



## HOW CAN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT OF THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC INSPIRE CITIZENS?

*Results of the study about the level of the Kyrgyz Republic citizens' trust in local self-government bodies, satisfaction with the quality of local services, and conditions for citizens' participation in the decision-making*

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The study assesses the processes taking place at the level of local communities in the Kyrgyz Republic, based on the citizens' opinions obtained during sociological surveys, and other data that the Development Policy Institute has accumulated in the course of work with local communities and government bodies since 2007. Duration of observations makes it possible to assess the dynamics of changes in the citizens' attitude towards local self-governments (hereinafter - LSG), their ability and willingness to take part in local development; the level of transparency, accountability and openness of LSG bodies, as well as the level of citizens' trust and opinion on corruption in LSG. A separate section of the study is devoted to the impact assessment of the "Voice of Citizens and Accountability of Local Self-Government: Budget Process" project financed by the Government of Switzerland through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Development Policy Institute (hereinafter - VAP Project).

Data for 2020 were obtained during a sociological survey conducted by Erfolg Consult LLC at VAP's order. Analysis of the survey results carried out jointly by Erfolg Consult LLC and the Development Policy Institute (hereinafter - DPI) included data of the surveys conducted in previous years in the framework of various projects.

Publication is intended for both local and national decision-makers, researchers, representatives of NGOs, government agencies, development partners, and the media.

Full electronic version of the study, as well as brief versions of the study in Russian, Kyrgyz and English, are published on the websites [www.vap.kg](http://www.vap.kg) and [www.dpi.kg](http://www.dpi.kg).

Given that the text of the study was prepared in Russian, in case of discrepancies between the Russian text and the texts in Kyrgyz and English, the text in Russian is considered correct.

*"Voice of Citizens and Accountability of Local Self-Government: Budget Process" project financed by the Government of Switzerland through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Development Policy Institute*

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## List of Abbreviations

AK	aiyl kenesh, a representative body of rural local self-government of the Kyrgyz Republic
ALE	association of legal entities
AO	aiyl okmotu, an executive body of rural local self-government of the Kyrgyz Republic
BC KR	Budget Code of the Kyrgyz Republic
DPI	Public Association “Development Policy Institute”
HCS	housing and communal services
JK KR	Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic
KR	Kyrgyz Republic
LB	local budgets
LSA	local state administration
LSG	local self-government
NGO	non-governmental non-commercial organizations
Non-target LSGs	LSG bodies that were not partner municipalities of the VAP Project
PH	public hearings
PWD	a person with disabilities
RLA	regulatory legal act
RPADWU	Rural public association of drinking water users
SALSGIR	State Agency for Local Self-Government and Interethnic Relations under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic
Target LSGs	LSG bodies that on a competitive basis, have become target partner municipalities of the VAP Project
VAP Project	“Voice of Citizens and Accountability of Local Self-Government: Budget Process” project financed by the Government of Switzerland through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Development Policy Institute
WUA	water users association, a community organization that manages irrigation water distribution

## Introduction

No matter how much it is said about the objective difficulties or mistakes of local self-government bodies, citizens have their own opinion about how badly or well they work, how effectively and sensibly they address problems of the local community, and how they improve life in a city or village. It is extremely important to research and study the citizens' opinion as well as to correct decisions made by local self-governments in response to it. If local politicians - deputies of local keneshes, heads of LSG bodies - ignore 'social temperature' of attitude towards them on the part of population, social stability of society will be under threat. It is also important to understand public sentiments and politicians at the national level - citizens' attitude towards LSG largely depends on them, since national politicians create an environment for LSGs' work. The Kyrgyz Republic already faced a critical situation in 2010, when people's dissatisfaction with the authorities was largely generated by complete helplessness of local authorities deprived of the authority and means to work for the benefit of local communities as a result of growing centralization of government.

Development Policy Institute in the framework of various projects and on its own initiative has been conducting research on citizens' attitudes towards local self-government for many years. In 2020, the sociological survey was carried out by Erfolg Consult LLC at the request of the "Voice of Citizens and Accountability of Local Self-Government: Budget Process" project financed by the Government of Switzerland through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Development Policy Institute. The analysis of the survey results carried out jointly by Erfolg Consult LLC and DPI used the data obtained in the course of the previous years' surveys conducted within various projects.

Goal of the study was to obtain, study and analytically interpret consolidated opinion of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic about local self-government as a system that includes LSG bodies and their relationship with the population. Such aspects of the system as performance, accountability and transparency of LSG bodies; corruption level in LSGs and level of public confidence in them; level of satisfaction with services provided by LSG bodies, etc. were studied.

A separate objective of the study was to assess the impact that VAP had on local communities and LSG bodies during the period of its operation in 2011-2020.

The survey was conducted in January-February 2020, before the Kyrgyz Republic faced the COVID-19 epidemic, so the impact of the epidemic was not reflected in this study.

Geography of the sociological surveys covered the Kyrgyz Republic.

Target audience is the adult population of the Kyrgyz Republic aged 18 and over living in the settlements included in the study sample.

## Survey Methodology in 2020

In the period from February to March 2020, at the DPI's request, the Erfolg Consult research agency conducted the sociological survey to measure main accountability indicators of LSG bodies, satisfaction level with services provided by LSG bodies and level of citizen participation in the activities of local self-government.

The sample size was determined by the DPI (see Table 1) and amounted to 2,637 respondents living throughout the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic. The proposed sample size makes it possible with an accuracy of +/- 1.9% to judge the sample population at the level of the aggregate of all the studied settlements. In total, 330 residents living in 9 cities and 2307 residents of rural settlements living in 72 aiyl aimaks, including remote ones, were interviewed.

*Table 1. Study sampling by oblasts*

	Number of interviewed people	Number of LSGs	Among them	
			Target LSG	Non-target LSG
Batken oblast	96	3	0	3
Jalal-Abad oblast	512	16	6	10
Issyk-Kul oblast	449	14	5	9
Naryn oblast	288	9	3	6
Osh oblast	384	12	5	7
Talas oblast	130	4	0	4
Chui oblast	448	14	6	8
<b>Village</b>	<b>2307</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>City</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2637</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>47</b>

A formalized personal interview (face-to-face) was used as a research tool. The interviews were carried out using a special questionnaire that contained closed and semi-closed questions. The original version of the questionnaire was provided by the DPI.

To ensure a random selection of respondents within each settlement during the field work, a respondent selection method was used using a step-by-step system (random routing) within the settlement. Each settlement under study was divided into conventional sectors. This procedure made it possible to geographically cover different parts of each settlement and reflect the situation in all its parts (both in the center and on the outskirts of the settlements). The number of zones varied for each settlement under study depending on its size. Strictly defined number of respondents were interviewed in each sector. The respondent selection in the household was carried out by the "last birthday method", that is, a household member aged 18+ took part in the survey, whose birthday was closest to the date of the survey.

The survey was conducted by experienced interviewers of Erfolg Consult with guidance of supervisors in each oblast of KR. Before the start of the field work, specialists of the Erfolg Consult research agency conducted a detailed briefing for interviewers and supervisors, during which they explained the goals, objectives of the study, the method for selecting respondents, questions and rules for filling out the questionnaire. The questionnaire was programmed, and the interview was audio-recorded. After the completion of the field work, the agency carried out quality control of the field work by listening to more than 40% of the audio recordings of the interviews from the total sample. Additionally, 20% control was carried out by the method of repeated telephone calls to check the quality of the interviewers' work and the reliability of the data obtained.

## Key Findings

Local self-government inspires citizens to participate in improving their lives, but its capability to respond to all needs lags behind the growing expectations of population

Image of LSGs suffers from their limited capability to respond to the citizens' expectations generated by political promises of the center

**Majority of Kyrgyzstanis still believe in local self-government, but the share of skeptics is growing, since LSGs do not have time to meet all the citizens' expectations.**

Thus, every third citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic feels optimistic and inspired in relation to LSG bodies, but every fourth citizen is irritated and disappointed. Local self-government is one of the most stable and most trusted institutions of public administration. Being in a constant direct contact with the population, LSG bodies provide citizens with a large amount of services and information, therefore, most citizens have a formed opinion about LSG bodies, experience both positive and negative emotions in relation to LSGs. Despite the fact that the majority believe in the capability of local self-government to change living conditions for the better, in recent years the share of those who are skeptical has been growing. Citizens' perception of LSG bodies largely reflects the population's perception of power as a whole, since it is LSG bodies that often create a generalized image of power in the eyes of population. The share of skeptics is growing because from year to year the expectations and inquiries of citizens towards local self-government bodies are growing, as are the general expectations of the living standards. On the other hand, the capability of LSG bodies to fully respond to the citizens' needs is increasingly lagging behind the expectations and the very needs of people.

**Proclamation of the regional development as a priority of the entire public policy gave rise to high expectations among the population, which were partially not met. This negatively affected the citizens' attitude towards local self-government and towards the authorities in general.** In 2018, there was a surge of optimism and inspiration in relation to LSGs, when a record high share of citizens - 66 percent - had positive expectations from LSGs. This surge is explained by the state declarations on reorientation of public policy towards the regional development (the President of KR for the first time in the country's history declared 2018 the Year of Regional Development). But, as it often happens in politics, expectations turned out to be higher than real results - this can explain the two-fold drop in the level of optimism and inspiration in relation to LSG in 2020. Citizens convey their expectations from the promises of the President of KR and the Government of KR to LSG bodies, and when they could not fully meet these expectations, positive perception began to give way to negative - the proportion of those who experience disappointment and irritation with respect to LSGs has doubled. Also, in 2020 compared to 2018, the level of trust in all institutions of government, including local self-government bodies, dropped. The satisfaction level with the LSG services has slightly but still decreased.

**There is a direct connection between the citizens' attitude towards LSGs and the total volume of local budgets: the higher the revenues of local budgets, the better the attitude of citizens towards LSG and vice versa.** Very quickly and very clearly the consequences of changes in the policy of interbudgetary relations, the distribution of finances between the center and the regions are being evaluated by the population. Within just a few months, citizens have been responding to the deterioration in the service quality and performance of LSGs, which are inevitably followed due to lack of funding in local budgets. Diagrams A and B clearly demonstrate presence of this feedback - year after year. This is an extremely important political comparison, since dissatisfaction with the work of local authorities translates into dissatisfaction with the authorities in general. This was clearly noticeable in 2010, when the weakness of LSG bodies, whose powers and budgets were sharply cut in the period of 2008-2009 in many respects became the reason for the people's dissatisfaction with the fact that life on

the ground was not improving in any way. Therefore, underfunding of local budgets is dangerous for the authorities posing a threat to social stability.

Diagram A. Dynamics of the share of citizens experiencing negative emotions towards LSG bodies in comparison with the dynamics of local budget revenues, 2015-2020<sup>1</sup>

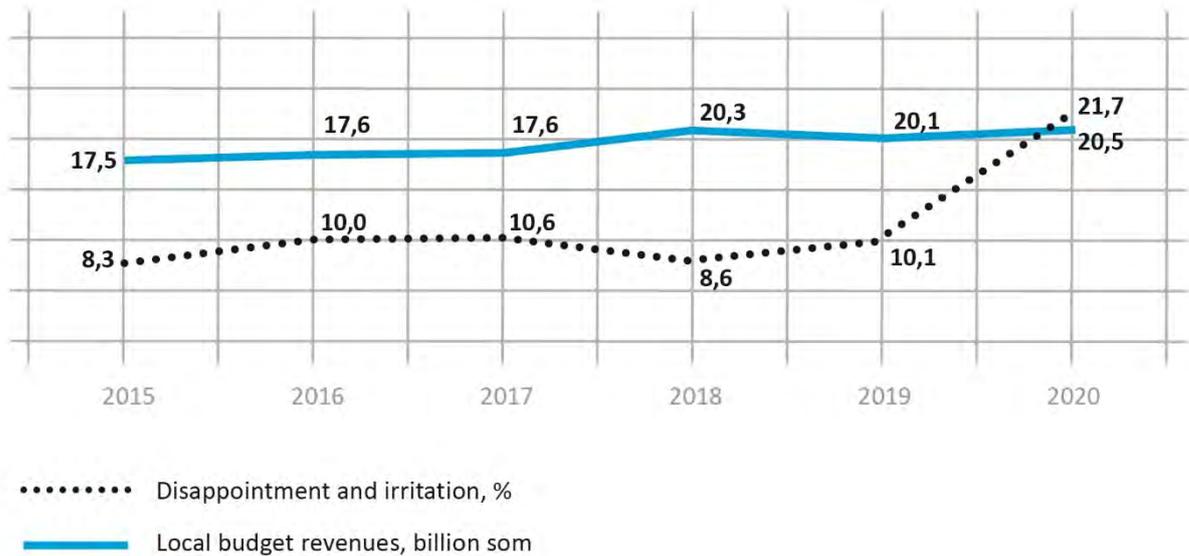
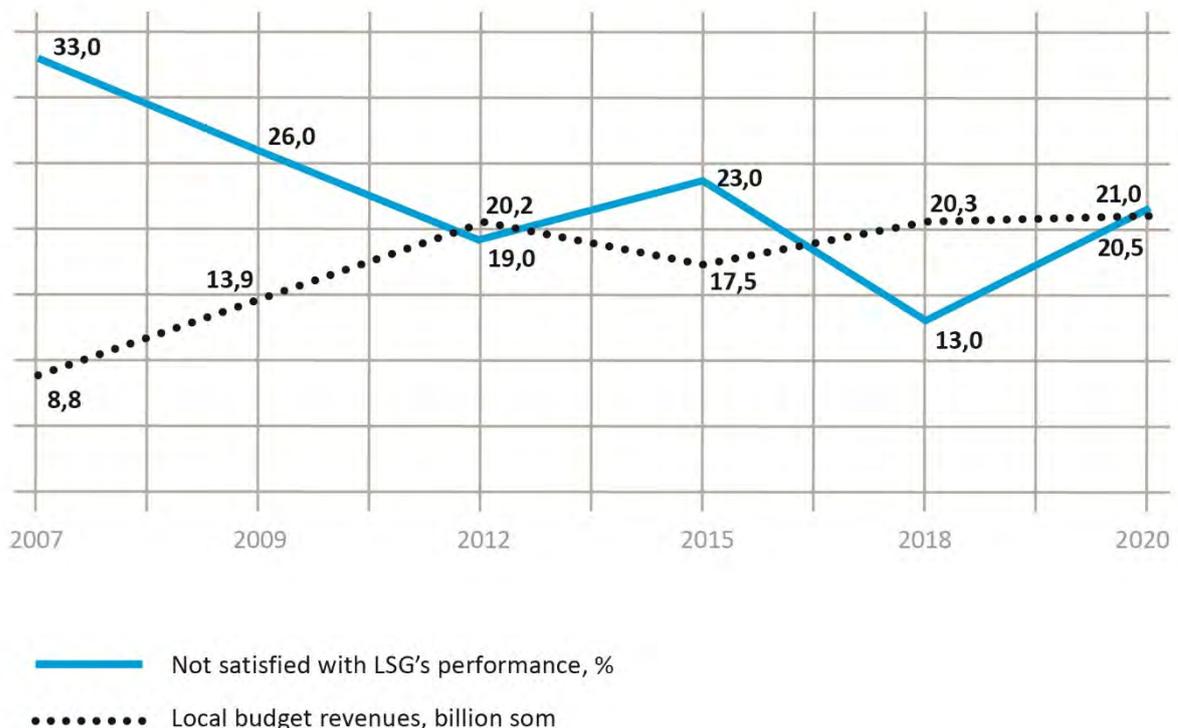


Diagram B. Dynamics of the level of dissatisfaction with the performance of LSG bodies in comparison with the dynamics of the volume of local budget revenues, 2007-2020.



<sup>1</sup> Total volume of the local budget revenues is given according to the plan after the reduction (sequestration) of the Kyrgyz Republic budget in the spring of 2020.

LSG bodies as an institution hold an increasingly definite and significant place in the collective consciousness of population

**Population of Kyrgyzstan is actively interested in the work of LSG bodies and knows local leaders well, while popularity of local leaders under the existing electoral system has reached the maximum possible.** Citizens' interest in the work of LSG bodies has remained, on the whole, consistently high over the past fifteen years (since the start of measurements). In fact, three out of four citizens of Kyrgyzstan are to one degree or another interested in the affairs of LSG, while those who actively interested are always one and a half to two times more than those who are not very interested. The overwhelming majority of citizens - more than 75% know who the head of the executive body of LSG – a mayor or a head of aiyl okmotu is. Taking into account the indirect electoral system, when citizens do not directly elect the head of the executive body of LSG, it is possible to expect further growth in the recognition of local leaders only if a system of direct elections is introduced, when, after "high-profile" election campaigns, winning politicians will be known to 90 and even 100 percent of the population, including children.

**Citizens have formed a clearer opinion about local self-government.** For many indicators, there is a decrease in the proportion of those who respond “I don’t know” or “I find it difficult to answer.” The share of such undecided declined in relation to the openness of LSG bodies, the party principle of forming a local kenesh, the level of satisfaction with LSG services and other parameters. In addition, citizens in 2020 have a much more realistic idea of the structure of local budget expenditures than it was in 2007. Thus, the share of those who were confused about the structure of local budget expenditures and who thought that the main expense item to be the maintenance of aiyl okmotu and mayor's offices sharply decreased. The number of incorrectly addressed appeals to LSGs, for example, regarding pensions, is decreasing. All this suggests that LSG bodies as an institution are taking an increasingly definite and significant place in the collective consciousness of population. At the same time, population's legal literacy and awareness of their civil rights are growing.

Trust in LSG bodies is higher than in executive state bodies, and some suspicions of corruption should be redirected to other institutions

**Citizens receive more and more information from LSG bodies and stop trusting rumors.** In the last two years alone, the share of citizens who consider friends, relatives and colleagues to be their main sources of information has halved (from 38 to 16 percent). More and more people receive information from LSG bodies at gatherings and meetings, during public hearings and through other communication channels of LSG bodies. In 2020, the share of citizens receiving information from LSG bodies directly exceeded 30%. The majority of citizens - 67.9% - are to one degree or another satisfied with the volume and quality of information about local self-government, which indicates a high level of openness of LSG bodies. Thus, the priorities of citizens regarding the sources of information about the work of LSG bodies are shifting in favor of official channels, while rumors and gossip are gradually losing popularity. Citizens are beginning to rely on more verified sources of information, which indicates a growing criticality in the perception of information.

**Despite unfulfilled hopes for a sharp breakthrough in the regional development, the level of trust in LSG bodies remains quite high, and if it is declining, then to a lesser extent than the level of trust in other institutions.** The level of citizens' trust in LSG bodies is traditionally higher than the level of trust in executive government bodies. In 2020, the executive bodies of LSG - the mayor's office and aiyl okmotu took the fourth place in the rating of public confidence, yielding the first three places to the education system, the armed forces and religious institutions, respectively. Local keneshes are less trusted by the population and rank seventh in the rating of trust, since citizens generally have a lower opinion of local keneshes deputies and want higher qualifications including in terms of education. **The absolute majority of**

**respondents - 94% - believe that the requirements for candidates for mayor or head should be higher.**

**Confidence in the work of political parties at the local self-government level is growing, and the number of opponents of the party system for forming local keneshes is decreasing, although it remains quite high.** The number of citizens who agree with the party principle for forming local keneshes has grown 2.5 times, although the number of those who disagree is still high - more than 40% (from 12 to 47% in the context of the regions of the Kyrgyz Republic). This tendency is most likely explained by the general normalization of the interaction of the kenesh with the executive bodies: their relations are evolving, the opposition is decreasing, and their relations are becoming more constructive. According to citizens, the influence of political parties over the past two years has become more positive in the area of strengthening control over the work of *aiyl okmotu*. The share of undecided citizens is also decreasing, which is probably a consequence of the gradual growth of understanding of the party system's essence on the part of the population. Almost 70% of citizens are satisfied with their interaction with local keneshes.

**Every third citizen of Kyrgyzstan believes that there is no corruption in LSG and the number of such opinions is steadily growing.** So, since 2008, the share of citizens who are confident that there is no corruption in LSG has increased almost sevenfold. The share of those who think that the corruption level in LSGs to be high has decreased by 2.5 times, and the share of those who think that the corruption level in LSGs to be very high by three times. The number of citizens who believe that corruption manifests itself in the local budget management and public procurement is decreasing.

**Suspicious of corruption of LSG bodies in the sphere of land, water management and inclusion in the list of the poor should be redirected to other governmental institutions.** Among the areas of the LSG bodies' activities where, according to respondents, corruption is most often manifested, land management and inclusion in the list of the poor are leading. Over the past two years, the number of those who observe manifestations of corruption in the process of being included in the list of the poor has more than doubled. However, the procedure for inclusion in the list of the poor began to be carried out through the rayon departments of social development, and LSG bodies were excluded from this process. Thus, this surge of suspicions of corruption is addressed, in fact, not to the LSG bodies, but to the authorized state body. Citizens also observe the growth of corruption in water management. But here, too, LSG bodies become a victim of redirected suspicions, since at present in most municipalities, drinking and irrigation water services are provided not by LSG bodies, but by public organizations – WUA and RPADWU. Suspicions of corruption in land management are distributed among LSG bodies; pasture committees (for pastures) and local state administrations (for land transformation).

**Citizen participation in LSG: population activity is growing, but people are waiting for new forms for more productive participation**

**Citizens strive for direct interaction with LSG bodies, avoiding forms associated with the principle of representation - elections and work through NGOs.** Citizens consider gatherings and meetings in communities to be the most effective forms of interaction with LSG bodies (47%); public hearings (35%); local *kurultai* (31%); local initiative (22%). And only 12% of citizens consider elections to the local kenesh as an effective form of participation and 10% - interaction through NGOs. These forms are unpopular due to the insufficient level of trust in the representative principle of citizen participation in LSG, incomplete fulfillment of their duties by local keneshes, insufficient level of development of NGOs, especially in rural areas.

**Influenced by the requirements of legislation and public demand, LSG bodies pay great attention to the citizens' voice, and citizens respond with their willingness to take part in the development of the community themselves.** The number of citizens who are ready to take personal part in public affairs of their city or village is growing, and almost half of the respondents confirm that they already had such experience. This is a positive development, as

the combined efforts of the community and the governing body are always more productive than working separately. But this poses a task of the LSG bodies to provide all these people with appropriate organizational forms of participation, as well as to make more efforts in relation to the assessment of this participation, formulating the citizen contribution, evaluating it and endowing it with public recognition and gratitude. The most popular forms of citizen participation in LSG are meetings and public hearings (70%), but the share of those who take part in the development and implementation of projects aimed at developing communities has grown rapidly – six fold.

**Community councils are losing popularity at the level of rural local communities, but remain in demand in cities.** If in 2018 community councils rated second in the ranking of the popularity of the participation forms and collected more than 30% of responses, then two years later the popularity of councils decreased and collected only 12% of responses. This change should be viewed as a positive development, since at the level of local self-government there is the most important council endowed with local legislative powers - the local kenesh. And if the local kenesh works efficiently and properly, then usually citizens do not need to participate in additional councils. However, the situation in villages is different from that in large villages and cities. In a small municipality, the local kenesh is able to provide all the needs for councils, but in a city or large municipality, creation of thematic councils is often justified. Therefore, in cities, citizens prefer to participate more in the work of initiative groups and public councils, and in villages - in public hearings, as well as in the development and selection of projects for funding.

**Three out of four citizens are ready to take part in public works for the improvement of their city and village.** In 2020, this figure was 72.8%. In fact, overwhelming majority of citizens are ready to make a personal contribution to the improvement of their municipality, and this “army” of people represents a huge development potential for LSG bodies. At the same time, this indicator demonstrates solidarity and collectivism of the people of Kyrgyzstan, presence of a sense of responsibility not only for their own lives, but for the living conditions of future generations. In this regard, the primary task of LSG is to provide citizens with effective opportunities for it. LSG bodies are addressing this task partially, since share of people who already have experience of personal participation in public works for the improvement of their city and village is growing and amounts to 36.7% in 2020. That is, every third Kyrgyz citizen already contributes to improving the living conditions, not only personal, but also public.

**Most citizens want to take part in monitoring and evaluation of the drinking water supply and garbage collection services. But citizens expect from LSG bodies new forms of organizing public monitoring and evaluation in order to reduce the cost of their personal time.** Water and garbage are quite logical leaders in the ranking of topics for public monitoring, since the provision of drinking water and garbage collection are services that every family uses every day, so everyone worries about the quality and sufficiency of these services and is ready to monitor their provision. The situation is much more complicated with the processes of public monitoring and evaluation of the LSG activities as a whole. In this case, monitoring takes on a long-term character, and assessment becomes more complex, since along with obvious results, management process is assessed. There are those who want to take part in such types of monitoring in the community, but their number has decreased. People began to realize that this type of participation requires a significant investment of personal time.

**Citizen participation in the local budget process has reached a quantitative maximum and LSGs must offer a new quality to maintain the level of participation**

**Citizen participation in public hearings on the budget has reached a historical maximum of 20%, and LSGs need to pay more attention to the quality of response to the proposals and needs of citizens in relation to the budget process.** In parallel with the accumulation of the hearings’ practice with history starting in 1999, until 2018 in Kyrgyzstan

there was a steady increase in the level of citizen participation in public hearings on the budget at the local level, which in 2018 exceeded the record for the Kyrgyz Republic 20%. In 2019, according to the Ministry of Finance of KR, hearings were held by 330 LSG bodies mainly rural, and the number of participants was more than 28 thousand people. Hearings are popular and are conducted by most LSG bodies, therefore efforts aimed at further quantitative growth of citizen participation in public hearings should not be the main task of the process of strengthening citizens' participation in the budget process. Simply increasing the number of participants does not mean that budget discussions are most effective for citizens. It is time for LSG bodies to focus on quality improvements, including introduction of new forms of citizen participation in the budget process. The quantitative indicator of the level of participation in public hearings in the assessment of the work of LSG bodies should be replaced to a greater extent by qualitative indicators of taking into account the opinions and wishes of citizens, creating conditions for online communication and receiving proposals through municipal sites, Telegram, WhatsApp groups, boxes for proposals and other forms of feedback.

**Quality of budget hearings and consideration of proposals in the future will have a key impact on citizens' willingness to participate in the budget process.** If in the first decade of holding hearings people were inspired by the very opportunity to discuss such a sensitive and important issue as public finance with the authorities, then over time, citizens began to appreciate the practical result of the hearings more. In this context, a twofold decrease - from 8% to 4.2% - is especially positive in the share of those citizens who do not believe in the very institution of hearings and believe that the wishes of the participants in the hearings will not be taken into account in the draft budget. These dynamics indicate that people are more confident that their opinions will be heard. In general, the share of citizens satisfied with participation in budget hearings remains quite high - about 70%. However, in 2020, for the first time in a long time, a 5.6% drop in the level of satisfaction was recorded. This can be explained by the fact that in 2019 many LSG bodies held budget hearings for the first time in their history (in 2019, 70% of LSG bodies held budget hearings - a record number in the entire history of hearings).

**One of the main obstacles to increasing the efficiency of citizen participation in the budget process is the low level of financial literacy of population.** An analysis of reasons why citizens do not want or cannot take part in the budget process showed that lack of awareness, lack of information is no longer the main factor. Most citizens are aware of the opportunities and methods of participation, but the low level of financial literacy in general, the inability to read and understand budget information remains one of the main reasons for the reluctance to get involved in the budget process.

#### Majority of citizens are satisfied with the volume of information, responses to appeals and the work of LSG bodies in general, but the share of skeptics is growing

Three out of four citizens of Kyrgyzstan are to one degree or another satisfied with the work of LSG bodies in general. Since 2007, the level of citizens' satisfaction with the work of LSG bodies has been growing, but it has been growing unstably and relatively slowly. Here, as in the case of trust in LSG bodies, there is a ten percent decline after the enthusiasm of 2018, when a historical maximum was reached (since the beginning of measurements) and 84% of citizens were satisfied with the work of LSG bodies, but reality suggests that this was an advance for the authorities, again caused by general optimism about the prospects for the development of local communities in the light of national priorities in the regional development.

Citizens have become less likely to request from LSG bodies to issue certificates. Behind this fact is digitalization and government policy aimed at reducing the number of citizens' requests for documents. It should be expected that with the development of digital technologies in governance, the number of requests for certificates will continue to decline.

Citizens began to more often request and receive satisfactory answers from LSG bodies about SALF (State Agriculture Land Fund) land, lease or sale of municipal land, improvement, provision and maintenance of housing, street lighting, roads, sewage and garbage disposal. The

level of citizens' satisfaction with the results of these appeals is very high - over 90%. The number of appeals on the issues of drinking water supply, as well as local taxes and fees decreased slightly. The number of appeals is significantly reduced, mainly on those issues that are not within the responsibility of LSG bodies - health care, pensions, and irrigation water. This suggests that the legal culture of citizens is increasing, who gradually understand which governing body is responsible for a specific issue.

Low satisfaction with a service does not always mean it needs to be improved first. First of all, according to citizens, it is necessary to resolve issues of life safety

**Citizens prioritize the need to fund services not by the level of their provision, but by their importance for life and safety. Therefore, despite relatively high level of dissatisfaction with garbage disposal, road maintenance and landscaping, most citizens still consider it necessary to direct local budget funds, primarily, to finance water supply and sewerage services.** Therefore, when making a decision, even despite the high level of citizens' dissatisfaction with a certain service, LSG bodies should give preference to those services that are more important. In general, citizens' priorities regarding the importance of services have changed little over time: water supply, garbage collection and road maintenance have remained in the top three for decades. The second most important group of the rating: street lighting, street cleaning and landscaping. It is noticeable, however, that landscaping has somewhat lost its importance in the eyes of the community, while water supply, on the contrary, has increased.

**In the opinion of citizens, services of street lighting, road maintenance, and street cleaning are improve; water disposal and sewerage services are deteriorating.** Since 2007, the share of citizens who are more or less satisfied with street lighting has been growing - over 13 years the growth was 30%; road maintenance - 24%; street cleaning - 7%. However, the level of satisfaction with garbage collection and kindergartens remains at the same level and even slightly declined. The satisfaction level with wastewater disposal and sewerage services is steadily decreasing - the number of those satisfied with the service has decreased three times and reached a critically low level of 10%.

**Garbage disposal has left top three leaders of the most problematic services, replaced by water supply service.** Most LSG bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic have made some progress in combating unorganized landfills, have established regular disposal of solid household waste. In this sector, issues of recycling come to the fore for LSG bodies, but they are less noticeable to citizens than to government bodies. The water supply, on the contrary, has become the most "sore" problem in the public opinion. Population's attention to safety is increasing, the citizen demands for quality and uninterrupted supply of drinking water are growing. So, if in 2018 respondents named the weak head (pressure) of water as the main problem - more than 60% of respondents thought so, and the duration of water supply during the day worried only 29%, then in 2020 more than 80% of respondents complained about interruptions in water. Share of those who are worried about water quality also increased to significant statistical values, although there were almost no such answers before. These data may indicate both the deterioration of the situation with access to water and its quality, and that citizens began to pay more attention to these aspects, whereas earlier they were worried about the lack of water or its insufficient quantity.

**Local communities, including rural ones, no longer want to live without sewers.** In 2020, the vast majority of citizens do not have access to sewage systems; moreover, their number is growing. Development of technical progress, increase in the environmental load, spread of infectious diseases make the issue of wastewater disposal and the organization of sewage facilities in rural areas more and more acute.

## More than 60% of women want to be more active in local self-government, but many feel constrained to fully realize this right

**Women are more confident in participating in informal events in local communities, but find that environment of formal events is not friendly to them.** In general, more than 70% of the respondents consider themselves citizens with an active civil position, among men the figure is 83%, among women - 63%. This is a high figure for both sexes, since more than 60% of women who consider themselves to be a person with active civil position is a relatively high figure for the region. This suggests that the majority of women are interested in public life, feel strong and have potential to participate in local self-government. Women and men assess their opportunities and the level of participation in informal, public events - gatherings and street meetings almost equally. However, women were much more skeptical about more formal events than men. Thus, the share of women who negatively assessed the level of participation in kurultai was 50%; in sessions of the local kenesh - 42%. Men more often (58%) than women (39%) manage to independently raise an important issue for them at public events (gatherings, public hearings on the budget), as well as at sessions of local keneshes.

**House chores and underestimation of women's rights and opportunities hinder them from realizing their right to participate in LSG.** In 2020, almost 60% of men took part in public affairs versus less than 40% of women. Main problem that prevents women from being active in public life in their local community, almost 60% of the respondents consider the overload of unpaid domestic work. The second reason is that women are not even invited to discuss important issues. So, about 10-15% of men may not invite women to important discussions, believing that they have no time due to the overload of household chores. Every sixth woman is sure that women's opinion is simply not taken seriously, and every tenth woman fears that she may be shamed for showing public activity or social initiative.

**Men more often than women manage to achieve a solution to an important problem for them, it is easier for men to find supporters and support for their initiatives.** Men consider themselves to be more effective transformers of living conditions. Thus, 61% of women and 91% of men resolved their problems - their own or their communities, 20% of women and only 4% of men failed to achieve the result. Men are more likely to receive support from LSG bodies, development projects and other sources in the form of funds or equipment to implement their proposals: men confirm receiving external assistance for their initiatives in 89% of cases, while among women this indicator was only 49%.

**Strengths of women are their leadership qualities and ability to unite the efforts; the weapon of men is based on personal experience and the relevance of the issues raised.** Men more often rely on the problem urgency for a large number of citizens, which is typical of traditional political behavior, as well as on their experience in implementing grant projects and a desire to help people. Women indicate their ability to unite in initiative groups among the most effective factors. Also, women are more likely than men to rely on their personal leadership qualities.

**Kindergartens and access to drinking water are absolute leaders among priority issues for women.** Kindergartens free up women's time for paid work and development, and access to drinking water reduces the exorbitant physical exertion for women and children when they are forced to deliver water in flasks and buckets. These questions are of concern to every third and fifth woman. This is followed by schools and garbage collection, which are priority issues for every seventh woman. Other common problems in local communities are becoming a priority for women much less often.

**Main obstacles to addressing priority problems for women: lack of money; indifference of officials and lack of gender mainstreaming in problem prioritization and planning.** Among the factors that hinder solutions to priority problems of women, the three most significant are leading. The first factor is the lack of funds in the local budget, which is indicated by almost every third respondent. The second is the lack of activity of interested persons among officials, which is indicated by every fifth respondent. The third factor relates to legislation,

which, according to every ninth respondent, does not take into account the gender aspect in relation to priority issues. A significant proportion of those who note the lack of support from the local community and government agencies. However, the smallest number of respondents complained about the lack of support from the mayor's office and aiyl okmotu.

**Women are more critical of the budget hearings' quality and talk about discrimination in the process of expressing their opinion on the local budget.** Thus, women are almost three times more likely than men to say that only one facilitator speaks during the hearings and does not give residents the opportunity to speak. Women are twice as likely as men to think that the hearings have turned into a regular meeting with people's complaints. At the same time, for 46% of men and only 30% of women, the explanation of the budget was incomprehensible. The conclusion is that women are just as well versed as men in public finance management, but women notice discrimination against themselves in the discussion, believing that they are not allowed to speak as much as they would like.

### VAP helped introduce new and fill old forms of citizen participation in local self-government with new content

**With influence of VAP Project, traditional forms of citizen participation in the development of local communities have evolved into modern mechanisms of civil participation enshrined in legislation.** So, for example, gatherings and initiative groups were regulated by the Local Community Charter in relation to requirements for legitimacy and other conditions, and in 2020 they are actively used by target and non-target LSG bodies. Initiative groups have always emerged in villages to address local problems, but the project helped formalize the status of initiative groups, specified the forms of their interaction with LSG bodies in such a way that LSG bodies would respond to the challenges posed by initiative groups. With the assistance of the project, the legislation (the Budget Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, a set of standard documents and provisions approved by the Government, the Ministry of Finance and SALSGIR) enshrines a logically linked set of mechanisms for citizens' participation in LSG: priority rural assessment, prioritization of needs and joint planning, participation in the budget process, joint monitoring and evaluation and support of citizens' initiatives from the local budget.

**With the support of VAP, legal and institutional conditions for LSGs' performance were improved:** status of a municipal employee was increased, system of advanced training was created, government recognized the need to finance delegated powers, actual delineation of powers between state bodies and LSG bodies began, state program for the development of LSG was formulated and is being implemented; process has been established for aligning draft laws with LSG bodies; provided administrative and financial conditions for the work of local keneshes; inspections of local self-government bodies and others were partially streamlined. The study showed that in the target municipalities affected by VAP Project, changes for the better occurred faster than in non-target ones, and changes for the worse, respectively, were slower.

**Residents of target LSGs of the Project believe more in the capabilities of their LSG bodies.** VAP provided citizens with new opportunities to be heard by LSG bodies through the implementation of the Priority Rural Assessment mechanism: in total, more than 68 thousand contacts of LSG bodies with citizens took place to identify problems of the local community; citizens included about 800 of their proposals in the Joint Action Plans, which were, to one degree or another, resolved through local budgets. Therefore, in 2020, there are more citizens who are optimistic and inspired in relation to LSG bodies in the target municipalities of the Project than in non-target ones. Although the target municipalities started from a lower start in 2012, they achieved a twofold increase in the optimism and inspiration of citizens in 2018, while in non-target LSGs the share of such citizens grew by only one third.

**Citizens believe that there is less corruption in target LSGs of VAP Project.** With the support of VAP, transparency of LSG bodies has increased, especially with regard to the disclosure of budget information. As a result, in target municipalities of VAP since 2012, there has been a gradual decrease by 2020 in the proportion of respondents who believe that their aiyl

okmotu has a very high level of corruption. In non-target municipalities, the share of respondents who give such an assessment to their aiyl okmotu or mayor's office has decreased by five times less. In VAP's target municipalities, in comparison with the non-target ones, the number of residents who observe manifestations of corruption in budget management and in the process of public procurement has decreased. At the same time, similar indicators in non-target LSG structures increased. In VAP's target LSGs, the share of those who are completely satisfied with the volume and quality of information about local self-government is growing faster than in non-target ones. Thus, in target LSGs, the share of those completely satisfied with information about local self-government in 2020, compared to 2018, more than doubled, while in non-target LSGs - only by a third. Also, target municipalities of the Project demonstrate a higher growth rate in the proportion of citizens who believe that LSG bodies are open to the public in their activities.

**Level of citizen participation in governance of target LSGs of VAP remained, while it decreased in the whole country.** Despite the overall decline in the level of citizen participation in public hearings on the budget for Kyrgyzstan, in VAP's target municipalities in 2020 this indicator remained almost at the level of the historical maximum in 2018 - above 20%. At the same time, the proportion of women among the participants in the hearings in target LSGs has increased, while in non-target ones, this indicator, unfortunately, has decreased. In target municipalities more actively than in non-target municipalities, the popularity of productive forms of participation is growing, allowing not only to receive information or speak out (meeting), but to have a real impact on the decisions made by LSG body (hearings and the development or selection of a project for financing. Emergence of this difference is logical due to the fact that the Project helped LSG bodies of target municipalities introduce more productive participation forms, which allows citizens to receive feedback from LSG bodies and see changes in accordance with their priorities and wishes. The Project's impact is especially noticeable in relation to citizen participation in the development or selection of projects applying for funding from the local budget or from external assistance. This is due to the fact that the Project helped significantly improve the targeting of LSG work by introducing Joint Action Plans, since with the help of such plans LSGs began to more reasonably link activities to specific groups, streets, etc. Annually about 100-150 acute problems of local communities were resolved through these plans by joint efforts of citizens and LSG.

**Residents of target LSGs have more opportunities to address pressing problems.** Responsibility of local communities has grown, citizens are ready to participate in solving a larger number of issues: in comparison with 2012, in 2019 the activity of communities in relation to the implementation of local initiatives has more than tripled, increasing from 31 to 100 initiatives. On average, 35 activists in each target LSG (more than 1700 people in total) united in almost 190 initiative groups, enshrined in the Local Community Charters, and addressed their problems together with LSGs. In target municipalities, the share of those citizens who already have practical experience of participation in public life is growing faster than in non-target LSGs. So, compared to 2015, in target municipalities the share of citizens who have already taken part in public affairs increased by 20%, while in non-target municipalities - only by 11%. A higher level of citizens' readiness to take personal part in target LSGs is explained by the fact that with the help of VAP Project, LSG bodies have improved their skills in attracting and managing investments.

Women in target LSGs received more opportunities to address important problems for them and self-realization. With VAP's influence, women's participation in identifying priorities and planning the work of LSGs increased: from 35% in 2012 to almost 50% in 2019. Women themselves, participating in the project, obtained new opportunities to be heard and self-actualize. So, the proportion of women in the initiative groups grew: from 36% in 2012-2015, up to 43% in 2016-2020. Many have managed to achieve personal growth, for example, become members of the local kenesh or continue their socialization in groups of joint monitoring and evaluation.

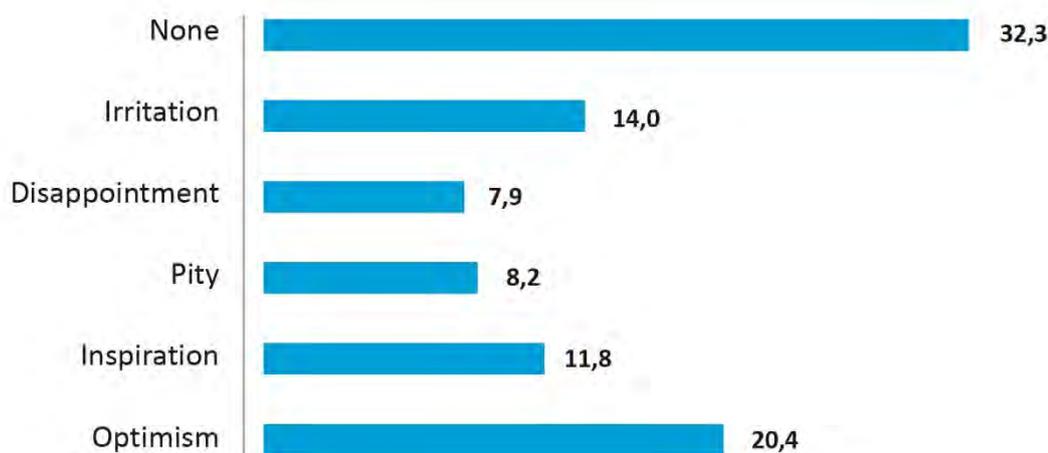
## I. Image of LSG bodies in Citizens' Perception

### Perception of local self-government bodies by citizens

Citizens' perception of LSG bodies reflects their attitude to the dynamics of changes in living conditions in local communities. At the same time, emotions that citizens feel in relation to LSG bodies express an opinion about how much LSG's work meets or does not meet people's expectations, belief or lack of faith in ability of LSG change life in communities for the better. During the survey, respondents were asked to select the emotions they experience towards LSG bodies from a list including the following: "optimism", "inspiration", "pity", "disappointment", "irritation" and "none."

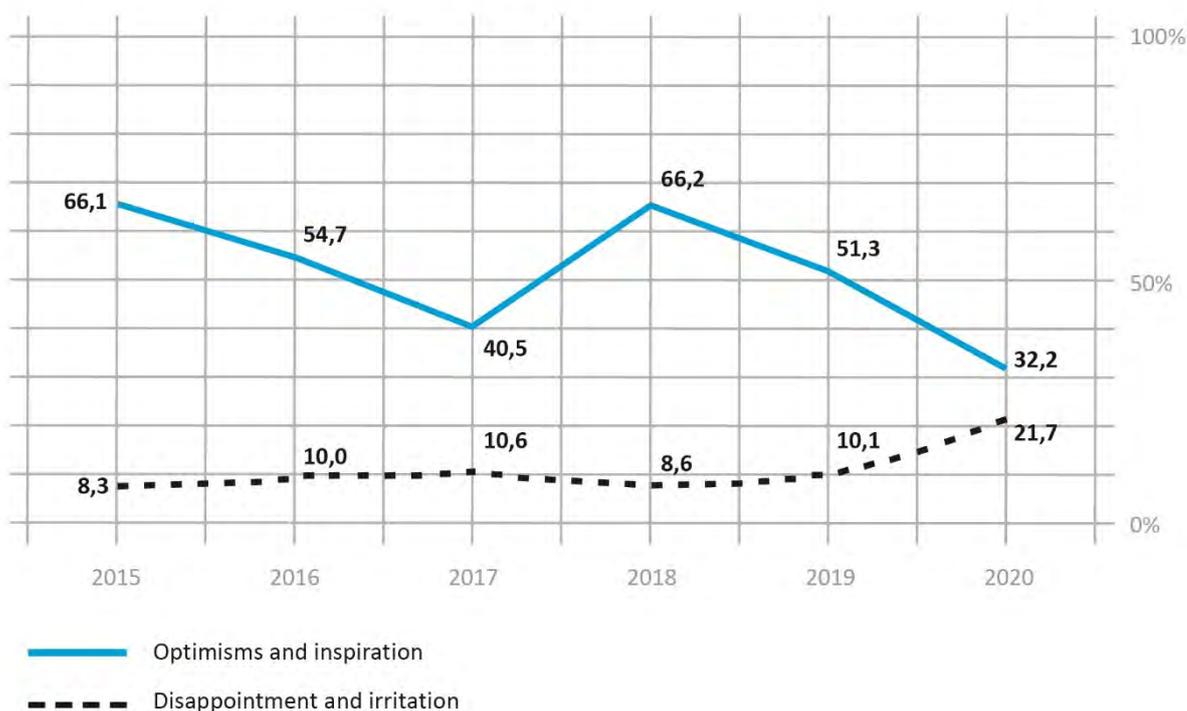
More than a third of citizens do not feel any emotions about LSG bodies. This suggests that most people do not associate the living conditions in their community with the performance of local self-government and rely on themselves. Opinions of the rest were divided. Thus, every fifth respondent is optimistic about LSG demonstrating faith in its ability to impact the community life. Almost 12% are even inspired by the prospects for the local self-government development. However, a quarter of the surveyed citizens feel negative about LSG: 14% - feel irritation, almost 8% is disappointed. A separate group of 8.2% citizens who feel pity in relation to LSG bodies. These respondents actually understand the difficulties of LSG bodies and realize their helplessness.

*Diagram 1. Emotions the citizens experience in relation to LSG bodies in 2020, in percent*



Despite the fact that there were always significantly more citizens who were optimistic about LSG than those who were disappointed in its capabilities, negative dynamics have been observed in the past six years.

Diagram 2. Dynamics of positive and negative perception by citizens of LSG bodies, 2015-2020, in percent



Share of those who experience positive emotions, optimism and inspiration, has almost halved, and share of those who experience negative emotions, disappointment and irritation, has grown 2.5 times. This is explained, on the one hand, by the fact that the expectations and requests of citizens to LSG bodies are growing from year to year, as are general expectations from the standard of living. On the other hand, capability of LSG bodies to fully respond to the citizens’ needs is increasingly lagging behind the expectations and the very needs of people. In Diagram 2, one cannot fail to notice a surge of optimism and inspiration in relation to LSGs in 2018, when a record high share of citizens - 66 percent – had positive expectations from LSGs. This surge is explained by the state declarations on reorientation of public policy towards the regional development (the President of KR for the first time in the country's history declared 2018 the Year of Regional Development). But, as it often happens in politics, expectations turned out to be higher than real results - this can explain the two-fold drop in the level of optimism and inspiration in relation to LSG in 2020. Citizens convey their expectations from the promises of the President of KR and the Government of KR to LSG bodies, and when they could not fully meet these expectations, positive perception began to give way to negative - the proportion of those who experience disappointment and irritation with respect to LSGs has doubled.

However, LSG bodies operate under conditions of limitations and cannot be held responsible for implementation of all the politicians’ intentions at the national level. The most important limitation is the scope of authority and funding for their implementation. In this respect, a comparison of the dynamics of negative emotions of citizens in relation to LSG bodies and the dynamics of local budget revenues is indicative.

Diagram 3. Dynamics of the share of citizens experiencing negative emotions towards LSG bodies in comparison with the dynamics of local budget revenues, 2015-2020<sup>2</sup>

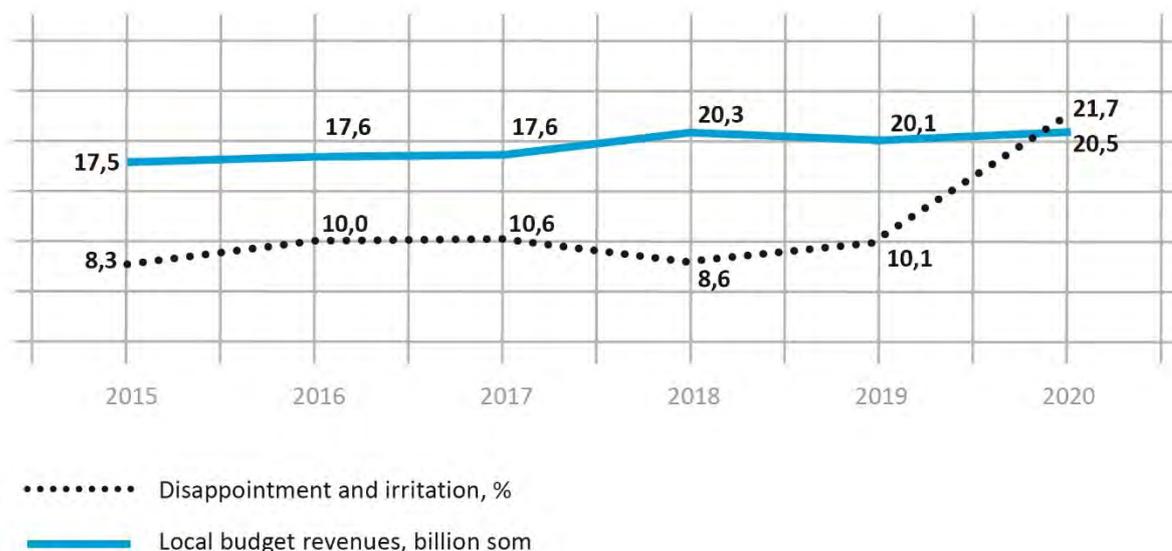


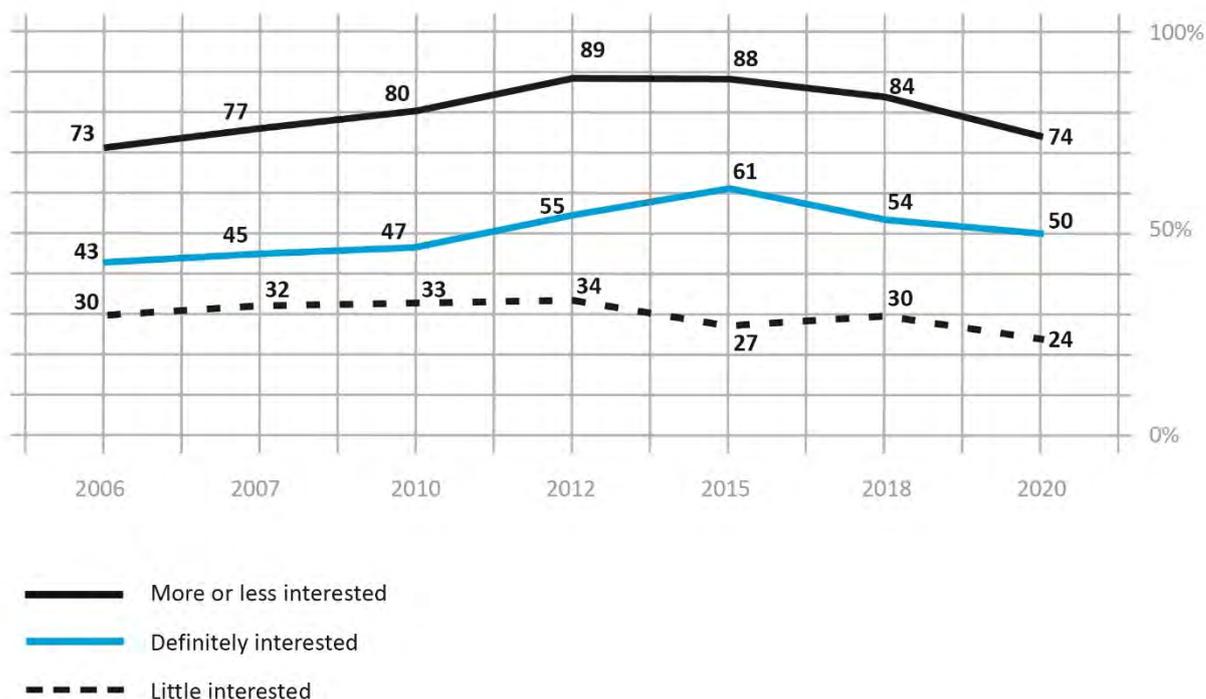
Diagram 3 reflects a connection between the share of citizens experiencing negative emotions towards LSG and the total volume of local budgets: the lower the revenues of local budgets, the more disappointment and irritation on the part of citizens, and vice versa.

### Citizens' interest in local self-government

Citizens' interest in the work of LSG bodies has remained, on the whole, consistently high over the past fifteen years (since the start of measurements). In fact, three out of four citizens of Kyrgyzstan are to one degree or another interested in the affairs of LSG, while those who were actively interested were always one and a half to two times more than those who were not very interested. At the same time, until 2012, there was a steady growth in the citizens' interest: from 73% in 2006 to 89% in 2012. After 2012, interest in LSG issues began to slowly but steadily decline and in 2020 amounted to 74%. Practice of public administration shows that the citizens' interest in the government system grows if people's problems are not addressed or solved poorly. Therefore, one of the reasons for the decline in citizens' interest in LSG after 2012 can be considered the introduction in 2011 of a two-tier budget system, which returned independence to LSGs in managing local budgets and strengthened their financial ability to address issues of local importance.

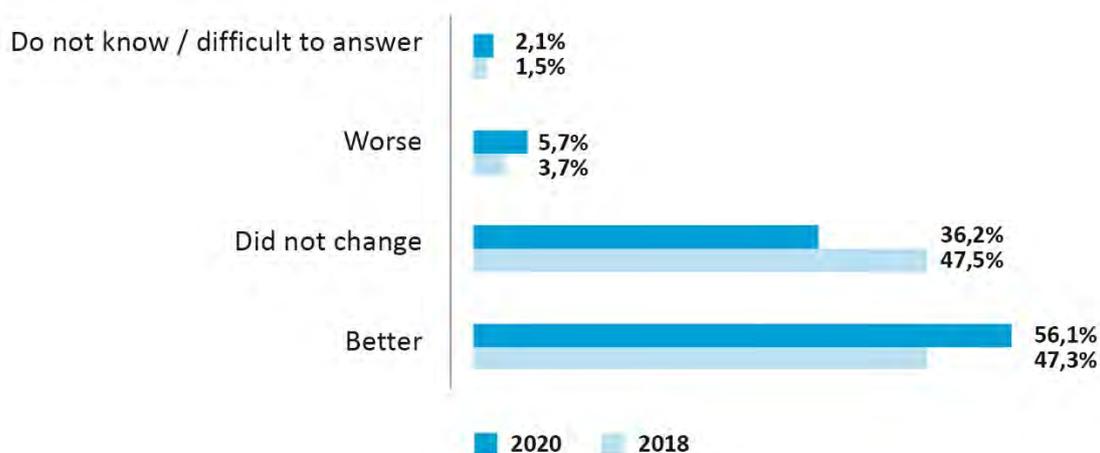
<sup>2</sup> Total volume of the local budget revenues is given according to the plan after the reduction (sequestration) of the Kyrgyz Republic budget in the spring of 2020.

Diagram 4. Dynamics of citizens' interest in the activities of LSG bodies for the period from 2006<sup>3</sup> to 2020, in percent



There is also a completely different hypothesis, according to which citizens' interest in government institutions decreases along with a decrease in the level of trust. In this case, people stop believing that power is capable of changing life for the better, and stop wasting time and energy on participating in governance. However, with regard to local self-government in Kyrgyzstan, the level of citizens' trust in LSG remains consistently high (see Diagram 6), therefore the first explanation related to the improvement of the situation on the ground seems to be more reasonable. Moreover, the 2020 survey data confirm the improvement in the situation. Thus, the respondents show a positive trend in their assessment of living conditions in their city, aimak or village compared to the previous year.

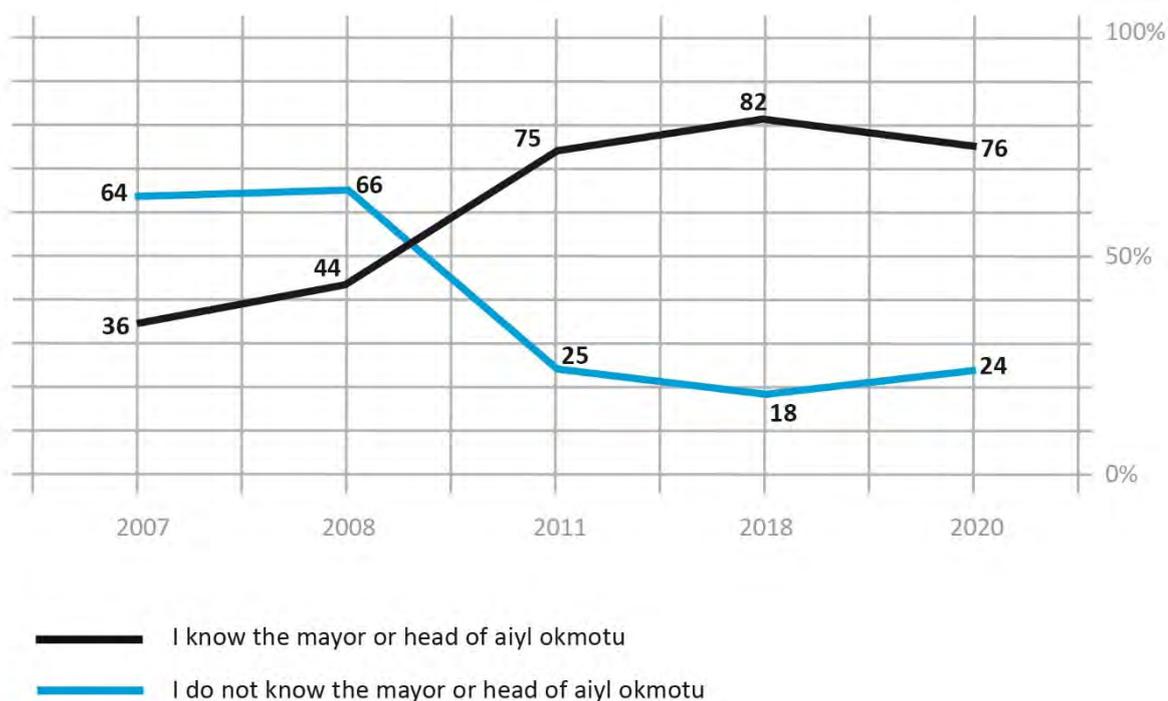
Diagram 5. Assessment of general living conditions in a city, aimak or village in comparison with the previous year, in percent



<sup>3</sup> Data for 2006 were obtained from the urban residents and do not take into account opinions of rural residents.

In addition, a drop in the level of interest in LSG may also be due to the fact that people are already sufficiently informed about the work of local self-government. So, overwhelming majority of citizens - more than 75% know who the head of the executive body of LSG - the mayor or the head of aiyl okmotu is. However, the long-term upward trend in citizens' awareness about the city mayor or the head of aiyl okmotu has stopped, since in 2020, compared to 2018, the share of citizens confidently declaring that they know the head of the municipality decreased by 8%. The same decrease by 8% was noted in relation to the awareness of local councils' deputies. This decrease cannot be regarded as an obviously negative fact, since 76% of those in the know is a very high level of awareness. Taking into account the indirect electoral system, when citizens do not directly elect the head of the executive body of LSG, it is possible to expect further growth in the recognition of local leaders only if a system of direct elections is introduced, when, after "high-profile" election campaigns, winning politicians will be known to 90 and even 100 percent of the population, including children.

Diagram 6. Dynamics of the citizens' level of awareness about the heads of executive bodies of LSG, in percent

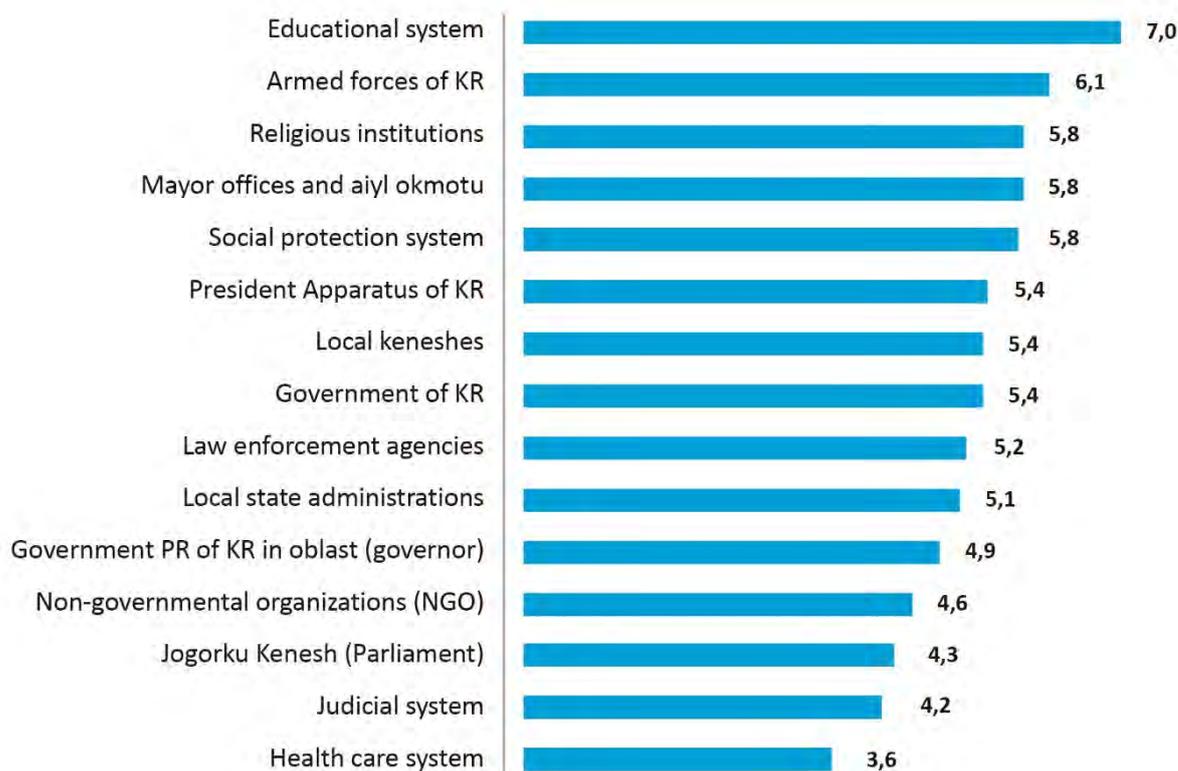


Analysis of the information sources about the LSG activities used by population shows that the citizens' preferences are changing. In the past, the most popular source of information was an informal one - friends, relatives and colleagues, but in 2020 the first place was taken by crowded places - bazaars, fairs, gatherings and the like, where, along with rumors, often quite official information circulated, which was shared by LSG bodies. Thus, the share of respondents who consider friends, relatives and colleagues to be the main sources of information in 2020 more than halved - from 38.5% in 2018 to 16.7% in 2020, and the share of respondents who receive information in public places (bazaars, fairs) increased from 8.5% in 2018 to 20.2% in 2020 (it is important to understand that LSG bodies often use crowded places to post official information). The share of citizens receiving information from LSG bodies at gatherings and meetings of citizens is also growing: in 2018, 22% of respondents used this method for obtaining information, and in 2020 - 26%. Thus, priorities of citizens regarding the information sources about the work of LSG bodies are shifting in favor of official channels, while rumors and gossip are gradually losing popularity. Citizens are beginning to rely on more verified sources of information, which indicates a growing criticality in the perception of information.

### Citizens' trust in LSG bodies

Level of citizens' trust in LSG bodies is traditionally higher than the level of trust in executive government bodies. In 2020, the executive bodies of LSG - the mayor's office and aiyl okmotu took the fourth place in the rating of public confidence, yielding the first three places to the education system, armed forces and religious institutions, respectively. Local keneshes are less trusted by the population and are ranked seventh in the rating of trust.

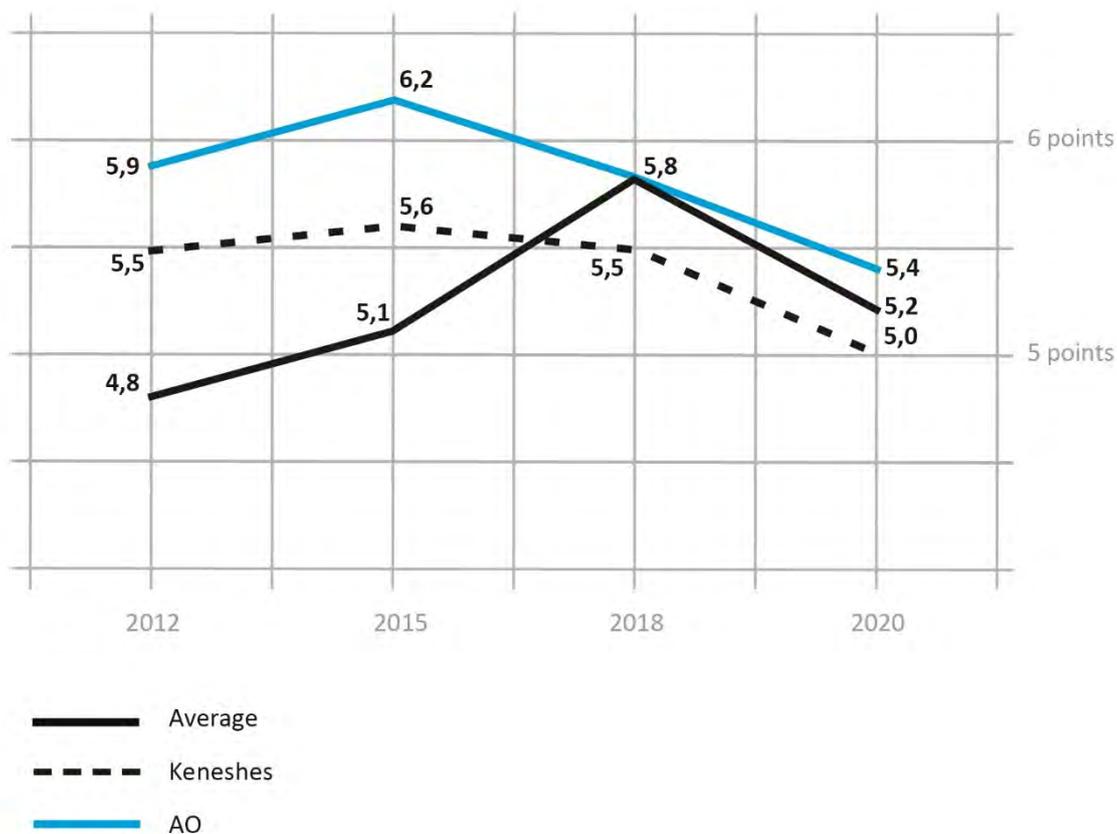
Diagram 7. Level of citizens' trust in institutions of governance and development in 2020, on a ten-point scale, where 10 means the maximum level of trust



Differences in the level of trust in the executive and representative bodies of LSG are explained by several factors. First, citizens generally have a lower opinion of the local kenesh deputies and want higher qualification requirements for them. Secondly, there is a lack of confidence in the party principle of electing local deputies - 44.2% of the respondents believe that local keneshes should not be formed on a party basis. However, this opinion is not uniform: for example, Osh oblast has the largest share of respondents - 46.9%, who believe that local keneshes should be formed according to the party list, while in Talas oblast such respondents are only 12.4%, and in other oblasts this indicator varies from 28 to 33%.

The level of citizens' trust in the authorities as a whole was influenced by the surge in confidence in the governance system in 2018 caused by high expectations from the regional development policy. After 2018, there has been a drop in the level of trust in all institutions. The largest drop in confidence was recorded in the education system (by 1.16 points) and Jogorku Kenesh (by 0.69 points). Compared to the 2012 results, the level of trust in local self-government is falling more slowly than in the system of governance as a whole. So, on average, in 2020 the level of trust in the governance system fell by 0.6 points, in city administrations and aiyl okmotu - by 0.4 points, in local keneshes - by 0.5 points.

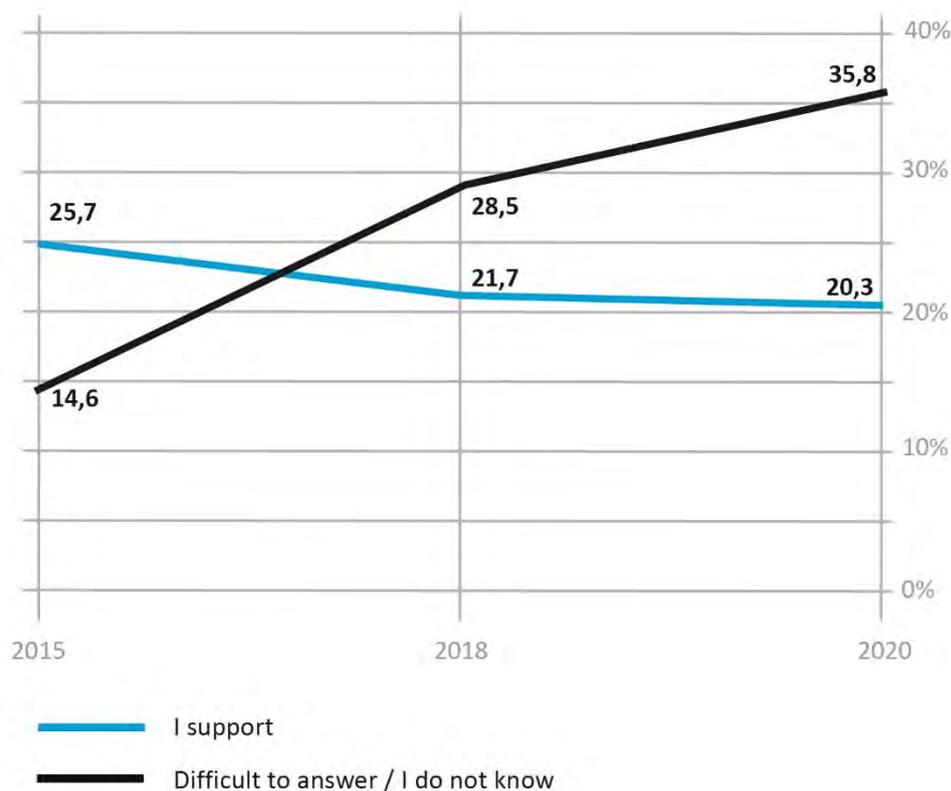
Diagram 8. Dynamics of the level of citizens' trust in LSG bodies in comparison with the average value of the trust level in government institutions in general, on a ten-point scale, where 10 means the maximum level of trust



The absolute majority of respondents - 94% - believe that the requirements for candidates for the position of mayor or head, as well as for the local kenesh deputies should be set higher. Significantly, by 13.4% compared to 2018, the share of citizens who are confident that the head of the LSG executive body should be chosen by population through direct elections has increased: 90.4% of citizens think so.

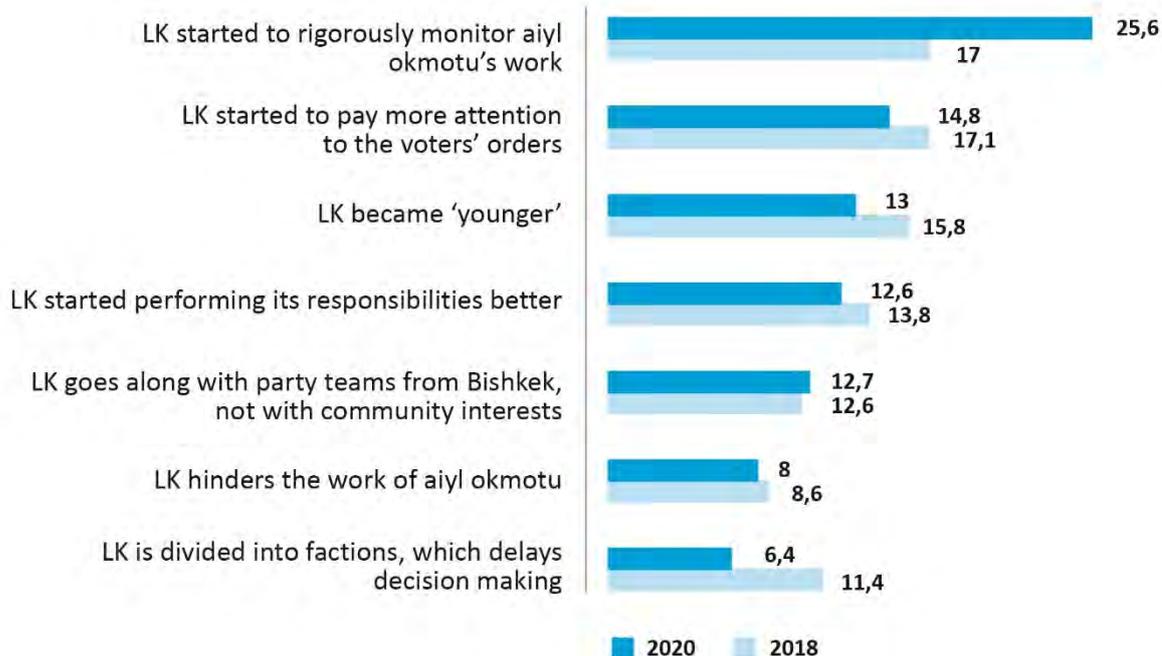
Regarding the representative bodies of LSG - local keneshes - skeptical opinion of citizens regarding the negative influence of the party factor has somewhat softened. Although in 2020 a significant part of citizens, 44%, do not support the party principle of forming local keneshes, the number of citizens who agree with the party principle has grown 2.5 times compared to 2015. This tendency is most likely explained by the general normalization of the interaction of the kenesh with the executive bodies: their relations are evolving, opposition is decreasing, and relationships are becoming more constructive. The share of undecided citizens is also decreasing, which is probably a consequence of a gradual growth of understanding of the essence of the party system by population.

Diagram 9. Dynamics of the level of citizens' support to the party principle of the local keneshes' formation, 2015-2020, in percent



As regards the factors of the political parties' influence on the work of local keneshes, situation is also changing. The share of respondents who believe that political parties fully or partially influence the work of local kenesh has decreased, and the total share of such respondents in 2020 was 40.5%, which is 11.5% less than in 2018.

Diagram 10. Opinion of citizens about the types of influence of political parties on the work of local keneshes, 2018 and 2020, in percent



In general, the nature of the respondents' answers indicates that, in their opinion, the influence of political parties over the past 2 years has become more positive in terms of strengthening control over the work of aiyl okmotu, but has not changed, and in some ways even has become more negative in terms of interaction of the local kenesh with the population.

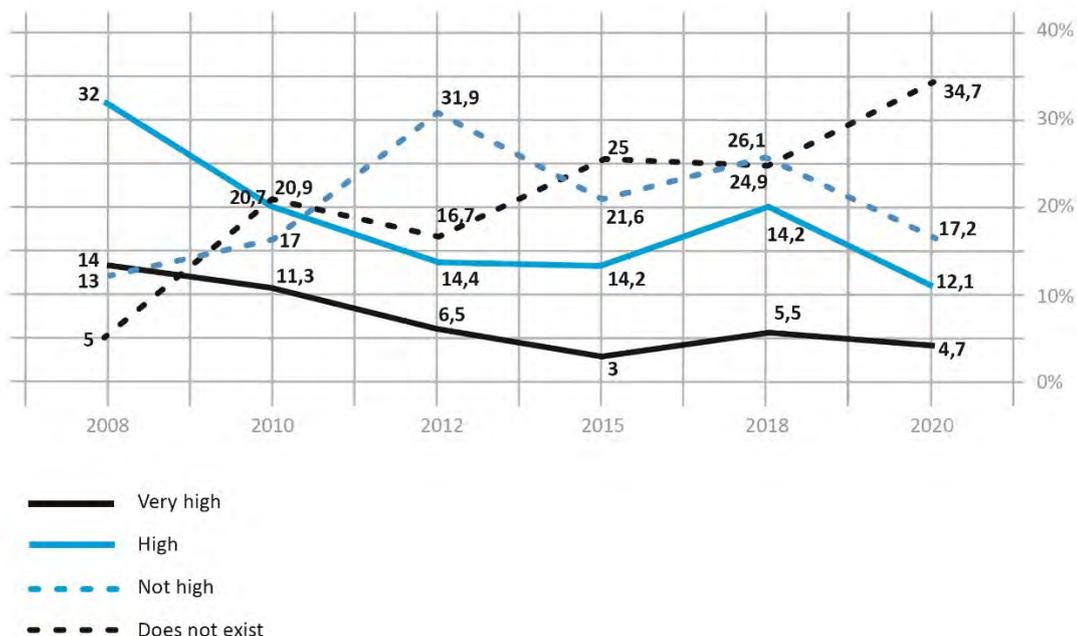
Nevertheless, the share of citizens fully or partially satisfied with the interaction with the executive bodies of LSG remains high and amounts to 75.5%, that is, three out of four citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic are to some extent satisfied with the work of local self-government. Although, compared to 2018, in 2020 this figure decreased by 5.5%. The share of citizens who are satisfied with interaction with local keneshes is also high, although lower than with mayor's offices and aiyl okmotu - 69.5% versus 75.5%.

Data obtained indicate that the level of citizens' trust in LSG bodies remains at a fairly high level (4th and 7th in the ranking of 15 organizations and institutions). The level of trust in LSG is still higher than the level of trust in government bodies. A slight drop in the level of trust in LSG bodies is caused, first of all, by the general tendency of a decrease of citizens' trust in the authorities as a whole, and secondly, by people's dissatisfaction with the qualifications of local deputies and municipal employees, as well as distrust of the party system of local elections. Despite the fact that satisfaction with interaction with the executive bodies of LSG – mayor's offices and aiyl okmotu - is higher than with local keneshes, in the future, the vast majority of citizens want to directly elect the heads of executive bodies of LSG.

### Citizens' opinion on the level of corruption in local self-government

Relative to state bodies, high level of citizens' trust in LSG bodies is also confirmed by their opinion on the corruption at the local level. Thus, every third citizen believes that there is no corruption in LSG. The number of such opinions is steadily growing. So, since 2008, the share of citizens who are confident that there is no corruption in LSG has increased almost sevenfold. The share of those who consider the corruption level in LSG to be high has decreased by 2.5 times, and the share of those who consider the corruption level in LSG to be very high by three times.

Diagram 11. Opinion of respondents regarding the level of corruption in the mayor's office and aiyl okmotu, 2012-2020, in percent



Among the areas of the LSG bodies' activities where, according to respondents, corruption is most often manifested, land management, budget management, and inclusion in the

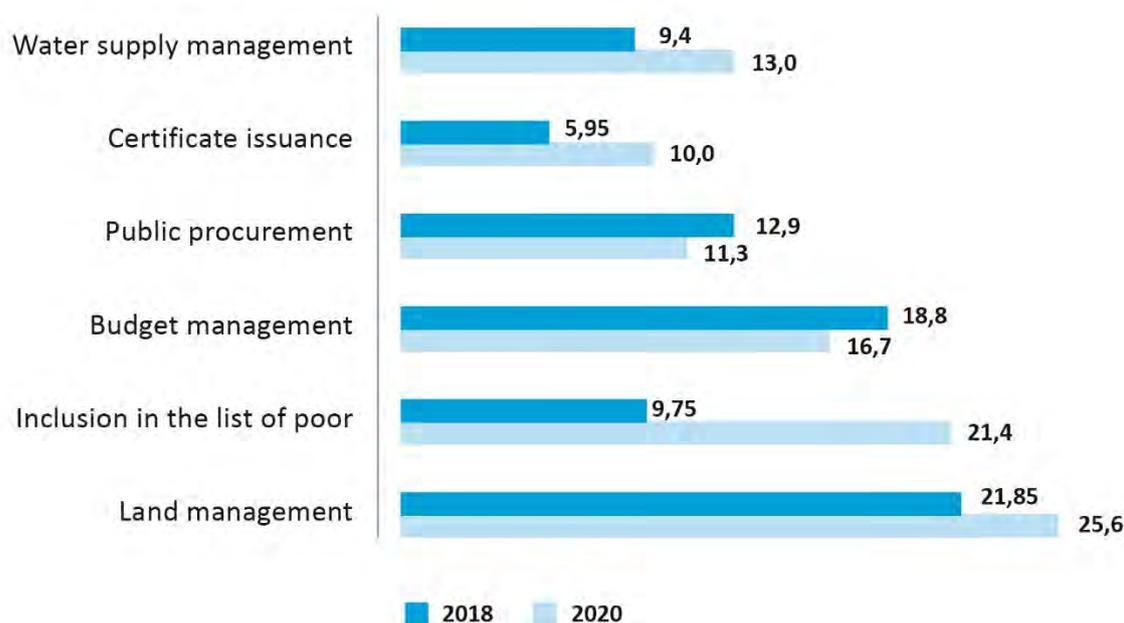
list of the poor are leading. Diagram 12 shows that over the past two years, the number of those who observe manifestations of corruption in the process of being included in the list of the poor has more than doubled - 9.75 to 21.4%. This may be due to an increase in the number of beneficiaries, caused by the fact that pensions were excluded from the total family income when establishing eligibility for the benefit - more new “clients”, more misunderstanding and suspicion. However, according to the changes in the legislation that took place in 2019, the initial appeal of citizens for a monthly allowance for low-income families with children is no longer going to LSG bodies, as it was before in rural areas, but to rayon social development departments. And the whole procedure for inclusion in the list of the poor began to be carried out through the rayon departments of social development, and LSG bodies were excluded from this process. Thus, this surge of suspicions of corruption is addressed, in fact, not to the LSG bodies, but to the authorized state body.

Citizens also observe the growth of corruption in water management. But here, too, LSG bodies become a victim of redirected suspicions, since at present in most municipalities, drinking and irrigation water services are provided not by LSG bodies, but by public organizations – WUA and RPADWU. However, in accordance with the legislation, the ultimate responsibility for these services is still borne by LSG, and citizens reasonably project their suspicions on local self-government, although the decision to transfer services to the above organizations was made not by LSG, but by the government.

Direct addressing of suspicions of corruption to LSG bodies is fair with regard to issuing certificates, since this function is performed only by local self-government. Suspicions of corruption in land management are distributed among LSG bodies (in relation to municipal land within settlements; provision of land plots for individual housing construction; distribution of land by the State Agriculture Land Fund); pasture committees (in relation to pasture cards) and local state administrations (in relation to the land transformation process).

In general, a growing number of citizens believe that corruption is more often manifested at the local level in issues related to the management of resources - land, water, as well as in the distribution of state benefits. However, there are areas in which the opinion of citizens about the presence of corruption in LSG bodies is improving - these are budget management and public procurement.

Diagram 12. Rating of the corruption areas by the LSG bodies, 2020, in percent



## II. Citizen Participation in Local Self-Government

Citizen participation in local self-government is the foundation of local self-government, since the essence of the local self-government system lies in independent decisions of the local community taken under its own responsibility. Therefore, a constant process of improving the legal and institutional conditions for realization of the citizens' right to participate in LSG is necessary.

Citizens are still not sufficiently informed about their rights and obligations in LSG and do not always fully exercise their right to participate in local self-government. Problem lies mainly in the lack of effective communication between LSG and citizens. Infantile, consumerist attitude of the population to the state, preserved from the times of the Soviet Union and the planned economy, also has an influence. Many citizens, including the heads and employees of LSG bodies, and even some civil servants, do not fully understand the true nature of LSG, and continue to expect the state to make both managerial decisions and resolve the problems themselves. While the state itself is not yet bringing the reform of LSG to a logically completed status, not ensuring the true independence of LSG bodies.

In the planning and implementation of social and economic development of the local community, LSG bodies in most cases do not sufficiently take into account the real needs of citizens. Local budgets should be inextricably linked with programs of social and economic development of territories and based on priorities of local communities. National legislation (the Budget Code of the Kyrgyz Republic and other RLAs) imposes requirements on LSG bodies to identify priorities and discuss draft budget with population at public hearings (hereinafter- PH). However, the quality of this work is still insufficient. This is mainly explained by the lack of understanding at the local level of how to represent the interests of population in the budget process.

Reporting is structured in such a way that LSG bodies are primarily accountable not to those who elect them (i.e., local community), but to those who are higher in the governance hierarchy - to state bodies. Lack of accountability to local community is expressed in the fact that the heads of executive bodies of rural LSGs - heads of aiyl okmotu are actually not accountable to population, citizens, since they are elected by the local kenesh deputies, and their candidacy is nominated by a representative of the state or local kenesh itself. Thus, citizens are not able to directly influence the leader through the electoral system. As a result, the main goal of the aiyl okmotu leadership is to meet the needs of the local state administration leadership or local kenesh, whose interests do not always coincide with the interests of the public majority, which is facilitated by the party electoral system.

Regarding the forms of participation in LSG preferred by population, citizens noted that the most effective form is the meetings that LSG body holds in the communities (47%); PH (35%); local kurultai (31%); local initiative (22%). It is alarming that only 12% of citizens consider elections to the local kenesh as an effective form of participation and 10% - interaction through NGOs. These data indicate that, despite the rather high level of public confidence in local self-government, citizens still strive for direct interaction, avoiding forms associated with the representative principle - elections and work through NGOs. This is due to the insufficient level of trust in the representative form of citizen participation in LSG, incomplete fulfillment of their duties by local keneshes, and weak accountability of LSG bodies to citizens.

*Diagram 13. The most effective forms of local democracy and civic participation at the LSG level<sup>4</sup>*



### Citizen participation in the budget process

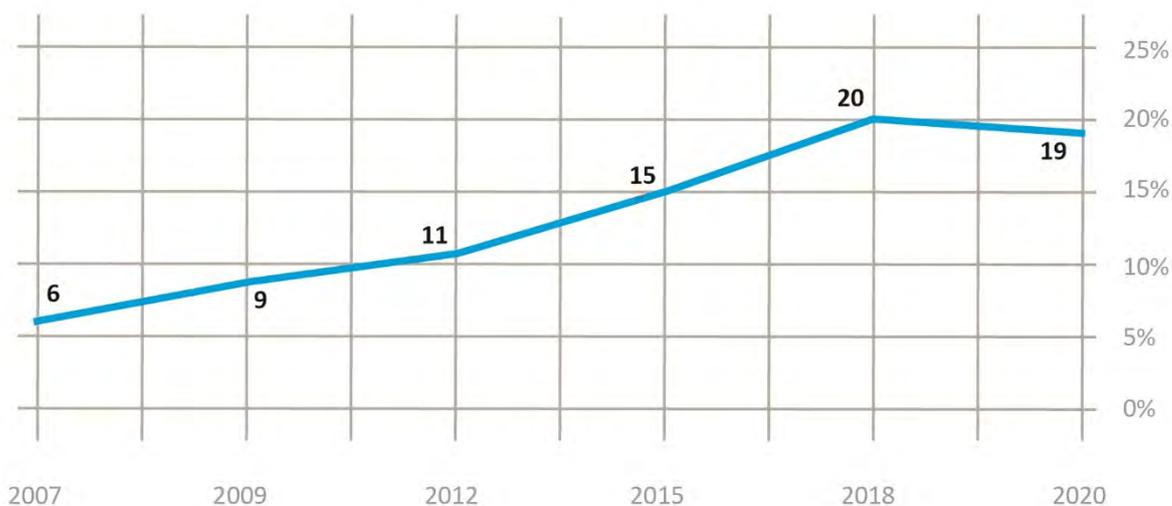
As mentioned above, meetings and public hearings remain the most popular form of citizen participation in LSG. It is important to understand that the participation of citizens in public hearings is inversely proportional to the number of citizens themselves. International practice shows that for a municipality with a population of less than 5000 people, attendance at general municipal meetings is 14-15%, with a population of more than 20 thousand people - 3-5%<sup>5</sup>. This is due to simple physical restrictions on holding any meetings - it is impossible to gather more than 150-200 people in one place in most settlements (in the practice of LSG bodies in Kyrgyzstan, hearings of more than 200 people are extremely rare). Based on the total number of LSG bodies in the country, physically possible maximum of participants in public hearings on the budget in the Kyrgyz Republic can range from 60 to 100 people (according to the Ministry of Finance of the Kyrgyz Republic, on average, 85 people attend hearings). However, physically possible maximum does not mean a socially possible and effective maximum, since simply increasing the number of participants does not mean that the budget discussion is most effective for citizens.

In parallel with the accumulation of the hearings' practice with history starting in 1999, until 2018 in Kyrgyzstan there was a steady increase in the level of citizen participation in public hearings on the budget at the local level, which in 2018 exceeded the record for the Kyrgyz Republic 20%. In 2019, according to the Ministry of Finance of KR, hearings were held by 330 LSG bodies mainly rural, and the number of participants was more than 28 thousand people. Thus, the prospects for further simple quantitative growth of citizen participation in public hearings should not be the goal of the process of strengthening citizen participation.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Public Opinion Survey Residents of Kyrgyzstan // The survey was conducted by Dr. Rasa Alisaukiene of the public and market research company Baltic Surveys/The Gallup Organization on behalf of the International Republican Institute. The field work was carried out by SIAR Research and Consulting, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Based on example of Massachusetts (USA). Ochertina M. A. Concept and typology of the institution of public hearings // Scientific Yearbook of the Institute of Philosophy and Law of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, No. 8, 2008. Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/ponyatie-i-tipologiya-institutu-publichnyh-slushaniy/viewer>

Diagram 14. Share of citizens participating in public hearings on the budget, 2007-2020, in percent

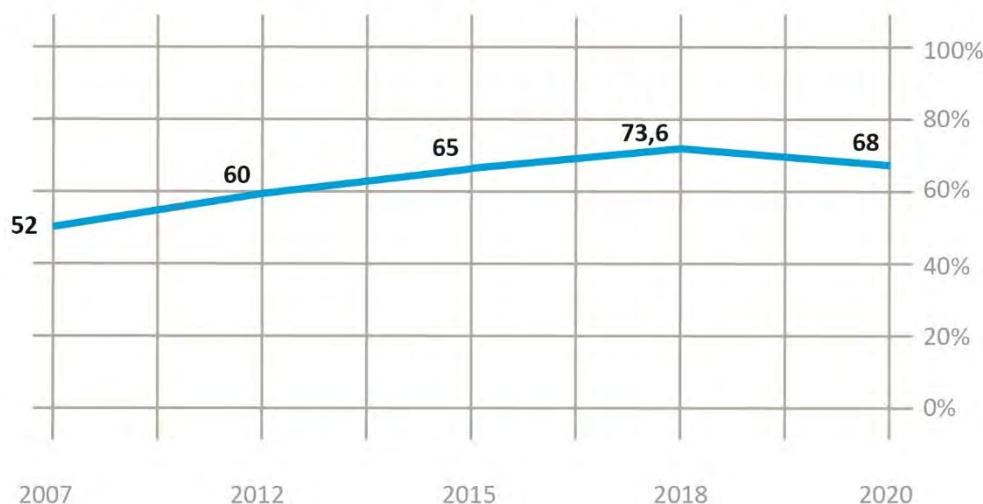


It is all the more unlikely that a further increase in the number of participants in the hearings is due to the fact that LSG bodies have created conditions for the majority of those wishing to participate, and lack of information, ignorance of the event is not the main reason for non-participation. This is confirmed by an increase in the number of citizens who did not take part in public hearings due to their employment, although they knew that such events were being held - 24.5% answered so in 2020 against 17.8% in 2018. The share of those who did not know about the hearing decreased by 3.4%; by 3.3% - the share of those who are not interested in this event.

Thus, the forecast is that in the future the level of citizen participation in public hearings will be unstable, for example, in 2020 there has already been a decrease in interest in hearings by 1.6% compared to the maximum in 2018. Now LSG bodies will have to pay special attention to the quality of hearings, and especially to the responsibility for accounting in the budget of the citizens' proposals received during the hearings.

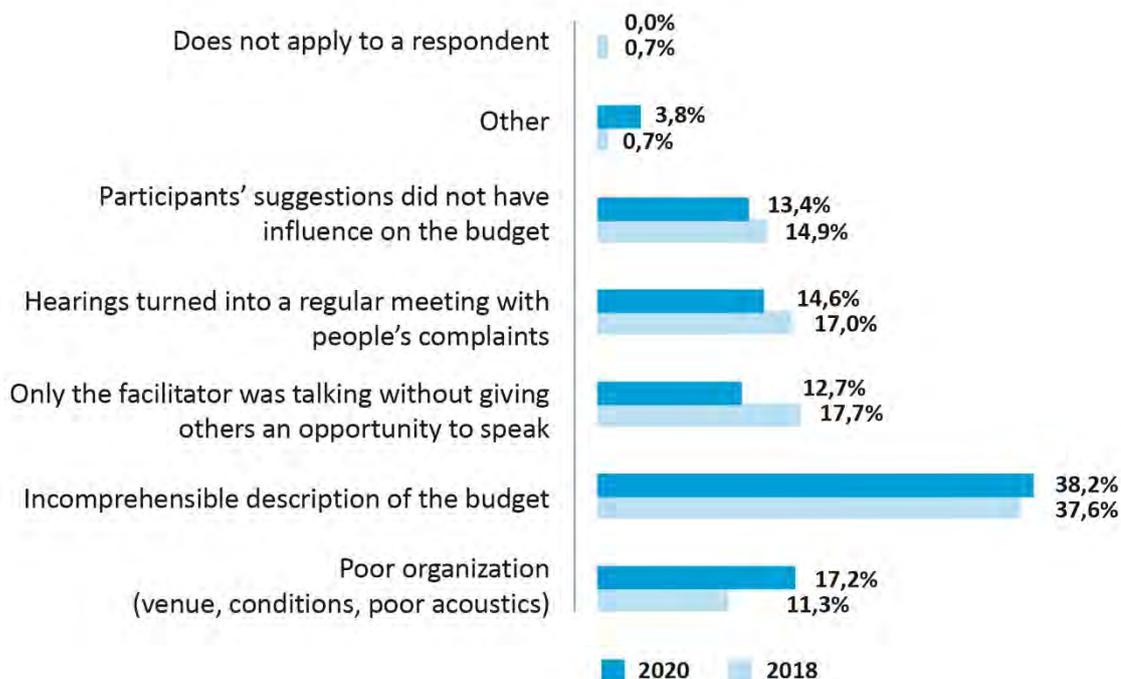
The quality of hearings and consideration of proposals will further have a key impact on citizens' willingness to participate in the budget process. If in the first decade of the practice of holding hearings people were inspired by the very opportunity to discuss such a sensitive and important issue as public finance with the authorities, then over time, citizens began to appreciate the practical result of the hearings more. In this context, a twofold decrease - from 8% to 4.2% - is especially positive in the share of those citizens who do not believe in the very institution of hearings and believe that the wishes of the participants in the hearings will not be taken into account in the draft budget. These dynamics indicate that people are more confident that their opinions will be heard. In general, the share of citizens satisfied with participation in budget hearings remains quite high - about 70%. However, in 2020, for the first time in a long time, a 5.6% drop in the level of satisfaction was recorded.

Diagram 15. Share of citizens satisfied with the results of their participation in public hearings on the budget, 2007-2020, in percent



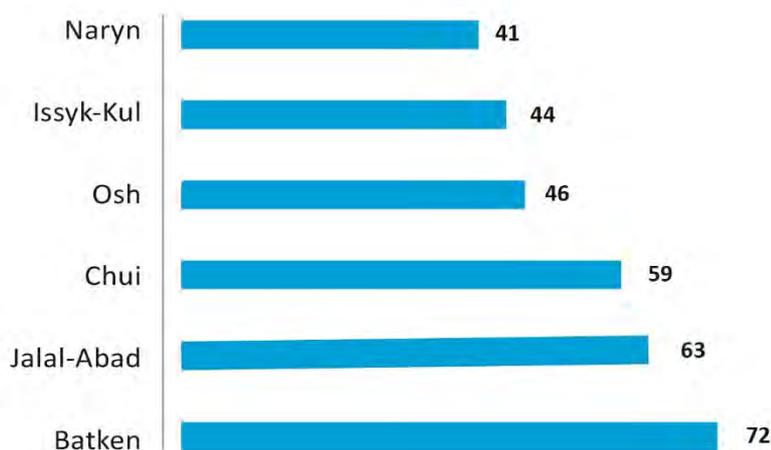
So, the overwhelming majority - almost 70% of citizens - are satisfied with their participation in hearings on local budgets. Representatives of the remaining minority, dissatisfied with their experience of participating in budget hearings, explain their opinion by the following reasons: low level of financial literacy and misunderstanding of the budget (38.2%), poor organization (17.2%), transformation of hearings into a regular meeting with people’s complaints (14.6%), proposals of the hearings participants did not affect the budget (13.4%), only the facilitator spoke and did not give the residents an opportunity to speak (12.7%).

Diagram 16. Rating of reasons for dissatisfaction from participation in public hearings on the budget, comparison of indicators for 2018 and 2020, in percent



Regarding taking into account the citizens' proposals received during the hearings on the local budget, according to the Ministry of Finance of KR, LSGs managed to take into account about 52% of the proposals received. At the same time, in Chui and Jalal-Abad oblasts, LSGs managed to take into account about 60% of proposals received from citizens, and in Talas oblast - more than 70%.

*Diagram 17. Share of proposals taken into account by LSG bodies based on the results of public hearings on the budget by oblasts of the Kyrgyz Republic, percent (excluding Talas oblast, data on which could not be collected)*



It needs to be understood that people often expect instant reactions and populist statements right away, already during the hearing. But at the local level, especially at the level of rural municipalities, it is often impossible to react instantly, it is impossible to make a promise to fulfill this or that wish. As a rule, there is not enough money in local budgets, and municipal leaders are careful about promises, realizing that it is impossible to solve all problems, and demand from them will come quickly.

Yet the reason for misunderstanding budget data is becoming more and more popular. Thus, low level of financial literacy in general, inability to read and understand budget information remains one of the main reasons for dissatisfaction with participation in budget hearings.

Study of this issue in the context of gender shows that women more often than men indicated that during the hearings only one facilitator spoke and did not give the residents an opportunity to speak - in 2020 19.4% of women answered this way, against 7.1% of men. At the same time, for 45.9% of men and only 29.2% of women, the budget explanation was incomprehensible. Women more often than men believe that the hearings turned into a simple meeting with people's complaints - 18.1% versus 11.8%. Conclusion is that women are just as well versed as men in public finance management, but women notice discrimination against themselves in the discussion, believing that they are not allowed to speak as much as they would like.

Further, LSG bodies will have to make efforts to introduce even simpler and more accessible mechanisms for dissemination of budget information, for example, online format of civil budget, which in 2019 was already filled in by about 70% of LSG bodies, but not all citizens know about it and can obtain information about the their LSG's budget with its help. The quantitative indicator of the level of participation in public hearings in the assessment of the work of LSG bodies should be replaced to a greater extent by qualitative indicators of taking into account the opinions and wishes of citizens, creating conditions for online communication and receiving proposals through municipal sites, WhatsApp groups, suggestion boxes and other forms of feedback.

### Citizens' readiness to personally participate in addressing issues of local importance

Efforts of LSG bodies to organize a dialogue, create new forms of interaction with citizens lead to increased responsibility on the part of the community itself. This is important, since true local self-government requires local communities to resolve issues of local importance, including their responsibility. Influenced by the legal requirements and public demand, LSG bodies pay great attention to the voice of citizens, and citizens respond with their willingness to take part in the development of the community.

A growing number of citizens are ready to take personal part in the public affairs of their city or village. In 2020, 64.8% of respondents express such a willingness, which is 8.7% more than in 2018 (citizens who previously were not often ready to take part in public affairs now speak with confidence about their readiness to do so). At the same time, almost half of the respondents (47%) confirmed that they already have a similar experience.

This indirectly testifies to the fact that more and more citizens believe in the possibility of changing the general living conditions, but at the same time, more and more people are ready to help local self-government, apparently realizing that they need such help. This is also the result of the introduction into legislation of the requirements for citizen participation in planning and setting priorities - by diving deeper into the problems of local self-government, people become more responsive to them.

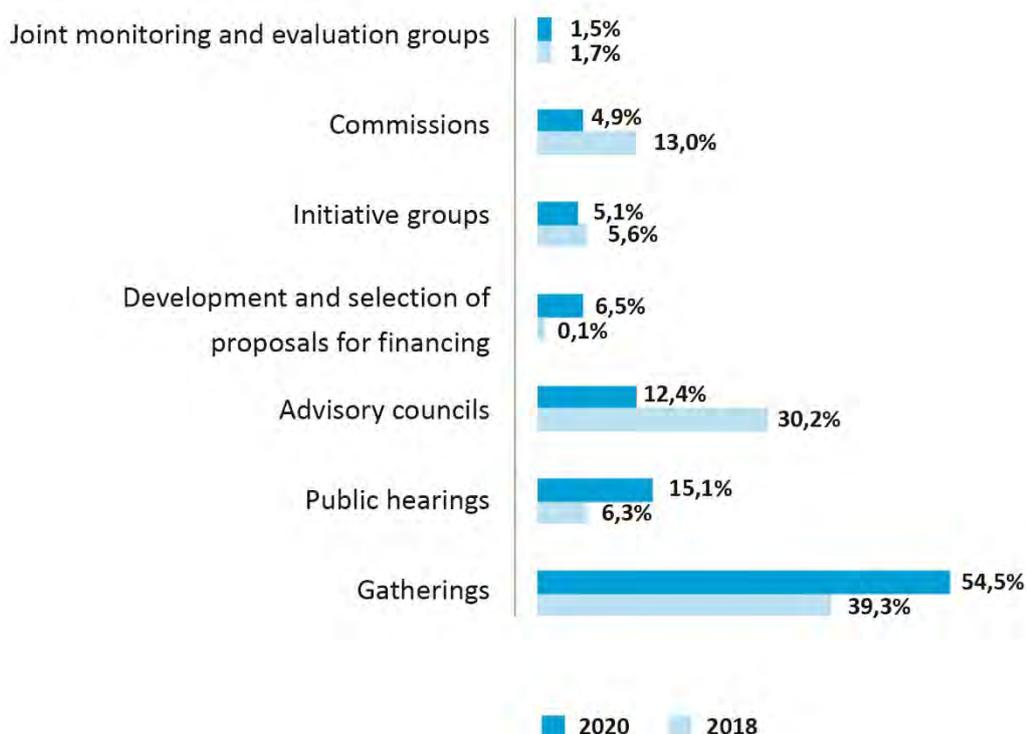
In general, the increase in the proportion of those who are ready to be involved in addressing issues of local importance is a positive fact, since the joint efforts of the community and the governing body are always more productive than working separately. However, this poses a challenge for LSG bodies to provide all these people with appropriate organizational forms of participation, as well as to make more efforts in terms of monitoring and evaluating this participation, formulating the contribution of citizens, evaluating it and giving it public recognition and gratitude.

Women are less likely to express their willingness to take personal part in addressing local issues. In 2020, 58.5% of men took part in public affairs against 38.1% of respondents among women. There are two reasons for this. First, women are overburdened with unpaid domestic work, which takes away their free time that they could spend on social activities. Secondly, women continue to face negative community attitudes towards manifestations of their public activity.

The most popular forms of participation in public affairs, according to citizens, are meetings (54.5%) and public hearings (15.1%). At the same time, the share of participants in public hearings on the budget, tariffs, services and other issues of local importance more than doubled. This suggests that citizen participation is gradually moving from the stage of consultation to the stage of joint decision-making, since hearings, in contrast to meetings, are aimed at making a specific decision, and not just information or consultation. Another proof that citizen participation is becoming more and more productive is the six fold increase in the proportion of those who took part in the development and selection of projects applying for funding from the local budget or external assistance.

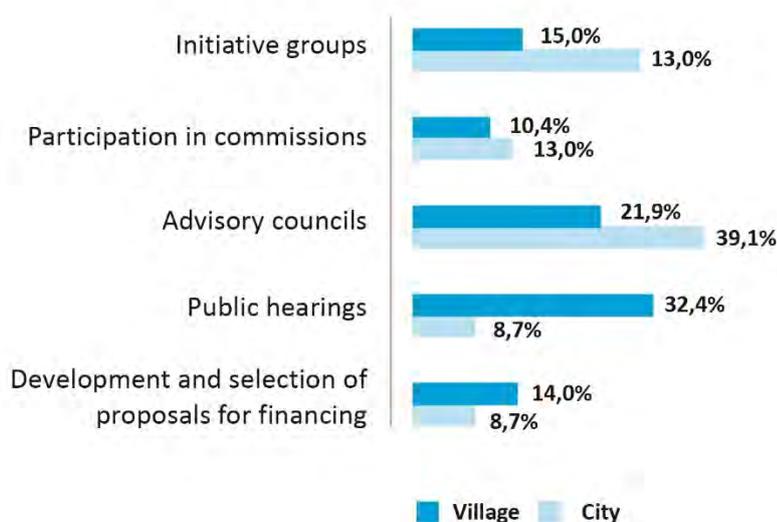
The fact of a sharp reduction in those who participate in public councils is noticeable. If in 2018 public councils ranked second in the popularity rating of the participation forms and collected more than 30% of responses, then two years later the popularity of councils more than halved, and collected only 12% of responses. This change should be viewed as a positive development, since at the level of local self-government there is the most important council endowed with local legislative powers - local kenesh. And if the local kenesh works efficiently and fully, then usually citizens do not need to participate in additional councils.

Diagram 18. Level of citizens' participation in public affairs by forms of participation, in 2018 and 2019, in percent



However, the situation in villages is different from that in large villages and cities. In a small municipality, the local kenesh is able to provide all the needs for councils, but in a city or large municipality, creation of thematic councils is often justified. Therefore, in cities, citizens prefer to participate more in initiative groups and public councils, and in villages - in public hearings, as well as in the development and selection of proposals for funding.

Diagram 19. Citizens' preferences of the participation forms in LSG in cities and villages, in percent



The number of citizens who are ready to take personal part in public works for the improvement of their city and village is constantly growing. In 2020, compared to 2018, this indicator increased by another 9.1% and amounted to 72.8%. In fact, the overwhelming majority

of citizens are ready to make a personal contribution to the improvement of their municipality, and this “army” of people represents a huge development potential for LSG bodies.

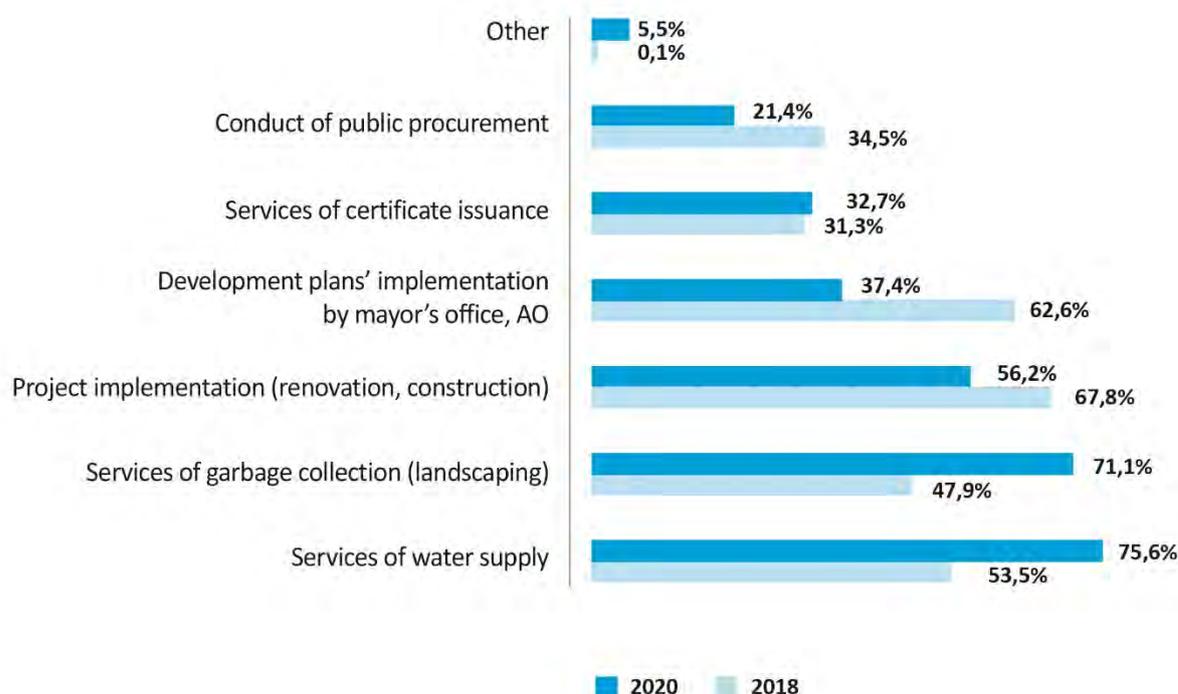
At the same time, this indicator demonstrates solidarity and collectivism of the people of Kyrgyzstan, presence of a sense of responsibility not only for their own lives, but for the living conditions of future generations. In this regard, the primary task of LSG is to provide citizens with effective opportunities for it. LSG bodies are addressing this task partially, since share of people who already have experience of personal participation in public works for the improvement of their city and village is growing and amounts to 36.7% in 2020. That is, every third Kyrgyz citizen already contributes to improving the living conditions, not only personal, but also public.

At the same time, the number of respondents who are not ready to take part in improvement works increased slightly - by 4% - which amounted to 16.2% in 2020, the rest are ready to participate on a non-permanent basis, or found it difficult to answer.

### Citizen participation in the monitoring and evaluation of LSG performance

Monitoring and evaluating the work of LSG bodies is one of the most difficult aspects of citizen participation in local self-government, although this type of public activity has a long history in the Kyrgyz Republic. In general, people are accustomed to the word “monitoring”, often perceiving it as control over the government, and therefore almost half - 47.4% - of citizens express a desire to participate in monitoring and evaluation, and only 7.3% were undecided about the answer. However, a deeper analysis of the subjects of monitoring and evaluation reveals significant differences in terms of citizens' preparedness.

Diagram 20. Rating of popularity of subjects (topics) of monitoring and evaluation among citizens, 2020-2028, in percent



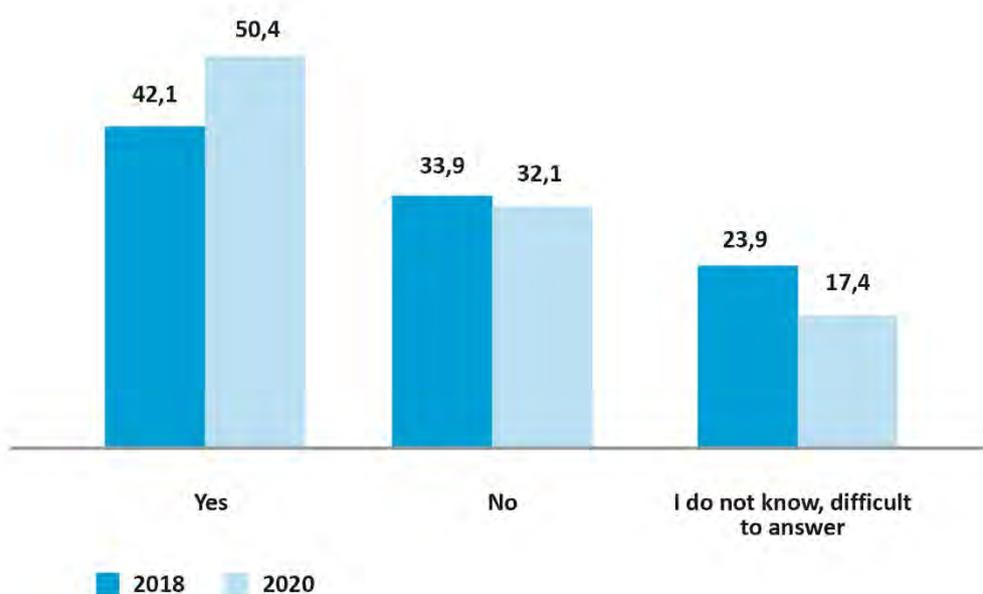
Thus, among those who express a desire to participate in monitoring and evaluation, more than 70% are ready to do so in relation to drinking water supply and garbage collection services (75.6% and 71.1%, respectively). These are quite logical leaders in the rating of topics for public monitoring, since the provision of drinking water and garbage collection services are used by every family every day, so everyone worries about the quality and sufficiency of these services and is ready to monitor their provision.

The third place in the ranking of topics is taken by monitoring the implementation of projects, which 67.8% of respondents are ready to deal with. For many years, the practice of involving citizens in monitoring and evaluating various infrastructure facilities, for example, repairing schools, has been developing in rural communities of the Kyrgyz Republic. This type of monitoring is usually not difficult, since there is a specific group of people in the community interested in the quality and timeliness of work, in the example of schools - these can be teachers, parents of students who are very interested in the school being renovated on time and with proper quality. However, here it is important to understand that the effectiveness of this kind of monitoring on the part of citizens is significantly higher if the customer is the LSG body, and not third-party organizations, in particular, development projects. It is easier for citizens to influence the LSG body than the third party.

The situation is much more complicated with the processes of public monitoring and evaluation of the performance of LSG body as a whole. In this case, monitoring takes on a long-term character, and the assessment becomes more complex, since along with the obvious results, the management process is assessed. The number of people willing to take part in such types of monitoring in the community has almost halved compared to 2018 and amounted to only 37.4% in 2020. People began to understand that this type of participation requires a significant investment of personal time, as well as efforts to study documents and gain new knowledge.

What is important is the opinion of citizens about whether the LSG has created conditions for citizens to realize their desire to take part in monitoring and evaluation. The survey participants believe that the opportunities have expanded - for example, in 2020 the share of those who see the possibility of monitoring and evaluating the work of LSG bodies exceeded 50%, respectively, the share of those who do not observe such an opportunity or could not answer the question decreased.

*Diagram 21. Dynamics of citizens' opinions on presence or absence of opportunity to participate in monitoring and evaluating the performance of LSG bodies, 2018-2020, in percent*

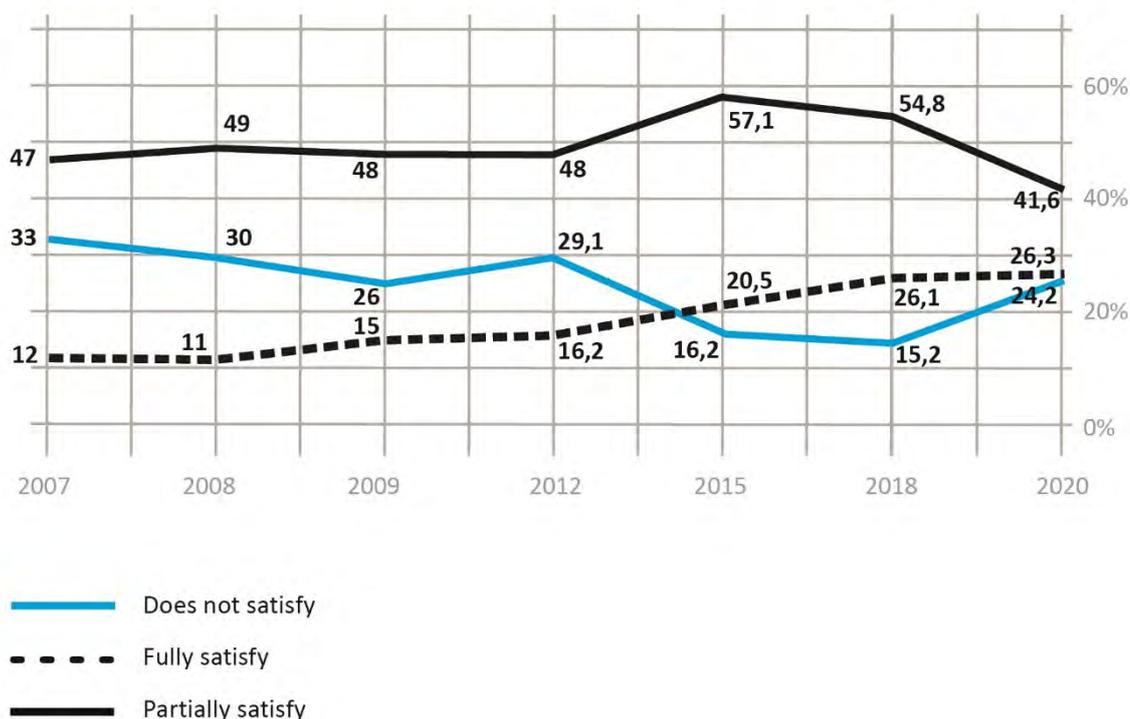


### III. Openness, Transparency, and Accountability of LSG

#### Level of openness of LSG bodies

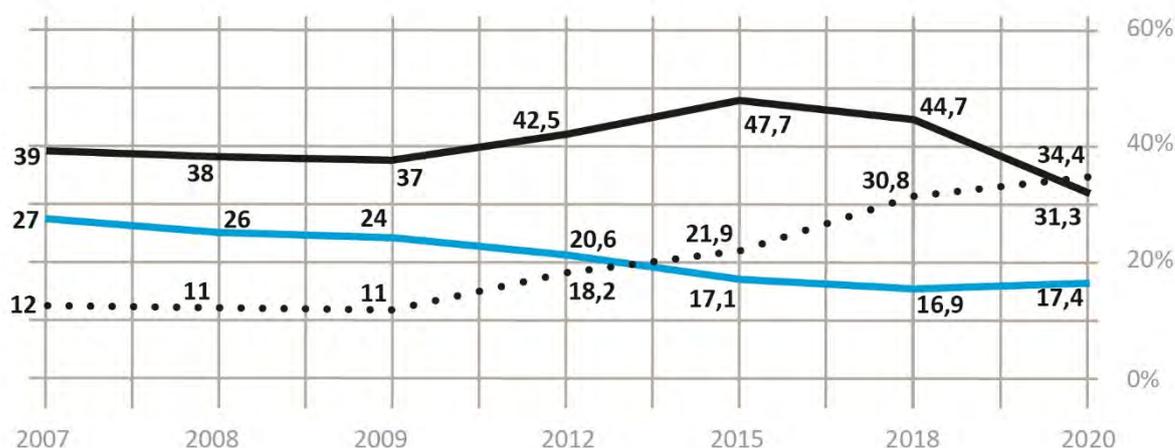
The majority of citizens - 67.9% - are to one degree or another satisfied with the volume and quality of information about local self-government, which indicates a high level of openness of LSG bodies. Since the start of measurements in 2007, the share of citizens fully satisfied with the volume and quality of information has steadily increased and by 2020 more than doubled - from 12 to 26.3%. The growth dynamics continued until 2018 also in relation to the share of citizens who were partially satisfied with the volume and quality of information. In 2018, a historical maximum was reached, when the aggregate share of citizens satisfied with the information fully or partially exceeded 80%. However, in 2020, compared to 2018, the share of those who are not satisfied with the quality and volume of information about local self-government increased sharply. This fact, coupled with a drop in the level of trust and satisfaction with interaction with local self-government bodies in 2020, confirms the hypothesis about the unjustified expectations of citizens that arose in 2018 in connection with the announcement of the year of regional development. Nevertheless, the growth in the share of those satisfied with the volume and quality of information about LSG continued, although its pace somewhat decreased compared to the previous period. It should be noted that citizens form a clearer opinion regarding information about local self-government: the number of those who have decided - fully satisfied and dissatisfied is growing, and the number of those who are partially satisfied or find it difficult to answer is decreasing.

Diagram 22. Dynamics of the citizens' satisfaction level with the volume and quality of information about local self-government, 2007-2020, in percent



The majority of citizens of Kyrgyzstan - 65.7% believe that LSG bodies are to some extent open in their activities to the public. Compared to 2009, those who believe that LSG bodies are **fully** open in their activities has almost tripled (dynamics from 12 to 34.4%).

Diagram 23. Dynamics of citizens' opinions on the level of openness of LSG bodies, 2007-2020, in percent



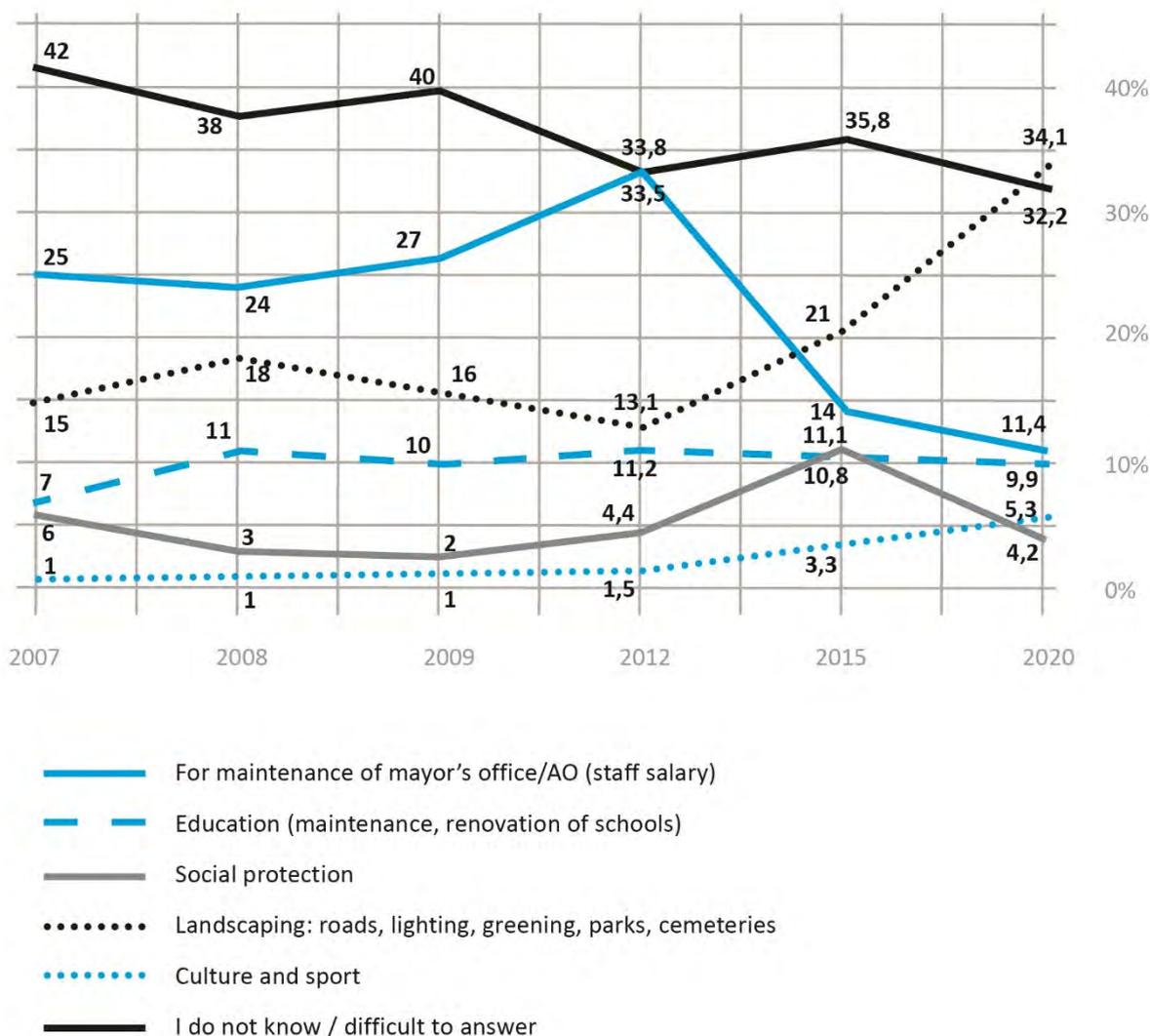
Analysis of the data obtained shows that the volume and quality of information received by citizens from LSG bodies affect the assessment of their level of openness and transparency: the higher the level of citizens' satisfaction with the volume and quality of information about local self-government, the more those who believe that LSGs are open in their activities.

An important fact demonstrating the general awareness of citizens about local self-government is the awareness of citizens about the purposes for which local budget funds are spent.

Diagram 24 shows that citizens' perceptions of the most significant items of expenditure in local budgets have changed and changed radically. Thus, in 2007, 42 citizens did not know for what purposes the local budget was spent. In 2020, the share of such ignorant people decreased by 10%. The idea of spending on the maintenance of the mayor's office and aiyl okmotu and on landscaping has radically changed. Currently, in 2020, 34% of citizens believe that landscaping is a priority item of expenditure, while in 2012 this figure was only 12%. The share of those who considered the maintenance of aiyl okmotu and mayor's offices to be the main item of expenditure also sharply decreased. The whole picture as a whole suggests that citizens in 2020 have a much more realistic idea of the structure of local budget expenditures than it was in 2007. And this is the result of many years of efforts to introduce the practice of disclosing budget information, holding public hearings on the budget, and involving citizens in local development planning.

Three out of four citizens of Kyrgyzstan are to one degree or another satisfied with the work of LSG bodies. Since 2007, the level of satisfaction of citizens with the work of local self-government bodies has been growing, but it has been growing unstably and relatively slowly. Here, as in relation to trust in LSG bodies, there is a decline after the enthusiasm of 2018, when a historical maximum was reached (since the beginning of measurements) and 84% of citizens were satisfied with the work of LSG bodies, however, reality suggests that this was an advance towards authorities, again caused by general optimism about the prospects for the development of local communities in the light of national priorities in the development of regions.

Diagram 24. Dynamics of citizens' opinions on the priority directions of the local budgets' spending, 2007-2020<sup>6</sup>, in percent

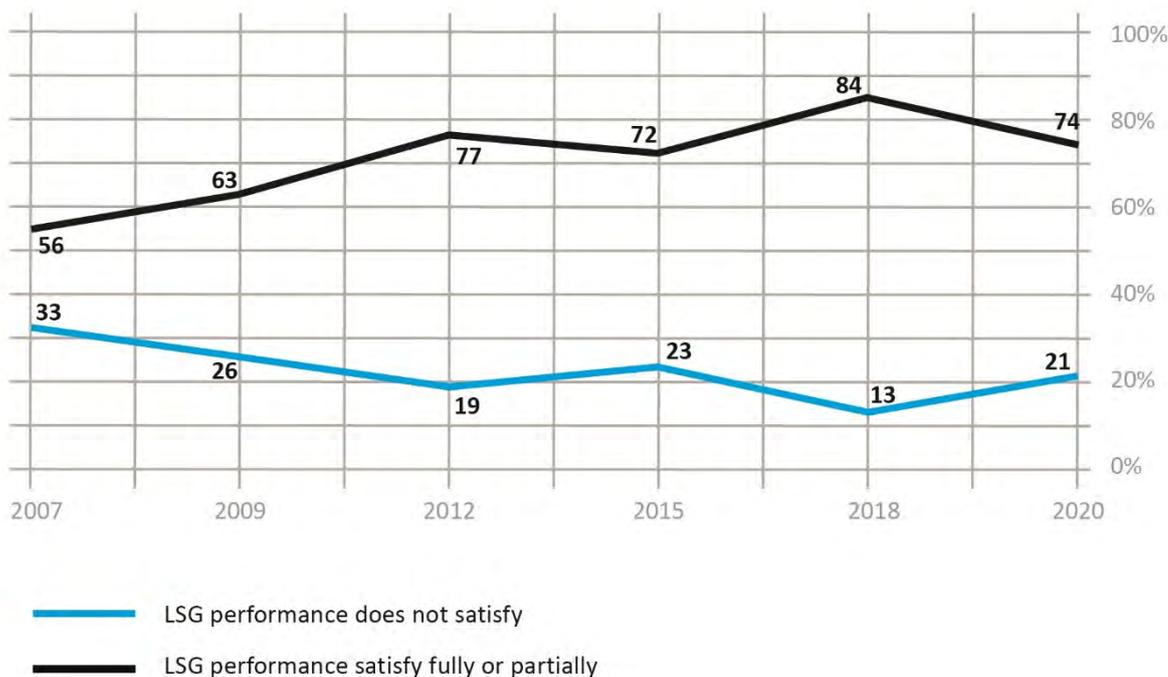


### Citizens' satisfaction with the work of LSG bodies

Three out of four citizens of Kyrgyzstan are to one degree or another satisfied with the work of LSG bodies. Since 2007, the level of satisfaction of citizens with the work of LSGs has been growing, but it has been growing unstably and relatively slowly. Here, as in relation to trust in LSG bodies, there is a decline after the enthusiasm of 2018, when a historical maximum was reached (since the beginning of measurements) and 84% of citizens were satisfied with the work of LSG bodies, however, reality suggests that this was an advance towards authorities, again caused by general optimism about the prospects for the development of local communities in the light of national priorities in the regional development.

<sup>6</sup> 2018 survey results were excluded due to the sampling error.

Diagram 25. Dynamics of the satisfaction level with the performance of LSG bodies, 2007-2020, in percent

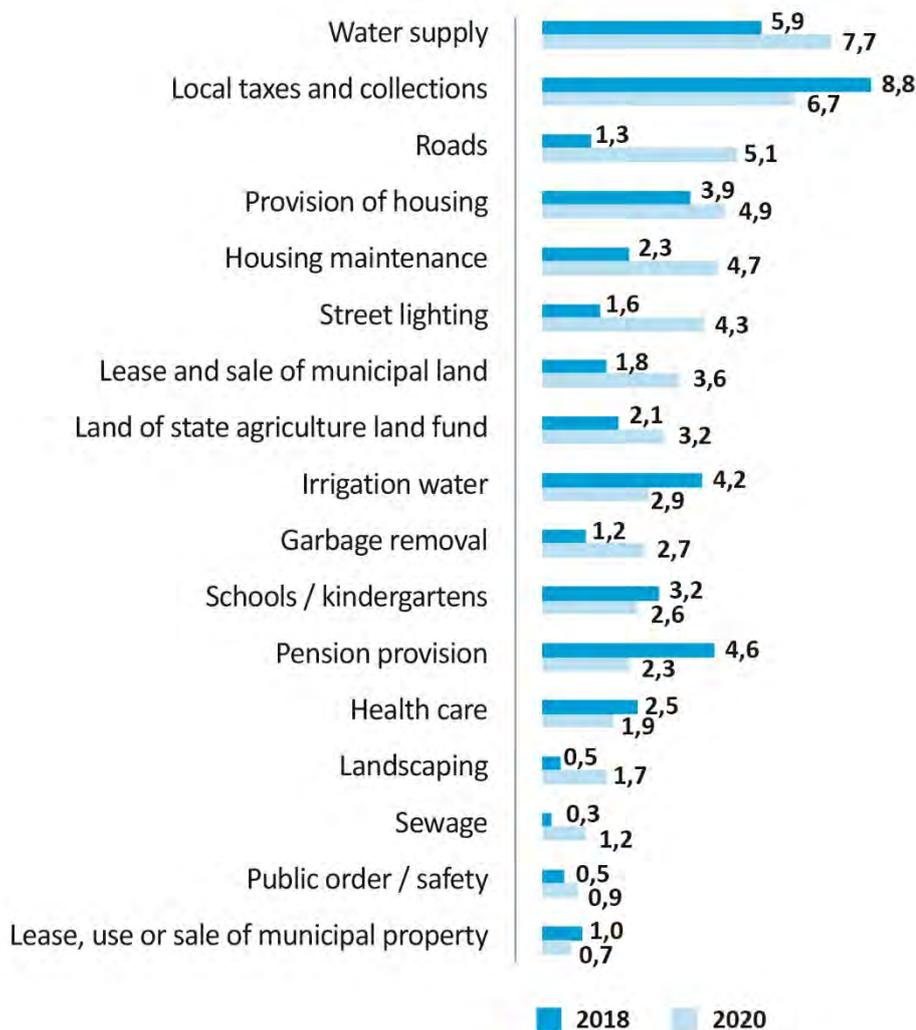


In general, citizens have become less likely to contact local self-governments. On average, the number of requests decreased significantly - by 20.5% and amounted to 42% in 2020. Over the past 12 months, women and men have reached out with an approximately equal number of requests to the mayor's office or aiyl okmotu. However, the most significant reduction occurred in relation to requests for issuing certificates. It must be admitted that digitalization and state policy aimed at reducing the number of citizens' requests for documents are behind this fact. So, in the general structure of the reasons for which citizens contact LSG bodies, certificates occupy about 50%, and about 25% are individual reasons. That is why a significant reduction in requests for certificates had an impact on the overall dynamics of requests. There is no doubt that with the development of digital technologies in governance, the number of requests for certificates will continue to decline.

However, this does not mean that the number of requests regarding the powers of LSG bodies is decreasing. Therefore, of greater interest for analysis is the remaining group of reasons for requests, where the undoubted leader was the issues of drinking water supply, as well as local taxes and fees, while the number of requests for taxes and fees, compared to 2018, decreased significantly. But this reduction is more likely an exception than a rule, since the number of requests is growing on almost all issues, the solution of which is under the jurisdiction of LSG bodies. Requests are growing about: SALF land, lease or sale of municipal land, improvement, provision and maintenance of housing, street lighting, roads, sewage and garbage disposal. The number of requests is decreasing, mainly on those issues that are not within the sphere of responsibility of LSG bodies - health care, pension provision, irrigation water. This suggests that the legal culture of citizens is increasing, who gradually understand which governing body is responsible for a specific issue.

The level of citizens' awareness of their right to vote is also increasing, they are getting used to the accountability of LSG bodies. Citizens put before the LSG bodies the questions that interest them, so the demand (appetite) for information, requirements for solving specific priority issues is growing.

Diagram 26. Comparative rating of reasons for citizens to approach LSG bodies, 2018-2020, in percent



Thus, exclusion of requests for certificates and personal inquiries from the rating showed that the number of citizens' requests to LSG bodies on issues related to their powers is increasing. The level of satisfaction of citizens with the results of these requests is very high - over 90%. The reduction in requests for certificates has occurred under the influence of digitalization and improved access to public services.

#### IV. Assessment of Services Provided by LSG Bodies

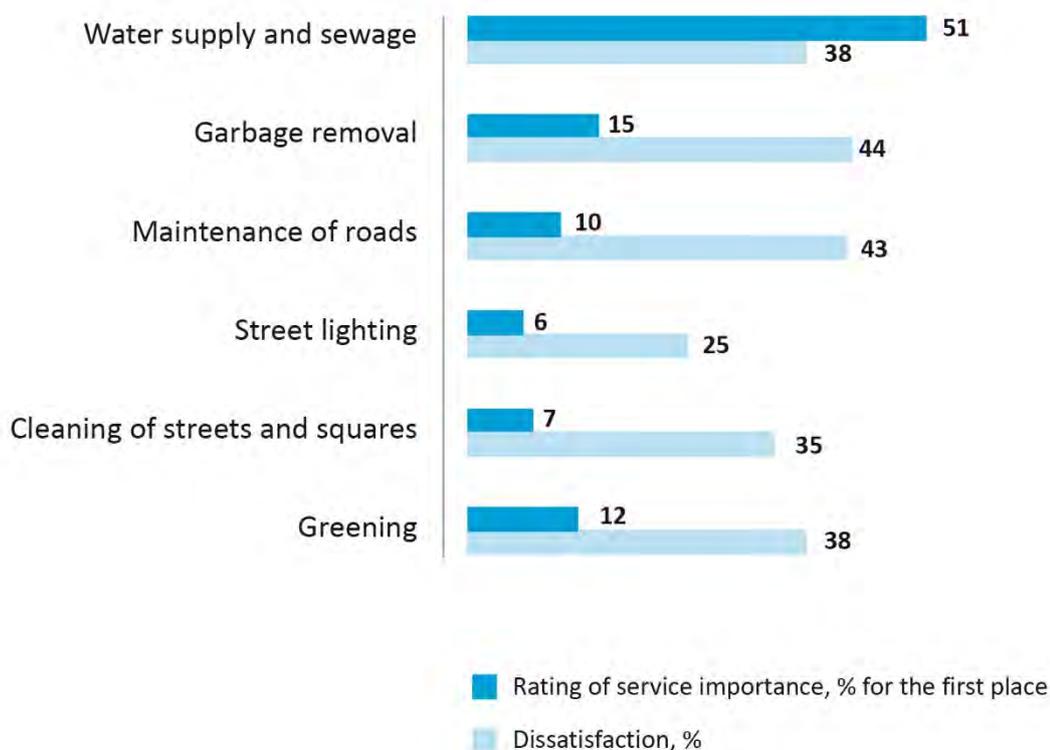
With regard to the services provided by LSG bodies, there are several significant aspects of the assessment by the consumers of these services - citizens.

First, LSGs need to know which of the services citizens consider the most important. These opinions are measured by the willingness of citizens to allocate funds from the local budget for this or that service. Secondly, LSG bodies must understand which services cause the greatest irritation and dissatisfaction on the part of citizens. And in the decision-making process, it is necessary to evaluate both these indicators in comparison.

For example, in 2020, despite the relatively high level of dissatisfaction with garbage collection, road maintenance and landscaping, most citizens still consider it necessary to allocate local budget funds, primarily, to finance water supply and sewerage services. Therefore, when making a decision, even despite the high level of dissatisfaction of citizens with a certain service, LSG bodies should give preference to those services that are more important. It is obvious that

citizens, realizing the importance of water supply and sewerage services for their health and safety, give preference to these services, and the LSG body should do the same.

Diagram 27. Comparison of the rating of the services importance with the citizens' dissatisfaction level with this service, 2020



In general, citizens' priorities regarding the importance of services have changed little over time: water supply, garbage collection and road maintenance have remained in the top three for decades. It is noticeable that it is these services that directly affect the safety of life and economic activity. So, water supply actually means the health of the whole family and productive time for women and children, garbage - health, roads - safety and economic factors. Further in the ranking are street lighting, street cleaning and landscaping. It is noticeable, however, that landscaping has somewhat lost its importance in the eyes of the community, while water supply, on the contrary, has increased.

Table 5. Services that need financial allocation, 2009

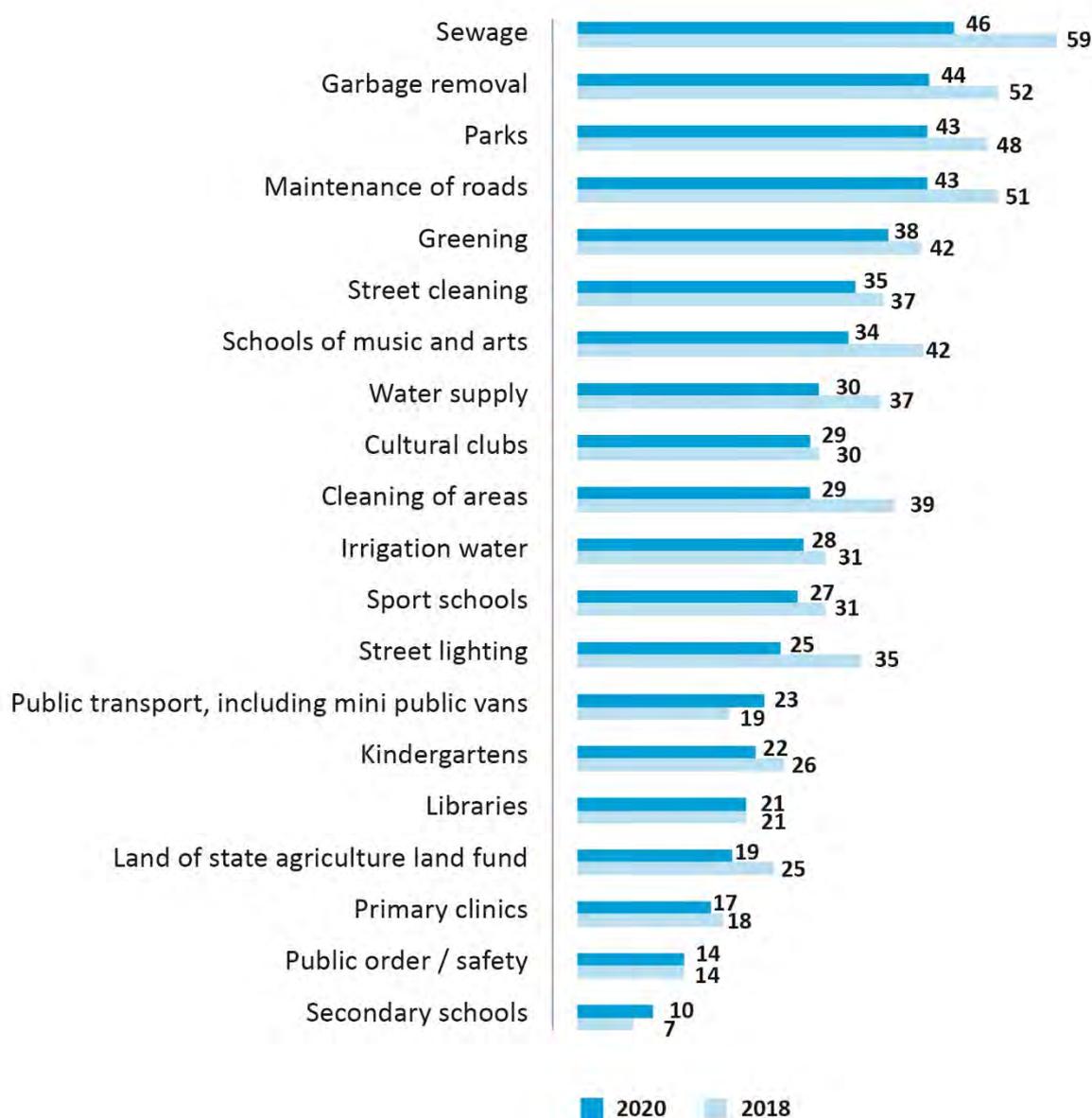
	Priority ranking					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Water supply and sewage</b>	<b>36%</b>	13%	14%	10%	9%	16%
<b>Garbage removal</b>	13%	<b>22%</b>	<b>31%</b>	17%	10%	6%
<b>Maintenance of roads</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>27%</b>	14%	15%	8%	4%
<b>Street lighting</b>	12%	19%	17%	<b>22%</b>	<b>20%</b>	8%
<b>Cleaning of streets and squares</b>	4%	9%	13%	<b>21%</b>	<b>34%</b>	16%
<b>Greening</b>	4%	8%	9%	12%	17%	<b>48%</b>

Table 6. Services that need financial allocation, 2020

	Priority ranking					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Water supply and sewage	51%	7%	26%	7%	2%	7%
Garbage removal	15%	25%	27%	15%	7%	11%
Maintenance of roads	10%	19%	23%	23%	12%	14%
Street lighting	6%	15%	11%	24%	27%	17%
Cleaning of streets and squares	7%	16%	8%	13%	35%	22%
Greening	12%	18%	6%	19%	17%	29%

The level of dissatisfaction with services in 2020, compared to 2018, slightly decreased for the entire range of services assessed, with the exception of public transport.

Diagram 28. Rating of services that citizens are not satisfied with, 2018-2020, in percent

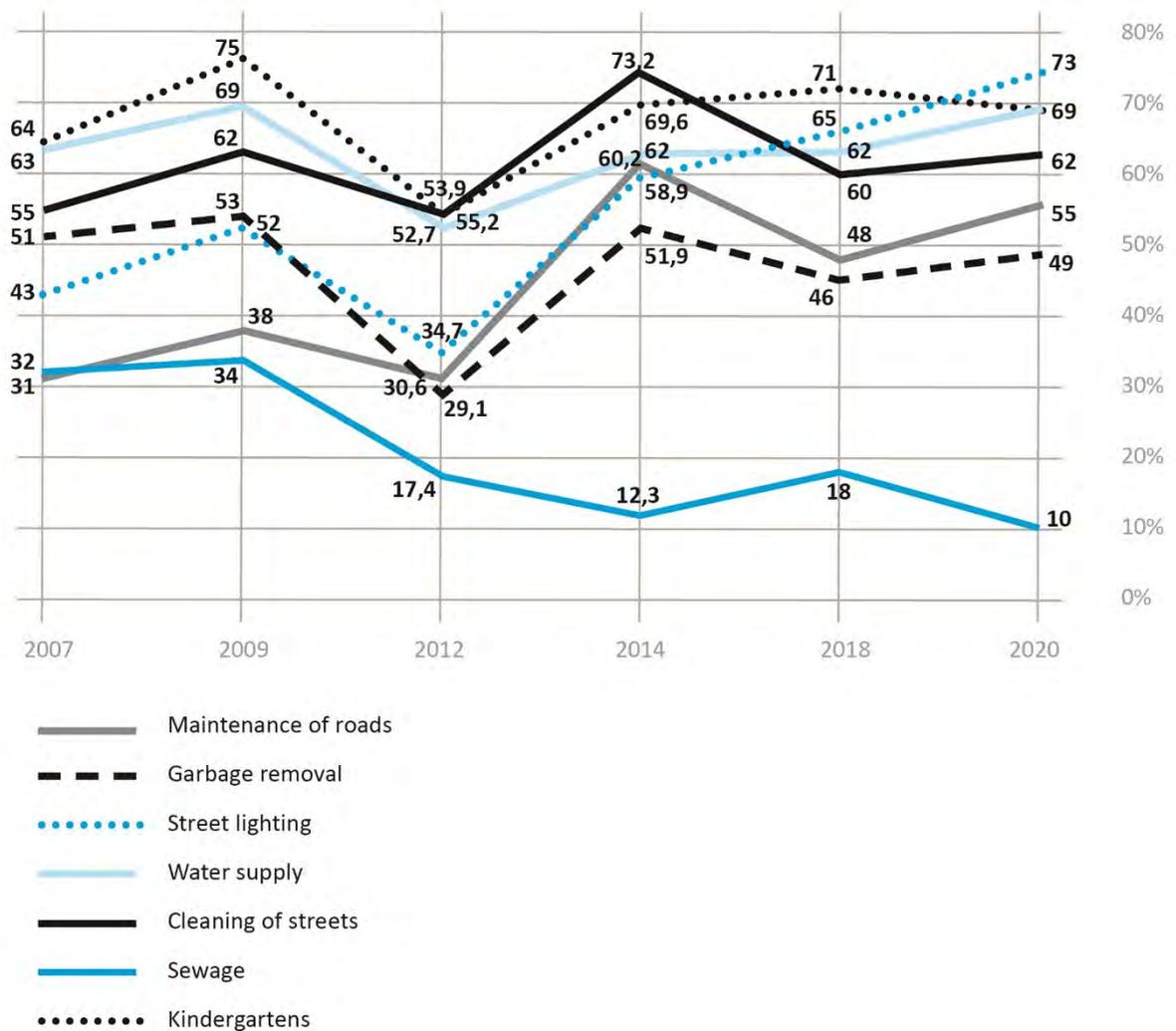


A relative decline in dissatisfaction with some of the most important services has been observed over the entire measurement period since 2007. The share of citizens who are more or less satisfied with street lighting is growing - over 13 years the growth was 30%; road

maintenance –24%; street cleaning - 7%; water supply - 6%. However, the level of satisfaction with garbage collection and kindergartens remains at the same level and even slightly declines. Only the level of satisfaction with sewage and sewerage services is steadily decreasing - people, even in villages, no longer want to live without sewerage, the number of those satisfied with the service has decreased threefold and reached a critically low level of 10%.

In Diagram 29, one cannot fail to notice the decline in the level of satisfaction in 2012. There is an explanation for this. As mentioned above, the level of satisfaction with the work of LSGs is directly related to the level of income of local budgets. After the introduction of a three-tier budget in 2009 and the imposition of responsibility on LSGs for compensating teachers' salary increases in 2010, LSGs almost lost their ability to finance local issues. This inevitably led to a drop in the volume and quality of local services, which could not but had a negative impact on the level of satisfaction with them on the part of citizens.

Diagram 29. Dynamics of the share of citizens fully or partially satisfied with some services, 2007-2020, in percent



The rating of services that citizens consider the most problematic has changed since 2014. Garbage collection left the top three, replaced by water supply service. Indeed, most LSG bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic have made some progress in combating unorganized landfills, have established regular removal of solid household waste. In this sector, the issues of recycling come to the fore for LSG bodies, but they are less noticeable to citizens than to government

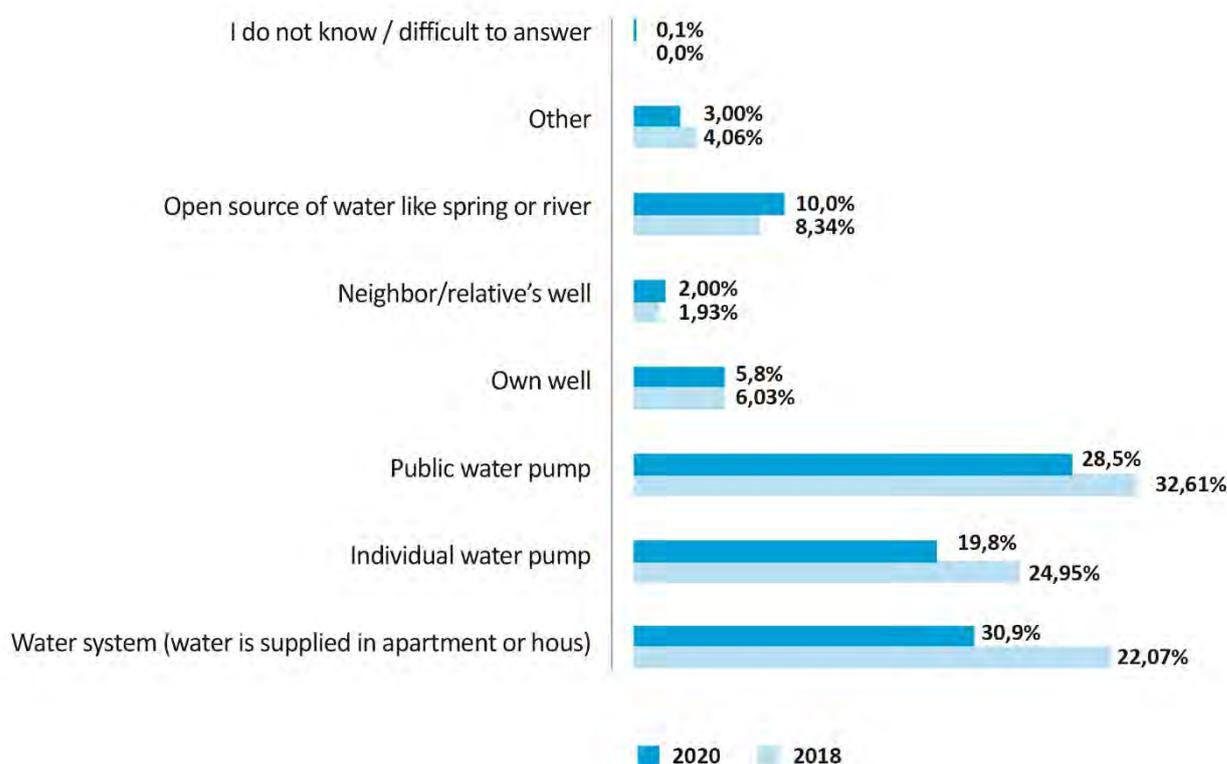
bodies. But water supply, on the contrary, has become the most "sore" problem in the opinion of the population.

Table 7. Rating of services that citizens consider the most problematic, 2007-2020, place in the rating

	2007	2008	2009	2012	2014	2018	2020
Road maintenance	1	4	1	2	3	2	3
Garbage disposal	4	1	3	3	1	10	6
Street lighting	2	2	2	1	2	3	2
Water supply	3	3	5	5	4	1	1

Given that water supply remains the most problematic service since 2018, it is advisable to consider the problem in more detail. In general, progress is evident: in 2020, the living conditions of the respondents improved, since the largest number of respondents use the water supply system - 30.9% versus 22.1% in 2018, when the majority of respondents used a public water pump. At the same time, insignificantly, but the number of citizens who use open water sources - springs or rivers - has increased.

Diagram 30. Sources of drinking water, 2020, in percent



In 2020, the vast majority of citizens do not have access to sewage systems, moreover, their number is growing - from 91% in 2018 to 93% in 2020. The growth is explained not by the fact that sewage facilities fail, but by the fact that the number of households is growing, and the sewage capacity is not increasing. Of course, the majority of the respondents are residents of rural areas, where sewage has been and remains a rare phenomenon. However, the development of technological progress, an increase in the environmental burden, the spread of infectious diseases make the issue of wastewater disposal and the organization of sewage facilities in rural areas more acute. So far, the Kyrgyz Republic does not assess in any way the impact of this kind of pollution on the environment and human safety, but in the near future the problem will come to the fore.

The population's attention to safety is increasing, the demands of citizens for the quality and uninterrupted supply of drinking water are growing. So, if in 2018 the respondents named the weak head (pressure) of water as the main problem - more than 60% of respondents thought so, and the duration of water supply during the day worried only 29%, then in 2020 more than 80% of respondents complained about interruptions in water supply. The share of those who are worried about water quality also increased to significant statistical values, although there were almost no such answers before. These data may indicate both the deterioration of the situation with access to water and its quality, and that citizens began to pay more attention to these aspects, whereas earlier they were worried about the lack of water or its insufficient volume. In favor of strengthening the second trend, the fact that in 2020 there were 76.5% of those wishing to pay more for better quality of supplied water, which is 6.9% more than in 2018, speaks for the strengthening of the second trend.

## V. Gender Equality in Local Self-Government

In recent decades, the number of women in leadership positions in the governance system has decreased. In 2019, article 59-1 of the Law of KR "On elections of deputies of local keneshes" was amended to reserve at least 30 percent of the mandates of aiyl kenesh deputies for women. This is a big step forward in ensuring gender equality in the governance system. Representation of women in the process of addressing issues of local importance is especially important, which directly affect the living conditions of families and women.

However, local self-government cannot solve the problem of gender inequality by the legislatively established quota alone. The question remains, how successful and effective will women deputies be? What conditions for their realization will be created for them by their male colleagues? Are men at the local self-government level ready to "let" women into the governance, in the process of making the most important issues? Are women themselves ready to take the initiative, take responsibility for decisions on an equal basis with men? What are the main factors hindering effective participation of women in local self-government? Are the reasons for women's limited participation really related to family, traditions and religion, or are women unwilling and unable to take on the role of community leaders?

Answers to these questions are formed not in the meeting rooms of local keneshes, but in the daily life of Kyrgyz villages and cities. To make a preliminary assessment of the local self-government system's readiness of to increase the level of women's representation, it is useful to look at the conditions for women's participation in the current life of communities, at their self-esteem as a driving force and resource for development. To this end, the Development Policy Institute in the framework of VAP Project conducted a special survey aimed at identifying conditions and level of women's participation in local self-government, the findings of which made it possible to make the following key conclusions:

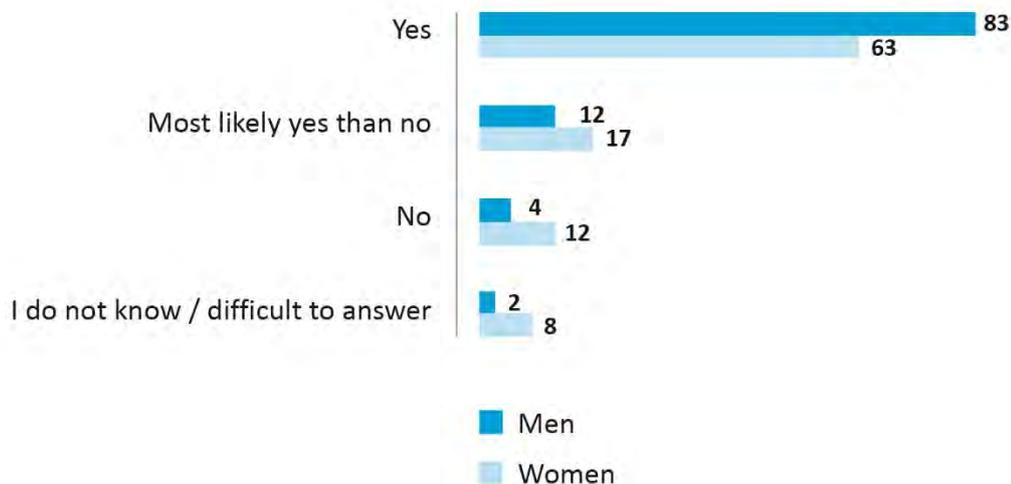
### Women's participation in local self-government

The survey participants were asked to assess the level of citizens' activity in public and official events: village gathering, street meeting, public hearings on the budget, kurultai and session of the local kenesh. It was noted that women assess the opportunities and level of participation in informal, public events - gatherings and street meetings in about the same way as men. However, women were much more skeptical about more formal events than men. Thus, the share of women who negatively assessed the level of participation in kurultai was 50% of the women surveyed; in sessions of the local kenesh - 42%.

In general, most of the respondents - more than 70% - consider themselves citizens with an active civil position, among men the figure is 83%. Among women - 63%. This is a high figure for both sexes, since more than 60% of women who consider themselves to be a person with an active civil position is a relatively high figure for the region. This suggests that the

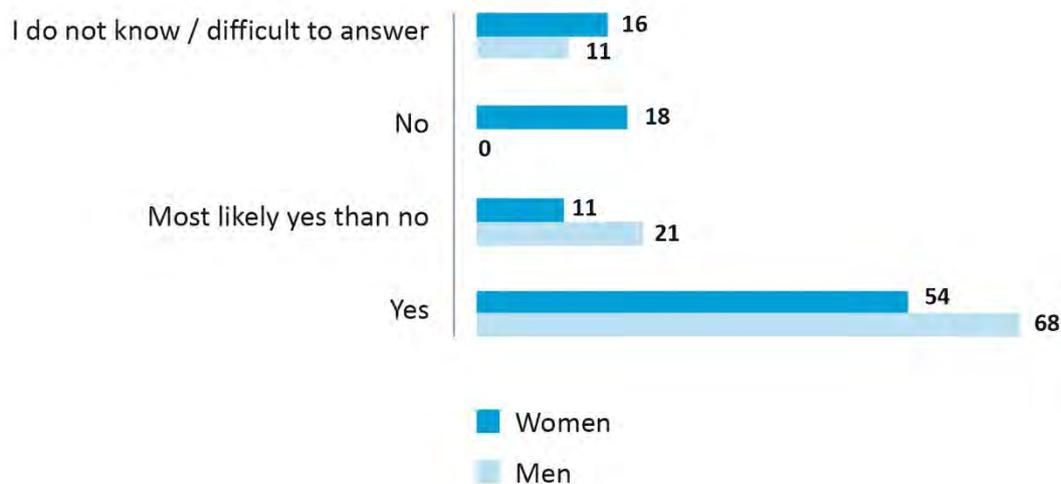
majority of women are interested in public life, feel the strength, the potential to participate in local self-government.

Diagram 31. Share of respondents who consider themselves citizens with an active life position, in percent



But not everyone succeeds in realizing this potential. For example, there are already fewer women in their community who are confident that they are considered activists - 54%.

Diagram 32. Share of respondents who believe that they enjoy the reputation of activists in their community, in percent



The majority - 73% of the respondents stated that over the past two years they have managed to achieve solutions of socially important issues at the level of the village or aimak. At the same time, men consider themselves to be more effective. Thus, 61% of women and 91% of men addressed their problems - their own or their communities, 20% of women and only 4% of men failed to achieve the results. Men are more likely to receive support from local self-government bodies, development projects and other sources in the form of money or equipment to implement their proposals: men confirm receiving external assistance for their initiatives in 89% of cases, while among women this figure was only 49%.

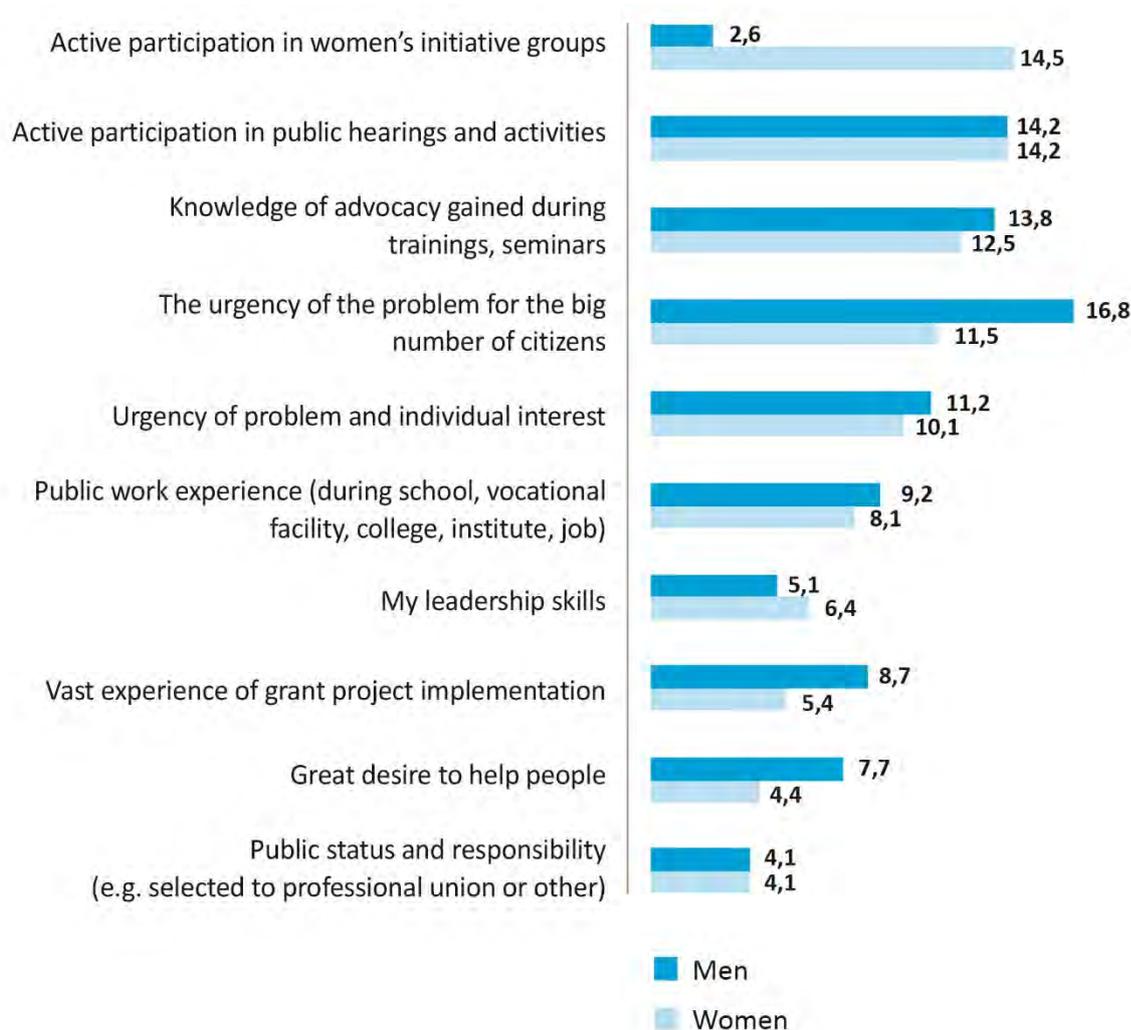
In almost half of the cases, citizens manage to draw attention to issues that are important to them and include projects in the work plan and local budget to finance the socially significant problems. At the same time, 17% independently put forward the initiative to solve the problem

and, thus, become leaders of the initiative groups, another 15% act on behalf of some groups of people, the rest use other methods of promotion. Men more often (58%) than women (39%) manage to raise this issue on their own at public events (gatherings, public hearings on the budget), as well as at sessions of local keneshes.

### Support for women's initiatives and proposals

Citizens believe that the most effective factor contributing to implementation of proposals and initiatives is participation in public hearings and events (14.5%), relevance of the problems raised (13.7%), obtaining new knowledge through seminars and trainings (12.9%), participation in public life, albeit under duress (10.4%). In terms of gender, it is noticeable that men more often rely on the urgency of problem for a large number of citizens, which is typical of traditional political behavior, as well as on their experience in implementing grant projects and a desire to help people. Women indicate their ability to unite in initiative groups among the most effective factors. Also, women are more likely than men to rely on their personal leadership qualities.

Diagram 33. Factors contributing to the promotion of citizens' initiatives, in percent



Among which groups are citizens looking for allies, political support for the implementation of their proposals and initiatives? First of all, from LSG bodies and local activists - half of the respondents answered. The second large group, from which about a quarter

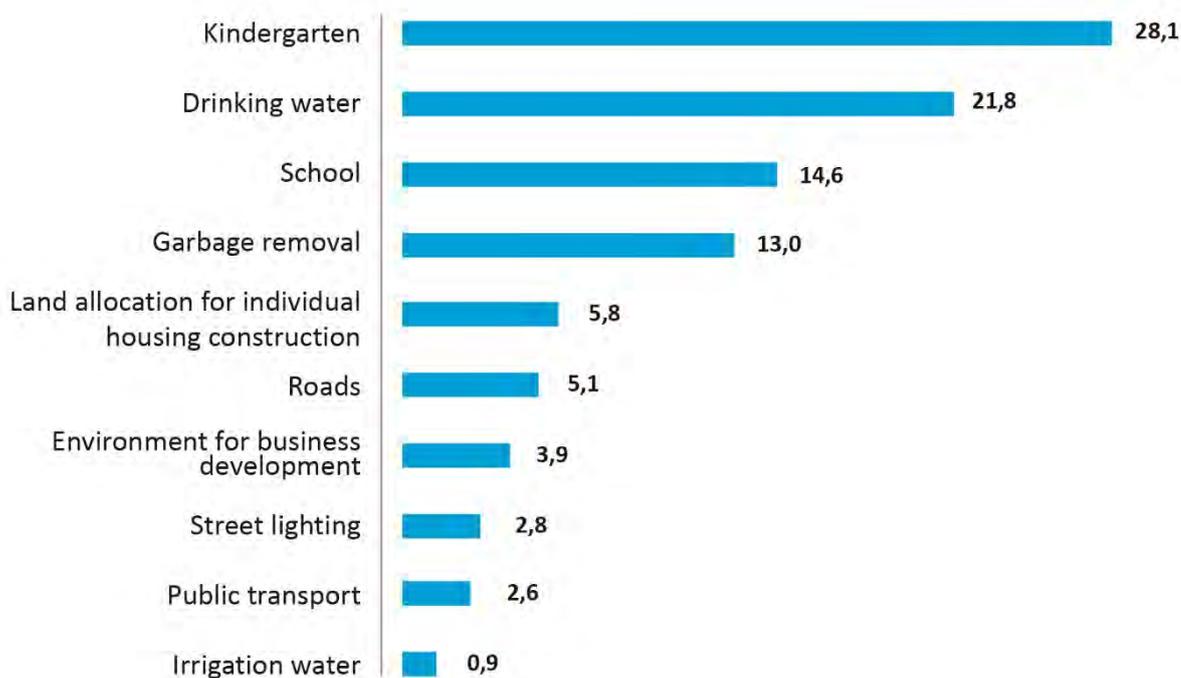
of activists are seeking support, are representatives of interested budgetary institutions, acquaintances of aiyl okmotu employees and colleagues. About one in ten asks for support from local NGOs, influential fellow countrymen and neighbors. Few seek allies among business and clergy. At the same time, women are much less likely (13.6%) than men (21.8%) to get support from the deputies of local keneshes.

### Status of women in the local community and obstacles to their self-realization

In general, the same proportion of men and women express full or partial satisfaction with the status of women in the local community, and women and men are unanimous in the opinion that women are more or less active in public life - almost 60% of respondents think so. Women are considered not very active and even passive, respectively, by 24% and 11% of the surveyed citizens.

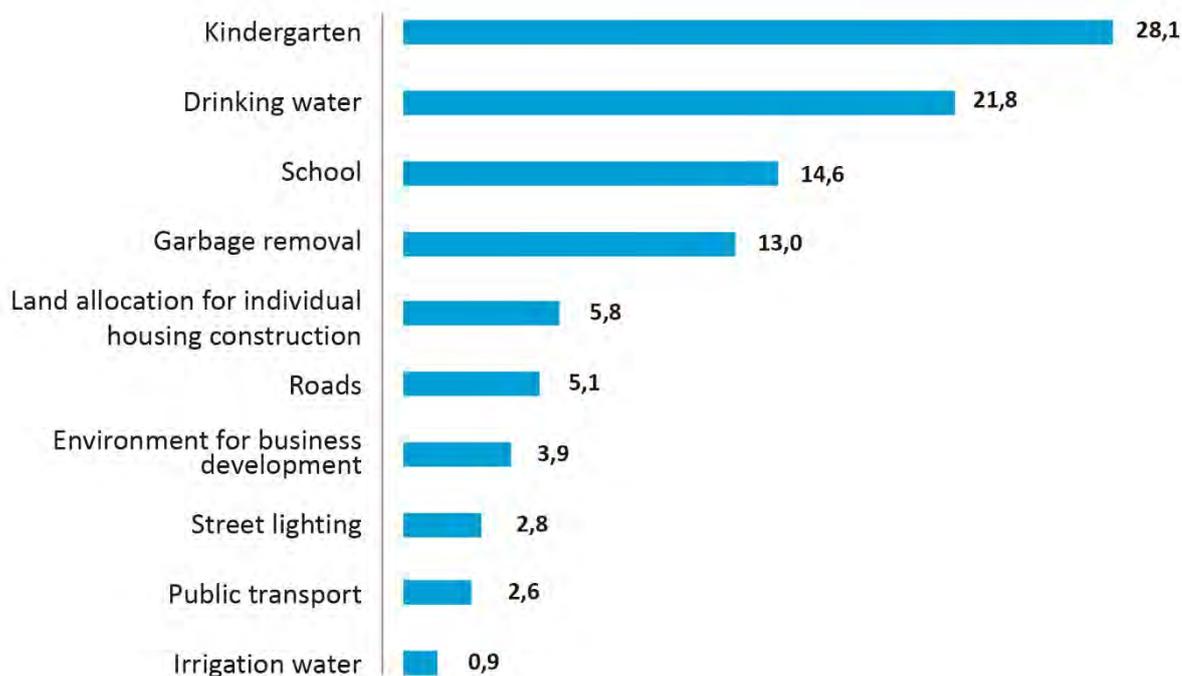
The absolute leader among priority problems for women are kindergartens, which free up women's time for paid work and development, as well as access to drinking water, which reduces the exorbitant physical exertion on women and children when they are forced to deliver water in flasks and buckets. These questions are of concern to every third and fifth woman. In second place are schools and garbage removal, which are priority problems for every seventh woman. Other common problems in local communities are becoming a priority for women much less often.

Diagram 34. Priority issues which women try to resolve, in percent



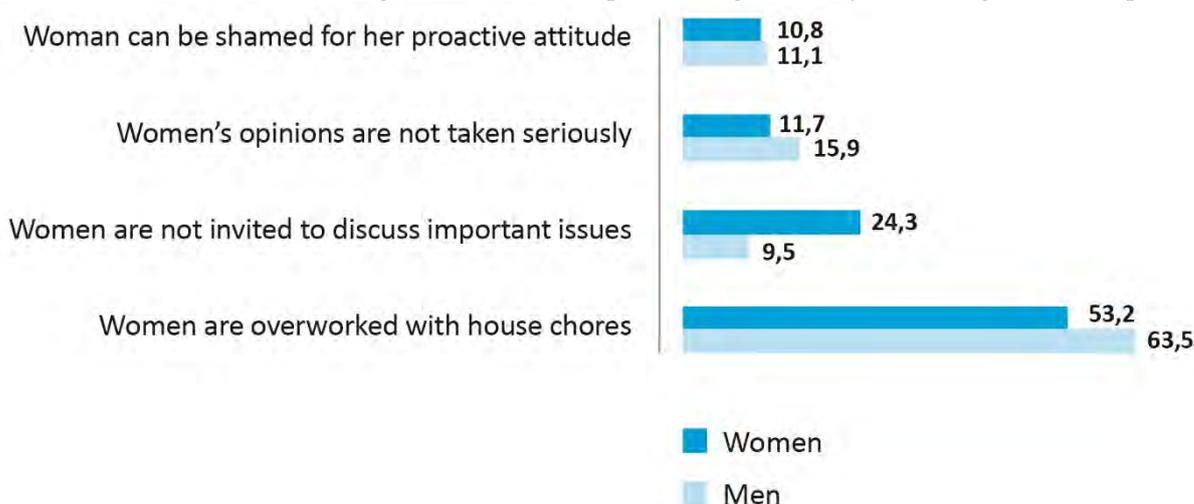
Among the factors that hinder solutions of priority problems of women, the three most significant are leading. The first factor is the lack of funds in the local budget, which is indicated by almost every third respondent. The second is the insufficient activity of interested officials, which is indicated by every fifth respondent. The third factor relates to legislation, which, according to every ninth respondent, does not take into account the gender aspect in relation to priority issues. A significant proportion of those who note the lack of support from the local community and government agencies. However, the smallest number of respondents complained about the lack of support from the mayor's office and aiyl okmotu.

Diagram 35. Barriers that women face in the process of implementing their initiatives, percent



The main problem that prevents women from being active in public life in their local community, almost 60% of the respondents consider the overload of unpaid domestic work. The second reason is that women are not even invited to discuss important issues. It is important, however, that the opinions of men and women on these factors differ. There are almost 15% more women who say their participation is ignored than men. At the same time, almost 10% of men overestimate women's domestic work. It can be concluded that approximately 10-15% of men may not invite women to important discussions, believing that they have no time due to the overload of household chores. Every sixth woman is sure that women's opinion is simply not taken seriously, and every tenth woman fears that she may be shamed for showing public activity or social initiative.

Diagram 36. Factors preventing women from being active, in percent

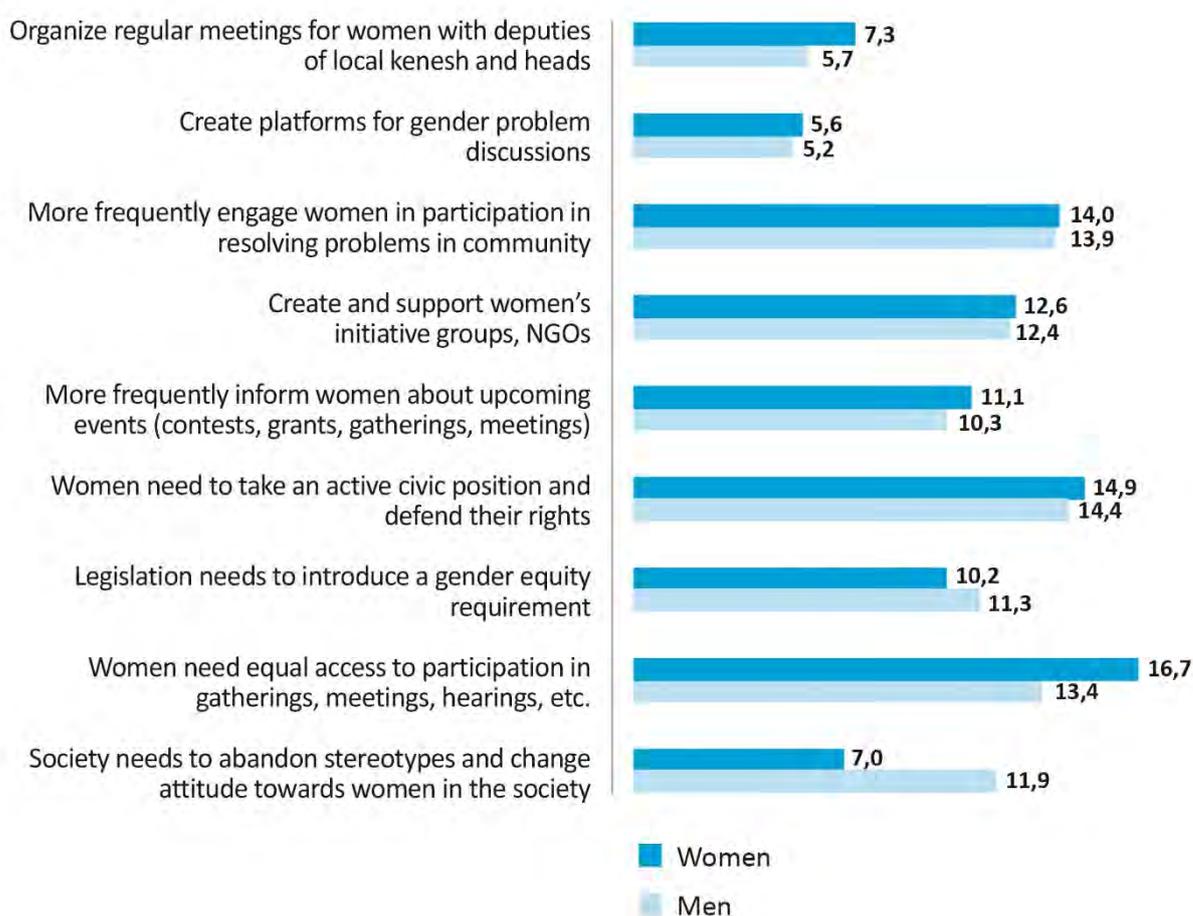


Slightly less than half of the respondents believe that equal conditions have been created for men and women in local communities to achieve their goals and realize their opportunities. More than half - 55% - believe that the conditions are still different. At the same time, the share

of those who believe that the opportunities for men are better, wider and more diverse is twice as more (37%) than those who see advantages for women (18%).

Opinions were divided on the measures needed to strengthen the role of women in decision-making, including budget decisions. An approximately equal number of respondents believe that it is necessary to provide women with equal access to participation in meetings, gatherings and hearings (15.4%); women themselves more often and more persistently demonstrate active civil position and defend their rights (14.8%); create and support initiative women's groups (12%); inform women more often about upcoming events; introduce requirements regarding gender equality into legislation. A slightly smaller number of respondents believe that the best measures will be to abandon stereotypes, change attitudes towards the role of women in society; creating platforms for discussing gender issues and organizing regular meetings of women with deputies of the local kenesh and heads of LSG bodies.

Diagram 37. Opinion on measures needed to strengthen women's role in decision-making, including budget decisions, in percentage



The assessment of gender equality in relation to women's participation in local self-government showed that the role of women in public life can be much higher than it is now. Women are more often active in issues related to everyday life and children - two main aspects that are considered traditionally female obligations in our country. At the same time, women face the problem of combining an active life position with the household chores, and at the same time, respondents confirm that in order to promote women in local self-government bodies, it is necessary to create various conditions, platforms and opportunities that would allow them to show and demonstrate their capabilities. Both men and women confirm that it is easier for men to achieve solutions to social problems. At the same time, men tend to more positively assess the position of women in the community.

## VI. Impact of the VAP Project

The VAP Project during 2011-2020 worked with local communities and LSG bodies in Jalal-Abad, Issyk-Kul, Naryn, Osh and Chui oblasts helping local communities take an active part in the local budget management, and LSGs to more effectively manage local budgets in the interests of citizens. On the basis of a competition, the project selected one target municipality in each rayon in the indicated oblasts, and provided some types of support to all LSG bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In the target municipalities, the VAP Project actively contributed to the implementation of the Citizen Participation Model in LSG, which helped LSGs engage citizens in identifying priority problems, joint planning for addressing issues of local importance, allocating local budgets in accordance with citizens' priorities, joint monitoring and evaluation of the LSG work.

To assess the project's impact, a separate analysis of the survey results was carried out in target and non-target municipalities. In general, the study showed that in the target municipalities affected by VAP, changes for the better took place faster than in non-target ones, and changes for the worse, respectively, took place more slowly. Below are data on certain aspects of the development of LSG bodies and their interaction with citizens, for which the study revealed significant differences between the target and non-target LSGs. For the rest of the research questions, no significant differences were found.

### General results of the VAP Project

With the VAP's influence, traditional forms of citizen participation in the development of local communities have evolved into modern mechanisms of civil participation enshrined in the legislation. With the project's assistance, the legislation (the Budget Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, a set of standard documents and provisions approved by the Government, the Ministry of Finance and SALSGIR) enshrines a logically linked set of mechanisms for citizens' participation in LSG: priority rural assessment, prioritization of needs and joint planning, participation in the budget process, joint monitoring and evaluation and support of citizens' initiatives from the local budget. Since 2012, all mechanisms have been implemented with the participation of more than 100 municipalities in 5 oblasts of the country (except for Talas and Batken oblasts), the Project recorded about 250 thousand productive contacts of citizens with LSG bodies. The Project directly influenced the accountability and transparency of LSG bodies that have significantly increased, in which VAP promoted the practice of using new formats of budget information: infographics, a brief description of the budget and an online civil budget, which in 2019 were used by 71% of LSG bodies throughout the Kyrgyz Republic. In target LSGs, the values of the Municipal Budget Transparency Index increased more than twice - from 32 to 78 points. Under the Project's grant program, LSG bodies have improved their skills in raising and managing investments; resolved 129 local problems, improving the living conditions of 530 thousand people, and created 129 jobs. The personnel potential of the heads of LSG bodies has grown, who have improved the skills of municipal governance and interaction with communities, who have gained access to a large volume of practical and methodological information (the Project has conducted 38 thousand people / trainings on more than 20 topics).

With the support of the VAP Project, the legal and institutional conditions for the work of LSG bodies were improved: the status of a municipal employee was increased, a system of advanced training was created, the government recognized the need to finance delegated powers, the actual delineation of powers between state bodies and LSG bodies began, a state program for the development of LSG was formulated and is being implemented; a process has been established for aligning draft laws with LSG bodies; provided administrative and financial conditions for the work of local keneshes; partially streamlined inspections of LSG bodies, etc. Over the years, the Project has provided numerous consultations on all aspects of LSG

development to the President’s Apparatus of KR, Jogorku Kenesh of KR, the Government of KR, the State Personnel Service and State Tax Service, the Ministries of Finance, Economy, Social Development, SALSGIR and other state bodies; ensured that the interests of LSG bodies were taken into account in the national strategic documents (national development strategies, state programs for the LSG development, concept of inter-budgetary relations, concept of administrative-territorial reform, etc.).

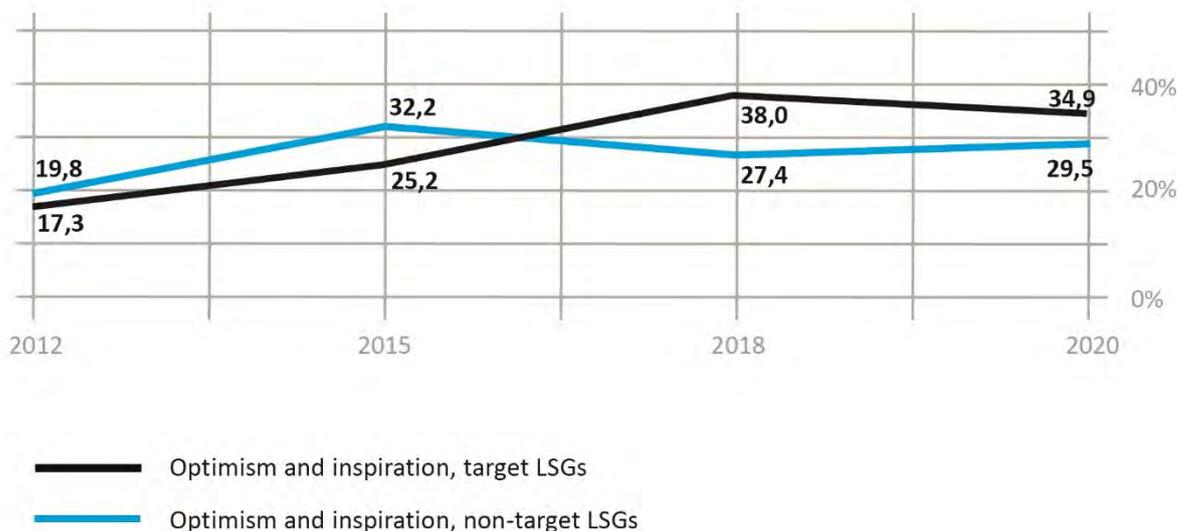
Over the years of the Project implementation, individual target municipalities of VAP have been recognized 11 times as the best LSG bodies in their rayons, at least 70 municipal employees and heads of target LSG bodies were awarded with the titles of “Excellence in Municipal Service” and “Excellence in Local Self-Government”.

### Residents of target LSGs believe more in the capabilities of their LSG bodies

Great efforts of the Project were aimed at ensuring that the target LSG bodies more often and more attentively treated the problems and wishes of citizens. The Project provided citizens with new opportunities to be heard by LSG bodies through introduction of the mechanism of Priority Rural Assessment: in total, more than 68 thousand contacts of LSG bodies with citizens took place to identify problems of the local community; citizens included in the Joint Action Plans about 800 of their proposals, which were, to one degree or another, resolved through local budgets. The Project helped improve the traditional form of interaction between citizens and LSG - gatherings, which were regulated by the Local Community Charter in relation to the requirements for legitimacy and other conditions, which in 2020 are actively applied by the target and non-target LSG bodies.

Therefore, in 2020, there are more citizens who are optimistic and inspired in relation to LSG bodies in the target municipalities of the VAP Project than in non-target ones. Although the target municipalities started from a lower start in 2012, they achieved a twofold increase in the optimism and inspiration of citizens in 2018, while in non-target LSG the share of such citizens grew by only one third.

Diagram 38. Dynamics of share of citizens who feel optimism and inspiration in relation to LSG bodies in target and non-target LSGs of VAP Project



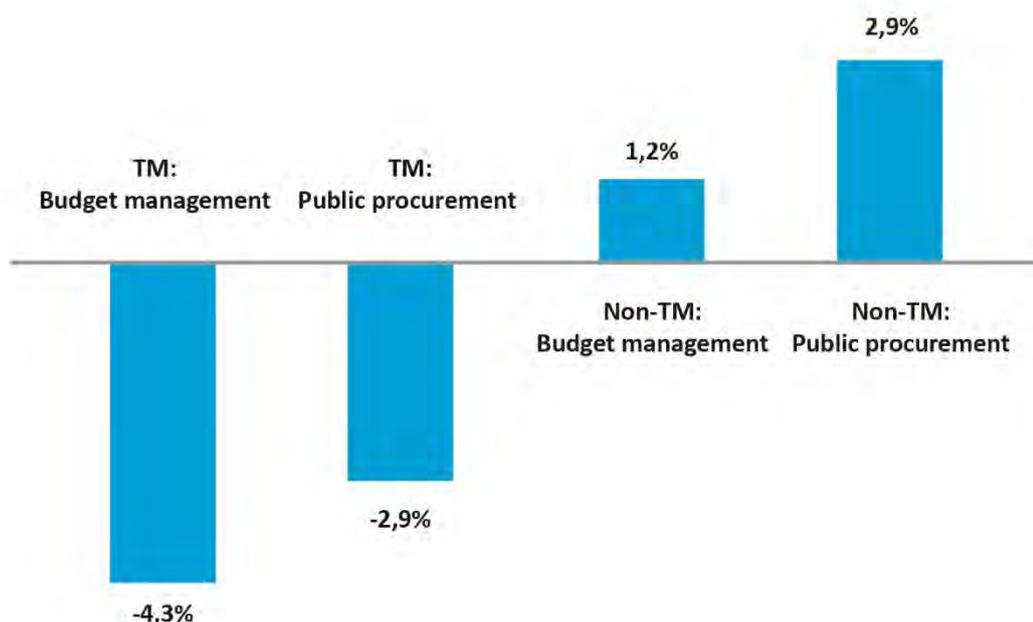
### Citizens believe that there is less corruption in target LSGs

With the support of the VAP Project, transparency of LSG bodies has increased especially with regard to the budget information disclosure. Also, information on transactions with municipal property of all LSGs became open by posting on the website of the State Register. The Project has created political conditions for further enhancing transparency of LSG bodies by including several relevant issues in the Open Government National Action Plan.

As a result, in the target municipalities of the VAP Project since 2012, there has been a gradual decrease - by 4.6% by 2020 - in the proportion of respondents who believe that their aiyl okmotu has a very high level of corruption. In non-target municipalities, the share of respondents giving such an assessment to their aiyl okmotu or mayor's office has decreased since 2012 by only 0.8%.

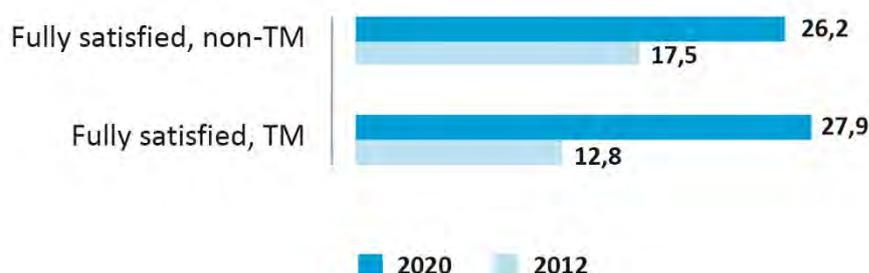
In the target municipalities of the VAP Project, in comparison with non-target municipalities, the number of residents who observe manifestations of corruption in budget management (from 20 to 16%) and in the process of public procurement (from 13.3 to 10.4%) has decreased. At the same time, these indicators in non-target LSGs increased: the number of residents observing manifestations of corruption in budget management (from 17.2 to 18.4%) and in the process of public procurement (from 9.6 to 12.5%) increased.

Diagram 39. Dynamics of share of citizens observing corruption in target and non-target municipalities of VAP Project, for the period from 2018 to 2020, in percent



In the target and non-target municipalities of the VAP Project, there is also a tendency of more clear self-determination of citizens with regard to their satisfaction with the volume and quality of information about local self-government: the number of those who have decided - are fully satisfied, and the number of those who are partially satisfied or find it difficult to answer is decreasing. At the same time, in the target LSGs, the share of those who are completely satisfied with the information is growing faster than in non-target ones. Thus, in target LSGs, the share of those fully satisfied with information about local self-government in 2020, compared to 2018, more than doubled, while in non-target LSGs - only by a third.

Diagram 40. Dynamics of growth in the share of citizens who are fully satisfied with information about LSGs, by target and non-target LSGs, in percent



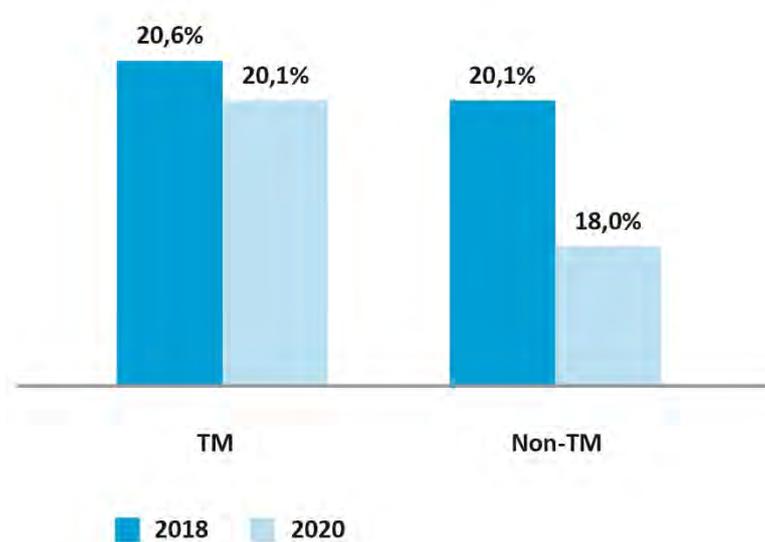
Also, target municipalities of the VAP Project demonstrate a higher growth rate of the share of citizens who believe that LSG bodies are open to the public in their activities. During the period from 2018 to 2020, this indicator in target LSGs increased by 22%, in non-target ones - only by 14.3%.

### Level of citizen participation in governance of target LSGs remained, while it decreased in the whole country

As a result of the direct impact of the Project on LSG bodies, 49 (100%) target and 298 non-target LSGs (66% of the total number of rural LSGs) take into account the priority needs of citizens in the budget. The mandatory requirement to involve citizens in the budget process and take into account their needs in the planning process was first established in the Budget Code of the Kyrgyz Republic. As a result, the number of LSG bodies conducting budget hearings increased 19 times compared to 2016: if in 2016 only 17 LSG bodies, or about 4% of the total, held hearings, in 2019, 330 LSG bodies held hearings or almost 70%. Requirements for assessing the priority needs of the community and including them in the local development programs were included in the methodology for developing programs approved by the Ministry of Economy of KR.

Therefore, despite the overall decline in the level of citizen participation in public hearings on the budget in Kyrgyzstan, in VAP’s target municipalities this indicator in 2020 remained almost at the level of the historical maximum - above 20%. Compared to non-target LSGs, where the level of participation in hearings fell by 2% and became even lower than the average for Kyrgyzstan, the decline in participation in target LSGs turned out to be insignificant - by half a percent.

Diagram 41. Comparative dynamics of the level of citizen participation in public hearings on budget in target and non-target LSGs of the VAP Project, 2018-2020, in percent



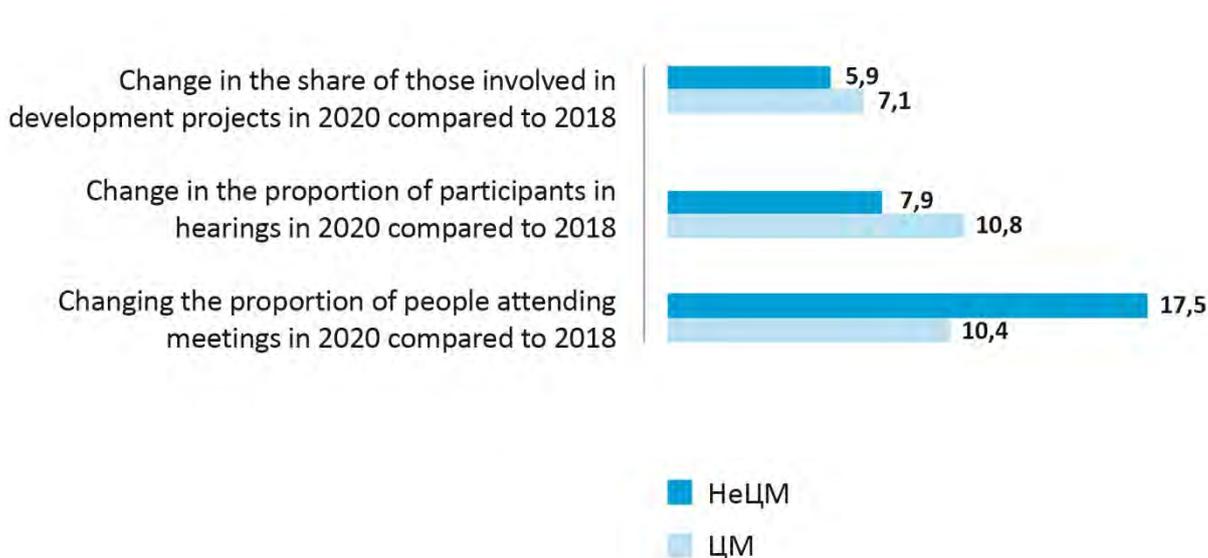
It is important to note that in target LSGs, the proportion of women among participants in hearings has increased, while in non-target LSGs, this indicator, unfortunately, has decreased.

Diagram 42. Comparative dynamics of the level of women’s participation in public hearings on budget in target and non-target LSGs of VAP Project, 2018-2020, in percent



In both target and non-target LSGs of the VAP Project, the level of citizen participation in meetings, public hearings not only on the budget, but also on tariffs, services and other issues of local importance is growing. However, there is a significant qualitative difference between this growth, which arose under the influence of the Project: in target municipalities, the popularity of productive forms of participation is growing more actively, allowing not only to receive information or speak (meeting), but to have a real impact on the decision of LSG body (hearings and development or selection of a project proposal for funding). Emergence of this difference is logical due to the fact that the VAP Project helped the LSG bodies of target municipalities introduce more productive forms of participation, within which citizens receive feedback from LSG bodies and see changes in accordance with their priorities and wishes.

Diagram 43. Comparison of the growth in the level of participation by forms, target and non-target LSGs, in percent



The Project’s impact is especially noticeable in relation to citizen participation in the development or selection of projects applying for funding from the local budget or from external assistance. This is due to the fact that the Project helped significantly improve the targeting of

LSG work by introducing Joint Action Plans, since with the help of such plans LSGs began to more reasonably link activities to specific groups, streets, etc. Annually about 100-150 acute problems of local communities were resolved through these plans by joint efforts of citizens and LSG. The plans also improved planning skills of LSG staff. Tayirbek ZHAYCHIBEKOV, head of Chon-Alai AA: “Joint action plans helped the LSG bodies improve the efficiency of local budget management, since funds are not scattered on the solution of unplanned “fire” tasks, as it was before the practice of joint planning. The plan facilitates mid-term planning as participatory prioritization helps distribute issues several years ahead. Work in aiyl okmotu has been streamlined, as employees see their ultimate goals.” Involvement of the community in joint planning has significantly strengthened the ability of LSGs to attract investment, for example, in 2018, in Chui oblast, united efforts of LSGs and the community raised 129 million soms, or 74% of the funds needed to finance the joint plan from other sources. In order to raise the status of joint action plans in 2019, VAP began transforming joint action plans, taking into account all the needs of the population, into official programs of socio-economic development, adapting the Methodology of the Ministry of Economy of KR.

### Residents of target LSGs have more opportunities to address pressing problems

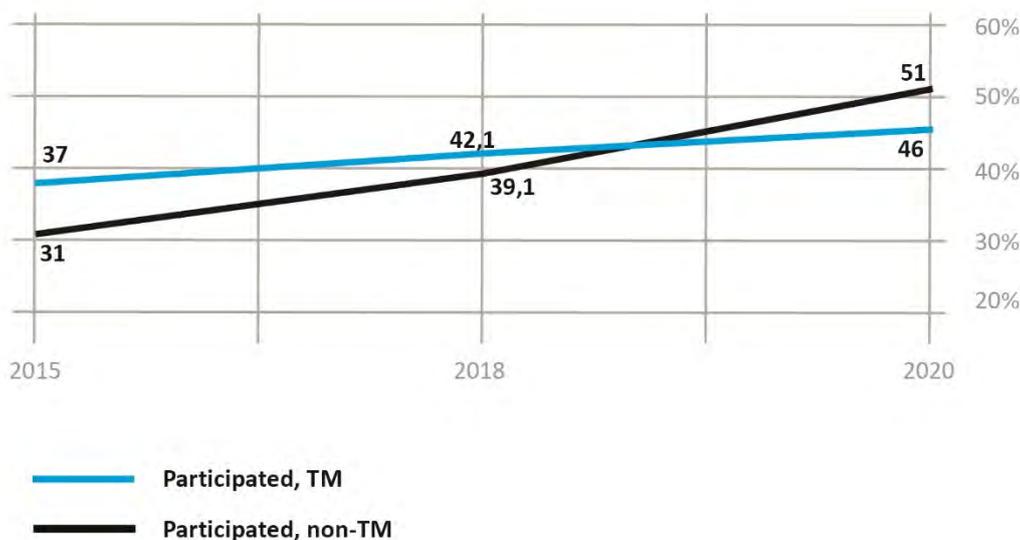
Direct impact of the VAP Project on the local community made it possible to strengthen traditional forms of civic participation: initiative groups have always emerged in villages to solve local problems, but the Project helped formalize the status of initiative groups, concretized the forms of their interaction with LSG bodies in such a way that LSGs respond to challenges set by initiative groups. Thus, the procedure for creation and interaction of groups, a way to achieve a solution to the problem through participation in the budget process and joint development planning with LSG bodies received a legal basis for the first time by being enshrined in the Local Community Charters. Until 2014, the charters interpreted the rights and obligations of members of local communities in different ways and could contradict the current legislation. Therefore, the Project helped equalize the rights of members of various communities in the Kyrgyz Republic by bringing the Charters in line with the legislation, as well as including in the charter mechanisms for realizing the rights of community members that are not described in other legislation (for example, a mechanism for exercising the right to participate in an open session of local kenesh). As a result, an average of 35 activists in each target LSG (more than 1,700 people in total) united in almost 190 initiative groups and resolved their problems together with LSG.

The VAP Project indirectly helped give practical meaning to the right of citizen participation in LSG declared in the Constitution, since the Initiative Groups became a kind of “school” of civic participation and allowed many local activists to believe in a possibility of changes, new ways of self-expression in local self-government (about 500 participants of initiative groups in target LSGs from target communities became deputies of local keneshes, municipal employees, participants in joint monitoring, received awards from state bodies for their contribution to the development of their aimak, etc.).

The Project contributed to the normative determination of the citizens’ ability to receive support for their initiatives from the local budget through introduction of the officially enshrined Local Initiative mechanism. The responsibility of local communities has grown, citizens are ready to participate in addressing larger number of issues: in comparison with 2012, in 2019 the activity of communities in relation to the implementation of local initiatives has more than tripled, increasing from 31 to 100 initiatives.

The findings of the study showed that, in general, the level of residents’ participation of target and non-target municipalities in public affairs of their city or village does not differ and in 2020 is almost 65%, which is almost 9% more than in 2018. However, in target municipalities, the share of those who already have practical experience of participation in public life is growing faster than in non-target LSGs. So, compared to 2015, in target municipalities the share of citizens who have already taken part in public affairs increased by 20%, while in non-target municipalities - only by 11%.

Diagram 44. Dynamics of growth in the share of citizens taking part in public affairs



The level of those wishing to take part in the improvement of their city or village is growing. So, in 2020, the share of answers confirming the readiness of such participation amounted to more than 70%, having increased by 9.7% compared to 2018. Moreover, the share of citizens who actually already took part in the improvement of a city or village increased by 10.7%, reaching 36.7% in 2020.

A higher level of citizens' readiness to take personal part in the improvement of target LSGs is explained by the fact that with the help of the VAP Project, LSG bodies have improved their skills in attracting and managing investments; solved 129 issues, improving the living conditions of 530 thousand people, and created 129 jobs. The Project created a precedent for the authorities and development partners of the Kyrgyz Republic, for the first time in the country's history, implementing a grant program through local budgets, which significantly increased control over the targeted spending of grant funds thanks to the strict public procurement procedures followed, while simultaneously training LSG bodies to manage budget and extra-budgetary investments.

### Gender equality in target LSGs

In general, sphere of responsibility of LSG bodies – issues of local importance - is addressed to all residents of the community, and therefore formally can be recognized as gender-neutral, but in fact LSG bodies are able to influence equality of women and men.

The VAP Project sought to create conditions for gender equality in the work of LSG bodies by including gender conditions in the mechanism of Priority Rural Assessment, where a prerequisite is a quota of at least 30% of participants of the same sex. As a result, participation of women in identifying priorities and planning the work of LSG increased: from 35% in 2012 to almost 50% in 2019. With VAP's influence, LSGs responded to the priority needs of women by including 47% of gender-sensitive activities (schools, kindergartens, drinking water, culture, street lighting, parks, etc.) in the Joint Action Plans to address local issues.

The VAP Project purposefully influenced the position of women through a grant program: 68% of grant projects were aimed at addressing gender-sensitive issues (87% in Osh oblast); 27 thousand women benefited from grant projects (51% of the total); 43% of jobs created by grant projects were occupied by women. To achieve this result, the Project introduced a special criterion into the project proposal evaluation system - number and proportion of women who participated in identifying the priority problem to be solved by a project.

In the Local Initiative competition, “women's” initiatives won 50% of the prizes and received support for their 80 initiatives out of 154. Moreover, women were more successful in finding co-financing for their initiatives, using funds attracted from third parties on average 6% more often than men.

Women who participated in the Project, received new opportunities to be heard and self-actualize. So, the proportion of women in the initiative groups grew: from 36% in 2012-2015 up to 43% in 2016-2020. Many managed to achieve personal growth, for example, to become deputies of local kenesh or continue their socialization in joint monitoring and evaluation groups, for example, the share of women in monitoring groups increased from 37% to 44%. Women were able to present themselves through the Local Initiative competition, 54% of proposals for which were written and submitted by women. Confectioner Larisa KUSOVA from Boroldoy AA until 2015 as a local activist criticized LSG a lot, but did not understand what she could change. With the support of the Project, Larisa began understanding the local self-government and decided to run for a deputy of local kenesh. For 4 years of her deputy work, she managed to restore order in relation to violators of community rules, achieved construction of a bridge, as the chairwoman of the standing commission on social issues, actively solves the problems of vulnerable groups.

## Appendix. Survey Questionnaire

Survey conducted by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of survey: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Start time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ end time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Oblast: \_\_\_\_\_ Rayon: \_\_\_\_\_  
City/Aiyl aimak (AA): \_\_\_\_\_  
Village in AA: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

### INTRODUCTION

Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I represent an independent company \_\_\_\_\_, which conducts a sociological survey in the framework of the “Voice of Citizens and Accountability of LSG” Project financed by the Government of Switzerland through the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and executed by the Development Policy Institute. The project aims to ensure that local self-governments manage local finances transparently and effectively, based on the priorities of the population, involving citizens in the decision-making process.

The survey is anonymous, no one will know what information we received from you, your name will not be mentioned, and no one will know what your answers were. You can of course opt out of participation. The survey will take approximately 20 to 25 minutes.

Do you agree to participate? If NO, then thank the respondent and end the interview.

Thanks for your consent. Usefulness of this survey depends on sincerity and accuracy of your answers. There are no “correct” or “wrong” answers to the questions, we ask only your opinion. If you don't know the answer or find it difficult to answer, then say so. Nobody will evaluate you according to your responses. The questions are asked to everyone in a standard way in a certain order so that all respondents understand and answer in the same way. Do you have any questions? Can I start? Thank you.

### SURVEY FOR RESIDENTS OF VILLAGES/CITIES ABOUT THE WORK OF LSG BODIES

1. To what extent are you interested in issues of local importance; what do the local self-government bodies (mayor's office / aiyl okmotu and kenesh) do?
  1. Interested
  2. Little interest
  3. Not interested77. I do not know / difficult to answer
  
2. How would you assess the general level of living in your city / aiyl aimak compared to last year?
  1. Better
  2. Did not change
  3. Worse77. I do not know / difficult to answer
  
3. What is the main source of information for you and your family about the activities of the mayor's office / aiyl okmotu and aiyl kenesh? (Please choose ONE answer only)
  1. Central television
  2. Local television
  3. Local press
  4. Republican press
  5. Gatherings (meetings) of citizens, quarterly meetings
  6. Information sheet (bulletin) of local self-government
  7. Publications (information) of NGOs (if any)
  8. Employees of local self-government bodies
  9. Friends, colleagues, relatives
  10. Places of crowds (bazaars, fairs)
  11. Website of local self-government bodies
  12. Information stands (boards)
  13. Social networks (WhatsApp, Facebook, classmates, etc.)
  14. Other (specify \_\_\_\_\_)77. I don't know / difficult to answer
  
4. How satisfied are you with the volume / quality of information about the local self-government of your city / aimak and its work?
  1. Satisfied fully
  2. Satisfied partially
  3. Does not satisfy77. I do not know / difficult to answer

5. Can you tell who the head of your aiyl okmotu / mayor of the city is?
1. Yes
  2. No
6. How many deputies of local kenesh do you know?
1. I know only one
  2. I know more than one
  77. I know none
7. In your opinion, to what extent are the mayor's office / aiyl okmotu open to the public in their activities?
1. Open
  2. Partially open
  3. Not open
  77. I do not know / difficult to answer
8. What do you think the largest part of the local budget of aiyl okmotu / city is spent on?  
(Please choose ONE answer only)
1. For maintenance of the mayor's office / aiyl okmotu (Salary for employees)
  2. Maintenance of public order (police)
  3. Education (maintenance and repair of schools)
  4. Social protection of the population
  5. Culture and sports
  6. Improvement, including maintenance of roads and sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, maintenance of parks, cemeteries (make sure that the respondent has listened to the entire list of services in subparagraph 6)
  7. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  77. I do not know / difficult to answer
9. Have you ever taken part in public hearings on the budget in your city / village?
1. No
  2. Yes -----  Go to question 11
10. If not, then why? (ONE answer only)
1. Not interested
  2. Did not know about it
  3. I knew about it, but I was too busy
  4. I knew about it, but timing was not convenient (too early or late, etc.)
  5. I do not think that my wishes would be taken into account in the draft budget
  77. I do not know / difficult to answer
- Interviewer: Go to question 13
11. Are you satisfied with your participation in public hearings on the budget?
1. No
  2. Yes -----  Go to question 13
12. If you are not satisfied with your participation in the hearing, why? (Please choose ONE answer only)
1. Poor organization (venue, conditions, poor acoustics)
  2. Incomprehensible / insufficient explanation of the budget
  3. Only the facilitator was talking without giving others an opportunity to speak
  4. Hearings turned into a regular meeting with people's complaints
  5. Hearings participants' suggestions did not have influence on the budget
  6. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
13. How satisfied are you with the performance of your mayor's office / aiyl okmotu?
1. Satisfied
  2. Partially satisfied
  3. Not satisfied
  77. I do not know / difficult to answer
14. Over the past 12 months, have you had to contact someone from the mayor's office / aiyl okmotu for any reason: a problem, question, complaint, or simply because of the need to get any information or help?
1. Yes
  2. No -----  (Go to question 18)
  77. I do not know / difficult to answer (Go to question 18)
15. On which of the above questions did you contact the mayor's office / aiyl okmotu over the past 12 months? (Mark 1 in column C for all that apply) Card No. 1.
16. Were you satisfied with the answer or solution to your question?
17. If you were not satisfied with any answer, what is the main reason?

	<b>Component</b>	For question 15 – Mark 1 all that applies	For question 16 – Satisfied with answer Yes=1 No =2	For question 17 – If NO, then why? 1. Did not receive a response or requested information 2. Wrong or poor quality answer 3. It took too long to resolve the issue 4. Staff replied that there was nothing they could do. 5. Other (specify)
<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>
1.	Issuance of certificates		1 2-→	
2.	Garbage removal		1 2-→	
3.	Sewage		1 2-→	
4.	Water supply		1 2-→	
5.	Roads		1 2-→	
6.	Street lighting		1 2-→	
7.	Schools / kindergartens		1 2-→	
8.	Health care		1 2-→	
9.	Pension provision		1 2-→	
10.	Housing maintenance		1 2-→	
11.	Provision of housing		1 2-→	
12.	Public order / safety		1 2-→	
13.	Local taxes and collections		1 2-→	
14.	Landscaping		1 2-→	
15.	Lease, use or sale of municipal property		1 2-→	
16.	Lease and sale of municipal land		1 2-→	
17.	Irrigation water		1 2-→	
18.	Land of state agriculture land fund		1 2-→	
19.	Other ( <i>specify</i> )		1 2-→	

18. What, in your opinion, is the level of corruption in your mayor's office / ayil okmotu when addressing issues of local importance?

1. Very high
2. High
3. Not high
4. Does not exist

77. I do not know / difficult to answer

19. In what area of activity of local self-government bodies, in your opinion, corruption is most often manifested (Choose three options):

1. Land management
2. Water supply management
3. Public procurement
4. Budget management
5. Certificate issuance
6. Inclusion in the list of the poor
7. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

77. I do not know / difficult to answer

**LSG SERVICES**

20. Please rate how satisfied you are with the following services provided by your LSG. Interviewer! Show Card No.2 (Mark in column C the number corresponding to the answer)

1. Satisfies 2. Satisfies partially 3. Does not satisfy 77. Do not know / difficult to answer

21. Name the five most important problems in your city / village from the list (Mark 1,2,3 in order of importance)

	<b>List of services</b>	<b>Question 19 – Level of satisfaction</b>	<b>Question 20 – Most acute</b>
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	List of services	Question 19 – Level of satisfaction	Question 20 – Most acute
A	B	C	D
1	Street lighting	1 2 3 77	
2	Greening	1 2 3 77	
3	Water supply	1 2 3 77	
4	Sewage	1 2 3 77	
5	Street cleaning	1 2 3 77	
6	Maintenance of roads	1 2 3 77	
7	Culture clubs	1 2 3 77	
8	Public transport, including mini public vans	1 2 3 77	
9	Kindergartens	1 2 3 77	
10	Secondary schools	1 2 3 77	
11	Schools of music and arts	1 2 3 77	
12	Sport schools	1 2 3 77	
13	Primary clinics	1 2 3 77	
14	Libraries	1 2 3 77	
15	Public order / safety	1 2 3 77	
16	Parks	1 2 3 77	
17	Garbage removal	1 2 3 77	
18	Cleaning of squares	1 2 3 77	
19	Irrigation water	1 2 3 77	
20	Land of state agriculture land fund	1 2 3 77	

22. What do you think, if the mayor's office / ayil okmotu had additional financial resources, what would have to be spent first of all? (Use a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 first and 6 last)

Service	Scale
1. Water supply and sewage	1 2 3 4 5 6
2. Garbage removal	1 2 3 4 5 6
3. Maintenance of roads	1 2 3 4 5 6
4. Street lighting	1 2 3 4 5 6
5. Cleaning of streets and squares	1 2 3 4 5 6
6. Greening	1 2 3 4 5 6

77. I do not know / difficult to answer

**CLEANLINESS AND GARBAGE DISPOSAL**

23. In general, you would say that compared to last year, your city / village has become

1. cleaner
2. did not change
3. more dirty

77. I do not know / difficult to answer

24. Are you willing to pay more if the collection and disposal of garbage is organized at the proper level on a regular basis according to the established schedule?

1. Yes
2. No
3. I do not know / difficult to answer

**WATER SUPPLY AND SEWARAGE**

25. Where do you currently get your drinking water from?

1. Water system (water is supplied in apartment or house)
2. Individual water pump
3. Public water pump
4. Own well -----  (Go to question 27)
5. Neighbor/relative's well -----  (Go to question 27)
6. Open source of water, like a spring or river -----  (Go to question 27)
7. Other (Specify) -----  (Goto question 27)
77. I do not know / difficult to answer -----  (Go to question 27)

26. What kind of problems do you face most often in connection with water supply?

1. Water pressure (head)
2. Duration of water supply during the day

- 3. Water quality which includes its safety, taste, smell, and color
- 4. Other
- 77. I do not know / difficult to answer
  
- 27. Are you willing to pay more so that water is supplied regularly with acceptable quality?  
1. Yes      2. No      77. I do not know / difficult to answer
  
- 28. Do you have access to the central sewerage system?  
1. Yes      2. No      77. I do not know / difficult to answer

**ENGAGEMENT IN ISSUES OF LOCAL IMPORTANCE**

- 29. Do you agree to take personal part in the public affairs of your city or village, i.e. participate in meetings / gatherings, public councils, initiative and other groups, commissions, etc.? (choose one answer)  
1. Yes  
2. Yes, but not often  
3. No  
77. I do not know / difficult to answer
  
- 30. Have you ever had to take personal part in public affairs of your city or village, i.e. participate in meetings / gatherings, initiative and other groups, public councils (council of elders, women council, youth council, etc.), commissions, etc., held and / or created under the LSG body (mayor's office, aiyl okmotu) ? (choose one answer)  
1. Yes  
2. No -----  (Go to question 32)
  
- 31. If you had to participate in public affairs, indicate in which ones? (select all that apply)  
1. Participation in meetings / gatherings  
2. Participation in the development, selection of project proposals for funding through grants and (or) local budget  
3. Participation in public hearings (on budget, on tariffs, on services and other issues of local importance)  
4. Participation in public councils (council of elders, women council, youth council, etc.)  
5. Participation in commissions  
6. Participation in initiative group  
7. Participation in joint monitoring and evaluation group  
8. Other
  
- 32. Do you agree to take personal part in public works for the improvement of your city or village? (choose one answer)  
1. Yes  
2. Yes, but not often  
3. No  
77. I do not know / difficult to answer
  
- 33. Have you personally participated in public works for the improvement of your city or village? (choose one answer)  
1. Yes      2. Yes, but not often      3. No      77. I do not know / difficult to answer
  
- 34. In your opinion, is there an opportunity for citizens to assess (monitor) the work of local self-government bodies (mayor's office / aiyl okmotu, local kenesh)?  
1. Yes      2. No      77. I do not know / difficult to answer

Availability of opportunity to conduct evaluation	1. Yes	2. No	77. I do not know / difficult to answer
1 year ago	1	2	77
3 years ago	1	2	77
5 years ago	1	2	77

- 36. Have you heard or do you know about the joint monitoring and evaluation teams?  
1. Yes      2. No      77. I do not know / difficult to answer
  
- 37. Do you want to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of services?  
1. Yes  
2. No -----  (Go to question 40)  
77. I do not know / difficult to answer -----  (Go to question 40)
  
- 38. If YES, then what you would like to participate in monitoring (Choose from 1 - 3 answer options)  
1. Services of drinking water provision  
2. Garbage collection services (improvement)  
3. Services of issuing certificates  
4. Conduct of public procurement  
5. Implementation of projects (repair, construction)

6. Execution of development plans (strategic plans, work plans) by the mayor's office / AO
7. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
39. How would you prefer to participate in monitoring and evaluation? (Choose from 1 - 3 answer options)
1. Send SMS messages
  2. Participate / write in WhatsApp group
  3. Attend meetings of tender commissions
  4. Visit objects (construction, renovation)
  5. Conduct surveys
  6. Participate in acceptance of purchased goods
  7. Participate in the monitoring and evaluation team
  8. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
40. What emotions do you feel when you mention local government? (Answer options must be read, no more than 3 answer options)
1. Optimism
  2. Inspiration
  3. Pity
  4. Disappointment
  5. Irritation
  6. None
  7. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
77. I do not know / difficult to answer
41. In your opinion, what should be the mandatory share / quota of women in local self-government bodies (keneshes and mayor's offices / aiyl okmotu)? (Choose one answer)
1. Less than 30% of the total number of employees and deputies (0-30%)
  2. At least 30% of the total number of employees and deputies (31-49%)
  3. At least 50% of the total number of employees and deputies (51% or more)
  4. It doesn't matter, everything depends on a person
77. I do not know / difficult to answer

**GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS**

43. How much do you trust the following organizations and public institutions?  
(on a rating scale of 1 - I do not trust at all, 10 - I completely trust)

	«1» – I do not trust at all									«10» – I completely trust
1.Institutions/Organizations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2.President Apparatus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3.Armed forces of KR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4.Jogorku Kenesh	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5.Executive bodies of local self-government (mayor's office/aiyl okmotu)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6.Non-governmental non-commercial organizations (NGO)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7.Plenipotentiary representative of the Government of KR in oblast (governor)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8.Government	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9.Law enforcement agencies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10.Representative bodies of local self-government (city and aiyl keneshes)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11.Rayon state administrations (akimiats)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12.Religious institutions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13.Health care system	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14.Education system	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15.Social protection system	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16.Judicial system	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

45. How satisfied are you with the interaction of local self-government bodies (aiyl okmotu / mayor's office and local kenesh) with citizens?

	Fully satisfied	Partially satisfied	Not satisfied	I do not know / difficult to answer
Aiyl okmotu / mayor's office	1	2	3	77
Local kenesh	1	2	3	77

46. Do you think that the requirements for candidates for the position of mayor / head and deputies of the local kenesh should be higher?

Requirements for candidates must be higher	1. Yes	2. No	77. I do not know / difficult to answer
mayors / heads of AO	1	2	77
local kenesh deputies	1	2	77

47. Who should elect the head of the LSG executive body (mayor / head of AO) (one answer option)

1. Deputies of local kenesh
2. Population through direct elections
3. President
4. Governor
5. Akim
6. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

77. I do not know / difficult to answer

//48. Should local keneshes be formed on a party basis?

1. Yes    2. No    77. I do not know

49. In your municipality, do political parties influence the work of local kenesh?

1. Completely    2. Partially    3. Do not influence -  Go to question No.51

50. How this influence is expressed (choose several answers):

1. Local kenesh started to rigorously monitor aiyl okmotu's work
2. Local kenesh hinders the work of aiyl okmotu
3. Local kenesh became 'younger'
4. Local kenesh goes along with party teams from Bishkek and ignores interests of the community
5. Local kenesh is divided into political factions and this hinders the decision-making process
6. Local kenesh started to pay more attention to the orders of voters
7. Local kenesh started performing its functional duties better
8. What else? (Add) \_\_\_\_\_