



# Community Action News

## A Quarterly Publication of the Youth and Community Action Program



Volume 1, Issue 1

Oct-Dec 2007



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YCAP is a USAID-funded 5 year program that began in October 2004, and works with 80 communities throughout Armenia to increase citizen participation to address issues of public concern. The program provides organizational assistance for communities to establish Youth Action Clubs and Community Action Committees. YCAP does not provide funding for community projects; activities highlighted in this newsletter are organized by the communities and funded locally or by other donor organizations. Disclaimer: This publication is made possible through the support of the United States Agency for International Development under the Youth and Community Action Program implemented by the Academy for Educational Development. The views and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

### Aragats Village CAC Addresses Issues Raised by Community Members: Meeting with State Cadastre Committee

As one method to solicit input from the village residents to address public issues, the Aragats Community Action Committee (CAC) in Aragatsotn Region has strategically placed nine suggestion boxes throughout the community. A recent issue brought to the CACs attention through the boxes was the numerous complaints concerning the inaccuracies in measurements of land and other property by the regional cadastre offices.

To address this issue, the CAC met with the staff of the village Municipality and suggested organizing a meeting with Mr. Manuk Vardanyan, Head of the State Cadastre Committee, to further discuss the problem. Having heard about this initiative, the residents of the neighboring villages, also having many complaints concerning the work of the regional cadastre offices, asked the CAC if it would be possible for them to participate in the meeting. The CAC honored this request and invited community leaders from the 25 villages in the Aparan region. They also invited Mr. Lyova Khachatryan, a National

Assembly Deputy. The meeting agenda focused on the need to improve the process for purchase and sale of property, and the need to redress the past mistakes made by the regional cadastre offices in the land and property ownership passports of the residents. At the meeting the CAC presented the complaints of the community, the consequences of the wrongly stated sizes of the land-plots and other real estate and property owned by

originated from the mistakes in citizens' ownership documents. Having heard the issues, Mr. Vardanyan said he would make arrangements to form a special committee to thoroughly study the issue and, with the village municipalities and village residents, correct the inaccuracies in the ownership passports. The process has been started, and the fact that their voices were heard has inspired the community residents and increased their trust in the CAC.



Meeting of cadastre representatives and village mayors organized by Aragats CAC (Aragatsotn Region) at the Aragats CAC Action Center

### "Three Days at the Akhuryan YAC": Youth Civic Education Program



Participants of the "Three Days at Akhuryan YAC" Youth Civic Education Program implemented by Akhuryan YAC

In November, the Akhuryan Youth Action Club (YAC) in Shirak Region implemented "Three Days at Akhuryan YAC" Youth Civic Education Program (Nov 9-11). They widely announced the activity in their community and selected 20 young people through an application and interview process to participate. The three-day intensive training program provided the young people with knowledge on citizenship and civic rights,

democracy, human rights, cultural education, non-formal education, involvement of young people in public services and volunteer work, youth state policy, and other subjects. Most of the sessions were conducted by the YAC members Arthur Najaryan, Seda Darbinyan and Shahane Gasparyan, who had previously participated in the YCAP "Yerevan in Five Days" Civic Education Program and were now passing on their (continued on page 2)

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#### About the YCAP Communities:

- There are currently 32 active Youth Action Clubs and 37 Community Action Committees throughout the country
- The smallest community is Zovashen village (Kotayk Region) with 196 residents and the largest is Dilijan town (Tavush Region) with 16,202\*
- Over 1,500 volunteers are participating in the program and they have implemented over 1,000 civic actions over the past three years

\*Census 2001, <http://www.armstat.am>

## First Annual Lejan Harvest Festival: A celebration of abundance

In October, Lejan YAC (Lori Region) organized a community Harvest Festival. As the Harvest Festival was a first-time event, YAC members conducted a survey to find out if community residents would participate. The YAC members received positive feedback from the residents, who were enthusiastic and ready to take part in the festival.

On October 6, the residents of all the community districts gathered in the center of the village and decorated tables that the YAC members had set up and signposted for each district. The tables were beautifully decorated and displayed many varieties of crops, vegetables,

fruit, and food prepared from the produce grown by the community residents.

During the one-day event, the community tasted food and delicacies prepared by each other, exchanged their experiences and recipes, sang songs, danced, and recited poetry. There were also many guests invited from neighboring villages and towns.

At the end of the day, the community members were pleased with the outcome of the event, thanked the YAC members for the excellent idea and work, and asked them to make the Harvest Festival celebration a tradition in the community every year.



Harvest Festival organized by Lejan YAC members (Lori Region)

## Akhuryan YAC

(continued from page 1)

knowledge and skills to the young people from their community.

They conducted the training using group work, interactive exercises, small group discussions, and presentations. All the YAC members were actively involved in planning, facilitating and organizing the program.

As a result of the program there are now 20 more active young people engaged with youth and community issues. The majority of participants have become members of the YAC, and as their first initiative they are planning to develop and implement a project aimed at creation of a Youth Recreational Center in Akhuryan.

***"I am not a plastic bag".***

Logo written on cloth grocery bags made by the Vahagni YAC to promote environmental awareness regarding pollution

## Vahagni YAC's Trifecta Campaign: Environment, Trafficking & Smoking

In November, Vahagni YAC (Lori Region) was actively involved in the implementation of three different campaigns: "Environmental Protection", "Anti-Trafficking" and "Anti-Smoking". For the "Environmental Protection" campaign, the YAC members organized a number of meetings with the community members and the school students and discussed various issues related to ecology, pollution and environmental protection. As a part of their action to discourage the use of plastic

bags, the YAC members made fabric bags with the logo "I am Not a Plastic Bag", and distributed them among community residents.

For the "Anti-Trafficking" campaign, the YAC members participated in a seminar organized by UN representatives, and then organized seminars on the same subject for the school students in their community. The YAC members also prepared handouts on the subject of Anti-Trafficking and distributed them among the youth.

For the "Anti-Smoking campaign," the club organized a *Forum Theatre* in the community where 26 YAC members performed various skits related to the theme. The goal of the performance was to increase awareness among youth of the consequences of smoking using drama and play acting. The young people also campaigned at their homes and tried to convince their parents who smoked to quit.



Constructing the access ramp for disabled student at Haytagh village school (Armavir Region)

## Haytagh CAC Promoting Integration of Disabled Student: Builds access ramp for the village school

During month of October, the Haytagh CAC (Armavir Region) organized a meeting with the village school principal to discuss the situation of a 12-year old disabled child's ability to attend school. With a musculoskeletal disorder, the child has been isolated at home and not able to receive a formal education.

The CAC requested that the school director create adequate conditions for the child to attend. The school director accepted the CAC's proposal and

suggested using the classroom on the first floor close to the school entrance for the child's classes. He also agreed to provide materials for the construction of an access ramp. The CAC met with the parents of the disabled child to get their agreement as well. Together, the CAC members and community residents constructed the access ramp. It is expected that the disabled child will attend the school classes beginning next academic year.

*It's important for all children to receive education regardless of their physical or mental disability*

## Civic Action Planning Workshops: Discussing community priorities and planning for action

During this quarter, YCAP Regional Coordinators conducted Civic Action Planning (CAP) Workshops for the members of ten newly established CACs/YACs. The workshops are designed based on participatory and interactive methodologies to facilitate the assessment of youth and community needs and priorities, identify resources which could support project implementation and result in defining youth/community action planning. Approximately 200 participants throughout the Armenia were involved in these one-day workshops.

Some of the priorities identified by participants during the workshops were:

- Starting community newsletters
- Creating more youth events in the community
- Garbage collection
- Rehabilitating sports grounds and facilities
- Youth employment
- Internet access
- Planting trees and greening the communities

By the end of the CAP workshop, each community developed an *Action Plan* to serve as a blueprint for their projects.



Civic Action Planning Workshop with the newly formed CAC in Verin Khotanan village, Syunik Marz

## The Role of Youth in the Fight Against Corruption: A seminar organized by the Aparan YAC

In November, the Aparan YAC (Aragatsotn Region) initiated and organized a seminar on the "Role of Youth in the Fight against Corruption." The YAC members invited the civic education teacher, Gagik Khachatryan to conduct the seminar and facilitate discussions, which focused primarily on petty corruption and bribery in the educational system. The YAC came to the conclusion that corruption is common in the education system because

of the lack of information about the responsibilities of the educational establishments and the rights and responsibilities of the students. The YAC decided to fight against petty corruption by initiating more actions aimed at increasing awareness of the young people of the responsibilities and duties of the educational establishments by protecting the interests of young people and by providing them advice on this subject.

*"Corruption is common in the education system because of the lack of information about the responsibilities of the educational establishments and the rights and responsibilities of the students"*

## Aygehovit residents more informed about Community Council

In December, the Aygehovit CAC (Tavush Region) organized a community meeting, including students, with the village Community Council. The goal of the meeting was to inform all of the community residents about the three-year community development plan, the work of the Community Council, and the community budget allocations for 2008, as well as to promote open dialogue between the residents and the Community Council.

## Armenian Volunteer Corps Continuing Involvement: Gomk village community center renovation project

From August 2006 through October 2006, YCAP hosted Veronica Siranosian, an Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC) volunteer, in the Yerevan office and in the remote village of Gomk, Vayots Dzor Region. Veronica participated in the Gomk CAC's CAP workshop and then stayed in the village for an additional two weeks to assist them with start-up. Part of AVC's program is for volunteers to create a *Continuing Involvement Proposal* where the AVC volunteer envisions how she can maintain contact with and support the people of Armenia. In Veronica's proposal she planned to assist with fundraising as needed for commu-

nity improvement projects. This quarter, the CAC of Gomk contacted Veronica with a request to help them raise \$2,500 as part of their cost share on a Social Investment Fund community development grant project to renovate the village community center. Veronica created a collection on Fundable, an online fundraising website ([www.fundable.com](http://www.fundable.com)) and raised a total of \$1,610 through two collections, and collected the remaining balance via donations from friends and family. Now, the village of Gomk has met their cost share component and reconstruction work will begin in the spring of 2008.



Community Village Center in Gomk, Vayots Dzor Region

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## Internships at the Margahovit Municipality: Students learn first hand about local government

In October, the Margahovit CAC (Lori Region) organized a Village Municipality study tour for the high school students. They arranged with the village administration for 20 high school students to visit the offices and observe the internal workings of the local administration, discuss the structure, functions and responsibilities of the employees, and the become familiar with the laws and regulations related to local government.

The Village Mayor, Mr. Seyran Ananyan, met with the students and explained the development of the community budget. As one visit was not enough for the youth to fully understand all of the municipal processes and procedures, the CAC and municipality decided to assign one representative of the village administration to each student as a mentor and provide each student with a five-day internship.



Internship at Municipality for School Students initiated by Margahovit CAC (Lori Marz)

YCAP is a 5-year USAID-funded program implemented by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) that began in October 2004. The overall goal of YCAP is **to instill in each target community the concept and importance of an individual or a group of people serving as an advocate in the interest of the public good.**

### Three Main Components

1. Create mechanisms by which youth and other community members increase their participation in local community public issues by establishing and supporting Youth Action Clubs (YAC) and Community Action Committees (CAC) that address group-identified youth, community, and public issues
2. Increase youth and adult knowledge/skills/attitudes required to generate a greater degree of civic involvement and participation in public issues by providing opportunities to young men/women and community members designed to increase awareness and knowledge, adopt appropriate attitudes, and develop the skills needed to successfully address youth, community and public concerns
3. YACs and CACs implement projects that: increase citizen participation and activism, benefit the general public and/or a targeted community group, lead to a systematic improvement in the way public issues are addressed in local communities, and foster a shift toward more sustainable approaches to address community needs

## Kotayk Region Citizen Activism: CACs addressing community and youth needs

Being concerned about the socially vulnerable people in the community, the Kotayk village CAC prepared and sent a letter in October to the "Adventist Development and Relief Agency" (ADRA) requesting support for the vulnerable families of the village. The letter received a positive response, and ADRA sent four boxes of clothing for distribution to families. The CAC verified the list of vulnerable families and coordinated the delivery of the clothing.

In December, they organized a meeting with the community residents and the village mayor to discuss the introduction of fines to be applied to those community residents who dispose of their garbage in unauthorized places. The intent of the meeting was to increase awareness of the garbage removal mechanism introduced in the community earlier due to the consistent efforts of the CAC and Municipality. The CAC also emphasized the importance of adhering to the new garbage disposal rules. The parties agreed that introducing fines would be included on the agenda for the next Community Council meeting. The CAC hopes that the fines will be effective at stopping certain community residents from throwing their garbage in the water canal and other inappropriate places.

During the quarter, The Yeghvard CAC organized a roundtable meeting with the town municipality, "Women's Association" NGO, and community youth. The topic for discussion was the absence of a Youth Cultural, Leisure and Recreational Center. The Mayor asked the participants to prepare a proposal to open a youth center and pledged his support to fund the project.

In order to learn the views of the young people regarding the type of Youth Center they would like to have, the CAC announced an essay competition in the three schools of Yeghvard with the subject, "The Youth Center I would like to see in Yeghvard."

The CAC formed an Evaluation Committee to review the compositions and summarize the ideas suggested by the youth, and as a follow-up will organize a meeting with the youth and the Mayor to present the results and decide on the options that will be chosen and developed into a project proposal. Being sensitive to the restricted funds available for the youth project, the CAC wanted to ensure that the idea for the project would come from the youth and that it would truly benefit them. This would only be possible if the youth were involved from the beginning of the project.