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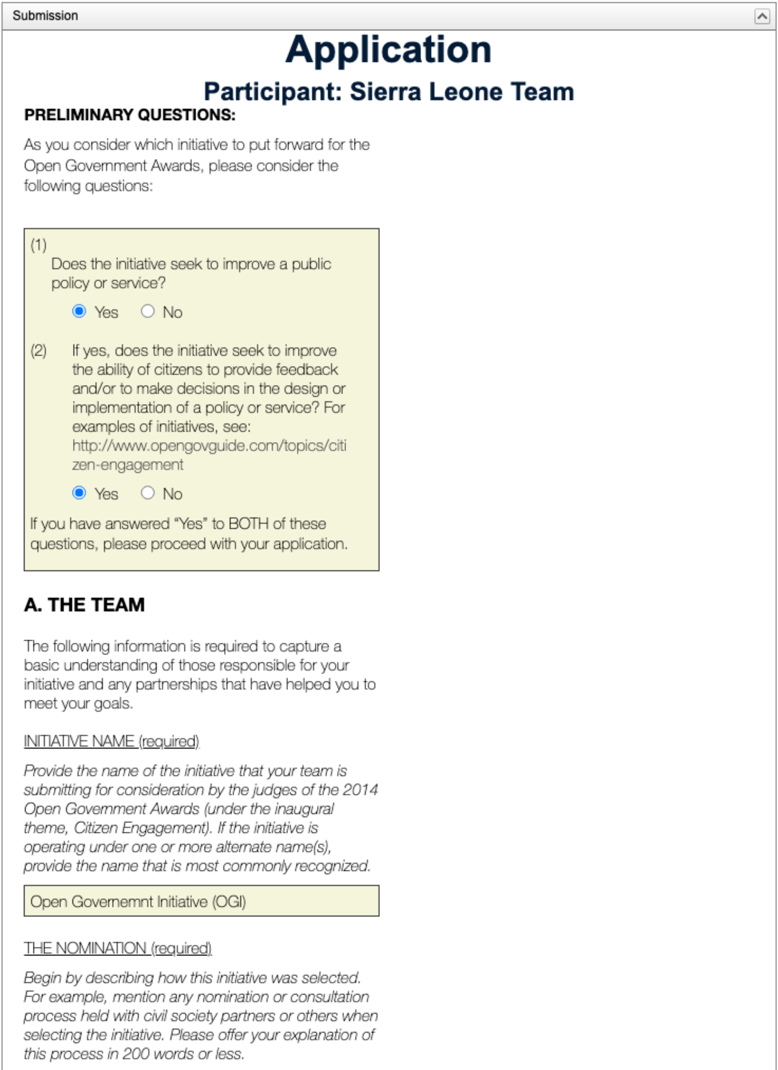

Submission

Application

Participant: Sierra Leone Team

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS:

As you consider which initiative to put forward for the Open Government Awards, please consider the following questions:

(1) Does the initiative seek to improve a public policy or service?

● Yes ○ No

(2) If yes, does the initiative seek to improve the ability of citizens to provide feedback and/or to make decisions in the design or implementation of a policy or service? For examples of initiatives, see: http://www.opengovguide.com/topics/citizen-engagement

● Yes ○ No

If you have answered "Yes" to BOTH of these questions, please proceed with your application.

A. THE TEAM

The following information is required to capture a basic understanding of those responsible for your initiative and any partnerships that have helped you to meet your goals.

INITIATIVE NAME (required)

Provide the name of the initiative that your team is submitting for consideration by the judges of the 2014 Open Government Awards (under the inaugural theme, Citizen Engagement). If the initiative is operating under one or more alternate name(s), provide the name that is most commonly recognized.

Open Governemnt Initiative (OGI)

THE NOMINATION (required)

Begin by describing how this initiative was selected. For example, mention any nomination or consultation process held with civil society partners or others when selecting the initiative. Please offer your explanation of this process in 200 words or less.

On May 1, 2014, the OGI Coordinator announced his organization's intention to run for the OGP Award in an email to the 34 member OGP steering team consisting of **17 civil society member organizations** (CSOs) and 17 Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Concurrence was gained via calls and through emails from civil society organizations including the Center for Accountability and the Rule of Law (CARL), Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), Initiatives for Media Development (IM4dev) and the Society for Democratic Initiatives (SDI).

A few people did write back and showed their support and interest and after two more times of solicitation we agreed that the open government initiative as run in Sierra Leone was the best suited for the competition. There were not any objections from none of civil society present. Everyone just naturally understands that when it comes to citizens' engagement there is no other institution that does it better than OGI

GOVERNMENT POINT OF CONTACT (required)

Provide the name and title of a single point of contact for the purposes of communicating with your team. The person should be the most senior individual responsible for overseeing the application submission. Provide the phone number(s), email address(es), and physical address of your designated point of contact. You may provide alternate contact information, if it is a direct means for reaching the designated point of contact.

Government Point of Contact – The Government Point of contact is Amadu Massally, the Coordinator of the OGI and the OGP. He can be reached via telephone on +232 76 831 728 or via email at amassally@ogi.gov.sl. His office resides at the OGI, in the Office of the President, at 1 State Avenue, State House, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

CIVIL SOCIETY POINT OF CONTACT (strongly recommended)

We strongly encourage applicants to submit a joint application from a government agency and a civil society partner. If submitting a joint application, please provide the name and title of a single point of contact at the partner organization. If not, please be sure to focus on the "validation of claims" in Section B (see pg. A-3).

Civil Society Point of Contact – The civil society points of contact are: Ndukong Vitalis Kiyah, a Senior Court Monitor for the Center for Accountability and the Rule of Law (CARL). Ndukong can be reached on +232 77 294 468 or email: kiyahvitalis@gmail.com.

And Marcella Samba Sesay, Director of Programs at the Campaign for Good Governance at +232 76 984 590 or email: mmacauley@slcgg.org is an option.

OTHER PARTNERSHIPS (optional)

If you are partnering with one or more other government agencies, private sector entities, media, or other organizations, please list each partner. In 250 words or less, provide a brief narrative of the partnership, including the roles that each partner assumes in the initiative.

The OGI is an integral body of the Office of the President and partners with the Executive, Legislative, Judiciary, Civil Society, Chiefs and the media. The initiative promotes effective communication free flow that provides a forum where government functionaries account directly to the people. The President and his Cabinet Ministers have attend nationwide town hall meetings organized by OGI. Presidential meetings have also been held abroad with Sierra Leonenas.

OGI has organized Town hall meetings with members of Parliament to foster better understanding between them and their constituents. Prior to the formation of OGI, most Parliamentarians would forsake their constituencies post elections; and the relationship between them got to the lowest ebb. Civic engagement was necessary and OGI organized meetings helped bridge that gap by creating dialogue sessions between Parliamentarians and their constituents.

Members of the public have often accused the Judiciary for corruption and inefficiency.

Studies indicate that these institutions have not been reaching out to the public enough, which led to misconception and distrust. However, meetings organized by OGI particularly in the provinces helped to educate the people about the functions of the Justice Sector.

Since the inception of OGI over 80.000 people have attended town hall meetings with all three arms of government. Also OGI partners with all government ministries, departments and agencies

In addition, OGI has relationships with many of the donor partners in country.

B. THE INITIATIVE

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is prepared to celebrate a range of successful applicants to the Open Government Awards. This year's theme is "citizen engagement." To qualify for recognition, we need to understand the various elements of success for your initiative and its sustainability over time.

PROBLEM DEFINITION (required)

In 200 words or less, please identify the specific problem your initiative intended to solve. Why was this problem important to solve at a particular time and for the particular context in which you are working?

Prior to winning the Presidential elections of 2007 where a new government led by the All People's Congress party was ushered in, the Government of Sierra Leone's medium of communication with the public had generally been characterized by weak institutions of conveying information. Compounding all these problems is the high illiteracy rate among the population.

A functional review of the Office of the President by the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET) recommended the need to centralize communications to ensure a uniform voice for government that can be heard by the people. It underscored, the conclusions from an earlier governmental retreat that the public information machinery was not opened wide enough to communicate its policies, strategies and programmes. The ACET recommendations focused on WHO? (Identify the key people to be in charge of communications); WHAT? (Identify clear spokesmen for the sources of information flow); WHEN? (When will it be necessary for government to communicate); and HOW? (How is information conveyed)?

The Open Government Initiative (OGI) was established by the President to promote citizen engagement between government and the people. The initiative was conceived because there was no machinery that served as a link between state and non-state actors.

TARGET POPULATION (required)

In 100 words or less, please identify the target population who may benefit from this initiative. Highlight your understanding of the needs or demands of the target population that were addressed by your initiative.

The OGI targets the entire population of Sierra Leone in general, but more specifically they target stakeholders such as the Paramount Chiefs, Village Heads, Tribal Heads, government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector as they form a representation of the masses.

There had been a national disconnect between the masses and the state to the point where a lot of distrust and skepticism from the former (people) to the latter (state) had been experienced.

Public engagement enhances government initiative to "bring the people to government and take government to the people" as the slogan reads.

INITIATIVE DESIGN (required)

In 350 words or less, describe your initiative's goals and objectives. Focus specifically on how the initiative was designed to meet those objectives. For example, identify stage(s) of the policy/service design or implementation when you solicited citizen participation. What kind of participation did you seek from citizens (e.g., feedback, consultation, joint decision-making, monitoring of activities, etc.)? Explain why this particular approach was best suited to achieve the initiative's goals. How did you encourage citizens to participate? Describe any innovations in the design of the initiative.

The OGI aims to simply be the medium between the public and the state. It coordinates an open dialogue between the government and the people of Sierra Leone to contribute to policy making implementation and strategies for the socio economic development of the country. OGI promotes participatory democracy, accountability and transparency by providing a forum where government functionaries account for its stewardship to the people.

OGI started with having town hall meetings and face-to-face dialog with representatives from the three arms of government including the President and his cabinet ministers; the parliamentarians; and the members of the judiciary including the police and prison officers. However, it has grown up to become the leading institution that forms the link between government and the masses and just does not only focus nationally, but has been known to have meetings with Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora where an opportunity to have a dialog with the Cabinet, especially the President who is always ready to engage his subjects regardless of where they may be.

The methodology for these town hall-like meetings is simple: On any given issue of relevance, OGI sets up a plenary session where information is disseminated from government to the people and then a question and answer session follows in which the citizens are free to ask questions and/or make comments on the topic at hand. At the OGI Hour weekly television discussions (see uploaded video) the initiative makes it possible to bring pertinent government functionaries in discussions with OGI's Director and/or Coordinator in a display of engagement and/or accountability primarily to inform the masses on a given topic.

OGI has evolved into other media and may take various questions and issues in current affairs to the air waves on the radio or television for discussion by experts and other government officials from the three branches of Government in concert with members of the public, experts, and civil society. OGI also has an interactive website that has a discussion forum and where even text messages can be sent to with questions and comments on burning issues.

INITIATIVE OUTCOMES (required)

In 250 words or less, describe the intended outcomes and the actual outcomes that the initiative achieved. Who were the ultimate beneficiaries, and *what benefits did they experience? For example, list any concrete improvements in policy, services, behaviors, or power relations between the government and citizens. Try to present your case from the perspective of the various stakeholders involved (e.g., your agency, citizens, Civil Society Organizations, media, et al.). If there are any baseline indicators or standards to measure the outcomes of the initiative, such as the breadth of depth of engagement, please describe them in detail.*

The OGI was created to improve the nexus between the public and the state and many Sierra Leoneans would tell you that they have just done that. In fact the OGI as an acronym has become a household name. Many constituents rely on the OGI to bring information to them and to take their grievances or issues back to the government. This has been achieved and continues on. That we had the open government initiative 6 years prior to the open government partnership speaks volumes as to what the government of Sierra Leone has consciously done with regard to citizens' engagement.

Also, over the years the initiative has built relationships with civil society organizations in an unprecedented fashion and that verity is illustrated more than anywhere else in the smooth and almost issue-less 34-member steering committee deliberations as we developed the national action plan for the open government partnership. Similarly, a testament to the good relationship between the OGI and civil society is this joint application being submitted for the award.

OGI also has formed an impressive relationship with all 149 of the Chiefs in Sierra Leone who are ever-present at OGI activities as is the media. Today when OGI travels the country with regard to strengthening participatory governance they do so with a consortium of media people because they have an infectious relationship with the media. In short, civil society organizations, the chiefs, and media have a lot of trust and confidence in the credibility of the initiative.

INITIATIVE SUSTAINABILITY (required)

In 200 words or less, please describe any plans for scaling up and/or sustaining the initiative in the future. Base your description of the strategy on information provided in the previous sections, such as how you intend to leverage your current success and increase your reach or capacity. Address any threats or operational challenges to your initiative and describe how you intend to manage those risks on a regular basis.

The OGI has already lasted about six to seven years so in essence have proven that they can be sustainable. Going forward, and with the advent of the open government partnership on Sierra Leone, there is a wonderful opportunity to leverage on being more transparent, more accountable and have citizens participate more in governance.

In addition to the core competencies of the OGI with regard to promoting transparency, accountability and citizens' engagement within the three arms of government and beyond, the commitments that are going to be coordinated by the OGP also falls under the auspices of the OGI. Particularly as it relates to informing the Sierra Leonean masses with regard to what the Government of Sierra Leone is doing with the implementation of the commitments or promises they have made to the citizens of Sierra Leone; or not. Such dissemination of information breeds relevance to OGI.

VALIDATION OF CLAIMS (required)

While it is strongly encouraged that each initiative includes partners, such as Civil Society Organizations, private sector agencies, media entities, etc., it is not a requirement. However, you are required to secure and upload documents from one or more credible nongovernmental actors who can attest to the veracity of any claims made in your application.

You are only allowed to upload one file. If you have multiple documents, please zip them into a single file first. The file types that are allowed to be uploaded have an extension of .ZIP, .PDF, .DOC, .DOCX, .XLS or .XLSX.

CSOs Joint Application Letter.pdf

C. THE PITCH

The following information allows each applicant to make their strongest (and final) case for consideration.

BEST CASE (required)

In 250 words or less, please present the most compelling facts for why your initiative should be recognized. This is an opportunity to distinguish your initiative, based on any factors that you have not had the opportunity to describe in the previous sections. What is your best argument for why your initiative has achieved a meaningful outcome? What elements of the initiative make it different and better than others, *that have been tried and tested? Be creative and concise.*

The Open Government Initiative (OGI) with a vision to promote transparency, accountability and participatory governance predates the Open Government Partnership . A major obstacle to improving good governance in Sierra Leone was the absence of an effective communication strategy by the government and the OGI was formed in 2008 to address that concern.

The OGI has been engaging citizens for six years now as a means to keep government honest. It is a unique institution in that even though it is a government function or unit it holds the very government accountable in the deliverance of some of its objectives. It does so by making the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary organs of government available to public scrutiny and accountability. It is no wonder then that then that the OGI and civil society have such a strong alliance in the country. That relationship fed into the efforts of the OGP methodology that places so much emphasis on citizens' engagement.

In addition to CSOs we have other key stakeholder groups in the association with all the Paramount Chefs of the country (and they are great harbingers of two-way information disseminating to and from government through OGI in their chiefdoms/kingdoms). There is also a strong relationship with people in the media. In fact OGI has at least two representatives as volunteers and two staff in all of the 12 districts in the country as a means of keeping citizens engaged.

We may be one of the most unique entity and befitting to be awarded.

VIDEO SUBMISSION (recommended*)

OGP does not offer a venue for applicants to meet our judges during the application process. In order to provide the opportunity for making a personal connection, you are encouraged to upload a short video to complement your application. You may also depict an individual participant in your initiative and describe his or her experience. We do not need to know actual names or personal details. Take this opportunity to tell a story, to connect with our panel of experts, so that they might better understand your attention to specific needs.

Video submissions should follow these guidelines:

- Maximum length of 3-4 minutes. Please focus on personal presentations; it's not necessary to develop a sophisticated or polished video.

Here are some logistical and technical suggestions:

- Video cameras, digital cameras, and phones are easy ways to record a video.
- Laptop and desktop computers can typically record video through Skype or other software.
- If possible, set to a low resolution to reduce file size. This will enable an easier video uploading process.
- If you are having difficulty uploading the video file, try logging out of the application and logging back in using another Internet browser.

Here are general suggestions for delivering a high-quality video pitch:

- Include the following:
  - Introduce yourself and your initiative.
  - Focus on describing your intended benefits and/or services and how they have been effective.
  - What is unique about your initiative, partners, or technical approach?
- Hone your content:
  - Keep your description and language simple.
  - Demonstrate passion through your words and enthusiasm.

*If the burden of developing a video presentation is either prohibitive or might not reflect the best characterization of your initiative, then you are not required to submit one, and the judges are instructed not to discount your application because it may not include a video. We hope that this option offers a new and inventive way in which you can best express the results of your work.