



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 2009 Youth Civic Education Program

On March 23-27, 2009 the fourth annual "Yerevan in 5 Days" Youth Civic Education Program was organized and implemented within the framework of Youth and Community Action Program (YCAP). Thirty-seven 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. 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, Government, Court of Cassation and First Instance, ArmenPress News Agency, Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, and Ministry of Labor and Social Issues. This year participants also had the opportunity to meet Mr. Joseph Pennington, Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy, and learn more about youth civic activism in the US, as well as about US assistance in Armenia. Additionally, the partici-

pants took part in interactive civil society workshops with local and international NGOs to learn more about the elections, local self-government system, anti-corruption initiatives and the 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 37 Youth Action Clubs deepened their knowledge of the basic

concept of 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; learnt 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 Mr. Joseph Pennington, Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy

Water Problem Will be Finally Solved in Haykadzor

For two years, Haykadzor CAC members (Shirak Marz) have been concerned with the issue of the village's water supply. The main water pipe bringing water to the border village Haykadzor is located in the neutral territory between Armenia and Turkey, and water pumps are being used to pump water to the village. In 2007, when one of the two water pumps broke down, the CAC managed to secure funding from a donor organization and replace the broken pump with a new one. In 2008, the main water pipe was damaged and the CAC

again applied to a number of organizations and received support for the repair of the water pipe. However, this was only a partial solution to the water problem in the village, as because of the high costs associated with the use of water pumps the water supply in the village was not regular. Drilling a well in the village to provide the community with a regular and less expensive water supply was seen as a solution to the problem. At the beginning of 2009 the CAC applied to the National Assembly Standing Committee on Territorial Management and Local Self-

Government with a request to assist in solving the water problem in Haykadzor by providing funding for drilling of a well in the village. In March, that issue was discussed at the National Assembly and a decision was made to allocate funding for the well. Haykadzor CAC received a written response to their letter stating that the National Assembly passed a decision to allocate funds for drilling a well in Haykadzor in May 2009. The community is very pleased with CAC's success on this issue.

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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>

Ashotavan CAC Promotes the Use of Electronic Governance Opportunities to Raise and Solve Community Problems

In January, Ashotavan CAC (Syunik Marz) organized a seminar on "Electronic Governance" to inform the community members about the e-governance opportunities and promote the use of electronic letters for their applications to various organizations and government bodies. The CAC invited a representative of "Partnership and Teaching" NGO Ms. Lilit Mkrtchyan, to conduct the seminar for the Ashotavan community. After reaching an agreement on the date and time of the seminar, the CAC members put up announcements in the village inviting community members to attend the seminar and discuss community problems. On January 22, the CAC members and the interested community members gathered for the seminar. Ms. Mkrtchyan made a presentation on electronic governance opportunities and presented the participants with a list of websites of

various organizations and state structures where they could find up-to-date information on the functions and activities of the latter and send them their queries and/or requests for information via electronic mail. After the presentation, the community members prepared letters raising community issues and problems to send to various structures. One of the priority issues raised was the inadequate health care in Ashotavan and the neighboring communities as there was no medical doctor who could provide healthcare services to the population. In their letter the community suggested assigning a medical doctor to work in the village and provide medical services to its residents and the residents of the neighboring 6 villages. A short time after sending the letter to the Ministry of Health the community received a positive response to their



Seminar on "Electronic Governance" organized by Ashotavan CAC (Syunik Marz)

request, and in February a doctor was assigned to work at Ashotavan ambulatory and provide medical services to the population of Ashotavan and the neighboring 6 villages. Inspired by their success, Ashotavan community members are determined to continue using

electronic governance opportunities for raising their priorities, and they hope to receive responses also from the other state structures to which they sent letters describing important community issues and requesting support in their solution.

Kotayk CAC Surveys the Community Needs to Address them in their Activities

In January, Kotayk CAC (Kotayk Marz) organized and carried out a survey on community needs. The survey aimed at finding out the problems and priorities of the community members belonging to different generations with the view of trying to address them during the CAC activities. As a result of the survey, the CAC discovered that the community's youth population prioritized the creation of a sports complex, establishment of a computer center, securing internet connection, renovation of the

House of Culture and revival of cultural life in the community. Priorities noted by adults included: the need to raise the level of social security guaranteed by the state (the size of pension, social assistance benefits, etc), putting in place a village sewage system, improvement of the roads, installation of an irrigation system and greening the village. Based on the findings of the survey, the CAC members prepared a list of the priorities and problems of the community and met with the Village Mayor

to discuss possibilities of addressing those issues. During the discussion, it became clear that many of the issues raised in the survey had realistic and feasible solutions. The CAC members subsequently developed a work-plan for implementing the planned activities, and they believe that in due course they will be able to address most of the community's top priorities.

Youth's Priorities:

- ⇒ Creation of a Sports Complex
- ⇒ Establishing a Computer Center
- ⇒ Securing Internet Connection
- ⇒ Repair of the House of Culture and Revival of Cultural Life in the Community

Adults' Priorities:

- ⇒ Raising Social Security Level (Pensions, Benefits)
- ⇒ Putting in Place a Sewage System
- ⇒ Improvement of Roads
- ⇒ Installation of Irrigation System

Awareness-raising on Freedom of Information in Kotayk Marz

With the aim of raising the community members' awareness on the right to access information, in February, Kotayk Marz YACs and CACs cooperated with the Freedom of Information Center Armenia (FOICA) to organize a seminar on "RA Law on Freedom of Information" for the Kotayk community and the representatives of all the other YCAP civically active groups operating in the Kotayk Marz. The seminar took place on February 17 and was conducted by

FOICA representatives Marine Hakobyan and Anahit Kocharyan. The participants discussed the RA Law on Freedom of Information and received answers to a number of questions they had concerning citizens' rights to receive information and the procedures for requesting information. The participants also learnt that the Village Municipality should ensure the availability of information stands in the community and post there the decisions of the Community Council

and the Mayor, data on the community budget and other important for the community information. As far as Municipality representatives were also present at the seminar, the participants started an interesting debate on importance of transparency and ensuring better access to information on the community leaders' decisions and the community budget. According to the participants, the seminar was very effective and they received important information about their right to

access information. They also received informational material, which they can pass to their community.



Tsovazard CAC Acts to Increase Accountability and Transparency of the Local Government

In their activities Tsovazard CAC (Gegharkunik Marz) has been regularly addressing the issue of improving transparency within the local government, including improving access to information on the community budget. To that end, during 2008 the CAC organized several discussions on the community budget and spread notifications in the community reminding village residents to pay their taxes to fuel the budget. They also prepared copies of the community budget for residents to peruse. In February 2009, the CAC continued in this effort by asking the Community Council to hold an open session at the CAC Action Club where residents were invited to attend. The Community Council accepted the suggestion and on February 16 the CAC Action Center hosted

an outgoing session of the Community Council, which was well-attended. As planned, the CAC invited a number of young people to the session. During the session, the Council members discussed issues connected with implementing the 2008, as well as the 2009 budget. The young people had an opportunity to ask questions and receive answers and clarifications from the community leaders. Considering that a meeting of this type was unprecedented in the Marz, the regional TV Company attended the event. In their TV interviews, a number of young people noted that the session was very interesting and educational. They emphasized the importance of being informed about the mechanisms of a community budget formation and about the projects planned for



Community Council Session held at the Tsovazard CAC Action Center (Gegharkunik Marz) by the Initiative of the CAC

implementation in 2009. The young people also mentioned that this 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.

Civic Activism in Vayots Dzor: Raising Bardzrouni Community Problems,

◆ With the aim of voicing the community problems, in February, Bardzrouni CAC invited a Vayots Dzor Marz reporter of the Armenia 1st National Public TV Company, Ms. Bagratouni, to visit their village to learn about life in the border community Bardzrouni and make a report on the village, as well as watch a film about Bardzrouni, prepared by CAC member, Bella Muradyan. Ms. Bagratouni accepted the invitation and paid a visit to Bardzrouni on February 24. The CAC members gave her a tour of the village and the school, told her about the problems in the community and asked her to raise awareness about the village. On the same day, the CAC members organized a debate on "Are we satisfied with the Armenia's 1st Public TV Company?" and invited Ms. Bagratouni to attend. Acknowledging the progress made by the TV Company over the recent years, the community members also expressed criticism and dissatisfaction with some of the programs of the Public TV. According to many of the residents, the Company airs low quality cultural and music programs and serials, and provides very little information on remote border villages like Bardzrouni. Residents also shared with Ms. Bagratouni the community's problems, including the lack of

housing for young couples, the problems with the water supply system, the bad condition of village roads, the lack of books in the library, the absence of an internet connection, and the lack of educational and cultural events in the village. Ms. Bagratouni promised the community that she would pass these concerns and the criticisms to the TV Company and she would be back in May to prepare a special report on the Bardzrouni community.

◆ Considering it very important to increase the community members' legal awareness, in March, Areni CAC organized a meeting of the community with the Public Defender in Vayots Dzor Marz, Mr. Mihran Khanamiryan. The meeting took place at the community House of Culture on March 19. The CAC president Anna Ghazaryan told the attendees about the goal of the meeting and importance of being legally aware and informed about one's rights to be able to fully realize and protect them. Mr. Khanamiryan delivered a presentation on the Public Defender's Office, which was established in Armenia in 2007 with the aim of providing free legal aid to disadvantaged citizens. During the meeting the community members asked numerous questions on a number of issues, including landownership rights, inheritance rights, divorce,

alimony, social security, the right to have an attorney during examination at the police office, and a number of other questions related to rights and legislation.

◆ With the importance of the issue of urbanization, particularly among the youth, Herher YAC in January, organized a debate on "Should we stay and live in the village?" At the beginning of the debate the participants chose a facilitator and broke down into two groups to argue their views on the subject. The members of the first group argued for leaving the village. The main justification for their argument was the lack of access to information, the high unemployment rate in the village and the lack of educational and cultural opportunities for young people. Their opponent team

argued that it was equally difficult for villagers to find employment opportunities elsewhere and that at least in the village they could rely on farming so they wouldn't starve. The members of this group admitted that there were challenges associated with village life, but they argued that the best solution would be to deal with and overcome those challenges instead of leaving. In the end, the debate helped the community's youth to review the pros and cons of living in the village, to reevaluate their attitude about village life, as well as realize the importance of uniting their efforts and solving the problems that would make their life in the village better and more attractive for youth.



Debate on "Should we stay and live in the village?" organized by Herher YAC

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

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<http://aed.am>

Ranchpar CAC Cooperated with Armenian American Wellness Center to Organize Check-ups for Women

With the view of addressing the importance of women's health as well as prevention and treatment of female disorders, in March, Ranchpar CAC (Ararat Marz) members invited specialists from the Armenian American Wellness Center to provide free medical services to the women of Ranchpar community. On a specified day, specialists arrived in Ranchpar, bringing the necessary equipment to provide free medical services to the community's women. The CAC advertised the event by placing announcements around the village and the neighboring villages.

In total, 83 women from Ranchpar and the neighboring communities of Sis and Noramarg attended the Health Fair and underwent check-ups by the specialists of the Armenian American Wellness Center. The community was very grateful to the CAC for that important initiative, as given the poorness of the villages it was extremely difficult for the community women to visit doctors and undergo regular medical examinations. The Health Fair organized by the CAC also received coverage in local press.



Free medical check-ups for the community women initiated by Ranchpar CAC

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 Update: Activities of Lori, Vayots Dzor and Armavir Sub-Committees

Within the YCAP Community Collaboration initiative the CCM Committee and the Sub-Committees of each of the ten Marzes were actively engaged in planning and implementation of various initiatives aimed at solution of problems at community and Marz levels.

◆ To address the problem of the lack of medical specialists and adequate medical services in the rural communities of the Marz, Lori Regional Sub-Committee initiated a signature collection campaign in the 8 villages of the Marz. The campaign collected 70-150 signatures from each village, and the Sub-Committee prepared a letter to the Ministry of Health, which described the health-care situation in the villages and requested the Ministry's support in organizing visits of medical doctors and specialists to the villages. In March, the Sub-Committee members were contacted by the representatives of the Ministry of Health, who asked for details on the request and told the Sub-Committee members that their letter would be referred to the Department of Health of the Lori Marzpetaran (Regional Administration) and they would further contact the Sub-Committee and cooperate with them in arranging visits of qualified doctors to the village. At present the Sub-Committee members are awaiting a letter from the Marzpetaran Health Department and are ready to cooperate with the Health Department in organization of the visit of specialists to the Lori Marz villages.

◆ Vayots Dzor Marz Sub-Committee initiated and carried out a survey aimed at identifying school problems in the Marz. Among the most common problems identified were absence of drinking water in schools, absence of a canteen, absence of bathrooms and toilets, heating problems, and absence of qualified teachers on some of the subjects. The results of the survey have been already finalized and the members of the Sub-Committee are currently working with the Marzpetaran Departments of Education and Local Governance to organize a Marz level public discussion with participation of Mayors, school directors and other interested community members to discuss and find ways of addressing the identified problems.

◆ Armavir Marz Sub-Committee was concerned with the danger of the spread of brucellosis in cattle in their region and the inadequate measures being taken by the Armavir Marzpetaran Veterinary Inspection agency to address the issue. Thus, they sent the agency a letter requesting them to strengthen their activities regarding this issue and provide more robust measures to prevent the spread of the disease, including vaccination. The Sub-Committee also offered their assistance in organizing the vaccination and provision of information on the initiative to the population of the Marz.