Monitoring of the official websites of the communities in Gegharkunik, Shirak and Syunik regions of the Republic of Armenia

Report

(Brief version)

2016

Introduction

The RA law "On Local Self-Government" defines: "A community represents the democratic basis of State system"[1]. Consequently, it's impossible to imagine local self-government without democratic environment, civil involvement and democratic working style of local self-government actors.

The principles of transparency, publicity and accountability of local self-government (LSG) bodies are enshrined by the RA law "On Local Self-Government", but accountability hasn't become the principle, integral and primary component of the activities of LSG bodies yet.

Unfortunately, in general we can state the following: sole management by community heads; community administrations isolated form community participation; closed working style; non-observance of the requirement of information on sittings of elderly councils. Of course, there are community administrations observing and implementing the requirements of the legislation, but they are few.

The importance and actuality of providing transparency and publicity of the activities of LSG bodies are inseparable from realizing human rights and freedoms and satisfying people's real life and daily requirements. Consequently, publication of the information in the internet required by the legislation by LSG bodies gradually becomes more and more actual and required.

Through internet information and creation and running of the community official websites LSG bodies should inform the population on their activities and allow community members to participate in community governance and decision-making processes. The community official websites should provide timely and the latest information about the activities of LSG bodies and publish the legal acts required by the legislation.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned, Sakharov Centre has implemented the monitoring of the official websites of the communities in Gegharkunik, Shirak and Syunik regions of the Republic of Armenia in the frames of the project №20140366 "Civil Society

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[1] RA law "On Local Self-Government", Article, A Community.

Strengthening in the Regions of the Republic of Armenia" funded by Bread for the World-Germany organization. The existing community official websites[2] in the mentioned regions have been monitored.

As provision of internet accessibility of the activities of LSG bodies needs continuous improvement, in the result of the implemented monitoring suggestions were made on focusing attention on the current problems and the ways of their solution.

The report is addressed to regional administration bodies, LSG bodies, civil society structures, mass media and users of the community official websites.

The goals and objectives of the monitoring

Goals

- To contribute to publicity, transparency and accountability of the official websites of the communities in Gegharkunik, Shirak and Syunik regions of the Republic of Armenia

- To contribute to process of publishing information required by the legislation in the official websites of the communities in Gegharkunik, Shirak and Syunik regions and to fulfilment of the requirements of the society related to obtaining information.

Objectives

- To carry out a comprehensive study of the information (required by the legislation) posted in the community official websites of Gegharkunik, Shirak and Syunik regions of the Republic of Armenia.

- To elaborate criteria and assess the adequacy of information in the community official websites of Gegharkunik, Shirak and Syunik regions of the Republic of Armenia.

- To study and reveal the main issues connected with the community official websites in Gegharkunik, Shirak and Syunik regions and governmental informative systems used as official websites and with their running. To submit suggestions helping to improve conceptual and structural work of the community official websites and to contribute to

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[2] The concept "Community official website" is not defined legislatively.

the increase of publicity, transparency and accountability of the activities of LSG bodies.

- To prepare the monitoring report and submit it to regional administration bodies, LSG bodies, civil society structures and users of the community official websites.

The observed websites

There are 320 communities in Gegharkunik, Shirak and Syunik regions.

№	Region	Cities	Villages	Total
1.	Gegharkunik	5	87	92
2.	Shirak	3	116	119
3.	Syunik	7	102	109
	Total	15	305	320

But about 22-25% of the mentioned 320 communities have community websites.

For online observation the official websites of 69 community from the 3 regions were chosen.

№	Region	Municipalities	Rural municipalities	Total
4.	Gegharkunik	5	21	26
5.	Shirak	3	21	24
6.	Syunik	6	13	19
	Total	14	55	69

Conclusions

The results of the monitoring show that the sphere of providing internet accessibility of the activities of LSG bodies needs continuous improvement. This monitoring aims at making

community inhabitants interested in visiting the community official websites, getting necessary information, using provided services, implementing public supervision. By this they will contribute to increasing effectiveness of community management.

According to the RA law on "On Local Self-Government" accountability to the community members, publicity and transparency in their activities, community residents' participation in local self-government are one of the principles of local self-government. Nowadays the implementation of these principles can be implemented more effectively through the community official websites. Their informative accessibility should be directed to the increase of transparency and community management, solve the issue of public accessibility of informative resources thus having a positive impact on the quality of citizens' life.

In the result of the implemented research we can state that the information presented by LSG bodies in their official websites partly corresponds to the criteria required by the RA legislation. We also protocoled that the community official websites are not used by community residents, that's why the issue of increasing the effectiveness of using the community official websites is very urgent.

Currently creation of community official websites is not a compulsory legislative requirement in our country. As we've already mentioned the concept "Community official website" is not defined legislatively.

At present Decree №280-U (April 8, 2015) of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations is the important legal act which must contribute to creation and running of the community official websites. The processes carried out in this direction should oblige LSG bodies in having and running official websites. Consequently, LSG executive bodies should consistently work towards creation of the community official websites and implementing the minimum requirements of similar official websites.

The implemented research showed that even after adoption of the above-mentioned decree and confirming the order of running the official websites the active websites haven't been complied with the minimum requirements envisaged for official websites. Here are the main omissions:

- The minimum requirements concerning the following information about municipalities (urban and rural):
  - ✓ history,
  - ✓ main issues and functions,
  - ✓ the issues and functions, location, staff contact details of structural and/or separate sub-departments and their subordinate bodies,
  - ✓ information about implemented inspections, studies and audit
  - ✓ procurement advertising.

- There are corresponding sections or sub-sections in the websites, but they don't contain information.

- Often finding the necessary information takes time, skills and search in one or several steps. The minimum information required by the legislation is presented in different sections; consequently getting full information is impossible.

- Information about current activities of LSG bodies and events taking place in the communities are not presented and updated by many community administrations. Rural community administrations are more passive in this regard.

- Announcements about vacancy, alienation or rent of plots owned by state or communities, provision of the right of their construction including the package with text or graphic information are few in the community official websites. But this information is posted in the official website of RA public notices-www.azdarar.am. Even if there are vacancy announcements, still the results of the competition and the appeal procedure are absent.

- Only few community administrations regularly post announcements about sittings of Elderly Councils. But there is no opportunity for following their updates.

- More seldom are the invitations to public open hearings and/or discussions. Drafts and bases of legal acts, as well as other related materials are not published with invitations.

- Websites operating on the basis of Community Management Information System (CMIS) have the opportunity in providing certain online services, but not all communities use these tools, update them or register baseline data.

- Not all the observed websites are available 7 days a week and 24 hours a day.

Suggestions

№	Suggestion	Whom it is addressed to
1.	Legislatively define the concept "Community Official Website".	The RA ministry of Territorial Administration
2.	Make the community official websites compatible with the minimum requirements defined by Decree №280-U. (April 8, 2015) of the RA Minister of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations.	The RA ministry of Territorial Administration LSG bodies
3.	Before the completion of the process of enlargement of communities, define certain term for confirming compulsory order of running the community official websites for LSG bodies with 5000 and more residents and for that purpose make a corresponding amendment to Decree №280-U. (April 8, 2015) of the RA Minister of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations regarding regulation of the financial, HR and technical security issues.	The RA ministry of Territorial Administration
4.	Create a special structure within the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration (or assign any other organziation) for providing	The RA ministry of Territorial

	LSG bodies with regular assistance in methodological, technical, technological and programic issues in making the community official websites compatible with the requirements of the RA legislation.	Administration Regional administrations
5.	Supplement the community official websites with "Site Map" navigation, which will allow to find the information posted in the website more easily.	The RA ministry of Territorial Administration LSG bodies
6.	Develop the opportunities of the community official websites in the sphere of providing online services to citizens and legal persons by LSG bodies.	The RA ministry of Territorial Administration LSG bodies
7.	Develop technical and technological opportunities of the community official websites for making the expanded search and the search in different sections of the websites easier.	The RA ministry of Territorial Administration LSG bodies
8.	Represent the activities of LSG bodies fully and comprehensively in the community official websites paying much importance to social significance of information so that the posted information serves public interests.	LSG bodies
9.	Present and timely update information about current activities of LSG bodies and events taking place in communities in the community official websites.	LSG bodies
10.	Post vacancy announcements, including announcements, competition results and appeal procedure in the community official websites.	LSG bodies
11.	Post announcements on alienation or rent of plots owned by	LSG bodies

	state or communities, provision of the right of their construction including the package with text or graphic information in the community official websites.	
12.	Post agendas of Elderly Councils in the section "Announcements" of the community official websites at least 7 days before the sittings of Elderly Councils.	LSG bodies
13.	If possible, make structural and substantial changes in the section "Announcements" and "Reports" in the community official websites by the example of the corresponding sections of the official website of Yerevan municipality, where the corresponding information is presented in chronological order and where there are information calendar archives.	"Information Systems Development and Training Centre" NGO LSG bodies
14.	Post invitations to public open hearings and/or discussions in the community official websites together with the drafts and bases of legal acts, as well as other related materials.	LSG bodies
15.	Provide 7 days a week and 24 hours a day availability of the community official websites.	LSG bodies

*The full report in Armenian is posted in the official website of Sakharov Centre http://www.sakharovcenter.org/