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PhD student

Karaganda University of Kazpotrebsoyuz

Karaganda, Kazakhstan

E-mail: ptn7@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0002-3806-6342

M.K. ZhetpisbayevaCandidate of economic sciences,
associate professor

Karaganda University of Kazpotrebsoyuz

Karaganda, Kazakhstan

E-mail: rimakeu@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0002-1341-3563

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN KAZAKHSTAN: ISSUES OF INVOLVING THE POPULATION OF RURAL DISTRICTS

Abstract: In modern developed countries, special attention is paid to the issues of power decentralization. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the formation of local self-government as a social institution is also underway. The involvement of citizens in this process contributes to a better solution of problems at the local level in accordance with the interests of the citizens themselves. The article substantiates the need for the participation of the rural population in local self-government. The main forms of participation of the inhabitants of rural districts in local self-government are described. The authors, based on the data of a sociological survey conducted in rural areas of the Karaganda region, analyzed the level of civic engagement in solving issues of local importance. In addition, the main results achieved so far in the issues of involving the rural population in participation in local self-government in Kazakhstan are identified. The main problems existing in this direction are revealed. The prospects for their solution are outlined.

Keywords: local self-government, public administration, rural district, akim, kenes, maslikhat, rural population.

Introduction.

In the modern conditions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, special attention is paid to the reform of public administration, which follows the path of developed western countries focused on using the potential of their citizens. Consequently, the emphasis is shifting to local self-government, since this level of government is closest to the population and is able to solve its vital problems. At the same time, the subjects of local self-government are given unequal attention. It is mainly focused on cities and urban agglomerations, which are considered as spaces with great development potential. This is confirmed by the active development of the «Smart city» concept, as well as projects of popular participation. In January 2020, the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, announced an initiative to implement these projects: «Citizens concerned should have the opportunity to take part in the discussion of important decisions. Every voice must be heard. To this end, it is necessary to develop the appropriate political mechanisms. In order to take into account the opinion of residents of a particular region regarding public spending, a draft budget of popular participation will be implemented» [1]. Thanks to this project, ordinary citizens got the opportunity to identify pressing problems and participate in the budget process at the stage of its formation, but the budgets of popular participation are being implemented in cities of republican, regional significance and in the capital. Thus, rural communities are left out of this process.

In the message of the President to the people of Kazakhstan dated March 16, 2022, K.-J. Tokayev notes: «We will continue to transfer real power from the center to the regions. First of all, it is necessary to effectively delineate the functions of the state and institutions of local self-government. It must be understood that a strong system of local self-government is the basic basis for the direct participation of citizens in improving the quality of life in their native locality» [2].

Issues of development of local self-government in the rural districts of Kazakhstan are particularly relevant. This is due to the vast rural territory of the country, a significant population living on it, the multinational composition of the population, the diversity of cultures, and significant differences in the socio-economic development of the regions. This level of power is closest to the population, as it is mainly formed by them, in particular, citizens got the opportunity to choose their rural akims, and they are directly responsible to the villagers. It is the development of institutions of local self-government that leads to a thoughtful and effective solution of economic and social problems of local importance, about which the population has more ideas than representatives of state bodies.

Based on this, the purpose of this scientific article is to analyze the possibilities for the participation of the rural population of Kazakhstan in local self-government. The tasks are: justification of the need for the participation of the rural population in local self-government; description of the main forms of participation of residents of rural districts in local self-government; analysis of the level of civic engagement in addressing issues of local importance (based on sociological survey data); identification of achievements, problems and prospects in the issues of involving the rural population in participation in local self-government in Kazakhstan.

Literature review

In the world scientific literature there is no universal approach to the issues of local self-government. In the Republic of Kazakhstan, individual authors: Nurlanova N.K., Brimbetova N.Zh., Burlakov L.N., Dauranov I.N., Kenzhebaeva A.A., Kireeva A.A. [3], Sadyrbaev E.A. [4], Assaubayev R. [5] and many others also offer their own view on this problem. However, despite the variety of approaches to the study of this issue, there is no common understanding of their implementation in the rural districts of Kazakhstan. The problems of involving the rural population of Kazakhstan in participation in local self-government are also given insufficient attention. This study is devoted to the solution of these questions.

Russian researchers of rural local communities Morozova E.V., Miroshnichenko I.V., Semenenko I.S. note that a significant amount of attention is paid to urban development in modern science, while there are significant gaps in rural development: «We see the key task of political science in the formation of a public discourse corresponding to the priorities of rural development, in establishing feedback mechanisms between experts and those who are the object of research, in stimulating the involvement of local rural communities and purposefully promoting their interests on the political agenda» [6]. Consequently, it is necessary to study the issues of rural areas, as well as to involve local communities in solving their problems.

Director of the Kazakhstan institute for strategic studies Tukumov Yerkin, speaking at the national expert platform «KAZISS GPS» with a report «Local self-government – a school of democracy» says that: «Today there are 2345 local communities in Kazakhstan. It is obvious that the scope of the reform will be broad. There is a concept for the development of local self-government until 2025, the role of maslikhats is changing significantly, the revenue base of local self-government will increase from the current 6 to 13 types of income in 2024. It is also planned to expand the powers of keneses, the transformation of the apparatus of akims of rural districts into the administration of local self-government, and most importantly, the adoption of the law «On local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan» [7]. Nevertheless, the question of the willingness of the citizens themselves to take part in local self-government remains open.

Materials and methods

The methodological basis of the research is a complex system of scientific methods. The study used theoretical and empirical research methods: analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, classification, comparative analysis, document analysis method, sociological survey, and also applied an integrated approach.

Results and discussion

The modernization of the local self-government system, carried out within the framework of the Strategy «Kazakhstan-2050» [8], assumed that the citizens of Kazakhstan would be actively involved in decision-making processes and their implementation. In this connection, the Concept for the development of local self-government for 2013-2020 was approved [9]. This modernization had a number of directions, providing the rural population with real opportunities to independently resolve issues of local importance (figure 1).

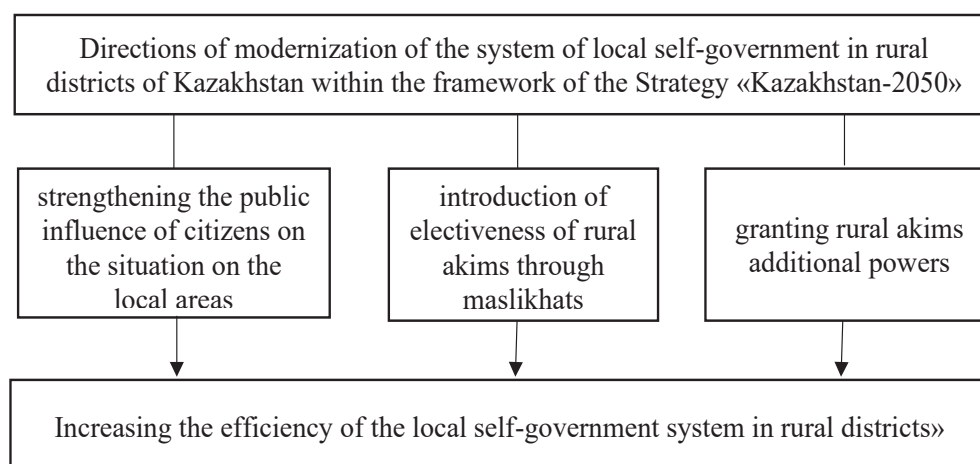


Figure 1. Modernization of the system of local self-government in rural districts of Kazakhstan within the framework of the Strategy «Kazakhstan-2050»

Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of the Strategy «Kazakhstan-2050» [8]

Within the framework of the Program of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2015 «Plan of the nation – 100 concrete steps» [10], two main directions are also identified in strengthening the role of rural citizens in the development of local self-government (figure 2).

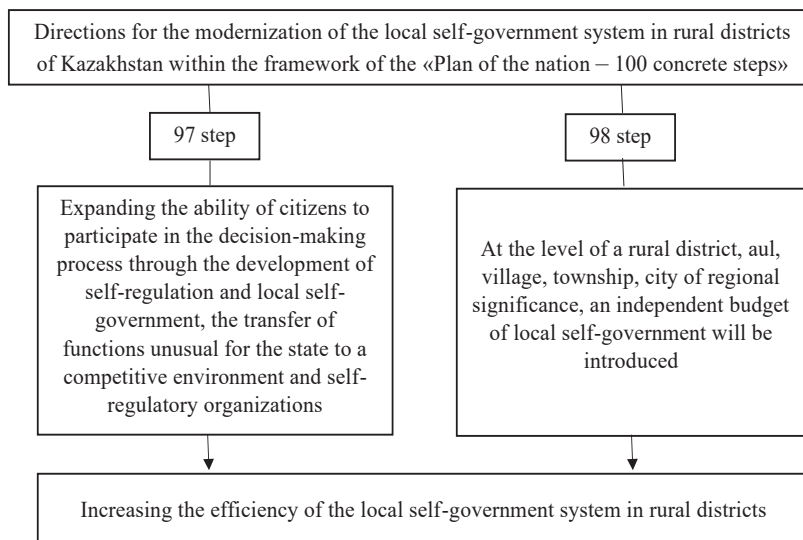


Figure 2. Modernization of the system of local self-government in rural districts of Kazakhstan within the framework of the «Plan of the nation – 100 concrete steps»

Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of «Plan of the nation – 100 concrete steps» [10]

The Concept of development of local self-government for 2013-2020 [9] also led to certain achievements in reforming the system of local self-government in rural districts of Kazakhstan. In the course of its implementation, the ground has been prepared for direct elections of akims of rural districts, villages and townships, which was implemented to increase the level of transparency and accountability of local authorities to the population, as well as to increase the interest of rural residents in making decisions on local problems and strengthening control over their implementation. At all levels of self-government, including at the level of rural districts, annual reporting meetings of akims in front of the population are held, at which the local community is informed about the main results achieved and subsequent areas of activity. In 2018-2020, the fourth level of the budget system was introduced in all rural districts. From 2023, in a pilot mode, rural citizens will be given the opportunity to elect district akims [11].

The main goal of involving citizens in the process of implementing local self-government is to independently or jointly with local authorities resolve issues of local importance to meet the needs of the population. The ways and forms of this involvement can be very diverse. The greatest effect is achieved by practices based on the principles of partnership between state authorities, local self-governments authorities and various associations of citizens [12].

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, members of local communities have the right to participate in local self-government, both directly and through elected bodies. On the territory of rural districts, villages and towns, gatherings and meetings of the local community are held to resolve issues of local importance [13] (figure 3).

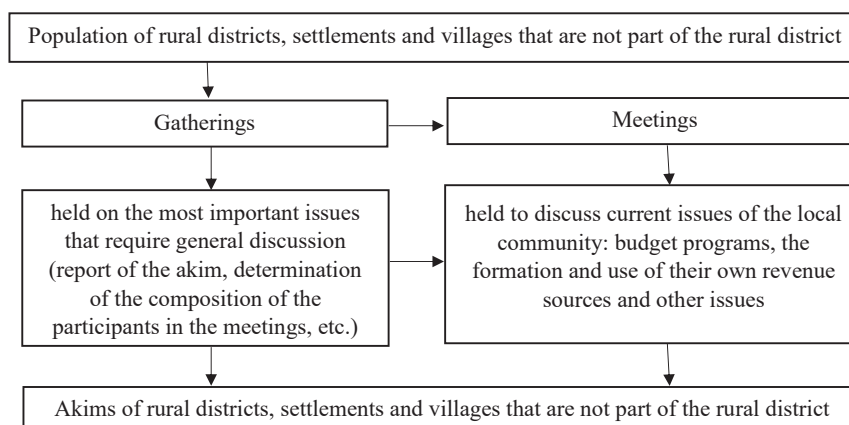


Figure 3. Implementation of local self-government by the population of rural districts of Kazakhstan

Source: Compiled by the authors on the basis of the Law «On local government and self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan» [13]

The direct participation of the local population in the implementation of local self-government is a necessary condition for increasing its effectiveness. At the moment, there is insufficient political and civil activity of the population at the local level, a low level of involvement of citizens in decision-making processes and control over the implementation of decisions. As a result, there is a low level of public confidence in local representative and executive authorities [14]. In addition, the issue of attracting the population to participate in the budget process is being updated.

Building a system of local self-government is a multi-stage process that requires time and an appropriate level of development not only of economic, political and legal institutions, but also of socio-humanitarian knowledge. Moreover, the latter is especially important.

An indicator of the extent to which the changes taking place in modern Kazakhstan society are reflected in the practice of everyday life are the socio-political moods of citizens, the level of their civic activity. Studying them makes it possible to form primary ideas not only about the thoughts and moods of people, but also about the population's predisposition to actively participate in solving local problems. Socio-political moods reflect combinations of public, group and personal interests, intentions, desires, explicit and hidden goals. As a dominant of public consciousness, predicting the possible behavior and reactions of people, the socio-political mood is a generalizing phenomenon, a holistic form of people's perception of their lives, both personally and publicly.

In order to identify the socio-political sentiments of the rural population, as well as to determine the level of their civic engagement in resolving issues of local importance, in the spring of 2022, a questionnaire survey of rural residents was conducted in the Karaganda region of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

As part of the research, the main problems faced by rural residents in their places of residence were identified. The most acute of them include: bad road conditions – 53.5%, low income level of the population (wages, pensions, benefits) – 46.9%, poor quality of medical care – 41.2%, rising prices for food and essential goods – 36.4%, poor access to the Internet / lack of Internet – 32.9%, lack of gas connection – 25.9%, unemployment, difficulty finding employment – 22.8%, insufficient assistance to socially vulnerable segments of the population (orphans, veterans, the disabled, the elderly, the poor, etc.) – 21.9%, the problem of leisure, lack of cultural events – 18.0%, housing problems – 16.2%, lack of opportunities for physical education and sports – 14.0%, poor access to public service centers – 13.2%. The remaining problems are less significant for rural residents: environmental problems – 9.2%, problems of improvement, gardening of the settlement – 8.3%, growth in tariffs for utility services – 7.9%, low quality in education – 6.6 %, shortage of kindergartens – 5.7%, lack of permanent access and poor quality of drinking water – 3.5%, problems associated with the operation of public transport – 3.5%, an increase in cancer, tuberculosis, HIV infection – 2, 6%. Only 0.9% of the total number of surveyed rural residents of the region state the absence of any problems (table 1). Thus, as the survey showed, rural residents underestimate the problems of local importance, in the solution of which they themselves have the opportunity to participate, thereby underestimating their own participation in their elimination.

Table 1. List of problems relevant for rural residents of the Karaganda region, in %

№	Problem name	%
1	Bad road conditions	53,5
2	Low income level of the population (wages, pensions, benefits)	46,9
3	Poor quality of medical care	41,2
4	Rising prices for food and essential goods	36,4
5	Poor access to the Internet / lack of Internet	32,9
6	Lack of gas connection	25,9
7	Unemployment, difficulty finding employment	22,8
8	Insufficient assistance to socially vulnerable segments of the population (orphans, veterans, the disabled, the elderly, the poor, etc.)	21,9
9	Problem of leisure, the lack of cultural events	18,0
10	Housing problems	16,2
11	Lack of opportunities for physical education and sports	14,0
12	Poor access to public service centers	13,2
13	Environmental problems	9,2

№	Problem name	%
14	Problems of improvement, gardening of the settlement	8,3
15	Growth in tariffs for utility services	7,9
16	Low quality in education	6,6
17	Shortage of kindergartens	5,7
18	Lack of permanent access and poor quality of drinking water	3,5
19	Problems associated with the operation of public transport	3,5
20	Increase in cancer, tuberculosis, HIV infection	2,6
21	Absence of any problems	0,9

Source: Compiled by the authors based on their own research

Most of the rural residents of the Karaganda region give an unsatisfactory assessment of how the problems of their settlements are being solved. Almost half of the respondents (41.2%) preferred the option «rather dissatisfied than satisfied» when answering this question. Rather, 25.4% of residents are more satisfied than not with the solution of local problems; fully satisfied – 15.4%; and completely dissatisfied – 10.1%. 7.9% of rural residents experienced difficulties in answering this question (figure 4).

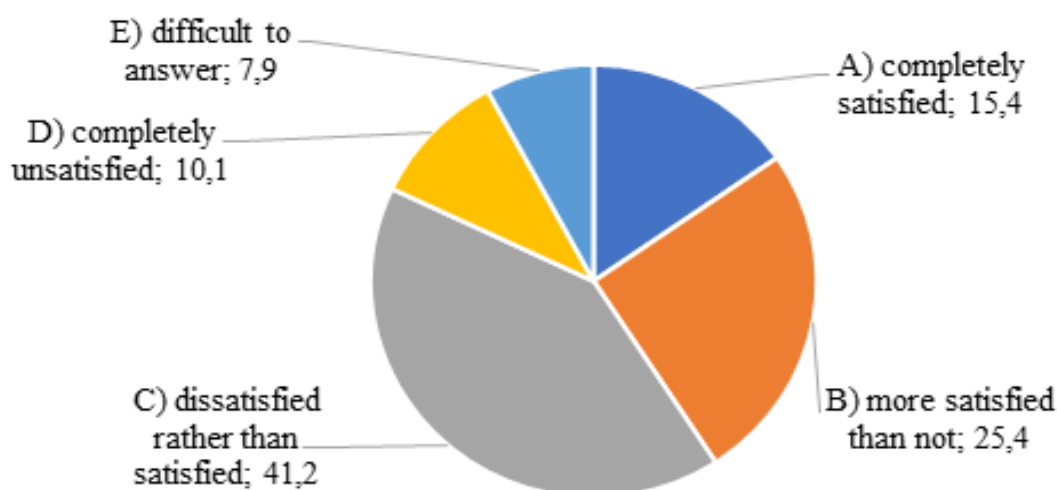


Figure 4. Level of satisfaction of rural residents of the Karaganda region with the solution of the problems of their settlements, in %
 Source: Compiled by the authors based on their own research

Of great importance for understanding the current socio-political situation in rural areas is the understanding of not only the problems that determine the degree of mood of rural residents, but also their idea of the level of involvement of local authorities in solving these problems. According to the data obtained during the research, most of the rural residents of the Karaganda region (52.6%) believe that the problems that exist in their places of residence are partially resolved by local state bodies. The percentage of those who are confident that local authorities do not solve the problems that are acute for local residents is 26.3. The most optimistic part of the population, confident that all existing problems are completely solved by local state bodies, amounted to 8.8%. 12.3% of respondents experienced difficulties in answering this question (figure 5).

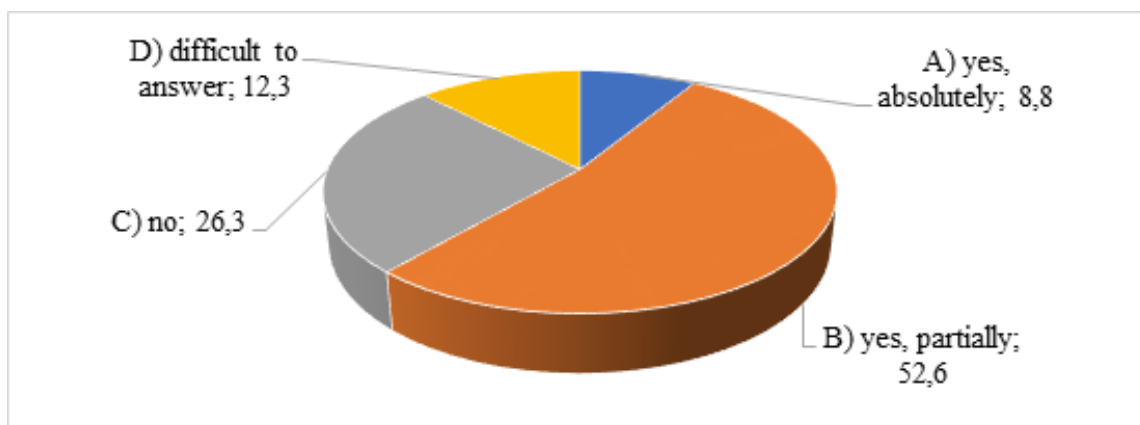


Figure 5. Assessment by rural residents of the Karaganda region of the level of solving local problems by local state bodies, in %

Source: Compiled by the authors based on their own research

In issues of local self-government development, it is of great importance to understand how rural residents themselves are involved in solving existing problems, to what extent they are aware of their involvement in the transformation processes taking place in the country and region, since they are the basis of local self-government.

More than half of the rural residents of the Karaganda region, in their own opinion, are partially involved in solving local problems – 54.4%. It should be noted right away that this indicator does not indicate that almost half of the region's residents are actively involved in the transformation processes. It may also be due to the fact that most of the population is interested in local problems and is sometimes included in their solution. Another 25.9% of the population say that they do not participate in solving local problems at all. In their own opinion, only 5.7% of the respondents are fully involved in solving local problems, which is an extremely low figure. 14% of rural residents experienced difficulties in answering this question (figure 6).

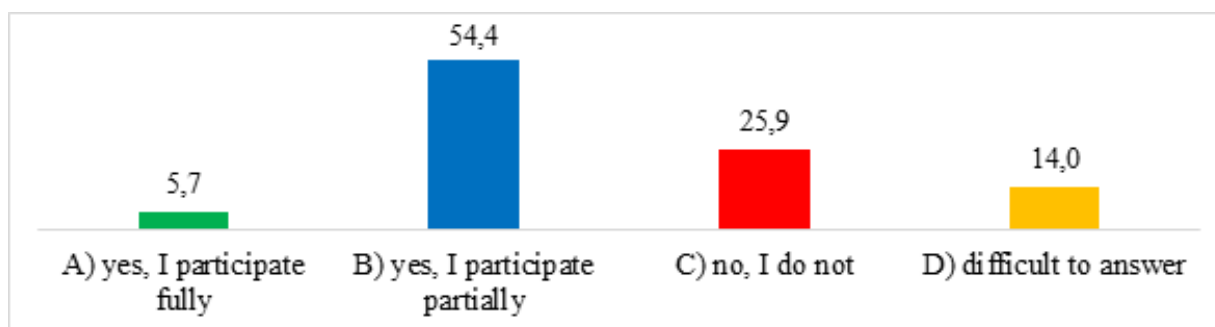


Figure 6. Level of participation of rural residents of Karaganda region in solving local problems, in %

Source: Compiled by the authors based on their own research

Thus, rural residents of the Karaganda region note a significant number of problems that exist in their settlements, many of which can be solved at the local level, in addition, most of them believe that the problems that exist in their places of residence are solved by local state bodies not enough. Despite this, the residents themselves, judging by their answers, participate in solving local problems either partially or not at all. And this is a fairly typical situation, on the basis of which it can be assumed that it causes objective difficulties with the promotion and implementation of the ideas of local self-government.

The formation of local self-government in Kazakhstan is a complex and dynamic process that directly depends on the development of institutions of the state and civil society. Until now, there are no full-fledged representative bodies of local self-government at the level of rural districts. This and a number of other problems are planned to be solved within the framework of the Concept for the development of local self-government of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025 [15]. The main directions of this concept, focused on enhancing the involvement of the rural population in this process, are:

- creation of Kenes – a special representative body in the countryside, elected directly by the population and solving problems of local importance;
- expanding the powers of local community gatherings in matters of designating priority goals and objectives of the local community, determining the timing of their implementation, coordinating development plans, changing the administrative-territorial structure, exercising control over the akim of the rural district;

- increasing the interest of residents of rural districts in resolving issues of local importance, including through the election and accountability of rural akims, as well as through outreach aimed at teaching the population the basics of local self-government, including using the opportunities of the non-governmental sector;
- creation of special places for collaboration of the rural community («Community center») with libraries, assembly halls, where people could gather, discuss local problems, and, if necessary, receive electronic public services or other household services;
- strengthening the interaction of local self-government bodies with the local population, in particular on the basis of the creation of a Unified Internet platform of state bodies, where plans for the development of rural districts, decisions of the representative body, information on budgets, their expenditures and receipts will be published without fail;
- wider involvement of citizens in the budget process, as well as further fiscal decentralization, carried out through the expansion of the revenue base of local government through the transfer of part of taxes and payments to the local fourth level, which will increase the budgetary self-sufficiency of rural districts.

Conclusion

Kazakhstani society in the process of transition to democracy, forms political institutions and democratic practices, the formation of which is necessary in the domestic socio-political process. As one of the most important tasks associated with the formation of a democratic state, one should consider a radical transformation of political and legal consciousness, the formation of a new system – the system of local self-government. It is it, being an intermediary between the state and society, state and local authorities, that ultimately ensures the integration of government and society, maintaining a balance between state and public interests. At the level of rural districts, due to the relatively low population density, since the rural district includes several villages located at a considerable distance from each other, these problems are exacerbated. In addition, the interaction of local state authorities and the local population is complicated not only by distance, but also by differences in the interests of residents of different villages.

The success of the development of local self-government, especially in rural districts, directly depends on the involvement of the rural population in the management of local affairs, the activity of the residents themselves in solving local problems, and the support of the authorities by citizens. Local problems can be effectively solved only with coordinated, balanced, equal cooperation between local government authorities and rural communities.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ЖЕРГІЛІКТІ ӨЗІН-ӨЗІ БАСҚАРУ: АУЫЛДЫҚ ОКРУГТЕРДІҢ ХАЛҚЫН ТАРТУ МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ

Т.Н. Пупышева*

PhD докторанты

Қазтұтынуодағы Қарағанды университеті

Қарағанды, Қазақстан

E-mail: ptn7@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0002-3806-6342

М.К. Жетпісбаева

Э.Ф.К, доцент

Қазтұтынуодағы Қарағанды университеті

Қарағанды, Қазақстан

E-mail: rimakeu@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0002-1341-3563

Аңдатпа: Қазіргі дамыған елдерде билікті орталықсыздандыру мәселелеріне ерекше көңіл бөлінеді. Қазақстан Республикасында да жергілікті өзін-өзі басқарудың әлеуметтік институт ретінде қалыптасуы жүріп жатыр. Бұл процеске азаматтарды тарту жергілікті деңгейдегі мәселелерді азаматтардың өздерінің мүдделеріне сәйкес жақсырақ шешуге ықпал етеді. Мақалада ауыл тұрғындарының жергілікті өзін-өзі басқаруға қатысу қажеттілігі негізделеді. Ауылдық округ тұрғындарының жергілікті өзін-өзі басқаруға қатысуының негізгі нысандары сипатталған. Авторлар Қарағанды облысының ауылдық жерлерінде жүргізілген социологиялық сауалнама деректеріне сүйене отырып, жергілікті маңызы бар мәселелерді шешуге азаматтық белсенділік деңгейін сараптады. Сонымен қатар, Қазақстанда ауыл тұрғындарын жергілікті өзін-өзі басқаруға қатысу мәселелері бойынша осы уақытқа дейін қол жеткізілген негізгі нәтижелер айқындалды. Бұл бағыттағы негізгі мәселелер анықталды. Оларды шешудің келешегі көрсетілген.

Түйін сөздер: жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару, мемлекеттік басқару, ауылдық округ, әкім, кеңес, мәслихат, ауыл тұрғындары.

МЕСТНОЕ САМОУПРАВЛЕНИЕ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ: ВОПРОСЫ ВОВЛЕЧЕНИЯ НАСЕЛЕНИЯ СЕЛЬСКИХ ОКРУГОВ

Т.Н. Пупышева*

PhD докторант

Карагандинский Университет Казпотреб-
союза

Караганда, Казахстан

E-mail: ptn7@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0002-3806-6342

М.К. Жетписбаева

к.э.н, доцент

Карагандинский Университет Казпотреб-
союза

Караганда, Казахстан

E-mail: rimakeu@mail.ru

ORCID: 0000-0002-1341-3563

Аннотация: В современных развитых странах особое внимание уделяется вопросам децентрализации власти. В Республике Казахстан происходит становление местного самоуправления как социального института. Вовлечение граждан в этот процесс способствует более качественному решению проблем на местном уровне в соответствии с интересами самих граждан. В статье обоснована необходимость участия сельского населения в местном самоуправлении. Описаны основные формы участия жителей сельских округов в местном самоуправлении. Авторами на основе данных социологического опроса, проведенного в сельских районах Карагандинской области, проанализирован уровень гражданской активности в решении вопросов местного значения. Кроме того, определены основные результаты, достигнутые на данный момент в вопросах вовлечения сельского населения к участию в местном самоуправлении в Казахстане. Выявлены основные проблемы, существующие в этом направлении. Обозначены перспективы их решения.

Ключевые слова: местное самоуправление, государственное управление, сельский округ, аким, кенес, маслихат, сельское население.