



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.

YCAP Community Civic Action Conference 2008

The Second Annual Community Civic Action Conference organized within the framework of Youth and Community Action Program for all 80 YCAP communities was held on September 3-5, 2008 in Tshaghkadzor, Armenia. The Conference brought together 160 representatives from 80 YCAP civic groups to discuss issues and problems common to all of them; share their experiences and lessons learned; and forge networks and closer working relationships among civic groups in the country. During the conference the participants took part in interactive workshops on the following topics: Citizen Participation in Armenia, Community Engagement and Participation, Leadership/Group Dynamics, Project Management, Civic Advocacy, Public Relations/ Freedom of Information, Creating/Perfecting Community Newsletter, Partnering with Local Government. An Open Space session was held with the theme of "Civic Advocacy at Local, Regional and National Levels". Having enriched their knowledge on Civic Advocacy tools and methods, the participants worked in 10 groups to develop civic advocacy strategies and campaigns

aimed at solution of the problems and issues deemed as priorities by the group members. Among issues discussed were youth problems, unemployment and need for creation of more jobs in the communities, addressing needs of the vulnerable groups and people with special needs, development of sports, bringing natural gas to the communities, improvement of the educational system, improvement of access to health care services, irrigation, and realization of agricultural produce. The participants developed plans for civic advocacy campaigns to address those issues and presented the results of their

work on the third day of the Conference. In addition, all 80 YACs/CACs put together exhibition/poster presentations, representing the work done in their communities and focused on what YACs/CACs contribute to community economic, social, educational, democratic, cultural and environmental progress. The YCAP Conference provided an excellent opportunity for strengthening YACs/CACs in Armenia through fostering linkages, exchanging ideas and increasing awareness of the important role the grassroots organizations can play in a civil society.



YCAP Conference Participants at a YCAP Conference Session

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Aragats CAC Continues Protecting Community Members' Rights

The Aragats CAC (Aragatsotn Marz) has been consistent in following up on one of their initiatives started in November 2007, when the CAC first addressed the community members issue of inaccuracies in measurement of the land and property of the community members. At that time, the CAC invited the Head of the Cadastre State Committee, Mr. Manuk Vardanyan, and the National Assembly Deputy, Mr. Lyova Khachatryan, to a meeting with community leaders and 25 neighboring villages to discuss community complaints regarding the work of the re-

gional cadastre offices that resulted in incorrect measurements of land-plots. The incorrect sizing of real estate and land-plots on community members' ownership documents gave rise to numerous disputes and problems. At the beginning of this year, as promised by Mr. Vardanyan, Special Committees were formed to carry out re-measurements and redress the situation in each village in the region. The Aragats village Committee was composed of a representative from Aparan regional Cadastre Office, the Aragats Village Municipality and a CAC

member. The work started in spring and is still in process. The CAC continues to be closely involved in this activity and as of September, 50 land-plots and houses were re-measured and the owners received new ownership certificates with the correct sizes of their land-plots and real estate. The committee continues their work addressing the complaints of community members who have registered with the Village Municipality for re-measurement of their land-plots and real estate. The re-measurement work will continue through 2009.

About the YCAP Communities:

- There are currently 37 active Youth Action Clubs and 43 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>

Sarnakunk Community Problems Raised through Posters

To increase awareness of community problems, in July, Sarnakunk YAC (Syunik Marz) initiated a poster campaign to illustrate the urgent problems existing in the community. The YAC first conducted a survey in the community to get views on the community problems and priorities. They then took corresponding pictures, prepared 5 posters, and posted them in places frequented by the community. The YAC received positive feedback from the community, who also suggested raising more issues through the posters and through continually updating them. The YAC then added more posters illustrating other important problems in the community. The presented problems included *unsafe roads, lone elderly people left without care and help, absence of a market for the local produce, lack of agricultural machinery in the village, poor state of the cattle-*

sheds, and lack of labor force in the village as a result of out migration. The posters proved to be a good tool for gaining the attention of the community and its leaders regarding the problems with a reminder of the urgency of finding solutions. In August, the YAC organized a community meeting with the candidates running for the post of Sarnakunk Village Mayor in the upcoming elections. At the meeting the YAC requested that the candidates provide their comments regarding the problems presented on the posters and suggest ways to resolve them. The meeting was very productive; the YAC and the community are now aware of the views, plans and potential of the candidates, can make an informed decision and can cast their vote for the candidate who will work for a brighter future and prosperity of their community.



A poster prepared by Sarnakunk YAC members (Syunik Marz) to illustrate Sarnakunk community problems and invite the attention of the community members and leaders

Debate in Getap: Armenia-Turkey Relations

In July, the Getap YAC (Vayots Dzor Marz) initiated organization of a debate on opening of the border with Turkey and improving relations between the two countries. After a short presentation on the current state of affairs and the relations between Armenia and Turkey made by the YAC president Lilit Margaryan, the participants broke into 2 groups: one group argued for opening of the border and improvement of the relations between Armenia and Turkey, and

the second group argued against it. The participants arguing for the opening of the borders tried to convince their opponents that the opening would promote economic development and would result in a decrease in the prices of goods. The opponents argued that opening borders and establishing diplomatic relations with Turkey would mean giving up on the issue of recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey and would lead to flooding the Armenian market with cheap

Turkish goods, which would create unfavorable conditions for the local producers. After the debate the participants watched a film about cooperation between Armenian and Turkish youth, provided to them by the participant of an Armenian-Turkish program "Role of Youth in Volunteer Work" (Kars, Turkey) Tigran Mikaelyan, who was invited to the debate to share his experience. The youth were impressed by the film and examples of the successful coopera-

tion of the Armenian and Turkish youth, and at the end of the discussion many of them changed their opinions regarding the relations between the two countries and found that cooperation was possible between the Armenian and Turkish youth. The debate helped the participants to overcome stereotypes regarding the Armenian-Turkish relations and consider the possibility of cooperation and establishing good relations with the neighboring country.

"Civil Society" Youth Camp in Sarnaghbyur Community



A session on "Sectors of Civil Society" held during the Youth Camp organized by Sarnaghbyur YAC (Shirak Marz) for the community youth

In August, the Sarnaghbyur YAC initiated and organized a three-day "Civil Society" Camp for the youth of the community. The 20 participants of the camp actively took part in seminars and sessions on Civil Society, Leadership, Human Rights, Non-formal Education, Volunteerism and participated in various games and role-plays, all of which contributed to building knowledge, capacity and motivation of the young people to exercise more actively their civic, economic and social rights, engage in volunteer work and participate in public life.

Meghradzor Community Members Mobilize to Protect Community Rights

In August, the Meghradzor CAC (Kotayk Marz), learned that a group of businessmen, in agreement with village leaders, planned to build a gold processing factory on reserved land in Meghradzor. The CAC organized a community meeting and invited the businessmen and community leaders to discuss this issue. After presenting their concerns regarding the pollution of the community and reduced prospects for community development if the gold processing factory were built on the reserved lands, the CAC and the community members, after heated dis-

ussion, succeeded in convincing the village mayor and the businessmen to cancel the proposal to use the Meghradzor community reserved lands for construction of a gold processing factory and leave the land for community development. The participants believed that this action increased their self-confidence and trust in their own strengths and ability to solve problems as well as enhanced their understanding of the importance of voicing their opinions and mobilizing community members.



YCAP Groups Act to Increase Community Members' Civic Activism and Participation in the Local Government Elections

In July, the Sarnaghbyur YAC (Shirak Marz) organized a campaign aimed at raising community awareness of their civic and constitutional rights, and promoting community participation in the upcoming elections. Campaign seminars and meetings were organized for the community and youth, including a seminar for first time voters and seminars providing information on the Electoral Code of Armenia, election procedures and the principles of democratic elections. The YAC hopes that Sarnaghbyur community participation in the upcoming elections will be unprecedented. In September, Verin Khotanan CAC (Syunik Marz) organized seminars, debates and round-table discussions on election related subjects and urged the community to be more active and participate in the elections. The CAC also verified the voter lists and sent notifications to all community members urging them to vote on

the Election Day. The CAC is confident that the campaign was effective and that they succeeded in persuading the community to overcome their apathy and passiveness, go to the polling station on the Election Day and exercise their civic rights thereby contributing to the development of their community. In July, the Getap YAC (Vayots Dzor Marz) prepared questionnaires and sent them to the three candidates running for the post of the Village Mayor. The questions concerned the plans and programs of the candidates in connection with the priority issues and problems of the community, and the candidates' opinion regarding participation of the community youth and other community members in the local self-governance. The YAC received written answers to their questions from two candidates, who also noted that they highly appreciated the role of the youth

in the life of the community and expressed their willingness to cooperate with the YAC. The YAC shared the answers with the youth of the Getap community to help them make informed decisions during local government elections. In September, the Artsvanik CAC (Syunik Marz) organized a seminar on "Principles of Democracy" to review basic values and principles of democracy, as well as election related laws and regulations, relevant in the light of the upcoming elections for Community Council. The seminar took place on September 26 and was conducted by Ms. Angela Makayan, Coordinator of "It's Your Choice" NGO. The newly elected Village Mayor and the candidates for membership in the Community Council were also invited. The participants discussed the main provisions of the Election Code of the Republic of Armenia and talked about vari-



Seminar on "Principles of Democracy" organized by Artsvanik CAC (Syunik Marz) for the community members

ous issues related to election procedures and the right to vote, principles of conducting elections, and voter lists verification. In the 2nd part of the seminar the CAC suggested discussing the urgent problems existing in the community. A list of the community problems was developed and the candidates for membership in the Community Council were asked to provide their views in regard with the possible ways of solving those problems.

Gegharkunik Region Citizen Activism: CACs Addressing Community Needs

In July, the Tsovaghyugh CAC (Gegharkunik Marz) addressed one of the problems raised by the community children during the photo-exhibition "Tsovaghyugh Problems in the Eyes of Children" organized by the CAC in April 2008 – the dirtiness of the community. The CAC initiated a garbage removal action and mobilized the community to participate. The CAC also applied to the Village Mayor with a request to provide adequate machinery to remove garbage accumulated in various spots in the village over many years. The school administration, in its turn, suggested providing the

necessary fuel for the operation of the machinery. The garbage removal action was successfully implemented by joint efforts of the community and the CAC. Currently the CAC is considering ways of developing and putting in place a mechanism for regular garbage removal in the village.



In August, the Tsovazard CAC (Gegharkunik Marz), learned from a local TV program that the Gegharkunik Marzpetaran (regional administration body) received a Draft Decree of the Government regarding joining three medical structures, the polyclinic, hospital and the maternity hospital, in the Marz Center Gavar and locating them in one building to save money. The CAC decided to express their disagreement with this Decree and sent a letter to the Government requesting an explanation regarding the expedience of the proposed changes and how joining three different structures provid-

ing services to the population of the Marz Center Gavar and other neighboring villages and towns including Tsovazard village, could contribute to the promised improvement in the quality of health care services. In this letter, they joined their voices with a number of non-governmental organizations as well as Gavar and neighboring communities who had also expressed their disapproval of the Decree. As a result of the negative feedback and the lobby process in which Tsovazard CAC participated, the Draft Decree was not endorsed and the process was suspended.

Public Transport Problem Solved in Nor Kharberd

In September, as a result of the signature collection campaign initiated by the Nor Kharberd CAC (Ararat Marz) and a petition with the signatures of 600 community members subsequently sent to the Village Municipality with a request to improve the inadequate public transport in the village, sixteen buses were allocated to the community.

The micro-buses N33 and N105 were replaced by buses, and the route of the Bus N33 was optimized to better service the needs of Nor Kharberd community. Thus, another important community issue was successfully solved as a result of the CAC's initiative and the active participation and involvement of the community.



Yerevan - Nor Kharberd Bus Service introduced for Nor Kharberd community members as a result of the campaign initiated by Nor Kharberd CAC (Ararat Marz)



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Souser Community Unites to Solve Drinking Water Problem

In August, the Souser CAC (Aragatsotn Marz) solved one of the priority problems in the community- repair of the drinking water supply system. The water supply in the village had not been regular for months, and in many districts the village residents were left without drinking water. The CAC first applied to the Village Municipality to ask if the community budget had sufficient funds for the repair of the water supply system and the water reservoir. The Village Municipality's response was that they were aware of the situation but were not able to do anything because of the lack of financial means required for the repair of the system. The CAC decided to develop an action plan, mobilize the community and village Municipality, organize a fundraising, obtain the necessary material and repair the system themselves. When the Action Plan was ready the CAC informed the village of the steps.

Fundraising was organized - some funds were provided by the village municipality and remaining by the community members - and the necessary material was purchased. Repair work started at the end of August. Around 40 people, including CAC members and other community residents, worked on repair of the water reservoir and the pipes. In September, the work was successfully completed and the system was operational. At present, the water supply is restored and the Souser village residents again have drinking water in their houses. The project implemented by the joint efforts of the CAC, the community and community leaders contributed to strengthening community cooperation and, most importantly, increased their self-confidence and trust in their own strengths and ability to solve problems on their own by uniting and mobilizing their resources and not merely relying on the village leaders or outside funding.

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

YCAP Community Collaboration

YCAP supports the development of a YCAP Communities Coordination Mechanism (CCM) for the YACs and CACs to exchange ideas and support each other in their civic initiatives. It is expected that CCM will improve collaboration, idea sharing, and strengthen implementation of civic initiatives to affect change in YAC and CAC communities and larger scale issues at the regional and national level. YCAP supported this movement towards developing a CCM through organizational workshops to facilitate determination of purpose, structure, policies and procedures. The resulting CCM will be determined by the participants; YCAP only facilitates the formation of the CCM and ensures

that the process is democratic, transparent and fair, and that the resulting CCM serves the member communities rather than the resulting organization or association itself.

The CCM Development First Meeting was held on July 10-11, 2008, in Tsakhkadzor for representatives of 80 communities. The CCM Marz Sub-Committee meetings (held in the marzes) and CCM Development Committee meetings (held in Yerevan for 10 participants; one from each marz) were also organized in July, August and September. To date, the participants have finalized their work on developing CCM mission, goals, objectives, structure, policies and procedures and started to plan their future activities.



The representatives of 80 YACs/CACs at the CCM Development First Meeting in Tsakhkadzor