



Local Self-Governance in Armenia: Public Awareness, Public Participation, and Public Satisfaction

Quantitative Research Results

Executive summary

The current report entitled “**Local Self-Governance in Armenia: Public Awareness, Public Participation, and Public Satisfaction**” is based on the results of two surveys conducted by CRRC-Armenia in 2015 (baseline) and in 2019 (endline), within the frames of “Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG)” program. The report consists of two parts. The first part compares the data from the baseline and endline surveys as well as from consolidated and non-consolidated communities in Armenia in 2019. The data covers a broad range of topics including public awareness of and public participation in local governance, as well as public satisfaction with the work of local self-governance bodies.

The comparison of the baseline and endline data shows that in 2019, the level of public awareness of local self-governance in Armenia remained as low as it had been four years earlier. For example, in 2019 about half of the respondents (49%) said that they did not know any of the members of the community elders’ council. This statistic was 48% in 2015. Meanwhile, in 2019, the percentage of those respondents who knew the members of the elders’ council was higher in non-consolidated communities than in consolidated ones. In 2019, as in 2015, only 2% of the respondents knew the size of their community budget. In 2019, approximately one third (32%) of the respondents knew how their LSG bodies spend the community budget funds; in 2015, this statistic was 27%.

In general, a small percentage of surveyed Armenians contacted their LSG bodies to solve personal or community issues. In both 2015 and 2019, 17% of the respondents turned to their community heads within the six months preceding the surveys to solve an issue. In 2019, another 7% contacted

the administrative heads of their settlements in the consolidated communities with the same purpose. The percentage of those respondents who contacted the members of the elders' council was significantly smaller (5% in 2015 and 4% in 2019).

A tiny portion of the surveyed Armenians participated in the work of LSG bodies. For example, in 2019 only 1.8% of the respondents participated in sessions of their community elders' council within the six months preceding the survey. This statistic was 2.4% in 2015. In 2019, only 1.4% of respondents attended community budget hearings, and in 2015 only 1.7% did so. Meanwhile, there are no statistically significant differences between consolidated and non-consolidated communities regarding the levels of public engagement in community-related hearings.

In 2019, 15% of the respondents said they were overall satisfied with the work of their LSG bodies. Four years earlier, 11% expressed their overall satisfaction with the LSG bodies. It is noteworthy that the percentage of those who were overall not satisfied with the work of their LSG bodies decreased from 36% (in 2015) to 27% (in 2019). Meanwhile, in 2019, the level of public satisfaction with the work of LSG bodies in non-consolidated communities was higher than that in consolidated ones, the difference being statistically significant.

The 2019 survey results also demonstrate some changes in the public assessment of specific activities implemented by LSG bodies, compared to 2015. For some activities the public assessment slightly improved. For example, the percentage of respondents positively assessing the activity "Keeping the community clean" increased from 47% in 2015 to 52% in 2019; the activity "Managing the domains of education, culture and sport", from 38% in 2015 to 43% in 2019; and the activity "Managing health institutions", from 27% in 2015 to 34% in 2019. For some other activities, the public assessment deteriorated. For example, the percentage of respondents positively assessing the activity "Setting rates of local taxes, fines, duties and fees" decreased from 50% in 2015 to 37% in 2019, and the activity "Maintaining local roads and bridges", from 33% in 2015 to 24% in 2019. Meanwhile, according to the results of the 2019 survey, the public assessment of some of the LSG activities (e.g.

“Managing health institutions” and “Maintaining local roads and bridges”) was slightly more positive in non-consolidated communities than in consolidated ones.

In 2019, community heads and members of elders’ councils enjoyed the trust of 39% and 23% of respondents, respectively. This is comparable with the levels of public trust toward community heads and members of elders’ councils four years earlier, 38% and 24%, respectively. According to the 2019 survey data, community heads and members of elders’ councils enjoyed more trust in non-consolidated communities than in consolidated ones, the difference being statistically significant.

In 2019, only 15% of the respondents assessed the level of transparency of their LSG bodies as high. This statistic was 13% in 2015. In 2019, the level of positive assessment of transparency of LSG bodies in non-consolidated communities was statistically significantly higher than in consolidated communities.

The second part of the report consists of short papers by Narek Karapetyan, Arman Gasparyan, Sona Msryan, and Zaruhi Simonyan, participants of the 2019 CRRC-Armenia “CELoG” research fellowship program. In their studies, the research fellows attempted to understand the factors leading to the development of participatory local governance in Armenia. Each paper also includes recommendations for policy makers.

Narek Karapetyan’s study is an attempt to understand the impact of a range of external factors, such as the community consolidation process, community budget, and socio-economic conditions of the community, upon the public perceptions of the work of LSG bodies. In order to answer the research question, the author uses several datasets: CRRC-Armenia’s 2019 “CELoG” endline survey, 2018 data on the community budgets, and 2016 dataset of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure on the socio-economic development of communities. With the application of several statistical methods, Narek arrives at the following conclusions; community consolidation in Armenia has a negative impact on the public perception of the work of LSG bodies. Public perceptions of the work of LSG bodies deteriorate as the levels of social vulnerability (e.g. limited access to drinking

water, healthcare and public education) increases in the communities. Meanwhile, the author suggests that the public perceptions of the activities of LSG bodies improve along with the increase of capital expenditures (e.g. construction) made in the communities.

Similar to the previous study, Arman Gasparyan's research attempts to determine the factors that impact public perceptions toward LSG bodies in Armenia. The author explores a range of questions including whether the residents of consolidated communities are more satisfied with the quality of services provided by their LSG bodies and with the levels of local democracy, whether the residents who elect their community heads directly are more satisfied with the work of their LSG bodies, as well as whether the community size and the size of the community population are related to levels of public satisfaction with the quality of LSG services. To answer these questions, the author uses CRRC-Armenia's 2015 and 2019 "CELoG" surveys along with two imported variables (the geographic size of and the number of population in each community). Some of Arman's conclusions are as follows. In 44 observed communities, the levels of satisfaction with the quality of LSG services have decreased after the process of community consolidation. According to the 2015 data, the size of the community did not affect the levels of public satisfaction with the quality of the LSG services; however, the 2019 survey data show that the impact of the community size has become significant. The author also makes a cautious assumption that compared with consolidated communities, non-consolidated ones are in a more advantageous situation when it comes to indicators of local democracy (e.g. transparency and accountability of LSG bodies). Rural communities, according to the author, have a similar advantage over urban ones.

The author of the third paper, Sona Msryan, tries to understand the relationship between the levels of public trust toward LSG bodies with the indicators of public awareness of and the public engagement in local self-governance in Armenia. To solve this issue, the author uses data from CRRC-Armenia's 2015 and 2019 "CELoG" surveys. At first, Sona creates an index for measuring the levels of public awareness of the activities of LSG bodies. Thereafter, she proceeds with performing a cluster analysis including the variable of public engagement in local self-governance. Finally, in a

moderation model, the author analyzes the levels of public trust toward LSG bodies as a moderator variable, along with the two mentioned variables. As a result, the author makes the following conclusions. In 2015, the overwhelming majority of respondents were unaware of the sphere of local governance in Armenia. Four years later, the level of awareness has increased; however, in 2019, there was a decrease in the levels of public engagement in local self-governance, compared with 2015. As the moderation analysis demonstrated, the index of public awareness of local self-governance is positively associated with the levels of trust toward LSG bodies. However, the levels of trust toward LSG bodies have no relationship with the indicators of public engagement in local self-governance.

Zaruhi Simonyan's paper is also based on the data from CRRC-Armenia's 2015 and 2019 "CELoG" surveys. Using various methods of statistical analysis (χ^2 test, decision trees, CHAID, and t-tests), the author sheds light on multiple aspects of local governance in Armenia. More specifically, she uses tables to demonstrate how effectively or ineffectively LSG bodies in specific communities and marzes of Armenia perform in specific domains of administration. These domains include the speed of reaction of LSG bodies to issues raised by community residents, the levels of transparency of LSG bodies, the quality of public services provided by LSG bodies, and public trust toward LSG bodies.

Disclaimer

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