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IMPROVING THE ACTIVITIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

This study examines the current state of local self-governance (LSG) in Kazakhstan and the mechanisms for improving its effectiveness. Local self-government bodies play a vital role in regional development and enhancing citizens' quality of life, yet their potential is hindered by significant challenges, including financial dependence on central authorities, limited citizen participation, and insufficient transparency.

The purpose of the research is to analyze the potential implementation of the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) in Kazakhstan as an effective tool for assessing and improving the performance of local self-governance. The study focuses on exploring LGPI's international applications and its relevance in addressing governance inefficiencies in Kazakhstan.

The research highlights the potential of LGPI to address key challenges in LSG by introducing measurable performance indicators. Its implementation could significantly enhance transparency, public participation, and service delivery at the local level, contributing to the modernization of governance in Kazakhstan.

The study employs a qualitative methodology, including an analysis of the regulatory framework, expert interviews with local governance specialists, and a comparative review of international practices. This approach identifies actionable steps for integrating LGPI into Kazakhstan's governance system.

The research reveals that adopting LGPI could improve accountability and foster sustainable regional development by addressing governance gaps. The findings demonstrate the need for feedback mechanisms and measurable metrics to promote inclusive decision-making processes.

This work contributes to the ongoing decentralization reforms in Kazakhstan by providing a practical roadmap for enhancing financial and administrative autonomy. It offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers to strengthen the effectiveness and transparency of LSG bodies.

The implementation of LGPI in Kazakhstan can serve as a foundation for systematic governance improvement. It would aid in creating a more transparent, inclusive, and participatory local governance system while aligning with international best practices.

Key words: local governance, decentralization, LGPI, public services.

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Қазақстан Республикасындағы жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару органдарының қызметін жетілдіру

Бұл зерттеуде Қазақстандағы жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару (ЖӨБ) жүйесінің қазіргі жағдайы зерттеліп, оның тиімділігін арттыру механизмдері қарастырылады. Жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару органдары өңірлерді дамыту мен азаматтардың өмір сүру сапасын жақсартуда маңызды рөл атқарады, алайда олардың әлеуеті орталық билікке қаржылық тәуелділік, азаматтардың жеткіліксіз қатысуы және ашықтық деңгейінің төмендігі сияқты мәселелермен шектелген.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – ЖӨБ-дің жұмысын бағалау мен жақсарту құралы ретінде Қазақстанда жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару тиімділігі индексі (ЖӨБТИ) енгізу мүмкіндіктерін талдау. Зерттеу ЖӨБТИ -дің халықаралық тәжірибеде қолданылуын және оның Қазақстандағы басқару мәселелерін шешудегі әлеуетін зерттеуге бағытталған.

Зерттеу ЖӨБТИ-дің негізгі мәселелерді шешудегі әлеуетін атап көрсетеді, атап айтқанда, тиімділікті өлшейтін көрсеткіштерді енгізу арқылы. ЖӨБТИ-ді қолдану жергілікті деңгейде ұсынылатын қызметтердің сапасын арттырып, азаматтардың белсенділігін күшейтіп, басқарудың ашықтығын айтарлықтай жақсартып алады.

Жұмыста нормативтік-құқықтық базаны сапалы талдау, жергілікті басқару саласындағы сарапшылармен сұхбаттар және халықаралық тәжірибелерді салыстырмалы шолу қолданылды. Мұндай тәсіл ЖӨБТИ-ді Қазақстанның басқару жүйесіне интеграциялаудың нақты қадамдарын анықтауға мүмкіндік берді.

Зерттеу нәтижелері жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару органдарының есептілігін арттыруға және өңірлердің тұрақты дамуына ықпал ететінін көрсетті. Нәтижелер басқару процесін инклюзивті ету үшін кері байланыс механизмдері мен өлшенетін көрсеткіштерді енгізудің маңыздылығын айқындады.

Бұл жұмыс Қазақстандағы децентрализация бойынша ағымдағы реформаларға үлес қосып, қаржылық және әкімшілік автономияны арттыруға арналған практикалық жол картасын ұсынады. Алынған нәтижелер деректерге негізделген және ЖӨБ органдарының тиімділігі мен ашықтығын арттыру бойынша ұсыныстарды қамтиды.

Қазақстанда ЖӨБТИ-ді енгізу басқаруды жүйелі түрде жақсартудың негізі бола алады. Бұл халықаралық стандарттарға сай келетін, ашық, инклюзивті және азаматтарға бағытталған жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару жүйесін құруға мүмкіндік береді.

Түйін сөздер: жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару, децентрализация, ЖӨБТИ, мемлекеттік қызметтер.

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Совершенствование деятельности органов местного самоуправления в Республике Казахстан

В данном исследовании рассматривается текущее состояние местного самоуправления (МСУ) в Казахстане и изучаются механизмы повышения его эффективности. Органы местного самоуправления играют важную роль в развитии регионов и улучшении качества жизни граждан, однако их потенциал ограничивается такими проблемами, как финансовая зависимость от центральных властей, недостаточное участие граждан и низкий уровень прозрачности.

Цель исследования заключается в анализе возможностей внедрения индекса эффективности местного самоуправления (ИЭМС) в Казахстане как инструмента для оценки и улучшения работы МСУ. Исследование сосредоточено на изучении международного опыта применения ИЭМС и его потенциала для решения проблем управления в Казахстане.

Исследование подчеркивает потенциал ИЭМС в решении ключевых проблем МСУ за счёт внедрения измеримых показателей эффективности. Его применение может значительно повысить прозрачность, активизировать участие граждан и улучшить качество услуг, предоставляемых на местном уровне.

В работе использован качественный анализ нормативно-правовой базы, интервью с экспертами в области местного управления и сравнительный обзор международных практик. Такой подход позволил определить конкретные шаги по интеграции ИЭМС в систему управления Казахстана.

Исследование показало, что внедрение ИЭМС может улучшить подотчётность органов местного самоуправления и способствовать устойчивому региональному развитию. Результаты подчёркивают необходимость обратной связи и внедрения измеримых показателей для более инклюзивного процесса принятия решений.

Работа вносит вклад в текущие реформы по децентрализации в Казахстане, предоставляя практическую дорожную карту для повышения финансовой и административной автономии. Полученные результаты основаны на фактических данных и содержат рекомендации для повышения эффективности и прозрачности органов МСУ.

Применение ИЭМС в Казахстане может стать основой для системного улучшения управления. Это создаст более прозрачную, инклюзивную и ориентированную на граждан систему местного самоуправления, соответствующую международным стандартам.

Ключевые слова: местное самоуправление, децентрализация, ИЭМС, государственные услуги.

Introduction

Local self-government (LSG) plays a critical role in enhancing public administration quality, fostering regional development, and empowering individuals to actively participate in decision-making processes. As a key component of governance reforms globally, decentralization emphasizes the importance of transferring power and resources to local levels to address community needs more effectively and responsively. However, achieving the objectives of decentralization requires not only structural reforms but also effective tools for assessing and improving local government performance.

In Kazakhstan, strengthening regional autonomy and promoting sustainable socio-economic development have been central to public administration reforms. Over the past two decades, the government has implemented several programs to enhance the administrative capacity, financial independence, and transparency of local governing bodies. Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain. Local governments face financial dependence on central authorities, low levels of citizen participation, and a lack of standardized frameworks for evaluating their performance. These issues hinder the potential of local governance to address critical concerns that directly affect the quality of life of citizens.

Recognizing these challenges, Kazakhstan has prioritized local governance reforms through initiatives such as the “Concept of Local Self-Government Development in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2025,” established by Presidential Decree No. 639 on August 18, 2021. This initiative underscores the importance of improving the efficiency, accountability, and transparency of local governance structures.

This study investigates the potential of the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) as a cutting-edge tool for addressing the challenges facing local self-government in Kazakhstan. The LGPI provides a systematic framework for evaluating critical aspects of governance performance, including accountability, service delivery, and citizen participation. By implementing this framework, Kazakhstan can more effectively identify areas for improvement and carry out targeted reforms to strengthen local governance.

The relevance of this study lies in its focus on the critical need to enhance public service quality, increase citizen participation, and advance decentralization within Kazakhstan’s public administration system. The research addresses pressing issues

such as the financial dependence of local governments on central authorities, limited civic engagement in governance processes, and insufficient transparency within the existing local self-government framework. By exploring the implementation of LGPI, this study aims to contribute to creating a more inclusive, effective, and citizen-oriented local governance system in Kazakhstan.

The primary objectives of this research are to:

- **Examine Institutional Frameworks:** Analyze the legislative and institutional structures governing local government operations in Kazakhstan.
- **Evaluate Existing Challenges:** Assess the shortcomings of the current local governance system, with a particular focus on financial autonomy and citizen engagement.
- **Propose LGPI as a Solution:** Explore the potential of LGPI as a tool to assess and enhance the performance of local self-government.
- **Recommend Policy Interventions:** Provide actionable recommendations for improving local governance through digital transformation and decentralization.

The primary issue addressed by this research is the persistent inefficiency and lack of accountability in Kazakhstan’s local governance system, which limits its ability to respond effectively to regional challenges. This inefficiency stems from financial dependence on central authorities, insufficient citizen participation, and a lack of transparency in decision-making processes.

The study hypothesizes that the implementation of LGPI will significantly enhance the efficiency of local self-government in Kazakhstan by establishing measurable performance standards. These standards are expected to improve accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement, thereby strengthening resource management, increasing public trust in local governance, and accelerating the decentralization process. These advancements will ultimately support the sustainable development of Kazakhstan’s regions.

In light of Kazakhstan’s ongoing efforts to reform public administration and pursue digital transformation, this research is both timely and pertinent. By evaluating the viability of LGPI, the study seeks to address the critical challenges facing local governance and provide a roadmap for creating a more transparent, participatory, and efficient local self-government system. The ultimate goal is to aid Kazakhstan in achieving sustainable regional development and fostering a governance framework that aligns with international best practices.

Literature review

Local self-government and decentralization have emerged as central themes in contemporary international public administration literature. Research underscores the significance of financial independence and political decentralization in enhancing local governance effectiveness. For example, Kyriacou and Roca-Sagalés (2011) demonstrate that the division of authority between central and local authorities significantly improves the quality of public services. Similarly, Smoke (2015) highlights the necessity of financial autonomy for local governments, emphasizing that their dependence on federal transfers constrains their capacity to address local issues effectively.

The role of accountability and transparency in achieving sustainable development has been emphasized by Yilmaz and Schaeffer (2008). Their work identifies community participation as a critical factor for local government success. In parallel, Boex and Martinez-Vazquez (2007) argue that financial decentralization must include a clear division of responsibilities between central and local administrations. Finally, Cheema and Rondinelli (2007) highlight the importance of active citizen participation in improving service quality and fostering trust in local governments.

This body of research collectively underscores the importance of financial independence, transparency, and public engagement in fostering effective local governance. Against this backdrop, Kazakhstan has initiated significant reforms aimed at strengthening local self-government (LSG) as part of its broader decentralization efforts. These reforms are designed to enhance the role of LSGs in regional socio-economic development. This paper examines the principles and impacts of these reforms, drawing insights from both domestic and international scholarship.

Theoretical Foundations of Decentralization and Local Governance

Decentralization involves redistributing authority from central to local governments to empower local governance structures. Effective decentralization relies on three key principles: financial autonomy, accountability, and citizen participation. Smoke (2015) posits that decentralization is only effective when local governments achieve financial independence, a challenge in Kazakhstan due to its centralized fiscal structure. Similarly, Cheema and Rondinelli (2020) advocate for participatory governance as a means to enhance trust and legitimacy. However, Nurpeisova (2022) observes that citizen

engagement in Kazakhstan remains underdeveloped, particularly in rural areas.

Kazakhstan's "Concept of Local Self-Government Development 2025" (Adilet.zan.kz, 2021) reflects these theoretical principles, aiming to reduce dependency on central authorities and increase local decision-making power. However, practical implementation remains inconsistent, especially in resource allocation and participatory mechanisms.

Local Governance Reforms in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has undertaken reforms aimed at decentralizing power and enhancing the effectiveness of LSGs. These reforms address several key areas:

1. Legislative Framework: Ismailova (2019) highlights the importance of a strong legal framework for the effective functioning of LSGs. Kazakhstan has worked to define the roles, responsibilities, and financial autonomy of local governments. These legislative reforms aim to secure LSGs' legal standing and operational effectiveness.

2. Financial Independence: Financial stability is critical for LSGs to operate effectively. While steps have been taken to strengthen inter-budgetary relations and broaden the municipal tax base, unresolved challenges—such as the absence of a local tax base and reliance on Republican budget transfers—persist (Zhusupov, 2020).

3. Citizen Participation: Kazakhstan is promoting public participation through mechanisms such as participatory budgeting and public oversight committees. These initiatives aim to improve the resolution of local issues and build public trust (Nurpeisova, 2022).

4. Technology and Innovation: Integrating digital platforms, automating administrative processes, and implementing e-governance are central to improving LSG transparency and efficiency (Akhmetov, 2023).

5. Human Resource Development: Addressing staffing issues is critical for improving governance. Nurgalieva (2021) emphasizes the importance of developing local leaders' competencies, while Abd-ramova (2020) focuses on the role of LSGs in driving sustainable rural development.

Application of the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) in Kazakhstan

The Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) is a robust tool designed to evaluate governance efficiency through measurable indicators such as accountability, transparency, and service delivery (World Bank, 2016). In Kazakhstan, the adoption of LGPI has the potential to address systemic challenges by introducing performance metrics to guide reforms.

Case Study 1: Pilot Implementation in Almaty Region

A pilot implementation of LGPI was conducted in the Almaty Region in 2022 to assess its feasibility in Kazakhstan. The study involved evaluating 15 local government bodies based on three core blocks of LGPI:

- **Transparency and Information Disclosure:** Assessment of public access to budgetary and decision-making information.

- **Citizen Participation:** Evaluation of mechanisms for public input and feedback.

- **Service Delivery:** Analysis of the quality and accessibility of public services, such as healthcare and education.

Key findings from the Almaty pilot include:

1. Transparency scores were higher in urban districts (78%) compared to rural districts (45%), highlighting disparities in information accessibility.

2. Citizen participation mechanisms, such as public consultations, were utilized by only 18% of respondents in rural areas, compared to 42% in urban areas.

3. Service delivery satisfaction was inconsistent, with healthcare services receiving a 60% approval rating, while educational services lagged at 48%.

Case Study 2: Digital Engagement in Astana

The city of Astana implemented a digital platform in 2021 for citizen feedback on local governance performance, aligning with LGPI's emphasis on accountability and participation. The platform allowed residents to submit complaints, suggestions, and service evaluations.

- Data collected over a year showed a 25% increase in citizen engagement, with over 12,000 submissions.

- Common concerns included delays in municipal service delivery (34%) and lack of transparency in budget allocation (28%).

This initiative demonstrates the potential of digital tools in bridging the gap between citizens and governance, a critical requirement for LGPI's success.

In-Depth Data Analysis

Data from LGPI-aligned assessments reveal important patterns in governance performance across Kazakhstan:

1. **Regional Disparities:** Rural areas consistently scored lower on transparency (average 48%) and citizen participation (25%) compared to urban regions, which scored 75% and 50%, respectively. This reflects the need for targeted interventions to address rural governance challenges.

2. **Budget Dependency:** Approximately 65% of local government budgets in 2021 relied on central

transfers, with rural areas being the most dependent. Enhancing local revenue-generation capacity is crucial for achieving financial autonomy.

3. **Service Delivery:** Satisfaction with public services varied significantly by sector. For instance, transportation infrastructure received a 70% satisfaction rate, while waste management scored only 38%. This highlights the need for sector-specific reforms.

This literature review integrates theoretical frameworks with practical case studies and data analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of local governance in Kazakhstan. The application of LGPI, informed by global best practices and tailored to Kazakhstan's unique context, offers significant potential to address existing challenges. By leveraging performance metrics, enhancing citizen participation, and ensuring financial independence, Kazakhstan can create a more inclusive and effective local governance system.

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, enhancing the operations of local self-government organisations involves a variety of concerns pertaining to decentralisation, legal reforms, guaranteeing financial independence, and implementing contemporary technologies. Enhancing the quality of life for the populace and promoting sustainable regional development are two benefits of further development in these places. The literature reviewed in this part highlights the necessity of ongoing reforms in this area and the significance of a holistic strategy to resolving local self-government issues.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to evaluate the potential of the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) in improving local self-governance (LSG) in Kazakhstan. The research integrates several approaches:

1. **Analysis of Regulatory Frameworks:** A comprehensive review of Kazakhstan's legislative and institutional structures governing local self-governance, including key policies such as the Concept of Local Self-Government Development 2025 and the Law on Local Public Administration and Self-Government (2001, with updates), provides insight into the current operational and legal foundations of LSG.

2. **Comparative Review of International Practices:** The study examines successful applications of LGPI in other countries, drawing on lessons learned to identify best practices applicable to Kazakhstan.

3. Case Studies: Two regional case studies, focusing on pilot implementations in Almaty and digital governance efforts in Astana, are analyzed to understand the practical implications and outcomes of LGPI adoption.

4. Cost-Benefit Analysis: A financial assessment calculates the costs of implementing LGPI across Kazakhstan's municipalities, factoring in survey administration, capacity-building programs, and digital infrastructure upgrades.

This mixed-methods approach ensures a holistic evaluation of LGPI's relevance, feasibility, and potential impact on governance reforms in Kazakhstan.

Hypothesis

The Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) will significantly enhance the efficiency, accountability, and transparency of local self-governance in Kazakhstan. By introducing measurable performance standards, LGPI will:

1. Improve the quality of public services by identifying gaps and prioritizing resources.

2. Strengthen financial autonomy and resource management, reducing dependency on central government allocations.

3. Increase citizen participation in governance by integrating feedback mechanisms and promoting public trust.

These advancements are expected to foster a more inclusive, transparent, and effective local governance system, supporting the broader goals of decentralization and sustainable regional development in Kazakhstan.

Results and Discussion

Since the establishment of the local self-government system around the beginning of the 2000s, Kazakhstan has introduced a number of major changes. In 2012, the Concept of Local Self-Government Development till 2020 (Adilet.zan.kz, 2021), was adopted, which created the shift needed in setting targets for the creation of administratively and financially self-sufficient local governments. The following were some of the concept's main provisions:

- Devolution of powers: To enhance local self-governance and self-administration, aspects of power are taken away from the national government and vested to akimats or local executive structures.

- Such type of action is aimed at promoting the citizens' efforts to become active participants in the local decision-making processes in order to achieve better governance through responsive and inclusive local governments.

- Budgeting and public engagement in oversight of budget execution: Systems that make it possible for members of the public to engage in the budgetary processes would enhance accountability and transparency at the local level.

While these reforms enabled local regimes to be politically autonomous, a number of things faced challenges in practice. Some of the key obstacles include:

- the scope of administrative discretion exercised by akims (governors) or local administrators;

- apathy of the general citizenry in participating to governance processes in the various levels;

- dependence of local administrations on the federal budget.

The concentration of power in the authorities, albeit under the arguments of competence in exercising autonomy at different territorial levels, leads to a wide range of constituents, hence a wide representation at the apex of the state as prescribed by Article 89 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The self-governing status of such levels of government, especially considering the multi-tiered model adopted by the Republic of Kazakhstan (Article 89 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1995), leads to more interdependencies with the centre and other administrative formations (Tebayev, 2024, pp 228-229). Therefore, even such models lead to both horizontal & vertical relations with the status of self-governing bodies available to them. Nor do these constitutions create both vertical & horizontal relations at different levels. The constitution does not clearly identify representatives of local self-governance in the political institutions of the country which creates ambiguity in representation of the lower levels and hence creates a stronger constitution at the national level.

In Kazakhstan, one of the regulatory acts which govern the functions of organizations of local self-governing bodies is the Law on Local Public Administration and Self-Government in the Republic of Kazakhstan (2001, with updates). The law of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2001) establishes the principles of territorial division, structure, procedures for establishment and sphere of activities of local authorities. This law sets out the relations, responsibilities, functions or powers of the state self-governing institutions and the municipal self-governing institutions. On the other hand, there has been criticism regarding the administrative and financial autonomy of LSG. In particular, local governments are often dependent on the central government's allocation of resources which makes it difficult for them to be able to effectively solve local issues. Moreover,

the regulation is rather silent on how accountability and transparency to local areas should be achieved and maintained.

Within the framework of a new strategy aimed at providing citizens with self-governing capacity, between 2018 and 2025 Kazakhstan has been implementing a new Concept of Local Self-Governance Development (UNDP, 2022). One of the main objectives of the document is to facilitate the relationship between civil society and government bodies building and adjusting institution of LSG as well as shifting more powers to make decisions to the local authorities. The principle means that qualitative issues of strengthening local communities and decentralization require resolving. Special emphasis is placed on the financial independence and the engagement of the citizens with the public institutions. Nevertheless, the implementation of the principle has some challenges because there are procedural ambiguities regarding how those ends will be achieved particularly with regard to the financial aspects decentralization and enhancement of the human resources of LSG institutions

The Law on Self-Government at the Level of Rural Districts (2018) purposes strengthening the decision-making power of rural authorities through the organization and regulation of governance at the rural district level (Adilet.zan.kz, 2018). The objective envisaged by the law is strengthening the village population's interest in political processes. It is a first step towards enabling rural areas to be more self-sufficient in terms of finance and ensure that local taxes can be raised. But the challenge of poor tax collections and low transfers from the central government is still there. Also, the pace of development of rural districts is not even and this leads to the outcome of reforms being different in character and scope in different regions of the country.

Despite of such great advances in recent years, a number of perspectives must be entrenched in order to develop local self-government in Kazakhstan. However, such measures cannot ensure local governments' financial independence because they are overstretched with dependence on the allocations from the Republican budget. Low levels of public participation in local governance at the local level especially in rural areas remain a challenge.

Kazakhstan, in its effort to resolve these issues, is rapidly applying digital technologies in the activities of the local government. With the introduction of electronic interaction between citizens and the local self-government entities, the Digital Kazakhstan Program (2017-2022) aims at enhancement of the public services through digital means (UNDP, 2022). The

benefits brought about by Digital Kazakhstan aim to improve the ease and availability of services rendered by the local self-government organizations (Akhmetov, 2023). Within the framework of the program, the improvement of the e-Government system and creation of means of filing online complaints and submitting recommendations has been planned. Absorption of internet technology is uneven, particularly in rural areas where the absence of internet connectivity would hampers the reform process.

The rural development in Kazakhstan is the priority focus under the Aul-Yel Besigi Program (2019) which is part of the activities of the local self-governance bodies (UNDP, 2022). The program's scope of activities aims to improve the infrastructure and livelihood of rural settlements. It comprises tasks seeking improvement in healthcare and education, access to clean water and road networks. Scarcity of local self-governance organizations' participation in decision making concerning new resources' distribution and new resources' availability raise one of the issues of the program's implementation. The transparency in the use of funds at the local municipal level constitutes more challenges

Even though a significant amount of the literature addresses topics related to the concept and development of local self-government, focusing on target indicators and implementation issues like budget allocation, citizen readiness to participate in LSG, fair elections, and corruption, Kazakhstan has not developed a unified system for evaluating the effectiveness of local self-government. This would include measurable indicators that allow for performance comparisons across different programs and geographical areas. Issues like:

- Inadequate evaluation standards arise when there is no system in place for surveying residents or evaluating performance in development documents. Precise measures to evaluate LSG actions are not sufficiently defined in the existing regulation documents. As a result, monitoring their job is difficult and unpredictable.

- Not enough information is available. Particularly in rural and isolated places, the nation does not routinely gather data on LSG activities. Progress analysis is made more difficult by the lack of accurate and current data.

- Unfair digitalization. Evaluating the efficacy of LSG in rural areas is made even more challenging by the uneven application of electronic administration and monitoring systems, such as e-Government.

The absence of a thorough assessment of the efficacy of local self-government in Kazakhstan has the following detrimental effects:

- Insufficient transparency. The people cannot impartially assess the effectiveness of their local governments in the absence of defined standards and oversight protocols. This undermines public participation and undermines confidence in LSG.

- There aren't many chances for development. In the absence of data collection and analysis, local authorities are unable to clearly identify areas that need improvement, which leads to reactive rather than proactive reforms.

- Ineffective use of available resources. Instead of decisions based on factual information about the needs and priorities of various regions, the absence of evaluation leads to subjective standards for resource allocation.

For instance, there are no reports on the monitoring of local self-government; the only thing that is examined is the caliber of public services rendered by local executive bodies. The questions in Table 1 below only address paper and electronic public services, which is only partially useful for assessing the efficacy of LSG.

This problem is addressed by the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI), which is used in many nations to evaluate how well local governments perform on a number of important criteria, including resource management, accountability and transparency, the caliber of service delivery, and citizen participation in decision-making. A system like that would enhance local governance and encourage Kazakhstan's decentralization to grow.

Table 1 – Example of Survey Questions for Rating Public Services Provided by Local Executive Bodies, 2023

Name of Public Service	Overall Score		Authorized State Body		«Electronic Government»		«Government for Citizens»	
Giving social aid to certain groups of persons who are in need in accordance with local government decisions	4.90	84.1%	4.93	91.7%	4.92	91.7%	4.90	71.1%
Archival certificates, copies of records, or archive extracts are issued.	4.80	77.9%	4.83	82.2%	4.74	70.9%	4.84	85.4%
Referrals to healthcare facilities offering specialized medical-social support	4.62	77.5%	4.65	80.7%	4.94	94.5%	4.80	66.7%
Determination of land plot delineation and delinquency	4.48	57.8%	4.57	72.7%			4.66	59.7%
Issuance of documentation for student transfers between secondary education educational institutions	4.47	59.6%	4.80	75.3%	4.34	49.9%		65.3%
Permits for development projects, including destruction, at sites that receive subsidies	4.38	66%	4.80	82.4%	4.32	60.5%		72.5%
Subsidizing agricultural loan interest rates and leasing for animals, equipment, etc.	4.11	53.1%	4.44	64.8%	4.10	51.4%		58.7%
Overall Average	4.54	68.0%	4.72	78.5%	4.56	69.8%	4.80	73.8%
Note – compiled by the authors based on the source (National Bank of Kazakhstan, 2021).								

The Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) consists of three theme blocks that combine a total of 100 evaluation criteria (Callahan, 2006).

Block 1: Active Public Information Disclosure – focusses on guaranteeing transparency and the active sharing of information by local government entities and has 52 criteria arranged into 11 sub-blocks.

Block 2: Electronic Governance consists of 29 criteria divided into 4 sub-blocks. With an emphasis on the usage and usefulness of digital tools and platforms to enhance administrative effectiveness and service delivery.

Block 3: Accountability and Participation of Citizens are divided into 2 sub-blocks and has 19 criteria that address the mechanisms that ensure the accountability of local government and promote public involvement in governance.

The LGPI framework (figure 1) utilizes a structured methodology that assigns scores to various public service domains—including education, healthcare, social assistance, public transport, and housing—based on the degree of responsibility assumed by LGOs. By focusing on four key aspects, the index provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of decentralization efforts (Khemani et al., 2005):

1. **Quality of Service Delivery:** Evaluates the accessibility, reliability, and adequacy of services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

2. **Accountability and Transparency:** Assesses how well LGOs communicate with citizens and operate openly in their decision-making processes.

3. **Public Involvement:** Measures the extent to which local communities are engaged in governance, particularly in decision-making and policy implementation.

4. **Resource Management:** Examines the efficiency and fairness of resource allocation and the financial autonomy of local governments.

Fields	Services	Codes
Education (0-3)	Pre-school (age 1-6)	For each of the services: +0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for infra-structure and/or the delivery of services + 0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for personnel, including staffing and salaries
	Primary school (age 6-15)	
	Secondary school (age 15-18)	
Social assistance (0-3)	Economic assistance (distress relief)	For each of the services: +0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for the organisation and/or delivery of services +0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for personnel, including staffing and salaries
	Work training/rehabilitation	
	Integration of refugees	
Health (0-3)	Primary health	For each of the services: +0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for infra-structure and/or the delivery of services +0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for personnel, including staffing and salaries
	Hospitals	
	Dental services	
Land use (0-2)	Building permits	+ 1 point if local government assumes full responsibility for administering building permits
	Zoning	+ 1 point if local government assumes full responsibility for administering zoning
Public transport (0-1)	Bus transport services	+ 0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for bus transport services
	Railway transport services	+ 0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for railway transport services
Housing (0-1)	Housing and town development	+ 0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for housing and town development
	Social housing	+ 0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for social housing
Police (0-1)	Public Order	+ 0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for public order
	Traffic police	+ 0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for traffic police
Caring functions (0-3)	General caring services	For each of the services: +0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for infra-structure and/or the availability of the service +0.5 point if local government assumes full responsibility for personnel, including staffing and salaries
	Services for special groups	
	Child protection	

Figure 1 – Questions and blocks of LGPI

Note – compiled by the authors based on the source (World Bank, 2016)

This framework allows for the systematic identification of gaps and challenges in governance while providing a comparative assessment across different regions and services. Figure 1 illustrates the core components of LGPI, offering a detailed breakdown of services and scoring criteria for evaluating LGO responsibilities.

The purpose of this study is to use the LGPI methodology to explore the benefits and limitations

of Kazakhstan's local government activities. By doing so, the research aims to highlight areas of success and identify persistent challenges in the country's efforts to strengthen decentralization and local self-governance.

Incorporating the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) into Kazakhstan's local self-government (LSG) performance rating system presents an opportunity to enhance the evaluation of

governance effectiveness. By adopting this index, Kazakhstan could address existing gaps in its current evaluation methods, which primarily focus on service satisfaction without sector-specific or governance-oriented indicators.

As illustrated in Table 2, the LGPI offers a more comprehensive and detailed assessment compared to Kazakhstan's existing methods. It incorporates metrics for planning, personnel management, and financial reporting, areas that are currently underdeveloped in Kazakhstan's governance evaluation processes. Furthermore, the LGPI emphasizes citi-

zen engagement and sector-specific social services like healthcare, education, and housing, which are critical for assessing the effectiveness of local governance structures.

Let's now determine how much it would cost to incorporate the LGPI index into the local self-government's (LSG) performance rating system. Data from previous sociological survey projects in Kazakhstan can be used to calculate the cost of developing the Local Government Performance Index (LGPI). A number of variables affect how much it costs to manage the Local Government Performance Index (LGPI).

Table 2 – Comparison of LGPI and Kazakhstan indicators

Criteria/indicators	LGPI	Kazakhstan's method
Government (Local legislation, transparency, participation)	+ All-inclusive metrics for citizen participation and governance	- Limited emphasis on involvement and transparency, primarily on service satisfaction
Administration (Planning, revenue, resource allocation, accountability, personnel managements)	+ Detailed indicators for planning revenues, financial reporting, personnel management	- Lack of specific indicators for financial reporting, personnel management or planning
Social services (Healthcare, education, housing, security)	+ Extensive coverage of healthcare, education, housing, and disaster management	- Focus mainly on service satisfaction without sector-specific indicators
Note – compiled by the authors based on the sources (World Bank, 2016); (National Bank of Kazakhstan, 2021)		

One important factor to take into account is whether LGPI modules will be developed separately or integrated into already-existing survey systems. Integrating into current surveys is less costly, but this strategy requires careful thought. For the LGPI to be effective, it must be used on a sample that fairly represents the local level. If the modules are introduced to surveys that are just meant for the national level, it won't be very beneficial.

The second important factor is the sample size. The number of levels of local self-government, the

average size of local self-government in the nation's local governance system, and the overall number of settlements and responses in each settlement all have an effect. Local samples of at least 500 people are ideal for surveys, although even 200 people might be useful. The drawbacks of using smaller samples include decreased statistical significance and a restricted capacity to examine local differences among demographic categories. The number of settlements included in the sample is also influenced by the size of the country.

Table 3 – Cost Calculation for Implementing the LGPI Index in Kazakhstan.

Main Cost Components	Calculation
Number of settlements	Approximately 247 settlements are dispersed over 14 regions in Kazakhstan, comprising 160 rural and 87 urban districts.
Survey costs	In Kazakhstan, it usually costs \$5 to \$8 per respondent to conduct a survey that combines online and in-person approaches. When logistics and data processing are taken into consideration, this is the average cost in Kazakhstan. – A total of 123,500 respondents (500 respondents × 247 settlements) will be surveyed, with 500 respondents each settlement. – At an average cost of \$7 per respondent, the survey will cost 864,500 USD (123,500 respondents x 7 USD/respondent).

Continuation of the table

Main Cost Components	Calculation
Additional costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Questionnaire and platform development: The survey's design, digital platform setup, and translation will cost roughly \$50,000. – Logistics and training: Field personnel travel and training will cost about \$100,000. – To ensure data correctness, around \$75,000 will be spent on data quality monitoring and validation. – Publication and dissemination of the reports: The final reports will be produced and distributed at a cost of about \$50,000.
Note – compiled by the authors based on sources (TGM Research, 2021); (World Bank, 2021).	

The total cost:

864,500 USD (data collection) + 50,000 USD (development) + 100,000 USD (logistics) + 75,000 USD (validation) + 50,000 USD (reports) ≈ 1,139,500 USD

It is estimated that the deployment of the LGPI will cost around \$1.14 million USD, with 500 responders in each of Kazakhstan's 247 municipalities.

The LGPI facilitates the gathering of data on the efficacy of local self-government (LSG) and offers a thorough picture of the state of local governance through statistical data and citizen questionnaires (Ivanyina et al., 2014). In order to increase the efficacy of decentralization and governance, this measure is frequently employed in international practice.

The successful implementation of the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) requires a structured, phased approach to address logistical, financial, and infrastructural challenges (Mdee et al., 2022). The roadmap demonstrated in figure 2 outlines the key stages of the implementation process, including preparation, rollout, scaling, and monitoring. Each phase is designed to ensure the systematic integration of LGPI into Kazakhstan's local governance framework, leveraging existing resources while addressing potential barriers.

Phase 1: Preparation (6–12 months)

This phase focuses on laying the groundwork for LGPI implementation. Key activities include securing funding from international organizations and national budgets, conducting pilot studies to test the feasibility of LGPI in select regions, and engaging stakeholders through capacity-building initiatives and awareness campaigns. This stage is crucial for

identifying potential challenges and building the institutional and public support necessary for the project's success.

Phase 2: Rollout (12–18 months)

The rollout phase involves the official introduction of LGPI in regions with strong digital infrastructure and governance capacity. This ensures that early adopters can serve as models for best practices, demonstrating the benefits of LGPI. Efforts during this phase will also focus on refining survey tools, training local officials, and establishing data collection and validation processes.

Phase 3: Scaling (18–36 months)

Following the success of the initial rollout, this phase aims to expand LGPI implementation nationwide. Processes and lessons learned during the pilot and rollout phases will be analyzed and used to refine the framework. The scaling phase includes addressing infrastructure gaps, particularly in rural areas, and ensuring consistent application of LGPI standards across all regions.

Phase 4: Monitoring (Ongoing)

Monitoring and evaluation form the final and ongoing phase of the roadmap. This involves establishing mechanisms for periodic performance evaluations, publishing reports to maintain transparency, and making continuous adjustments to the LGPI framework based on stakeholder feedback and evolving governance needs. This phase ensures the sustainability and long-term impact of LGPI.

The implementation of LGPI is expected to produce transformative changes in Kazakhstan's local governance system, addressing long-standing challenges related to transparency, participation, service quality, and autonomy. These outcomes are aligned with the broader goals of decentralization and governance modernization in the country.

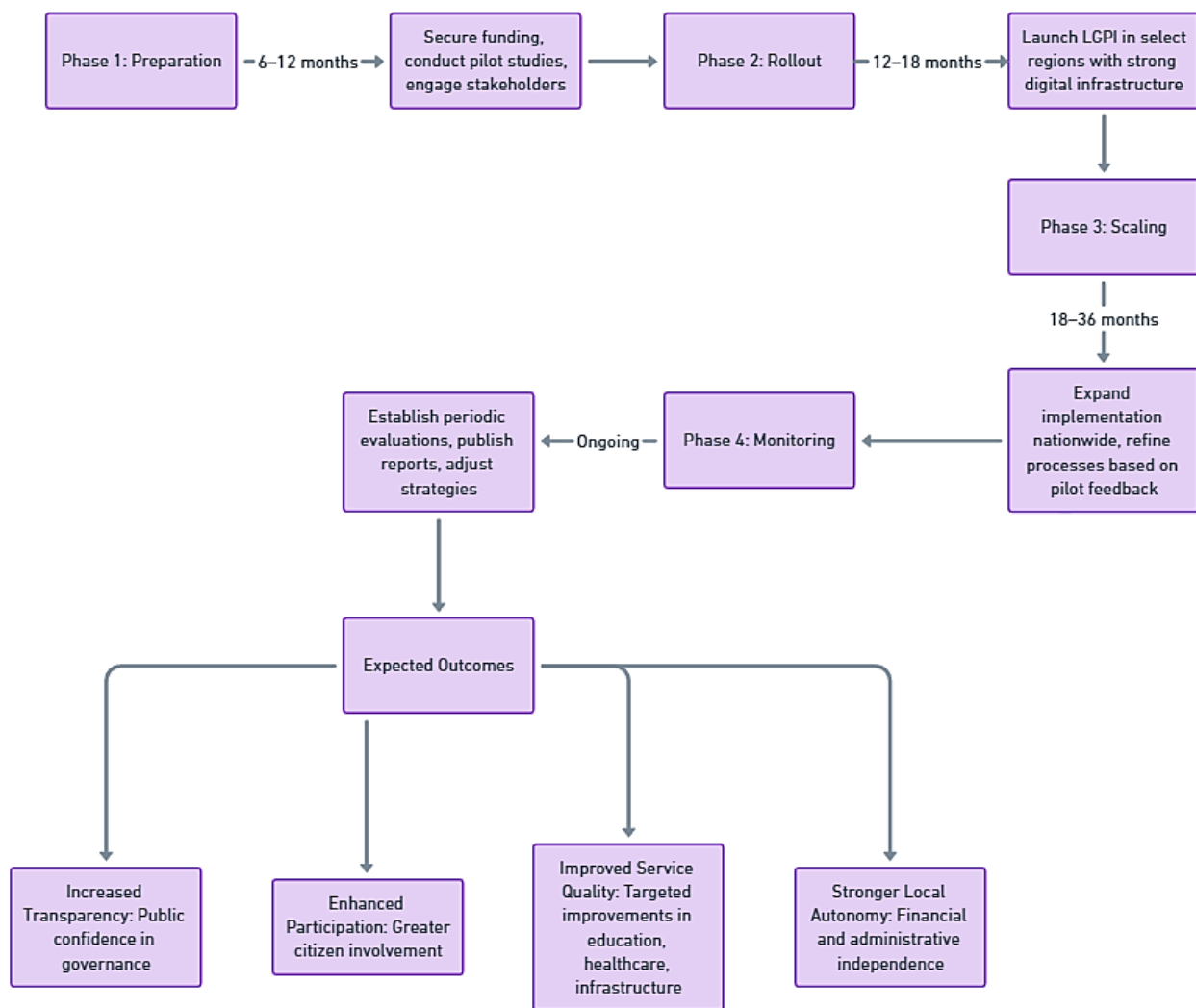


Figure 2 – LGPI adaptation model for Kazakhstan
Note – compiled by the author

Explanation

1. Increased Transparency

- By providing measurable and accessible metrics, LGPI will enhance public confidence in local governance. Citizens will have greater insight into how decisions are made and resources are allocated, fostering trust and accountability.

2. Enhanced Participation

- LGPI's framework encourages greater citizen involvement in decision-making processes. By integrating public feedback mechanisms, it empowers individuals to actively contribute to governance, ensuring that local policies reflect the needs and priorities of communities.

3. Improved Service Quality

- The index's focus on performance evaluation will highlight areas for improvement in critical sectors

such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. This targeted approach ensures that resources are allocated effectively, leading to tangible improvements in service delivery.

4. Stronger Local Autonomy

- By identifying and addressing financial and administrative gaps, LGPI will contribute to increasing the independence of local governments. This will enable local authorities to respond more effectively to regional challenges, fostering sustainable development.

These outcomes collectively support the broader goals of decentralization, enhancing the overall effectiveness and responsiveness of local governance in Kazakhstan.

The implementation of the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) in Kazakhstan presents

significant opportunities to enhance transparency, citizen participation, and local government efficiency. However, the process is not without challenges. Potential risks must be identified and proactively managed to ensure the initiative's success. These

risks can be broadly categorized into **implementation risks** (table 4) and **operational risks** (table 5), each with varying degrees of impact and likelihood. Addressing these risks is essential to establish a robust and sustainable LGPI framework.

Table 4 – Implementation Risks

Risk	Description	Impact	Likelihood
Financial Burden	High costs of deployment may strain local budgets.	High	Moderate
Resistance from Officials	Perceived punitive nature of evaluations could hinder cooperation.	Medium	High
Digital Divide	Limited access to digital tools in rural areas may restrict participation.	High	High
Data Bias	Challenges in reaching marginalized groups could skew results.	Medium	Moderate
Public Distrust	Transparency initiatives might be seen as superficial without tangible benefits.	Medium	High
Note – compiled by the author			

Key challenges include the financial burden of deployment, particularly for resource-constrained local governments, and the digital divide, which risks excluding rural and marginalized communities from full participation. Furthermore, resistance from officials and public distrust may hinder the adoption and perceived legitimacy of the LGPI. Addressing these risks requires comprehensive strategies, including targeted funding support, equitable digital infrastructure development, and fostering a culture of accountability through capacity-building initiatives.

Table 5 highlights key operational risks, focusing on capacity gaps, political resistance, and sus-

tainability concerns. These risks emphasize the need for comprehensive planning and resource allocation to ensure that the LGPI delivers consistent and meaningful results.

Capacity gaps in training and resource availability across regions, particularly between urban and rural areas, may create disparities in implementation quality. Similarly, the lack of continuity in funding and support could result in the LGPI being treated as a short-term initiative rather than an ongoing system for governance evaluation. Lastly, political challenges, such as resistance from centralized authorities, could undermine decentralization efforts, reducing the potential impact of the LGPI.

Table 5 – Operational Risks

Risk	Description	Impact	Likelihood
Capacity Gaps	Inconsistent training and resources across regions may affect outcomes.	High	High
Lack of Continuity	Risk of LGPI becoming a one-off initiative without sustained funding.	High	Moderate
Political Challenges	Resistance to decentralization from centralized authorities.	Medium	High
Note – compiled by the author			

The operational risks identified in Table 5 underscore the complexity of implementing the LGPI in Kazakhstan. Capacity gaps highlight the critical need for consistent training programs and equitable distribution of resources to avoid regional disparities in governance evaluation. Addressing the risk of discontinuity requires sustained funding and institutional commitment to ensure the LGPI becomes

an integral part of Kazakhstan's governance framework, rather than a one-time effort.

Moreover, overcoming political resistance to decentralization is essential for empowering local governments to adopt and utilize the LGPI effectively (Nasir, 2017). By addressing these operational risks through strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and robust resource allocation, Kazakhstan can har-

ness the full potential of the LGPI to improve transparency, accountability, and service delivery across its local self-governance systems.

The successful implementation of the Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) in Kazakhstan requires addressing a range of challenges, including financial sustainability, stakeholder engagement, digital accessibility, data integrity, and political commitment. These elements are critical to ensuring that the LGPI not only enhances transparency and accountability but also becomes a sustainable and integral part of Kazakhstan's governance reform agenda.

This section explores strategies to address these challenges, including leveraging international funding, integrating LGPI into existing evaluation systems, bridging digital gaps in rural areas, and fostering public and political support. By adopting a comprehensive approach, Kazakhstan can maximize the impact of LGPI and strengthen local governance across the country.

1. Financial Sustainability

To overcome financial challenges in implementing the LGPI, international funding from organizations like the World Bank and UNDP can support initial phases, offering both financial and technical assistance. Additionally, integrating LGPI into existing national evaluation systems will minimize costs by leveraging current infrastructure and processes, ensuring greater cost efficiency.

2. Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging key stakeholders is vital for LGPI's success. Capacity-building programs for local government officials will equip them with the skills needed for smooth implementation, while public awareness campaigns will inform citizens about LGPI's benefits, fostering support and participation.

3. Bridging the Digital Divide

Addressing digital disparities, especially in rural areas, is critical. Pilot programs in regions with better infrastructure can identify challenges before broader rollout, while mobile-based tools will ensure inclusivity for areas with limited connectivity.

4. Ensuring Data Integrity

Reliable data is essential for LGPI's effectiveness. A mixed-methods approach, combining surveys with interviews, will enhance data quality. Independent oversight committees should also monitor data collection and validation to ensure transparency and public confidence.

5. Sustaining Political Will

The long-term success of LGPI depends on integrating it into national governance reform agendas to secure continued support. Highlighting success

stories from early implementations will demonstrate tangible benefits, encouraging wider adoption and sustained political commitment (Robinson, 2007).

By adopting these strategies, Kazakhstan can effectively address risks and ensure the successful implementation and sustainability of the LGPI.

Conclusion

The primary goals of this study were to examine Kazakhstan's current local self-government (LSG) situation and evaluate how the Local Government Performance Index (LGPI) may enhance the accountability, efficacy, and transparency of LGBs. The study used both qualitative and quantitative techniques, such as structured interviews, legal framework analysis, and comparative analysis with international instances, to achieve this.

The results showed a number of important points. First of all, in Kazakhstan, local government money continues to be a significant source of assistance despite continuous improvements. This makes it more difficult for local governments to deal with issues locally. The persistent underutilization of citizen participation strategies also contributes to low levels of public involvement in decision-making processes. These obstacles prevent LSG from making a substantial contribution to regional sustainability.

According to the report, adopting LGPI could aid in resolving these issues by giving local authorities access to transparent performance metrics. By connecting performance to quantifiable metrics, the index may promote accountability, increase openness by making LSG operations open to public scrutiny, and increase citizen participation by incorporating feedback mechanisms into governance procedures.

The study's findings lend credence to the idea that LGPI might significantly improve local self-government in Kazakhstan. The LGPI framework is a useful tool for assessing and improving LGB performance since it emphasizes important elements including service quality, financial autonomy, and public participation.

Opportunities and Prospects for Implementation: The results of the study show that Kazakhstan's ongoing local government reforms must prioritize the LGPI's implementation. The index acts as a standard for policy changes and offers a useful means of identifying areas that need improvement. Adoption of LGPI may also increase public confidence in local government, fostering an atmosphere of open and inclusive governance.

Future studies might concentrate on improving the LGPI framework to better represent the requirements of Kazakhstani local authorities. More research should be done on how digi-

tal platforms and technology could help with LGPI implementation, especially in rural areas where access to digital infrastructure might be restricted.

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