



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 Active Groups Promote Community Awareness and Participation in Local Government Elections

In October, before the Local Government Elections in Armenia, the YCAP civic groups were actively engaged in promoting their communities' participation in the Elections and increasing the community members' awareness regarding election related processes and the programs of the candidates for the post of the community leaders. Below are a few examples of such initiatives:

◆ The Urtsadzor CAC (Ararat Marz) organized a community meeting with the three candidates for the post of the Village Mayor. To provide enough space for all the community members, the meeting was organized and took place in the hall of the community school. The three candidates attended the meeting which was also widely attended by the community - around 200 village residents were present. Each of the candidates presented his visions, plans and program for the development of the community. After the presentations, a question/answer session with the community was held. Given the importance of the issues raised, it was a heated discussion of community needs and problems. Afterwards, the floor was given to the proxies and the supporters of each of the

candidate who were presenting their views on the advantages and the strengths of the candidates' programs. The community found the meeting very useful as it helped them to receive full information about the candidates' programs, priorities and their vision of the community, and now they could make an informed decision and vote for the candidate whom they found most suitable for the position of the Village Mayor.

◆ Within the framework of a campaign aimed at increasing the community awareness of their civic and constitutional rights,

Sarnaghybur YAC (Shirak Marz) organized a seminar titled "Free and Fair Elections" for the youth of the community. During the seminar a detailed presentation was made on the election related legislation and procedures, the role of the Election Committee, and that of the proxies and observers. Among the participants were young people who were going to vote for the first time, and they were very excited and expressed their desire to take part in the elections also as observers and use the knowledge acquired during the seminar to help ensure free and fair elections in the community. (Continuation on pg. 2)



Community Meeting with the Candidates for the Post of the Village Mayor organized by Urtsadzor CAC

Seminar on Human Rights in Davtashen



Seminar on "Human Rights" organized by Davtashen YAC members (Aragatsotn Marz)

In November, Davtashen YAC (Aragatsotn Marz) initiated and organized a seminar on "Human Rights". The YAC invited a lawyer, Ms. Khanum Mkrtchyan, to conduct the seminar and answer questions. The young people discussed various cases of violation of rights in their everyday lives, at school, interacting with the private sector, local government bodies, violation of children's rights, and violation of citizen's constitutional and civic rights.

The participants stressed the need to constantly raise awareness on the subject of rights in the community. Ms. Mkrtchyan also informed the young people about the procedure of applying to the Human Rights Defender for protection of their rights. At the end of the seminar the YAC suggested organizing similar sessions for other community members (their parents and teachers) to further promote awareness regarding rights and right protection in the community.

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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 2000 volunteers are participating in the program and they have implemented over 1,200 civic actions over the past four years

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

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After the seminar the YAC applied to the Village Municipality and received permission for the four first time voters from the village to serve as observers during the local government elections. In the YAC's view, the young people performed the observer's tasks very well and contributed to ensuring free and fair elections in the village.

◆ The Koti CAC (Tavush Marz) organized a community meeting with the candidates for the membership in the Community Council. Eleven candidates attended the meeting and presented their plans and programs for community development. The CAC also arranged an interview of the

candidates for the "Young Koti" community newspaper. The community found the meeting and the information they received concerning the plans and programs of the candidates for membership in the Community Council very important and helpful for making their decision on the candidacy of the person they were going to vote for. After the elections, the CAC organized a meeting with the elected seven members of the Community Council, congratulated them on being elected and discussed with them in detail their plans and programs, as well as the opportunities for further cooperation. The initiative was very well

received by the Community members who admitted that being very active, the CAC could help in promoting the community participation in the decision making concerning the issues affecting their lives.

◆ The Verin Khotanan CAC (Syunik Marz) to combat passiveness of community women in the pre-election processes in the village, organized a round-table discussion for women on "Women and Politics". Participants presented and discussed the barriers to their participation in the local government election related activities, meetings with the candidates for the post of the Village Mayor and the Community Council members. The

women concluded that most of the barriers mentioned were artificially created and could be easily overcome given their determination and will to participate in the elections. The participants also discussed issues connected with gender equality and stressed the importance and role of women's participation in politics. The CAC believes that the round-table discussion helped to increase women's activism and their understanding of the importance of women's participation in decision making regarding the issues affecting their and their children's lives. The CAC hopes that their initiative will result in increased participation of women in the local government election.

Civic Activism in Ararat Marz: YACs and CACs Address Community Issues

In November, Aygepat YAC organized and implemented a campaign against littering in the community. The YAC campaign was aimed at raising the community members' awareness of the consequences of littering in the community and the danger that plastic bags and bottles represent for the environment.

Within the framework of the campaign a seminar was conducted on the dangers of polluting the environment by plastic bags and bottles. Afterwards, the YAC prepared posters with calls to stop littering and polluting the environment; they also made a scarecrow of a person with plastic head to show the image of a person who litters the community and to attract the attention of community members. With the posters and the scarecrow they paraded in the community calling on the community to become more responsible for their actions and quit the habit of littering the village. Hearing the unusual noise and voices of children from the street the community members came out of their houses and were surprised to see their own children among the campaigners.

The YAC believes that the campaign attracted sufficient attention from the community and was successful in increasing community awareness about environmental issues and the consequences of pollution, and that as a result of their initiative the community will stop littering in the village.

Considering availability of internet access at the CAC Action Center as one of their priorities, in November, Urtsadzor CAC applied to the Village Municipality with a request to allocate a digital telephone line to the CAC that would allow connecting internet in the CAC Action Center. After discussion of the issue, the Village Mayor agreed to allocate the digital station phone line for securing internet connection at the CAC Action Center and promised to pay half of the monthly bill for the internet. The CAC committed to paying the other half. Since November 7, internet has been available at the CAC Action Center. Access to internet opened new opportunities for the CAC, allowing them to access current information on community development, enhance their knowledge and cooperation with other local and international organizations, and provide a wide access to alternative media and news. They can also visit the websites of state agencies and review the most current information on laws and regulations. After ensuring internet access at the Action Center, the CAC established an Internet Club where they volunteered to train the community in internet use. Currently the Urtsadzor CAC's Internet Club has 10 members who receive training in internet use. The CAC also decided to create the Urtsadzor community website. CAC members already started the work



Campaign against littering in the community organized by Aygepat YAC (Ararat Marz)

on the creation and design of the community website. As a result of the CAC's further negotiations with community leaders, the latter, admitting the importance of having internet access at the CAC Action Center and having a community website, agreed to include a special line in the community budget for 2009 to make allocations to cover the internet and the community website host domain and maintenance costs.

For the past six months, Ranchpar CAC focused on addressing the garbage removal problem in the village. In June, the CAC organized a meeting with the Village Mayor, Village Municipality representatives and the community. The CAC presented their plans for future action and discussed community priorities, which included organization of the garbage removal process in the village, night lighting of the streets, and other issues. The CAC requested the village leaders to allocate funds

from the community budget for organization of the garbage removal in the village, as the pollution was causing serious ecological and environmental problems and representing a threat to the health of the community. As a result of the meeting and further discussions, the Village Mayor agreed to organize a garbage removal process in the village by providing a garbage truck and allocating funds from the community budget for hiring a special worker. The CAC organized a survey in the community and developed the optimal route and schedule for the garbage collection in the village. The CAC agreed to a schedule with the Municipality, printed and posted copies in the streets and other locations frequented by the community. Due to the CAC's initiative and consistent efforts starting from November, garbage removal is regularly organized in Ranchpar village.

YCAP Grassroots Civic Activism Study Tour to Ukraine

In October, a group of 20 YAC and CAC representatives participated in a one-week study tour in Ukraine to better understand effective approaches used in addressing key issues related to grassroots civic activism.

The study tour, conducted by GURT Resource Center, emphasized practical skills and applied knowledge rather than abstract theory.

The topics addressed during the study tour included:

- participation and engagement of citizens in democratic processes;
- leadership and activism - examples from other countries;
- community service and volunteering;
- developing leadership and political awareness;
- how to stimulate civic involvement;
- how to search and manage resources for the projects;
- volunteering - how to involve and manage people in social transformations;

- activities of Youth/Community associations.

The participants were also introduced to the activity “Quest - Community Change Agents”. The aim of this activity was to practice techniques of effective community engagement using knowledge and skills, received during previous training days. Tasks of Quest included developing a community mobilization plan, involving followers, and choosing a leadership style for idea implementation. It was expected that by experiencing the Quest activity as part of the study tour the participants would have a community mobilization tool which they could use in their communities in Armenia. Based on participants’ comments expressed during action planning and evaluation sessions, the participants plan to:

- Organize needs assessment in the community the results of which will be shared with the local officials for further addressing,



The participants of the Grassroots Civic Activism Study Tour during one of the sessions

- Introduce more campaigns leading to positive change in the communities,
- Involve more volunteers,
- Develop and implement PR strategies for their projects,
- Publish newspaper and brochures,
- Intensify contacts and cooperation with NGOs,
- Build more effective relations with Local Council and community members in general, inform them about Club/Committees activities and ask for support,
- Increase number of people involved in the projects as well as improve information sharing activities, etc.

Bardzrouni CAC Stands for Community Rights

In November, during their discussion of the “Comprehensive Program for the Development of Border Communities”, the Bardzrouni CAC (Vayots Dzor Marz) came across a provision which stated that priority in distribution of the agricultural resources received as humanitarian aid should be given to the border communities. A few days after the discussion, the CAC learned from the TV news and newspapers that 50 tractors have been provided as a

donation from China to Armenia and they decided to send a letter to the Ministry of Agriculture requesting, as a border community, of the community’s entitlement to receive one of the donated tractors. In December, the CAC received a response from the Ministry informing them that the received agricultural machinery was going to be sold by auction and that the Bardzrouni community was welcome to participate in the auction and purchase a tractor.

Since the CAC understood that agricultural resources received as humanitarian aid should be given to the border communities without auctions, the letter from the Ministry of Agriculture was discussed at the CAC meeting, and, being unsatisfied with the response, the CAC decided to continue protecting the interests of the community. With this aim, the CAC is planning to prepare and send letters to Mr. Samvel Sargsyan, their Deputy at the

National Assembly, and to Mr. Hovhannes Margaryan, the head National Assembly Standing Committee on Territorial Management and Local Self-Government, requesting clarifications regarding the issue and asking for their support in restoring the Bardzrouni community rights. The CAC hopes that their efforts will have positive effect and Bardzrouni, as a border community, will receive the much needed tractor for development of agriculture in the village.

Marts CAC Strives for Revival of Cultural Life in Community

With the renovation of the House of Culture and revival of cultural life in the village as one of the priorities for the community, in October, the Marts CAC (Lori Marz) sent a letter to the Ministry of Culture requesting the Ministry’s support in renovation and furnishing the Marts community House of Culture. In November, they received a response from the Ministry advising them to apply to the relevant department of the Lori Marzpetaran (Regional Administration) and enclose an estimate for the

renovation needs and the furniture. The CAC prepared the requested estimate and sent it with a letter to the Lori Marzpetaran Department of Culture. In December, the CAC also sent a letter to the National Assembly Deputy requesting his support in renovation of the House of Culture. The CAC is still waiting for a response to their letters and at the same time considering other options and ways of solving the problem of renovation and furnishing of the community House of Culture.

Akhtala CAC Promotes Community Cooperation with Local Government

In November, Akhtala CAC (Lori Marz) organized a seminar-discussion on “Cooperation with Local Government”. Participants discussed the role and responsibilities of the Community Council and the possibilities for cooperation with the Community Council in solution of the community problems. The importance of participation of community members in the Community Council meetings was repeatedly emphasized during the seminar and it was decided to continue further increasing community

members’ awareness of the role and responsibilities of the local governance bodies and promote community participation at the Community Council meetings. At the end of the seminar the participants decided to prepare proposals connected with two community problems, development of the garbage removal mechanism and repair of the water supply system, and present their proposals at the next meeting of the Community Council.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The Academy for Educational Development
10 Aygedzor Lane
0019 Yerevan
Republic of Armenia

Phone: (374 10) 225 636
Fax: (374 10) 275 686
E-mail: ycap@aed.am

Youth and Community Action Program



Academy for Educational Development

We're on the Web!
<http://ycap.am>
<http://aed.am>

Lukashin CAC Cooperates with "Heifer" to Assist Socially Insecure Families in Community

One of the strategic directions of the Lukashin CAC's (Armavir Marz) activities is work aimed at alleviating poverty and supporting socially insecure families of the community. The CAC constantly meets with local and international organizations, tries to make new partnerships, apply and participate in various projects. In November, the CAC received a positive response regarding their application to "Heifer Project", which agreed to provide cows to the

socially vulnerable families in the village. The CAC formed a committee which, in cooperation with the Village Municipality, made a list of the socially insecure families of the village, and each of the 25 families on the list received a cow. These families are now part of the "Heifer Project," which includes a provision that, after three years, the families should pass any offspring of their cow to other socially insecure families in the village.



Lukashin CAC's (Armavir Marz) initiative to secure assistance for the socially insecure families of the community

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

Vardenik CAC Increases Awareness of Community Development Program

In December, Vardenik CAC members (Gegharkunik Marz), having learned that the newly elected Community Council had already approved the Four Year Community Development Program, applied to the Community Council with a request to provide them with a copy of the program. After receiving a copy, the CAC prepared a short and accessible summary of the program and printed leaflets with the information regarding the development programs and plans. The CAC posted the leaflets in the places frequented by the community so that all the community members would be aware of the programs and the timing when the given problem was going to be

solved in the community. Around 100 copies of the leaflet were posted and spread in the community. The CAC's initiative was very much appreciated by the residents of Vardenik, who now know, that, for instance, it is planned to build a kindergarten in the village in 2009, and the drinking water problem in the village will be solved in 2010. The CAC believe that their action will increase the responsibility of the community leaders for implementation of the program approved by them, and will contribute to strengthening the accountability and enhancing the transparency of the local government and their activities.

Ptghni YAC Assists Sevaberd Community

In October, Ptghni YAC members (Kotayk Marz) initiated a drive for clothes and stationery to assist one of the poorest and most remote villages of Kotayk region, Sevaberd, which also has one of the highest out migration rates in Armenia. Due to unfavorable climatic conditions, residents cannot engage in farming and agricultural activities to derive their livelihoods, nor are there any businesses, establishments or any other opportunities for the residents' employment in the village, and the majority of the community members live under very hard conditions. Ptghni YAC members' initiative received positive feedback from the community, as they were all aware about the hard

conditions of Sevaberd, and they actively took part in the action by donating clothes and stationery. The YAC contacted the Sevaberd Village Municipality, informed the Village Mayor of the initiative and asked to help them with the delivery of the donated items. On October 25 YAC members Hermine Poghosyan and Tatev Mnatsakanyan took the boxes with clothes and stationery to Sevaberd, where together with the Sevaberd Deputy Village Mayor, they distributed the assistance to the socially insecure residents of the village. The latter were very grateful and touched by the Ptghni community's attention to them and their needs.