

Gender Inclusivity in Local Governance of the Kyrgyz Republic

Submitted to USAID Kyrgyz Republic DGO office November, 2020

Written by Meghan McCormack
with research assistance by Baktygul Kapalova and Joelle Besch

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Introduction

Research and writing for this report were conducted primarily in October, 2020. This was a time of upheaval and uncertainty in Kyrgyzstan, not merely because of the global Covid-19 pandemic but also because protests over irregularities in national parliamentary elections on October 4 resulted in an overthrow of government, the installation of a formerly jailed politician as both Prime Minister and acting President, the annulment of the initial election results, and heated debate over a proposed re-drafting of the Constitution. The unrest extended from Bishkek and its national politics to Kyrgyzstan's rural areas and their local self-governments (LSGs), including successful overthrows of municipal and district representatives, forced changes in management of government-owned enterprises (such as the Kara Keche coal mine in Jumgal), and violence against local government workers (including, for example, one village where the local police officer and *aiyl okmoty*, or village mayor, were tied together to a tree and beaten). It was a difficult time for the LSG representatives interviewed for this report, particularly for those who experienced unrest in their communities. In the final section, we discuss these upheavals in more detail, consider their gender dynamics, and reflect on whether there are any positive outcomes that could be wrested from these difficult times.

This report has a specific scope, namely exploring gender dynamics in relation to village (*aiyl aimak*) local self-governments (LSGs) in the Kyrgyz Republic. Kyrgyzstan's continual push to decentralize government in the post-Soviet period has concentrated extensive responsibility in the hands of these local authorities, though not necessarily the concomitant power and financial resources to meet those responsibilities.¹ This means that village LSGs have control over much of the decision-making that impacts gender equality as a daily, lived experience but are pressured to prioritize programming that impacts the maximum portion of community members, often leading even female village leaders who are both sensitive to and concerned about women's inequality to de-prioritize "women's issues". One of the core concerns of this analysis is thus to identify realistic ways that LSGs could increase their capacity to deliver quality services to *all* of their constituents, with particular attention to the needs of under-served groups, including many groups of women.

Country Context

Kyrgyzstan's 6.5 million citizens live in any one of its 453 "village units" (*aiyl aimak*), 29 cities, Osh City, or the capital city of Bishkek (National Statistics Committee 2020, pp. 40, 55). For citizens of the nation's villages and cities, the "local self-government" (LSG) is the closest unit of governance, overseeing the decisions and programs that impact daily life. The State apparatus, meanwhile, is represented at the lowest level by any one of 40 district-level authorities. The 40 districts are in turn overseen by any one of 7 regional (oblast) governments.² Bishkek and Osh, the largest cities in the country, enjoy a separate legal status

¹ Consider, for example, that as of 2019 local budgetary resources were only 14% of those of the State (21.37 billion KGS for all local budgets versus the 167.3 billion State budget) (Ministry of Finance 2020, pp. 15, 59), despite local self-governments having responsibility for providing almost all basic governmental services to their citizens.

² To avoid confusion, it is worth emphasizing that LSGs are considered to be distinct and independent from the national State government, with the authority to pass their own laws and regulations (so long as they are not contrary to those of the State government), form their own budgets, and initiate their own programs (Constitution §§ 110, 113). District and regional authorities are considered to be representatives of the national State government in the localities that they oversee.

and governmental organization, putting them on-par with the country's 7 regional governments. At the top lies the national government, overseeing all 9 regional authorities and enjoying the right to pass legislation impacting all levels of the government structure.³

Women make up a little more than half of Kyrgyzstan's population (National Statistics Committee 2020, p. 58), while some 64% of the nation's female population and 66% of its male population lives in rural areas (National Statistics Committee 2019b, p. 17). The ratio of women to men and girls to boys is roughly equal until age 40, after which women begin to outnumber men, reaching a ratio of 2:1 among those in their 80's (id. at p. 15). Women's tendency to outnumber men starting at age 40 may explain in part why this is such a pivotal age for women's political participation, with women above 40 vastly out-representing young women in local self-governance despite the population's skew toward youth (additional factors are discussed on p.). Poverty rates are roughly equal across men (at 22.2%) and women (at 22.5%), while the overall rural poverty rate is approximately 4% higher than that of urban areas (23.7% versus 20.1%, respectively) (id. at p. 75).⁴ Across all age groups, women are less likely to be employed than men, with the largest differences in employment rates appearing for those 20 – 39 years old, i.e. in families with under-age children (id. at pp. 42 – 43). Overall, 45% of women and 75% of men in Kyrgyzstan are gainfully employed (id.). As will be discussed later in this report, many female *aiyl okmotys* and local council deputies believed that the most important priority for women in their communities was to enhance economic opportunities for *both* women and men – employment giving women increased financial independence, decreasing men's propensity toward domestic violence, and enhancing financial and psychological welfare for all.

Legal Framework and Governance Structures

Local self-governments are divided into two core branches: legislative and executive ([Law on Local Self-Government](#) § 6). The legislature, or local council, consists of anywhere from 11 to 31 deputies (id. at § 23.3) who are elected to 4-year terms by direct, community-wide vote ([Law on the Status of Deputies of Local Councils](#) § 2) and (at the village level) receive no pay for their public work. A 2019 amendment to the [Law on the Election of Local Council Members](#) mandates that at least 30% of these local deputies be female (§ 59-1.1), a change that presents numerous opportunities and challenges as will be explored in this report. The executive branch of local government consists of a mayor (for cities) or *aiyl okmoty* (for villages), who is voted into office by the local council and whose term in office is linked to that of the local council ([Law on Local Self-Government](#) § 49).

³ As noted in the Constitution, LSGs are “responsible before the State government and its organs for implementation of the laws” (§ 113). And while LSGs can pass additional rules and regulations for their territories, these must not be contrary to national legislation and regulations.

⁴ Intriguingly, urban women are slightly *less* likely to live below the poverty line than urban men (19.5% versus 20.7%) whereas rural women are *more* likely to live below the poverty line than rural men (24.3% versus 23.0%). This pattern is driven by wide gender-poverty disparities in a limited number of rural regions, namely Jalal-Abad (where women's poverty is 2.5% higher than men's), Naryn (2.1%), and Talas (3.5%). In Batken, Chui, Issyk-Kul, Bishkek, and Osh Cities, women's poverty rates are actually lower than those of men (National Statistics Committee 2019b, p. 75). These patterns highlight the fact that there are notable regional differences in the Kyrgyz Republic (which overall national statistics may hide), and that the commonly-deployed lens of “north versus south” to analyze gender and political patterns is not always relevant.

Together, LSG executive and legislative organs are responsible for delivering the vast majority of public services across Kyrgyzstan’s rural areas, meaning that they have a key role to play in the gender-equal distribution of public resources and the gender-equality of the decision-making that allocates those resources. Laws outlining the functions and responsibilities of LSGs and their employees include the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (§§ 110 – 112), the [Law on Local Self-Government](#), [Law on the Status of Deputies of Local Councils](#), [Law on the Election of Local Council Members](#), [Law on the State Civil Service and Municipal Service](#), and [Law on the Local State Administration](#).⁵ Under these laws, LSGs are responsible for providing minimum social welfare to their residents; education; healthcare; drinking water; infrastructure such as roads, street lights, and sewer systems; parks and recreation facilities; garbage collection; programs for children and youth; municipal transportation; rules on land use; and the “formation, approval, and execution of the local budget” (Law on Local Self-Government §§ 10, 18.1). LSGs are also tasked with multiple functions related to preventing gender-based violence, from “implementing systematic measures to prevent and protect against family violence” (id. at § 18.1.25), to “developing and implementing a system from providing legal advice to the population” (id. at § 47.9-2), to supporting probationary authorities in community service plans for offenders (id. at § 20.6.17-2). The [Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women](#) also outlines far-reaching guarantees of gender-equality in all spheres of life – from equal pay for equal work, to equal access to all forms of employment (including municipal service), to equal rights within the family and to own land, and more – which LSGs are responsible for carrying out “measures to develop and implement a gender policy” and coordinate with State officials on implementing State, regional, and local programs (§ 27).

The precise details of *how* each LSG fulfills all of these functions are (supposed to be) contained in their respective self-adopted Charters, which lay out the rights and obligations of community members, the procedures by which community members can participate in local self-government affairs (including budgeting processes), and the basic principles and rules governing community life (Law on Local Self-Government § 15.2). These Charters present an under-utilized opportunity to formalize detailed norms and processes that promote gender equality at the local level, such as requirements that local council budget commissions include female members, conduct gender-responsive budgeting, and authorize that LSG funds be spent on gender-related programming; the establishment of local-level institutions to address gender-based violence and integration of such a mandate into the charters of pre-existing LSG institutions such as Public Prevention Centers (PPCs; *общественно-профилактический центры*, or *ОПЦ* in Russian); assurances of non-discriminatory processes in all LSG decisions and the non-discriminatory allocation of resources; and specific recourse mechanisms if LSGs fail to fulfill their Charter-based duties. Amendments to local charters can be proposed by local citizens’ initiatives and local council deputies, and require a 2/3rd majority vote by the local

⁵ The *Law on the Local State Administration* applies to district-level authorities (e.g. the akim and his/her apparatus), which are considered to be State as opposed to municipal employees. As discussed in the introduction, this report does not explore district-level authorities or gender patterns at the district level in any depth. It is worth noting that there is a dearth of information on district and regional authorities, their gender policies (and gaps), and how work with these officials could be useful for the promotion of gender equality across the country.

council to be adopted (Law on Local Self-Government § 15). As such, there are also significant opportunities and the need for community-wide programming to engage citizens in understanding the content of their local charters and its importance, informing citizens and council members of the legal processes to change their charters, building local movements to propose gender-equality-promoting amendments, and providing technical guidance on the content of such potential amendments.

LSGs are additionally tasked with conducting “socio-economic planning” (Law on Local Self-Government § 18), a process whereby key community development needs are identified and programs are put in place to address them. *Aiyl okmotys* develop and implement these socio-economic development projects and programs (id. at §§ 47.1, 50.1-1), while local councils approve and monitor their implementation (id. at § 31.3). Every year, *aiyl okmotys* are supposed to share information with the public on their progress implementing these programs (id. at § 47.1-1). Under the *Law on the Prevention and Protection against Family Violence*, LSGs are required to “approve and control the implementation of measures to prevent and protect against family violence” within their socio-economic development plans (§ 19).

Legal framework for citizens’ participation in local self-governance

Citizens’ direct participation in local self-government is authorized in four forms: discussion of important issues at public meetings, the election of deputies to the local council, the initiation of a special rule-making initiatives (such as making changes to the Charter, as described above), and direct voting on issues of particular public importance (Law on Local Self-Government § 7.3). All citizens, regardless of sex, have equal right to exercise local self-governance in these ways and have the right to equal access to municipal government workers (id. at §§ 5, 8). Local council sessions are open to the public and must be announced to the public, though local councils may stipulate regulations for citizens’ participation and hold closed sessions where “state secrets” are involved (id. at § 30). Local deputies, meanwhile, are required to make a public accounting of their work to community members no less than once per year (Law on the Status of Local Council Deputies § 15).

Notably, numerous LSG Charters contain additional articles promoting gender-equal political participation. Of the 22 LSG Charters available in the Ministry of Justice’s public database of legal-normative acts, 12 contain non-discrimination clauses that ban sex-based discrimination within the community (*aiyl aimak*) as a whole, 18 contain clauses on the equal rights of all adult individuals to participate in local self-governance, regardless of sex; and several state that all adults have the right to participate in the identification of shared local needs (for socio-economic development and budget planning, for example), regardless of sex. It is worth noting that these 22 charters represent less than 5% of all LSGs (453 village LSGs and 31 city LSGs, or 484 overall).

Legal framework for attaining positions in the LSG

All adults over the age of 21 with at least a secondary general education and who reside within the given community (*aiyl aimak*) can run for local council office (Law on the Election of Local Council Members § 3.4). As of 2019, at least 30% of all seats on each village local council must be reserved for women (id. at § 59-1.1), an amendment whose results will be tested on a

national scale in the next round of municipal elections in the 2021 spring.⁶ Notably, while village elections do not operate on a party system, those of cities do (Law on the Election of Local Council Members § 49.2). As such, candidates for city councils must affiliate themselves with a political party, no more than 70% of candidates on each party's list can be of one sex or the other, and candidates of alternating sex must be listed in at least every 3rd position on the list (i.e. no more than two male candidates can be listed consecutively, and vice versa) (Law on the Election of Local Council Members § 49.7).

Adults with a higher education, at least 2 years of experience in government or other leadership, near fluency in Kyrgyz, and without a standing criminal conviction may be elected to the position of *aiyl okmoty* (Law on Local Self-Government § 48). Nominations are made by members of the local council and the chief executive authority of the district (a.k.a. the *akim*), with the candidate who receives a simple majority vote of local council deputies becoming the *aiyl okmoty* (id. at § 49). Municipal employees must be Kyrgyzstani citizens aged 18 years or older who pass a standardized civil service exam (Law on the State Civil Service and Municipal Service §§ 19.1, 23), though the *aiyl okmoty* also has limited authority to select and appoint members of his or her administration. All eligible citizens are guaranteed equal access to municipal employment regardless of sex (Law on the State Civil Service and Municipal Service § 4.4; Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women § 10 ¶1).

The Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women contains numerous additional measures to promote women in the ranks of municipal service. These include placing an obligation on LSG authorities to “ensure equal access of persons of different sexes ... to municipal service positions in accordance with their abilities and professional training,” adhere to a 30% gender quota for municipal service workers that applies across all levels (including at the decision-making level), establish competitions for positions and promotions in which men and women participate “equally and on equal terms,” create a “gender-sensitive career development policy for employees,” and to select candidates of the “less-represented gender” for appointment where all other qualifications are equal ([Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women](#) § 10). LSG officials’ failure to follow these provisions can result in the annulment of their hiring decisions or competition results and entail “administrative responsibility” (§ 10).

⁶ Note that some LSGs have already held local council elections since the adoption of the 30% gender quota amendment on 8-Aug-2019. The first of these, Saruu Village of Issyk Kul Region, took place in September, 2019, where male candidates voiced significant opposition to the quota, claiming it violated their “civil rights and rights as young men (*jigitov*)” and would lead to “conflict between men and women” (Kaktus Media 2019). Ultimately, their opposition was overcome, the gender quota was upheld, and a woman was elected to be Council Chairperson (id). In April 2020, an additional 25 LSGs were slated to hold local council elections. Of the 910 candidates who registered to run for these 375 positions, 287 (or 46%) were women.

Saruu Village demonstrates an intriguing wrinkle in the possible impact of the quota: the protesting candidates’ use of the word “*jigit*” suggests that it was specifically *young* men worried about losing council seats, with young men likely receiving fewer votes than their elders and therefore at greater risk of “losing” council spots to women candidates. Meanwhile, older women are significantly more likely to run for and win council seats than young women. And unintended consequence of the quota may thus be to decrease the overall representation of youth on local councils and raise the average age of deputies, both male and female. The recommendations to this report include several ideas to increase young people’s participation, though additional emphasis and creative thinking may be in order to counteract this possible challenge.

LSG institutions oriented toward the promotion and protection of women

Local self-governments are equipped with numerous institutions, both formal and informal, that work to resolve challenges commonly faced by women and that can serve as vehicles for women's involvement in local decision-making. These include:

- **Aksakal Courts**, or Courts of Elders, which are tasked with hearing disputes about property, including post-divorce division of property; domestic violence; disputes concerning “national marriage relations and traditions”; and small-scale arguments over land, rent, and more ([Law on Aksakal Courts](#) § 15). Located within the territory of each LSG and legally bound to provide dispute resolution free of charge (id. §§ 10, 23 ¶15), Aksakal Courts offer easier access to justice than the formal court system both physically and financially. At the same time, their authority to hear domestic violence cases has raised significant alarm, in no small part because their overriding mandate is to promote reconciliation and harmony (id. § 3), an inappropriate orientation in family violence cases that can put victims at further risk of harm;⁷
- **Women's Committees**, a Soviet-era institution, continue to exist in almost all LSGs despite having no status at national law (Sultanova 2019, p. 9). Generally composed of women aged 50 and older (i.e. those who were already adults when the Soviet Union dissolved), in some localities they have led initiatives to prevent early marriage, bride kidnapping, and domestic violence (id). They also frequently take part in aksakal court proceedings and the work of Public Prevention Centers (PPC), particularly when cases deal with family relations, domestic violence, or divorce (McCormack 2013). As many interviewees for this report noted, they serve as one of the primary institutions where older women can exercise authority over matters of local concern. Women's Committees are also the only woman-oriented institutional structure mentioned in LSG Charters;
- **Public Prevention Centers** (PPC) are umbrella organizations that bring together local government officials, the police, and other concerned citizens (often including aksakals and members of women's committees) for “joint participation of local self-government bodies and citizens in crime prevention” ([Law on Crime Prevention in the Kyrgyz Republic](#) § 12¹; see also Bolponova 2018).⁸ As of 2013, PPCs were largely under-funded and overlooked by government officials, though police actively used them to divert recurring caseloads related to alcoholism, domestic violence, and teenage crime out of their dockets and into the hands of LSG representatives and Aksakal Courts;⁹

⁷ A worldwide best practice is to prohibit any form of mediation in cases where gender-based violence is involved (see, e.g. UN Women 2012, p. 37). Unfortunately, under Kyrgyzstani legislation mediation is allowed both in the formal justice system and in informal fora such as aksakal courts, regardless of the presence of violence between the parties.

⁸ Further details on PPCs can be found in the government's [Sample Charter for Public Prevention Centers](#), which notably makes no mention of domestic violence, women, gender, or any need for members to have special training or skills in dealing with victims of abuse, trauma, or addiction.

⁹ These observations come from the author's fieldwork in Bishkek, Naryn Oblast, and Batken Oblast in 2013 and 2015. While researching the legal procedures and substance of Aksakal Court cases in these regions, I frequently came across PPC offices – often dilapidated and lacking basic supplies – and interviewed aksakals and police about the workings of their PPCs. Many police spoke of the PPC as a way to get rid of unwanted, messy cases. For aksakals, PPCs were one of the main referral mechanisms whereby they received their cases: in those LSGs where

- **Local Committees for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (LCPDV)** are tasked with providing psychological and legal support to those suffering from domestic violence, monitoring and analyzing local trends in domestic violence, and informing local citizens about domestic violence (Kabar 2020). Much like PPCs, LCPDVs are umbrella organizations that coordinate local responses to domestic violence, bringing together local government representatives (including, for example, members of Women’s Committees, local councils, and aksakals), religious leaders, staff of civil society organizations and other local activists (id). A Government order issued in March 2020 proposes the immediate establishment of LCPDVs in all LSGs across Kyrgyzstan, though no mention is made of providing financial or technical support to LSGs for so doing (Government of the Kyrgyz Republic [Plan for Immediate Activities to Prevent Family Violence in the Kyrgyz Republic](#)).¹⁰

One important note is that while the above institutions are formally distinct, oftentimes the same individuals staff all of them. So, for example, the same woman who leads the Women’s Committee is also likely to be a member of the local council, aksakal court, and PPC. Thus while these institutions have distinct mandates and functions, in practice the responses and results that citizens can expect from one or the other are often similar if not identical.

National-level institutions tasked with working with LSGs

Overseeing, coordinating, and supporting the work of LSGs is the **Government Agency for Local Self-Government and Inter-Ethnic Relations (GAMSUMO)**, the sole national-level institution whose core function is to work with LSGs. With an overall goal of, “creating the conditions for sustainable development of the local self-government system to achieve economic growth and the well-being of the population” ([Regulation on the Government Agency for Local Self-Government and Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Kyrgyz Republic](#) § 2), GAMSUMO “implements state policy in the sphere of local self-government” (id at § 4.a), “improves the activities of local self-government bodies, strengthening their responsibility to the local community”, and “provides organizational, methodological and advisory assistance to local governments” (id. at § 6.b), among numerous other duties. Despite its orientation toward promoting participatory and responsive local self-governance, the legal framework governing GAMSUMO lacks any reference to gender-inclusivity or non-discrimination, whether in its staffing, in the programs and guidance documents that it creates, or in its monitoring of the effectiveness of LSGs.

The **National Council for Women and Gender Development** [hereinafter “National Gender Council”] – the main national institution for developing, implementing, and monitoring a coherent gender policy for the State – is tasked with coordinating gender policy across

police were active users of the PPC, aksakal caseloads were significantly higher and more likely to include domestic violence and alcoholism issues.

¹⁰ Note that the Government Order does call for an “increase in state budget funds allocated for the implementation of socially useful projects under the state- and social-order for the provision of services to citizens who have suffered from domestic violence and for preventive measures.” It is arguable that these funds could go to LSGs for their preventative programming, though without explicit authorization for LSG usage, many ayyl okmotys may feel at risk if they attempt to access or use these funds.

national government organs and LSGs, as well as providing them with “effective models of real gender equality” ([Regulation on the National Council for Women and Gender Development under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic](#) § 5). LSG representatives are supposed to be included among members of the National Council (id. at § 8), and are required to share relevant documents with the council upon request (§ 7). Given the overall lack of publicly available information about the Council it is difficult to say what interaction if any it has with LSGs, whether there are LSG representatives among its members, and what guidance it provides to LSGs or GAMSUMO, if any.

Meanwhile, the **Ministry of Labor and Social Development** (MLSD), is tasked with designing, implementing, and monitoring Kyrgyzstan’s policies on gender equality and domestic violence ([Regulations on the MLSD](#) § 1).¹¹ Managing the MLSD’s gender equality work is its “Division on Gender Issues” which is charged with:

- Coordinating the work of state entities and other bodies (e.g. LSGs) in their efforts to prevent family violence (id. at § 2);
- Developing draft bills on protecting individuals from family violence (§ 7a);
- Proposing priorities and objectives for national gender policy and monitoring its implementation (§ 7a);
- Providing methodological and consulting assistance on gender policy (§ 7b), and;
- Interacting with interested state, oblast, district and LSG bodies on gender policy (§ 7d).

Additionally, the MLSD oversees the full system of welfare and social support payments for families in “difficult life situations”, with social service staff located across the country (§ 7). The precise division of responsibilities across the National Council for Women and Gender Development and the MLSD is somewhat unclear given their overlapping mandates, though ultimately it is the MLSD that has the staffing, budget, and therefore presumably the capacity to implement gender equality policy on the ground across the country.

The **Office of the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic** is tasked with carrying out, on a permanent basis, “Parliamentary control over the observance of Constitutional human rights and civil rights and freedoms on the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic,” in accordance with both the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic and the international treaties to which it is a party ([Law On the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic](#) § 1). These include Kyrgyzstan’s Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women, with its expansive gender-equality rights and corresponding LSG obligations already mentioned, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Convention), with articles that require State parties to eliminate discrimination against women in the political sphere (art. 7), advance the rights of rural women (art. 14), and to counter gender-based violence against women (see [CEDAW Committee General Recommendation No. 35](#) for further details). Meanwhile, the Law on the Prevention and Protection against Family Violence tasks the Ombudsman directly with communicating petitions related to domestic violence to municipal officials (§ 16.1), holding

¹¹ As of October 28, 2020, there is no Minister of the MLSD, the previous one presumably being removed with the change of government in early October and no replacement yet being found. It is the only ministry that still lacks a head, and given its lack of leadership it is unclear to what extent it is functioning (See: Government of the Kyrgyz Republic website (Accessed 28-Oct-2020), “Members of the Government”. Available: <https://www.gov.kg/ru/gov/s/103>).

municipal officials accountable for failures to protect victims of domestic violence, including by initiating court cases (§ 16.2), preparing special reports on domestic violence (§ 16.3), and posting information about its domestic violence prevention work publicly on its website (§ 16.4). As such, Kyrgyzstani legislation creates a large role for the Ombudsman in advancing women's rights, including at the local level and in relation to LSG officials and institutions.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB)

At law, local budgets originate with the **aiyl okmoty**, who develops the draft budget and executes it upon approval by the local council (Law on Local Self-Government § 47.2). The draft budget is received by the local council's **budget commission**, which determines potential changes from the previous year's budget, consults with the aiyl okmoty and other executive authorities to consider their proposals for change, and submits budgetary conclusions and recommendations to the local council as a whole, which then approves or rejects the draft budget in light of the budget commission's guidance ([Budget Code of the Kyrgyz Republic § 102](#)). Local councils have additional core responsibilities in budgeting, from delimiting budget priorities, to dedicating funds for socio-economic development, to approving the executive's implementation of the budget, to organizing public hearings on draft budgets, and more ([Budget Code of the Kyrgyz Republic § 78](#)). Aiyl okmotys are further tasked with contributing to the design of socio-economic development programs, implementing these and all other programs outlined in the local budget, attracting external funds for programming above and beyond the local budget (as agreed upon with the local council), providing quarterly and annual budget reports to the local council for approval, and organizing public hearings on draft budgets along with the local council ([Budget Code of the Kyrgyz Republic § 79](#)).

Gaps in the legal and institutional framework

The legal framework that governs LSGs is notably lacking in guarantees of gender-inclusivity and mechanisms for women's empowerment, while specific obligations placed on LSGs under gender-equality-promotion-laws are not carried over into the laws and regulations that directly govern the LSGs. For example, the 2017 [Law on the Prevention and Protection against Family Violence](#) foresees a significant role for LSGs, such as running preventative programming, financing women's crisis centers, and providing socio-economic support to victims. The Law on Local Self-Government correspondingly states that LSGs are to implement "systematic measures to prevent and protect against family violence" (§ 18.1.25). And yet the [2018 – 2023 Program for the Development of Local Self-Government in the Kyrgyz Republic](#) and its detailed [Implementation Plan](#) fail to mention any activities to prevent family violence (or any other efforts to promote gender equality or gender inclusivity), giving LSGs no concrete action steps, indicators, goals, or guidance on a responsibility newly allocated to them in 2017.¹² Meanwhile, though the Law on Local Self-Government guarantees all citizens equal rights to "exercise local self-government" (§ 5), there is no article in the law that directly

¹² Notably, the government implicitly acknowledges this shortcoming in its March 2020 [Plan for Immediate Activities to Prevent Family Violence in the Kyrgyz Republic](#), where it calls for immediate integration of all of the specific obligations delegated to LSGs in the 2017 Law on the Prevention and Protection Against Family Violence into the legal framework directly governing LSGs.

guarantees non-discrimination in LSGs' management or distribution of public resources, nor a provision that would expressly give citizens the right to formally complain against such discrimination, and no articles mandating that local self-governments make reasonable accommodations to enhance disadvantaged groups' capacity to participate in local self-governance (e.g. women, the disabled, ethnic minorities, the poor, etc.). Finally, the numerous measures meant to enhance women's employment and promotion opportunities in municipal governance that are outlined in the Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women, discussed supra p. 5, are nowhere carried over into the Law on Local Self-Government or other relevant acts. These gaps leave LSGs' obligations to promote gender-equality – an obligation which they surely have under Kyrgyzstan's ratification of the Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the [Kyrgyz Republic Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women](#) – ill defined, to the detriment of LSG official and the women living in their communities.

These challenges start at the top, with the regulations governing GAMSUMO including no mention of gender-inclusivity or equality. Presumably as a result, none of the guidance documents issued by GAMSUMO or currently active GAMSUMO programs that the research team could find include gender-inclusivity, the prevention of gender-based violence, or women's empowerment as relevant concepts, LSGs concerns, or indicators.¹³ All 4 of GAMSUMO's top leadership positions are staffed by men,¹⁴ while 4 of the 8 leadership positions on GAMSUMO's staff are held by women and none of these positions include a mandate to consider gender equality or women's empowerment at the LSG level.¹⁵

Similarly, public documentation available from the website of the Office of the Ombudsman suggests that the institution and its staff give little attention to the promotion of women's rights and equality. Currently the only organ of the Ombudsman's Office dedicated to women's rights is the problematically-titled, "Department on Protecting the Rights of Children, Women, and the Family" (a title suggesting that women's rights are embedded within the realm of the family and children, as opposed to promoting women as rights-holders in and of themselves) while its most recent annual report (recounting its work in 2018) fails to make any mention of efforts to protect against domestic violence, promote women's political empowerment, ensure women's equal economic opportunity, or indeed any work focusing

¹³ The research team conducted a comprehensive review of the information that [GAMSUMO provides on its website](#) as well as documents generated by GAMSUMO and made available on the [Ministry of Justice's database of normative-legal acts](#). Notably, the 2018 [Methodological Guidance for LSGs on Socio-Economic Development Planning](#), a joint creation of the Ministry of the Economy and GAMSUMO, *does* include guidance on ensuring gender balance at public meetings and describes ways that LSGs can make socio-economic development planning more socially inclusive. As of 2019, this document had been available on the Ministry of Justice's database of legal-normative acts, where the author first encountered it. However, as of October, 2020, it was missing from the database and extensive targeted searching was required to find a PDF copy of it on the website of the Kyrgyzstani NGO "Development Policy Institute". It is unclear why the guidebook is no longer easily accessible on official sites – including that of GAMSUMO, the Ministry of the Economy, and the Ministry of Justice – or what import this may have for its legal status.

¹⁴ GAMSUMO website (Accessed 28-Oct-2020), "Leadership". Available: http://gamsumo.gov.kg/ru/?page_id=103

¹⁵ GAMSUMO website (Accessed 28-Oct-2020), "Staff". Available: http://gamsumo.gov.kg/ru/?page_id=855. As of January 1, 2019, GAMSUMO had a total staff of 53 individuals, of whom 21 (or 40%) were women (National Statistics Committee 2019a, p. 22).

specifically on women's empowerment. Rather, the 280-page report dedicates 20 pages to its section on "the right of women and children", covering the right to education, issues of violence against the children and especially children of migrants, and on the payment of alimony (i.e. child support payments) (Office of the Ombudsman 2019, pp. 139 – 158). No special reports on domestic violence or information on the work of the Ombudsman's Office in preventing domestic violence were found on the website,¹⁶ though as previously mentioned such materials are supposed to be made available in-line with the Law on the Prevention and Protection against Family Violence. The Ombudsman's arguably large role in the protection and promotion of women's rights thus does not appear to be fully realized.

LSG charters similarly tend to lack enforceable guarantees of women's and men's equality, measures for gender-inclusivity, or the institutional arrangements to advance gender equality. Of the 22 LSG charters publicly available on the Ministry of Justice database – 15 for aiyl aimaks and 7 for cities – none make any mention of family violence or its prevention, of gender-responsive budgeting, or of any institutions to promote women's equality except for Women's Committees. As previously mentioned, a positive element is the inclusion of language banning sex-based discrimination in 11 of the 15 village charters and 1 of the 7 city charters, and the right for all individuals to participate in local self-governance regardless of sex in all village charters and 3 city charters. Yet there are no provisions within the charters describing the consequences for an LSG's failure to, say, respond to instances of sex-based discrimination within their communities or even by their employees. Lest one theorize that these charters are too high-level to mention specific institutional arrangements for the promotion of gender-equality or that detailed rules around gender-responsive budgeting would be out of place in charter language, consider that 16 of the charters (or more than 70%) describe holding competitions for "best family", "exemplary house", "most moral family", and the like – measures that one female aiyl okmoty said were intended to get women out in the public realm. If such competitions are worthy of inclusion in LSG charters, it would seem that rules for gender-inclusivity in LSG meetings and budgeting would also qualify.

Access, Participation, and Representation

Women's Participation in Local Planning and Budgeting

Women's active participation in public decision-making is a necessary pre-cursor to gender-aware identification of community issues, gender-responsive selection of which issues to address at the LSG level, and gender-inclusive implementation of resulting LSG programs. And yet women are under-represented at every phase of LSG planning and programming. Interviewees noted widespread barriers to women's participation in public meetings and decision-making. Again and again, female aiyl okmotys said that they made targeted efforts to include women in LSG budgetary discussions, socio-economic development planning, and *kurultai* (community-wide meetings). And yet they reported that few women go, particularly

¹⁶ Isolated news articles were found announcing meetings with women rights-holders. In one indicative article, the Ombudsman is said to have "taken control of the situation in St. Petersburg, where a Kyrgyzstani man brutally beat his pregnant wife" by, "making a complaint to the Authority on the *Rights of the Child* of the President of the Russian Federation" (Office of the Ombudsman 2020, emphasis added). The woman in question was an adult.

young married women (*kelins*) and those from disadvantaged socio-economic groups (e.g. women who were married under-age, who live in polygamous households, who are of ethnic minority groups, who are divorced single mothers, etc.). Female local council deputies similarly noted that young women in particular tend not to attend LSG meetings either because they “have no interest”, “lack knowledge”, or “their families don’t allow them”. When discussing the budgeting process, one local council deputy explained that,

If women participate in the [budgeting] process, then it is the older ones, not the younger. Women want to participate in these processes, but they’re afraid of speaking their minds. ‘My mother-in-law or father-in-law will yell at me’ [they think]. The interest is there, but we need to put in place conditions for women to participate in these processes.... When making decisions, women’s opinions aren’t really taken into account.

While this female deputy was particularly concerned with the lack of young women’s active participation, others seemed to approve of the fact that young women were less vocal, saying that they lack the “knowledge, skills, and abilities” to participate productively. These types of age-discriminatory perspectives appear to be widespread, making it difficult for young women to garner support from elder, potential female role models who otherwise could help pave their paths into politics.

Female local council deputies also described men engaging in direct opposition to women’s public participation. A key concrete example of this is that of Saruu village, where male candidates for the local council united in opposition to the newly-enacted 30% gender quota law (see supra p. 5, fn. 6). More broadly, focus group participants noted that this kind of opposition was ongoing and constant, saying, “we are constantly fighting with men.” One female deputy described how,

Men arrive [at public decision-making meetings] already knowing where they want it to go, already having agreed among themselves. And then they vote, and of course women end up in the minority. There are few women, their participation is not enough, and so men’s votes always outweigh [ours]. Women are scolded by their father-in-law, their mother-in-law, that they should stay at home.

Ultimately, men’s organized opposition and women’s subordination within the family structure appear to play pivotal roles in their political disempowerment. It is worth noting that given Kyrgyzstan’s tradition of patrilocality, many men will tend to live in the village where they grew up and women to move into their households (at least temporarily), meaning that men benefit from having the same networks they grew up with for their entire lives while women must build anew from marriage onward.

The *aiyl okmotys* and local council deputies interviewed for this report said that those women who did attend LSG meetings were “the same active women” who fill almost all public roles for women in the community: members of the Women’s Committee, teachers, hospital workers, local council deputies, female staff of the *aiyl okmoty*’s administration, and scattered “activists” or civil society leaders. Most of these women-participants also tended to be at least 40 years old. The *aiyl okmotys* contrasted these active women with those who “sit at home”, a group deemed impossible to reach and yet representing the vast majority of women in their

communities.¹⁷ When asked why so few women participate in local governance, experts' answers were uniform: mentality, time poverty, and family violence.

Mentality

Almost all interviewees described widespread beliefs (which they alternately characterized as “Muslim” or “Asian”) that women should not lead, that it is shameful for men to submit to women’s leadership, that it is a woman’s duty to keep the house in order and that this should be her first priority, and that women who go out in public – particularly in the evening, when public meetings most often take place, and particularly young (physically attractive) women – are calling too much attention to themselves.¹⁸ Changing these beliefs, several noted, would be the first indispensable step to increasing women’s capacity to participate in the public sphere.

Pre-existing literature on the topic helps quantify the extent of such beliefs and clarify their dimensions. As of 2016, a striking 74% of women and 83% of men believed that men were better leaders than women (UNFPA 2016, p. 53). Some 78% of women and 85% of men believed that “a woman should not stay long at work, as she has duties at home” (id), duties that would presumably also have higher priority than her participation in evening-time LSG meetings. According to the same study, some 25% of women and 35% of men believed that women had no business being in politics, 42% and 53% thought that women were too emotional for politics, and 42% and 51% believed that family obligations and political activity were not compatible for women (id. at p. 139). At the same time, both women’s and men’s reported participation in local political processes was found to be roughly equal, and equally low: only ~15% of both male and female respondents reported participating in public hearings and ~3% in public discussions of the local budget (id. at pp. 146 – 147).

Time poverty

Second, our interviewees noted women’s time poverty in comparison to men’s, and particularly the time poverty of young, married women who not only have to complete all of the household chores but also care for (and give birth to) young children, leaving them with little time, energy, or interest in public meetings. On average, women in Kyrgyzstan spend 4.5 hours a day on household labor compared to men’s 1.5 hours, while both men and women in rural areas spend 1.5 times as much time on domestic labor as their urban counterparts (National Statistics Committee 2015, p. 8). The burden of this labor does not fall on all age groups equally: women aged 18 to 34 are those who spend the most time on domestic labor, while men’s contributions are highest at ages 14 – 17 and 45 – 54 (id). Interviewees for this

¹⁷ In their 2015 study of Kyrgyzstani budgeting processes, Esenaliev and Kisunko found that women and those of ethnic minority backgrounds were significantly less likely to know about or be interested in local budgeting processes and related public meetings (p. 11). Meanwhile, “females originating from non-Kyrgyz ethnic groups” expressed no interest or awareness in local budgetary processes (p. 13). The authors theorized that this disinterest on the part of women could be the result of patriarchal attitudes or the fact that many women – and particularly those with the intersecting vulnerabilities of being female and being ethnic minorities – found it pointless to participate as their input would not be taken into account.

¹⁸ For additional analysis of these beliefs and associated behaviors as well as support for these experts’ comments, see, e.g. Muldoon and Casabonne 2017, pp. 23 – 26, 33 – 35;

report noted that once women become old enough to have married sons, and therefore at least one daughter-in-law living in their household, they become significantly less burdened with household tasks. This, along with the confidence that comes with age, the seniority and networks that come from years of service as teachers and doctors, and the fact that their children have grown and become independent, all were noted as contributing to the fact that the vast majority of female local council deputies are aged 40 and older.

Gender-based violence

Finally, several interviewees described extensive gender-based violence in their communities, some of which was a direct response to women's attempts to participate in the public sphere. Two such examples included:

- A female aiyl okmoty from Issyk Kul Region stated that "It's almost completely men," who participate in public meetings. "Women aren't allowed to make decisions," she continued, "Even women who are aiyl okmoty staff, they go home at night and they're beaten by their husbands. There's a lot of family violence. A lot. They [women] might want to go [to meetings] but they're embarrassed." It is unclear if she meant that women were embarrassed to express themselves publicly, to go against their husbands, to have their wounds seen by others, of something else, or of all of the above;
- One female aiyl okmoty serving in Chui Region described her attempts to enroll a local nurse in a series of political empowerment trainings, organized to help prepare women to enter local councils under the new 30% gender quota. Despite being a nurse, the aiyl okmoty noted, this woman demurred, saying that her, "husband would not allow it" and that she was, "afraid of him" if she asked for his permission. The young nurse was generally banned from being outside of the house apart from during working hours.

The aiyl okmotys who provided these anecdotes noted that while husbands were the main perpetrators of such violence, other family members – and in particular mothers-in-law – played an active role in condoning and rationalizing it. Scant information is available on nationwide trends in gender-based electoral violence – constituting violence against women for their participation (or potential participation) in political processes as voters, candidates, poll watchers and administrators, activists, and more – in Kyrgyzstan or indeed worldwide. That said, some 28% of Kyrgyzstani women aged 15 and older have reported experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional violence at some point in their lives (National Statistics Committee 2013, p. 257), with some 97% of this reported violence being perpetrated within the family (id. at pp. 249, 251).¹⁹ Overall, 71% of ever-married women said that their husbands were jealous or angry if they talked with other men – presumably a requirement of being active in the public sphere, where communication with both male and female constituents is vital – while 69% said their husbands insist on knowing where they were at all times (id. at p. 253). Underlying these statistics are widespread beliefs that domestic violence – and particularly violence against

¹⁹ The methodology used in this 2013 study is the most comprehensive of those known by the author to quantify gender-based violence in Kyrgyzstan, adhering to best practices in comprehensive collection of information on violence against women. Thus while more up-to-date data sources are available, we have chosen to present the information from this earlier source.

women – is justifiable in certain situations. Thus, when asked if it would be acceptable for a man to hit or beat his wife, 17% of women and 24% agreed that it would be acceptable if she were arguing with him, 23% and 36% agreed in the case that she went out without telling him, and 26% and 45% agreed in the case that she was neglecting the children (id. at pp. 279, 281). Given the stress (and therefore potential for more arguments); irregular, unpredictable, and long hours entailed in political work; and their overall time poverty, many women are likely to run into any one of these situations in the case that they choose to participate in political processes – and to therefore face heightened risk of violence at home.

In contrast, women who *do* participate in LSG business were often described as somewhat older and as representatives of pre-existing institutions, i.e. as part of a Women's Committee or a local NGO. Indeed, when asked how LSGs determine the needs of female members of their communities, aiyl okmotys interviewed for this report said that they relied on Women's Committees to inform them (rather than, for example, conducting surveys of their citizens or attempting to speak directly with women of different socio-economic, ethnic, and other backgrounds). Those NGOs or Women's Committee well-organized enough to develop presentations would, at times, present to the local council and sometimes have budgetary funds dedicated to the challenges they identified.

Reflecting on these results, it would seem that working through family-based power structures – and in particular with men in their role as husbands and women in their role as mothers-in-law – would be one of the most effective ways to enhance women's public participation, and subsequently to increase the gender-inclusivity of LSG services.²⁰ The key barriers to women's public participation arise from the family sphere: from women's obligations to provide domestic labor (which could be shared across family members), to violence perpetrated by husbands and condoned by others (which will likely only decline with widespread changes in social norms), to interlocking norms and beliefs that undermine women's opportunity to raise their voices in public. In this environment, working solely with women to, say, increase their knowledge of local politics or motivation to participate in local decision-making processes is not only likely to be ineffective on a broad scale, but may also place female participants in harm's way, setting them up for discord and possibly violence at home. Barring such efforts, work with pre-existing avenues for women's participation – such as Women's Committees – could be beneficial, particularly if emphasis is placed on making them more inclusive in membership and in the focus of their proposals to LSGs.

Women's Representation in Local Councils

Women's representation in local councils has consistently declined over the 2000's: from 19% in 2004 to 17% in 2007 to 13% in 2012 (Food and Agriculture Organization for the UN 2016, p. 46). In 2016, the most recent round of nationwide local council elections, less than 12% of elected local council members were women.²¹ These results are driven in part by direct

²⁰ This was also the main conclusion reached by Muldoon and Casabonne in their 2017 report for the World Bank, where they recommended first and foremost "campaigns to reduce husbands' resistance to women's civic engagement" to increase women's political involvement (p. 40).

²¹ These calculations and all others for the 2016 elections are based on data from the Central Elections Committee website. Details of the methodology are discussed in Appendix 1.

violations of women's political and electoral rights, as described by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization:

Analysis of the 2012 election results indicated that ... [m]any rural women lacked information about the pre-election process, including the possibility of registering for election funding, and local authorities refused to register some female candidates. ... Observers also identified a phenomenon that occurred throughout the country, namely, after the elections, some successful female candidates reported that they were told they would have to choose between taking a seat on the council or retaining their jobs. This practice suggests that political parties were "misleading candidates" in order to use women's resources (financial and networks) during campaigns (2016, p. 46).

In sum, women's capacity to participate fully and freely in their local elections as candidates was undermined by misinformation, intimidation, and obstruction. Similar information was not available about the 2016 elections, but given the further decline in the rate of female deputies elected to office it seems likely that these trends continued.²²

Specific sub-groups of women are particularly under-represented in local councils, namely young women, those who are of ethnic minorities, and those in rural areas:

- **Young women:** Significantly fewer young women serve as local council deputies than older women. In rural areas, only 10% of all female local council deputies are younger than 40, some 1% of rural deputies overall. This is significant under-representation for this age group, which constituted 32% of all Kyrgyzstani women in the 2016 election year and 16% of the overall population (National Statistics Committee 2016, p. 15).²³ Women under 40 make up a slightly higher portion of female deputies in urban areas at 18%, yet only 5% of city deputies overall.

In contrast, this apparent age discrimination does not have a similar an impact on young men's representation. 32% of rural male deputies – or 28% of all rural deputies – are younger than 40, much closer to this age group's 34% prevalence in the general population (National Statistics Committee 2016, p. 15). Men younger than 40 make up 34% of all male city council deputies, or 25% of city council deputies as a whole. Moreover, as men begin their government work earlier, they accrue the necessary years of experience to move into higher positions at a younger age, not to mention the skills, networks, and knowledge to more successfully fulfill their roles – contributing to the over-representation of older men in LSGs.

- **Ethnic minorities:** Ethnic minorities of both sexes are under-represented in local self-government. After the 2016 elections, ethnic Kyrgyz made up 88% of all local council

²² This decline is also explained in no small part by a law that banned those whose salaries were publicly funded – such as school teachers, doctors, and nurses – from serving in their local councils. When faced with the choice between full-time paying work and a part-time voluntary position on the local council, public employees roundly chose their full-time jobs. These positions were (and are) overwhelmingly held by women, and so the detrimental impact on women's local political representation was large. That legislation has since been repealed, removing another barrier to women's participation as candidates in the 2021 local council elections.

²³ As noted in the main body of this report, individuals qualify to become deputies once they reach age 21. Thus the "deputies younger than 40" category, representing individuals aged 21 – 39, corresponds roughly to the age group 20 – 39 for which the National Statistics Committee provides data.

deputies, Uzbeks 6%, Russians 2%, and all other minorities 5%. Meanwhile, that same year Kyrgyz represented 73% of the general population, Uzbeks 15%, Russians 6%, and all other minorities 7% (National Statistics Committee 2020, p. 60).

Women of all ethnic minorities – except for Russians – were more deeply under-represented in local councils than Kyrgyz women, as shown in Table 1.1 below. For example, Uzbek women make up only 6% of the 374 Uzbek deputies serving on village councils. Women minorities were more favorably represented in city councils, though the total number of minority representatives is so low in city councils that the relatively high portion of women has less meaning (for example, while 7 of the 64 Uzbek city council members were women (or 11%), this is such a vanishingly small number of representatives that it loses political relevance).

Table 1.1 Ethnicity of Council Deputies Elected in 2016, with Gender Data

Village (<i>aiyl aimak</i>) Deputies, by Ethnicity				City Council Deputies, by Ethnicity			
Total Deputies		Female Deputies		Total Deputies		Female Deputies	
Kyrgyz	5,411	631	(12%)	Kyrgyz	611	162	(27%)
Uzbek	374	21	(6%)	Uzbek	64	7	(11%)
Russian	106	24	(23%)	Russian	29	14	(48%)
Other	291	40	(14%)	Other	23	6	(26%)
Total	6,182	810	(12%)	Total	727	189	(26%)

Among ethnic Russian female deputies (both rural and urban), 3 are younger than 40. Across all other ethnic minorities, only 8 women younger than 40 are represented in rural and city councils combined: 5 Uzbek and 2 Azerbaijani women, ranging from 33 to 39 years old, serve on village councils while a single city council deputy is a woman under 40, a Bashkiri in the Karakol City Council.

- **Rural versus urban:** Though the statistics are laid out above, it is worth highlighting that the portion of women serving on rural councils is less than half that of city councils, at 12% and 26%, respectively. The main driver of this difference is likely the distinct legal framework applied to city council elections, whereby women must make up at least 30% of candidates on the lists of parties running for city council seats. Given that the party system does not apply to village elections, this quota does not apply at the village level. The 2019 amendment to the Law on the Election of Local Council Members puts in place a direct 30% quota for village council seats, and is likely to result in a drastic increase in the number of women serving in rural councils after the 2021 elections.

Perceptions of the 30% gender quota for local councils

Notably, all interviewed experts and LSG members believed that the 30% gender quota for local councils was a positive step. Interviewees believed that this would pave the road toward greater LSG focus on educational quality and access, improved services for children and youth (including setting up nurseries and renovating libraries), and enhanced healthcare. Some experts worried that some localities would struggle to find enough women to run for these seats (while others strongly disagreed that this would be a problem), while one noted the *realpolitik* concern that communities – led by existing male power networks – may purposefully

select female deputies with few skills or voice, thereby willfully diluting the impact of the gender quota on public policy. Some literature also raises the concern that gender quotas such as this one can have a “crowding out” effect, creating just enough space for dominant female groups to voice their concerns to the exclusion of ethnic minority and other more disadvantaged women. Minimizing the risk of these somewhat more negative outcomes and realizing the full positive potential of the new gender quota thus represents a prime opportunity for future programming at the local government level.

Women’s representation on local council budget committees

As previously described, the budget committees of village councils play a central role in LSG decision-making, reviewing the aiyl okmoty’s budgetary suggestions and recommending budgetary priorities to the local council as a whole. As such, membership on the budget committee represents a powerful position. Unfortunately, budget committees appear to be staffed almost entirely by men. Our interviewees described having either no or only one woman on their budget committees, compared with 5 to 7 male members.. Unfortunately, this issue appears to have received no prior research attention, with no pre-existing literature found that explores the gender-distribution of local budget committee members, the *de facto* efficacy and importance of budget committees, or links between those communities that have dedicated budgetary resources to gender issues and the gender-breakdown of budget committee members. These all represent potentially fruitful areas for future research and gender-equality programming, depending on the results and findings.

In our interviews with experts, local council deputies, and female aiyl okmotys, we found that gender-responsive budgeting was rarely if ever practiced. For example, when asked if deputies on her village council considered the needs of women when determining budget priorities, one female aiyl okmoty said, “Not if I don’t bring it up. And if I do, it’s a fight. They don’t think about it at all.” As she continued describing the intricacies of her relationship with the council, it became clear that raising such issues was part of a careful calculus of how much political capital she could expend, a calculus that often favored silence on GRB in favor of more concrete “asks”.²⁴ Another female aiyl okmoty noted that, “male council deputies are always talking about infrastructure, about repaving the roads. We act like that means we’re spending the money on something good for everybody, but really it’s just what the men want.” Another respondent described how LSG funds dedicated to supporting youth in his village are expended entirely on young men’s concerns – in most recent years, building a male-only gym and inviting a high-profile male athlete to dinner at the facility. None of the youth money, he noted, had been spent on programming or facilities for young women that he could ever remember.

²⁴ This same aiyl okmoty also described how, when “higher authorities” (*biilik*, presumably the district *akim*) visited her village, he saw her and said, “Why am I talking to a woman? A woman can’t decide anything.” This incident provides insight into this female aiyl okmoty’s careful expenditure of her political capital with the local council: the akim can remove the aiyl okmoty from duty if he can show that she has failed to fulfill her duties *and* he has the support of a majority of the local council (Law on Local Self-Government § 49.7.2). At a disadvantage before the akim because of her gender, this female aiyl okmoty and others like her may be more careful to keep their council members happy to forestall a possible challenge to their authority.

Women's Representation in LSG Leadership

Within the local self-governance system, two powerful positions are those of council chairperson and aiyl okmoty. Both are elected to office by a simple majority of local council deputies. Of the 389 local self-governments for which data is available, women were elected to be council chairperson in 16 of them (or 4%) and aiyl okmoty in 11 (or 3%). Notably, no villages had both a female council chairperson and a female aiyl okmoty. Moreover, the level of female representation on the local council did not correlate to the presence of a female chairperson or female aiyl okmoty: for those villages with a female council chairperson, women represented anywhere from 4% to 21% of council deputies and on average 13%, while for villages with a female aiyl okmoty, the portion of female deputies ranged from 6% to 18%, and on average 12%. No cities were led by a female mayor, while only one – Batken's Kyzyl-Kiya – had a woman elected as chairperson of the city council (22.5% of the Kyzyl-Kiya Council deputies who elected this female chairperson were women, slightly less than the city average of 24%). Considering these statistics, it appears to be *more* difficult for women to attain positions of leadership in city politics, and highly likely that the greater prevalence of women deputies in city as opposed to village councils is not the result of any differential beliefs about women's political participation (belying the thesis that city dwellers are on average more progressive) but rather the direct result of the gender quota law.

These outcomes – and particularly the lack of any correlation between the portion of female deputies on a council and its propensity to elect or not elect female leaders – bring into question the thesis that the 30% gender quota for village councils will increase the number of women elected to be aiyl okmotys, a thesis upheld by several experts interviewed for this report. Certainly, such a result cannot be taken for granted. In the recommendations section, we thus provide ideas on supporting female candidates for aiyl okmoty and local council deputies in ways that may make them more open to appointing women to this top leadership position.

To better understand what factors enabled women to become leaders in their LSGs, we asked our interviewees what they believed had driven their success. Notably, the three female aiyl okmotys interviewed for this report all said that the number one reason they were elected was their long-standing history of attracting external funds and programming to their communities (indeed, it was striking that this factor was so emphasized by all three). It did not seem to matter that their previous work experience and grant-raising had been oriented toward “women's concerns” (e.g. education, the prevention of family violence, etc.) but rather that they had demonstrated the capacity to win and implement grant-funded programs for their communities; they noted that they had been elected by local council deputies with the explicit expectation that they would use their skills and connections to secure additional grants for their communities. These women-leaders had all spent several years working in local government service prior to their appointment as aiyl okmoty, while the youngest among them (a 34-year old aiyl bashchi) had her career path paved for her by her father-in-law, who was a senior member of the local council.

Ongoing challenges for female leaders

Women's struggles did not end upon becoming leaders within their communities. On the contrary, the female aiyl okmotys that we interviewed shared stories of public humiliation,

harassment, and obstruction strategies that had undermined their performance and their desire to lead. All described grudging comments from male community members and council deputies that women cannot lead and that it is shameful for a man to bow to a woman, comments that did not cease (though sometimes waned) over their years of service. One aiyl okmoty said that the greatest challenge of being a female leader was that she could not enter the mosque, and so at times the male deputies of her local council would set up shop inside of it to discuss policy issues and make governance decisions. She recounted becoming so frustrated by this situation that she once donned a head-scarf and full-body cover, entered the mosque, and badgered the deputies until they came out. Female deputies recounted similar stories of being told to “go sit at home”, particularly if and when they pushed for specific programs or funds. These women all faced direct, angry challenges to their authority during the unrest of the past month – primarily from large groups of young, unemployed men – and sounded tired, worn-out, and unsure if they would remain in local government in any form beyond the 2021 elections.

LSG Responses to Gender-Based Violence

Under both the Law on the Prevention and Protection against Family Violence and the Law on Local Self-Government, LSGs have a central role to play in preventing gender-based violence in their communities. And yet even those LSG representatives most sensitive to the problem of GBV and most desiring to fix it said their efforts fell short. In one indicative description, an aiyl okmoty stated that,

GBV is a huge problem. ... We have all the institutions starting at the national level down to us [the LSG], we have all the programs.... We have a Local Commission for the Prevention of Domestic Violence [LCPDV]. But when members of the LCPDV go to people’s houses, no one lets them in. If aiyl okmoty staff invites them [citizens] to talk about family violence, no one comes. No one will talk to them [LCPDV staff]. And then the young married women (*kelins*) who are beaten hide from the LCPDV. They’re embarrassed. They won’t say anything openly.

This aiyl okmoty stated repeatedly and forcefully that gender-based violence could only be prevented by widespread change in what she called “mentality”, i.e. the social norms whereby this violence is considered acceptable and the beliefs that justify it. She was skeptical of the capacity of institutional structures – such as the LCPDVs – to have any impact on GBV, though she did note that additional financing and more skilled psychological staff (particularly those familiar with trauma psychology) could make positive changes on the margins. A (potential) counter example, however, was a second aiyl okmoty interviewed for this report, who had just secured funding for a women’s support center in her village and fretted about whether a male aiyl okmoty would be able to understand and implement the project were she to be voted out of office by the post-election local council.

Local council deputies who took part in focus groups for this report generally did not identify the prevention of domestic violence as a top priority for their communities, instead emphasizing the need to enhance employment opportunities, secure basic medical staff (many noted they lacked family doctors), and put in place nurseries and childcare facilities. When

asked directly what programming their LSG engages in to prevent domestic violence, those female deputies who responded said that:

1. “We hold explanatory sessions. For example, that if you’re getting married the imam will ask for your passport and if you’re not yet 18, you can’t get married.” “Bride kidnapping has decreased.”
2. “We keep track of the families of migrants.” “We don’t have any bride kidnapping, after our explanatory sessions.”
3. “They [families where DV is present] work with specialists. Many families are separated [i.e. live in different places] because of unemployment.”
4. “We explain things, we have presentation slides.”
5. “There are local courts. And various support programs. Explanatory work is being conducted.”

In sum, the most prevalent form of programming the prevent domestic violence appears to be giving speeches and “explanatory sessions.” The male deputies who took part in our focus group were unfamiliar with any programming in their villages for the prevention of domestic violence.

Of those women who experience physical or sexual violence in the Kyrgyz Republic, some 39% seek help (National Statistics Committee 2013, p. 264). Of these, the vast majority seek help from their own birth families (83%) and their husband’s families (33%) (id. at p. 265).²⁵ In comparison, only 5% reported actually going to the police (id). This is significantly lower than the percent of women who reported that they *would* go to the police were they to experience domestic violence, which stood at 37% in a 2014 survey (UNDP p. 53). In this same survey, 22% of women said they would go to court, 19% nowhere, and 5% to the Aksakal Court, these being the three top selections after the police (id). It seems that many women overestimate the likelihood that they would seek help were they to experience domestic violence, while some may not conceptualize the violence they have suffered as falling into this category.

While much programmatic attention has been focused on improving police practices, setting up LCPDVs and other institutions to work with victims of violence, and raising awareness on legal rights, the patterns described above would suggest that women’s birth families play a pivotal (and under-supported) role in their attempts to escape violence. LSGs may benefit from adding into their domestic violence prevention efforts – such as they are – programmatic support for the families of young women, and particularly those families where one of their daughters is in a situation of family violence. Specific potential programmatic efforts could be, for example, to help women’s birth family members understand the psychology of trauma (and why, much to their frustration, their daughters are likely to return to their abusers repeatedly), provide them with simple “do’s and don’ts” for interacting with someone who has recently been victimized (e.g. common questions and comments to avoid, however well-intentioned they may be), offer social support and streamlined access to the educational system for the children of women victims of violence who are returning to live with their birth families, and

²⁵ Respondents were allowed to select multiple options of whom they turned to for help, and thus the statistical numbers add up to more than 100%.

possibly even counselling (or a “what to expect” guide) to facilitate a smooth relationship between the returning birth-daughter and any daughters-in-law who live in the household (her return, particularly if she has children, will put an additional strain on these daughters-in-law, the youngest of whom will be expected to assume most of the additional domestic labor from having a new household member and children).

Unrest in Kyrgyzstan’s LSGs and its Gender Dynamics

As noted at the outset of this report, the past month was a time of extraordinary unrest across the Kyrgyz Republic. All of the LSG representatives that we spoke with for this report had experienced challenges to their authority or the authority of their government apparatus within the weeks and days before we spoke with them. The experiences were deeply gender- and age-encoded: one woman described a “group of young men wearing *kalpaks* [a man’s hat that is a symbol of the Kyrgyz ethnicity], who came to the main square and demanded we install another young, uneducated man [as *aiyl okmoty*]. The son of a rich man, nothing else.” Another female interviewee similarly described groups of men demanding that their political desires be met, summing up her experience by saying, “Youth think they can get anything by yelling the loudest. ‘By yelling or by force, we get what we want,’ that’s how they think these days.” These women had retained power, though only by avoiding their offices on the day of the most violent and vocal protests and emerging later, with groups of community supporters nearby, to re-assume office. They now face a particularly unclear future, as it is not known when the local council elections that were planned for the 2021 spring will be held.

A common refrain of LSG officials that we spoke with was that the protesters and youth were uneducated, interested only in grabbing power for their personal gain, and naively serving the whims of criminal actors. Considering the protests from a gender lens, one aspect that becomes painfully clear is that though these young men claimed to speak for “the people” in the face of corrupt power, there are no women among the crowds (or members of minority ethnic groups), none of the appointees that they would have put in office were women, and none of the issues that they raised in their complaints had to do with improving education, healthcare, social services, or any number of other local public services – they are rather more interested in acquiring office and government-owned businesses. As one expert summed up, “Women were completely forgotten” in the protests, “their interests were trampled.”

If a silver lining can be gleaned from these events, it is perhaps their illustration of just how important truly inclusive representative democracy is, including at the local level, and their opening of a window to something new. While the protests emerged to push for fairer electoral processes, their rapid decline into strength-based struggles for political office deeply undermined the legitimacy of both the protesters and the individuals that they brought to power. This provides an opportunity for all citizens – and in particular women – to reflect on the wisdom of allowing only a small portion of society control the vast amount of political and economic power in the country, and to use this moment of weakened legitimacy of these power structures to push for change and inclusion. For female leaders within LSG structures and those women interested in making a positive impact on their communities, now is the time when the “old ways” are still in operation but drastically delegitimized while “new ways” such as the 30% gender quota are propelling them forward.

Recommendations

A. Close gaps in LSG-relevant legislation and regulations and strengthen institutions	
	A.1. Conduct a comprehensive analysis of legal-normative documents related to the functioning of LSGs – including the laws and regulations governing GAMSUMO, the Law on Local Self-Government, LSG Charters, and LSG socio-economic development plans – to (i) identify areas and opportunities to enhance the gender-inclusivity and gender-responsiveness of these documents and (ii) provide detailed technical support recommending specific changes to the LSG legal-regulatory framework; a. Part of this analysis could be oriented toward identifying the optimal national-level partner to work with in engaging LSGs on the promotion of gender-equality. Each of those identified in this report has strengths and weaknesses, and none stood out as an ideal;
	A.2. To the extent that the above-recommended research identifies GAMSUMO as an effective partner for work with LSGs, introduce obligations for GAMSUMO to support LSGs in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment: a. Introduce into the Regulation on the Collegium of the State Agency for Local Self-Government and Interethnic Relations under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic an explicit mandate for the Collegium to develop strategies, guidance, and decisions on the promotion of gender equality at the LSG level (ideally, this would be an addition to the “basic tasks and functions of the Collegium” listed in § 2); b. Develop a protocol for collaboration and cooperation between GAMSUMO and the National Gender Council, including regular joint meetings and mutual reporting requirements to one another; c. Place a gender focal point within GAMSUMO, preferably making this a full-time position wholly dedicated to supporting LSGs with their (extensive) responsibilities to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence;
	A.3. Enhance GAMSUMO’s likelihood to prioritize gender equality and the promotion of women’s rights by working with higher political authorities, such as encouraging the Vice Prime Minister to issue an order outlining specific gender-promotion initiatives for GAMSUMO to implement, deadlines for their completion, and metrics for ongoing monitoring of progress;
	A.4. Improve the gender-inclusivity of LSG charters by, for example: a. Collecting and researching pre-existing charter language, and particularly the types of guarantees and programs described therein for gender-equality and gender-inclusivity; b. Conduct community-wide, broad-based campaigning to involve citizens in the process of changing their local charter. This work could serve as the focal point or a concrete outcome of a broader social-norm change campaign at the local level to

	enhance acceptance of norms promoting women’s public participation (see recommendation B.1 as well); c. Provide technical guidance on the types of changes to charters that could be beneficial to enhancing gender-inclusivity and gender-equality and recommendations on precise charter language, including formalizing clear requirements for gender-responsive budgeting;
	A.5. Engage local councils to improve their socio-economic development planning, with a particular eye toward the inclusion of metrics related to gender-equality in socio-economic development plans (SEDPs), inclusion of women in the process of SEDP development (via public meetings and surveys, for example), and specific consideration given to programs to enhance women’s opportunities at the local level. Pre-existing materials, such as the 2018 Methodological Guidance for LSGs on Socio-Economic Development Planning issued by the Ministry of the Economy and GAMSUMO, could help jump-start this process;
	A.6. Continue ongoing review of LSG-level institutions meant to support women – such as LCPDVs – and identify ways to scale-up any emerging best practices across localities and reform emerging challenges in those that are struggling (see also recommendation D.1);
	A.7. Given the longevity and prominence of Women’s Committees, consider ways of making them more attractive and relevant to young female participants, and more responsive to the needs of women of all age-groups and backgrounds.
B. Increase women’s and girls’ participation in local planning and budgeting	
	B.1. Respondents were roundly in agreement that widespread beliefs that hold women to be in second place were the core barrier to women’s equal public participation and key drivers of gender-based violence. In this light, long-term, intensive social-norm change programming at the community level is key to enhancing women’s capacity to participate in public affairs and should be a programming priority; a. A focus of norm-change work should be men, with efforts to reform their beliefs about domestic labor, the role of women and men in the household and society, and the nature of leadership;
	B.2. Facilitate and incentivize women’s participation in LSG meetings by providing childcare during the meetings, transport to and from public meetings, positive feedback to women when they speak up and share their opinions, and positive feedback to men when they support the women in their lives (and particularly the young women in their lives, such as their wives and daughters) in speaking up. These efforts will make it easier for young women to attend, both through the direct support of shouldering some of their childcare burden and the indirect support of decreasing their families’ reasons for resistance. Work with LSG representatives and community groups to ensure that such accommodations

	become standard practice and sustainable after the completion of external programming support; a. Consider holding “women only” local planning and discussion sessions, where women can meet with female LSG leaders in a female-only environment. Many women may find it easier to express themselves, particularly on sensitive topics such as family violence, sexual harassment, and reproductive health needs. This may also be a more acceptable forum for women from particularly conservative backgrounds; b. Seek input from women – and particularly young women – on the specific tasks that keep them from attending LSG meetings (e.g. Washing clothes? Cooking meals? Being present in the house to serve tea if a neighbor stops by unexpectedly?) and thoughts that keep them from speaking up if they go (e.g. Embarrassed of what others will say? Afraid of expressing an opinion that household members don’t like?). Engage these women in a collaborative and experimental process of addressing these challenges (e.g. via design thinking), testing their ideas, documenting the results, and scaling-up creative solutions to the time poverty and mentality blocks that can keep them from entering the civic space.
	B.3. To the extent that “the most moral family” or “best household” competitions are the best way to reach a large swath of women who are otherwise unengaged with the community – as several LSG representatives claimed – use these competitions to spread information about upcoming public meetings (through prepared handouts and fliers targeted expressly at women participants), to speak with these women about their community-relevant concerns and interests (whether through informal chats or prepared brief survey questions), and to poke fun at the gender stereotypes that these competitions reinforce. LSGs could also include household members’ participation in LSG meetings, planning, and processes as a criteria for winning these competitions, with additional points for women members’ active pre-competition participation;
	B.4. Work with young women to help them understand the local budgeting process, including showing them how much funding is dedicated to “youth”, what this money has been spent on in previous years, and examples of how this money could be spent in support of young women (collaborative awareness-raising and participatory development of these ideas could make this process more effective). Supply them with the legal and technical knowledge to present their ideas to their local councils and aiyl okmotys and push for funding; a. Similar efforts could also be started with school children, supporting them in identifying public priorities of interest to them (such as playgrounds, school facilities, and more) and teaching them how to engage in the political process from an early age;
	B.5. Given the extremely low level of ethnic minorities’ representation in LSGs, additional efforts should be made to include ethnic minority women (and men) in LSG planning and

	budgeting. These efforts should go beyond quotas or targets for minority representation in program activities, and extend to giving ethnic minority individuals meaningful voice, including giving them the space to push for programming that is uniquely in their interest and validating that these interests are of communal import (for example, voicing the need for materials or programming in their native languages, funding for programming about their cultures, etc).
C. Facilitate women’s ascension to key leadership positions and successful fulfillment of their duties	
	C.1. Work with male and female local council deputies alike to increase their capacity and effectiveness, develop an ethic of public service in their work, and develop their own village-level hiring metrics outlining the skills, qualifications, and qualities that they seek in a council chairperson and aiyl okmoty. Encouraging deputies to use these frameworks when appointing people to positions of authority may help to make the process more meritocratic and less based on pre-existing gender assumptions;
	C.2. Actively work with female council members and activists to prepare them to stand for election to the position of aiyl okmoty, if not after the 2021 elections then in the next election cycle (presumably in 2025);
	C.3. Given that women’s capacity to raise funds for their communities was the first and foremost skill sought out by local deputies when appointing women to higher office, work with young women already in public service (i.e. teachers, doctors, nurses, local bureaucratic staff, etc.) to teach them about program design, grant-writing, and working with the public to identify community needs. These efforts could increase young women’s public profile, increase the pipeline of future local female leaders, and improve the LSG’s core public services in the process;
	C.4. To the extent that laws against workplace harassment are adopted in the Kyrgyz Republic, consider working with male LSG representatives (and potentially district and regional authorities) to make clear the unacceptability of gender-discriminatory speech in the workplace and gender-discriminatory practices. To the extent that specific cases of gender-discriminatory firings or mistreatment of female government employees are identified, consider providing legal support to bring high-profile cases against wrongdoers.
D. Support LSGs to prevent and protect against gender-based violence in their communities	
	D.1. Echoing recommendation A.4, conduct exploratory research to better understand what LSG-level mechanism(s) work best to prevent domestic violence (whether LCPDVs or others), and how these mechanisms can be scaled-up across the country;

	D.2. Consider concrete ways in which LSG authorities and institutions such as LCPDVs could work with women's birth families, improving their capacity to support their daughters as they try to escape situations of domestic violence. Consider collaborative development of such programs with women victims of domestic violence and their birth families, pilot ideas on a small scale, and document which strategies make a difference for potential application on a larger scale;
	D.3. Few LSGs are equipped with the knowledge, staff, expertise, or sensitivity to prevent and respond to domestic violence, though they have been delegated these tasks under the <i>Law on Local Self-Government</i> and <i>Law on the Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence</i>. To enhance their capacity to meet these obligations: a. Work with village councils to help them understand the precise nature of the programming and financing needed to effectively counter domestic violence at the local level, and to introduce necessary changes into LSG charters and budgetary documents to authorize such spending; b. Work with aiyl okmotys to identify ways to attract the psychological, legal, and medical resources necessary to counteract domestic violence at the local level; i. Provide aiyl okmotys with practical trainings on local budgeting, authorized spending, and examples of successful LSGs' use of resources for anti-GBV programming and domestic violence prevention, giving them the concrete tools that they need to tackle these challenges; ii. Promote knowledge-sharing tours among aiyl okmotys, bringing those from villages working to improve their GBV programming to villages that have successfully put in place systems, institutions, and norms to prevent such violence. These kinds of in-country learning tours could include other relevant programming topics and provide a unique opportunity for network-building among distant aiyl okmotys; c. Consider devising a handbook or guidance document for aiyl okmotys and probationary officers with ideas on community service projects for domestic violence offenders and special concerns when dealing with them. As noted in the separate gender analysis report on the rule of law, many domestic violence offenders are now sentenced to probation, with LSGs tasked with helping probation officers devise community service programs. LSGs could consider, for example, participation in batterer intervention programs (BIPs) as a form of community service, being sure to use those versions of BIPs that have shown actual results. Probation officers, meanwhile, should be well versed in domestic violence dynamics and aware of when DV recidivism constitutes reason for an offender to be sent to prison.

Appendix 1: Methodology

Research for this report was conducted over October 2020 and included a desk review of literature and normative-legal acts, interviews with experts, and focus group discussions with male and female deputies of local councils. Overall, 4 civil society leaders and 4 international development organization staff members were interviewed on their work with local self-governments and the promotion of gender equality; 3 female aiyl okmotys were interviewed on their paths to political leadership, challenges while in office, and orientation toward women's advancement in their public work. 10 female local council members and 3 male local council members took part in 3 separate focus group discussions about their villages' budgeting processes, the challenges that local men and women face, and their priorities as local council deputies. A comparison across the responses in male and female deputies' responses provided insight into the different levels of awareness and interest that male and female deputies have in women's challenges at the local level.

Given the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews and focus group discussions were conducted remotely, either by Zoom (for FGDs and interviews with experts from international development organizations) or phone (for interviews with aiyl okmotys and civil society leaders). Interviews in English were conducted by the author, while interviews in Russian and Kyrgyz were conducted by the lead field researcher, Baktygul Kapalova. All research instruments – i.e. interview and focus group discussion guides – were written originally in English and translated to both Russian and Kyrgyz; some language or phrases taken directly from Kyrgyzstani legislation were used in their original Russian format in all research instrument versions.

Table 1. Respondents

Research Activity	Respondent Organization / Category	Female	Male	Oblast(s) of residence	Age / Age range
Expert interview	LSG Aiyl Okmoty	3	0	Chui (2) Issyk-Kul (1)	34, 48, 52
	Public Foundation 'Abiyir El'	2	0	Issyk-Kul	
	Public Foundation 'Activist'	1	0	Batken	
	Public Foundation 'Demilgeluu Ishker Ayaldar'	1	0	Osh	
	Public Foundation 'Women's Support Center'	1	0	Bishkek	
	OSCE	1	0	Bishkek	
	UNDP	1	0	Bishkek	
	USAID	1	1	Bishkek	
Sub-total		11	1		
FGD	Female local council deputies (2 FGDs)	10	0	Batken (1) Chui (2) Issyk-Kul (2) Jalal-Abad (1) Osh Oblast (1) Naryn (1) Talas (2)	
	Male local council deputies (1 FGD)	0	3	Batken (1) Jalal-Abad (1) Chui (1)	40 25 32
Sub-total		10	3		

Total		21	4		
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In addition, data from the Central Elections Committee (CEC) website was used to calculate metrics such as the gender-, age-, and ethnic breakdown of local council deputies, council chairpeople, and aiyl okmotys across the country. The CEC dataset contains separate lists of many of the deputies elected in the local council elections of December, March, and May 2016, accounting for 410 village councils and 27 city councils. This data includes the birth dates, gender, ethnicity, and political party affiliation of the council deputies listed. To produce the statistics presented in this report, the author and research assistant Joelle Besch downloaded district-by-district local council deputy lists from the CEC website over the last two weeks of November 2020, compiled the data into a single spreadsheet, and thereby generated information on ethnic minority women's and men's representation on local councils, the age distribution of council members by gender, and more. Some notes on the contents of this dataset are in order:

- It is representative of 410 local councils, or a little less than 91% of the country's 453 LSG units, 27 of 29 cities (93%), Bishkek and Osh. Given the separate legal status of Bishkek and Osh, their data is not included in the statistics presented in this report;
 - Aiyl aimaks (AAs) missing from the dataset include those of Leilek District in Batken, Jumgal district in Naryn, and Alamedin District in Chui. Though links are included on the CEC website for AA data from these districts, the linked files provide information for other localities (Kyzyl Kiya City Council, Ak Talaa District, and Kara Buura District, respectively);
 - City council data missing from the dataset is that of Isfana and Batken, both in Batken region;
- In the CEC dataset, age data is missing for 9 of the 6,182 deputies (or 0.15%) while for 6 of the deputies (0.10%) the birth year is facially incorrect, as the deputies would have been 4, 4, 10, 18, 18, and 19 years old at the time of the 2016 elections. These were likely data-entry mistakes, and while they represent only a very small portion of the information in the dataset, it is worth remembering that in such a large body of information there are likely additional typos. Given the above, the statistics on youth representation presented in this report is based on age data for 6,167 of 6,182 village deputies (99.76%);
- The composition of local councils appears to change between major elections, with many of the female deputies interviewed for this report saying that they attained their seats only 2, 3, or 4 years ago. The data is thus representative of a moment in time, but given ongoing changes is not a precise reflection of the composition of local councils as of today;
- As of November 2020, the underlying data could be accessed on the CEC website at: https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/vybory_shailoolor/Mestnyh_kenesheyJergiliktyy_kenes/Deputaty_mestnyh_keneshey/

In addition, the CEC's database of "Elected Heads of Executive Organs of Local Governance" from 2017 was cross-referenced with the data on city- and village-councils to explore how many women were voted in to head their local councils and serve as aiyl okmoty, and how this correlated to the portion of female deputies on the local council.

- The CEC’s database of “Elected Heads of Executive Organs of Local Governance” is available at:
https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/vybory_shailoolor/Mestnyh_kenesheyJergiliktyy_kenesh/KALENDARNYY_-690/

Finally, the Ministry of Justice’s [database of legal-normative acts](#) was accessed from October 15 – 25 to search for and download LSG Charters. 22 Charters were identified, and a keyword search was conducted for the words “woman/women”, “sex” (as in sex-based discrimination, or a ban on it), “violence” (as in family violence, and the prevention of), “equal”, and subsequently “competition” (to explore the prevalence of articles for “most moral family competitions” and the like). Charters were then reviewed in full to identify any additional topics of areas of relevance to gender equality. The data derived from these keyword searches, including the relevant articles identified, were entered into Excel to generate the overall percentages used in this report.

Appendix 2: Sources Cited

Normative Legal Acts

[Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)

[Budget Code of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)

[Law on Aksakal Courts](#)

[Law on Crime Prevention in the Kyrgyz Republic](#)

[Law on Local Self-Government](#)

[Law on the Election of Local Council Members](#)

[Law on the Local State Administration](#)

[Law on the Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)

[Law on the Prevention and Protection against Family Violence](#)

[Law on the State Civil Service and Municipal Service](#)

[Law on the Status of Deputies of Local Councils](#)

[National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality by 2020 of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)

[Plan for Immediate Activities to Prevent Family Violence in the Kyrgyz Republic](#)

[Program for the Development of Local Self-Government in the Kyrgyz Republic \(2018 – 2023\)](#)

[Regulation on the Collegium of the State Agency for Local Self-Government and Interethnic Relations under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)

[Regulation on the Government Agency for Local Self-Government and Inter-Ethnic Relations of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)

[Regulation on the National Council for Women and Gender Development under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic](#)

[Sample Charter for Public Prevention Centers](#)

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