



Research on the Topic “Transparent and Public Development Programs”

Executive Summary

The “**Transparent and Public Development Programs**” program studied the course of selection, presentation and financing of subvention programs launched by the government to the communities of Meghri, Kapan, Sisian, Goris, Tegh and Tatev of Syunik province between 2019 and 2022, the effectiveness of the implemented programs, as well as the participation of citizens in their selection and implementation.

In addition, the effectiveness of the procedures for “Organizing and Holding Public Open Hearings and Discussions” was studied.

The research was carried out using the document analysis method and written surveys; surveys were also conducted in the communities among representatives of the local government and residents.

As a result of studies, it was found that in almost all communities (Kapan excepted) the programs were implemented in the community center or in the neighboring villages.

The document analysis found that generally no public hearings were held in the villages and towns prior to drawing up the subvention programs, and the programs were selected according to the preferences of the authorities. In individual villages of some communities several programs were approved.

In the opinion of most representatives of the community authorities, organizing public hearings is time-consuming and, in some sense, inexpedient, because each participant expects a solution to the problem concerning themselves. According to the LSG representatives, they are well aware of the problems in the community.

On the other hand, the surveys conducted among the residents revealed that most of them are not aware of the development programs being implemented in their communities. Some of the respondents are not even interested in the decisions the community authorities make to change the quality of their lives and have no desire to participate in public hearings. Some of the residents suggest to organize regular meetings rather than public hearings and to hear their voices as well.

The municipalities publish information on subvention applications on official websites, yet not always and not in a manner that is accessible to residents. The hearings often feature the already selected programs, and a public hearing may last only half an hour. In other cases, in the communities where public discussions are organized several questions are put on the agenda at the same time, which is ineffective.

Most communities do not use alternative tools for information dissemination, such as Facebook. The feedback mechanism for the residents is not active.

Although organizing online public hearings has positive aspects in the case of a consolidated community, not all population groups are able to participate, due to lack of awareness of online resources.

The research also found that the paperwork for holding public hearings is not done properly.

Pursuant to Article 11 of the RA Law “On Local Self-Government” the participation of community residents in local self-government is defined as a process carried out in the community, through which the residents, without discrimination, are being informed about the activities of the LSGs and can directly or indirectly influence the decisions of local self-government bodies. Therefore, organizing public hearings, regardless of the mechanisms used, is a legal requirement mandatory for enforcement: failing to organize public hearings in villages and towns violates the compulsory legal requirements stipulated in the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority. As a result of the conclusions of the research, as well as during the preliminary discussions of the report, a number of recommendations were made that can promote the publicity and transparency of LSGs and the participation of residents in local self-government. These mainly refer to the development of a new toolkit for organizing public hearings, considering the specificities of multi-settlement communities, the initiatives aimed at the establishment of the institution of the council of elders in order to ensure communication between the LSGs and residents, changes in the sectoral scores set for community contribution for the implementation of subvention programs, as well as the undue interference of some institutions in the process of selection and approval of subvention programs, for example, regional administrations (marzpetarans).

Due to the impossibility of community contribution, subvention programs are not introduced in communities with small budgets, and the state should apply an alternative approach.

Regarding the schedules of public hearings, it is recommended to select subvention programs exclusively from among the issues included in the five-year development plans, and organize the hearings for those programs.