



# Community Action News

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YCAP is 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.  
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## Yerevan in Five Days 2010 Youth Civic Education Program

On March 15-19, 2010 the fifth annual "Yerevan in 5 Days" Youth Civic Education Program was organized and implemented within the framework of Youth and Community Action Program (YCAP). Forty-three youth representing Community Action Committees 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. This year the opening and closing sessions of the Program were attended by the USAID/Armenia Mission Director Dr. Jatinder Cheema. In her opening remarks Dr. Cheema stressed the importance of civic participation and noted that citizen participation in the governmental processes of Armenia is one of the key foundations of a democratic society. "This civic education program is designed to help you better understand your roles and responsibilities as citizens of Armenia. We hope that you return to



USAID/Armenia Mission Director Dr. Cheema handing Program Completion Certificates to "Yerevan in Five Days" Youth Civic Education Program participants

your communities with a better awareness of how your efforts can make a difference in the progress of Armenia," she said. 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. Additionally, the participants 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 43 Community Action Committees 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. Several TV stations attended the program opening and prepared news coverage that were broadcasted by their TV channels. In addition, the National Assembly prepared a special reportage about young people's visit to the National Assembly and meeting with NA President, which was broadcasted by HI Public National TV Station. (Parliament Hour TV Program).

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"Yerevan in 5 Days" Program Participants during meeting with National Assembly President Mr. Hovik Abrahamyan

### 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 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>

## “Vardenik through Our Eyes” Photo Exhibition was Organized to Illustrate and Voice Community Issues

To find out the community's perspective on problems existing in the village, in January Vardenik CAC (Gegharkunik Marz) decided to organize a photo exhibition “Vardenik through our eyes”. As a first step, the CAC posted announcements about the upcoming seminar to develop the community members' photography skills. Many young people were interested and expressed their willingness to participate in the seminar, which was held by Vardenik CAC members who are quite experienced in the field. The CAC obtained photos about the problems existing in the community, particularly garbage

removal issues, the bad condition of the House of Culture, street illumination problems, the bad state of community roads, and unfavorable conditions for tourism development. Almost 70 people took part in taking photos and submitted over 550 photos. The exhibition took place on March, 10; the venue selected for the exhibition was House of Culture to emphasize the bad conditions of the building. Vardenik CAC invited the community, including the Community Mayor and members of Community Council. During the exhibition, given the pressure from community, the Community Mayor promised to solve many problems as soon as possible. It was suggested moving the exhibition to the Municipality Hall and placing the photos in two walls; one - illustrating the problems and another - resolved issues. This will serve as a constant reminder to the village authorities about the issues that need to be solved and will also illustrate successes once the problems resolved.



Vardenik community people during the photo exhibition highlighting the community problems organized by Vardenik CAC (Gegharkunik Marz)



The letter to RA President with more than 500 signatures requesting to address the issue of House of Culture renovation

The exhibition helped to once again attract local authorities' attention on current problems. Residents did not wait long for result as from March, 15 a garbage-removal vehicle drives around the community and removes the trash accumulated in the streets at least once a week. Another issue concerning night illumination is also on its way to be resolved as corresponding activities are being implemented in remote streets of the community with the participation and assistance of community people. The Community also took action to address the issue of

House of Culture by addressing a letter to RA President and attaching 500 signatures to it. CAC members reached an agreement with local authorities to participate in all Community Council's sessions with a right to deliberative vote. It was also decided to create a community webpage and publish local newspaper called “Vardenik”. Community residents appreciated the exhibition as it equipped the participants with skills, helped to identify community issues and priorities and urged local authorities to spare no efforts to address the issues the community is concerned about.

## Garbage Removal Issue is Finally Resolved in Ashotavan Community

Ashotavan community (Syunik Marz) had a community garbage removal issue, which the Ashotavan CAC had tried to address through requesting help from different individuals and organizations. They had also sent an online letter to the NA Deputy of their Marz via National Assembly official website. Since they had received no aid, they determined to resolve the issue on their own and held a meeting in January with the community and local authorities. The CAC members introduced the present anti-sanitary state of the

village urging that the community should mobilize and initiate a garbage removal action. The CAC introduced their plan requesting the local authorities to provide a vehicle to gather the garbage and transport it to a special area. Each household agreed to pay monthly 200 AMD to cover fuel and driver's salary. After a brief discussion the plan was approved by the community and a timeline was developed. The garbage removal vehicle started working from February keeping the community clean.



The garbage removal issue is solved now due to Ashotavan CAC initiative

## Aragats CAC Creates a Community Website

Taking the advantage of internet availability the Aragats CAC (Aragatsotn Marz) decided to create a community website and a group of young people started to work on the creation and design of the webpage. To make the process of the webpage development participatory and to reflect the ideas and wishes of all the community in the design, the CAC organized a number of meetings and discussions with the community during which they presented the webpage and discussed the interface, design and the sections that the community wanted to see on the webpage. The website is currently under construction and will consist of separate sections for education, health, ecology and agriculture. The website will also contain general information about the village, its geographic location and history. Another section will be dedicated to CAC initiatives and the “Gallery” section will illustrate community events and CAC activities. The website will enable the community to illustrate their ac-

complishments as well as voice their issues and priorities. The local government will be able to publicize four-year community development plan, community budget, decrees, as well as illustrate their current projects and future projections. The CAC plans to hold an official presentation of the website in May with the participation of local authorities, community people, CAC members, neighboring YACs and CACs as well as other invited guests. The CAC 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.



## Syunik Marz Active Groups Develop Their Computer Skills through Trainings and Seminars

With the aim of developing community residents' skills and knowledge on internet accessibility, a training was initiated in four communities of Syunik Marz (Khntsakh YAC, Gorayk YAC, Artsvanik CAC, Ashotavan CAC) on "discovering the internet". The activists of four communities had jointly developed the materials for the training via electronic mails. During the training the speakers detailed some helpful information on how to access the internet and use the links, how to search for information, how to search for local and international news, and how to open a new e-mail account. They also studied the sites where they could access information on laws and legislation, the recently adopted decrees, announcements, latest news and

other important for the community information. In addition, the participants performed some assignments to practice the knowledge obtained. The participants appreciated this initiative and stressed its usefulness as well as stated that the IT sphere is very broad and it is impossible to introduce the huge amount of information during one meeting. They concluded that the training should be held on regularly basis to introduce the updates of the field and to equip the participants with additional skills. The groups also believe that the seminars will result in organization of advocacy campaigns via internet and a more active realization and a better protection of community members' rights and the community's interests.



*Syunik YAC and CAC members practice knowledge and skills obtained during the trainings*

## Martouni YAC Actively Participates in Local Elections

On January 21, Community Council's elections were anticipated in Martouni (Gegharkunik Marz) community. The Martouni YAC decided to actively participate in this process and assist ensuring fair and transparent elections. First of all they actively participated in the pre-election process of checking the lists of voters and then organized a meeting with the Community Council candidates and youth representatives to raise their awareness on the role, competences and re-

sponsibilities of Community Council as well as get acquainted with their projects. During the meeting the candidates introduced their ideas about community issues and the solutions they envision during their management. YAC members were addressing many questions requesting Community Council's members to justify their viewpoints. The young people believe that suchlike events help the community member to make an informed decision during local government election.

## Herher YAC Raises Awareness on Anti-Corruption Methods

The Herher YAC (Vayots Dzor Marz) learned that under the USAID/Mobilizing Action against Corruption (MAAC) initiative an Anti-Corruption and Advocacy Center was opened in Yeghegnadzor - the administrative center of Vayots Dzor Marz. To raise community residents' awareness on corruption and anti-corruption initiatives, Herher YAC organized a meeting with the representatives of the above mentioned Center. In January, the meeting was held with the participation of YAC members, school representatives and other community members. Mr. Ghazaryan, the representative of the Center introduced the goal, objectives

and activities of Anti-Corruption and Advocacy Center and presented the hot line operating in the Center. The participants discussed ongoing corruption cases and the present corruption rate in the Marz. Mr. Ghazaryan brought anti-corruption materials and literature to donate to the YAC library. He also promised YAC members to invite them to the events organized by the Center as well as to engage them in different campaigns and initiatives. The YAC believes that increasing community people's awareness on methods and mechanisms for fighting against corruption will bring to desirable results and reduce the cases of corruption.

## Addressing the Issues of Tsovazard Community Students

There are 55 students from the Tsovazard community studying in the universities and colleges of Gavar, Sevan and Yerevan who can hardly afford covering their tuition and transportation fees. Given the hard social conditions of the families and high tuition fees, Tsovazard CAC (Gegharkunik Marz) members decided to discuss and find possible ways to address the issue. CAC members and the students agreed that they should meet with the local authorities and ask them to allot special funds for the students to cover their trans-

portation expenditures. Taking into account that the budget of current year had not been approved yet, they decided to send a letter to local authorities with the request for financial assistance to socially insecure students. The CAC also participated in the Community Council's meeting to address the urgency of the issue. The Community Council members agreed that the Village Municipality will assign certain amount of money to each student to compensate their transportation fees for this year.

## The Rights of People with Disabilities are on the Focus of Marts CAC

With the aim of assisting people with disabilities residing in the community, the Marts CAC (Lori Marz) decided to identify the families with disabled members and regularly provide them with support and information. The CAC downloaded and compiled materials on the rights of people with disabilities prescribed by legislation, information on assistance organizations, and privileges anticipated by health structures. Based on the information they held consultations for people with disabilities with the aim of raising awareness on their rights and privileges. After the consultation, people with disabilities presented suggestions concerning their needs and issues

to be submitted to the attention of institutions. These kinds of meetings are very important as living in such a remote community they often lack up-to-date information on laws and procedures regulating the sphere. The CAC also plans to invite representatives from interested structures to meet with disabled people and introduce their services. The CAC once again highlighted the role of community in helping the people with disabilities to integrate into society, participate in all aspects of life and feel as full members of the society they live in.



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## Ltchashen YAC Holds a Meeting to Discuss Women's Role and Participation in Politics

To combat passiveness of community women in local decision making processes and to stress the importance and role of women's participation in politics, Ltchashen YAC (Gegharkunik Marz) decided to discuss the opportunities of increasing gender equality in the community and promoting women to actively participate in community's political and social life. During the meeting held on March 8, the YAC presented and discussed the barriers to women's participation in the local government election related activities and local decision making in the whole. The YAC raised the issue that all seven members of Community Council are male representatives and they have never had any women candidate for this position. The YAC found that women don't show interest in becoming a Community Council member as according to a widely-spread stereotype it is not a "female

job". Community women are mainly engaged in household activities and child care. The YAC expressed its concern about the fact that gender-based stereotypes block women's advancement and can be devastating, potentially undermining women's capacity to lead. One of YAC members suggested that the Law on Local Self-Governance should anticipate certain quotas for women (at least 20%). Other members did not agree on this opinion believing that if a woman wants to be enrolled in Community Council, no one and nothing should impede her doing that. They came to the decision that actions should be taken to break the gender-based stereotypes and activate community women. The YAC is a very good example of female participation as the majority of members are active females whose candidacy can be nominated during the upcoming local elections.

YCAP is 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

## Ashnak YAC Celebrates the Fourth Anniversary of Club Operation

This March was very significant for Ashnak YAC (Aragatsotn Marz) members as they were celebrating the fourth anniversary of Youth Action Club operating in the community in the framework of YCAP program. During the celebration they introduced implemented projects, current and past accomplishments and future plans. They also prepared several short performances to raise people awareness on various topics. For example, they prepared three short performances referring to the corruption cases - imaginative cases to illustrate the possible corruption processes, to

raise people awareness about corruption and to encourage them to fight against corruption practices. The celebration was held in cultural hall of the community with the participation of representatives from different NGOs, teachers, community people, Municipality employees, the Mayor as well as YAC/CAC members of neighboring Davtashen and Karmrashen communities. YAC members were very happy and inspired and once again valued the importance of their activities implemented for the development of the community and the well-being of its people.



Ashnak YAC (Aragatsotn Marz) is celebrating the fourth anniversary of Club establishment