



Community Action News

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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 (YACs) and Community Action Committees (CACs). 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.

“Yerevan in Five Days - 2008” Youth Civic Education Program

On June 23-27, the third annual “Yerevan in 5 Days” Youth Civic Education Program was organized and implemented within the framework of Youth and Community Action Program (YCAP). 35 youth representing Youth Action Clubs located in all 10 Marzes of Armenia came to Yerevan to visit national institutions and learn how they function for the progress of the nation and her people. The program was designed to bring youth from Armenian communities close to the inner workings of national government structures and broaden their understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democratic society. The participants toured institutions and met representatives from the RA Presidential Administration, National Assembly, Court of Cassation and First Instance, Central Bank, Armen-Press News Agency, Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Labor and Social Issues. Additionally, they partici-

pated in interactive civil society workshops with local and international NGOs to learn more about the elections, local self-government system, anti-corruption initiatives and role of media in democracy. The participants also had opportunities to share information and ideas from their respective communities to enhance the YCAP network of civically engaged youth throughout Armenia. The members of the 35 Youth Action Clubs deepened their knowledge of the basic of

concepts government (both national and local) and citizenship in Armenia; enhanced their understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a participatory democracy and the judicial process in Armenia; learned how constituents, interest groups and party politics affect the legislative process and governance process; and explored diverse viewpoints concerning domestic and international policy questions facing the National Government and National Assembly.



“Yerevan in 5 Days” Program Participants meeting with the RA Minister of Labor and Social Issues

Film about Dilijan Youth Action Club Activities

Dilijan YAC members (Tavush Marz) spent several months working on production of a film about Dilijan Youth Action Club and the activities implemented by the



Presentation of the film about Dilijan Youth Action Club

YAC. The film is dedicated to the 2nd anniversary of the YAC's establishment, and features all of the significant projects and programs the YAC has implemented in the community since its establishment, as well as interviews with YAC members, the Mayor, Community Council members, NGO sector representatives, youth and other community members. The film highlights the YAC's active work and contribution to the development of the community and their efforts in empowerment of youth by equipping them with knowledge and new skills and engaging them in various projects and programs benefiting the community.

To get funds for the production of the film, the YAC members applied to the Municipality and to local businessmen, and they were successful in raising funds. In April, the film titled “Self-affirmation” was ready and the YAC members arranged the film premiere at the YAC Action Center. In June, YAC members organized visits to Dilijan schools N1, 2, 4 and 5, made a presentation on the YAC's mission and activities. The YAC showed the film and followed it with a question-answer session for the young people to provide them with comprehensive information about the YAC goals and to motivate and encourage them to join the YAC and become civically more active.

Inside this issue:

- Drinking Water Problem 2
solved in Garnahovit Commu-
nity New District*
- Community Problems Through 2
the Eyes of Children: Photo-
Exhibition in Tsovaguygh*
- Shirak Region Youth Unites to 2
Address Environmental Issues*
- Civic Activism in Lori: 3
Increasing Awareness on
Women's Right, Fighting
against Corruption*
- Seminar on IT: Khnatsakh 3
Youth on a Friendlier Terms
with Computer and Internet*
- Community Civic Action Plan- 3
ning Workshops in 12 New
YCAP Communities*
- Gomk Community Meets to 4
Discuss Community Budget,
Problems and Plans*
- Kotayk Region Civic Groups 4
Addressing Community Needs*

About the YCAP Commu- nities:

- There are currently 36 active Youth Action Clubs and 44 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>

Drinking Water Problem Solved in Garnahovit Community New District

In April, Garnahovit CAC (Aragatsotn Marz) completed the project started last autumn to bring drinking water to the new district of the community where around 40 households lived without running water in their homes. Due to the consistent efforts of the CAC, the issue of absence of potable water in the new district of the community was brought to the attention of the local government and the NGOs functioning in the region. As a result of the CAC's application to and cooperation with "Armenian Village Operation" NGO run by an Armenian Diaspora representative, the situation in Garnahovit

and the need for a water supply system was broadcast in the US media outlets and an Armenian Diaspora representative pledged funding for the implementation of the project. The allocated funds were used for the purchase of the necessary construction material, and the work of planning and laying the pipes was carried out by the CAC members and the residents of the district who joined the CAC in that important initiative. At present, the 40 households are provided with drinking water. The CAC has prepared and sent a thank you letter to the sponsor - Mr. Jani Sahakyan.



Drinking water available in the new district of community as a result of the project initiated and implemented by Garnahovit CAC

Community Problems Through the Eyes of Children: Photo Exhibition in Tsovagyugh

To find out the children's perspective on problems existing in the community, in April, Tsovagyugh CAC (Gegharkunik Marz) organized an exhibition titled "Tsovagyugh Problems in the Eyes of the Children." The CAC announced the planned exhibition at the community school and invited the school children to draw pictures demonstrating the problems they considered to be most urgent in the community. Drawings were submitted by 25 children for the exhibition, which took place on April 25 at Tsovagyugh school. The exhibition was well attended. Among the problems were dirtiness of the village

(pictures showing garbage and waste everywhere, in the streets, lawns, in front of houses), absence of a house of culture in the community (pictures with the half-built building that was once intended for the house of culture), unemployment (pictures showing community members sitting in the streets, or walking and knocking doors in search of a job, but getting only refusals and coming across shut doors), absence of a recreational center where the youth could spend their free time engaging in various sports and/or cultural activities (pictures showing sad and dull young men and women

sitting in front of their houses and dreaming about sports and concerts). The community was very impressed by the seriousness of the problems raised by the children and the creative way they had presented those problems. The CAC thanked the children who participated in the exhibition for the pictures and their interpretations, and promised them that the CAC was going to try and address the presented problems in their future activities. At present, the CAC is organizing a clean-up campaign in the community to address the dirtiness of the village.

Tsovagyugh Village Problems as seen by the Community Children:

- *Dirtiness of the Village*
- *Unemployment*
- *Absence of House of Culture in the Community*
- *Absence of Recreational/Sports Center for Youth*

Shirak Region Youth Unites to Address Environmental Issues



Seminar on "Role of Youth in Environment Protection" organized by Sarnaghbyur, Akhuryan and Kamo YAC members (Shirak Marz) in Kamo

After their participation in a "Training of Trainers" organized by the "A.D. Sakharov Armenian Human Rights Protection Center" NGO, Kamo YAC members Liana Hakobyan and Arevik Ghazaryan, Akhuryan YAC member Seda Darbinyan and Sarnaghbyur YAC member Tamara Atshemyan decided to organize and conduct a seminar on "Role of Youth in Environmental Protection" in Kamo village. They believed that at present there were more environmental problems and issues in Kamo

than in other two communities (Akhuryan and Sarnaghbyur) and there was a need to increase awareness of youth living in Kamo village about the importance of environmental protection and urge them to take an action. The seminar took place on April 20. The participants (Kamo YAC members and other young people from the community) received information on the subject, participated in group work, watched an environmental movie, discussed various environmental issues and problems existing in their community and devel-

oped an action plan to start addressing those issues. The first items in the work-plan were organization of garbage removal, monument area clean-up and improvement, as well as tree planting in Kamo village, which the Kamo YAC members planned for and implemented at the end of April. The participants evaluated the seminar as very productive and decided to continue the cooperation with Akhuryan and Sarnaghbyur YACs, as together they could do and achieve more, and be the driving force for addressing the environmental problems in Shirak region.

Civic Activism in Lori: Increasing Awareness on Women's Rights, Fighting against Corruption

In April, Dsegh YAC initiated a seminar on "Women's Rights." To conduct the seminar, the YAC invited their peers from Lejan YAC, who they knew had already conducted seminars on Women's Rights in their community. Lejan YAC accepted the invitation, and on April 22, Lejan YAC member Satenik Papyan and a Lejan based Peace Corp volunteer, Andrea Hendrickson, conducted the seminar at the Dsegh YAC Action Center. The seminar was organized in an interactive way, with games, tasks, team work and presentations. Dsegh YAC members and other community members who attended the seminar found it very interesting, informative and useful and thanked their peers from Lejan for the important information about women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment.

Throughout this quarter, one of the priority areas for action on Lejan YAC's agenda was fighting against corruption. Wishing to have their contribution in decreasing corruption at various levels, the YAC members met with the Village Mayor, the school director and other community members to discuss their perspectives on the issue and ways of fighting against it. As many of the community youth study in Vanadzor, the YAC members also met with the Rector, Deans and heads of various departments, as well as with the Student Council of the Vanadzor State Teacher Training Institute, and discussed corruption in the educational system and the possible ways of fighting against it. During their meeting with the Rector of the Institute, the YAC members proposed, as

actions directed to reducing corruption in the educational system, to organize debates and seminars with the Institute professors and students to continue increasing awareness regarding the issue and discussing possible ways of fighting against corruption. The suggestion was welcomed by the Rector, and at present the YAC members are working on organizing debates and seminars aimed at increasing awareness regarding the issue and reducing the level of corruption at educational establishments. The YAC members are also planning to meet with the Mayor and community members of the nearby town Stepavan to discuss the issue of corruption with them as well. As a result of the meetings and discussions, the YAC is going to



Seminar on "Women's Rights" at Dsegh YAC (Lori Marz) Action Center

develop an action plan aimed at the increasing awareness regarding the issue and reducing the level of corruption, and they hope that their efforts directed to reducing corruption would complement the broader anti-corruption actions taking place in Armenia.

Seminar on IT: Khnatsakh Youth On a Friendlier Terms with Computer and Internet

In May, Khnatsakh YAC (Syunik Marz) decided to address the issue of lack of knowledge on Information Technology and Internet among the youth of the village. On May 27, World Telecommunication Day, the YAC organized a seminar on "IT and Internet" and invited young people who wished to learn more about IT, internet and modern means of telecommunication. The seminar was conducted by an IT and web design specialist,

Narine Danielyan, who was invited to Khnatsakh from Goris city. During the seminar, the participants learned about the evolution of information technology, computers and how to use basic software and applications, to work with the internet, to write electronic mails, and to participate in forums and online discussions. To make the material more accessible, a power point presentation (offline web-pages, forums, opening an E-mail

account, etc.) was used throughout the seminar. In particular, the participants were very interested and enthused with the idea of having an email address and the possibility of writing emails instead of hard copy letters to the organizations and government offices they were cooperating with or planning to apply to. The seminar was very productive and shed light on modern means of telecommunication for

the youth living in one of the remote and isolated villages near the eastern boarder of the country where internet connection is still inaccessible. The youth received basic knowledge and information which increased their determination to work on bringing internet access to their community and to help them start exploring the internet and using email when they get access to it.

Community Civic Action Planning Workshops in 12 New YCAP Communities

During this quarter, YCAP Marz Coordinators conducted Community Civic Action Planning (CAP) Workshops for the members of the twelve newly established YACs/CACs in 10 marzes of Armenia.

The workshops were designed based on hands-on and interactive methodologies to facilitate the assessment of youth and community needs and problems, identify resources which could support project implementation and result in defining youth/community action planning. From April to June, approximately 250 participants throughout Armenia were involved in these workshops.

Among the problems that were identified by the participants during workshops were:

- Lack of access to information
- Absence of community newsletter or newspaper
- Poor conditions of community roads
- Absence of garbage collection mechanism in the community
- Absence of sport grounds
- Unemployment
- Absence of Internet
- Lack of cultural, educational and recreational facilities and/or events for youth



Community Civic Action Planning Workshop in Martuni village (Gegharkunik Marz)



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Gomk Community Meets to Discuss Community Budget, Problems and Plans

In April, Gomk CAC (Vayots Dzor Marz) initiated a public discussion on the subject of "Community Budget and the Community Development Plan." Several community members had applied to the CAC asking them to organize a seminar on that subject as they wanted to clarify a number of issues connected with the community budget formation. On April 17, community members wishing to learn more about the community budget and the Community Development Plan attended the public discussion and had a chance to ask their questions to the Village Mayor and the accountant of the Village Municipality, who were also invited to the meeting-discussion. The Village Mayor and the Village Municipality accountant explained the mechanisms for developing the community budget, the current size of the community budget and why it was implemented only for 49%. The community learned that the high level of migration from the village was the reason why it hadn't been possible to ade-

quately collect the land and property tax to complete the budget. The community discussed other issues and community problems, as well as the activities included in the community development plan. Another issue voiced by the village residents was the privatization of houses and land that was in progress in the village. Many of the village residents were concerned with the fact the apartments or houses privatized were in a very poor conditions and required capital renovation which they couldn't afford. It was decided to apply to the government with a request to support the refugee population of Gomk village with the renovation of the privatized apartments and houses. The public discussion organized by the CAC served its purpose, and community members not only clarified their questions regarding the community budget, but also had a chance to discuss their problems together with the community leaders, get updates on the development plan implementation and make plans for further action.

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 Civic Groups Addressing Community Needs

To help the community members solve the unemployment problem, in June, Nor Geghi YAC members (Kotayk Marz) decided to access and print out the job opportunity and vacancy announcements posted in the Armenian employment sites and to spread them widely among the community members, so that the unemployed people in the community would have access to the information on employment opportunities and could apply for suitable jobs. The initiative of the YAC members received positive feedback in the community where only a small percentage of the population had access to internet and to information about vacancies. As a result of the YAC's initiative, several people have already found jobs. The YAC members are constantly updating the job opportunity announcements and posting them

in places frequented by community members to make the information equally available for everyone.

In June, Kotayk CAC (Kotayk Marz) organized a seminar on "Child's Health and Childhood Disease Prevention" for the young mothers in the community. The seminar was conducted by Ms. Larisa Artashesyan, Kotayk ambulatory pediatrician, who is the lead of the Kotayk CAC health sector. Many important issues related to child's health, hygiene, eating patterns, and childhood diseases like chickenpox, measles, mumps, whooping cough and their prevention and treatment were discussed during the seminar. The participants found the seminar very useful; they also received leaflets with information on vaccination and disease prevention methods.



Seminar on "Child Health and Childhood Disease Prevention" organized by Kotayk CAC (Kotayk Marz) for young mothers and other community members