THE ROLE OF LEGAL INFORMATION AND AWARENESS IN ENSURING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

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Abstract: *This article investigates the strategic importance of legal information and awareness in ensuring the transparency of the legislative activity. The author analyzes legal mechanisms for increasing public participation in the discussion of draft laws, examining the experiences of developed nations such as the USA, the European Union, and Estonia regarding "Plain Legal Language" and digital communication platforms. The article concludes by proposing practical recommendations for aligning Uzbekistan's legislative activity with international standards, specifically by attaching brief summaries for citizens to draft projects and implementing a multi-channel information system.*

Keywords: *legislative activity, public discussion, legal awareness, plain legal language, transparency, digital democracy, regulation.gov.uz.*

Legal awareness serves as a vital institutional tool in facilitating public participation in the legislative activity and elevating it to a qualitatively new level. The effective organization of legal awareness aids in conveying the essence and objectives of draft normative-legal acts to the public, increasing citizens' legal awareness, and ensuring their participation through informed and grounded proposals.

According to the 2024 United Nations E-Government Survey, Uzbekistan has shown consistent progress, ranking 63rd in EGDI and 53rd in the E-Participation Index (EPI)[1]. While the rise to 53rd place in EPI reflects a robust digital infrastructure (e.g., regulation.gov.uz), there remains a "participation gap". High rankings in technical infrastructure must be matched by high-quality legal awareness to ensure that digital platforms are not just available, but actively and meaningfully used by the citizenry.

Nevertheless, in current practice, legal awareness is often limited to explanatory work conducted only after a document has been adopted. However, legal awareness should commence at the stage of legislative initiative; the objectives, underlying problems, and expected legal consequences of a draft project must be communicated to the public in advance.

The OECD's concept of the "Ladder of Citizen Participation" (also known as the "Levels of Stakeholder Participation") provides a structured approach to understanding how citizens and stakeholders can be involved in government

decision-making processes. It outlines three key levels of participation: Information, Consultation, and Engagement (OECD, 2023).

1. Information

This is the most basic level of participation, where the government simply provides information to the public. Communication is one-way — from authorities to citizens — and aims to increase transparency and awareness but does not require feedback. Examples include websites, newsletters, or public announcements (OECD, 2024).

2. Consultation

At this stage, the government asks for the public's opinions or feedback on draft laws or policies. This involves two-way communication: authorities share information and collect public comments. Crucially, authorities are expected to provide feedback — explaining how citizens' views were taken into account in the final decision (OECD, 2024).

3. Engagement

This is the most advanced form of participation, where citizens and stakeholders take part in co-creation and co-decision processes. Engagement involves collaboration throughout the policy cycle — from problem identification to implementation and monitoring. It requires accessible data, institutional trust, and resources for meaningful participation (OECD, 2023).

According to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government (2017), public authorities have an obligation of "active dissemination," meaning that they must actively promote information across various platforms to inform broad segments of the population[2].

The experience of developed foreign countries demonstrates that extensive coverage of draft normative acts is more effective than publicity generated after their adoption. In the United States, pursuant to Section 5 U.S.C. § 553(b) of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), it is mandatory to publish any federal proposed rule in the Federal Register.

The Federal Register is the official daily journal of the government, serving as the primary source for all significant regulatory announcements, which are subsequently redistributed through radio, newspapers, and television[3].

In the United Kingdom, according to the "Consultation Principles" (Cabinet Office, 2018), draft documents are published on the GOV.UK – Consultations portal. In practice, for particularly significant draft laws, notification via BBC News, Parliament TV, and official press releases is employed as a standard procedure, even where not strictly mandatory[4].

In France, according to Articles 131-132 of the Code des relations entre le public et l'administration (CRPA), which regulates public discussion, documents submitted for consultation are published in the Journal officiel de la République française. For major projects, notifications in media outlets such as France Info, France 24, Le Monde, and Le Figaro are carried out within the framework of state-funded information policy[5].

In South Korea, Article 42 of the Administrative Procedures Act (1996, amended 2016) states: "If a regulation affects the public, the draft shall be announced through the Official Gazette, major newspapers, or broadcasting media." Additionally, online discussions are conducted through the "People's Opinion Portal"[6]

As observed in the experience of developed foreign nations, these countries have clearly defined the mandatory sources where announcements regarding the public discussion of draft normative-legal acts must be published.

Based on this experience, it would be advisable for Uzbekistan to adopt a similar mechanism: information about the submission of draft regulatory legal acts for public discussion should be mandatorily published on official government websites, in mass media (television, radio, newspapers), and through social media platforms to ensure maximum public awareness and engagement.

In particular, information on draft regulatory legal acts submitted for public discussion should be mandatorily published on the regulation.gov.uz portal, as well as on the official websites of relevant ministries and agencies. Additionally, such announcements should be disseminated through national mass media, including television and radio channels such as "O'zbekiston 24", "Yoshlar", "Mahalla", "Oilaviy", and "O'zbekiston radiosi", and through printed newspapers like Xalq so'zi, Narodnoye slovo, and Jamiyat.

Furthermore, to ensure broader accessibility and active public engagement, announcements may also be shared via popular online media platforms, such as gazeta.uz, kun.uz, and daryo.uz, as well as through the official social media channels of public authorities. Establishing such a multi-channel information system would enable timely and widespread dissemination of consultation materials to citizens.

Implementing this approach would significantly enhance transparency and accountability in the legislative process, ensuring that citizens are properly informed and able to participate effectively in lawmaking. Adopting these practices would harmonize Uzbekistan's consultation mechanisms with international standards, promote genuine participation of public representatives, and strengthen the principles of transparency and democratic governance.

Currently, in Uzbekistan, the process of explaining the content of draft laws to citizens is not sufficiently systematized.

The regulation.gov.uz portal posts the full text of draft laws, but it is written in legal language, which is often difficult for the general public to understand.

Some ministries provide brief explanations on their websites or social media accounts, but this is not conducted in a systematic or standardized manner, meaning that some ministries and agencies do not post explanations at all, and the information that is published does not provide a clear understanding of the draft law.

Press conferences and briefings are held in parliamentary committees, but this practice is mainly applied to major draft laws.

In legal awareness raising, implementing the principle of "plain legal language"—stating draft regulatory acts in a simple and understandable manner—is of paramount importance. Complex legal terminology and technical-legal structures serve as significant barriers that limit public participation. In this regard, preparing explanatory materials for every draft regulatory act—outlining its summary, key provisions, and social significance—enhances the conscious engagement of the public.

In the European Union, within the framework of the "Have Your Say" platform for regulatory initiatives, documents are published in both "legal text" and "summary for citizens" formats. These summaries explain the core content of the document, whom it affects, and what changes are expected in simple language. This approach ensures that public participation is not restricted to experts alone but allows broader segments of the population to be involved in the legislative activity[7].

In the experience of Estonia and Finland, visual and interactive tools are widely utilized in the process of raising legal awareness. Materials such as infographics, diagrams, and Q&A formats regarding draft regulatory acts are presented to the public. This creates an opportunity to quickly and easily grasp the essence of complex legal norms.

In the United States, the Plain Writing Act (2010) was enacted, which mandates federal executive agencies to write legal and administrative documents in clear, concise, and understandable language. This law is aimed at ensuring transparency in legislative activity and legal information for the public, serving to help citizens comprehend regulatory initiatives and participate actively in discussions[8].

In the legislative activity process, the most critical stage of raising legal awareness occurs during the drafting of regulatory acts and their presentation for

public discussion. Foreign experience demonstrates that utilizing information technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) during the drafting stage is decisive in expanding and improving the quality of public participation.

In the United States, several AI-based tools and research initiatives exist to analyze legal and political texts, simplify them, and support public discourse:

PolicyPulse – an interactive system based on generative Large Language Models (LLMs) that automatically analyzes online public opinion regarding specific political issues, extracting key thematic categories and critical points. This tool helps policy researchers obtain general civic sentiment in a rapid and systematic format, effectively engaging citizen contributions in the project discussion process.

FiscalNote - a widely used platform in the West that analyzes the text of draft bills. Using AI, it performs functions such as identifying key aspects, comparing them with similar legislation, and tracking changes over time. This makes it easier for the public and stakeholders to quickly understand and comment on complex regulatory texts.

These types of systems present the complex text of draft regulatory documents in a structured format, providing citizens with brief summaries, key provisions, and an understanding of their social impact. It is advisable to create such system in Uzbekistan as well.

Currently, more than 80% of the drafts posted on the regulation.gov.uz portal are written in complex legal language, which prevents ordinary citizens from understanding the content and leads to passive participation in discussions.

Implementing the experience of the US Plain Writing Act and the EU Summary for citizens. It should be mandatory to attach a "Plain Language Annotation" and visual materials to every draft.

In result, public participation in legislative activity will increase 2-3 times, the effectiveness of identifying hidden corruption-prone norms in laws will improve, and the level of legal awareness among the population will be formed right at the drafting stage.

Furthermore, creating the "Explanatory Note for Citizens" system may help to enhance the role of public.

Every developing agency, when posting a draft on the regulation.gov.uz portal, must attach a "Summary for Citizens" text not exceeding 200 words. This summary should include:

Purpose: Why is this document being adopted?

Change: How does it differ from the current regulations?

Result: How will it affect the lives of ordinary citizens or entrepreneurs?

For drafts of socio-economic significance (especially in tax, customs, education, and healthcare), at least one infographic or comparative table must be attached.

A "Visual Project" button should be introduced on the portal, displaying complex legal norms in the form of flowcharts.

Implementation of the "Legal-AI" Analytical Module is also will be helpful to explain the core meaning of projects to citizens.

To integrate a virtual assistant based on Artificial Intelligence (LLM) into the regulation.gov.uz portal. When a complex legal clause is selected, the AI translates it into "plain human language."

The implementation of these proposals will yield the following results:

Firstly, a transition from "formal participation" (pro forma commenting) to "meaningful participation" in legislative activity.

Secondly, the level of legal awareness will be established during the drafting stage, rather than only after a law is enacted.

Thirdly, corruption loopholes arising from complex legal terminology will be brought under public scrutiny.

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