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**Title: Elgeyo Marakwet County Government opens up to global scrutiny to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive and accountable governance.**

County:	Elgeyo Marakwet		
Sector/s:	Governance	Sub-sector/Theme:	Transparency & Accountability
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Target Audience:	County Stakeholders		
Authors (contacts and their institutions can be included as well)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vincent Bartoo, Director of Public Communication, Elgeyo Marakwet County, Contact;0721601304</li> <li>2. Ruth Kendagor, IRM Researcher for Elgeyo Marakwet County, Contact;0728551144</li> <li>3. OGP Website; <a href="http://www.opengovpartnership.org">www.opengovpartnership.org</a></li> </ol>		
Resource Persons (include their designations)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. John Maritim (Director Economic Planning and Budget &amp; OGP Focal Point Person, Elgeyo Marakwet County), Contact;0722425863</li> </ol>		

**Introduction (*Context and Challenge*):**



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In 2016, the County Government of Elgeyo Marakwet took the bold move to open up its governance for global scrutiny by voluntarily joining the world wide Open Governance Partnership (OGP) program, becoming the first County in Kenya and among three local governments in Africa to do so.

OGP is an organization of reformers inside and outside of government working to transform how governments around the world serve their citizens. In 2011, global government leaders and civil society advocates came together to create a unique partnership – one that combines these powerful forces to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive and accountable governance.

Before the advent of devolution, Government was largely a closed shop for many citizens, to the extent Kenyans had corrupted the *Kiswahili* name of Government from *Serikali*



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(Government) to *Sirikali* (top secret) owing to its lack of openness. It is this problem that the Elgeyo Marakwet County Government sought to address.

Among the notable achievements of the County Government that earned its inclusion into the OGP program was its enactment of a Public Participation Act in 2015 that gave its citizens an avenue to have their input included in the County Governance through open and structured public participation forums. The County also enacted a model Equitable Development Act (EDA) that devolves County resources equitably to its 20 wards and gives citizens the power to decide how the funds would be utilized every fiscal year.

In 2015, the County was also rated as among the least corrupt counties in Kenya in a survey conducted by the Ethics and Anti Corruption Commission (EACC) which mapped out corruption prone areas and unethical practices in counties. In 2016, it was chosen by EACC to host the North Rift region celebrations to mark the International Anti-Corruption Day.

**Implementation of the practice (*Solution Path*)** – Participation in OGP requires participating national and local governments to partner with citizens, civil society, media and other special interest groups to co-create innovative solutions aimed at improving service delivery to the public. That means opening up government to these stakeholders including budget making and implementation, procurement processes, audits among others, for them to help craft workable solutions to gaps that exist in Government to make it better responsive to the needs of citizens.

Despite initial resistance from insiders in Government, Elgeyo Marakwet took the nose dive into this new concept and agreed to the co-creation process.

The process resulted into commitments contained in Action Plans that the County Government and its stakeholders agreed to implement to re-engineer service delivery. The County has had two, four year, action plans since joining OGP in 2016. The County finalized its third action plan covering 2024 to 2027. While the first action plan focused on setting up systems to enable government work in a more transparent, accessible and accountable manner, the second plan contained specific, results oriented commitments that directly translates to improved service delivery.

The policy area focus of the second action plan incorporated the inclusion of marginalized groups, open contracting and health service delivery. The action plan features commitments related to transparent public procurement, expanding opportunities for civic participation, enhancing public healthcare service delivery, and access to relevant



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information as a basis for youth engagement and empowerment.

**Results of the practice (outputs and outcomes)**- The County increased and improved relations between the government and citizens, civil society organizations, media and development partners. The co-creation process brought together government, CSOs and other non-governmental stakeholders to design and implement commitments that put forward the interest of citizens. This has created a culture of engagement between the County and its stakeholders. For instance, a quarterly roundtable with the stakeholders was initiated, chaired by H.E the Governor, to track implementation progress of County projects and programs. In the meetings, CSOs present findings of social audits carried out on government funded projects and programs for discussion, resulting to either compliments towards government authorities or a demand for accountability. Equally, Elgeyo Marakwet has also made substantial achievements in widening spaces for more meaningful citizen engagement, ensuring that special interest groups such as women, youth and people living with disabilities have access to information, and that their voices are heard. One notable achievement at the local level of open government is the expanded two-way communication between government and citizens. Compared to the national government, the feedback process is shorter and less bureaucratic at the local level. Citizen voices are better heard and responded to by the County government. For instance, in its first action plan, Elgeyo Marakwet County started a direct, real time communication channel between government and citizens via its County website, SMS and Whatsapp channels. The County also designated communication lines where citizens are able to voice their concerns, file complaints/compliments without much trouble or delay, and receive rapid government response. Further, the County also published key budget documents on its website as part of its transparency efforts. In 2019, the International Budget Partnership (IBP), a body that tracks management of public money globally, ranked Elgeyo Marakwet as the top most County in Kenya with most budget documents available online that help citizens have a voice in budget decisions that impact their lives. In a bid to entrench transparency and accountability in the procurement processes, the County has also made effort to simplify procurement processes and documentation. The second action plan aims to move forward open contracting efforts by creating spaces for citizen feedback, as well as improving access to government procurement opportunities for special interest groups (women, youth and people living with disabilities). Similarly, the open data commitment in the



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County website strives to provide a framework for government to put together and disclose county specific data relating to development and service delivery indicators. This is geared towards improving the quality of information provided to the citizens and better their knowledge in planning and budgeting by the County government. Elgeyo Marakwet's OGP participation has been noted locally and internationally with the County attracting development support due to the openness in governance. For instance, the University of Miami in the United States sought to test the effectiveness of the County's citizen participation in development and funded 120 projects spread across the County's 20 electoral wards with each ward getting six projects that citizens chose for implementation through public participation. As a result of successes made by Elgeyo Marakwet in the OGP program, it was chosen to host the Africa OGP convention in 2018 where government and non-governmental representatives from Kaduna State in Nigeria, Kigoma Ujiji in Tanzania and Sekondi Takoradi in Ghana held a peer to peer learning convention in Iten town, Elgeyo Marakwet's County Headquarters. Kenya, through National Government, joined OGP in 2011, two years before counties came into existence in 2013. While the national government leads with five action plans, Elgeyo Marakwet as a sub national government follows closely with four action plans, leading other counties in its commitment to transparency and accountability. Elgeyo Marakwet County's participation in OGP as the first County in Kenya motivated other devolved units to join the partnership, which has gained popularity around the world particularly from citizens in participating countries who now feel included in the running of their governments, funded through their taxes. Other Kenyan counties that have joined OGP include Makueni, Machakos, Kakamega and Nandi, which are at various governance reform stages under OGP.

**Lessons learnt:**

Elgeyo Marakwet has seen the need to institutionalize the OGP reforms contained in the Action Plans for continuity and sustainability of the good governance practices, largely through policy formulation.

**Recommendations (Conclusion) –**

A forum bringing together OGP participating counties should be initiated jointly by the National Government and the Council of Governors (CoG) to create a community of practice, hold peer to peer engagement and amplify the importance of participation in OGP by all devolved units.



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**Further reading:**

[www.opengovpartnership.org/elgeyomarakwet](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/elgeyomarakwet)

[www.elgeyomarakwet.go.ke](http://www.elgeyomarakwet.go.ke)

[www.internationalbudget.org/elgeyomarakwet](http://www.internationalbudget.org/elgeyomarakwet).

[www.eacc.go.ke/National-Ethics-and-Corruption-Survey-2015-REPORT](http://www.eacc.go.ke/National-Ethics-and-Corruption-Survey-2015-REPORT)