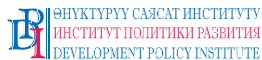


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PRIORITY RURAL ASSESSMENT (PRA) THE FIRST STEP TO GENUINE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CITIZENS AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENTS

“Voice of citizens and accountability of local self-government: budget process” project funded by the Swiss Government in cooperation with the Department for International Development, UK, implemented by Development Policy Institute.



- *What is a local self-governance?*
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What is local self-governance??

Local self-governance is a right guaranteed by the Constitution and a distinct possibility for local communities to address issues of local significance independently and in own interest, as well as being responsible for it.

Issues of local significance are the issues related to the livelihoods of the population in the designated geographical area, which are to be addressed by local self-government bodies and officials, as well as through citizens' direct expression of the will.

Local self-governance is exercised by the local citizens' communities per se or through the bodies of local self-government.

Local self-government bodies are representative and executive bodies, assuring solutions to the issues of local significance.

System of local self-government bodies consists of:

1. Local kenesh - representative bodies of local self-governments;
2. Aiyl okmotu, mayor's office - executive bodies of local self-governments.

The jurisdiction of local self-governments includes the following **issues of local significance**:

1. ensuring economic development of the appropriate territory;
2. municipal property management;
3. formation, adoption and implementation of the budget;
4. supply the population with drinking water;
5. maintenance of sewage systems and wastewater treatment facilities in inhabited localities;
6. maintenance of municipal roads in inhabited localities;
7. maintenance of the lighting of public areas;
8. maintenance of cemeteries and funeral services provision;
9. provision of public amenities and landscaping of public areas;
10. maintenance of parks, sports and recreation facilities;
11. organization of collection, disposal and recycling of waste;
12. maintenance of public transport operation and regulation of public transport within inhabited localities;
13. protection of cultural and historical sights;
14. organization and provision of local libraries;
15. establishment of land use rules and ensuring compliance with regulations of urban development and architecture;
16. advertising on the territory of the respective inhabited locality in a manner prescribed by the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic;

17. promotion of protection of public order;
18. creating conditions for the development of folk arts;
19. creating conditions for leisure;
20. organization of activities in working with children and youth;
21. providing conditions for the development of physical culture and sports;
22. assistance in prevention and elimination of emergency situations consequences.

Important principles of local self-government are transparency and participation of citizens

Local self-government is exercised based on the following principles:

- transparency and accountability of local self-government bodies to the local community and exercise of their functions in the interests of the local community;
- rule of law and social justice;
- expression of the citizens' will through the system of local self-government bodies, as well as through citizens' assemblies, meetings and kurultais;
- protection of the rights and legitimate interests of the local communities;
- publicity and consideration of public opinion ...

Formation and execution of the local budget is carried out in compliance with the principles of transparency, public participation, and accountability of local self-governments to the local community.

Participation of citizens in the strategic documents of the Kyrgyz Republic NSDS¹ in paragraph 5 of section 2.7 "Development of local self-government" secures one of the strategic directions of development as *an increase in responsibilities and roles of the heads of local self-governments, improvement of the accountability forms to the local community and deputies of local kenesh*. LSG Development Program² in section II "Strategic goals and objectives" highlights Direction 1 "Increased accountability and optimization of LSG bodies, oriented to the needs of citizens" which particularly states the following objective for LSG: *"... develop mechanisms to involve citizens in the process of personal participation in self-government, decision-making on important public issues, exercise the right to local rule-making initiative. It is necessary to build capacity of the LSG heads by increasing level of professionalism, ethics, transparency, accessibility, credibility and reputation in the community"*.

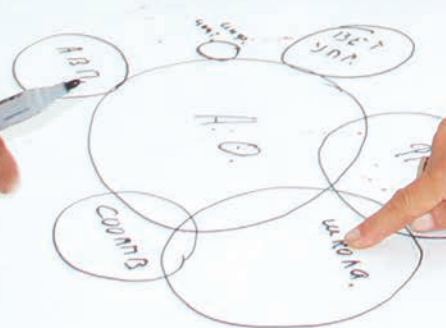
Why is it beneficial to learn opinion of the population?

Addressing the issues of local significance is inconceivable without dialogue between LSG bodies and concerned population. Success of any decision





- 1. AB
- 2. Jilma
- 3. Jatin
- 4. COOPING
- 5. AB
- 6. Jilma
- 7. 1997-2004



made by LSG bodies is largely dependent on support of the population.

- Exploration of the population opinion allows LSG bodies to plan own expenditures and get population's support for rational distribution of existing resources.
- Exploration of opinion and ensuring participation of citizens in the issues of local significance are considered as an important condition for effective performance of functions and authorities of LSG bodies.
- Exploration of public opinion is also an effective tool of the civil society through which the population can express trust or distrust to LSG bodies.

LSG bodies should try not only to take public opinion into account, but also to shape it according to their internal resources and capabilities. When communities feel that their opinions are important for the bodies of local self-governments, the citizens willingly participate in solving the issues of local significance. This allows the citizens to decide which problems should be addressed in the first instance and how to solve them. Proposing ways of solution the population takes partial responsibility for the development of the local community. Such sharing of responsibility is rather beneficial for local self-government bodies both in a dialogue establishment and search for resources.

Meaning of priority in the context of resource shortage

Resources are always scarce, especially at the level of LSGs, due to limitations of the government on the number of income sources for the local budgets. Simply, money is always not enough. For any governmental body, or any municipality. Generally, money is not enough for any budget in the world, because human needs are growing faster than capabilities to meet them. In this light, there is necessity to make regular decisions in order to meet population's needs in the first place. Or - what is the priority? That is why while managing the local budget LSG bodies constantly need to prioritize problems and needs in order to meet population's expectations in the best way and be accountable to it. In other words, there is an evident need to train LSG bodies and the citizens on how to achieve the goals, how many resources are needed and how to get them, i.e. search ways to increase revenues for the local budget. Prioritization also helps planning own capital expenditures.

What is PRA?

Governing bodies do not always interact efficiently with the population. In one hand, there is dalliance with the public opinion, various populist actions. In another hand, while developing significant social and

1 *Kyrgyz Republic National Strategy of Sustainable Development for 2013-2017 (approved by Presidential Decree of January 21, 2013 № 11).*

2 *Development of local self-government Programme of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2013-2017 (approved by the Governmental Decree of 18 December 2013 № 678).*

economic projects, reforms implementation, making and realization of decisions on issues important for the whole local community, capacity of the public opinion is not fully used.

Democratic governance requires utilizing of special tools that provide concordance of interests of various groups. For example, Priority Rural Assessment (PRA)³.

Priority Rural Assessment is a process of joint collection of information, its analysis and planning of activities taking population's opinion and interests into account.

PRA is a constantly advanced set of methods and approaches that allow people to analyze own livelihood, living conditions and promotes sharing of experience and knowledge. With the help of PRA rural and urban populations may identify own priorities and make decisions independently, to determine their living conditions.

PRA is a complex of activities, which consists of few consecutive activities⁴:

- Collection of information and study of the situation in the rural area;
- Identification of problem in the rural area;
- Analysis of the problem in the rural area: what is the reason and the consequences of the problem;
- Identification of priority issues that need to be addressed in the first place;
- Joint discussion of the ways to address the priority problems;
- Development of the joint action plan;
- Discussion of the joint action plans to address the priority issues with the local community at the gatherings, public hearings;
- Reflection of the joint action plans in the local budget;
- Implementation of the joint action plan;
- Joint monitoring and evaluation of the implemented joint action plans;
- Reporting on outcomes of the implemented joint action plans at the gatherings, public hearings, kurultais.

Disclosure of the local budget information, on how money is spent to address the issues of local significance is mandatory inevitable element of all stages and activities of PRA.

All of the activities are participated by:

- Members of local community, who have attained 18 years old, regardless sex, race, nationality, language, religion, employment or property status;
- Representatives of the state bodies, agencies, territorial subdivisions

³ PRA is not well suited for large cities, where because of the large population it is difficult to ensure the representativeness of citizen participation. In most cities use other methods - case studies, targeted focus groups, expert assessments, studies, etc.

- of the state bodies, commercial and noncommercial organizations, public associations, etc.;
- Deputies of local keneshs;
- Employees of aiyl okmotu⁵.



PRA is a part of citizens' participation in addressing the issues of local significance in partnership with LSG bodies

The assessment of the priority problems of the communities is meaningless per se, if it is not followed up by concrete actions to address them. The most effective way to solve the community problems is to work together, since the problems were also identified together as well.

Joint identification of the problems, making decisions about which of them need to be addressed at first and joint actions - this is the real implementation of the capabilities of the local communities in their own interests and under their own responsibility to address the issues of local significance.

After conducting PRA active and interested citizens form initiative groups on the identified problems and plan the activities to address them by developing the joint action plan.

Detailed information about work of the initiative groups and implementation of the joint action plans is contained in paragraphs 25 and 26 of the Standard Charter of the local community approved by the SALSGIR Decree #01-24/19 as of 04 March 2014.

An important part of the plan implementation is the monitoring and follow-up evaluation of the LSG performance by the population. Methodology to conduct assessment of services, local initiatives, projects implemented at the expense of the local budget, contribution of the local community, donor organizations, as well as provisions on the group of joint monitoring and evaluation, its composition should be approved by the local kenesh . According to the results of the plan execution LSG bodies are accountable to the community on addressing priority issues and again carry out a set of PRA activities in order to understand how priorities have changed. Then the cycle is repeated.

In which cases does LSG apply PRA?

LSG bodies may widely apply methods of PRA in various processes of governance. In particular it is important to conduct joint assessment of rural priorities in the process of:

- Strategic planning of the territory development;
- Formation of municipal social order;
- Formation of polices that support certain social groups (women, children, youth, elderly, migrants, ethnic groups);
- Development of other programs, plans and strategies in order to



⁴ Details see 4. Article 24 of the Model Charter of the local community, approved by the Order № 01-24/19 GAMSUMO dated March 04, 2014.



identify goals of such documents and meet expectations of the populations in addressing long-standing problems.

Conducting complex activities within PRA is MANDATORY condition to be eligible to apply for the Small Grant Program under the “Voice of citizens and accountability of local self-government: budget process” Project.

Majority of the international donor organizations and projects, as well as non-governmental organizations in provision of grant aid, especially on infrastructure issues require identifying priority issues. Therefore conducting PRA also serves LSGs as a tool to raise investments from external sources.

Why can one trust in PRA results?

1. **Reliability:** during direct meetings and collective discussions the population is more outspoken about their priorities and evaluate performance of LSG bodies and quality of the services provided.
2. **Specification:** information received via live conversation enables saturation of information with necessary specific individual details.
3. **Efficiency:** active participants of the meetings when discussing problems may immediately define a caus-end-effect relationship and propose solutions. In an effort to express own opinion in public, leaders become apparent among the mini-groups, who may become active actors in addressing the problems (development and implementation of action plans).
4. **Informational content:** face-to-face communication during the meetings is already a fact of the information exchange and feedback between the population and citizens.
5. **Credibility:** emotional disposition for communication and collaboration, opportunity to be heard and get answers to questions lead to increased level of confidence in the bodies of LSG;
6. **Collectiveness:** participation not only of the chief executives of aimak, but also deputies promotes understanding that decisions are made not solely in the municipality; participation of the deputies contributes to their real authority in front of the community and a proper understanding of their role by the deputies themselves.

Example of PRA in solving the problems of rural population in Ak-Chii aiyl aimak (AA) Issyk-Kul oblast

PRA, initiative groups and joint action plan

In 2012 Ak-Chii AA became a pilot municipality under the “Voice of citizens and accountability of local self-government: budget process” Project (hereinafter - the VAP Project). In order to establish a partnership with the community with the support of the VAP Project in early autumn of 2012 the LSG bodies in each of the three villages of the aimak conducted 11 PRA

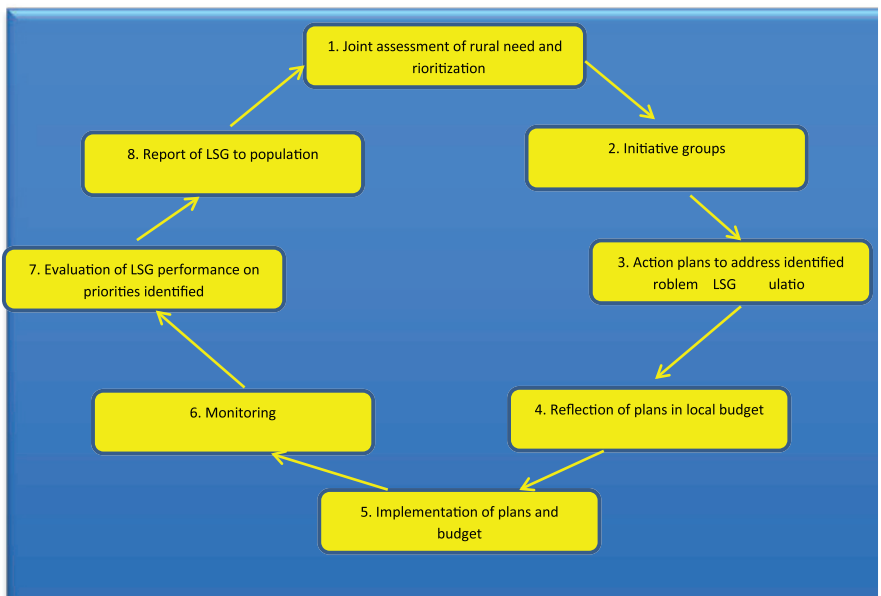
5 Details see ibid, paragraph 5.

sessions in format of 3 focus age-sex groups (males and females 18-35 years old, 36-55 years old, from 55 years old and above). 311 people participated in focus groups, including 95 women: staff of aiyl okmotu and local kenesh deputies; community leaders and activists; employees of schools, kindergartens, feldsher stations and other budget organizations; farmers; pensioners; youth. Six priority issues of AA were identified:

- 1) condition of roads and bridges;
- 2) absence of street lighting and lack of transformers;
- 3) absence of kindergarten;
- 4) absence of club and gym (leisure);
- 5) lack of transparency in the local budget;
- 6) development of the local economy.

In the PRA process there were active aimak residents identified, who joined in 3 initiative groups (IG):

- “Kelechek” IG tackled the problem of the roads and bridges condition;



- absence of street lighting and lack of transformers;
- “Umut” IG tackled the problem of absence of kindergarten; club and gym (leisure); and the low level of transparency of the local budget;
- “Aikyn” IG focused on the development of the local economy, including the establishment of agro-veterinary pharmacy and purchase wool-

6 For details, see Model Rules ayylnogo council, Chapter 2, «Issues related to the competence of aiyl kenesh (local council)»

carding machine.

The composition of the initiative groups has been approved by the head of the aiyl okmotu. The IG included village leaders and activists, AO specialists and the deputies of the aiyl kenesh.

With the participation of all IGs the joint action plan (JAP) was developed and subsequently approved by the decision of the aiyl kenesh.

For addressing 6 priority issues 49 activities were defined in the plan of Ak-Chii AA. By early 2014, 34 of them were conducted totaling 5,684,800 soms. The joint monitoring and evaluation group (JM&E) of 7 persons from among the members of the IG, municipality activists and members of aiyl kenesh was created, which tracks the performance of JAPs and achievement of the outcomes.



Joint action plan that is based on the PRA results can become part of the development strategy of the municipality or action plan for its implementation. Also the plan may be part of the work plan of the aiyl okmotu or local kenesh; included as part of or be the basis of other action plans for the development and governance. The value of JAP is stipulated by the fact that it is based on the real priorities of the population. LSG body using JAP as a tool for planning and governance in the framework of all its programs and projects, protects itself from the risk of being misunderstood by the community. The citizens always appreciate efforts of the local self-government that rests upon population needs and preferences in planning of their work, and then support these efforts of LSG to improve the livelihood in the municipality.

Village gathering to select the priority project

All 3 IGs actively participated in the development of projects in order to apply for the Small Grants Program under the VAP Project. LSG bodies conducted the village gathering in order to select the most important project for the community that will participate in the Small Grants Program. The participants of the gathering were representatives of the Sovet, Kachybek and Ak-Chii villages (farmers, teachers, businessmen, pensioners, unemployed, housewives, representatives of LSG bodies and the IG members). Gathering participants were presented three project proposals and the results of voting results are as follows:

- “Ak-Jol” project (solving the problem of the internal roads) received 31 votes;
- “Muz ayantchasy” project (creating conditions for youth recreation by building the skating rink) received 12 votes;
- “Madanii ochok” (overhaul and equipment for club in Kachybek village) received 7 votes.

For implementation of the “Ak-Jol” project that was selected as a priority

by the gathering participants, the aiyl aimak received the grant of 1 million som in the result of winning in the Small Grant Program competition. The municipality using these funds will purchase special machinery – excavator for repair of the internal roads.

The bodies of LSG can announce similar programs if they have the means in the local budget. They can also use similar mechanisms to raise additional funding for their projects, as the project based on the priorities of the local community can easily receive support from many potential sources of funding: investors, developing nearby mines; government agencies, managing regional development funds and the state budget; international donor organizations; charity foundations; fellows working in other countries. The project that was selected by the community in a competitive manner arouses trust and makes evident the need for an urgent problem solution; accelerates decision-making in terms of co-financing, donations, grants. Furthermore, the process of PRA events, discussion of the problem involves a large number of officials, citizens, experts and organizations. As a result, the chance of raising additional funding significantly increases, as all PRA participants feel involved in addressing the problem and automatically begin thinking about how to solve it. Figuratively speaking, without PRA the municipality deals the problem alone. By applying PRA methods the municipality engages a large number of potential stakeholders to address the problem, so the problem starts to be solved by all.

Access to the budget information

The problem of access to the budget information, transparency of the local budget was identified as a priority during PRA in Ak- Chii AA. Therefore, LSG bodies decided to hold public hearings on 26 June 2013 on the draft budget for 2014. The main difference of the hearings was that aiyl okmotu conducted an effective information campaign “before”, “during” and “after” the hearings by using non-standard methods of informing the public. The employees of the municipality dressed in national costumes with megaphones mounted on horses circled the streets of the village creating a festive atmosphere and inviting residents to the hearings. During the hearings the aiyl okmotu staff presented the draft budget for next year to the villagers, but also answered their questions, provided comments on the proposals of the villagers, moreover covered the results of the previous hearings. So, on behalf of the local self-government the active participants of the previous budget hearings were awarded prizes for the most interesting question, for the best proposal, also the most elderly member received a present.

After the hearings, the budget commission of the local kenesh together with the aiyl okmotu discussed 13 proposals of the citizens and having received an expert opinion, the commission accepted 11 proposals in the draft budget that was approved by the local kenesh in February 2014. In the framework of the information campaign after the hearings the municipality sent

letters, where concrete timeframe and ways of the problems solutions were described in accordance with the developed action plan to those villagers who have made their proposals. Creative approach to informing citizens and the responsibility for the results of the hearings were highly appreciated in the framework of the competition “The real citizen participation in budget formation” (VAP Project). Ak- Chii AA took the first place and won the prize - a set of office equipment, which is now used for conducting high quality public events, including disclosure of information on the local budget.

Outcomes of using PRA in addressing problems of rural population

In 2011-2013 “Voice of citizens and accountability of local self-government: budget process” project provided support to 16 municipalities in conducting PRA activities, which were attended by over 11,000 people. According to the results PRA the municipalities developed the joint action plans to address identified 151 priority issues. 65 initiative groups were created that plan to take part in implementation of more than 600 events.

Priority issues identified during PRA in 16 municipalities (the number indicates the rank of priority)

1	Transparency of LSG performance	12	Health care
2	Youth issues	13	Bridges
3	Internal roads	14	Sanitation-ecological condition
4	Drinking water	15	Development of local economy
5	Pre-school education	16	AO staff capacity
6	School education	17	Social issues
7	Street lighting	18	Planting of greenery and provision of amenities
8	Irrigation water	19	Citizens security
9	Condition of irrigation ditches and canals	20	Municipal transportation
10	Agriculture	21	Absence of mill
11	Garbage		

The joint action plans to address these issues are successfully implemented - for 2 years in 16 pilot LSG the work is done for more than 150 hundred million soms at the expense of local budgets (21%), using the contributions of the population (4%), as well as by raising additional financial sources (75%). More than 550 thousand people received direct benefits from performing these activities in the aйл aimaks and over 350 thousand people benefited indirectly. High level of additional funding demonstrates success of the model of active cooperation between LSG and the citizens.





КЫРГЫЗСТАН - ШВЕЙЦАРИЯ
KYRGYZSTAN - SWITZERLAND
Кызматташтыкка 20 жыл
20 лет сотрудничества
20 years of cooperation



**DEVELOPMENT POLICY INSTITUTE WITHIN THE PROJECT ON
“Voice of citizens and accountability of local self-government: budget process”
funded by the Swiss Government in cooperation with the Department for
International Development, UK, implements activities in the pilot aiyl aimaks,
including capacity building of LSG bodies and local communities on various
aspects of municipal governance, actual engagement of local communities in
addressing issues of local significance. Activities on identification, prioritization,
discussion, planning, implementation and monitoring of addressing rural
problems are supported.**

***For detailed information and consultations please contact us by email:
office@dpi.kg***

For more information about the Project please visit www.vap.kg and www.dpi.kg