Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) Progress Report 2014—15: Georgia

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Executive Summary: Georgia

Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM): Georgia Progress Report 2014–15

Georgia has advanced significantly, especially in increasing access to information through open data and creating mechanisms for improving public participation in decision making. However, with two-thirds of the current commitments focused on the delivery of public services and improvement of internal government systems, more could be done to build on first efforts to address open government values of transparency, public accountability, and civic participation.

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. Georgia has participated since 2011. The Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) carries out a biannual review of the activities of each OGP participating country.

A July 2013 decree assigned OGP implementation to agencies including the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Ministry of Finance, and the State Procurement Agency (SPA), delegating oversight to the government as a whole. It also designated MoJ's Analytical Department to coordinate the OGP national action plan.

The Open Government Forum (Forum) acts as the main coordination mechanism at the national level, to facilitate OGP processes. Representatives from government and civil society co-chair the forum.

OGP PROCESS

Countries participating in the OGP follow a process for consultation during development and implementation of their OGP action plan.

Consultation to develop the plan was significantly broader and notice was earlier than the first action plan. Based on the countrywide public consultation plan, the MoJ and Forum members held the consultation meetings in 15 different cities and villages across nine regions with a wide range of participants. However, the Prime Minister's Office, the Parliament, and the private sector were not involved in the consultations, and public awareness of OGP remained low. Although a number of well-known online media outlets published information on consultations, the meetings were not covered by the Georgian Public Broadcaster or by popular national TV channels.

During implementation, the Forum met once every two months in Tbilisi. Minutes of the Forum's meetings are published online.

The MoJ published the first draft of the government self-assessment report on 23 September 2015 and provided five days' notice for comments on the report.

At a Glance

Member since:	2011
Number of commitments:	29

Level of Completion:

Completed:	12 (41%)
Substantial:	7 (24%)
Limited:	9 (31%)
Not started:	1 (3%)

Timing:

On schedule:	13 (45%)
Ahead of schedule:	6 (21%)

Commitment Emphasis:

Access to information:	13 (45%)
Civic participation:	7 (24%)
Public accountability:	6 (21%)
Tech. & innovation for transparency & accountability:	1 (3%)

Number of Commitments that Were:

Clearly relevant to an OGP value:	17 (59%)
Of transformative potential impact:	3 (10%)
Substantially or completely implemented:	19 (66%)
All three (✪):	2 (7%)

This report was prepared by Lasha Gogidze, an independent researcher

COMMITMENT IMPLEMENTATION

As part of OGP participation, countries make commitments in a two-year action plan. The Georgian action plan contains twenty-nine commitments. The following tables summarize for each commitment the level of completion, potential impact, whether it falls within Georgia's planned schedule, and the key next steps for the commitment in future OGP action plans. The IRM clustered commitments into thematic grouping for ease of reading, with standalone commitments presented at the end.

The IRM methodology includes starred commitments. These commitments are measurable, clearly relevant to OGP values as written, of transformative potential impact, and substantially or completely implemented. The Georgia action plan contains two starred commitments: 15 (Political party financial declarations) and 17 (Proactive publishing of surveillance data). Note that the IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015 to raise the bar for model OGP commitments. In addition to the criteria listed above, the old criteria included commitments that have moderate potential impact. Under the old criteria, Georgia would have received eight additional starred commitments (commitments 2, 6A, 9, 13, 16, 18, 19 and 20). See http://www.opengovpartnership.org/node/5919 for more information.

Table 1: Assessment of Progress by Commitment

COMMITMENT SHORT NAME	POTENTIAL IMPACT				LEVEL OF COMPLETION				TIMING
✪ COMMITMENT IS MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	NONE	MINOR	MODERATE	TRANSFORMATIVE	NOT STARTED	LIMITED	SUBSTANTIAL	COMPLETE	
Cluster 1: Public services									
1.A. Travel insurance services - At Public Service Halls (PSH), citizens will be able to apply for passports and obtain insurance at the same time.	■				■				Behind Schedule
1.B. State property registration - This initiative will make it possible for consumers to lease or purchase and register state property in "One Space."	■				■	■			Behind Schedule
3. JUSTdrive - Drive-up windows of JUSTdrive at Tbilisi PSH will allow citizens to save time by acquiring the service without leaving their cars.	■				■	■	■		On Schedule
4. Educational services - PSH staff will verify and issue school certificates and diplomas.	■				■	■			Behind Schedule
5. Citizen's Portal (www.mygov.ge) - The portal will expand the range of online public services to citizens.	■				■				Behind Schedule
8. Digital signature and online authentication - This initiative will ease document processing and transaction costs.	■				■	■			Behind Schedule
Cluster 2: Open data									
9. Open data portal (data.gov.ge) - Redesigned open data portal will include datasets in open data formats.	■	■	■		■	■	■		On Schedule
15. Political party financial declarations - Party financing data will be published in accessible (csv) formats.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	On Schedule

COMMITMENT SHORT NAME	POTENTIAL IMPACT				LEVEL OF COMPLETION				TIMING
✪ COMMITMENT IS MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	NONE	MINOR	MODERATE	TRANSFORMATIVE	NOT STARTED	LIMITED	SUBSTANTIAL	COMPLETE	
Cluster 3: Public participation tools									
2. "Voice of the Consumer" - This tool will facilitate citizen feedback on the quality of public services provided at PSH.	▓	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓	▓	On Schedule
12. I-Change.ge - Public participation in decision making will increase through a new online petition platform.	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓			Behind Schedule
Cluster 4: Local government capacity									
6.A. Development of community centers in Georgia - The centers will improve service delivery and public participation at local government level.	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓		Ahead of Schedule
6.B. Introduction of e-governance in local self-governments - This initiative will develop digital infrastructure in community centers for the 10 most in-demand services.	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	On Schedule
7. Transformation of public libraries for regional development - This initiative will modernize the existing village libraries in the municipalities.	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	On Schedule
Cluster 5: Digital public service management systems									
21. Digital human resource management system - This action will create a unified digital database of all public servants job profiles through the e-Human Management Resources System (e-HMRS).	▓				▓	▓			Behind Schedule
25. Public finance management system - The e-HMRS linking the payroll system of the public service with the State Treasury is part of the government's commitment to improve Georgia's Public Finance Management (PFM).	▓				▓	▓	▓	▓	Ahead of Schedule
Cluster 6: Transparency of archives									
22. Digital preservation system: E-archive - The system will be set up to create the digital catalogues of archived data.	▓	▓			▓	▓			Behind Schedule
23. Openness and accessibility of national archives - This initiative will make all archived data available for free.	▓				▓	▓	▓		On Schedule
24. Electronic catalogues of Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) archives - Archives of the Soviet period, including from such entities as National Security Committee and Communist Party, will be digitized and published.	▓	▓			▓	▓			Behind Schedule
Cluster 7: Safer communities through technology									
26. Alternative channels to "112" - The new channels will make it easier for citizens to ask for help in case of emergency.	▓	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓	▓	Ahead of Schedule
27. Interactive statistics and crime mapping - Crime statistics will be disclosed through new GPS-based technologies.	▓	▓	▓		▓	▓			Behind Schedule

COMMITMENT SHORT NAME	POTENTIAL IMPACT				LEVEL OF COMPLETION				TIMING
✪ COMMITMENT IS MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	NONE	MINOR	MODERATE	TRANSFORMATIVE	NOT STARTED	LIMITED	SUBSTANTIAL	COMPLETE	
Standalone Commitments									
10. Freedom of Information Act (FoI) draft - A separate FoI Act will be drafted.	■	■			■	■	■		On Schedule
11. Georgia's OGP Forum - Regular meetings with stakeholders will be held on a bimonthly basis.	■	■			■	■	■		Ahead of Schedule
13. Transparency of public service recruitment - New rules will be adopted to improve transparency in public service recruitment.	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	On Schedule
14. Asset declaration monitoring system - The verification mechanism will be created to monitor public officials' asset declarations.	■	■			■	■	■		On Schedule
16. Accessibility of Ministry of Interior's webpage to people with special needs - An audio based police services information website will be launched.	■	■			■	■	■		On Schedule
17. Proactive publishing of surveillance data - The phone tapping data will be made available publicly.	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		On Schedule
18. Public awareness of the electoral process - An awareness campaign will be implemented to better inform citizens about the electoral process.	■	■	■		■	■	■		On Schedule
19. Transparency of budgetary processes - Key budget documents will be published together with the informative presentations.	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	Ahead of Schedule
20. Electronic system of procurement - The improved e-procurement platform will include the new module for purchasing various services.	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	Ahead of Schedule

Table 2: Summary of Progress by Commitment

NAME OF COMMITMENT	SUMMARY OF RESULTS
✪ COMMITMENT IS MEASURABLE, CLEARLY RELEVANT TO OGP VALUES AS WRITTEN, HAS TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL IMPACT, AND IS SUBSTANTIALLY OR COMPLETELY IMPLEMENTED.	
Cluster 1: Public Services	
1.A. Travel insurance services • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Not started	The following set of commitments aims to improve public services through administrative innovation and new technologies. While each is commendable, the IRM researcher found that the direct link to open government was not clear. For each of these commitments, a stronger link to information disclosure, civic participation, or public accountability will strengthen the next action plan, should government choose to continue work in these policy areas.
1.B. State property registration • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Limited	**Travel insurance:** The commitment to help Georgian citizens to travel abroad by allowing them to simultaneously obtain passports and travel insurance cards at Public Service Halls (PSH) was not started because the government has yet to appoint the service providers as well as develop the administrative system for implementation.
3. JUSTdrive • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Completed	**State property registration:** This will allow citizens to buy, lease, and register the state property at PSH. Within the period covered by this report, the state property registration service was introduced in the Marneuli municipality only. The PSH is in the process of conducting trainings for the PSH staff in other municipalities to make this service also available there.
4. Educational services • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Limited	**JUSTDrive:** The main objective is to make it easier for citizens driving in the capital Tbilisi to obtain the PSH services without leaving their cars. This service was fully launched in April 2015. Only a few customers have used the JUSTdrive service, in part attributed to the fact that the PSH has not conducted any public awareness campaign. The OGP relevance is unclear. **Educational services:** This commitment makes educational services, such as the verification of school certificates and diplomas, available at PSH. During the assessment period, the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) was still awaiting authorization via a decree for the implementation of this service.
5. Citizen's Portal – www.mygov.ge • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Limited	This commitment aimed to provide citizens with more public services online. There are around 70 public services available on mygov.ge, an increase by 10 since 2013; however, the portal is still lacking services from the Ministries of Health, Social Affairs, Education and Science, including services in municipalities. Stakeholders pointed out three main issues with the portal: First, inconvenient and time-consuming registration requirements, second, the FoI section of mygov.ge does not allow users to track the status and the timeline of processing the requests, third, public awareness of mygov.ge remains low and many people are not using the services provided. Government should promote this platform to the wider segments of society across the whole country so that more people start using the portal as a means to connect with the government.
8. Digital signature and online authentication • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Limited	To ease document processing and reduce transaction costs related to paper signatures, the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) committed to develop digital signature and online authentication systems. The main challenge for the PSDA is that there are a limited number of users of these systems, as a result of people frequently losing the login pin codes, in addition to being very cautious about making their personal information available online. The private sector also has been reluctant to implement this system. It is recommended that government develop new public services based on the citizen priorities. It is important that responsible agencies, PSH, PSDA, and the Data Exchange Agency (DEA), start publishing information regularly and proactively on how many citizens are using and are satisfied with the services.

Cluster 2: Open data	
9. Open data portal - data.gov.ge • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Substantial	This commitment entailed the redesign of the preexisting open data portal, data.gov.ge, by complementing it with actual datasets (95 datasets as of August 2015) published in open data formats. The portal allows users to see the date of publication and the last update of each dataset, as well as the contact details of the responsible person. The government was not clear as to what datasets should be made available on data.gov.ge, hence limiting the scale and scope of the portal's impact. While stakeholders assess the commitment as a step in the right direction, there is a need to improve the usability, scope of data covered by the platform, level of access, level of detail, as well as to situate the portal within the necessary legal framework to ensure that all public agencies comply in publishing data.
♻15. Political party financial declarations • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Transformative • Completion: Complete	This commitment has been completed and has addressed directly the IRM's recommendation to publish party financing data in accessible formats. These reports converted in CSV files also were made available on data.gov.ge. The stakeholders think that Georgia's open data commitments are a step in the right direction in that they improve government transparency and accountability. Civil society organizations engaged in research and advocacy regularly use party financing data, including information about income and expenditures of political parties as well as their contributors. Thus, this has been assessed as transformative. Stakeholders recommended publishing information about the sources of income of individual party contributors.
Cluster 3: Public participation tools	
2. Voice of the Consumer • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Complete	To allow citizens to provide their feedback on the Public Service Hall (PHS) services, the PSH committed to create a feedback mechanism (Voice of The Consumer). Although the commitment has been completed, it does not include awareness-raising activities, as reflected in its low usage. In addition, it does not envisage the monitoring mechanism to ensure the integrity of the PSH personnel dealing with the feedback forms. The impact of this instrument on OGP values has been assessed as moderate. It is recommended that the PSH launch an online version of Voice of the Consumer to save citizens' time and resources to send feedback on the PSH services but also offer new reform initiatives for implementation.
12. I-Change.ge • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Transformative • Completion: Limited	The main objective of this commitment was to increase public participation in decision making through the electronic petitions platform – I-Change.ge. Stakeholders interviewed thought that the e-petitions portal is very relevant to open government. The portal has not been launched by the set deadline of June 2015 due to the delay in the adoption of the government decree. Stakeholders believe that to motivate people to use the soon-to-be-launched Ichange.gov.ge, the government should simplify its terms of usage and remove any unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles as to the eligibility and authorization of petition authors. This portal should be easily accessible to everyone willing to send ideas to the government.
Cluster 4: Local government capacity	
6.A. Development of Community Centers in Georgia • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Complete	This commitment aimed to improve service delivery at the local level and increase public participation in local decision making by expanding the chain of Community Centers (CCs). Thirteen CCs were opened, instead of the initially planned six, with an additional seven currently under construction. The CCs provide more than 200 different types of services, both from public and private sector agencies, including banks and mobile operators. Although the CCs provide venues for better connecting local authorities with the citizens and contributing to the development of policies that are based on public needs in the spirit of OGP, their use for these purposes remains limited. Stakeholders stated that the government should articulate better that the main goal of CCs is to increase transparency and public participation, in addition to raising awareness on the range of services on offer.

6.B. Introduction of e-Governance in local self-governments • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Substantial	To make the Community Centers (CC) services available online, the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) committed to develop the CCs' digital infrastructure. The PSDA selected CCs in five municipalities for piloting the Municipal Services Management System and has worked closely with local legislatures (Sakrebulos) and executives (Gamgeobas) on the implementation. Relevance to OGP remains unclear, as the action plan does not explain to what extent these venues are opening up new areas for public participation.
7. Transformation of public libraries for regional development • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Substantial	A pilot project "modernizing" the existing village libraries in the municipalities, using them for increasing access to information and integrating them into the system of CCs, was started in March 2015 and ran until September 2015. Libraries within CCs provide free Wi-Fi as well as different types of printed literature, including fiction and public documents produced by governmental and nongovernmental agencies. The OGP relevance remains unclear as the commitment's focus is on service delivery rather than creating a clear mechanism for public participation.
Cluster 5: Digital public service management systems	
21. Digital human resource management system • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: None • Completion: Limited	The Civil Service Bureau (CSB) aimed at creating a unified digital database of job profiles of all public servants through the electronic human resources management system (e-HMRS). This new module has already been implemented in 13 Ministries, while six Ministries are still in the process of implementing it. The CSB works with the Data Exchange Agency (DEA) on creating software for data sharing between the public agencies and the DEA and the CSB. As a consequence of being an internal systems-oriented commitment, stakeholders did not see this commitment as part of the OGP, due to the lack of a public-facing component.
25. Public finance management system • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: None • Completion: Complete	The e-HMRS linking the payroll system of the public service with the State Treasury has been completed and is part of the government's commitment to improve Georgia's Public Finance Management (PFM) through such electronic modules as e-Treasury, e-Budget, e-Debt Management and Investment and e-HMRS. These systems contribute to consolidating information on public finances and reducing transaction costs for processing and applying this information in practice. As a consequence of being an internal systems-oriented commitment, stakeholders did not see it as relevant to the OGP, due to the lack of a public-facing component.
Cluster 6: Transparency of archives	
22. Digital preservation system: e-Archive • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Limited	This commitment aims to create digital catalogues of archived data. The National Archives started consultations with Data Exchange Agency (DEA) and other stakeholders in 2014, as part of the EU's twinning project. Based on these consultations, the agency developed a draft general concept on the e-Archive system, its main modules, and general requirements. Yet, the commitment has not been implemented. Due to the fact that the commitment is focused on creating the archive system rather than providing access, its relevance to OGP is unclear.
23. Openness and accessibility of national archives • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Substantial	The aim of this commitment is to provide the archived data for free. This commitment has two components: (1) creating a legal basis and (2) providing technical infrastructure. To make all archived data available for free, the National Archives drafted a relevant amendment and sent it to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for revision. Yet, to implement it in practice, the National Archives would need additional technical infrastructure and institutional capacity. While access to information is an important and recognized OGP value, greater emphasis should be placed on commitments that directly affect citizens' lives, such as disclosing information concerning ongoing government activities to involve citizens more closely in decision making.

24. Electronic catalogues of MIA archives • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Limited	The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) has committed to digitizing and publishing the archives of the Soviet period, including from such entities as National Security Committee and Communist Party. An appropriate storage facility for sorting the documents and funding for the initiative is constraining the implementation of this commitment. While access to information is an important and recognized OGP value, greater emphasis should be placed on commitments that directly affect citizens' lives, such as disclosing information concerning ongoing government activities to involve citizens more closely in decision making.
Cluster 7: Safer communities through technology	
26. Alternate channels to 112 • OGP value relevance: Unclear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Complete	To make it easier for citizens to ask for help in case of emergency, the Emergency and Operative Response Center 112 (112) committed to establishing multiple channels of communication. Video and text message services for the hearing and speaking impaired people were established in 112 in March 2015, and 60 GPS trackers were purchased to help locate lost persons. The OGP relevance of this commitment is unclear as a result of the main emphasis on the provision of a public service to citizens. Stakeholders had concerns over accessibility of these services to citizens due to many citizens, especially those with special needs, not having access to the necessary ICT hardware, resulting in this commitment having a moderate impact. Stakeholders recommended training police officers to communicate better with the hearing- and speaking-impaired citizens.
27. Interactive statistics and crime mapping • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Limited	The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) pledged to disclose crime statistics through the usage of new technologies. The Ministry was not able to move forward with this commitment as a result of still requiring the purchase of hardware in the form of a GPS tracker to implement this commitment. Publishing interactive crime statistics addresses the lack of readily available, accurate and transparent crime data that many CSOs and citizens are concerned about. There is concern over the lack of implementation of this important commitment, in addition to concern over the level of information detail, information access, as well as the methodology to be used, specifically concerning the uniformity of information that will be mapped.
Standalone Commitments	
10. Freedom of Information Act Draft • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Substantial	The government pledged to draft a separate Freedom of Information (FoI) law and submit it to the Parliament for adoption. The Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) took the lead in this process, representing civil society. If adopted without changes, the new law would put Georgia in the second place, currently thirty-second, in the Right To Information (RTI) rating. However, the draft fails to address one key aspect: disclosure of revenue by private companies that are registered offshore, but involved in rendering commercial services to the public sector. There is also concern over whether the draft law will be implemented in its current form, or revised downwards, to be less effective. Thus, as a result, it is coded as having a minor impact. Nevertheless, the commitment has a high level of OGP relevance.
11: Georgia's OGP Forum • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Minor • Completion: Complete	This commitment, which aimed to improve the work of Georgia's OGP Forum, was completed. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) has continued hosting the Forum meetings first on a monthly basis (during the development of the second national action plan) and then on a bimonthly basis (during the implementation). Most of the stakeholders had largely positive views on the Forum. However, some public agencies are taking the Forum's role less seriously than others in that they are limiting their participation to providing simply technical updates on their activities rather than engaging in meaningful discussions. To make the Forum's work more inclusive, stakeholders suggested expanding its membership to include regional CSOs. The Forum would also benefit from an online platform increasing access and participation to those that are unable to physically attend.
13. Transparency of public service recruitment • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Complete	This commitment aimed to improve the transparency of public service recruitment procedures and was completed in 2014, as planned. A major novelty is that it has become mandatory to involve independent experts and representatives of NGOs and trade unions as members in the selection commission. A number of issues concerning the level of access and degree of participation by nongovernmental stakeholders remain unresolved at the local level, which leads the IRM to assess the commitment impact as moderate. Stakeholders call for a codified and uniform set of standards, including a completely transparent process in the hiring of public officials.

14: Asset declaration monitoring system • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Substantial	This commitment envisages the creation of the verification mechanism for public officials' asset declarations. The draft legal amendments necessary for implementation of the new system were prepared and submitted to the government. The Civil Service Bureau (CSB) Director will create an independent commission with the involvement of CSOs to make random selection of declarations for monitoring using a special methodology. To verify the declarations, the commission members will crosscheck the existing online databases and other available documents. In case of a criminal offense, the CSB will submit a report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) Anticorruption Department. By allowing CSOs to be involved directly in the work of the verification commission could result in a transformative impact. Stakeholders recommended capacitating the office of the CSB, in addition to focusing on existing high-interest cases of alleged fraud, in addition to publishing results and setting a minimum number of declarations to be verified annually.
16: Accessibility of Ministry of Interior's webpage to people with special needs • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Complete	The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) pledged to make information it publishes accessible to blind and visually impaired people and to improve its communication with citizens in general. A special website, voice.police.ge, allowing the audio reading of the main police.ge website's content was launched in 2014. This was preceded by MIA's consultations with representatives of the Union for the Blind of Georgia to tailor the new website to their needs. Increasing access to government information in the law enforcement sector is relevant to OGP. The representatives of the Union for the Blind suggested the government adopt special legislation obliging all public agencies to adapt their websites to the needs of disabled people. It is further recommended that data on website usage and satisfaction is published.
✪17: Proactive publishing of surveillance data • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Transformative • Completion: Complete	To shed light on some aspects of the government's surveillance activities, this commitment aimed to make the phone tapping data publicly available. The Supreme Court started producing publicly available statistics on phone tapping from October 2014 as a response to the high public interest on this issue. This commitment should help instil transparency into the frequency of the government's tapping of phones and should illuminate whether this trend is increasing. Stakeholders requested more detailed data, details about type of crime, geographic distribution of the prosecutor's office, and details about how many redundant tapped records were destroyed.
18. Public awareness of the electoral process • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Substantial	To inform citizens better about the electoral process, the Election Administration of Georgia (CEC) committed to implement a number of awareness-raising activities, most of which have already been completed. The commitment impact is assessed to be moderate as a result of the awareness-raising activities targeted at mostly the youth, while similar activities planned for other groups of voters were not started during the reporting period. According to stakeholders, it is important that the topic of elections does not lose relevance after the elections. It is recommended that the government expand its election awareness-raising activities to other target groups of people not directly involved in the electoral process and those with limited access to information compared to other groups.
19: Transparency of budgetary processes • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Complete	To open the budgetary process, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) committed to publish the key budget documents with the informative presentations and to create an online survey for soliciting public feedback, all of which have been completed. This commitment has high relevance for OGP because citizens would like to know how their governments are expending public funds and what mechanisms allow for participating in budget drafting, monitoring, and execution processes. Although Georgia scores substantially higher in the Open Budget Index than the global average, there is still room to improve on the level of accessibility and relevance of information, in addition to increasing the space for engagement with the public.
20. Expanding electronic system of procurement • OGP value relevance: Clear • Potential impact: Moderate • Completion: Complete	The main objective of this commitment was to improve the existing e-procurement system through the new module of an e-Contest used for purchasing various services. A pilot version of the e-Contest was launched in May 2015, and the full system was launched on 1 July 2015. A major novelty is that all contest procedures, including selection and assessment of submitted bids and the final decision on granting the contract to the winning company, are conducted electronically. Stakeholders stated the new e-Contest module is a useful monitoring tool for increasing transparency and impartiality of the public procurement bidding process. Stakeholders recommended clarifying the criteria for assessing the quality of bids, category of bids classified as "urgent," in addition to building a provision that administers tenders from all levels of government through a centralized process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Georgia has made significant advancements in a range of OGP-related target areas, specifically in increasing access to information through a range of open data commitments and creating mechanisms for improving public participation in government decision making. However, with two thirds of the current commitments focused on the delivery of public services, more could be done to increase the focus of future commitments towards OGP-specific values of transparency, accountability, and civic participation. In particular, there is a need for commitments that address state surveillance and government decision making in the areas of energy, natural resource extraction and cultural heritage preservation. Based on the challenges and findings identified in this report, this section presents the principal recommendations.

TOP FIVE 'SMART' RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Develop a government strategy and a policy vision on OGP to make it a nationwide project with the direct impact on citizens' lives.
2. Involve high-level decision makers in the work of the OGP Forum to raise the responsibility of relevant agencies in charge of specific OGP commitments.
3. Include more bottom-up commitments in the next national action plan so that citizens feel the ownership over their implementation.
4. Involve local governments as responsible agencies for future OGP commitments to contribute to the opening up of policymaking at the local level and to the empowerment and sustainable development of local communities.
5. Make it a binding obligation for all public agencies to publish data on data.gov.ge so that this portal becomes a primary source of reference for receiving government data that is open, automated, and updated.

Eligibility Requirements: To participate in OGP, governments must demonstrate commitment to open government by meeting minimum criteria on key dimensions of open government. Third-party indicators are used to determine country progress on each of the dimensions. For more information, see Section IX on eligibility requirements at the end of this report or visit: http://www.opengovpartnership.org/how-it-works/eligibility-criteria.

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The Open Government Partnership (OGP) aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. OGP's Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) assesses development and implementation of national action plans to foster dialogue among stakeholders and improve accountability.

Open
Government
Partnership

I. National participation in OGP

History of OGP participation

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder international initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to their citizenry to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. In pursuit of these goals, OGP provides an international forum for dialogue and sharing among governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector, all of which contribute to a common pursuit of open government. OGP stakeholders include participating governments as well as civil society and private sector entities that support the principles and mission of OGP.

Georgia began its formal participation in August 2011, when then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Gregory Vashadze declared his country's intention to participate in the Partnership.[1]

To participate in OGP, governments must exhibit a demonstrated commitment to open government by meeting a set of (minimum) performance criteria on key dimensions of open government that are particularly consequential for increasing government responsiveness, strengthening citizen engagement, and fighting corruption. Objective, third-party indicators are used to determine the extent of country progress on each of the dimensions, with points awarded as described below.

Georgia entered into the partnership exceeding the minimal requirements for eligibility, with a high score in each of the criteria. At the time of joining, the country had the highest possible ranking for open budgets (two out of a possible two),[2] an access to information law (four out of a possible four),[3] the highest possible rankings in asset disclosure for senior officials (four out of a possible four),[4] and a score of 6.18 out of a possible 10 on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index Civil Liberties subscore.[5]

All OGP-participating governments are required to develop OGP country action plans that elaborate concrete commitments over an initial two-year period. Governments should begin their OGP country action plans by sharing existing efforts related to their chosen grand challenge(s) (see Section IV), including specific open government strategies, and ongoing programs. Action plans should then set out governments' OGP commitments, which move government practice beyond its current baseline with respect to the relevant grand challenge. These commitments may build on existing efforts, identify new steps to complete ongoing reforms, or initiate action in an entirely new area.

Along with the other 39 participating countries, Georgia developed its first national action plan from September 2011 to April 2012. The effective period of implementation for the first national action plan submitted in April was officially 1 July 2012 through June 30, 2013 (see IRM Progress Report 2012-2013).[6] The government published its self-assessment of the first national action plan in February of 2014, five months after the deadline.[7] The effective period of implementation of the second national action plan submitted in June 2014 was officially 1 July 2014 through 30 June 2016. The government's self-assessment report is due on 31 August 2016. This report covers the first year of implementation of this period, from 1 July 2014 through 30 June 2015. The government published its draft midterm self-assessment report in September 2015. At the time of writing (October 2015), no final report was published yet.

To meet OGP requirements, the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) of OGP has partnered with independent researcher Lasha Gogidze, who carried out the evaluation of the development and implementation of Georgia's first and second national action plans. It is the aim of the IRM to inform ongoing dialogue around development and implementation of future commitments in each OGP participating country. Methods and sources are dealt with in a methodological annex in this report.

Basic institutional context

In Georgia, the executive branch is in charge of OGP, specifically the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and its Analytical Department. However, this agency had little legal power to enforce policy changes on other agencies within the government. At the current time, its mandate is largely around coordinating the implementation of the national action plan, but it does not have the ability to compel other agencies to enter in commitments, especially given that the Head of Government, the Prime Minister, is not directly involved in the action plan development and implementation processes. As a result of the MoJ's limited mandate, the action plan is heavily oriented toward public services, which the Ministry's subordinated agencies are responsible for providing. Further, the government has not dedicated a separate budget or staff to OGP, which is part of the existing expenditure programs under the state budget.

In April 2012, the government developed an interagency coordination mechanism called NGO Forum to work on the implementation of 2012-2013 national action plan. At the initial stage, the Forum's meetings were informal and involved a few leading civil society organizations (CSOs) in the field along with the government contact person on OGP. The Forum's work was not promoted to other stakeholders, and therefore it failed to have a real impact on decision making. In the period between November 2012 and January 2014, the MoJ stopped hosting the Forum meetings. Highly contested parliamentary elections, held in October 2012, also affected this decision. Further, the ensuing power transfer from the then-ruling party (the United National Movement) to the opposition coalition (Georgian Dream) affected the decision. During this period of transition, OGP coordination was limited to occasional roundtables supported by international donor organizations, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

On 15 January 2014, the MoJ relaunched the NGO Forum, now called Georgia's Open Government Forum, as a multiagency structure. The Forum has a new Terms of Reference and an expanded list of members, including different public agencies responsible for OGP commitments, CSOs, and international organizations.[8] It played a key role in developing Georgia's 2014-2015 national action plan. Specifically, the Forum members were involved actively in planning and conducting OGP public consultation meetings across the country and incorporating public feedback into the final document. Although the Forum has played a coordinating and facilitation role in the development of the 2014-2015 OGP national action plan, including the development of one commitment, it lacks legal mandate to compel government agencies to take any OGP related actions.

Until July 2013, there was no legal basis for OGP in Georgia. To improve this, the government adopted a decree, which assigned the responsibility to implement OGP commitments to a number of agencies, including the MoJ, the Ministry of Finance, and the State Procurement Agency (SPA), and it delegated the oversight role to the government as a whole.[9] The same decree designated the MoJ's Analytical Department as the lead agency in charge of coordinating the development and implementation of the OGP national action plan.

The IRM researcher has been part of the processes described above since the beginning, when Georgia developed its first OGP national action plan in April 2012.

Methodological note

The IRM partners with experienced, independent national researchers to author and disseminate reports for each OGP participating government. In Georgia, the IRM partnered with independent researcher Lasha Gogidze. Mr. Gogidze reviewed the government's midterm self-assessment report, gathered the views of civil society, and interviewed appropriate government officials and other stakeholders. OGP staff and a panel of experts reviewed the report.

This report follows on an earlier review of OGP performance, "Georgia Progress Report 2012-2013," which covered the development of the first action plan as well as implementation from 1 July 2012 to 30 June 2013.

To gather the voices of multiple stakeholders, the IRM researcher organized individual and group meetings with all relevant stakeholders as well as a forum discussion with journalists. The IRM researcher also reviewed key documents prepared by the government, including the draft self-assessment report published in September 2015, as well as reports of nongovernmental actors. Numerous references are made to these documents throughout this report.

Summaries of these meetings and more detailed explanations are given in the Annex.

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[1] Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, letter of intent to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP), 30 August 2011, http://bit.ly/1t9uRWT

[2] Open Budget Partnership, *Open Budget Survey 2010* by the International Budget Partnership (Report, Washington, D.C., 2012), http://bit.ly/1fAV22Y

[3] Government of Georgia, "Decree of the Government of Georgia N219 'About the Form of the Electronic Request of Information and Proactive Disclosure of Public Information,'" Right2Info.org, 26 August 2013, http://bit.ly/1hT9ANZ

[4] Simeon Djankov, Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, and Andrei Shleifer, "Disclosure by Politicians," (Tuck School of Business Working Paper 2009-60, 2009), http://bit.ly/19nDEfK; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Types of Information Decision Makers Are Required to Formally Disclose, and Level Of Transparency," in *Government at a Glance 2009*, (France: OECD Publishing, 2009), 132, http://bit.ly/13vGtqS; Richard Messick, "Income and Asset Declarations: Global Experience of Their Impact on Corruption" (paper prepared for the Conference on Evidence-Based Anticorruption Policy organized by Thailand's National Anticorruption Commission in collaboration with the World Bank, Bangkok, Thailand, 5-6 June 2009), 16, http://bit.ly/1cIokyf

[5] The Economist, *Democracy Index 2010: Democracy in Retreat,* by the Economist Intelligence Unit (Report, London, 2010), http://bit.ly/eLC1rE

[6] OGP, *OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism: Georgia Progress Report 2012-13* by Lasha Gogidze (Report, Washington, D.C., 2013), http://bit.ly/12m9MBq

[7] Ministry of Justice*, Georgia Implementation of 2012-2013 Open Government Partnership Action Plan Self-Assessment Report* (Georgia, February 2014), http://bit.ly/1ARhBiy

[8] Ministry of Justice, Georgia OGP Forum, Guiding Principles, http://bit.ly/1xnGePV

[9] Government of Georgia, "N775 Decree 'About the Necessary Measures for the Implementation of the Action Plan of Georgia for the Open Government Partnership'," Government of Georgia, 9 July 2013, http://bit.ly/1Js5QnK

II. Process: Action plan development

Countries participating in OGP follow a set process for consultation during development of their OGP action plan. According to the OGP Articles of Governance, countries must:

- Make the details of their public consultation process and timeline available (online at a minimum) prior to the consultation
- Consult widely with the national community, including civil society and the private sector; seek out a diverse range of views; and, make a summary of the public consultation and all individual written comment submissions available online
- Undertake OGP awareness-raising activities to enhance public participation in the consultation
- Consult the population with sufficient forewarning and through a variety of mechanisms—including online and through in-person meetings—to ensure the accessibility of opportunities for citizens to engage.

A fifth requirement, during consultation, is set out in the OGP Articles of Governance. This requirement is discussed in the Section III on consultation during implementation:

- Countries are to identify a forum to enable regular multistakeholder consultation on OGP implementation—this can be an existing entity or a new one.

The Georgian government fell short of fulfilling the OGP requirements on public consultations during the development of the first national action plan. First, it did not publish the plan or timeline of consultations and did not raise public awareness on OGP. Second, it started consultations with only a couple of CSOs and later informed other CSOs about the process. Third, it held public consultations at the final stage of submitting the national action plan to OGP. These consultations were not meant for soliciting feedback on the new OGP commitments, but rather for promoting the government's existing plan. Furthermore, the government did not publish a summary of public comments or discuss how the OGP commitments responded to public needs. Finally, the commitments lacked proper planning and performance indicators, which made it difficult to assess the progress made in their implementation.[1]

The government addressed the flaws mentioned above in the development of the second action plan. Specifically, it published the plan and the timeline of consultations, actively involved the Forum members in conducting those consultations, and informed the media about the process. The consultations covered the whole country, and participant feedback was reflected in the final action plan. In addition, the government published online most of the public comments received in the cities/villages consulted. Finally, more public agencies than before were involved in planning the new commitments. The government used the OGP template to complement those commitments with a set of detailed benchmarks and timeframes, which made it easier to assess the progress made.

Evidence for consultation both before and during implementation is included here and in Table 1 for ease of reference.

Table 1: Action Plan Consultation Process

Phase of Action Plan	OGP Process Requirement (Articles of Governance Section)	Did the Government Meet this Requirement?
During	Were timeline and process available prior to	Yes

Development	consultation?	
	Was the timeline available online?	Yes
	Was the timeline available through other channels?	No
	Provide any links to the timeline.	Ministry of Justice of Georgia, OGP Public Consultations, 1. http://bit.ly/XnWnHf 2. http://bit.ly/1nYOsLq
	Was there advance notice of the consultation?	Yes
	How many days of advance notice were provided?	3 days
	Was this notice adequate?	No
	Did the government carry out awareness-raising activities?	No
	Provide any links to awareness-raising activities.	N/A
	Were consultations held online?	Yes
	Provide any links to online consultations.	http://bit.ly/1oV3BNi
	Were in-person consultations held?	Yes
	Was a summary of comments provided?	Yes
	Provide any links to summary of comments.	http://bit.ly/1ogjsRA
	Were consultations open or invitation-only?	Open
	Place the consultations on the IAP2 spectrum.[2]	Involve
During Implementation	Was there a regular forum for consultation during implementation?	Yes
	Were consultations open or invitation-only?	Invitation-only
	Place the consultations on the IAP2 spectrum.	Collaborate

Advance notice and awareness-raising

In March 2014, the Ministry of Justice of Georgia (MoJ) published on its website the schedule of in-person public consultation meetings. These meetings were to be held between 15 March and 16 April 2014.[3] At the same time, the MoJ created a section on its website allowing citizens to send online comments about the new action plan.[4] Yet, as was the case with the previous action plan, the MoJ's online consultation module was not promoted widely to encourage citizens to submit their feedback. This was also due to the persistent issue that the OGP section has no prominent place on the MoJ's website, and it is difficult to find information about what the government is doing in OGP.

Besides the MoJ, local governments and a number of popular online media outlets operating both in the capital and in the regions also published the information on the OGP consultation meetings.[567] The schedule and summary of those meetings was published by Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) as well, one of

the leading CSOs in the field.[89] However, the Georgian Public Broadcaster or popular national TV channels such as Rustavi 2 and Imedi did not cover the OGP consultations. This again points to the problem that general public awareness of OGP in Georgia remains low.

To improve this, the MoJ, in close cooperation with the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Good Governance in Georgia (GGI) program and the IDFI, conducted a public awareness-raising campaign after adopting the action plan. Specifically, a social advertisement was created and aired on different local TV channels.[10] Additionally, the flyers including the summary of the action plan (in English and Georgian) were distributed to the participants of OGP public consultation meetings.[11]

Depth and breadth of consultation

Based on the OGP template, the MoJ drafted the initial version of the national action plan, which was shared with members of the recently re-established Open Government Forum (the Forum). Relevant public agencies were asked to include their commitments in the template, while CSOs were asked to provide recommendations and submit their own commitments. At the same time, the MoJ and the Forum member CSOs organized public meetings in different regions. During those meetings, they made presentations about the OGP and Georgia's participation and asked citizens to define priority commitments for the inclusion in the second action plan. Based on the comments received from these meetings and from the Forum members, the MoJ shared the first draft of the action plan in April 2014. After incorporating additional recommendations from local CSOs, the Ministry submitted the final document to OGP in June 2014.[12]

According to Georgia's 2014-2015 OGP action plan, the MoJ expanded the list of cities and regions covered by the public consultation process. Specifically, the Ministry in cooperation with the OGP Forum members held a total of 19 consultation meetings. These meetings spanned across 15 different cities/villages of Georgia's nine regions.[13] The participants included local authorities, journalists, CSOs, political parties, businesses, academics, and trade unions.[1415]

As mentioned above, the MoJ also created a module on its website for online consultations. Yet, the Ministry did not publish information on the number and content of online comments received, which makes it difficult to measure the impact of this module. On a positive note, the Ministry published the minutes of in-person consultation meetings.[16] According to those minutes, citizens were concerned mostly about having limited access to the Internet as well as about employment and public services. They also asked for more information on public expenditure and for better opportunities to participate in decision making.[17]

In addition, the CSO members of the Forum led by IDFI submitted the following six commitments to be included in the action plan:

1) Creating online platform for public petitions and consultations;

2) Facilitating public participation in law-making;

3) Increasing public access to crime data;

4) Improving legislation on citizen surveillance and publishing relevant statistics;

5) Improving transparency of public expenditures; and

6) Improving transparency of national archives.[18]

At the same time, Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia) suggested that the government take on two new commitments:

1) Institutionalizing public participation in budgeting processes; and

2) Make it a binding obligation to publish Citizens Budget, a simplified, less technical version of the state budget.

The government agreed to include most of the suggested commitments in the action plan, except for two: public participation in law-making, and a legal obligation to publish a Citizens Budget.[19]

By and large, the government's public consultations contributed to generating a diversity of views most of which were reflected in the second national action plan, an achievement commended by local stakeholders.[20]

Additional Information

The whole process of OGP public consultations in Georgia was driven mainly by the MoJ's Analytical Department in active collaboration with the OGP Forum members. A major limitation was that the Prime Minister's Office, the Parliament, and the private sector were not involved in this process.

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[1] OGP, *OGP Independent Reporting Mechanism: Georgia Progress Report 2012-13* by Lasha Gogidze, http://bit.ly/12m9MBq

[2] "IAP2 Spectrum of Political Participation," International Association for Public Participation, http://bit.ly/1kMmlYC

[3] Ministry of Justice of Georgia, OGP Public Consultations 2014, 15 March 2014, [Georgian] http://bit.ly/XnWnHf

[4] Ministry of Justice of Georgia, Online Consultation Module, [Georgian] http://bit.ly/1oV3BNi

[5] "OGP Presentation," Telavi City Hall, 17 March 2014, [Georgian] http://bit.ly/1MXeyv5

[6] Interpressnews, "The Government Conducted a Public Consultation in Kutaisi," 22 March 2014, [Georgian] http://bit.ly/1qPmxQq

[7] Interpressnews, "Rustavi Hosted a Public Discussion," 19 March 2014, [Georgian] http://bit.ly/1nRyD8x

[8] Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), "2014 OGP Consultations in Georgia," 17 March 2014, [Georgian] http://bit.ly/1nYOsLq

[9] IDFI, "Public consultations in Telavi," 18 March 2014, [Georgian] http://bit.ly/1q0DxRs

[10] Ministry of Justice, "Open Governance in Georgia 2014-2015," Open Government Georgia, 25 September 2014, [Georgian] http://bit.ly/1kpoQXS

[11] Ketevan Tsanava, National Coordinator of OGP Georgia, comments on the draft Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) report, 7 December 2015.

[12] Ministry of Justice, *Open Government Partnership Action Plan of Georgia 2014-2015* (Report, Tibilisi, 2014), http://bit.ly/12D079H

[13] Ministry of Justice of Georgia, OGP Public Consultations, http://bit.ly/XnWnHf

[14] *Open Government Partnership Action Plan of Georgia 2014-2015*, 4, http://bit.ly/1pLwPdI

[15] Ministry of Justice of Georgia, *Report on 2014 OGP Public Consultations*, http://bit.ly/1pa4xxn

[16] Ministry of Justice of Georgia, Minutes of Public Consultation Meetings, http://bit.ly/1ogjsRA

[17] Ministry of Justice, Minutes of Public Consultation Meetings, http://bit.ly/1ogjsRA

[18] IDFI, CSO Recommendations on Georgia's 2014-2015 OGP Action Plan, 2 May 2014, http://bit.ly/V14mYV

[19] Transparency International (TI) Georgia's Recommendations on Georgia's 2014-2015 OGP Action Plan, 15 May 2014.

[20] IDFI, CSO Recommendations on Georgia's 2014-2015 OGP Action Plan, http://bit.ly/1rwslhS

III. Process: Action plan implementation

As part of their participation in OGP, governments commit to identify a new or existing forum to enable regular multistakeholder consultation on OGP implementation. This section summarizes that information.

In Georgia, an Open Government Forum has served as a main coordination mechanism at the national level to facilitate both the development and implementation of the action plan's commitments. Under the new Terms of Reference, the Forum's mandate is dedicated solely to OGP and is focused on achieving three main objectives: (1) developing recommendations on open governance issues in Georgia, facilitating the development of the OGP action plan, and conducting public consultations; (2) contributing to and monitoring the implementation of the national action plan; and (3) raising public awareness of the OGP.[1]

The Forum's membership has been expanded to include different public agencies responsible for OGP commitments as well as international and local organizations that were not participating before, such as National Democratic Institute (NDI), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and a local CSO called Partnership for Road Safety.[2] CSOs become members based on their interests and experience in OGP. Those that were involved from the beginning were included automatically as members in the re-established Forum. There are currently no business representatives taking part in the Forum meetings, while civil society continues to be represented by professional organizations only. The Forum has no rules to ensure the gender balance of its members. There is no restriction to become a Forum member and interested organizations can ask the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to send them the invitations to join.

According to the new procedures, the Forum has two Chairs/Rapporteurs in charge of leading the discussions - one from the government and one from the civil society. Both Chairs update the members about the new developments from their respective sectors.[3] At the second Forum meeting held on 5 February 2014, the Forum members elected the Director of MoJ's Analytical Department and the Director of IDFI as the two Chairs/Rapporteurs.[4] Based on the previous practice, the Forum meetings are in-person consultations and are held once a month at the premises of the MoJ in Tbilisi. During the implementation, the Forum members agreed to hold meetings once every two months to be able to generate more meaningful content for discussions. The agenda of meetings is defined by the MoJ's Analytical Department, while CSOs ask questions and present their perspectives. In addition to regular meetings, a number of ad hoc meetings and roundtable discussions were held between March and June of 2014 to facilitate the national action plan development process.[5] A positive turnaround in the operation of the redesigned Forum is that the MoJ started publishing minutes of Forum's meetings.[6]

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[1] Georgia OGP Forum, Guiding Principles, 15 January 2014.
[2] Georgia OGP Forum, Minute of the 3rd Meeting, 5 March 2014, http://bit.ly/1rVRxOd
[3] Georgia OGP Forum, Guiding Principles.
[4] Georgia OGP Forum, Minute of the 2nd meeting, 5 February 2014, http://bit.ly/1m4Nwzz
[5] Interpressnews, "Presentation of Georgia's 2014-2015 Draft OGP Action Plan," 6 June 2014, http://bit.ly/1nRyL85
[6] Ministry of Justice of Georgia, Minutes of OGP Forum Meetings, http://bit.ly/1ocKaPn

IV. Analysis of action plan contents

All OGP participating governments develop OGP country action plans that elaborate concrete commitments over an initial two-year period. Governments begin their OGP country action plans by sharing existing efforts related to open government, including specific strategies and ongoing programs. Action plans then set out governments' OGP commitments, which stretch practice beyond its current baseline. These commitments may build on existing efforts, identify new steps to complete on-going reforms, or initiate action in an entirely new area.

Commitments should be appropriate to each country's unique circumstances and policy interests. OGP commitments should also be relevant to OGP values laid out in the OGP Articles of Governance and Open Government Declaration signed by all OGP participating countries. The IRM uses the following guidance to evaluate relevance to core open government values:

Access to information

Commitments around access to information:

Pertain to government-held information, as opposed to only information on government activities. As an example, releasing government-held information on pollution would be clearly relevant, although the information is not about "government activity" per se;

Are not restricted to data but pertain to all information. For example, releasing individual construction contracts and releasing data on a large set of construction contracts;

- May include information disclosures in open data and the systems that underpin the public disclosure of data;
- May cover both proactive and/or reactive releases of information;
- May cover both making data more available and/or improving the technological readability of information;
- May pertain to mechanisms to strengthen the right to information (such as ombudsman's offices or information tribunals);
- Must provide open access to information (it should not be privileged or internal only to government);
- Should promote transparency of government decision making and carrying out of basic functions;
- May seek to lower cost of obtaining information;
- Should strive to meet the 5 Star for Open Data design (http://5stardata.info/).

Civic participation

Commitments around civic participation may pertain to formal public participation or to broader civic participation. They should generally seek to "consult," "involve," "collaborate," or "empower," as explained by the International Association for Public Participation's Public Participation Spectrum (http://bit.ly/1kMmlYC).

Commitments addressing public participation:
- Must open up decision making to all interested members of the public; such forums are usually "top-down" in that they are created by government (or actors empowered by government) to inform decision making throughout the policy cycle;
- Can include elements of access to information to ensure meaningful input of interested members of the public into decisions;

- Often include the right to have your voice heard, but do not necessarily include the right to be a formal part of a decision making process.

Alternately, commitments may address the broader operating environment that enables participation in civic space. Examples include but are not limited to:
- Reforms increasing freedoms of assembly, expression, petition, press, or association;
- Reforms on association including trade union laws or NGO laws;
- Reforms improving the transparency and process of formal democratic processes such as citizen proposals, elections, or petitions.
- The following commitments are examples of commitments that would **not** be marked as clearly relevant to the broader term, civic participation:
- Commitments that assume participation will increase due to publication of information without specifying the mechanism for such participation (although this commitment would be marked as "access to information");
- Commitments on decentralization that do not specify the mechanisms for enhanced public participation;
- Commitments that define participation as inter-agency cooperation without a mechanism for public participation.
- Commitments that may be marked of "unclear relevance" also include those mechanisms where participation is limited to government-selected organizations.

Public accountability

Commitments improving accountability can include:
- Rules, regulations, and mechanisms that call upon government actors to justify their actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of them, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments.

Consistent with the core goal of "Open Government," to be counted as "clearly relevant," such commitments must include a public-facing element, meaning that they are not purely internal systems of accountability. While such commitments may be laudable and may meet an OGP grand challenge, they do not, as articulated, meet the test of "clear relevance" due to their lack of openness. Where such internal-facing mechanisms are a key part of government strategy, it is recommended that governments include a public facing element such as:
- Disclosure of non-sensitive metadata on institutional activities (following maximum disclosure principles);
- Citizen audits of performance;
- Citizen-initiated appeals processes in cases of non-performance or abuse.

Strong commitments around accountability ascribe rights, duties, or consequences for actions of officials or institutions. Formal accountability commitments include means of formally expressing grievances or reporting wrongdoing and achieving redress. Examples of strong commitments include:
- Improving or establishing appeals processes for denial of access to information;
- Improving access to justice by making justice mechanisms cheaper, faster, or easier to use;
- Improving public scrutiny of justice mechanisms;
- Creating public tracking systems for public complaints processes (such as case tracking software for police or anti-corruption hotlines).

A commitment that claims to improve accountability, but assumes that merely providing information or data without explaining what mechanism or intervention will

translate that information into consequences or change, would **not** qualify as an accountability commitment. See http://bit.ly/1oWPXdl for further information.

Technology and innovation for openness and accountability

OGP aims to enhance the use of technology and innovation to enable public involvement in government. Specifically, commitments that use technology and innovation should enhance openness and accountability by:
- Promoting new technologies that offer opportunities for information sharing, public participation, and collaboration.
- Making more information public in ways that enable people to both understand what their governments do and to influence decisions.
- Working to reduce costs of using these technologies.
- Additionally, commitments that will be marked as technology and innovation:
- May commit to a process of engaging civil society and the business community to identify effective practices and innovative approaches for leveraging new technologies to empower people and promote transparency in government;
- May commit to supporting the ability of governments and citizens to use technology for openness and accountability;
- May support the use of technology by government employees and citizens alike.

Not all eGovernment reforms improve openness of government. When an eGovernment commitment is made, it needs to articulate how it enhances at least one of the following: access to information, public participation, or public accountability.

Key variables

Recognizing that achieving open government commitments often involves a multiyear process, governments should attach time frames and benchmarks to their commitments that indicate what is to be accomplished each year, whenever possible. This report details each of the commitments the country included in its action plan, and analyzes them for their first year of implementation.

All of the indicators and method used in the IRM research can be found in the IRM Procedures Manual, available at (http://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/about-irm). One measure deserves further explanation, due to its particular interest for readers and usefulness for encouraging a race to the top between OGP-participating countries: the "starred commitment". Starred commitments are considered exemplary OGP commitments. In order to receive a star, a commitment must meet several criteria:
1. It must be specific enough that a judgment can be made about its potential impact. Starred commitments will have "medium" or "high" specificity.
2. The commitment's language should make clear its relevance to opening government. Specifically, it must relate to at least one of the OGP values of Access to Information, Civic Participation, or Public Accountability.
3. The commitment would have a "moderate" or "transformative" potential impact if completely implemented.
4. Finally, the commitment must see significant progress during the action plan implementation period, receiving a ranking of "substantial" or "complete" implementation.

Based on these criteria, Georgia's action plan contained two starred commitments:

- Commitment 15: Political party financial declarations
- Commitment 17: Proactive publishing of surveillance data

Note that the IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015 in order to raise the bar for model OGP commitments. Under the old criteria, a commitment received a star if it was

measurable, clearly relevant to OGP values as written, had moderate or transformative impact, and was substantially or completely implemented.

Based on these old criteria, Georgia's action plan would have received eight additional starred commitments:

- Commitments 2: "Voice of the Consumer"
- Commitment 6A: Development of community Centers in Georgia
- Commitment 9: Open Data Portal
- Commitment 13: Transparency of public service recruitment
- Commitment 16: Accessibility of Ministry of Interior's webpage
- Commitment 18: Public Awareness of the electoral processes
- Commitment 19: Transparency of budgetary processes
- Commitment 20: Electronic system of procurement

Finally, the graphs in this section present an excerpt of the wealth of data the IRM collects during its progress reporting process. For the full dataset for Georgia, see the OGP Explorer at www.opengovpartnership.org/explorer.

General overview of the commitments

Georgia's 2014-2015 OGP national action plan consists of 29 commitments that span across four grand challenges: improving public services, increasing public integrity, more effectively managing public resources, and creating safer communities. A total of 16 public agencies, five of them subordinated to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), were in charge of implementing those commitments. While the Supreme Court and three independent agencies, the State Audit Office (SAO), the State Procurement Agency (SPA), and the Election Administration, were among the responsible agencies, elected bodies such as Parliament and local councils made no commitments. Parliament joined the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness in April 2015 and adopted a separate Open Parliament Action Plan in July.[1]

For ease of understanding, the IRM clustered the commitments in a way that differs from the national action plan. Specifically, the commitments were reorganized in 16 different thematic clusters, instead of four proposed by the government. The main criterion for the IRM clustering was to group commitments based on the topics they cover. The government clustered all 29 commitments across the four OGP grand challenges it aims to address: improving public services, increasing public integrity, more effectively managing public resources, and creating safer communities.

However, this is not representative of a variety of topics that the commitments cover. For instance, some commitments included in the cluster on public services, such as developing Voice of the Consumer and data.gov.ge, are more relevant for open data and public participation than for the delivery of public services. The government was not clear about this aspect in its clustering of the commitments. The IRM addressed this by creating new separate clusters for such commitments. The second action plan also includes a number of commitments, like expanding the e-procurement system, which had no equivalent in other commitments. The IRM grouped such standalone commitments separately from the clustered ones. Due to their technical nature, the IRM also merged milestones under each commitment.

Therefore, this report provides assessment at the commitment level, not at the milestone level. The commitments are numbered in accordance with the national action plan listing of commitments. The only difference concerns the total number of commitments. The action plan states 27 commitments but in fact it presents 29 commitments. Specifically, the government combined commitments 1A and 1B as well as 6A and 6B into two commitments, although each of these commitments appears to be

an individual commitment. The IRM counted these four as separate commitments, thus increasing the total number of commitments to 29. The commitments are presented under the titles Clustered Commitments and Standalone Commitments and thus at times do not follow in a sequential numbering sequence.

Of all 29 commitments, 12 were on improving the delivery of public services, building the capacity of local governments and digitizing public service management systems while three were on increasing accessibility of national archives. Further, six commitments were on implementing open data standards, launching online tools for public participation, and creating safer communities through the usage of technologies. A further eight commitments focused on drafting a Freedom of Information (FoI) Act; improving the work of Georgia's OGP Forum; increasing transparency and impartiality of public service recruitment process; establishing a monitoring system for public officials' asset declarations; publishing surveillance data proactively; raising public awareness of the electoral process; expanding electronic system of public procurement; and increasing the accessibility of Ministry of Interior's webpage to people with special needs.

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1 Parliament of Georgia, "Open Parliament Georgia Action Plan 2015-2016," http://bit.ly/1P2blr7

Clustered commitments

Cluster 1: Public services

Commitment Text:

1.A. Implementing travel insurance services at Public Service Halls (PSH)[1]

By visiting the PSH citizens will be able to apply for passports and obtain insurance at the same time.

1.B. Implementing state property registration services at PSH[2]

This initiative will make it possible for consumers to lease or purchase and register state property in "One Space". Initially, additional services will be introduced in particular strategic regions where there is an absence of above described services (including the places where National Agency for State Property Management has no service centers) and for this reason, citizens have to visit another town. These regions are: Ozurgeti, Gurjaani, Batumi and Marneuli.

3. Creating an easier way, JUSTdrive, for receiving the PSH services[3]

Drive-up windows of JUSTdrive at Tbilisi PSH will allow citizens to save time when acquiring the service without leaving their cars. Consumers will only be required to carry an ID card on them when obtaining a desired service at the JUSTdrive area.

4. Making educational services available at PSH[4]

The competence of Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) to verify school certificates and diplomas will be transferred to the Public Service Development Agency and the verified documents will be issued within the premises of PSHs.

5. Develop Citizen's Portal – www.mygov.ge[5]

By the end of 2015, the Data Exchange Agency (DEA) will ensure integration of e-services of the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and also several e-services of Ministry of Internal Affairs into the Portal. Moreover, municipal e-services will be incorporated in the Portal. Additionally, to make the services on the Portal even easier to use, DEA will create a comprehensive service catalogue. In order to boost the usage of e-services, an awareness-raising campaign will be planned and implemented until the end of 2015.

8: Implementing digital signature and online authentication systems[6]

Online Authentication System will be developed by means of electronic ID card and relevant authentication mechanisms integrated in it.

- Digital Signature and Stamp (e-Seal) will develop the electronic document-flow systems in Georgia.

Lead Institutions:

1.A, 1.B, and 2: Public Service Hall (PSH)

4 and 8: Public Service Development Agency (PSDA)

5: Data Exchange Agency (DEA)

Supporting Institutions:

1.A: Insurance Companies

1.B: National Agency for State Property Management

3: Public Service Development Agency, National Agency of Public Registry, National Archives of Georgia, Data Exchange Agency, and Smart Logic

4: National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, PSH

5: Ministries and other governmental agencies, e-service provider private entities

8: State Insurance Supervision Service of Georgia

Timescales:

1.A: Implementing travel insurance services at PSH

1.B: Implementing state property registration services at PSH

Start Date: May 2014 **End Date**: September 2014

3: Creating an easier way, JUSTdrive, for receiving the PSH services

Start Date: May 2014 **End Date**: September 2014

4: Making educational services available at PSH

Start Date: September 2014 **End Date**: October 2014

5: Develop Citizen's Portal – www.mygov.ge

Start Date: 2014 **End Date**: December 2015

8: Implementing digital signature and online authentication systems

Start Date: July 2014 **End Date**: July 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
1.A. Travel insurance services				✔			Unclear			✔			✔			
1.B. State property registration				✔			Unclear			✔				✔		
3. JUSTdrive				✔			Unclear			✔						✔
4. Educational services			✔				Unclear			✔				✔		

5. Citizen's Portal – www.mygov.ge			✔	Unclear			✔			✔	
						✔					
8. Digital signature and online authentication			✔	Unclear						✔	
						✔					

What happened?

1.A: Implementing travel insurance services at PSH

This is a new commitment that aims to make it easier for Georgian citizens to travel abroad by allowing them to obtain passports and travel insurance cards simultaneously at Public Service Halls (PSH). According to the PSH representative, those obtaining new passports also are likely to want to have travel insurance issued in the same facility. Through this new commitment, citizens will be offered electronic travel insurance cards automatically, which will save their time and resources for arranging the travel.[7] In July 2015, the PSH announced on its website a call for expression of interest for insurance companies operating in Georgia.[8] The companies must have at least four years of experience in travel insurance, offer competitive pricing for insurance cards, and share the profits from selling those cards with the PSH, among other more technical requirements detailed in the call.[9] After selecting a company that meets all those requirements, the PSH is going to launch the travel insurance service in all its branches in September/October 2015. Given that this is the first time the government is going to implement a private sector service, the PSH faces a challenge to train its staff so that they are able to deliver the service at a high quality.[10]

1.B: Implementing state property registration services at PSH

This is also a new commitment that will allow citizens to buy, lease, and register the state property at PSH. At the initial stage, this service was supposed to be implemented in the municipalities where there is the most need. These include Ozurgeti, Gurjaani, Batumi, and Marneuli municipalities. Within the period covered by this report, the state property registration service was introduced in the Marneuli municipality only. The PSH is in the process of conducting trainings for the PSH staff in other municipalities to make this service available there.[11]

3: Creating an easier way, JUSTdrive, for receiving the PSH services

This is a preexisting commitment that also was included in the first national action plan, but was not implemented. The main objective is to make it easier for citizens driving in Tbilisi to obtain PSH services without leaving their cars. This service was fully launched in April 2015. However, according to the PSH representative, only a few customers have used the JUSTdrive service in part attributed to the fact that the PSH has not conducted any public awareness campaign concerning this commitment.[12]

4: Making educational services available at PSH

This is a new commitment making educational services, such as the verification of school certificates and diplomas, available at PSH. However, its level of completion during the implementation period has been very limited. While the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) created a necessary business module and software, the agency is not able to move forward without government approval by special decree, which is still pending. Given that this commitment was added to the national action plan

hastily at its pre-planning stage, the PSDA was not able to foresee a reasonable date for completion. Therefore, the agency failed to complete the commitment in October 2014, as was indicated in the action plan.[13]

5: Develop Citizen's Portal – www.mygov.ge

This is a pre-existing commitment aimed at providing citizens with more public services online. Within the period covered by this report, there were approximately 70 public services available on mygov.ge, an increase of 10 since 2013. New services were added from such agencies as Ministry of Justice, the National Bureau of Enforcement, and the National Intellectual Property Center Sakpatenti. In addition, the Data Exchange Agency (DEA) is in the process of adding services from Ministry of Environment as well as creating a business portal for private companies. However, the services of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science, and local municipalities are not yet available on mygov.ge because these agencies have not launched internal digital case management systems linking their data to the portal. Further, the government has yet to conduct a public relations campaign to increase the usage of services provided.[14]

8: Implementing digital signature and online authentication systems

To ease document processing and reduce transaction costs related to paper signature, the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) committed to develop digital signature and online authentication systems. Both of these systems were operational prior to the second national action plan. As the PSDA representative noted, while obtaining a new electronic ID card, citizens also receive a two-year certificate with the pin code to manage their personal information on the ID card. Citizens have to pay GEL 10 each time they want to renew this certificate. On id.ge, citizens can download special software for reading the ID card and creating a digital signature while they can make online authentication on mygov.ge.

In March 2014, the PSDA launched the updated version of the digital signature software. The main challenge for the PSDA is that there are a limited number of users of these systems as a result of people frequently losing the login pin codes, in addition to being very cautious about making their personal information available online. To address this, the PSDA plans to first create software that would make it possible to restore the pin code, followed by an awareness raising campaign. Another challenge is that private companies prefer using their existing digital authentication systems rather than the PSDA system. Although the PSDA provides technical infrastructure for these companies to make them adapt their systems to the PSDA systems, there is still a lack of enthusiasm from the private sector to participate in this initiative.[15]

Did it matter?

These commitments are focused on public service delivery, but they do not explicitly involve disclosing new information, opening public sector decision making, or making government more accountable to the citizens. Therefore, it is considered that their relevance to OGP values is unclear. Further, the commitments contain minor technical activities that do not seem to empower local communities and encourage the development of needs-based policies. This leads the IRM to assess the commitments' potential impact on OGP values and the betterment of citizens' living standards as minor.

All stakeholders interviewed outside the government think that improved public services are necessary for making the government better, but are not sufficiently relevant to OGP because they do not make government more open and do not include any reform initiatives. According to the United States Agency for International

Development (USAID) representative, the service delivery commitments included in the national action plan are modest initiatives that people understand easily and at the same time are easier to implement. Yet, these services only make sense in combination of other OGP-specific commitments, such as the Voice of the Consumer, allowing users to provide their feedback on the services received (discussed in Cluster III on "Launching New Public Participation Tools").[16]

When asked if they used any of the services included in the national action plan, the stakeholders, especially the journalists, mentioned only one: mygov.ge. They mostly used this portal for sending the Freedom of Information (FoI) requests to the government and arranging interviews with government representatives.[17][18] While they were generally satisfied with how the system works, the stakeholders pointed out three main issues with the portal: First, the registration requirements (e.g., requirements to buy an electronic ID card and a USB card reader and to visit the PSH to obtain the username and the password) remain cumbersome and might demotivate people from using the portal.[19] Second, the FoI section of mygov.ge does not allow users to track whether the government received requests, to which agency the requests were assigned, or a timeline for response.[20] Finally, public awareness of mygov.ge remains low, and many people are not using the services provided.[21]

Moving forward

The stakeholders think that in the next action plan, the government should switch focus from public services that have been ongoing for quite some time to more novel reform initiatives more relevant to OGP values. In the context of online communication between the authorities and the citizens, the government should first simplify the registration procedures on mygov.ge. Second, it should promote this platform to the wider segments of society across the country so that more people start using the portal as a means to connect with the government.[22]

According to the DEA Chairman, his agency plans to start the mygov.ge awareness-raising campaign in September 2015. First, the DEA is going to distribute a special manual on e-services to schools. Second, the agency will air promotional ads on different TV channels. Finally, a new public administration reform strategy to be signed by the Prime Minister in September 2015 will oblige all public agencies to develop e-services and make them available on a unified online platform. If mygov.ge is selected for that purpose, the DEA is expecting an increased number of agencies and citizens to connect to the portal.[23]

The IRM researcher recommends that the government develop new public services based on the citizen priorities. In that context, it is important that responsible agencies, PSH, PSDA and DEA, start regularly and proactively publishing information on how many citizens are using the services included in this national action plan and what their satisfaction is with those services. These agencies also should offer citizens the opportunity to prioritize the services they need the most. Citizens should be consulted actively on the service development process, and their feedback reflected in the final product. In case of service malfunctioning, citizens should be able to send a report to the responsible agency quickly and seek redress. Only through such needs-based measures will the government succeed in aligning public services with the OGP values.

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[1] See the original commitment number 1A in the action plan, 4, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[2] See the original commitment number 1B in the action plan, 5, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[3] See the original commitment number 3 in the action plan, 6, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[4] See the original commitment number 4 in the action plan, 7, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[5] See the original commitment number 5 in the action plan, 8, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[6] See the original commitment number 8 in the action plan, 14, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76

[7] Irakli Lomidze, Deputy Executive Director/Service Development Director of Public Service Hall, interview with the IRM researcher, 5 August 2015.

[8] Public Service Hall, http://bit.ly/1E5cAoF

[9] Public Service Hall, http://bit.ly/1NEClMN

[10] Lomidze, interview, August 2015.

[11] Lomidze, interview, August 2015.

[12] Lomidze, interview, August 2015.

[13] Giorgi Lobjanidze, Head of Project Management and Business Analysis Division of Research and Development Department at Public Service Development Agency, interview with the IRM researcher, 5 August 2015.

[14] Irakli Gvenetadze, Chairman of Data Exchange Agency, interview with the IRM researcher, 4 August 2015.

[15] Mikheil Kapanadze, Interim Head of Identification Service Development Unit at Public Service Development Agency, interview with the IRM researcher, 5 August 2015.

[16] David Stonehill, Deputy Director at Office of Democracy and Governance USAID/Caucasus (Georgia), interview with the IRM researcher, 3 August 2015.

[17] Eter Turadze, Editor of Batumelebi Newspaper, phone interview with the IRM researcher, 22 July 2015.

[18] Mariam Baramidze, Graduate Masters Student of Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA), interview with the IRM researcher, 4 August 2015.

[19] Journalists, Forum Discussion, 28 July 2015.

[20] Levan Avalishvili, Chairman of the Board/Projects Director at Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), interview with the IRM researcher, 31 July 2015.

[21] Giorgi Kldiashvili, Director of IDFI, interview with the IRM researcher, 31 July 2015.

[22] Kldiashvili, interview, July 2015.

[23] Gvenetadze, interview, August 2015.

Cluster 2: Open data

Commitment Text:

9: Developing an open data portal - data.gov.ge[1]

The current data.gov.ge portal, which is mainly a navigation web-page for various links to the government pages, is to be transformed into a real open data portal where open data is available, similarly to the open data web-pages of the UK and the US.

15: Publishing financial declarations of political parties in machine-readable format[2]

Information provided by political parties and related statistics will be uploaded onto the official web-site of State Audit Office in a machine-readable format (excel forms).

Lead Institution:

9: Data Exchange Agency

15: State Audit Office

Supporting Institutions:

9: Ministries and other governmental organizations; e-service provider private entities

15: Not provided

Timescales:

9: Developing an open data portal

Start Date: August 2014   **End Date**: December 2014

15: Publishing financial declarations of political parties in machine-readable format

Start Date: March 2014   **End Date**: September 2014

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
9. Open data portal – data.gov.ge			✔		✔						✔				✔	
15. Political party financial declarations				✔	✔							✔				✔

Editorial note: Under the old criteria of starred commitments, commitment 9 would have received a star because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has moderate potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented.

Under the new criteria, commitment 15 is a starred commitment because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has transformative potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented (note that IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015).

What happened?

9: Developing an open data portal - data.gov.ge

This commitment aimed to redesign the preexisting open data portal, data.gov.ge, by complementing it with actual datasets published in open data formats, which was not the case before. Based on the recommendation of foreign experts, a redesigned portal was launched in the beginning of 2015. As of August 2015, it contained a total of 95 datasets published in CSV and XML formats. Most of these datasets are provided in the fields of finance and education by such agencies as the National Bank and Legal Entities of Public Law (LEPL) Education Management Information System under the Ministry of Education and Science. The portal allows users to see the date of publication and last update of each dataset as well as the contact details of the responsible person. It also gives information about the number of viewers and downloads, while enabling users to make comments and rate the datasets provided.[3]

According to the Data Exchange Agency (DEA) Chairman, a major challenge is that there is no legal basis obliging public agencies to compile data systematically and to make it available on data.gov.ge. Therefore, DEA has to send individual letters to each agency to ask them to upload data on the portal.[4] A United States Agency for International Development (USAID) representative outlined this issue in an interview with the IRM researcher.[5]

15: Publishing financial declarations of political parties in machine-readable format

This commitment has been completed in the period under review and directly addressed the IRM's recommendation to publish party financing data in accessible formats. Since May 2014, the State Audit Office (SAO) started publishing on its website regular reports detailing the income and expenditures of political parties, as well as the names and ID numbers of individual contributors in excel spreadsheets.[6] These reports converted in CSV files also were made available on data.gov.ge.[7] As the SAO representative noted, there are only a few cases of political parties, which continue to send reports as scanned PDFs. However, they usually correct this following an SAO request to do so.[8]

Did it matter?

Publishing open data is one of the most important commitments in the OGP context because it allows citizens to have easy access to official information that may be of public interest. The stakeholders think that Georgia's open data commitments are a step in the right direction in that they improve government transparency and accountability. Yet, the country's main open data portal data.gov.ge in its current form provides scant information and has few users. Moreover, the public agencies have no obligation to publish data on this portal. Further, the government was not clear as to what datasets should be made available on data.gov.ge, hence limiting the scale and scope of the portal's impact which has been assessed as moderate. In contrast, party financing data including information about income and expenditures of political parties as well as who their contributors are is used regularly by CSOs engaged in research and advocacy. With this in mind, the actual impact of this latter component of the commitment has been assessed as transformative, although the original text in the action plan does not indicate this.

As mentioned above, the stakeholders had different degrees of satisfaction with how the redesigned systems of SAO and DEA work in practice. Most said they regularly visit the SAO's website, and their access to party financing data has improved significantly after data has become available in a machine-readable format.

While they praised the IT architecture and the new design of data.gov.ge, which is more user-friendly than before, the stakeholders' main concern was the lack of available data on the portal. The journalists said that a number of datasets are published late when it is no longer relevant to reuse them.[9] Journalists also mentioned that they are not able to choose what data they want, and it is difficult for them to compare and crosscheck different datasets. Therefore, the journalists prefer searching for specific data on individual public agencies' websites or sending FoI requests to obtain them.[10] According to JumpStart Georgia's Executive Director, the main issue with data.gov.ge is that it does not provide information on how to use the data. Additionally, there is no option of subscribing or receiving notifications concerning the release of data.[11] The stakeholders also identified low public awareness of the portal as a challenge, resulting in a low number of users.[12]

Moving forward

The stakeholders' only recommendation for improving the transparency of party financing was to publish information about the sources of income of individual party contributors.[13] In contrast, they provided a lot more recommendations for improving data.gov.ge, including the following:

- The government should create a legal basis obliging all public agencies, including Parliament, courts and local governments, to publish data proactively on data.gov.ge;
- To simplify and inform users how the data can be used, the DEA should provide information about licensing on the dataset as well as information on when the data was collected;
- DEA should allow users to subscribe to data.gov.ge, to choose what data they want, and to receive notifications whenever that data become available;
- Like the US data.gov, data.gov.ge should also be open source and should provide application source code to the users so they are able to build their own software applications based on the available data;
- To comply with metadata standards, the data on data.gov.ge should be properly labelled and tagged, including geographic coordinates, diagrams or maps, when appropriate.

Finally, DEA should organize a large-scale public relations campaign and a hackathon as committed in the national action plan to promote data.gov.ge and attract more users to the portal.

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[1] See the original commitment number 9 in the action plan, 15, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[2] See the original commitment number 15 in the action plan, 22, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[3] "Open Data," Data.gov.ge, http://bit.ly/1Nxc6ds
[4] Gvenetadze, interview, August 2015.
[5] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.
[6] "Financial Monitoring," State Audit Office, http://bit.ly/1BLEuhI
[7] "Donations to Political Parties," Data.gov.ge, http://bit.ly/1Po71m1
[8] Zurab Aznaurashvili, Head of Financial Monitoring Service of Political Parties, phone interview with the IRM researcher, 30 July 2015.
[9] Turadze, interview, July 2015.
[10] Forum Discussion, July 2015.
[11] Eric Barrett, Executive Director of JumpStart Georgia, interview with the IRM researcher, 14 July 2015.
[12] Kldiashvili, interview, July 2015.
[13] Turadze, interview, July 2015.

Cluster 3: Public participation tools

Commitment Text:

2. Launching a feedback mechanism for consumers of Public Service Hall (PSH) – "Voice of the Consumer"[1]

Currently, consumers' interaction with the PSH is limited to lodging appeals. In the framework of this commitment, the PSH will launch a feedback system - "Voice of the Consumer", which will allow citizens to directly participate in improving PSH service quality. The PSH aims to communicate to the citizens about existing products and to provide information regarding ongoing processes.

"Voice of the Consumer" will increase accountability of the PSH to the public and will allow citizens to directly participate in improving service development and quality improvement processes.

12. **Creating** *an e-petitions portal – I-Change.ge*[2]

The I-Change.ge portal will enable citizens to initiate e-petitions on the issues within the competencies of the Government (Law on the "Structure and Competence and Activities of the Government of Georgia"). Those petitions that accumulate a necessary number of signatures will be discussed at the Cabinet Session.

Administration of the Government of Georgia will be leading and coordinating the process with different public agencies involved in the implementation of the commitment. To ensure involvement of all relevant agencies, a special working group will be created and meet regularly to plan and review the progress achieved. The working group will consist of the representatives from the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, LEPL Data Exchange Agency, the Parliament, the Civil Service Bureau, CSOs, and international organizations.

Work on e-petitions' portal will be concluded with the portal's launch in 2015.

Lead Institution:

2: Administration of the Government of Georgia

12: Public Service Hall (PSH)

Supporting Institutions:

2: Parliament; Ministry of Justice; Data Exchange Agency; Civil Service Bureau; IDFI; USAID

12: Consumer of PSH

Timescales:

2: Launching a feedback mechanism for consumers of PSH – "Voice of the Consumer"

Start Date: May 2014 **End Date**: August 2014

12: Creating an e-petitions portal – I-Change.ge

Start Date: June 2014 **End Date**: June 201

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
2. "Voice of the Consumer"				✔		✔	✔				✔					✔
12. I-Change.ge				✔		✔	✔					✔		✔		

Editorial note: Under the old criteria of starred commitments, commitment 2 would have received a star because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has moderate potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented (note that IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015).

What happened?

2: Launching a feedback mechanism for consumers of Public Service Hall (PSH) – "Voice of the Consumer"

To allow citizens to provide their feedback on the PSH services, the PSH committed to create a feedback mechanism called the Voice of the Consumer. Since April 2014, this new mechanism was launched at 13 PSHs. The Voice of the Consumer will become available soon at the PSH in Poti, a port city in western Georgia where a PSH opened in July 2015. This is how it works in practice: There are special boxes at the entrances of PSH; citizens can take the standardized feedback forms which are available nearby, fill the forms out, and then place these forms into the boxes provided.[3]

The IRM researcher visited the Tbilisi PSH to see the feedback form. A standard form includes a section in which the users can indicate their personal information such as name, ID number, address, phone number, email, and location (where the form was filled out). As the PSH representative clarified, citizens are free to decide whether they would like to indicate their ID numbers on the form. If they do provide their ID numbers, it is much easier for PSH to give them the feedback.[4] The feedback forms also provide information about the follow-up process under which the Internal Audit Departments of PSH will study citizens' comments or complaints and react to those within 30 days. Citizens can check the status of their feedback by contacting the PSH call center and providing a unique identification code indicated on each form.

12: Creating an e-petitions portal – I-Change.ge

The main objective of this commitment was to increase public participation in decision making through the electronic petitions platform called I-Change.ge (Ichange.gov.ge). The government started discussions on the concept of this new platform with the OGP Forum members in the fall of 2014. Tetra Tech, ARD, and IDFI, companies implementing the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Good Governance Initiative (GGI) project, were particularly active in providing feedback. After a series of discussions, the stakeholders agreed on the threshold of 5,000 signatures for petitions that the government would have the obligation to consider. Then they developed a set of criteria for the system and put together a manual explaining the process and terms of usage of Ichange.gov.ge.[5]

According to the representative of the government administration, there will be two types of users of Ichange.gov.ge, both of whom have to be 18 (voting age): verified users

and unverified users. The first category must have a new ID card and will have to register on the portal either by using the USB card reader or by creating an integrated profile combining the user accounts of mygov.ge or rs.ge (website of Revenue Service). Only this category will be able to register an e-petition. Unverified users can bypass the aforementioned requirement, but they also will have to register on the portal by entering personal information (e.g., name, age, ID number, email, and phone) if they wish to sign the petition. The only limitation for the latter is that they will not be able to start a petition.[6]

The Ichange.gov.ge moderator then will check if the petition is clean of calls for coup d'état, offensive language, hate speech, or any discriminatory remarks. In cases when a petition contains a request that is the competence of Parliament or local governments, the moderator will not publish such petitions on Ichange.gov.ge; instead, they will refer the authors to those other agencies. The moderator will have to decide whether to publish a petition within 10 days after its submission. From that point on, the petition authors will have 30 days to collect 5,000 signatures required for making the government consider the petition. If they fail to do that, the petition will be closed and moved to the archives that will be published on the portal. If they succeed, an expert group of around 10 people including the staff of the government administration and the Ministry of Finance will assess the petition based on its relevance to the competences of different agencies and the available budget for implementing the activities involved. This group then will forward the petition to the competent agencies that have three months to react. The users will be able to track the status of their petitions online and see the government's responses. These terms of usage will be published on Ichange.gov.ge.[7]

As the government administration representative noted, the portal's interface is ready and is being tested. The reason why it was not launched in summer 2015, as indicated in the national action plan, is that there are many different government agencies involved, and coordination with them has turned out to be more time-consuming than expected. Nevertheless, the portal will be launched fully in the fall of 2015, following the adoption of the Government Decree. Around the same time, the government will start a public relations campaign with USAID support and will air promotional ads on national TV channels.[8]

Did it matter?

Stakeholders think that the government's commitments on public participation, especially concerning the creation of an e-petitions portal, are the most important commitments directly responding to OGP values of accountability and public participation. Therefore, most of their comments were related to Ichange.gov.ge. Not having a government portal for petitions was one of the main issues outlined by many in Georgia who had to use private websites to start petitions on issues of local concern. However, often the government representatives questioned the validity of signatures collected on the websites.[9] With this commitment, the government shows that it is serious about addressing this issue. If implemented properly, Ichange.gov.ge would have a transformative impact on citizens' lives because it would allow one to send petitions directly to the government. Nevertheless, given that the commitment on *Voice of the Consumer* does not include awareness-raising activities, as reflected in its low usage, and does not envisage a monitoring mechanism to ensure the integrity of the PSH personnel dealing with the feedback forms, the impact of this instrument on OGP values has been assessed as moderate.

According to the representative of Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), one major issue with Ichange.gov.ge is that its moderator will have wide discretion to decide whether to publish a petition. That leaves room for subjective interpretation and might

potentially conflict with freedom of speech.[10] He also thought that a 5,000 threshold for signatures would be too high in the Georgian context and should be decreased to 1,500 or 1,000 to motivate people to start using the portal. Finally, a requirement to enter the ID number could deter some people from registering or signing the petitions.[11]

While commending the government's efforts to move forward with Ichange.gov.ge, representatives of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Tetra Tech also shared their views on the concept of the portal. According to the USAID representative, it is a legitimate concern that having a requirement to enter the ID number for signing the petition might demotivate some users. For instance, a similar petition platform in the U.S. called *We the People* only requires users to indicate and verify their email addresses to send a petition to the government.[12] However, the capacity for IT forensics in the U.S. is more developed than in Georgia, making it easier to detect fraud. Therefore, in the Georgian context, the ID authentication seems as a reasonable safeguard to deter fraud from happening.[13] The Chief of Party of Tetra Tech ARD also shared this view.[14] The USAID representative also noted that having a 5,000 threshold for petition signatures is reasonable because there is no straightforward formula for determining the number of signatures and the government had to make an arbitrary decision.[15]

Both the USAID and Tetra Tech ARD representatives pointed out that the main challenge for Ichange.gov.ge is to make sure it is operational, technologically sound, and accessible to all citizens. The latter is especially challenging given that 46 percent of Georgian speaking adults (18 years old and over) have never used the internet, according to the latest public opinion poll of 2015 conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) for Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia).[16] Typically, to encourage people to start using this new platform, the government and stakeholders should explain what the appropriate petition should look like and how to develop support for it. The planned public relations and educational campaign in the fall of 2015 aims to address that challenge.[17][18]

Regarding Voice of the Consumer, stakeholders think it is a major component of public service commitments that is in line with the spirit of OGP and is likely to improve the quality of services offered by the government. It is also a good example of a bottom-up idea. The public raised the need for such a feedback mechanism during the OGP consultations.[19] As mentioned by civil society and government representatives, people have used Voice of the Consumer already and received feedback. The PSH has software through which it analyzes citizens' feedback. As of 7 August 2015, PSH received over 1,000 feedback forms. In most cases, these included positive comments from the customers who were satisfied with the treatment by the PSH staff. However, there were also complaints about the behavior of certain staff members.[20]

Moving forward

Stakeholders believe that to motivate people to use the soon-to-be-launched Ichange.gov.ge, the government should simplify its terms of usage and remove any unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles as to the eligibility and authorization of petition authors. The government should refrain from marginalizing groups of society who might want to start e-petitions on politically sensitive issues. All citizens should be free to decide the kind of petitions they would like send to the government.[21]

While some stakeholders agreed that ID numbers serve the useful purpose of deterring fraud and spam on Ichange.gov.ge, they also raised the need for the government to clarify to what extent it is going to protect the users' personal data from unauthorized access and abuse.[22]

The IRM researcher recommends the PSH launch an online version of Voice of the Consumer to save citizens' time and resources in sending feedback on the PSH services, and also offer new reform initiatives for implementation. Regarding Ichange.gov.ge, the IRM researcher also believes that this portal should be easily accessible to everyone willing to send ideas to the government. Hence, it should be free of unnecessary requirements like using a new ID or a USB card as a means for starting a petition.

[1] See the original commitment number 2 in the action plan, 5, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[2] See the original commitment number 12 in the action plan, 19, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[3] Lomidze, interview, August 2015.
[4] Lomidze, interview, August 2015.
[5] Giga Paichadze, Head of E-governance and Development Department at Government Administration, interview with the IRM researcher, 6 August 2015.
[6] Paichadze, interview, August 2015.
[7] Paichadze, interview, August 2015.
[8] Paichadze, interview, August 2015.
[9] Media.ge, "People Prove the Validity of Signatures on the May 17th Petition through the Facebook Campaign," 18 June 2013, http://bit.ly/1SftYdd
[10] Sulkhan Saladze, Project Coordinator at Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, interview with the IRM researcher, 30 July 2015.
[11] Saladze, interview, July 2015.
[12] The White House, *We the People*, United States Government, http://1.usa.gov/1KO6gig
[13] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.
[14] David Smith, Chief of Party at Tetra Tech ARD, interview with the IRM researcher, 11 August 2015.
[15] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.
[16] Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), "Survey on Public Policies, 2015," Online Data Analysis, http://bit.ly/1hzEcIU
[17] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.
[18] Smith, interview, August 2015.
[19] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.
[20] Lomidze, interview, August 2015.
[21] Saladze, interview, July 2015.
[22] Vako Natsvlishvili, Local Democracy Development Program Coordinator at Open Society Georgia Foundation, interview with the IRM researcher, 11 August 2015.

Cluster 4: Local government capacity

Commitment Text:

6.A. Development of Community Centers in Georgia[1]

Development of Community Centers (CCs) in Georgia ensures provision of demanded private sector services to the local population at the village level. CCs provide citizens with opportunities to interact with the government and receive up to 200 public services locally without the need to travel outside the village. CCs serve as a point of service delivery for the local population, and most importantly, represent a good mechanism for promoting citizen engagement.

Currently, 12 Community Centers (CC) are fully operational across Georgia. Construction of 6 additional CCs is planned throughout 2014, which will increase the number of local inhabitants participating in local decision-making processes.

6.B. Introduction of e-Governance in Local Self-Governments[2]

In 2014, the PSDA plans to introduce the Municipal Services Management System in 6 selected pilot municipalities (Kareli, Tetritskaro, Xashuri, Khobi, Akhmeta, and Gardabani). To meet the demands of the new software, necessary trainings for the municipality personnel will be organized.

The municipalities will have an access to the existing electronic databases, resulting in reduced time and human resources and decreasing costs related to data collection, processing and verification within self-government offices. All services available through the new electronic system will be integrated in the Citizen's Portal - my.gov.ge. Additionally, Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) will conduct a survey to study the interests and informational needs of the local population. Based on the findings, PSDA will design a new web-portal to post information on Municipality and Community Center activities. In 2014-2015, e-Governance will be implemented in 4 additional municipalities. It is also envisaged to increase the number of services selected at the initial phase of the project, study additional services and embed relevant procedures into the electronic municipal service management system.

7. Transformation of public libraries for regional development[3]

This commitment implies the use of public libraries with new functions: along with the traditional purposes libraries will acquire functions of Community Centers. Thus, libraries will serve as additional opportunity to increase capacity of communities and local governments. Trained librarians through modern technologies (Internet, computer technologies, and new books) will ensure high quality service delivery for local population.

The project aims to ensure access to public information and better communication between citizens and the local governments as well. It will improve the level of civic engagement and capacity of local librarians through e-governance and modern technologies on the regional level.

The pilot project will be implemented in 2014. It will cover 4 public libraries. Based on the pilot, the work will continue in 2015.

Lead Institution:

Public Service Development Agency (PSDA), Ministry of Justice (MoJ)

Supporting Institutions:

6.A: Local Government Units, MoJ, Social Service Agency, Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, Meqanizatori LLC, European Union, CSO

"Multinational Georgia for the Strengthening of Democratic Values," Liberty Bank, MagtiCom

6.B: Local Government Units, MoJ, Social Service Agency, European Union, UGT

7: The National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, IREX, IDFI, Georgian Library Association

Timescales:

1: Development of Community Centers (CCs) in Georgia

Start Date: January 2014   **End Date**: December 2015

2: Introduction of e-Governance in Local Self-Governments

Start Date: March 2014   **End Date**: March 2015

3: Transformation of public libraries for regional development

Start Date: December 2013   **End Date**: December 2014

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
6.A. Development of Community Centers in Georgia				✔		✔					✔					✔
6.B. Introduction of e-Governance in Local Self-Governments				✔		Unclear				✔					✔	
7. Transformation of public libraries for regional development			✔			Unclear				✔					✔	

Editorial note: Under the old criteria of starred commitments, commitment 6A would have received a star because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has moderate potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented (note that IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015).

What happened?

6.A.: Development of Community Centers in Georgia

This commitment aimed to improve service delivery at the local level and increase public participation in local decision-making by expanding the chain of Community Centers (CCs). Within the period covered by this report, the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) opened 13 CCs, instead of the initially planned six, and is in the process

of constructing seven more. This has increased a total number of CCs operating across Georgia from 12 to 25. In addition, in December 2014, a special website, centri.gov.ge, was launched, which gives information about the location of CCs as well as their services and activities.[4] The CCs provide more than 200 different services from public and private sector agencies, including banks and mobile operators. The number of CC services used by citizens has increased substantially over the years from 3,627 in 2012 to 153,518 in 2014, while in the first seven months of 2015 this number was already at 89,104.[5] PSDA plans to add notary and free legal aid services to the existing services given a high public demand. Additionally, the CCs also are used as a venue for organizing public meetings involving central and local governments as well as events of CSOs.[6] During the reporting period, different events and informational meetings were organized at the CCs involving more than 1,300 local citizens as participants. These included meetings on Georgia's 2014 Local Self-Government Code, EU integration, municipality development plans, mygov.ge portal, documentary film screenings, and discussions, as well as an awareness-raising campaign for people with special needs. In 2017, after they are fully equipped with all necessary resources, the CCs are going to be transferred in ownership to local municipalities.[7]

6.B. Introduction of e-Governance in Local Self-Governments

To make the CC services available online, PSDA committed to develop the CCs' digital infrastructure. PSDA selected CCs in five municipalities for piloting the Municipal Services Management System and has worked closely with local legislatures (Sakrebulos) and executives (Gamgeobas) on the implementation. The plan is to make the 10 most demanded services of CCs available within this system.[8] In February 2015, PSDA conducted a survey in eight CCs to find what type of information and services the citizens would like to have access to online. Based on the survey findings, PSDA is going to complement the CC's website, centri.gov.ge, with additional services as well as with an online feedback mechanism and mobile applications.[9] Given the low technical competence of local staff, frequent staff changes, and poor IT infrastructure, PSDA had to spend a significant amount of resources on improvement. This included conducting trainings on the new service management system and effective communication. It also included installing high speed internet, fixing the ICT cables, and renovating the reception for citizens within the CCs. The next step is to test the new digital databases and to link them to mygov.ge, which PSDA expects to do in the fall of 2015.[10]

7. Transformation of public libraries for regional development

This commitment envisaged modernizing the existing village libraries in the municipalities to increase access to information and integrate them into the system of CCs. A pilot project started in March 2015 and ran until September 2015. The project, implemented in two target CCs, is funded by International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). In addition, librarians from the other two CCs are participating in the training program on Training of Trainers (ToT) and building librarians' IT skills. The trained librarians then will train their colleagues from other CCs on the same topics.[11]

Libraries within CCs provide six computers with free Wi-Fi as well as different types of printed literature, including fiction and public documents produced by governmental and nongovernmental agencies. PSDA supplied the target libraries with books that are in high demand among the local population. The agency also developed monitoring software, according to which many locals are using the CCs' library services. For instance, while the number of visitors to the old village libraries was 20 to 30 per month in 2014, this number increased to 400-600 since March 2015, when PSDA started the project.[12]

During the reporting period, libraries hosted different informational meetings involving around 25 participants. The meetings covered the following issues: the role of EU and

NATO in Georgia, women's rights, youth engagement in local politics, and monitoring of local budget. In addition, young residents of Nukriani village developed a project on the renovation of the garden of their local library. Local government approved this project and allocated GEL 30,000 for the garden's renovation.[13]

Did it matter?

The Community Centers (CCs) provide venues for better connecting local authorities with the citizens and contributing to the development of policies that are based on public needs in the spirit of OGP. However, the commitment text does not commit local governments to involving the population in public affairs and changing their current practice. For instance, these venues have not yet been used for public consultations on the local budget or infrastructural projects about which local residents are most concerned. Further, it is not clear how the e-governance and library components of CCs, with their heavy focus on service provision, are going to improve government transparency and accountability, OGP requirements. This leads the IRM researcher to assess the impact of this commitment as moderate.

Stakeholders believe that CCs are providing people in various regions with vital services in a single space, which they previously did not have. This is especially true for ethnic minorities who are in need of additional information and consultation from the government on what services are available to them.[14] Stakeholders also believe that CCs have the potential to create an interface between the government and the people and to enable public participation. For instance, CCs were used successfully as a venue for conducting public consultations on the OGP action plan. Some CSOs also used them for organizing public meetings and discussions on different topics with the involvement of government representatives.[15] However, one media representative raised an issue: the administration of a CC in Kakheti asked him about the purpose of the event he was going to organize in that CC, which he believes should be irrelevant when it comes to using the public space for CSO and media activities. To avoid such questions, he and his partner organizations prefer organizing their events in the USAID Centers for Civic Engagement.[16] The USAID representative noted that the USAID centers provide very useful neutrality and safety from the USAID logo. Therefore, the challenge for CCs is to replicate this sense of safety.[17] A related challenge is that, with its focus on service delivery, the CC commitment in the national action plan does not explain in detail the mechanism of how it is opening the government, in addition to the indicators not measuring the impact.[18]

Moving forward

According to stakeholders, the government should articulate better that the main goal of CCs is to increase transparency and public participation. It should clarify to what extent these venues are opening new areas of relevant services and information for citizens to make use of, as well as what mechanisms are being put in place to measure the progress achieved.[19] For example, the government can encourage people to participate more actively in decision making by sending their e-petitions on Ichange.gov.ge from the premises of the CCs.[20] To dissipate any concerns about the neutrality of CCs, the MoJ and PSDA should put in place good governance structures, such as a Code of Ethics, to assure Georgian citizens that CCs are safe venues where people of different political affiliations can gather and share ideas.[21]

Finally, the government should work more on raising public awareness, informing local residents about the availability of such service centers in their areas so they start using these centers on a regular basis. In addition, the government should host public meetings and discussions on the quality of CC services and their impact on the lives of local communities, especially the ethnic minorities.[22][23]

The IRM researcher recommends local governments start using CCs actively as a means for organizing consultation meetings with citizens and learning about their priorities.

[1] See the original commitment number 6A in the action plan, 9, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[2] See the original commitment number 6B in the action plan, 11, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[3] See the original commitment number 7 in the action plan, 12, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[4] "Community Centres," Public Service Development Agency (PSDA), http://bit.ly/1JbYT6E
[5] Nana Tsiklauri, Head of International Relations and Donor Coordination Division at PSDA, interview with the IRM researcher, 5 August 2015.
[6] Tsiklauri, interview, August 2015.
[7] Tsiklauri, interview, August 2015.
[8] Vato Dolidze, Business Analyst of the Project "Implementing E-governance in Local Municipalities" at PSDA, interview with the IRM researcher, 5 August 2015.
[9] Dolidze, interview, August 2015.
[10] Dolidze, interview, August 2015.
[11] Salome Chukhua, Project Manager of "Georgian Public Services through Libraries" at PSDA, interview with the IRM researcher, 5 August 2015.
[12] Chukhua, interview, August 2015.
[13] Tsiklauri, interview, August 2015.
[14] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.
[15] Kldiashvili, interview, July 2015.
[16] Gela Mtivlishvili, Editor of Network of Kakheti Information Center, interview with the IRM researcher, 29 July 2015.
[17] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.
[18] Barrett, interview, July 2015.
[19] Barrett, interview, July 2015.
[20] Saladze, interview, July 2015.
[21] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.
[22] Forum Discussion, July 2015.
[23] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.

Cluster 5: Digital public service management systems

Commitment Text:

21. Develop electronic human resources management system for civil service[1]

Electronic Human Resources Management System - e-HMRS is a unified database for civil servants countrywide. It aims at ensuring electronic human resources management in accordance with the defined policy and standards. E-HMRS is a solution that brings civil service human resources management to the next level of development.

E-HRMS will allow Civil Service Bureau (CSB) and other relevant agencies to easily and quickly obtain the information existing in the database of the system that can be used for development and overhauling of the HR management policies and practices. E-HRMS will reduce the spending of materials, time and human resources.

The system elaboration process will be coordinated by the CSB in close cooperation with LEPL Financial-Analytical Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia. CSOs will be involved in the process.

25. Increase efficiency and transparency of public finance management system[2]

This commitment includes the development of an integrated information system for public finance management, which will contribute to the further development of E-Government in Georgia.

Improvement of the PFMS integrated information system is planned to be achieved through the following advancements:

−−Further development of State Treasury electronic service system (eTreasury) and implementation in all fiscal organizations, legal entities and relevant bodies of local governments. The system will enable all payments to be executed electronically;

−−Further development of electronic system for State budget planning (eBudget) - will be implemented in all fiscal organizations, including relevant bodies of local governments;

−−Further development of information system of state debt management and investment projects (eDMS) represents a collection of tools for managing state internal debt and loans. It aims to gather all relevant information regarding state debts, loans and grants and thus ensure access to trustworthy and exhaustive information on financial related areas;

−−Further development of online auction of state-owned property (eAuction) - unique system of buying and selling goods, which was initiated by the relevant LEPLs of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia, aimed to dispose state-owned property through auctions. As a result, both private and legal persons can purchase state or private property and place their property for sale online without leaving their homes or offices.

Lead Institution:

21: Civil Service Bureau

25: Financial Analytical Service of the Ministry of Finance

Supporting Institutions:

21: Financial Analytical Service of the Ministry of Finance, CSOs

25: Relevant MoF agencies, Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, local governments, National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia; Association of Finance Officers of Georgian Local Self-Governing Units

Timescales:

21: Develop electronic human resources management system for civil service

Start Date: January 2014   **End Date**: December 2015

25: Increase efficiency and transparency of public finance management (PFM) system

Start Date: 2014   **End Date**: 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
21. Digital HR management system				✔			Unclear		✔					✔		
25. Public finance management system				✔			Unclear		✔							✔

What happened?

21: Develop electronic human resources management system for civil service

Under this commitment, the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) aimed at creating a unified digital database of job profiles of all public servants through the electronic human resources management system (e-HMRS). This new module has already been implemented in 13 Ministries, while six Ministries are still in the process of implementing it. In addition, four local municipalities and 17 Legal Entities of Public Law (LEPLs) will create similar digital databases. The CSB works with the Data Exchange Agency (DEA) on creating software for data sharing between the public agencies and the DEA and the CSB.[3]

25: Increase efficiency and transparency of public finance management system

The electronic human resources management system (e-HMRS) linking the payroll system of the public service with the State Treasury is part of the government's commitment to improve Georgia's Public Finance Management (PFM) through such electronic modules as e-Treasury, e-Budget, e-DMS and e-HMRS. These systems contribute to consolidating information on public finances and reducing transaction costs for processing and applying this information in practice. While they are for internal use only, another component of the PFM included in the national action plan, the e-Auction, is not.[4] E-Auction is a public website allowing citizens to purchase online state and private property. Improving and making the e-Auction website more user-friendly is a preexisting commitment from the first national action plan.[5]

According to the representative of the Ministry of Finance's Financial Analytical Service, e-Budget with its budget-planning module was integrated with e-Treasury in 2012. In January 2015, local governments, Legal Entities of Public Laws (LEPLs) and the PFM's funds were integrated in the system. Since then, all transactions concerning public funds have been processed through a treasury single account.[6] The e-DMS system improving the public debt payment process was updated in June 2015 with new modules, including the targeted grant module. Also in 2015, a new Buy It Now module for immediate online purchases and mobile applications was added to the existing e-Auction website.[7]

As the Financial Analytical Service representative noted, a major challenge with implementing the e-Treasury and e-Budget modules is that there is low technical awareness among the staff of the State Treasury and the respective spending agencies, especially at the local level. Therefore, Financial Analytical Service had to spend a lot of time and resources on training.[8]

Did it matter?

While noting the importance of new digital systems for public administration reform, stakeholders did not see this commitment as part of the OGP due to its lack of a public facing component. First, the information generated through e-HMRS, e-Treasury, e-Budget, and e-DMS is available for internal use only. At the same time, the e-Auction's new modules are oriented to improving the service provision rather than the transparency and accountability of the public auctions. The stakeholders also outlined that this commitment is heavy on technical specifications and therefore hard for an average person to understand, a mismatch with the OGP.

Moving forward

Stakeholders suggested removing such commitments dealing with internal government processes from the commitments of the future action plans and instead focus on those that citizens can see and monitor.[9] For instance, in the context of accountability of public finance management, it would make more sense to create an online module through which citizens would be able to track how different public agencies are expending public funds.[10]

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[1] See the original commitment number 21 in the action plan, 28, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[2] See the original commitment number 25 in the action plan, 32, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[3] Maia Dvalishvili, Deputy Director of Civil Service Bureau, and Irina Aghapishvili, Head of the Civil Service Institutional Set-Up and Practice Generalization Department at Civil Service Bureau, interview with the IRM researcher, 31 July 2015.
[4] Aleksandre Khuskivadze, Head of Research and Systems Analysis Department of Financial Analytical Service, interview with the IRM researcher, 7 August 2015.
[5] Georgia's OGP Action Plan 2012-13, 8, http://bit.ly/ZfPYPB
[6] Khuskivadze, interview, July 2015.
[7] Khuskivadze, interview, July 2015.
[8] Khuskivadze, interview, July 2015.
[9] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.
[10] Forum Discussion, July 2015.

Cluster 6: Transparency of archives

Commitment Text:

22. Digital preservation system: e-Archive[1]

Currently, an e-archive system does not exist in Georgia. This represents a big challenge in respect of preservation of electronically born documents. The E-archive - electronic solution for archiving digital data, will allow long term preservation of data, provide access to authentic data and ensure its long term maintenance and usability.

E-Archive Project is an essential component of e-governance strategy of Georgia. It enables retention of electronic documents for a long period of time in a technology-neutral way, to ensure access to the data through the Internet for all relevant stakeholders.

23. Increasing openness and accessibility of national archives[2]

The National Archives of Georgia preserves unique historical material from the IX century until now. Unrestricted access to those documents carries great importance for researchers as well as the general public. Currently, fees are attached to services of National Archives; besides, only original documents are accessible, which eventually leads to their damage as a result of frequent use. Ministry of Justice of Georgia, under the leadership of the National Archives of Georgia in the framework of the National Action Plan of 2014-2015, will study relevant legislation framework and elaborate amendments needed to ensure greater openness of archives and increased citizen engagement. Electronic documents preserved in the system of National Archives will be available for free and researchers will be allowed to work on the preserved material without limitations. Original documents will not be in use on a daily basis and thus they will be protected from damage.

24. Create and publish electronic catalogues of MIA archives[3]

Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia preserve archives of former National Security Committee and the Communist Party agencies, including Soviet period and beyond. Due to the specific features of the documents preserved in the mentioned archives, MIA's archive used to be one of the least accessible agencies in Georgia.

As mentioned, the Archive contains unique historical information that covers all aspects of the XX century history. The public interest toward these archives is high. Although the digitalization of documents and formation of preserved databases is carried out by the Ministry of Internal affairs on a permanent basis, as of now documents preserved in the MIA archive are not yet fully sorted in accordance with the modern catalogue system. The descriptions of several archival funds and registry are very general and therefore, not user-friendly.

Due to the high public and scientific interest in the documents preserved in the archives of former National Security Committee, MIA's Archive will create and publish electronic catalogue and provide relevant descriptions for documents preserved in the former National Security Committee.

Lead Institution:

22: National Archives Agency, Data Exchange Agency, Ministry of Justice

23: The National Archives of Georgia, Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of Georgia's Archive

24: Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia

Supporting Institutions:

22: Electronic service provider private companies

23: Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia; Office of the Personal Data Protection Inspector; CSOs

24: Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)

Timescales:

22: Digital preservation system: e-Archive

Start Date: May 2014 **End Date**: December 2015

23: Increasing openness and accessibility of national archives

Start Date: July 2014   **End Date**: 2015

24: Creating and publishing e-catalogue of archives of Ministry of Internal Affairs

Start Date: 2014   **End Date**: 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
22. Digital preservation system: e-Archive			✔		Unclear					✔				✔		
23. Openness and accessibility of archives				✔	✔					✔					✔	
24. Electronic catalogues of MIA archives				✔	✔					✔				✔		

What happened?

22: Digital preservation system: e-Archive

To create digital catalogues of archived data, the National Archives started consultations with Data Exchange Agency (DEA), in 2014, as part of the EU's twinning project involving Austrian experts. Based on these consultations, the agency developed a draft general concept on the e-Archive system, its main modules, and general requirements.[4] Yet, the commitment has not been implemented since then.

In 2016, the National Archives is going to set up a technical working group in charge of selecting the right module for the e-Archive system and defining the requirements and detailed procedures for public agencies. The responsible individuals for this commitment expect the full system to be launched only in 2017 after finishing designing the necessary technical infrastructure.[5] According to the project lead, the main challenge is that Georgia has no experience of developing such a system, especially given that the new automated module should be installed in all public agencies, including local governments, and should be integrated into the unified e-Archive system. Therefore, the National Archives needs to rely on foreign experience but also

domestic support from Ministry of Justice, mainly through the projects on digital signature and online authentication.[6]

23: Increasing openness and accessibility of national archives

A related commitment of the National Archives is to provide the archived data for free. This commitment has two components: (1) creating a legal basis and (2) providing technical infrastructure. Currently, the price rates for the National Archives' services are regulated by a special government decree, according to which requesting a single case from archives costs GEL 0.5, while students, pensioners, and scientists have a 50 percent discount.[7]

To make all archived data available for free, the National Archives drafted a relevant amendment and sent it to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for revision.[8] Yet, to implement it in practice, the National Archives would need additional technical infrastructure. According to the Archives' representatives, there are currently only three reading halls and nine computers linked to the digital catalogues containing a total of 2,500 archived cases (516,000 files). These catalogues are not available online. Therefore, the users have to come to the National Archives, provide their ID number for registration, and use the free computer in the reading hall.[9] The Archives' representatives noted that the demand on archived documents has increased by 20 percent in the first six months of 2015 while the number of registered users has reached 1,500.[10]

24: Create and publish electronic catalogues of MIA archives

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) has committed to digitizing and publishing the archives of the Soviet period, including from such entities as National Security Committee and Communist Party. Yet, as of August 2015, the commitment's implementation was limited.

According to the MIA representative, the Ministry needs to build a new storage facility for the huge amount of archived data, after which (and only then) it will be possible to fully digitize this data. While digitization and creation of e-catalogues is underway, moving the storage to the new building might delay this process.[11] Another challenge is the lack of donor support for this commitment. The MIA asked the Forum member donors to help them build the new storage and provide necessary software as well as designated staff for digitizing the archives, but no support has been received to date.[12]

The Ministry created and published an e-catalogue of 90 percent of archived documents. After filling out a special application form on the MIA's website and paying a set fee for each document requested, citizens can receive hard and soft copies of archived personal files about their family members and relatives.[13] The Ministry has not published thematic breakdown of these files yet due to limitations stemming from the personal data protection legislation. After receiving recommendations from Personal Data Protection Inspector and making relevant amendments to the legislation, the MIA also will be able to have such breakdown available to the public.[14]

Did it matter?

Easier access to publicly held archives is beneficial for the citizens, especially for those working in the field of science and research. But updated data on the government's new policies and activities adds more value for improving citizens' living standards. Further, given that the implementation process is slow, the commitment's overall impact on OGP is minor.

Stakeholders had mixed views on this commitment. Some think that the transparency of archives is an important component of OGP, setting a good precedent to make more public information available to the citizens. Like the government, they also outlined the

main challenges as the lack of capacity in responsible agencies to handle huge amount of archived data and to configure servers for data processing and.[15]

By contrast, while also stressing the usefulness of increasing access to public information, some thought this commitment is secondary for OGP because of its focus on the historical data and because the government could have included more ambitious commitments in the action plan. It was included in the action plan as a commitment in part because opening the archives did not require a political decision unlike other reforms meant to change the existing status quo.[16]

Moving forward

While it is important to have easy access to the archived documents held by the government, the IRM researcher thinks that, in the OGP context, the priority should be given to commitments that are more directly affecting citizens' lives, such as disclosing more information about the government's ongoing activities and involving citizens more actively in decision making.

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[1] See the original commitment number 22 in the action plan, 29, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[2] See the original commitment number 23 in the action plan, 30, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[3] See the original commitment number 24 in the action plan, 31, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76
[4] Teona Iashvili, General Director of National Archives of Georgia, and Zviad Melkadze, Head of IT Service of National Archives of Georgia, interview with the IRM researcher, 3 August 2015.
[5] Iashvili and Melkadze, interview, August 2015.
[6] Iashvili and Melkadze, interview, August 2015.
[7] Ministry of Finance (MoF), "Government Decree No. 506 on Fees Attached to the Services of the National Archive," Georgian Government, 29 December 2011, http://bit.ly/1EsWaXO
[8] Iashvili and Melkadze, interview, August 2015.
[9] Iashvili and Melkadze, interview, August 2015.
[10] Iashvili and Melkadze, interview, August 2015.
[11] Davit Alaverdashvili, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive, interview with the IRM researcher, 14 August 2015.
[12] Alaverdashvili, interview, August 2015.
[13] "Archive, Services," Ministry of Internal Affairs, http://bit.ly/1KfmMaT
[14] Alaverdashvili, interview, August 2015.
[15] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.
[16] Saladze, interview, July 2015.

Cluster 7: Safer communities through technology

Commitment Text:

26. Develop alternative channels to connect to "112"[1]

In response to the challenge Creating Safer Communities - Legal Entity of Public Law of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, which is an emergency situations service center across the country, will develop alternative and innovative means to connect with the emergency situations call center 112-to swiftly provide citizens (especially people with disabilities) as well as each and every individual residing in Georgia with assistance in emergency situations. It is important that the connection to call center is not limited to phone only as it might not always be possible to use a phone during an emergency.

By the end of 2014, the emergency situations call center "112" will be accessible through multiple channels, including: a) phone call; b) fire and gas detectors - in case of threat the system automatically sends alarm signal to 112 c) text message or video call - the latter will be especially helpful for people with disabilities who have problems with speech and hearing; d) GPS tracker - satellite device, which sends an alarm signal even if a mobile device is out of the coverage area. Additionally, the device enables the emergency center to define exact location of a person in need of assistance to ensure immediate and effective response.

27. Interactive statistics and crime mapping[2]

This commitment implies diversification of statistics and opening up and presenting crime statistics through innovative tools:

1. Interactive statistics will be provided based on the data of the Integrated Criminal Case Management System of Georgia (which made criminal case management paper-free and fully electronic in law enforcement and prosecution service);

2. Detailed Crime Mapping will be created: an interactive instrument, which allows seeing the statistics in various formats with combination of different variables, including specified time period, crime type, regions etc.

Lead Institution:

26: "112"

27: Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia

Supporting Institutions:

26: Georgian National Tourism Administration; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

27: Chief Prosecutor's Office of Georgia

Timescales:

26: Develop alternative channels to connect to "112"

Start Date: March 2014   **End Date**: End of 2014

27: Interactive statistics and crime mapping

Start Date: 2014   **End Date**: 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
26. Alternate channels to "112"				✔	Unclear						✔					✔
27. Interactive statistics and crime mapping				✔	✔			✔			✔			✔		

What happened?

26: Develop alternative channels to connect to "112"

This commitment established an Emergency and Operative Response Center (called 112), which established multiple channels of communication, making it easier for citizens to ask for help in emergencies. The first two components of this commitment, (1) contacting 112 via phone calls and (2) fire and gas detectors, were completed before the development and implementation of this national action plan. Therefore, during the implementation in the period under review, 112 focused on other alternative channels of contact, such as text messages, video calls, and GPS trackers.[3]

The main target group of text messages and video calls is deaf and hearing-impaired people because this was the only group that could not connect with 112. The agency consulted with the Union of the Deaf through a number of workshops. The representatives of the Union of the Deaf raised their need of having a video call service via Skype. They also mentioned that they would prefer communication with gestures over text messages.[4] In response, 112 hired special translators and launched both video call and text message services in March 2015. This was followed by a series of public relations events across the country during which 112 registered all participants in the new system.[5] The beneficiaries have to register their cell phone number and a Skype ID on the 112 website, after which a specially designated translator will communicate with them.[6] As of August 2015, a total of 265 users were registered for 112's new services. Of these, 82 have connected with 112 through the video call, while 34 were connected through text messages, mostly for medical emergency purposes.[7]

In addition, given frequent cases of lost foreign tourists and challenges in finding them, "112" decided to address this issue through the development of GPS trackers. Trackers enable defining the exact location of lost persons, even if they are beyond the coverage of the mobile operators.[8] According to the 112 representative, the main beneficiaries of this commitment will be organizations working in the mountainous regions of Georgia. These include the National Tourism Administration, the Ministry of Environment, the Natural Resources Protection, MIA's Emergency Management Agency, and companies specializing in extreme sports and mountain tourism.[9] Center 112 purchased 60 trackers for USD 24,000 (a single unit costs USD 400) and transferred them to the aforementioned agencies, which now have to identify direct beneficiaries and give them the trackers based on the special terms of usage. Center 112 is going to report on the usage of trackers in a quarterly report by the end of 2015. As the 112 representative noted, the main challenges to implementation are finalizing the identification of direct

beneficiaries of GPS trackers and bureaucratic procedures of transferring the trackers to partner agencies.[10]

27: Interactive statistics and crime mapping

This is a preexisting commitment under which the MIA pledged to disclose crime statistics through the usage of new technologies. Yet, the Ministry was not able to move forward with this commitment. As a result, implementation has remained very limited since the first national action plan. According to the MIA representative, the Ministry has installed the software for the Integrated Criminal Case Management System. However, it has not purchased the GPS tracker devices for relevant law enforcement bodies.[11] The devices, which cost GEL 100,000, are necessary to visualize crime statistics on a map. Under Special Decree No. 2116, the government authorized the MIA to purchase the GPS trackers through the simplified procurement procedure. Yet, the change of Minister in January 2015, the ensuing restructuring of the MIA, and the lack of available funding all have hindered the progress, as noted by the MIA representative.[12]

Did it matter?

The government's commitment on improving the safety of citizens through the usage of technologies includes two different components, whose relevance to and impact on OGP values vary. The first one on increasing public access to emergency call center 112 is oriented heavily on service provision, thus having no clear connection with the government transparency, accountability and public participation. By contrast, the commitment to publish interactive crime statistics addresses an issue about which many CSOs and citizens are concerned. CSOs say that the MIA's official crime data is not based on the uniform methodology, making it difficult to compare this data over time or to find new trends. In turn, this creates a discrepancy between the public's perception of increased crime rate in the country and the MIA's statistics suggesting the opposite. Therefore, stakeholders think that crime statistics data might have transformative impact on preventing crimes and improving the safety of citizens, while also building the trust in the MIA's work. [13] However, CSOs were concerned that the government has not implemented this part of the commitment, although it was supposed to be completed during the previous action plan. This leads the IRM researcher to assess the overall impact of the commitment as moderate.

Nevertheless, the direct beneficiaries of 112's video call and text message services provided positive feedback on the implementation. According to the representative of the Union for Deaf in Georgia, the 1,500 Union members have used both services, mostly in cases of medical emergency and reporting accidents. They were highly satisfied with how the system works in practice.[14] The only challenge is that not all Union members have tablets or phones. Therefore, not all are able to use online services, resulting in moderate impact.[15]

Moving forward

The stakeholders' only recommendation for improving the 112 services for hearing and speaking impaired people was to train the police officers on the basic communication methods to be used with this group of people. Regarding crime statistics data, stakeholders suggested the MIA develop a unified methodology for publishing detailed statistics across useful categories such as time and location of crimes committed and investigated, as well as the gender and social and economic status of offenders. Such detailed breakdown would allow for analysis over the years. Stakeholders asked for crime data to be available through mobile applications and across all municipalities in Georgia.[16] According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) representative, in the U.S., for instance, policing is devolved at the county or

city level, and the residents expect the police to develop a mobile application allowing them to see what crimes have been committed in their neighborhoods.[17]

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[1] See the original commitment number 26 in the action plan, 34, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76

[2] See the original commitment number 27 in the action plan, 35, http://bit.ly/1Yf5K76

[3] Ani Kekelidze, Head of Analytical Department of "112," interview with the IRM researcher, 18 August 2015.

[4] Kekelidze, interview, August 2015.

[5] Kekelidze, interview, August 2015.

[6] "About Service," 112, http://bit.ly/1LbK9az

[7] Kekelidze, interview, August 2015.

[8] Giorgi Kikvidze, Lead Specialist of Administration and Legal Consultant of "112," interview with the IRM researcher, 18 August 2015.

[9] Kikvidze, interview, August 2015.

[10] Kikvidze, interview, August 2015.

[11] Khabuliani, interview, August 2015

[12] Khabuliani, interview, August 2015.

[13] Civil.ge, "PM Says 'Crime Situation Stable,' Calls to Tighten Laws on Carrying Arms," 5 September 2014, http://bit.ly/1PQuShP

[14] Maia Metonidze, Vice President of Union of the Deaf in Georgia, phone interview with the IRM researcher, 14 August 2015.

[15] Metonidze, interview, August 2015.

[16] Mtivlishvili, interview, July 2015.

[17] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.

Standalone Commitments

10. Freedom of Information Act Draft

Commitment Text:

Currently, the norms regulating access to public information are scattered in several laws. significant difficulties are encountered in practical implementation of legislation. Taking into consideration practical challenges, elaboration of special law aims to eradicate legislative gaps and consolidate existing legal provisions in a separate act.

Ministry of Justice of Georgia will coordinate elaboration of freedom of information law in close cooperation with civil society. In order to ensure broad consultation process and wide involvement of stakeholders, a special working group will be created. Based on consultations and international expertise a special working group will elaborate the new provisions of freedom of information in compliance with international standards. The first draft will be completed in spring of 2015.

Lead Institution:

Ministry of Justice of Georgia; Anticorruption Council of Georgia

Supporting Institutions:

Parliament of Georgia; Open Society Foundation - Georgia; Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)

Start Date: February 2014   **End Date**: Spring 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
10. Freedom of Information Act Draft				✔	✔					✔					✔	

What happened?

Under this commitment, the government pledged to draft a separate Freedom of Information (FoI) law and submit it to the Parliament for adoption. The Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) took the lead in this process from the civil society side. Following a buy-in from the government, in January 2014, OSGF created a working group involving prominent experts from organizations such as the Constitutional Court, the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, IDFI, OSGF, and the Analytical and Law-making Departments of the Ministry of Justice. This group researched the best international practices, specifically the Mexican FoI law, and developed the first draft in spring of 2014.[1]

A number of important novelties of the new draft include the following:
- The independent oversight body, the Freedom of Information Commissioner, which will be entitled to issue administrative fines to agencies that violate the FoI legislation, including provisions on proactive publication of information;

- Defining a reasonable timeline of maximum one month for public agencies, the Commissioner, and the courts for reviewing the FoI complaints; exempting the complaints that were submitted first to the Commissioner from the costs that the courts require to process complaints;
- Rules of information processing, including systematization and categorization of different types of information and encryption of personal and commercial information;
- Special registry to categorize, store, manage, and protect public information, and allow quick and simple access to it;
- Expanded list of agencies responsible for granting access to information, including individual entrepreneurs when they are financed from the state budget and private companies which are owned, founded, and controlled by the state;
- Reduced number of working days from ten to three for issuing readily available information from the registry;
- And, most importantly, the obligation of public agencies to explain the damage that could be inflicted on the state and the society by publishing the classified information, as well as their obligation to declassify information that is in high public demand.[2]

This draft was shared with international experts as well as with the Center of Law and Democracy producing the Right to Information (RTI) rating. According to the latter, if adopted without changes, the new law would rank Georgia second (up from the current rank of thirty-second) in the RTI rating.[34] OSGF submitted the draft law to the MoJ in October 2014, but it has not received feedback since then.[5] As the MoJ representatives noted, the Ministry is going to start public discussions around the new draft in September 2015, soon after which the draft will be submitted to Parliament.[6]

Did it matter?

Stakeholders praised this commitment as the government's new reform initiative, while noting that a standalone law would give freedom of information more weight in Georgia. Yet, the MoJ only committed to draft a law and submit it to the government and the Parliament, who might dismiss this draft or make substantial changes to it to alter its spirit. The text of the commitment does not imply accountability mechanisms, although the draft does in that it envisages the creation of the oversight body and sanctions. This lack of ambition on the part of the government has diminished the commitment's impact to a minor level. Stakeholders also outlined this as an issue, especially given that the government has not published its feedback on the initial draft submitted to it in spring of 2014. One important aspect of the draft that is missing is that private companies with public functions registered in the offshore zones would not be required to disclose the sources of their revenue.[7] Stakeholders also noted that the main issue with the existing FoI legislation is not so much the legal provisions as their implementation in practice.[8]

Moving forward

The current draft of the Freedom of Information Act is an extremely important and relevant OGP commitment. Therefore, it is crucial to retain its rigor and to put greater focus on the implementation and oversight of the new accountability provisions. Stakeholders also raised a need for having meaningful discussions on the new draft law with CSOs, media, and the wider population. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) representative, public discussions supported by his agency would serve as a useful means to have a healthy dialogue about the new law. This is especially true considering government officials may raise concerns about

having a new oversight body responsible for monitoring their compliance with the FoI legislation.[9]

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[1] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.

[2] Draft Law of Georgia on Freedom of Information, 2014.

[3] "Country Data," Global RTI Rating, http://bit.ly/1JOq0aa

[4] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.

[5] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.

[6] Zurab Sanikidze, Head of the Analytical Department of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, and Ketevan Tsanava, National Coordinator of OGP Georgia, interview with the IRM researcher, 29 July 2015.

[7] Saladze, interview, July 2015.

[8] Forum Discussion, July 2015.

[9] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.

11: Georgia's OGP Forum

Commitment Text:

The Open Government Georgia's Forum is a national coordination-consultative mechanism of the OGP at the national level established under the Anti-Corruption Council of Georgia to support elaboration of the OGP Action Plan and monitor its implementation. The Forum comprises responsible agencies, CSOs, international organizations and private sector. The Forum held its first meeting on January 15, 2014, since then Forum sessions have been held regularly, on a monthly basis and were mainly focused on elaboration of Georgia's second Action Plan. After submitting the second Action Plan of Georgia to the OGP Support Unit, the Forum will continue to assist the Action Plan implementation, monitor its progress, raise awareness on Open Government Georgia's process and coordinate OGP processes at the national level.

The Secretariat of the Anti-Corruption Council of Georgia commits itself to:

1. Coordinate the forum activities and assist in administrative matters;

2. Determine agenda for the sessions;

3. Prepare minutes of the Forum meetings;

4. Present activity reports of the Forum to the Anti-Corruption Council of Georgia biannually.

Lead Institution: The Secretariat of Anticorruption Council at Ministry of Justice

Supporting Institutions:

Responsible agencies under the action plan; Forum member civil society and international organizations

Start Date: January 2014   **End Date**: Not specified

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
11. Georgia's OGP Forum				✔		✔	✔			✔						✔

What happened?

This commitment, which aimed to improve the work of Georgia's OGP Forum, was completed before the start of the second national action plan. Since the Forum's reformation in January 2014 (see Section III on action plan implementation), MoJ has continued hosting the Forum meetings, first on a monthly basis (during the development of the second national action plan) and then on a bimonthly basis (during the implementation). The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) defines the agenda of the meetings jointly with the Forum members by sending them an email with the draft agenda a week before the actual meeting.[1] The MoJ also has been consistent in publishing the minutes of all Forum meetings on its website and in reporting on the progress of the second national action plan to the Anticorruption Council.[2]

Did it matter?

Most of the stakeholders had largely positive views on the Forum. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) representatives think the Forum is the most successful coordination mechanism that the MoJ has ever created. They especially pointed out the practice of co-rapporteurs, through which, alongside the government, civil society organizations (CSOs) report regularly on the progress of the action plan. The MoJ tries to involve CSOs and the donor members of the Forum (e.g., United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and European Union Delegation) more actively in OGP by sending them the government's quarterly monitoring results of the action plan and soliciting their feedback. The MoJ then sends the combined feedback to the responsible agencies, which have to reflect that feedback in quarterly reports submitted to the Forum for discussion.[3]

CSOs and donors also commended the Forum's work, especially in the organization of European Regional OGP Conference held in Tbilisi in June 2015.[4] CSOs thought the Forum is the best way to connect public and private sectors. Therefore, the commitment is contributing significantly to the implementation of the national action plan. Generally, there is a higher interest in the Forum's work now than before, and the existing problems in OGP are discussed openly among the Forum members.[5] According to the USAID representative, the Forum's new monitoring matrix is a very good mechanism for tracking progress made in implementing OGP commitments. Efficient management tools can be shared with other countries as a best practice of monitoring government's performance.[6]

Stakeholders also pointed out some challenges related to the Forum's work. First, some public agencies are taking the Forum's role less seriously than others. They limit their participation to simply providing technical updates on their activities rather than engaging in meaningful discussions on the impact of their commitments with the Forum members.[7] This is conditioned by the fact that mid-level public servants who represent do not have the capacity to make decisions. Moreover, the Prime Minister's Office is not involved actively.[8][9] Another challenge is that only a small group of CSOs based in the capital are closely involved in the Forum's work, which is not representative of the whole civil society sector.[10] The Forum does not have an online mechanism for sharing feedback, and the only way to participate is through physical attendance of meetings at the MoJ premises in Tbilisi, which many regional CSOs cannot afford.[11] Even those who attend the Forum meetings sometimes are frustrated by the technical focus of government presentations. Therefore, CSOs prefer engaging in the Forum as a group to advocate on the issues of common concern.[12]

Moving forward

To further open the Forum's work and make it more inclusive, stakeholders suggested expanding its membership to include regional civil society organizations (CSOs). According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) representative, a Rustavi-based CSO, Civil Development Agency (CiDA), which is running a network of approximately 50 regional CSOs in Georgia, would be a good platform to connect CSOs with the Forum members and to inform the larger communities about the Forum's work.[13][14] To give more weight to the Forum, the government leadership, at least at the level of Deputy Ministers, should be involved in its meetings so Forum members' feedback can inform government policy decisions.[15] Stakeholders also suggested the MoJ plan the agenda of Forum meetings better to ensure reasonable time allocation between the members' individual presentations and discussions, while placing more focus on the latter.[16] Finally, stakeholders thought the government should promote better the Forum's work to all its agencies, encouraging them to participate and to come up with new OGP commitments.[17]

The IRM researcher suggests the MoJ create an online mechanism so that organizations that are not able to attend the Forum meetings and other interested parties can send feedback on the issues discussed.

[1] Sanikidze and Tsanava, interview, July 2015.

[2] Ministry of Justice, OGP Forum, http://bit.ly/1ocKaPn

[3] Sanikidze and Tsanava, interview, July 2015.

[4] IDFI, "OGP European Regional Meeting Has Closed," 4 June 2015, http://bit.ly/1APHWOF

[5] Saladze, interview, July 2015.

[6] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.

[7] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.

[8] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.

[9] Kldiashvili and Avalishvili, interview, July 2015.

[10] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.

[11] Barrett, interview, July 2015.

[12] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.

[13] Civil Development Agency (CiDA), Working Meeting of Regional Network of CSOs, 20 April 2015, http://bit.ly/1JgzqGS

[14] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.

[15] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.

[16] Forum Discussion, July 2015.

[17] Forum Discussion, July 2015.

13: Transparency of public service recruitment

Commitment Text:

The Civil Service Bureau will coordinate the process of overhauling the civil service recruitment process. A special working group will be created in order to ensure inclusive process.

Lead Institution: The Civil Service Bureau

Supporting Institutions: Special working group: Ministry of Justice, CSOs and international experts

Start Date: July 2014   **End Date**: Fall 2014

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
13. Transparency of public recruitment				✔	✔	✔	✔				✔					✔

Editorial note: Under the old criteria of starred commitments, this commitment would have received a star because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has moderate potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented (note that IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015).

What happened?

This commitment aimed to improve the transparency of public service recruitment procedures and was completed in 2014 as planned. On 18 June 2014, following a series of expert group meetings and public consultations, the government adopted a decree defining new rules for recruiting public servants.[1] A major novelty is that it has become mandatory to involve independent experts, representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and trade unions as members in the selection commission.[2]

In addition, the decree has expanded monitoring powers of Civil Service Bureau (CSB) in two directions. First, the CSB has the power to appoint the head of the selection commission and to ensure that independent members are included in the commission. Second, the agency checks all vacancies announced on hr.gov.ge, a web directory of public sector jobs, within three days of their publication to make sure that job descriptions are adequate to the requirements of the positions announced. In case of inadequacies, the CSB sends a report to the publishing agency. If the latter fails to resolve the inadequacies, the CSB then sends a report to the government.[3] As the CSB representatives noted, in most cases, the public agencies address their recommendations and make necessary corrections to the vacancy announcements, if needed.[4] Further, to make it easier for citizens to apply for public sector jobs, the CSB has complemented the CV template on hr.gov.ge with additional sections and made it possible for applicants to edit those sections before submitting them to the recruiting agency. The applicants also are able to see the number of applications submitted for a single position on hr.gov.ge.[5]

Did it matter?

Although the text of this commitment as written in the action plan is not very clear about its relevance to OGP values, the IRM researcher was convinced that the commitment was significant and relevant to OGP. Allowing civil society organizations (CSOs) to monitor the public service recruitment process, and to conduct interviews with stakeholders can be considered major developments. In the past, CSOs had no such opportunity, and the process was closed to the public, resulting in arbitrary decisions of the selection commission members, staff dismissals on political grounds, and public concerns about nepotism and favoritism.[6] Under the new system, CSOs are engaged actively in the work of the commission and provide valuable input on the recruitment process. However, a number of issues remain unresolved at the local level, which leads the IRM to assess the commitment impact as moderate.

First, independent observers are allowed only to observe the written test stage of the recruitment process in local governments, not the interview stage. Second, the CSB's monitoring powers are limited at the local level, where Sakrebulo Chairs (local legislature) and Gamgebelis (local executive) serve as heads of selection commissions in charge of defining the number and composition of commission members.[7] The CSB does not have the mandate to oblige local authorities to allow independent members to observe the interview process, which therefore lacks transparency. According to the representative of the Kakheti Information Center, large-scale exams of local government staffers were conducted in Kakheti in 2015. But they were closed to the public gaze, raising concerns about the impartiality of the whole process.[8] A related problem is that local governments refuse to provide the list of job applicants, their final exam results, and the selection criteria on the ground of personal data protection.[9] This information is particularly relevant considering that there sometimes is a discrepancy between the written test results received at the testing place and the final test results announced later.[10]

Moving forward

Given high public interest in the staff recruitment process, especially at the local level, stakeholders provided the CSB and the local governments with the following recommendations:
- Establish unified standards for disclosing information based on high public interest;
- Disclose to the interested parties information about the job applicants and their exam results in a comprehensive and timely manner;
- Develop clear criteria for selecting candidates prior to their attestation;
- Make it possible to print written test results immediately after the completion of the test to compare them with the final results;
- Give free access to independent observers to all stages of the recruitment process, including the interviews and final decision making;[11]
- To avoid manipulation, design uniform threshold scores for different ranks of public servants for passing the written tests across all municipalities.[12]

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[1] MoF, "Government Decree No. 412," Georgian Government, 18 June 2014, http://bit.ly/1Ub8U7a
[2] Decree No. 412, http://bit.ly/1Ub8U7a
[3] Decree No. 412, http://bit.ly/1Ub8U7a
[4] Dvalishvili and Aghapishvili, interview, July 2015.
[5] Dvalishvili and Aghapishvili, interview, July 2015.
[6] Erekle Urushadze, Project Manager at TI Georgia, phone interview with the IRM researcher, 22 July 2015.
[7] Tamar Bartaia, Deputy Director of International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), phone interview with the IRM researcher, 5 August 2015.
[8] Mtivlishvili, interview, July 2015.
[9] Bartaia, interview, August 2015.

[10] Bartaia, interview, August 2015.
[11] ISFED, *Monitoring the Process of Certification and Competition in Public Service, Third Interim Report* (Report, 22 May 2015), http://bit.ly/1doupU9
[12] ISFED, *Monitoring the Process of Certification and Competition in Public Service, Second Interim Report,* 12 February 2015, http://bit.ly/1KMvUUZ

14: Public officials' asset declarations monitoring system

Commitment Text:

The Civil Service Bureau will coordinate the processes related to the implementation of the asset declaration monitoring system in Georgia. The process will be carried out in close cooperation with governmental and non-governmental sectors.

Lead Institution: The Civil Service Bureau

Supporting Institutions:

Anticorruption Council of Georgia; Government of Georgia; Parliament of Georgia; German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)

Start Date: March 2014   **End Date**: 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
14. Asset declaration monitoring system		✔			✔		✔				✔				✔	

What happened?

This is a preexisting commitment envisaging the creation of the verification mechanism for public officials' asset declarations. In 2014, in cooperation with the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) created a working group involving relevant government agencies, CSOs, and experts. Another intra-agency group was created in February 2015 under the umbrella of the Anticorruption Council. Further, the CSB conducted eight public consultation meetings across the country. The feedback from the public consultations was reflected in the draft amendment package.[1] This package was first submitted to Anticorruption Council in June 2015 and then to Parliament a month later. As of August 2015, the draft amendments passed the first hearing in Parliament. The CSB expects them to pass the second and third hearings, scheduled in September, because MPs raised no objections during the first hearing.[2]

Under the draft amendments, the CSB Director will create an independent commission, with the involvement of CSOs, to selection declarations for monitoring randomly using a special methodology. The CSB will publish proactively a list of randomly selected declarations at the start of each year.[3] In addition, the commission will check declarations for which Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs), media, and the general public submitted evidence of fraud.[4] Under another new rule, public officials will have to publish their asset declarations after one year of leaving the office to prevent post-employment conflicts of interest.[5] To verify the declarations, the commission members will crosscheck the existing online databases and other available documents. In case of a criminal offense, the CSB will submit a report to the MIA's Anticorruption Department.[6] The monitoring results will be published on an annual basis at the end of each year.[7] This new system will be up and running starting from 1 January 2017. To run it

smoothly, the CSB would need additional resources in the face of a separate department, according to the agency's representatives.[8]

Did it matter?

Georgia has a good system for tracking the assets of public officials on declaration.gov.ge. This portal contains annual asset declarations of 3,100 different officials.[9] However, the challenge in terms of preventing corruption is that there is no mechanism for verifying the accuracy of those declarations, something civil society organizations (CSOs) have been criticizing. CSOs often have reported public officials hiding important information on their assets or providing wrong data in their declarations.[10] In light of this challenge, stakeholders commended the government's commitment to establish a monitoring system as a positive step forward in increasing public accountability, especially by allowing CSOs to be directly involved in the work of the verification commission. Stakeholders thought this could have a major impact on improving the behavior of public officials and consolidating ethical standards in the public service. One component that is missing from the draft monitoring methodology is the "red flag system." This system would allow the CSB to verify declarations that contain very different information from ones submitted by the same officials in previous years. Yet, the government refused to implement this system due to the lack of technical infrastructure, the lack of capacity, and the high costs involved.[11]

Moving forward

Stakeholders suggested the following recommendations for improving the draft verification system:
- Start verifying the declarations based on high public interest and the evidence of fraud already in 2016;
- Publish the monitoring results within one month after completing the works, and provide arguments for negative assessments;[12]
- To make the system work better, set a minimum number of declarations to be verified through the random selection process;[13]
- Equip the CSB with all necessary resources for assuming the new role.

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[1] Dvalishvili and Aghapishvili, interview, July 2015.
[2] Dvalishvili and Aghapishvili, interview, July 2015.
[3] Civil Service Bureau (CSB), "Self-assessment," 2015.
[4] Urushadze, interview, July 2015.
[5] Dvalishvili and Aghapishvili, interview, July 2015.
[6] CSB, "Self-assessment," 2015.
[7] Urushadze, interview, July 2015.
[8] Dvalishvili and Aghapishvili, interview, July 2015.
[9] "How It Works," Civil Service Bureau, http://bit.ly/1tW4S9F
[10] TI Georgia, "Non-declared Property of Local Self-government Officials," 26 March 2014, http://bit.ly/1Mk4vtP
[11] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.
[12] Urushadze, interview, July 2015.
[13] Saladze, interview, July 2015.

16: Special needs accessibility to Ministry of Interior's webpage

Commitment Text:

At present, the official web-site of the Ministry - www.police.ge - is not accessible for persons with disabilities, particularly for blind people. The MIA communicates with citizens through e-mail and Facebook account. However, Ministry aims to further develop public relations and to add an option of live-chats to the MIA web-page.

In the framework of the commitment, the web-page of MIA will be accessible for people with disabilities. In addition, online consultation mechanism will be implemented. Besides, using the live-chat application citizens will be able to communicate with the representatives of the Ministry on issues related to the competences of the MIA.

Lead Institution: Ministry of Internal Affairs

Supporting Institutions: None specified

Start Date: May 2014 **End Date**: December 2014

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
16. Special needs access to Ministry of Interior's webpage				✔	✔						✔					✔

Editorial note: Under the old criteria of starred commitments, this commitment would have received a star because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has moderate potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented (note that IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015).

What happened?

Under this commitment, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) pledged to make the information it publishes accessible to blind and visually impaired people and to improve its communication with citizens in general.

A special website was launched in 2014. The website, voice.police.ge, allows audio reading of the main police.ge website content.[1] MIA's consultations with representatives of the Union for the Blind of Georgia preceded tailoring the new website to their needs.[2] In addition, in January 2015, MIA launched a live-chat application on its website to communicate more actively with the citizens.[3] On average, 40 or 50 people per day are using this application. Since December 2014, MIA also has used an online survey to solicit public feedback on its activities.[4]

Did it matter?

Based on the OGP values, the Ministry of Internal Affair's (MIA) commitment envisages opening more information about the Ministry's work and connecting it better with the citizens, especially those with special needs. However, given that the Ministry does not publish information about how its practice has changed as a result of new accountability

mechanisms created, the IRM researcher has assessed the commitment impact as moderate.

The Union for the Blind of Georgia is the main stakeholders for this commitment. The Union is comprised of 3,500 registered members who are either fully blind or visually impaired people in 21 offices across the country.[5] A Union representative confirmed that MIA consulted with him and a fellow Union member who are IT specialists. They helped the Ministry install special software on voice.police.ge that allows audio reading of the written text.[6] According to these specialists, the new website is working well and has received positive reviews from its users.[7]

Moving forward

The representatives of the Union for the Blind suggested the government should adopt special legislation obliging all public agencies to adapt their websites to the needs of disabled people.[8]

The IRM researcher recommends the Ministry of Internal Affairs publish data on how many people are using voice.police.ge and the live chat application, on the level of their satisfaction, and on additional information or services the users would like to receive from the Ministry.

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[1] Ministry of Internal Affairs, http://bit.ly/1KLsJCO

[2] Shalva Khabuliani, Head of Legislation Analysis and Harmonization Section of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, interview with the IRM researcher, 14 August 2015.

[3] Ministry of Internal Affairs, http://bit.ly/1KRDiEw

[4] Khabuliani, interview, August 2015.

[5] "About Us," Union for the Blind of Georgia, http://bit.ly/1UMRZ0h

[6] Lado Urdulashvili, Member of Union of the Blind in Georgia and an IT Specialist, phone interview with the IRM researcher, 17 August 2015.

[7] Urdulashvili, Interview, August 2015.

[8] Revaz Maisuradze, Board Member of Union of the Blind in Georgia, phone interview with the IRM researcher, 17 August 2015.

17: Proactive publishing of surveillance data

Commitment Text:

The Supreme Court of Georgia started maintaining statistics on hearing the motions regarding operative investigative activities since 2014, in order to ensure transparency and accountability of law enforcement agencies. However, that statistics is not available for public.

Pursuant to Article 7 of the Law on Operative Investigative Activity, a covert investigative action such as phone tapping is only possible with the permission of the court order. Thus, the courts have the possibility to maintain and publish statistics of surveillance proactively. Starting September 2014, the Supreme Court of Georgia will publish statistics on surveillance quarterly, which will be followed by an annual publication starting from 2015.

Lead Institution: The Supreme Court of Georgia

Supporting Institutions: None specified

Start Date: September 2014   **End Date**: January 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
17. Proactive publishing of surveillance data				✔	✔							✔				✔

Editorial note: This commitment is a starred commitment because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has transformative potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented (note that IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015).

What happened?

To shed light on some aspects of the government's surveillance activities, this commitment aimed to make the phone tapping data publicly available. The Supreme Court started producing the statistics on phone tapping in January 2014 in response to the high public interest in this issue. These statistics were produced for internal use at the initial stage. However, following a request of the OGP Forum members and subsequent amendments to the Criminal Procedures Code,[1] the Court started proactively publishing yearly statistics in October 2014. In 2015, the Court started publishing quarterly statistics as part of the action plan commitment.[2] The data presented in PDF documents on the Court's website includes the number of motions on phone tapping submitted by the prosecutors to the courts and the number of motions granted by the courts.[3] As the Supreme Court representative explained, no more details are given to protect personal information of the people tapped. The Court also pointed out that, in the absence of automated electronic case management system, it is challenging for the Court to process manually the data provided by the district courts.[4]

Did it matter?

All stakeholders noted that this is a very important commitment, which should instil transparency into the frequency of the government's tapping of phones and whether this trend is increasing. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) representative, Georgia might be one of few countries in the world that proactively publishes surveillance data. The USAID representative also commended the fact that the Supreme Court is the main agency responsible for this commitment. This shows that OGP, which started as an executive initiative, has expanded to other branches of the government, including the Judiciary.[5]

On a negative note, it is not easy to search through the phone tapping data with keywords on the Supreme Court's website, and the user has to open multiple pages to access the data.[6]

Moving forward

To further improve the existing practice, stakeholders asked for more detailed data broken down by types and severity of crimes and by the categories of persons for which the courts grant motions on phone tapping.[7] Stakeholders also recommended publishing the geographic distribution of prosecutor's offices requesting motions and the courts granting or denying those motions.[8] Finally, stakeholders suggested that the Supreme Court disclose statistics on how many tapped records were destroyed by the prosecutor's offices after the completion of their investigative activities, as required by the law.[9]

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[1] MoF, "Criminal Procedures Code," Georgian Government, article 143, http://bit.ly/1EkbaXZ

[2] Lia Mchedlishvili, Chief Consultant in the Analytical Department/Head of the Statistics Unit at the Supreme Court of Georgia, interview with the IRM researcher, 6 August 2015.

[3] Supreme Court, http://bit.ly/1PsSjJk

[4] Mchedlishvili, interview, August 2015.

[5] Stonehill, interview, August 2015.

[6] Forum Discussion, July 2015.

[7] Natsvlishvili, interview, August 2015.

[8] Lika Sajaia, Parliamentary Secretary at TI Georgia, interview with the IRM researcher, 26 August 2015.

[9] Sajaia, interview, August 2015.

18: Public awareness of the electoral process

Commitment Text:

In order to increase public participation in the electoral process and to raise awareness of involved parties, the Election Administration of Georgia (CEC) and LEPL Center of Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Trainings will organize various meetings for the electorate and other involved parties.

Lead Institution: Election Administration of Georgia (CEC), Training Center

Supporting Institutions: Election Administration of Georgia and all interested public agencies, local and international CSOs

Start Date: September 2014   **End Date**: October 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
18. Electoral process awareness			✔		✔	✔					✔				✔	

Editorial note: Under the old criteria of starred commitments, this commitment would have received a star because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has moderate potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented (note that IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015).

What happened?

To better inform citizens about the electoral process, the Election Administration of Georgia (CEC) committed to implement a number of awareness-raising activities, most of which have been completed. First, the CEC concluded memos with 19 major universities across Georgia to make a course on electoral law part of their curriculum. CEC Training Center staff conducts the lectures. Student attendance is very high, and students provide largely positive feedback on the course. As part of this project, in April 2015, the CEC Training Center created a legal clinic for students. In the clinic, students hold thematic debates on election issues such as voting age and gender quotas.[12]

Second, in cooperation with Social Service Agency and SOS Children's Villages, the CEC conducted a two-week long course on elections for a total of 70 homeless orphans in Tbilisi and Kutaisi, including first time voters reaching the age of 18.[3] In addition, on 13 July 2015, the CEC started implementing the project Electoral Development Schools for youth aged 17 to 25 in 10 election districts of Georgia. The Council of Europe and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded the program, while International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) are implementing partners.[4] IFES created a promotional ad on the electoral schools. This ad aired on regional TV stations prior to the launch of the project and attracted many to apply.[5] The CEC received 923 applications, of which they accepted 550. The first participant feedback on this course was very positive, according to the CEC Chairperson.[6]

Finally, the CEC announced two calls for grant competitions during the implementation of the second national action plan. The first one was announced in March 2015 and focused on four main priorities: (1) voter education; (2) women's political participation; (3) strengthening election capacity of political parties, especially at the regional level; and (4) helping ethnic minorities participate in policymaking.[7] The CEC received more than 75 applications for this call and provided funding in the amount of GEL 1.3 million to 25 local CSOs.[8] The selection commission in charge of reviewing applications consists of well-known international organizations such as USAID, IFES, OSCE, CoE, and others.[9] In addition, in July 2015, the CEC announced a second grant call focused on two priorities: (1) informing voters about the October 2015 by-elections for Members of Parliament and (2) assisting vulnerable groups in districts of October 2015 by-elections to participate in the election process.[10]

Did it matter?

This commitment aims to raise citizen awareness of the elections and to involve them actively in the electoral process, which is highly relevant in the OGP context. However, given that the activities conducted so far have been limited to youth groups, the commitment impact is assessed as moderate.

Stakeholders partnering with the Election Administration of Georgia (CEC) on youth projects had positive views on the efforts undertaken. As the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) representative noted, the Electoral Development Schools project turned out to be a real success. Within this project, GYLA was responsible for conducting information campaign prior to its launch. The organization also committed to deliver a module on local observer organizations, to organize debates around important election issues, and to produce a promotional video. Given the exceptionally high interest, the project partners plan to conduct another series of election schools in the fall of 2015.[11] Both the CEC and the GYLA representatives stressed that these schools contribute significantly to promoting elections among the youth and to developing a pool of election specialists for relevant election monitoring organizations. Therefore, they plan to make it a permanent undertaking to be conducted on an annual or biannual basis.

According to stakeholders, it is important that the topic of elections not lose relevance after the conduct of elections. That many citizens become disinterested beyond the election period might be conditioned by the fact that they do not receive election education in schools.[12] Therefore, to make the youth awareness-raising projects sustainable, with support of the Ministry of Education and Science, the CEC is going to introduce the election course on a permanent basis in the final grade of secondary high school education. In addition, the CEC plans to create a Facebook page for Electoral Development Schools and a database of all participants, which will serve as a useful resource for all parties involved in the election process.[13]

Moving forward

The IRM researcher recommends the Election Administration of Georgia (CEC) move ahead with expanding its election awareness-raising activities to other groups of people not directly involved in the electoral process and to people who have limited access to information compared to other groups. This especially concerns ethnic minorities in Georgia's Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions, most of whom do not speak the official state language and hence are not able to benefit from the CEC's ongoing activities.

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[1] Tamar Zhvania, Chairperson of the Election Administration of Georgia (CEC), interview with the IRM researcher, 23 July 2015.

2 "Legal Clinics," CEC, http://bit.ly/1kdd7fg

3 Zhvania, interview, July 2015.

4 CEC, "Training of Trainers for the CEC Electoral Development Schools," Press Release, 2 July 2015, http://bit.ly/1JkCtxW

5 Keti Maisuradze, Deputy Chief of Party of International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) Georgia, interview with the IRM researcher, 30 July 2015.

6 Zhvania, interview, July 2015.

7 "Information on the Grant Competition," CEC, 24 March 2015, http://bit.ly/1JnM4WW

8 "Grant Competition Results," CEC, http://bit.ly/1JzyyRf

9 "Information on the Grant Selection Commission," CEC, 23 April 2015, http://bit.ly/1EkltLf

10 "Information on the Grant Competition," CEC, 21 July 2015, http://bit.ly/1IiWtzg

11 Irma Pavliashvili, Election Projects Lawyer at Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, interview with the IRM researcher, 24 July 2015.

12 Maisuradze, interview, July 2015.

13 Zhvania, interview, July 2015.

19: Transparency of budgetary processes

Commitment Text:

The public is informed about budget process through various presentations as well as publication of the relevant documents online. However, there is no formal mechanism for managing these processes.

With coordination with the Ministry of Finance of Georgia and based on the recommendation of international and civil society organizations, list of specific actions and the scheme for disseminating information of budgetary processes was elaborated and ensuring civil society involvement in the budgetary process.

Lead Institution: Ministry of Finance

Supporting Institutions: Parliament of Georgia; International Organizations, Forum member CSOs

Start Date: July 2014   **End Date**: December 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
19. Transparency of budgetary processes			✔		✔	✔					✔					✔

Editorial note: Under the old criteria of starred commitments, this commitment would have received a star because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has moderate potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented (note that IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015).

What happened?

To open the budgetary process, Ministry of Finance (MoF) committed to publish the key budget documents with the informative presentations and to create an online survey for soliciting public feedback. In June 2014, the MoF redesigned an online survey on its website to allow citizens to plan better their budgetary priorities across different sectors for the year of 2016. As of August 2015, 4,157 citizens participated in this survey and prioritized education, science, social, and healthcare programs.[1] Moreover, in 2015, the MoF published a Citizens Budget, a shorter and less technical version of the enacted state budget, in a more accessible format. This included informative tables and charts summarizing the key data from the budget.[2]

Did it matter?

This commitment has high relevance for OGP because citizens worldwide would like to know how their governments spend public funds and what mechanisms allow for participating in budget drafting, monitoring, and execution processes. In Georgia, stakeholders acknowledged that the Ministry of Finance (MoF) is consistent in publishing the key budget documents in a comprehensive manner. The latest 2015 Open Budget Index results confirmed this. According to the Index, Georgia provides its

citizens with substantial budget information. The country's score of 66 out of 100 in this survey is substantially higher than the global average score of 45.[3] However, the same survey indicated that the Georgian government provides limited opportunities for the public to engage in budget processes.[4] This leads the IRM researcher to assess the commitment impact as moderate.

Further, stakeholders noted that the government's budget documents, including the modified Citizens Budget, are not written in simple language, making it difficult for citizens to comprehend the data provided. At the same time, a pile of PDF files published in separate chapters on the MoF's website represents a challenging task for the users to find specific data.[5]

Regarding the online survey, the MoF representative admitted that the number of participants is not high. That might be conditioned by two factors: (1) people are more interested in local government budgets that have more direct effects on their lives than the national budget, and (2) the MoF has not conducted any public relations campaign to raise public awareness about the survey.[6]

Moving forward

Stakeholders suggested the Ministry of Finance (MoF) tailor the expenditure programs to the public needs by proactively reaching out to citizens, involving them more meaningfully in the discussions, and reflecting their feedback in the final decisions on key priorities.[7] In addition, the MoF should publish the budget documents in an open data format to allow users to filter the data and search for keywords when looking for specific information.[8] To address the challenges identified above, the MoF plans to develop detailed legal procedures for increasing public participation in budgetary processes and to launch a comprehensive public relations campaign on this.[9]

While the provided budget documentation is comprehensive, the IRM researcher recommends complementing it with the following information: impact analysis of possible changes in different macroeconomic assumptions, such as the GDP growth and the inflation rate, on the budget expenditures, revenues, and debt. This is especially relevant in the context of the recent currency crisis in Georgia.[10]

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[1] "Online Survey," MoF, http://survey.mof.ge/
[2] "2015 Citizens Budget," MoF, http://bit.ly/1PVR3QR
[3] TI Georgia, "Open Budget Survey 2015: Georgia Scores 66," Blog, 9 September 2015, http://bit.ly/1RCNcsn
[4] "Open Budget Survey 2015: Georgia Scores 66," http://bit.ly/1RCNcsn
[5] Nino Evgenidze, Executive Director of Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC), and Givi Chanukvadze, Senior Program Manager of EPRC, interview with the IRM researcher, 4 August 2015.
[6] Ekaterine Guntsadze, Head of Budget Department of MoF, interview with the IRM researcher, 7 August 2015.
[7] Mikheil Kukava, Senior Analyst at TI Georgia, interview with the IRM researcher, 20 July 2015.
[8] Evgenidze and Chanukvadze, interview, August 2015.
[9] Guntsadze, interview, August 2015.
[10] "GEL Continues to Slide," Civil.ge, 25 August 2015, http://bit.ly/1i4fr7H

20: Electronic system of procurement

Commitment Text:

In order to ensure greater transparency of state procurement, the State Procurement Agency (SPA) in the framework of this commitment will expand the Unified Electronic System of State Procurement (Ge-GP) and integrate electronic module of contest into the system.

According to the current rule, a contest representing an alternative method of state procurement of design services is announced via the official web page of the SPA. Conducting the Contest process is not fully electronic as it is in case of tenders. The contest is held in the procuring entity, while the related documentation is sent to the SPA and published on its official web-page.

Current method does not provide necessary level of transparency and publicity as it is the case with tenders. Procuring entity has wide discretion and autonomy and the decisions of the committee, which is making decisions on contests, are not appealable to the Dispute Resolution Board (DRB).

Implantation of e-Contest system will enable suppliers to participate in the contest through Ge-GP in the same way as in case of tenders. Implementation of e-Contest system will remove geographical obstacles and simplify procedure for participation in contest. Decisions of the committee will be appealable to the DRB, which will ensure that the suppliers' rights are effectively protected. Incorporation of e-Contests in the system will make contest procedures more transparent which directly responding to Open Governing Partnership principles and will ensure efficiency of public spending.

Lead Institution: State Procurement Agency

Supporting Institutions: None specified

Start Date: June 2014 **End Date**: May 2015

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP value relevance				Potential impact				Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to information	Civic participation	Public accountability	Tech. and innov. for transparency and accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative	Not started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
20. Electronic system of procurement				✔	✔		✔				✔					✔

Editorial note: Under the old criteria of starred commitments, this commitment would have received a star because it is clearly relevant to OGP values as written, has moderate potential impact, and has been substantially or completely implemented (note that IRM updated the star criteria in early 2015).

What happened?

The main objective of this commitment was to improve the existing e-procurement system through the new module of an e-Contest used for purchasing design, architectural, and engineering services.[1] According to the Order of Head of the State Procurement Agency (SPA), the SPA launched a pilot version of e-Contest, in May 2015. A pilot of the full system was launched on 1 July 2015.[2] As of August 2015, there were a total of 12 contests announced through the new module.[3]

A major novelty is that all contest procedures, including selection and assessment of submitted bids and the final decision on the contract grant to the winning company, are conducted electronically. The new system also envisages assessing the price and the quality of bids at the same time and determining the winning bid automatically.[4] The SPA developed a special matrix allowing the procuring entities to include a set of criteria against which they will evaluate the quality of the bids and assign scores to the bidders. Following this process, the matrix automatically aggregates the total quality score with the price and other quantifiable criteria indicated by the candidates in their application. The candidates are ranked automatically and the procuring entity has to select the one that ranks first based on the final scores. The procuring entities prioritize the bidders' experience, expertise, and the quality of the completed works when assessing their bids.[5] Importantly, the e-Contest module allows bidders to file a complaint to the SPA's Dispute Resolution Board if they think they were disqualified unfairly.[6] No complaints were received as of August 2015.[7]

The SPA conducted public consultations in different cities to inform relevant stakeholders, including the procuring entities and the private companies, on how the e-Contest would work in practice.[8] In addition, the agency developed a special manual and published it on its website.[9]

Did it matter?

Transparency of the public procurement process is vital for preventing corruption in government and in the private sector. Stakeholders stated the new e-Contest module is a useful monitoring tool for increasing transparency and impartiality of the public procurement bidding process.[10] However, they stressed that it is not meant to address the vagueness of exemptions, through which the government simplifies tendering under the pretext of urgent need and public necessity.[11] The exemptions allow the procuring entities to grant contracts worth millions to the favored suppliers, while bypassing the e-procurement system, thus limiting competition and creating a risk for corruption.[12] At the same time, the contest is the least used procurement method and, therefore, far less competitive than electronic tenders. According to Transparency International Georgia, only 1,280 contracts worth GEL 31.4 million were signed through contests from 2011 through June 2015.[13] In contrast, a total of 42,404 contracts worth GEL 3.1 billion were signed through electronic tenders in one year, from 2013 to 2014.[14] This huge discrepancy is conditioned by the facts that, first, contests are used to purchase design and architectural services, which are not in high demand and, second, only a few companies on the Georgian market can provide such services. Thus, the impact of this OGP commitment on creating a new e-Contest module has been assessed as moderate.

Moving forward

As the State Procurement Agency (SPA) representative noted, the agency's only recommendation on the e-Contest is for the procuring entities to come up with clearer criteria for assessing the quality of the bids.[15]

However, the European Union (EU) recommended resolving issues with the simplified tendering by requiring public agencies to notify the SPA about their plan to proceed with such tenders and to seek the SPA's independent approval, while also considering the dissenting views.[16] In response, the Parliament started discussions on the new amendment, which would oblige procuring agencies to notify publicly and to seek the consent of the SPA before proceeding with the simplified tendering.[17] On the e-procurement website, all interested parties will be able to express their views on the necessity of allowing such tenders. Based on the feedback received, the SPA will make the final decision whether to accept or deny the procurers' requests on the simplified tendering.[18]

According to stakeholders, the SPA should create an effective monitoring system for reviewing the tenders to be processed under the simplified procedures. A related suggestion is to limit the number of exemptions from the e-procurement and clearly define what is meant by urgent need and public necessity.[19] This should ensure that agencies such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defense publish important public tenders. Finally, the users of the e-procurement platform should be able to receive automatic e-mail notifications on tenders of their interest.[20]

[1] "E-contest Module," State Procurement Agency (SPA), http://bit.ly/1JBkNSe
[2] Head of SPA, "Order No. 7," 22 May 2015, http://bit.ly/1Eoj0zS
[3] SPA, *Self-assessment Report*, 2015.
[4] *Self-assessment Report*, 2015.
[5] Manana Shurghulaia, Head of Foreign Relations Department at State Procurement Agency, interview with the IRM researcher, 31 July 2015.
[6] Self-assessment Report, 2015.
[7] Shurghulaia, interview, July 2015.
[8] Shurghulaia, interview, July 2015.
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V. Process: Self-assessment

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) published the first draft of the government self-assessment report on 23 September 2015.[1] On that date, the MoJ sent an email to the OGP Forum members, including the IRM researcher, informing them about the publication of the draft and inviting them to meet to discuss its content. In addition, the Ministry provided five days for public comments that were supposed to be sent to the following email address ogpgeorgia@justice.gov.ge by 28 September 2015.

A special Forum meeting took place on 24 September 2015. While the IRM researcher was not able to attend this meeting, he interviewed some of the participants from Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia) and Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) by phone.[2] According to the information received from these CSO representatives, the responsible agencies updated the Forum members on the progress of each commitment in the national action plan. CSO representatives provided feedback, which mostly concerned the level of completion of the commitments. The MoJ pledged to incorporate the CSO feedback into the final report. Yet, no new update was published before 30 September 2015, a due date for the submission of the government self-assessment report to the OGP.

Self-assessment checklist

Was the annual progress report published?	Yes
Was it done according to schedule?	Yes
Is the report available in the administrative language(s)?	Yes
Is the report available in English?	No
Did the government provide a two-week public comment period on draft self-assessment reports?	No
Were any public comments received?	Yes
Is the report deposited in the OGP portal?	No
Did the self-assessment report include review of consultation efforts during Action Plan development?	No
Did the self-assessment report include review of consultation efforts during Action Plan implementation?	No
Did the self-assessment report include a description of the public comment period during the development of the self-assessment?	No
Did the report cover all of the commitments?	Yes
Did it assess completion of each commitment according to the timeline	Yes

and milestones in the action plan?	
Did the report respond to the IRM key recommendations (2015+ only)?	No

Summary of additional information

The published draft includes tables from the action plan containing the information about all 29 commitments, responsible agencies, timeline, assessment indicators, and the level of their completion. However, the draft contains no review of the government's consultation efforts during the development and implementation of the second national action plan. Nor does it contain an account concerning the number and content of comments received from the general public, as required by the OGP.

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VI. Country context

Georgia's democratic development during the first 12 years of its independence from the Soviet Union was marred by two separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the civil war in early 1990s. In 2003, following the Rose Revolution and the coming into power of Mikheil Saakashvili and his United National Movement (UNM) party, the new government embarked on a path of reforms aimed at fighting corruption and building a strong economy and public administration.

While achieving notable progress in this direction, the UNM government consolidated power in the hands of the President and the Executive, thus limiting the independence of the Parliament and the Judiciary. Consolidated power created challenges in protecting transparency, accountability, human rights, and media and business freedoms. The situation was further exacerbated by Georgia's 2008 war with Russia, resulting in Russia's recognition of breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

The growing resentment towards Saakashvili's Government served as a catalyst for the opposition Georgian Dream (GD) coalition, led by the billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, to beat the UNM in the 2012 parliamentary elections, thus marking Georgia's first peaceful transfer of power in the post-Soviet era. The October 2013 constitutional amendments shifted the power from the President, currently Giorgi Margvelashvili, to the Prime Minister and the Parliament. A month later, Bidzina Ivanishvili resigned from his post of the Prime Minister and was replaced by his close ally Irakli Gharibashvili.

The GD government implemented a series of reforms to strengthen judicial and media independence and to improve healthcare and labor standards in the country. However, it also adopted a controversial amnesty law which added an "arbitrary list of individuals convicted on widely varied legal grounds to a general amnesty" (as stated in the law) that were detained during the UNM's rule.[1] Another controversy arose over the arrests of the former high-ranking officials of the UNM government who were charged for corruption and abuse of power. While some thought that these arrests have served the so-called "restoration of justice" and the rule of law, others criticized them for being politically motivated.[2]

Political debates during the first year of the action plan implementation often have featured conversations on reforming the country's electoral system. Georgia has a mixed system of elections combining the party list proportional and the majoritarian voting systems. In practice, this means that 77 of the country's 150 Members of Parliament (MP) are elected through the proportional system, and 73 are elected through the majoritarian systems. Proportional mandates are distributed among political parties or blocs that gain at least five percent of votes in the elections. Majoritarian mandates are distributed among candidates who receive the most number of votes in a single district, but no less than 30 percent.[3] However, the challenge is that the current majoritarian system does not equally represent voters across the country. For instance, Kutaisi, an election district of over more than 150,000 registered voters, as well as voters is represented by one majoritarian member in Parliament. Kazbegi, an election district with a little more than 5,000 registered voters equally too is represented by one majoritarian member in Parliament. This huge discrepancy between the sizes of election districts results in situations where the number of votes a party receives in the elections and the number of parliamentary mandates awarded are not proportional.[4]

Among numerous proposals to reform the current system, the one proposed by a group of eight opposition parties in 2010 has received the most attention and continues to be

debated during the period covered by this report. According to this proposal, the majoritarian system envisaging a winner-takes-all model in Georgia's 73 single-mandate constituencies should be replaced with a regional-proportional or a party bloc system in multi-mandate constituencies. Under the proposal, the total number of election districts would be reduced. The small districts that have similar histories and geographies would merge together, while the largest districts would elect multiple MPs. The authors of the proposal believe that such a new arrangement also would resolve the voter inequality issue.[5] This proposal has received support from a group of leading CSOs working in the field, including Transparency International Georgia, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) and International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED).[6] However, this has not yet been translated into a change in legislation.

During the midterm assessment, a number of other important developments occurred in Georgia that are not captured in the national action plan commitments, but that have significant impact on OGP values and the country's participation in OGP.

Most importantly, in April 2015, Parliament signed the Declaration on Parliamentary Openness; and, in July 2015, it adopted an Open Parliament Action Plan for 2015-2016.[7] Parliament's Inter-Factional Group developed this action plan. The Group consisted of 11 MPs with active support of local civil society organizations (CSOs) and international donors such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).[8] The action plan includes 18 commitments structured around the core OGP values of citizen participation, access to information, technology and innovation for transparency and accountability, and public accountability.[9] In addition, in September 2015, the Parliament, in cooperation with the key local stakeholders, hosted a high-level international meeting of OGP's Legislative Openness Working Group. During this meeting, participants from more than 32 countries discussed the action plans adopted by their respective governments. They also exchanged information about new mechanisms of transparency and accountability, as well as about challenges concerning their implementation.[10]

Georgia hosted a preceding high-level OGP European Regional Conference in June 2015.[11]

An important milestone for public accountability occurred in February 2014 when the Parliament adopted a new Local Self-Government Code. The Code showed a marked improvement from the previous legislation by advancing decentralization in Georgia. The Code includes provisions to empower local self-government units, especially directly elected representative bodies, and to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in local decision making. Most notably, the Code enabled a total of 71 municipalities in Georgia, including 12 self-governing cities and 59 self-governing communities to elect directly the heads of the local executive branch (Mayors and Gamgebelis) and local council (Sakrebulo) members.[12] As a result, the June 2014 local elections, conducted under the new legislation, significantly increased representativeness of both the Mayor's Office/Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, Georgia's two principal institutions in charge of governance at the local level. Besides these institutions, the Code has also allowed local residents to form General Assemblies and Citizen Advisory Councils to assist local governments in identifying and resolving issues of local concern and to send them electronic petitions on those issues.[13]

In 2014-2015, CSOs continued to be active in pursuing their advocacy campaigns to increase government accountability and to ensure better protection of human rights in Georgia. This Affects You Too is the most prominent civic campaign. The first phase of this campaign, launched in February 2012, was successful in making the government revoke controversial restrictions on citizens' political activity and on freedom of

expression in the context of elections and party financing.[14] During the second phase, launched in March 2014, the This Affects You Too campaign focused on limiting and conducting effective oversight of the government's ubiquitous surveillance over its citizens.[15] Unlike in the first phase, the campaign failed to achieve its main goal of depriving the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of direct access to telecom operators' networks. However, notable progress still has been made. Specifically, in August 2014, the Parliament adopted new amendments to the Criminal Procedures Code. According to these amendments, law enforcement agencies have to provide higher standards of justification to obtain court warrant on surveillance and are under the expanded monitoring of Personal Data Protection Inspector. The Personal Data Protection Inspector has to authorize electronically law enforcement agencies' interception of personal communications once there is a relevant court warrant.[16] While considering these amendments as insufficient, participants of the This Affects You Too campaign plan to continue their advocacy efforts for tighter limitations on the government surveillance.[17]

In 2014, the government filled some legislative gaps in whistleblower protection by introducing a number of amendments to the Law on the Conflict of Interest and Corruption in Public Service. First, the new amendments defined whistleblowing not only as an act against already-committed violations in public service, but also against potential violations. Second, a whistleblower filing a report against such violations is presumed to be honest until proven otherwise. Third, a whistleblower can file a report not only to the supervisor (former supervisor) but also to the external entities, including law enforcement agencies and the public defender. Two months later, the whistleblower can also inform the media and CSOs. Fourth, the amended law extended the scope of protection to the relatives of whistleblowers. Finally, it has ensured anonymity of whistleblowers, unless they wish otherwise.[18] It is noteworthy that these new provisions have never been applied in practice by the government or by the whistleblowers.[19]

While commending Georgia's improved standards of whistleblower protection, local CSOs provided the government with recommendations for further improvement. Among other issues, the CSOs outlined the need to adopt a freestanding law on whistleblower protection, rather than relevant provisions incorporated in other laws, such as the Law on Public Service and the Law on Conflict of Interest and Corruption in Public Service. CSOs recommended that the law apply to private contractors and the private sector, in general. CSOs also recommended providing whistleblowers with adequate compensation in case of threats or reprisals following the act of disclosure, and allowing them to inform the media and CSOs with no restriction, such as the two–month silence period.[20]

On a more negative note, in July 2015, the Parliament amended the Law on State Secrets to allow the government to expand the range of legal acts classified as secret, as well as to limit further public access to classified information and chances to declassify such information.[21] A group of leading CSOs published a critical statement about this and outlined a number of key challenges: first, the amended law does not define the public interest test, according to which the information should be disclosed if it is of high value to the public. Second, it does not clearly define the harm that could be inflicted on the state by disclosing the classified information. Third, the law assigns the main role in protecting the state secret to the State Security Service (SSS), a newly created security and intelligence agency as a result of its decoupling from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) in July 2015.[22] The CSOs think that, despite this institutional change, a problem remains in that the SSS has weak external oversight and, at the pretext of guarding state interests, the SSS might use this new authority to collect personal information without a

necessary court order.[23] Finally, the law does not establish an independent oversight body or guarantee for the protection of whistleblowers.[24]

Stakeholder priorities

Stakeholders continue to prioritize increasing public participation in decision making and publishing more information in an easily accessible way. Therefore, they considered a new electronic petitions portal, Ichange.gov.ge, and a feedback mechanism for public services, Voice of the Consumer, as the most important initiatives with potentially transformative impact on the lives of the citizens. The government's future work should focus mainly on getting the Ichange.gov.ge portal up and running and promoting it to all citizens across the country because that is the best way of involving the public in decision making. In addition, stakeholders think the government should carry forward with the implementation of open data commitments pertaining to publishing more information on data.gov.ge, especially crime statistics, salaries and allowances of public officials, and budgetary information.

Given that all principal institutions at the national level in Georgia, to varying degrees, participate in OGP, stakeholders believe that local governments should follow the pattern. This is especially relevant because all of Georgia's local level executives and legislatures are elected directly by the people. Therefore, they should take on commitments in the next national action plan to address challenges related to the lack of access to information, especially on staff recruitment procedures and on public participation in local decision making.

Stakeholders also believe that to increase the integrity of the public sector the Georgian Government should establish clear practical mechanisms of whistleblower protection, as part of the next national action plan commitments. This would encourage both the whistleblowers and the government to apply currently inactive provisions in the Law on Conflict of Interest and Corruption in Public Service in practice and to help uncover corruption cases that otherwise can be extremely difficult to detect.

Finally, according to stakeholders, the next action plan should move beyond the existing areas of focus and cover a diverse range of topics in other important sectors for the society, such as labor, healthcare, agriculture, environment, natural resources, energy, and culture.

Scope of action plan in relation to national context

Georgia's 2014-2016 national action plan shows marked improvement from the previous action plan in terms of including more OGP-relevant commitments and milestones for measuring the progress in the implementation. Commitments aimed to develop open data and to create mechanisms for public participation in government decision making are of particular importance in the OGP context. However, more than one-third of commitments are on improving the delivery of public services and internal government systems that are not linked to the OGP values of transparency, accountability, and civic participation. While avoiding such commitments, the next national action plan should focus instead on institutionalizing collaboration between the government and the citizens and on raising the integrity of public officials. This is particularly relevant at the local level, where government policies have more direct effect on citizens' lives and where public accountability mechanisms are lacking or non-existent.

At the same time, given civil society's high demand on limiting the surveillance powers of law enforcement agencies, the government should commit to undertaking more vigorous independent oversight of this area. In line with the stakeholder priorities, the government also should consider expanding OGP to cover the activities in the field of

energy, natural resource extraction, and the cultural heritage preservation. This is especially relevant in the context of the huge public outcry in 2014 over the government's decision to allow gold mining operations in Sakdrisi, located in the Bolnisi municipality, which resulted in severe damage to a cultural heritage site.[2526] Another public controversy was triggered by the government's plan to construct a Khudoni hydropower plant in Georgia's mountainous region of Svaneti. Civil society and local communities in particular are highly concerned about the ensuing displacement of the indigenous population, as well as the negative effect of a new hydropower plant on the local climate and cultural sites. Lack of information about the construction project, including choosing the implementing company and the potential benefits, is another source of public discontent.[27]

These two cases suggest that the government should use OGP as a means to shed more light on the activities in the fields of energy and natural resources. That would help dissipate public concerns about opacity and arbitrariness of the decisions.

VII. General recommendations

New strategy vision on OGP

Although there is now a higher degree of stakeholder participation in OGP in Georgia under the second national action plan, ordinary citizens still lack the knowledge and ownership of commitments undertaken by the government. The national OGP process continues to be led by a group of the few "usual suspects" based in the capital Tbilisi, while the international high-level conferences hosted by the country are more like elitist events than citizen-driven forums for dialogue. Against this backdrop, the government should come up with a long-term strategy and policy vision on the OGP. Instead of increasing the number of commitments, the major focus should be on making the national action plan commitments relevant to the OGP values.

In more practical terms, the government should proactively, and through multiple channels, reach out to citizens and inform them in simple language about how open data and other national action plan commitments can impact their lives. For instance, helping people understand how Ichange.gov.ge works in practice is one good way to promote OGP at the grassroots level. At the same time, CSOs and donors should work on building the capacity of local journalists, civic activists, and community leaders, to use the OGP as a platform for better advocacy and monitoring of government policies.

Sustainable leadership involvement in OGP

To make OGP a national priority, it is crucial that the Prime Minister set the tone as a supreme executive. The Prime Minister has the capacity to encourage sustainable direct involvement of other high-ranking officials in the implementation process beyond the ad hoc international conferences and roundtables. Ministerial representation in the OGP Forum meetings should not be limited to mid-level managers of a few agencies. At the least, Deputy Ministers from more diverse sectors than the currently selected representatives should start participating in the OGP process. The same holds true for CSOs, which are mostly organizations working on transparency and accountability issues. There are no sectoral NGOs involved. The Forum meetings and the OGP in general would also benefit from the participation of academics. The input of academics would be especially useful in identifying issues and ways for addressing these issues. The government should consult more with businesses on some of the OGP commitments that might, for example, envisage the creation of software or mobile applications for public consumption.

More bottom-up commitments and participation of local actors

All stakeholders noted that the development of the current national action plan was far ahead of the previous in terms of the scale of public consultations conducted. The government should sustain this practice and generate more bottom-up commitments, such as the Voice of the Consumer. It should involve more CSOs in the process, make commitments easily understandable to people, and tailored to their needs. For instance, the next action plan may want to avoid commitments that focus on improving internal government processes that do not involve citizens directly.[28] Commitments should connect the government more directly with citizens and should hold public officials to account more closely on their actions, especially at the local government level. Creating institutionalized mechanisms for consultation and feedback on the local budget, increasing the transparency of local staff recruitment process, adopting binding Codes of Ethics for local elected officials, and establishing robust practical mechanisms for whistleblower protection are a few commitments that might be considered for the inclusion in the next action plan.

Georgia is shaping up to be a global OGP leader, which was illustrated by the successful hosting of the two OGP high-level conferences in 2015. Furthermore, the Parliament's adoption of the Open Parliament Action Plan is indicative that the country is looking at OGP as something more than just an executive commitment. To sustain this trend, the government should make OGP a national priority across all branches and should expand it to the local government level as well.[29]

Top SMART recommendations

Beginning in 2014, all OGP IRM reports should include five key recommendations about the next OGP action planning cycle. Governments participating in OGP will be required to respond to these key recommendations in their annual self-assessment reports.

TOP FIVE 'SMART' RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Develop a government strategy and a policy vision on OGP to make it a nationwide project with the direct impact on citizens' lives.
2. Involve high-level decision makers in the work of the OGP Forum to raise the responsibility of relevant agencies in charge of specific OGP commitments.
3. Include more bottom-up commitments in the next national action plan so that the citizens feel the ownership over their implementation.
4. Involve local governments as responsible agencies for future OGP commitments to contribute to opening policymaking at the local level and to the empowerment and sustainable development of local communities.
5. Make it a binding obligation for all public agencies to publish data on data.gov.ge so that this portal becomes a primary source of reference for receiving government data that is open, automated, and updated.

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VIII. Methodology and sources

As a complement to the government's self-assessment report, well-respected governance researchers, preferably from each OGP-participating country, write an independent IRM assessment report.

These experts use a common OGP independent report questionnaire and guidelines,[1] based on a combination of interviews with local OGP stakeholders, as well as desk-based analysis. This report is shared with a small International Expert Panel (appointed by the OGP Steering Committee) for peer review to ensure that the highest standards of research and due diligence have been applied.

Analysis of progress on OGP action plans is a combination of interviews, desk research, and feedback from nongovernmental stakeholder meetings. The IRM report builds on the findings of the government's self-assessment report and any other assessments of progress from civil society, the private sector, or international organizations.

Each local researcher carries out stakeholder meetings to ensure an accurate portrayal of events. Given budgetary and calendar constraints, the IRM cannot consult all interested or affected parties. Consequently, the IRM strives for methodological transparency, and when possible, makes public the process of stakeholder engagement in research (detailed later in this section). In national contexts where anonymity of informants—governmental or nongovernmental—is required, the IRM reserves the ability to protect the anonymity of informants. Additionally, because of the necessary limitations of the method, the IRM strongly encourages commentary on public drafts of each national document.

Interviews and focus groups

Each national researcher will carry out at least one public information-gathering event. Care should be taken in inviting stakeholders outside of the "usual suspects" list of invitees already participating in existing processes. Supplementary means may be needed to gather the inputs of stakeholders in a more meaningful way (e.g. online surveys, written responses, follow-up interviews). Additionally, researchers perform specific interviews with responsible agencies when the commitments require more information than provided in the self-assessment or accessible online.

In Georgia, the IRM researcher interviewed a total of 52 stakeholders, including representatives of all public agencies responsible for the national action plan commitments, key actors from the civil society, media, and international donor organizations as well as the direct beneficiaries. Specifically, in the period between 14 July and 2 October 2015, the IRM researcher conducted in-person meetings and phone calls with 24 officials of 16 public agencies, 21 representatives of 13 civil society and donor organizations and two direct beneficiaries of the commitments for people with special needs.

In addition, the IRM researcher organized a focus group discussion with journalists. This discussion was held on 28 July 2015 at the premises of JumpStart Georgia and attended by three journalists, while two were interviewed by phone. The journalists came from different media outlets and organizations operating both in the capital and in the regions. These included Interpressews, Kakheti Information Center, Batumelebi, Media Checker, and JumpStart Georgia. During the meeting, the IRM researcher went through all commitments of the national action plan and asked the participants to provide their feedback. A special focus was given to questions as to what extent the journalists are using the new mechanisms and tools created under the national action

plan, how relevant they are for OGP, and what recommendations they have for improvement.

All stakeholders interviewed were eager and open to provide their feedback and agreed to disclose their names for the report. Following the interviews, some of the stakeholders emailed additional useful materials to the IRM researcher.

About the Independent Reporting Mechanism

The IRM is a key means by which government, civil society, and the private sector can track government development and implementation of OGP action plans on a biannual basis. The design of research and quality control of such reports is carried out by the International Experts' Panel, comprised of experts in transparency, participation, accountability, and social science research methods.

The current membership of the International Experts' Panel is:

- Anuradha Joshi
- Debbie Budlender
- Ernesto Velasco-Sánchez
- Gerardo Munck
- Hazel Feigenblatt
- Hille Hinsberg
- Jonathan Fox
- Liliane Corrêa de Oliveira Klaus
- Rosemary McGee
- Yamini Aiyar

A small staff based in Washington, D.C. shepherds reports through the IRM process in close coordination with the researcher. Questions and comments about this report can be directed to the staff at irm@opengovpartnership.org.

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[1] Full research guidance can be found in the IRM Procedures Manual, available at http://www.opeCSOvpartnership.org/about/about-irm.

IX. Eligibility requirements annex

In September 2012, OGP decided to begin strongly encouraging participating governments to adopt ambitious commitments in relation to their performance in the OGP eligibility criteria.

The OGP Support Unit collates eligibility criteria on an annual basis. These scores are presented below.[1] When appropriate, the IRM reports will discuss the context surrounding progress or regress on specific criteria in the section on country context.

Eligibility Requirements: To participate in OGP, governments must demonstrate commitment to open government by meeting minimum criteria on key dimensions of open government. Third-party indicators are used to determine country progress on each of the dimensions. For more information, visit http://www.opengovpartnership.org/how-it-works/eligibility-criteria.				
	2011	**Current**	**Change**	**Explanation**
Budget transparency[2]	4	4	No change	4 = Executive's Budget Proposal and Audit Report published 2 = One of two published 0 = Neither published
Access to information[3]	4	4	No change	4 = Access to information (ATI) Law 3 = Constitutional ATI provision 1 = Draft ATI law 0 = No ATI law
Asset Declaration[4]	4	4	No change	4 = Asset disclosure law, data public 2 = Asset disclosure law, no public data 0 = No law
Citizen Engagement (Raw score)	3 (6.18)[5]	3 (5.88)[6]	No change	*EIU Citizen Engagement Index* raw score: 1 > 0 2 > 2.5 3 > 5 4 > 7.5
Total / Possible (Percent)	15/16 (94%)	15/16 (94%)	No change	75% of possible points to be eligible

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[1] For more information, see http://www.opengovpartnership.org/how-it-works/eligibility-criteria.

[2] For more information, see Table 1 in http://internationalbudget.org/what-we-do/open-budget-survey/. For up-to-date assessments, see http://www.obstracker.org/.

[3] The two databases used are Constitutional Provisions at http://www.right2info.org/constitutional-protections and Laws and Draft Laws http://www.right2info.org/access-to-information-laws

[4] Simeon Djankov, Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, and Andrei Shleifer, "Disclosure by Politicians," (Tuck School of Business Working Paper 2009-60, 2009), http://bit.ly/19nDEfK; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Types of Information Decision Makers Are Required to Formally Disclose, and Level Of Transparency," in *Government at a Glance 2009*, (OECD, 2009), http://bit.ly/13vGtqS; Ricard Messick, "Income and Asset Disclosure by World Bank Client Countries" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2009), http://bit.ly/1cIokyf; For more recent information, see http://publicofficialsfinancialdisclosure.worldbank.org. In 2014, the OGP Steering Committee approved a change in the asset disclosure measurement. The existence of a law and de facto public access to the disclosed information replaced the old measures of disclosure by politicians and disclosure of high-level

officials. For additional information, see the guidance note on 2014 OGP Eligibility Requirements at http://bit.ly/1EjLJ4Y.

[5] Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2010: Democracy in Retreat" (London: Economist, 2010), http://bit.ly/eLC1rE

[6] Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2014: Democracy and its Discontents" (London: Economist, 2014), http://bit.ly/18kEzCt