



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.

Tavush Marz Active Groups Act to Increase Awareness and Promote Community Participation

On April 10, Gandzakhar CAC celebrated its 1st anniversary with a big community event held at the Village Hall. The representatives of the Village Municipality, the school, church and other community members and guests from the neighboring communities, around 90 people, attended the event to congratulate the CAC on their first anniversary and learn about their planned activities. The CAC made a presentation accompanied by photo slides on the projects implemented by them during the reporting year and their outcomes. They also told the guests about their future plans and invited everybody to join them in their initiatives and efforts to make the community a better place to live. The community was very impressed by the CAC's achievements, wished them well in their future endeavors and pledged their support to the CAC's initiatives. Gandzakhar CAC's first anniversary turned into a big community event after which the whole community became more unified and proud of the CAC and their village, as well as full of hopes for a brighter future.

In May, with the aim of increasing community's involvement in solution of public and community issues and community's participation in the workings of the local government, the Berdavan YAC initiated placing boxes for applications, complaints and suggestions in the village. The YAC met with the Village Mayor and presented him their suggestion according to which boxes for applications, complaints and suggestions were going to be placed in the village, in the places frequented by the community, and a special committee was going to be set up to process the applications, complaints and

suggestions of the community and meet with the representatives of the relevant local self-government bodies to address the raised issues or discuss the community's complaints and suggestions. The Mayor agreed to allocate funds for the activity and the YAC, who are currently working with the Village Municipality representatives to design, construct and place the boxes in the village, believe that the initiative will help to enhance the efficiency of local self-government, as well as to increase the community's participation in the solution of public issues and the workings of the self-government bodies.



Community reporting event dedicated to the 1st anniversary of the Gandzakhar CAC's (Tavush Marz) establishment

Margahovit CAC Takes Action to Address a Community Issue

In May, Margahovit CAC (Lori Marz) worked to address the problem of absence of sanitary facilities at the newly renovated Educational and Cultural Complex of the community. The CAC had a meeting with the Village Mayor to discuss the issue and found out that around 1/3rd of the budget approved for the renovation of the Educational and Cultural Complex, which initially included also building sanitary facilities, had not been transferred to the community, and, as a result, the work was suspended leaving a certain part of the renovation incomplete. The CAC prepared a letter with the description of the situation and sent it to the RA Prime-Minister requesting the support of the latter in clarification of the reasons for not transferring the full amount of money to the community, as well as help with finding a solution to the problem of absence of sanitary facilities at the Educational and Cultural Complex. Shortly after sending the letter, the CAC was contacted by the representatives of the Lori Marzpetaran Division of Urban Planning, who informed the CAC that their letter had been re-addressed to the

Urban Planning division and stated that given the importance of the role of the Educational and Cultural Center for the community, the funds required for building sanitary facilities at the Margahovit Educational and Cultural Complex would be included in the budget for one of the upcoming Marz projects. The CAC is resolute to follow-up on the Marzpetaran's pledge to allocate funds for the project and to cooperate with the Division of Urban Planning to resolve that important community problem.

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About the YCAP Communities:

- There are 37 active Youth Action Clubs and 43 Community Action Committees established and operational 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 2,000 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>

Shirak Marz Active Groups Raise Community Issues and Protect Community's Rights

In April, Haykadzor CAC attempted to address one of the community's priorities - construction of a railroad platform in the village that would ensure the connection of the remote and border community Haykadzor with the two strategic cities of Armenia - the capital Yerevan and the Shirak Marz Center Gyumri. For a number of years Haykadzor community has been isolated with no direct means of transportation to the capital Yerevan or the regional center Gyumri. This has created problems for the community. Currently, there is a working railway route from Yerevan to Gyumri passing through the village where there used to be a platform and a stop before the deterioration of the Armenian railway network with the fall of the Soviet Union.

The CAC sent a letter to the "South Caucasian Railway" CJSC which currently manages the Armenian Railways. The CAC requested the "South Caucasian Railway" company to allocate funds for reconstruction of the platform in Haykadzor and to open a rail stop in the village. The CAC also expressed their readiness to mobilize the community to make a contribution to the project by carrying out all the construction work themselves. The CAC and the whole community are now looking forward to receiving a response from the "South Caucasian Railway" CJST. They hope the response will be positive as construction of a platform in Haykadzor would be beneficial for both parties - the community and the rail opera-

tor company, as the railway will become the main means of communication between Haykadzor, Yerevan and Gyumri and the whole community would be constantly using the services of the company for traveling and transportation of goods and agricultural produce.

In June, Bavra CAC organized a campaign aimed at protecting the interests of the community who believed they had the right to use the community's lands located at the border with Georgia - at 1km's distance from the border customs, but which they were not allowed by the border guards to use for cultivation or as cattle pastures. To protect the community's rights the CAC applied to the Village Mayor with whom they discussed the community members' concerns and claims and asked the Village

Mayor to invite a lawyer who could provide a consultation on the issue. After consulting with the lawyer and verifying the legality of the community's claims the CAC met with the head of the border patrol and with the help of the lawyer succeeded in proving the case for Bavra community to use the border lands belonging to them. The community members were very glad to hear about the developments and the CAC's success in protecting the community's rights. The CAC decided to take the case further and invite a lawyer who could help them obtain a written and legally verified document stating that those lands belong to the Bavra community and could be used by the community as agricultural lands or pastures.

Survey on Community's Perception of Gender Issues in Areni

In April, Areni CAC (Vayots Dzor Marz) initiated a survey on the community's perception of gender issues. The CAC developed a questionnaire composed of 5 questions, and carried out the survey among community members - men and women belonging to various age groups. The questions were as follows: Do you know what is meant by "gender"? Do you think the men and women have equal rights in our community? Would you like our community to have a female leader? Can a woman be the head of a household? Would you like to participate in seminars and

discussions on gender issues? After concluding the results of the survey the CAC found that the respondents were not very clear about the notion of gender, and that the stereotypes were still prevailing in the community. In the position of the community leader most of the respondents wanted to see a man, and the majority of the respondents noted that a woman could not be the head of a household. To the question about the equality of rights of men and women in Areni, the majority of the respondents gave a negative answer, saying that

men and women did not have equal rights in their community. As to the final question, all the surveyed people were interested in the subject and expressed their wish to participate in seminars and discussions on gender issues. Following the conclusion of the survey results, the CAC organized a meeting-debate in the village to present the findings of the survey to the community. At the beginning of the meeting the CAC president, Anna Ghazaryan, made a presentation on gender issues and gender equality, afterwards, she presented the results of the survey on the community's per-

ception of gender issues. The presentation was followed by a heated debate on the five questions raised in the questionnaire forms. At the end of the meeting many of the participants noted that they changed their views regarding certain gender issues, and all the participants were unanimous in their opinion that the meeting-debate was very interesting and important for the community, it helped to increase awareness on gender equality and motivated many women to review their attitude to leadership and take a more active role in family, social and political life.

Training in Journalism in Ptghni

In May, Ptghni YAC (Kotayk Marz) initiated training in "Journalism" for 8-10 grade school students of the community. The YAC's initiative aimed at promoting the young people's participation in addressing public issues by equipping them with skills required to write letters, applications, short stories and articles for newspapers in order to voice their views and raise issues important for them. YAC member Tatev Mnatsakanyan, who is a journalist by profession, conducted the trainings and shared her knowledge on the subject with the young people who wished to learn about journalism and acquire basic journal-

istic skills. After the presentation of the topic (basics of journalism, stylistics, certain rules), the participants were given assignments and homework to do before the next session. At the subsequent sessions the young people presented and discussed their articles and stories. According to the participants the training was very effective, they acquired sufficient knowledge on journalism and improved their writing skills which they were going to use for raising important problems, writing letters and applications to officials, as well as writing articles and stories for newspapers and newsletters to make their voices heard.

Karakert YAC Protects the Interests of the Community

In May, Karakert YAC (Armavir Marz) decided to address the issue of the unsatisfactory quality of water being imported to the village for sale. Due to the shortage of drinking water in the village, Karakert community has to buy potable water in tanks, and recently the village has had complaints concerning the quality of the water. To address this issue the YAC prepared and sent a letter to the Sanitary-Hygienic Safety Control Regional Department with a request to test the water imported to Karakert for sale, as well as to establish a mechanism for constant monitoring and check-up of the quality of

the water being sold in the village. In June, the representatives of the Department of Sanitary-hygienic Control of the Armavir Marzpetaran informed the YAC that in response to their concerns the quality of the water being sold in Karakert will be checked biannually to keep the water quality under control and prevent the spread of any infection through water. The YAC is determined to follow-up on the implementation of the water quality check-ups to make sure that the water imported to their community meets the water quality standards, as well as keep the community informed about the results of the water tests.

Martouni YAC Motivates Peers and Promotes Civic Activism in the Neighboring Community of Aygut

In April, Martouni YAC (Gegharkunik Marz) organized a presentation on the activities and projects implemented since the YAC's establishment in Martouni, in April 2008, for the youth of the neighboring Aygut community. The YAC's initiative aimed at motivating the youth of Aygut to become civically more active and involved in the solution of the community problems. According to the YAC, small communities like Martouni and Aygut could achieve more and be more successful in finding solutions to the community issues and improving the lives in their communities by acting together and uniting their efforts to find solutions to youth and community problems and issues. The YAC's presentation took place on April 21 at Aygut secondary school events hall.

The young people who attended the presentation were very impressed by the initiatives and activities implemented by their peers in Martouni. They asked the YAC numerous questions and requested the YAC's help in setting up a youth action center in their village. Martouni YAC pledged their support in establishing an active group in Aygut village. Seeing the enthusiasm of the young people, the school headmaster and the teachers also promised to help the youth in their initiative and provide a suitable room to serve them as an Action Center. Martouni YAC set the date of their next visit to Aygut to share their experience with their peers regarding the organizational issues, community needs assessment and action



Seminar organized by Martouni YAC (Gegharkunik Marz) for the youth of the neighboring Aygut community

planning. The YAC considers their first step in the direction of establishing a cooperation with the youth of the neighboring community very productive and they are going to continue building up the cooperation, sharing their experi-

ence and skills with Aygut community and start planning and implementing together actions aimed at the betterment of the life in the rural communities of the Gegharkunik Marz.

Garnahovit CAC Attempts to Find Solutions to the Problem of Youth Unemployment in the Village

Concerned with the problem of youth unemployment in the village, in April, Garnahovit CAC (Aragatsoth Marz) initiated and organized a discussion with Ms Anahit Abgaryan, a representative of Talin Regional Employment Service Agency. The participants discussed numerous issues in regard to possible ways of increasing employment opportunities for youth in rural communities. Among the suggestions discussed by the community were the creation of conditions for young people to work from home, get orders and deliver the

ready produce to the clients and/or manufacturers, engaging the young people in public works, helping the skillful young people to find contractual work abroad, and provision of concession loans for starting a small business. Some of the participants, mostly the unemployed young people, expressed their discontent with the effectiveness of the State Employment Service Agency's work and the lack of care and attention the unemployed get from the state. They noted that unemployment results in their social exclusion and inability to participate in the community life

and failure to consider and feel themselves as complete members of the society. The participants also expressed their disagreement with the speaker's statement that those who own land-plots are considered to be employed and are not eligible for unemployment benefits, as provided for in the Armenian legislation on unemployment. As a follow up to the discussion the CAC sent a letter to the RA National Assembly raising the issue and stating their arguments against that provision in the decree and requesting reconsidera-

tion of it. The CAC also prepared another letter describing unemployment in Garnahovit and their suggestions for addressing the problem and sent the letter to the director of the Talin Regional Employment Service Agency. The CAC hopes that their efforts will have positive results and the relevant structures and authorities will get more closely and efficiently engaged in addressing the issue of youth unemployment.

YCAP Community Collaboration Update: Activities of Tavush and Ararat Marz 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.

◆ In June, Tavush Marz CCM Sub-Committee finalized the results of the survey on community problems carried out by the Sub-Committee members in the eight YCAP communities of the Marz. In total, 340 people completed the survey, the findings of which revealed that the most common

problems are the shortage of drinking water, absence of a garbage collection and garbage removal mechanism, absence of jobs, absence of natural gas, poor condition of roads, absence of irrigation water, need for renovation at the community school and low quality of education at the schools. As to the reasons for the problems, 78% of the respondents indicated 'lack of financial resources', 20.7% of the respondents answered 'inactivity of the local government', and 2.7% noted 'indifference'. The results of the survey were also analyzed separately for each community, and

letters were prepared and sent to the leaders of each of the eight communities. The Sub-Committee members presented the problems raised by the community and offered their cooperation with the local government on finding solutions to those problems. A letter will also be sent to the Tavush Marzpet informing him about the survey carried out in the Tavush Marz communities and the findings of the survey. In the letter to the Marzpet, the Tavush Marz CCM Sub-Committee members will request a meeting with the Marzpet to discuss the methods of addressing the problems exist-

ing in the Tavush Marz communities. The Sub-Committee is also planning to prepare an article illustrating the survey results and have it published in "Tavush" regional newspaper. The Tavush Marz CCM Sub-Committee is determined to continue their work on mobilizing the communities, cooperating with other organizations and jointly solving the problems brought up by the Tavush Marz communities.

◆ In April, Ararat Marz CCM Sub-Committee initiated and implemented a clean-up and tree-planting action at the Khor Virap (continued on page 4)

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YCAP Community Collaboration Update: Activities of Tavush and Ararat Marz Sub-Committees

(continued from page 3)
 monastery. The Sub-Committee met with Ararat Marzpetaran representatives and requested their support in providing some necessary items for the activity (gloves, bags for removing garbage). The Ararat Marz CCM Sub-Committee also met with their respective community leaders, who agreed to support the action by providing a vehicle, or by covering the transportation costs of their community members to Khor Virap monastery. The Sub-Committee also discussed the initiative with the leaders of Lusarat community (the Khor Virap monastery is located in this community) and worked with the village residents on organization of the activity. The Lusarat Village Mayor provided a tractor with a trailer for transportation of the collected garbage and tanks of water for watering the newly planted trees. On April 9, around 50 volunteers from the eight YCAP communities of Ararat Marz, together with around another 50 people from Lusarat village, took part in the activity.

The participants cleaned an area of around two square kilometers of plastic bottles, plastic bags, debris and garbage. Afterwards, 30 decorative trees that were provided by Mkhchyan based "Ekogen" NGO on the CCM Sub-Committee members request were planted around the monastery. Ararat Marzpet and other officials from Ararat Marzpetaran visited the volunteers on the Clean-up Action day and discussed the environmental situation in the Marz. The regional Mass Media also attended the event and provided media coverage that was broadcast on the regional "Anna" TV. The Sub-Committee hopes their action will motivate the youth in other communities to be more active and implement activities aimed at solution of public and community issues.

At present, the Ararat Marz CCM Sub-Committee is planning to address the problem of frequent car accidents across the region. Being concerned with the growing number of road accidents involv-

ing fatalities and casualties in the Marz, the Sub-Committee is currently working with a number of organizations including the Armenian State Auto-Inspection to organize a public discussion on the subject and to find solutions for improvement of the existing situation. The Sub-Committee members developed a questionnaire form and are going to organize a public opinion poll to collect the views of people on the main reasons for the road accidents, the need to erect additional alerting signs or warning posters on the dangerous segments of the road and the need to organize road safety trainings at schools. In the questionnaire the respondents are also asked to name the most dangerous seg-

ments of the roads and provide suggestions on how to reduce the risk of road accidents in the region. The survey is going to be carried out in July – August, and the CCM Sub-Committee members are planning to present the findings to the public and suggest specific solutions to the problem. Ararat Marz CCM Sub-Committee is also planning to organize a contest of road alert signs/posters to involve more people in the initiative and further increase public awareness. The sign/poster exhibition and voting for the best road alert sign/poster are planned to be held on the same day as the public discussion – at the beginning of September.

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A clean-up and tree-planting action at the area of Khor Virap monastery initiated by Ararat Marz CCM Sub-Committee

- 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