Creating Open Governance R&D Unit in UNDP Armenia CO

*This project aims to reenergise the open governance process in Armenia and leverage resources for a large open governance program for the Country Office along three emergent tracks (sub-national OGP, data hacker’s unit and fintech4gov). It builds on proof of concept in three critical areas, implementing catalytic interventions that have a genuine route to further resource mobilisation (from UK, SDC, ADB, EU). The intervention will act as a bridge between past (especially Kolba Lab) and future interventions, ultimately scaling outputs to a wider and deeper layer of society, including line ministries, sub-national government, and citizens. It aims to prepare ground and serve as a catalyser for three specific resource mobilization efforts, with a total envelope of around $10 million.*

This project will act as an **R&D support unit** for open governance scaling up interventions in three areas. These areas are self-selecting due to: (i) their success in proof of concept stage, (ii) feasible opportunities for further resource mobilisation.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP), initiated in 2013, has become a global lab to design transformative solutions that promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance across the world.

Armenia was one of the first to join this network. However, the national OGP efforts to date have been fragmented and didn’t lead to transformative changes in the system.

Over the past three years, UNDP has provided key support to the government in a range of areas, from [crowdsourcing the Third National Action plan](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/beggars-and-netizens-crowdsourcing-policy-making-armenia) to introducing [new ICT solutions](http://www.odecanet.org/how-technology-makes-justice-more-accessible/) to make public services more accessible.

# **Catalyst 1: Promoting OGP at sub-national level**

**What:** develop and implement first sub-national OGP actions with the Yerevan Municipality, in two mid-size towns in the country and at least in one consolidated rural community.

**How:** using crowdsourcing to elicit ideas (and engagement) from citizens and the private sector. This human-centered approach will include various innovative solutions such as one-stop shops, ICT and e-gov, and public-private partnerships, with the ultimate goals to make the municipal government much more open to citizens, and to have citizens systematically influence and help re-design public services.

**Why:** Armenia only has an OGP Action Plan at national level. In order to continue to build momentum around open governance, this intervention will support open governance at a deeper level, in municipalities, and those services providers more directly connected to citizens. This will also be a precursor to / proof of concept for a much larger intervention on Localizing Services[[1]](#footnote-1) that the CO is discussing with the Government, EU and SDC.

## **Why are we confident this will succeed?**

* **We successfully tested crowdsourcing for OGP in Armenia**. UNDP’s Kolba supported the Office of the PM in organising a first-ever crowdsourced idea competition for its OGP Third Action Plan process;
* **We successfully tested of platform for innovative public servants.** Kolba implemented the country’s first-ever innovation challenge aimed at public servants, unlocking a wealth of expertise and appetite in the redesign of public services and business processes;
* **We established partnership/network with government OGP champions.** UNDP has provided technical support to the government in injecting innovation into conventional OGP commitments, resulting in a global award
* **We have a track record of working with citizens** on start-up projects, including those affecting the life of municipalities.

## **Resource mobilisation target: EUR 5 million** from EU and or Switzerland

# **Catalyst 2: Establishing a governmental data team (or ‘Hacker’s Unit’)**

**What:** Create a mobile task-force, or ‘Hacker’s Unit’, made up of both data science and public administration professionals, with initial pilot in the Ministry of Justice, focusing on the Open Justice[[2]](#footnote-2) agenda but also with a strong link to the emerging line of work on Open Parliament[[3]](#footnote-3) (a top priority for the CO in 2018), for which this project will prototype a similar functionality.

**How:** bring together various data champions both from within the government system, academia and the private sector, to address emerging and wicked challenges through data solutions. Specifically, the group will: (i) develop minimum standards for data quality (format, timeliness, accuracy, protocols), (ii) assist with visualisation of open data, and (iii) provide data-driven policy advice for policy-makers.

**Why:** there is a growing culture of data in the government of Armenia (most notable in the recent Digital Armenia strategy), and a desire amongst a cross section of champions to create an institutional structure.

## **Why are we confident this will succeed?**

* **Unique access to network of government data champions**. Through Kolba Lab’s public servants’ challenges a network for interested and engaged IT, e-gov and data champions was created at all levels of the Ministry of Justice, from Ministerial level, to technical project officers.
* **Unique sector knowledge**. UNDP’s Kolba Innovation Lab recently produced a knowledge product mapping open data resources in Armenia, gathering insights from a range of policy-makers, CSOs, private companies, and citizens.
* **Private partnerships:** Kolba Lab has brokered a partnership between the ICT community and government on both national and municipal level through hackathons, innovation challenges and gov-tech solutions.

## **Resource mobilisation target: GBP 2 million** from UK Good Governance Fund

# **Catalyst 3: Piloting blockchain and other fintech in public administration**

**What:** pilot the use of blockchain technology in one area of Armenia’s public Administration system.

**How:** a blockchain specialist will be recruited to continue to develop a viable pilot project, and build a coalition of blockchain supporters from across government.

**Why:** This intervention will use a recently completed blockchain feasibility study, carried out with UNDP’s Alternative Finance Lab, the government’s Centre for Strategic Initiatives and UNDP Armenia, to develop a concrete pilot intervention.

## **Why are we confident this will succeed?**

* **Government has publicly backed blockchain technology**. This will be done on the back of growing acceptance to the need for blockchain both at an individual and institutional level (with the Prime Minister and several ministers publically throwing their support behind blockchain application in Armenia).
* Recently completed **feasibility study** conducted by UNDP’s Alternative Finance Lab, the government’s Centre for Strategic Initiatives, UNDP Armenia, and two Blockchain start-ups Neocapita and Aid Tech.

## **Resource mobilisation target: USD1 million from the private sector and SDC**

# Risks

**Due to extensive past action, the risks to this intervention have been fully identified and mitigation strategies developed.** These include a withdrawal of governmental support and a lack of take-up among citizens. In both cases, UNDP and Kolba Lab’s internal capacity and extensive network allows course corrections to be easily made.

# Budget

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| # | Activity | Description | Cost (USD) |
| 1 | Sub-national OGP strategy | Subnational OGP Action Plan piloted in 3-4 locations, committing to implement actions towards OGP principles.  | 60,000 |
| 2 | Set-up government “Hacker’s Unit” | Designing data products, analysing big datasets, setting open data standards. Prototyping the functions of the unit in Ministry of Justice and in the National Assembly.  | 50,000 |
| 3 | Development of blockchain pilot  | A blockchain road map for Armenia developed, addressing participatory democracy, open contracting, access to public information  | 20,000 |
| 4 | Project Team |  | 30,000 |
|  |  |  | **150,000** |

1. A Project Proposal for EUR 6.5 million entitled “Leading innovations for public service provision by the communities at local level in Armenia. Localizing Openness in Armenia to achieve SDGs” is now being reviewed by the government, before being submitted to donors. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A project proposal on Open Justice is being discussed with the Ministry of Justice and will be submitted to the UK Good Governance Fund in early 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A project proposal for EUR 5 million entitled “Support to Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy in Armenia” is being finalized with the National Assembly and will be presented to donors in late November 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)