



Community Action News

A Quarterly Publication of the Youth and Community Action Program



№ 3 (8)
July – September 2009



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

YCAP is a USAID-funded 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 2009

The Third Annual YCAP Conference for all the 80 YCAP communities was held on September 23-25, 2009, in Tshakkhadzor, Armenia. The Conference brought together 160 representatives from 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. The opening session of the Conference was attended by U.S. Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch, representatives of USAID/Armenia, the Academy for Educational Development, Counterpart International, local NGOs and members of the 80 YCAP communities from all 10 marzes of Armenia. In her opening remarks, U.S. Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch stressed the importance of building partnerships and networks to strengthen advocacy, and the need for constructive engagement with local and national institutions for collective action. 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, Freedom of Information,

Access to Alternative Media, Creating/Perfecting Community Newsletter, Partnering with Local Government. At a special Information and Experience Exchange session the participants, YAC/CAC representatives from 80 communities throughout Armenia, delivered presentations on the civic actions and advocacy campaigns implemented by their YACs/CACs and shared information on their achievements and successes. The participants also took part in an Open Space session with the theme of "Promoting Civic Activism in Armenia" and worked in groups to develop strategies to overcome the existing barriers to civic participation and promote civic activism in the country.

In addition, the Youth Action Clubs and Community Action Committees put together exhibition/poster presentations focused on their work in their communities and the YACs/CACs' contribution to the economic, social, educational, democratic, cultural and environmental advancement. The YCAP Community Civic Action Conference provided an excellent opportunity for the YAC/CAC representatives to enrich their knowledge, gain new skills, exchange information and experience and strengthen the network of civically active groups throughout Armenia by fostering linkages, exchanging ideas and increasing awareness of the important role the grassroots can play in a civil society.



U.S. Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch addresses the participants at the YCAP Community Civic Action Conference 2009

"Open Window" Legal Support Initiative of Verin Ptghni CAC, Kotayk Marz

In August, Verin Ptghni CAC established an informational-consulting service "Open Window" at the CAC Action Center which will be providing information and legal advice to the community free of charge. The CAC is determined to resolve the issue of lack of information and legal awareness in the village and help the community in settling their legal issues and problems within the Republic of Armenia's legal framework. The CAC members who work on this initiative pro-

vide the community with legal advice using 'IRTEK' Legal information Center's database of the Armenian legislation. In August, many community members received legal advice that help in restoring their violated rights. For instance, the CAC helped one resident restore his right to free health care services; and two other residents received help in appealing the decision of the Social Service Agency to terminate their Poverty Family Benefit. Parents of school children received

help in preparing a letter and organizing a signature collection campaign to resolve some issues violating the students' rights at the community school as well as raising those issues in a letter addressed to the RA Minister of Education and Science. The CAC's initiative has had a very positive feedback in the community and the CAC is determined to continue with the project, increasing legal awareness in the community and helping people to protect their rights and interests.

Inside this issue:

- Pre-Election Meeting Organized by Sarnaghbyur YAC* 2
- Seminars Initiated by Ashnak YAC to Engage the Community in Anti-corruption Efforts, Promote Volunteerism and Increase Legal Awareness* 2
- International Youth Day Celebrated in Dilijan to Unite Youth and Increase Awareness of Youth's Role in Building the Country's Future* 2
- Community Budget Published as a result of Martouni YAC's Initiative* 3
- Nor Geghi YAC Creates a Community Website* 3
- Artsvanik CAC Raises Awareness about Ecological Issues* 3
- YCAP Community Update: Activities of Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor Marz CCM Sub-Committees* 3
(Continued on pg. 4)

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 1,700 civic actions over the past five years

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

Pre-Election Meeting Organized by Sarnaghbyur YAC

In July, Sarnaghbyur YAC (Shirak Marz) organized a community meeting with the candidates for the post of the Village Mayor, as the former Village Mayor had resigned from his post due to health related problems and elections of a new village leader were going to be held. All the candidates for the post were invited to the meeting, which was widely attended by the community. The candidates for the post made presentations on their programs and plans and answered the questions of the community, most of which concerned their future steps, plans and priorities, as well as the reason and their motivation for becoming the village leader. The community found the meeting

very effective and helpful for making an informed decision regarding the candidate they wanted to see in the post of the village leader. At the end of the meeting the participants thanked the YAC for initiating and organizing the meeting with the candidates. The YAC expressed their determination to continue their efforts to ensure transparent and fair elections in the village and urged the community to be active, learn more about the candidates' programs and vote on the election day for the candidate who they would find more competent and capable of holding that responsible position and working effectively for the development of the community.



Meeting with the candidates for the post of the Village Mayor, organized by Sarnaghbyur YAC

Seminars Initiated by Ashnak YAC to Engage the Community in Anti-Corruption Efforts, Promote Volunteerism and Increase Legal Awareness

In July, Ashnak YAC (Argatsotn Marz) invited representatives from the Anti-corruption Advocacy and Assistance Center (AAC) established in Talin under the USAID/Mobilizing Action against Corruption (MAAC) initiative to inform the community about the activities of the Center and present the anti-corruption efforts and actions in the region. The guest speaker – Ms. Epraksia Khachatryan, provided detailed information on the activities of the Talin AAC and informed the community that the Center also provides free legal

advice and assistance to citizens to resolve corruption related problems and helps with the legal processing of complaints. The participants also discussed possible ways of reducing corruption in the country and the importance of every person's involvement in anti-corruption efforts. The seminar provided the participants with important information and further built their capacity and confidence to protect their rights.

In July, Ashnak YAC members also organized a meeting at the community school to make a

presentation for the school students on the mission and activities of the YAC and discuss with them the subject of volunteerism, the benefits of volunteering and making a contribution to the development of their community, as well as to invite the young people to join the YAC. At the end of the meeting many school students approached the YAC and expressed their willingness to join the Youth Club and get involved in the YAC's activities.

In August, continuing their efforts to raise legal awareness in the community and help resolve cer-

tain issues and disputes that had arisen between the consumers and the shop owners in the village, Ashnak YAC organized and conducted a seminar on "Consumer Rights". The YAC president made a detailed presentation on the rights and responsibilities of the consumers, shop owners and service providers in general. The YAC believes that the seminar helped to clarify a number of questions related to the consumer rights, and in future there will be fewer misunderstandings and disputes.

International Youth Day Celebrated in Dilijan to Unite Youth and Increase Awareness of Youth's Role in Building the Country's Future



Event dedicated to the International Youth Day, organized by Dilijan YAC

On August 12, the International Youth Day proclaimed by the United Nations, Dilijan YAC (Tavush Marz) organized a youth event to unite community youth, increase activism and awareness of the role youth can play in the development of civil society, solution of youth issues, improvement of their life chances and realization of their potential. The YAC posted posters in the city center where the event was held. The latter included speeches and presentations on the meaning of the International Youth Day, the role of the young people as future leaders and the moving force for changes, as well as concerts, dances, a biking competition and other activities.

The event turned into a youth festival and was widely attended by the community youth, representatives of various NGOs, educational establishments and guests of the city. The Dilijan YAC also applied to the public radio and gave an interview to the "Lyunsey" youth program about the International Youth Day. The interview aired by the local public radio station aimed to reach a larger audience and further raise the youth's awareness on the meaning of the International Youth Day and the importance of uniting efforts to improve the well-being of the young people and their opportunities to fully realize their potential and contribute to the betterment of life in the country.

Community Budget Published as a Result of Martouni YAC's Initiative

Martouni YAC members (Gegharkunik Marz) have had several discussions with the Village Mayor regarding the need to publish the community budget and make the information on community incomes and expenditures available to all residents, however, they hadn't been able to achieve the Village Mayor's agreement to do that. In August, the YAC decided to take a different approach and apply to the Village Mayor with a written request to publicize the community budget. In their request the YAC also included reference to the RA Law on Local Self-Governance and the RA Law on Freedom of Information, and quoted relevant provisions from those laws stating the responsibility of the local government to provide

information on the community budget and the right of the citizens to obtain the information they seek. The YAC also provided examples from other communities where Village Mayors held open discussions on the community budget, published the budget and made it available for the community. After the receipt of the letter, the Village Mayor invited the YAC members to a meeting and expressed his approval of their initiative. He asked the YAC to cooperate with a Village Municipality specialist on publicizing the community budget. As a result, copies of Martouni community budget for 2009 which included information on the budget implementation with all the incomes and expenditures listed, were



Community acquaints themselves with the community budget, copies of which were posted in the village as a result of Martouni YAC's initiative

posted in the village. The community was pleasantly surprised to see the information on the community budget openly published in the village, they familiarized themselves with the document and learned about the projects the

community budget covered in 2009. The YAC believes that their initiative contributed to increasing the local government's accountability and transparency, as well as helped to increase the community involvement in decision-making.

Nor Geghi YAC Creates a Community Website

The Nor Geghi YAC (Kotayk Marz) worked on creation and design of the community's web page. To make the process of the web-page development participatory and to reflect the ideas and wishes of all the community in the design of the community's website, the YAC organized a number of meetings and discussions with the community during which they presented the web-page and discussed the interface, design and the sections that the community wanted to see on the web-page. In September, after the website was ready, the YAC presented it

to the community on September 18 at the Nor Geghi YAC's Action Center. The YAC presented the webpage that contained sections titled 'Village Municipality' – for posting announcements and Community Council's decision, 'News' for local and international news updates, 'Library' where the list of the books available in the two libraries of the community will be posted, 'Announcements' where the community can post any announcements, and 'Dialogue' where the community can ask questions on any subject related to laws, regulations, decisions of the

local government, their rights and entitlements and receive answers from professional lawyers with whom the YAC is going to cooperate on that initiative. The website also contains general information about the village, its geographic location and history. The community was very impressed by the YAC's work on the website and the new opportunities that open with its operation. The YAC also asked the attendees to spread the information about the website and its address to their neighbors, friends and family, and also distributed leaflets with information on

the website. The YAC believes that the website will serve as a tool for improving access to and exchange of information for the community and will contribute to the improvement of the dialogue and cooperation with the local government.



Artsvanik CAC Raises Awareness about Ecological Issues

With the aim of increasing awareness of the ecological issues in the village, in August, Artsvanik CAC (Syunik Marz) reached an agreement with local authorities to invite mass media to the village to raise environmental issues that concerned village residents. The CAC's invitation was accepted by the local "Khoustoup" TV reporters, who, on August 12, arrived in Artsvanik for a meeting with the CAC, local authorities and the community. The CAC presented the ecological problems the community faces due to its location close to the site where the Kajaran Copper Molybdenum Factory deposits its toxic waste, which has a very negative effect on the environment – not only on

flora and fauna, but also on people's health. The village residents present at the meeting also expressed their concerns with the health risks the toxic waste deposit site poses to the residents of Artsvanik community and the nearby villages. The resulting report was broadcast by the regional TV. The CAC believes that the program helped to raise awareness about that problem, as well as the importance of protecting environment and ensuring safety of people and the flora and fauna of the given locality. They also hope the coverage attracts the attention of the regional government and environmental organizations who would take action to redress the situation.

YCAP Community Collaboration Update: Activities of Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor Marz CCM Sub-Committees

Within the YCAP Community Collaboration initiative the CCM 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 July, Gegharkunik Marz CCM Sub-Committee received a positive response from the Gegharkunik Marzpetaran concerning their proposal to use the regional TV stations to provide the population with comprehensive information on free health services guaranteed by the state in order to address

the problem of lack of information in the communities and help the citizens protect their rights and entitlements. On July 12 a live program was aired by the regional TV Station during which Mr. Gurgen Davtyan, head of the Health Department of the Gegharkunik Marzpetaran, made a presentation on the free health services guaranteed to the population by the state, touched upon other issues and problems existing in the health care sector in the country, accepted and answered the questions of the audience. (Continued on page 4)

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>

YCAP Community Collaboration Update: Activities of Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor Marz CCM Sub-Committees

(Continued from page 3)

Mr. Davtyan also called on the TV viewers to apply in written to the Department of Health with their problems and queries and promised that he would personally follow on their solution. The Gegharkunik CCM Sub-Committee's initiative significantly contributed to raising people's awareness on the guaranteed free health care services which will lead to a better realization and protection of the citizens' rights and entitlements.

◆ In July, Vayots Dzor CCM Sub-Committee organized a public discussion on the "Problems Existing at Schools in Vayots Dzor Villages" after tabulating the results of the survey on school problems carried out by Sub-Committee in the schools in the eight YCAP communities. The Sub-Committee contacted and worked with all the interested parties in the region including the officials of Marzpetaran and Village Municipalities, school directors and students, and reached their agreement regarding the date, time and venue of the discussion which was decided to

organize in Yeghegnadzor, Vayots Dzor Marz center. The discussion took place on July 10 and was widely attended by public and officials including Arpiar Ghazaryan, head of the Vayots Dzor Marzpetaran Department for Education, Culture and Sports, Aram Grigoryan, head of the Regional Division for Education, the Village Mayors and School directors of the eight YCAP communities in Vayots Dzor Marz and representatives of educational establishments and NGOs in the Marz as well as USAID and AED representatives. The discussion was opened by Arpiar Ghazaryan, the head of the Vayots Dzor Marzpetaran Department for Education, Culture and Sports, who made a brief overview of the situation at the schools in the villages of the region, which was followed by the presentation of the results of the survey carried out by the Vayots Dzor Marz CCM Sub-Committee in the 8 YCAP communities of the Marz. According to the findings of the survey, many schools in the communities had problems connected

YCAP is a 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

with the sanitary facilities (absence of bathrooms), availability of water and canteens, school heating, and availability of qualified teachers on some of the subjects. After the presentation, the schools directors presented the issues and problems in their schools and discussed their plans and measures to be taken to resolve those issues. The Village Mayors also agreed on the need to join efforts and improve the situation at schools of the region, they also noted that they highly appreciated the activities and achievements of the YCAP groups in their communities and expressed their willingness to further support the YAC/CACs activities aimed at bringing improvements in the communities. The representatives of the NGOs

and other participants also expressed their views regarding the possible ways of improving the situation in the schools of the region and stated their readiness to join efforts in that initiative. The public discussion was evaluated by all the participants as very effective and conducive for constructive cooperation around solution of the issues at the schools in the rural communities of the Marz. The CCM Sub-Committee believes that the public discussion served as a springboard for further action by all the interested and competent bodies to solve the issues in rural schools of the region and make education at schools as effective and enjoyable for the students as possible.



Public Discussion organized by Vayots Dzor Marz CCM Sub-Committee to discuss and find solutions to the problems of schools in rural communities of Vayots Dzor