 2015 to more than 30,000 in 2016 and the budget continues to increase accordingly.⁴³ This commitment proposes the creation of a civic mechanism to monitor and evaluate the performance of services provided by the city government and improving the e-government system, such as the free canteen program.

To do so, the City Hall plans to create and authorize ‘civic monitoring groups’ to undertake some type of monitoring over current services provided by the government (in healthcare, social services, education, sport and youth affairs – specific projects include: homeless shelters, homecare and free of charge canteens for the socially vulnerable). The action plan does not provide an explicit methodology for the monitoring process.

The action plan specifies that the City Hall is to create a web platform and mobile application that integrates all services provided by the different departments of the City Hall. During the implementation of the commitment, the government confirmed that they would use the online system of municipal services (my.tbilisi.gov.ge), which already has information from all City Hall departments, municipal districts in Tbilisi and legal entities within the system. The website would provide a catalog of programs and services and available monitoring groups. Citizens would be able to voluntarily join a group through a registration process for residents and organizations. These groups would have access to privileged information to carry-out their functions of studying and understanding how the programs are being run and prepare relevant conclusions and recommendations to the City Hall. The group participants would fill electronic templates that would be sent directly to the relevant municipal department for their consideration. According to the commitment language, all reports from the monitoring groups should be periodically analyzed, aggregated and made public, including all information related to responses to citizen requests or concerns.

The commitment is relevant to the OGP values of access to information, civic participation and technology and innovation for transparency. The civic monitoring groups invite citizens to oversee the performance of service providers and civil servants by providing access to government-held information. In addition, the commitment calls for the publication of results from the monitoring groups’ investigation. Civil servants are to respond to the groups’ results, requests and concerns and publish general information about their response. However, the commitment text does not specify what this response should contain and whether it would be enough to ensure the justification of the Government’s actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of citizens, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments.

Specificity and Potential Impact

The commitment is of medium specificity as most milestones are, to some extent, objectively verifiable and represent subsequent steps to form civic monitors registration’s e-tool format with unified electronic portal, to describe and document the processes of municipality services, testing of system and civic monitors electronic tools, and train of civic monitors coordinators, and employees of relevant departments of Tbilisi City Hall. However, the commitment requires interpretation from the reader, especially as it speaks about providing monitoring groups with the capacity to undertake “some type of control” over services without defining the extent to which stakeholders will

participate in oversight, what information they will be privy to, what ‘consensus’ means and among whom, and other important details.

The commitment could have a moderate potential impact. The civic monitoring groups are an innovative concept to actively integrate citizens and make service providers and civil servants accountable to tax-payers. Additionally, the information gathered by these groups would be made public in easy to read formats, allowing citizens to understand how the money is being spent. Moreover, the integration of all services under one platform, to meet the one stop shop principle (also known as one window policy), is a significant step forward that, coupled with the monitoring groups, could signify an important change in the status quo. However, the commitment is limited in scope, as it does not explain exactly what information citizens will be provided with to fulfil the monitoring role.

³⁹ For example: the “Local Governance with Rights Based Approach” program with the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy in 2015-2016, which aims at training civil servants and reforming public structures. For more information: ‘New Conception of Citizens’ Service Center’, Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy, (03 February 2017), <http://www.icld.se/en/article/new-conception-of-the-citizens-service-center>

⁴⁰ These electronic services were available prior to the creation of the 2015 website and are still accessible on the following websites: www.iauction.ge and www.tas.ge, respectively.

⁴¹ “Transparency and Accountability of Tbilisi City Hall”, Open Society Georgia Foundation, (23 December 2014), http://www.osgf.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=15&info_id=4017

⁴² “A new Portal of Tbilisi City Hall”, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, (22 July 2015), <https://idfi.ge/en/tbilisi-city-halls-new-portal-the-move-towards-transparent-and-open-government>

⁴³ Factcheck: Sevdia Uregkhelidze vs Rima Beradze (06 January, 2016) <http://factcheck.ge/en/article/sevdia-ugrekhelidze-vs-rima-beradze/>