



# Community Action News

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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.

## Aparan YAC had the honor of hosting the US Ambassador to Armenia Marie L. Yovanovitch in their Action Center

On October 15, Aparan YAC (Aragatsotn Marz) had the honor of hosting the US Ambassador to Armenia, Marie L. Yovanovitch, in their community and having a meeting at the YAC Action Center. During meeting the participants introduced the most essential initiatives and projects they had carried out during the previous four years. The YAC members were very happy and excited to have an opportunity to discuss youth and community issues with the Ambassador Yovanovitch. The young people also talked about YAC anti-corruption activities implemented by community youth and discussion focused on anti-corruption methods, objectives and outcomes that have occurred. After the meeting, the YAC received a letter from the Ambassador Yovanovitch thanking them for the interesting meeting and discussions. "It was my pleasure to meet with the

dedicated young activists of the Aparan Youth Action Club and to learn about your many activities on behalf of your community. Your actions give us all hope for a more open and de-

mocratic future." The Ambassador's visit inspired the YAC to continue their efforts and take on a more active role in the development and democratization of the country.



Aparan YAC (Aragatsotn Marz) had the honor of hosting the US Ambassador to Armenia Marie L. Yovanovitch in their Action Center

## Sarnakounk YAC Creates a "News Corner" to Increase Community Access to News and Information

Bringing Internet connectivity to their Center served as a stimulus for new ideas and initiatives for the Sarnakounk YAC. They decided to conduct a survey to find out mass media availability throughout the community and about 100 people belonging to different age groups participated in the survey which lasted for three days in November. Survey results show that 32% of respondents don't read newspapers because of unavailability, 15% are passive state, i.e. they are not interested in the news, for the remaining 53% newspapers are

not available because of the unstable financial situation. The survey results indicated to the YAC that political, economic and cultural news downloaded from the internet would be useful to their community, and the "News Corner" the YAC established became an important source of information. YAC invited all the community members to regularly visit the "News Corner" established in their Action Center for the latest economic, political, social and cultural news. YAC also downloaded the latest news and information from the internet

and printed and disseminated the news in the community. In addition YAC organized a meeting with the representatives of local self-government bodies to instruct community authorities on using internet tools, particularly on using websites with updated laws or decrees defining the process of applying to corresponding body for the solution of any problems. YAC members believe that Internet accessibility and increased access to current news and up-to-date information will open new opportunities for the community development.

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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 1,700 civic actions over the past five years

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

## Davtashen YAC Acts to Raise Awareness on the Right to Access Information

With the aim of raising community awareness on the right to access information, in December, Davtashen YAC (Aragatsotn Marz) cooperated with the Freedom of Information Center Armenia (FOICA) to organize a seminar on “RA Law on Freedom of Information”. The participants included teachers, local government representatives, community residents, and YAC members. 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. As stated by the speaker, awareness is the first step in right protection process. Participants were provided

with information about the right of receiving information, who to apply to for receiving information, and how to apply, in what cases requests can be rejected, and what to do if the answer is not sufficient. The speaker and participants shared examples of the violation of rights regarding the process of receiving Poverty Family Benefits and outlined the restoration of their rights due to learning about the legislation. The participants shared numerous examples of suffering from not being aware about their rights. They agreed to continue organizing similar seminars as the knowledge obtained is very important in everyday life. The participants also agreed that the more they are aware about their rights the fewer mistakes they make.



*Seminar on Freedom of Information organized in Davtashen Action Center*

## Internet Accessibility Opens New Opportunities for YCAP Communities: Updates from Gegharkunik Marz

Internet connectivity established by YCAP in 80 communities enabled providing broader community access to alternative media, current news and other information useful to community development and inspired communities to initiate numerous new activities.

◆ Located far from the marz center and having no local mass media, the Tchambarak community has very little opportunity to raise their issues and voice their concerns to marz authorities. Internet accessibility opens new opportunities for the Tchambarak CAC. Learning

in December that the “Hetq” online newspaper would organize an online interview with the Marzpet of Gegharkunik, Mr. Nver Poghosyan, the CAC decided to ask their questions to the Marzpet online. Their questions concerned Tchambarak’s difficult social-economic situation and proposed solutions. The Marzpet listed the projects implemented in the region during the previous two years. He admitted that the amount spent was not sufficient for immediately improving resident’s living standards and he mentioned the new

projects anticipated for this region in 2010 given the availability of funding. The CAC believes that the interview was effective one and helped focus the Marz authorities’ attention on Tchambarak community problems.

◆ Given that youth are concerned about unemployment issues, and given the high unemployment rates among young people, the Lchashen YAC (Gegharkunik Marz) used internet opportunities to address the issue. They visited [www.ashxatanq.am](http://www.ashxatanq.am), [www.job.am](http://www.job.am) and [www.careercenter.am](http://www.careercenter.am)

websites, found vacancy announcements, printed and disseminated them in the community in December. They informed community youth about 20 job opportunities existing in Gegharkunik and other regions. This was also a way to introduce the labor market demand, which may help orient youth as they choose their future specialty. Action Club members plan to post resumes of interested people for the employers’ attention. The YAC also listed web sites where young people could search employment opportunities on their own.

## Lukashin CAC Holds a Campaign to Protect Community Water Consumers’ Rights

In November, the campaign to protect the interests of water consumers was initiated by Lukashin CAC (Armavir Marz). Water consumers had informed the CAC that the bills to the consumers they received for the used irrigation water did not correspond with the amount of water they actually used. Thus, the consumers had to pay for water they had not used. The CAC organized a

process to collect, register and compare the existing checks with the ones stated in the register book. The results proved that the amount of money required by the water supplier was considerably different from the actually amount used. The CAC met with the district law office to get more information to be able to file a suit against the organization supplying the

water. On November 15, they also organized a seminar on “How to Apply to the Court of RA”. The lawyer invited by the CAC introduced the community to the court system and to the mechanisms and procedures for applying to the Court of RA. The CAC is determined to continue their actions aiming at protecting the interests of water consumers and, in January, is planning to file a suit

against the organization supplying water.



## Martouni YAC Take Actions to Increase Local Government Accountability

To keep the local government accountable and to raise youth awareness of local government roles and responsibilities, on December 5, the Martouni YAC (Gegharkunik Marz) organized a meeting with the Community Mayor, Vahram Hovhannisyan, to discuss community issues, community budget preparation as well as local government roles and responsibilities. The Mayor presented the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Local Self-Government, introduced community budget preparation process, the anticipated expenditures, and the role of community in budget preparation and approval. The young people asked a lot of questions about the processes of com-

munity budget formation, about taxation as well as about projects planned for the next year. As the community budget is being developed and approved at the end of the year, the youth suggested that the Mayor plan expenditures to make their daily and cultural life more interesting and meaningful. The mayor promised to take into consideration their suggestions and present them for Community Council's discussion. The YAC believes that this initiative contributed to increasing the local government's accountability and transparency, as well as helped to increase the young people's involvement in decision-making.



*Meeting of community youth with Village Mayor organized per Martouni YAC initiate*

## YAC/CAC Grassroots Civic Activism Study Tour to Georgia

In October, a group of 21 YAC/CAC representatives participated in a one-week study tour in Georgia that was designed to:

- help representatives of Youth Action Clubs and Community Action Committees from different regions of Armenia to acquire skills and knowledge with respect to Citizen Participation Process and Tools, Community Activism and Mobilization, Collaboration Methods with Local Government Bodies and Funding Opportunities for community and youth projects;
- motivate participants to become more active citizens in their communities by providing them with best practices of civic and youth activism in Georgia and facilitating new project ideas;

- support participants in establishing of new contacts with Georgian civil society and youth organizations and finding partners for future joint projects.

The study tour, conducted by Civitas Georgica NGO, emphasized practical skills and applied knowledge rather than abstract theory and included numerous site visits to various state bodies, local and international civil society organizations in Tbilisi, Lagodekhi, Rustavi, Tkibuli, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti and Khashuri. The topics addressed during the study tour included:

- Funding opportunities for youth and civil society initia-

tives

- Protection of environmental, social and economic rights of local communities for sustainable development
- Youth programs and activities of the Government of Georgia
- Citizen participation, active citizenship and forms of collaboration with local government
- Public - private partnerships between government, the private sector, and civil society
- Local democracy
- Using the internet to improve access to news and community development information
- Youth community centers in rural areas
- Youth participation in community development planning
- Debates organizing
- The Role of community development and integration centers
- Community organizing in case of emergency and crisis situations

Based on participants' comments expressed during action planning and evaluation sessions, the participants plan to:

- Improve technical infrastructure in their villages: namely setting up recreational area/park and sport ground, and establishing garbage cans in public places.
- Jointly organize environmental youth camp for Georgia and Armenia youth, where young people will learn about common

environmental problems in Caucasus region

- Introduce debate competitions to schools and higher education institutions
- Establish pre-school education centers in communities with no public kindergarten with the help of local community and local government
- Organize volunteer youth exchange programs between Georgia and Armenia.
- Use Internet resources more intensively to support youth and community projects
- Organize the meetings and share information and knowledge learned during the Study Tour
- Intensify contacts and cooperation with NGOs, media and other civil society organizations
- Organize outdoor youth camps similar to "Patriot" run by Government of Georgia
- Build more effective relations with Local Government; increase involvement in local decision-making and keeping the local government accountable
- Organize exhibition and sale of pictures drawn by exceptionally talented children. Money raised from exhibition will be used to help children with disabilities.



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



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## Surenavan YAC Holds a Campaign to Prevent Environmental Pollution

To address environmental pollution issues in the marz caused by the cement factory, a signature-collection campaign was initiated by Surenavan YAC (Ararat Marz). By November about 600 signatures were collected and with a letter, were handed to Ms. Larisa Alaverdayn, Deputy of National Assembly of RA. The YAC members discussed with

Ms. Alaverdayn the fact that other neighboring communities had also submitted several letters concerning this issue. The National Assembly Deputy promised to find a solution to this issue as the harmful influence of Ararat cement factory is dangerous not only for Surenavan community residents, but also for all neighboring communities and cities.



Signature collection campaign organized by Surenavan YAC (Ararat Marz) to address the environmental pollution issues in the Marz

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

## YCAP Community Collaboration Updates: Activities of Aragatsotn, Kotayk and Syunik 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 October, Aragatsotn Marz CCM Regional Sub-Committee initiated a meeting with the Deputy Minister of Youth Affairs to discuss the issues and problems faced by the youth in the Marzes. The Sub-Committee members mentioned that in marzes youth face numerous problems - much more than those from Yerevan - and thus need special attention. The Deputy Minister welcomed the Sub-Committee members desire to address the problems and to collaborate and promised to visit communities in the near future to study the problems for joint discussion of the possible solutions to be able to better present them in the Country's youth policy and in the upcoming programs. In November as a first step, the Aragatsotn Marz CCM Regional Sub-Committee sent a letter to the Deputy Minister listing the problems faced by the youth in all eight YCAP communities of the Marz and reconfirming their desire to collaborate and to jointly solve them.

◆The Kotayk Marz CCM Regional Sub-Committee initiated a letter-writing campaign to improve the conditions of community libraries that do not receive newly published books and journals. They sent letters to the Ministry of Culture, regional administration and other bodies to request the authorities to address the issue. The Ministry of Culture informed the Sub-Committee that the decision to allocate more than 20 different books (two copies of each) was made by the respective Commission and all eight YCAP community libraries will receive them from the "Book" Foundation soon.

◆Syunik Marz CCM Regional Sub-Committee members, to improve access to local government decisions, the community budget and four-year development plan, and community events, requested that the local government in all eight YCAP communities of the Marz install Information and Announcement Boards. As a result, the Boards with updated information were installed in Khnatsakh, Gorayk and Verin Khotanan communities. The Sub-Committee members continue working with other five communities Municipalities to speed-up the Board installation process in their communities as well.