

TOOLKIT ON CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

**FOREWORD BY ANDREAS KIEFER,
SECRETARY GENERAL**

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES
COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Dear Reader,

The toolkit before you presents the results of initiatives to foster citizen participation and dialogue between local authorities and community residents under the *“Support to Consolidating Local Democracy in Armenia”* project.

This project – in particular its component on *“Strengthening local elected representatives’ leadership”* – was implemented by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities over the period of three years within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2015-2018 and with the financial support of the Government of Denmark. The citizen participation initiatives, which were part of the in the Congress component, were conducted in the communities of Akhtala, Artik, Urtsadzor and Vardenik. Its objective was to enhance the active participation of citizens and civil society in decision making and problem solving in their communities, and to engage them in community-building efforts, priority setting and budgeting processes through public consultations and close interaction with their mayors and city councils.

Citizen participation in public decision making is the basis of participatory democracy and one of the key principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional Protocol on the right of citizens to participate in the affairs of a local authority. For more than two decades, the Council of Europe Congress has been working to promote democratic participation at local and regional level, and its reference framework elaborated over the years is also presented in this toolkit.

The project in Armenia was crucial for creating a space of *“learning by doing”* whereby the residents – while contributing to finding solutions to their communities’ problems – improved their knowledge of the workings of local self-government as well as capacities and limitations of municipal autonomy. As a result, the project participants agreed a set of principles, guidelines, methods and useful tips to steer participatory processes, which can be applied to future projects and which are also included in the toolkit, together with an overview of the legal framework for citizen participation at local level in Armenia.

I am confident that these materials will be useful as both a reference tool and a practical manual when designing and implementing projects to promote citizens’ engagement in local communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Andreas Kiefer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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LEGAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN ARMENIA



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BACKGROUND

Citizen participation implies participation of individuals, as well as stakeholder groups and civil society organisations in self-government. The Republic of Armenia (RA) recognizes and supports the right of citizens to participate in community affairs through self-government.

In recent years, the RA legislation in this respect has been improved through binding requirements on involving citizens in self-government. Citizens can become involved by raising issues, setting agendas and participating in decision making, implementation and oversight, especially related to the community development plans and development and execution of the community budget. Participation of community residents in their local self-government is prescribed by the **RA “Law on Local Self-Government”** and is defined as a process performed within the community, through which the citizens without discrimination shall be informed about the activities of the local self-government bodies and have direct or indirect influence on the decisions made by the local self-government bodies.

BINDING INTERNATIONAL LAW

In 2001, after becoming a member of the Council of Europe, Armenia ratified the **European Charter of Local Self-Government** and later on, **Additional Protocol 207 to the Charter on the right to participate** in the affairs of a local authority, which became an integral part of the national **Law on Local Self-Government** adopted in September 2013.

REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA CONSTITUTION

The RA Constitution amended on December 2015 grants citizens the right to directly participate in the administration of their community and in solving community problems through local referendum.

A human being shall be free to do what does not violate the rights of others and does not contradict the Constitution and laws.

No one may bear obligations that are not prescribed by law, states the **RA Law “On Legal Acts.”**

REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA LAWS ON LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Two fundamental principles of the **RA Law on Local Self-Government** directly relate to participation:

- Local authorities are accountable before members of the community;
- Local authorities' activities should be transparent and public.

The Law on Local Self-Government provides that:

- Citizens over the age of sixteen have a right to participate in local self-government in the community;
- Every resident of the community, individually or together with others shall have a right to submit a letter to the local self-government bodies and receive proper answer within reasonable time;
- Every person and organisation shall have a right to demand and receive information about the time and place of the Community Council meeting and the draft agenda of the meeting, as well as about and any other issues related to the local tasks;
- A community with 3000 or more residents shall have an official web-site (live streaming of public hearings and discussions on the official web-page of the community).

The Law on Local Self-Government sets out responsibilities in the field of citizen participation for the Mayors mandating them to:

- Ensure sufficient conditions in places that are convenient and accessible for residents, ensuring the participation of community residents with disabilities and those with limited mobility;
- Inform community residents about public hearings and discussions;
- Make the materials and information concerning them accessible and available; establish rules and procedures for presenting opinions and recommendations, discussing them and taking them into consideration during public hearings and debates;
- Provide open information about the activities of the local self-government bodies, decisions passed by the Community Head and the Community Council, as well as about the community budget and community budget performance;
- Organise and hold public hearings and/or discussions before submitting the draft five-year community development plan and/or annual draft budget for the approval of the Community Council

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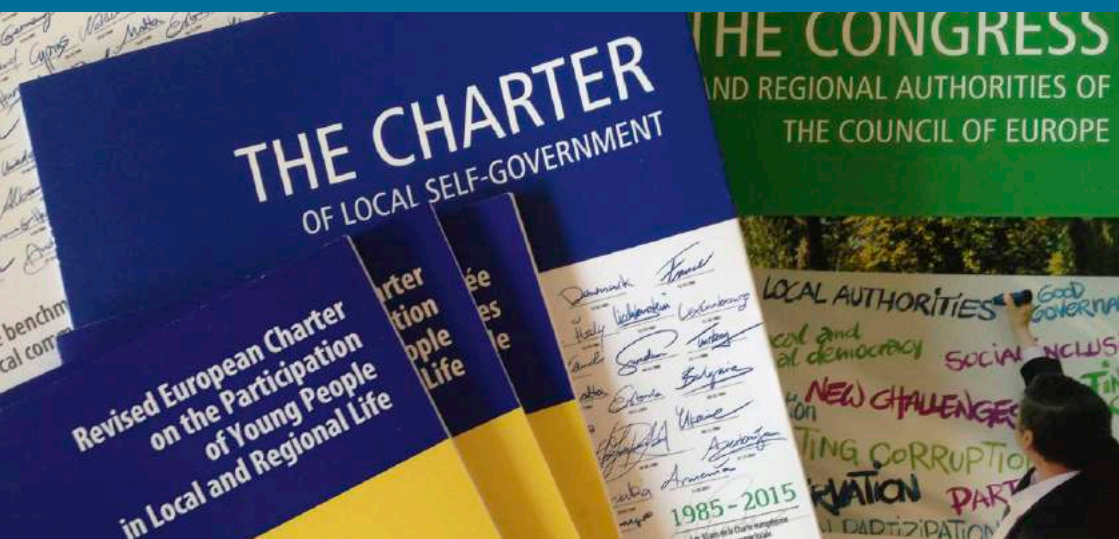
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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

REFERENCE TEXTS OF THE CONGRESS OF
LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES



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THE KEY ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Local and regional authorities are closest to the citizens: they are thus an essential building block to foster citizen participation and the development of citizens' communities that encourage greater involvement in public decision making and more transparency at local level. To strengthen good local governance, elected representatives are responsible for enabling citizens to influence the decision-making process, and for taking into consideration citizens' needs and concerns. Citizens' trust in local authorities means more commitment and more participation which benefits participatory democracy, a crucial tool to enable local elected representatives to effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities.

- The European Charter of Local Self-Government (entered into force in 1988) is an international treaty ratified by all 47 member states. It defines, in its Preamble, the right of citizens to participate in local affairs as an immutable principle, and requires the principle of local self-government to be embedded in the domestic law.
- The Additional protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government CETS No.207 (entered into force in 2012) guarantees the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

FOSTERING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

For more than two decades, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and its partners have been working closely on improving local democratic governance through enhanced citizen participation at local level as the prerequisite for a stronger democracy. Fostering citizen participation in the political process and building a Europe that respects common values has been set as one of the priorities of the **Congress for 2017-2020** (2016).

Among various fields of action, the cooperation programmes of the Congress aim to increase citizen participation and to ensure the full application of democratic principles at local and regional levels in Europe.

Since 2007, the **European Local Democracy Week** has brought together local authorities from all the 47 member States, their associations, citizens and NGOs. By inviting them to organise creative public events to foster democratic participation at the grassroots, the Congress offers participants the opportunity to join a European network engaged in promoting citizen involvement at the local level.

EMPOWERING LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND ENCOURAGING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

The Congress produces various documents and publications and supports activities aimed at empowering local authorities to enable, promote and facilitate the exercise of the right to participate. During its sessions, it also adopts recommendations to governments, as well as resolutions for improving local and regional governance and encouraging citizen participation. Among the key Congress texts are:

- **Resolution 385** (2015) "Fostering active citizenship by building partnerships with civil society", which examines the implementation of the Code of Good Practice for civil participation in the decision-making process;
- **Resolution 332** (2011) "Education for democratic citizenship: tools for cities", which encourages good practices of education for democratic citizenship at local level across Europe;
- **Resolution 326** (2011) "Citizen participation at local and regional level in Europe".

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The Congress considers that effective citizen participation must be inclusive and concerns society at large, meeting the needs of those categories of people who can face particular obstacles in participation such as youth and women, as well as underrepresented and vulnerable groups:

- Youth participation is a key in creating meaningful citizen participation: **Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life** (2003)
- **Resolution 141** (2002) on "the participation of foreign residents in local public life: consultative bodies"

E-GOVERNANCE

E-Governance includes new ways of deciding policy and listening to citizens for a stronger, more accountable and inclusive democracy. The Congress encourages the use of information and communication technologies for the promotion and exercise of the right to participate, to widen the use of e-democracy tools at local and regional levels to better involve citizens (e.g. consultative processes, local referenda, petitions) even when they are unable to get around.

- **Resolution 266** (2008) "E-tools: a response to the needs of local authorities"
- **Resolution 267** (2008) "Electronic democracy and deliberative consultation on urban projects"

For more than two decades, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and its partners have been working closely on improving local democratic governance through enhanced citizen participation at local level as the prerequisite for a stronger democracy.

The Congress produces various key texts aimed at empowering local authorities to enable and promote the exercise of the right to participate, and at encouraging citizen participation.

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CULTURE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

SET OF PRINCIPLES

LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

SUPPORT TO CONSOLIDATING LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN ARMENIA



” Encouraging a culture of citizen participation must be guided by firm principles to ensure that public participation effort is based on a common set of values. These principles also permit the flexibility necessary to cater to the range of public participation settings

During the “Engaging Citizens in Local Policy Making: Peer Review” event, held in Artik and Urtsadzor, Armenia, on the 27-28 October 2016, as part of the “Leadership programme” in the framework of the project “Support to consolidating local democracy in Armenia”, participants discussed and agreed on the following set of principles to encourage a culture of citizen participation:

COMMITMENT - Providing appropriate time and resources is necessary to ensure that involved people can participate in a meaningful way.

INTEGRITY, HONESTY AND CLARITY - It is of importance to address public concerns in an honest and forthright way. Honesty and clarity are needed about the purpose, the limits of what can and cannot be changed, who can be involved and how, and what happens as a result.

INCLUSIVENESS - It is essential to make every effort to include the citizens affected by the pending decision, so that no one is excluded because of a lack of physical access to meeting places, timing, insufficient support, etc.

ACCOUNTABILITY - Participatory processes need to include a feedback to all those involved. It is necessary to demonstrate that results and outcomes are consistent with the commitment to public participation that was made to public at the outset of the initiative.

TRANSPARENCY - Transparency is about ensuring that people involved understand the scope of the pending decision, decision-making process and procedures, and that any constraints on the decision-maker are known. Transparency and trust between citizens and power-holders go hand-in-hand.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT - Participatory processes should seek to support a climate of mutual learning and development among all the actors involved.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE - The purpose of participation is to impact positively and productively all the actors involved in terms of learning, personal confidence, sense of active citizenship, and to improve trust in the democratic process.

DEVELOPING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION INITIATIVES

USER-FRIENDLY GUIDELINES



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WHAT?

Citizen participation is a process which guides decision making and its primary contribution lies in the fact that the problems are being discussed. Participation is a right to take part in the local governance, a process that allows influence and control over decision making, but also a process of learning, listening, recognizing and accepting different opinions, feelings, values and knowledge.

WHY?

The four key objectives of participatory action in the field of public policies are:

- Governance, namely strengthening democratic legitimacy, accountability, stimulating active citizenship;
- Social inclusion and social justice- building relationships, social capital, equity, empowerment;
- Improving quality of services – to suit the real needs and reflect its values;
- Capacity development and learning- for individuals and institutions, as a basis for future development of local community.

IMPACT

Participation fosters the development of policies, strategies, plans, programs and projects. It has an impact on local budgeting, urban and spatial planning, local sustainable development planning, traffic planning, waste and water management, tourism development, climate change adaptation, social planning, urban and architectural design and determining land-use of public spaces, housing reconstruction, and more.

BENEFITS

Citizen participation brings about numerous benefits– from the redistribution of authority and power, to establishing mechanisms for identifying and targeting interests, overcoming conflicts, and ensuring the implementation of decisions.

PROBLEMS

Participatory approach requires significant resources – financial means trained staff, time, knowledge and institutional arrangements. In case of need for harmonization of conflicting interests, participation can extend the duration of the decision making process.

PARTICIPANTS

In order to perceive the sample for citizen participation, it is necessary to think about the following questions: Who is directly responsible for the decisions on the issues? Who is influential in the area, community? Who will be affected by any decisions on the issue? Who runs organizations with relevant interests? Who is influential on this issue? Who can obstruct a decision if not involved? Who has been involved in this issue in the past? Who has not been involved, but should have been?

CREATION OF PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

The creation of participatory process implies consideration of the ways the outcome will be reached, as well as which methods will be applied and when. Process is inseparable from the purpose and context.

LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

The involvement of actors in the different steps of the political decision-making process varies in accordance with the intensity of participation. There are four levels of participation sorted from least to most participative (Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process (2009) of the Council of Europe):

- Information - a relatively low level of participation which usually consists of a one-way provision of information from the public authorities;
- Consultation - public authorities may ask for opinion on a specific policy topic or development;
- Dialogue - two-way communication built on mutual interests and potentially shared objectives to ensure a regular exchange of views (broad and collaborative dialogue);
- Partnership - the highest level of participation where citizens, NGOs and the public authorities co-operate closely together while ensuring that the citizens and NGOs continue to be independent and have the right to campaign and act irrespective of a partnership situation. Partnership can include activities such as provision of services, participatory forums and the establishment of co-decision-making bodies.

METHODS

A wide range of different methods is being used, and many greater or lesser variations of them, to the point where it is sometimes hard to know where one method ends and another begins. The key to success is to understand the purpose of the participatory process, specifics of the local context, previous successful/unsuccessful practice. Participatory processes usually combine several methods to achieve an aim.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL PARTICIPATION

Formal participation consists of methods of public participation strictly envisaged by laws and regulations (human rights, public policies, urban planning, strategic environmental assessment etc.). Formal procedural requirements for participation are helping to preserve different groups' interests.

Informal participation is not required by law. It contributes to higher level of legitimacy in decision making, and serves as an incentive for a better urban governance and improvement of the quality of life. Compared to formal participation, it includes a much broader range of methods and provides more flexibility and freedom in arbitration.

Participatory action, as a process which guides decision making in the field of public policies, is a guarantee for good governance, social inclusion and social justice, as well as good quality of services and allows capacity development for both individuals and institutions.

The purpose of the participatory process, the specifics of the local context as well as the level of participation are one of the many aspects at stake when developing citizen participation initiatives.

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15 TIPS FOR FACILITATING THE SUCCESS OF PUBLIC MEETINGS



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1. **Distribute written materials at the beginning** (or put posters on the wall), including “the rules of the game”, so that people can consult them.
2. **Explain orally or on written posters the competences** of the local authority which is engaged in the process, so that people will concentrate on feasible proposals; but leave a space to expose ideas/problems related to other levels of government, with which the local authority could propose to act as a “mediator”.
3. **Recall GOALS and RULES** of the game. Decide the duration of each intervention.
4. **Have a CLOCK** (projected on wall, for example) so that people can calculate and respect the schedule and time limit for each speech. **Respect the time-table** (for the sake of those who were punctual) but be open to welcome any non-scheduled intervention.
5. **Ensure rules are being respected by everyone**, including by important actors, without being too stiff: inflexibility and impoliteness are not the same thing.
6. **Be always respectful of the participants’ capacities** (avoid saying they must be “trained” or “made aware”). It is important to remind that we are talking to people, and their perception of the way the meeting is conducted can affect the legitimacy of the process.
7. **Avoid interrupting participants in case their suggestions do not exactly fit the streamlines** provided for the meeting. Imagine that every contribution is important for the municipality, even though it does not fit perfectly the pre-decided format. In this case it is possible to take notes of such proposals or complaints in a “special workbook” in order to ensure that it will appear in the final proceedings of the process (although in a side-list, or in an annex).
8. **Avoid debates limited to two speakers only.** If someone wants to speak more, he/she can do so, if it is allowed by the rules. However, it is important to give the priority to people who have not spoken yet.

- 1. Work in small groups if possible, so as to make every person feel “at ease”,** and not intimidated by big audiences.
- 2. Connect complaints with proactive proposals/solutions,** in order to avoid the creation of an environment dominated by negative energies.
- 3. Avoid giving the impression that the moderator has close relations with some participants** and there is a “special family” in the audience (so avoid using terms such as “brothers and sisters”, “companions”, or calling some but not others by their first name).
- 4. Try to “redirect” the discussion on the right track in case of visible diversion or differences of opinion.** Do not allow any personal offense, and ask speakers also to provide arguments in support of the usefulness of their proposals, while avoiding generic phrases such as “everyone knows that....” or “people need”.
- 5. Showcase and promote symbolic moments,** such as voting or election of speakers/delegates, and **try to summarize at the end of the meeting** (possibly on a projected screen or on a poster) all the gains made throughout the day.
- 6.** When collecting proposals, **try to induce reflection on the possible costs of proposals in terms of maintenance of infrastructure/equipment,** so that people can take responsibility to contribute to it, and make the implementation of proposals more sustainable in time.
- 7. Let some informal space after the end** of the meeting allowing people to meet in a more informal way. Such informal talks could be stimulated around a small table of beverages and biscuits for example.

The success of public meetings depends to a great extent on the quality of their organisation. The tips presented here are aimed at facilitating the manner in which public are conducted, thus increasing their effectiveness.

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SUPPORT TO CONSOLIDATING
LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN ARMENIA
STRENGTHENING LOCAL ELECTED
REPRESENTATIVES' LEADERSHIP

VARDENIK PLENARY OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES

1 JUNE – 15 NOVEMBER 2015

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PRESENTATION

Vardenik is located in the Gegharkunik region. It is one of the two largest villages of Armenia. It is situated near the Sevan Lake at a high altitude and with a severe climate. Agriculture is the main source of income for its inhabitants. It is a very closely-knit community. As in other villages of the region, the number of labour migrants from Vardenik is very high, but even those who are working in Russia try to maintain firm ties with their native village. Some of those who have migrated successfully have been able to provide support for their village by investing money to take care of urgent needs. Another specificity of Vardenik is that it is a patriarchal society.

Mayor : Hovhannes Hoveyan

Community: 10,702 inhabitants ; 11 councillors ; 19 municipal employees

EXISTING SYSTEM OF PROCESSING CITIZENS' COMPLAINTS

Citizen complaints are considered, processed and answered either verbally or in written form.

IMPLEMENTATION/STEPS OF THE PROCESS

During the preparatory stage of the initiative, printed materials were developed and distributed to inform the population about the upcoming series of community meetings. Meetings were conducted with different society groups in order to hear their opinion about the existing communal services, and what they would like to have added to them. The entire process was summarised and presented during the final workshop where the participants could vote on the priorities. The majority of the votes concerned establishing a tradition of local 'Olympics' during the summer months, when young people studying in different universities return home for the holidays. This idea, approved by the community council unanimously, has been part of the prioritisation process. The initiative also comprised the establishment of a live-stream broadcasting device in the municipality, so that the citizens of Vardenik who are out of the country could follow the council's and other meetings, and could be updated on what is taking place in the community. Professional staff from Yerevan was involved in the installation of the device and trained the municipal staff to use the equipment.

PERIOD

1 June – 15 November 2015

METHODS USED

- Printed materials
- Community meetings
- Workshop
- Prioritisation process
- A live-stream broadcasting device

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

Mayor, Councillors, Youth, Citizens

OUTCOMES

The importance of Vardenik's initiative is that live broadcasting of the town-hall meetings was set up. The innovation ensured broader access to town-hall meetings and to the issues discussed for those thousands of Vardenik residents who are working abroad and investing in their community, including in the public sector. Providing access to the town-hall meetings for those residents further strengthened their confidence and their support to solving the problems identified by community residents. As community residents, they also had the opportunity to participate in the process of identifying and prioritising these problems. Increased sharing of concerns is one of the main outcomes of this initiative. In addition, local NGOs in Vardenik organised training about the methods for prioritising community problems. Moreover, it is strongly hoped that the 'Olympics' games, to be organised in the summer, will become a tradition for the municipality and will remain on the community's summer calendar.

ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

The most important participatory methods used were community meetings with different groups and a live-stream broadcasting device. The driving forces of the project were the Mayor and young people.

In the framework of the project “Support to consolidating local democracy in Armenia” - Line of Action III “Strengthening local elected representatives’ leadership”, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe implemented of the ‘Leadership programme’. Four participating communities (Akhtala, Artik, Urtsadzor and Vardenik) were granted financial and expert support to implement new citizen participation initiatives.

The aim of Citizens Initiative in Vardenik was to engage the citizens in the discussions concerning community services, in the identification of priority issues and their inclusion in the budget.

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SUPPORT TO CONSOLIDATING
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STRENGTHENING LOCAL ELECTED
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URTSADZOR

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION FOR PROMOTING ACTIVE SPORTS AND LEISURE IN THE COMMUNITY

1 JUNE – 10 NOVEMBER 2015

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PRESENTATION

Urtsadzor is a rural community in the Ararat region. Khosrov Forest, which is a protected state reserve, is situated in the village territory. Environmental consciousness and education, healthy lifestyle and sports are integral parts of the community life. The municipality staff is well qualified and experienced in working with donors and implementing projects. In the framework of the local self-government reform which entails the consolidation of communities, Urtsadzor became the centre of a newly formed enlarged community which includes 3 localities/settlements. It means that the municipality assumes a leading role in providing services to the population in the enlarged community.

Mayor : Rafik Andreasian

Community: 4525 inhabitants ; 9 councillors ; 18 municipal employees

EXISTING SYSTEM OF PROCESSING CITIZENS' COMPLAINTS

Complaints are followed up routinely. During the general meeting, citizens suggested their issues of concern. The complaints are being answered either in written or verbal form, depending on the priority and sequence.

EXISTING RULES CONCERNING PARTICIPATION

At the beginning of each year, public budget hearings are set up and, at the end of the year, performance results are summarised and announced.

IMPLEMENTATION/STEPS OF THE PROCESS

The implementation of the initiative began with the elaboration of communication materials (leaflets and brochures), which carried the project's logo and slogan. These materials, together with the invitations to the first community meeting, were widely distributed among the residents with the help of schoolchildren and youth. The first community meeting elected a steering committee for the project as well as working groups for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and environmental education, and established voluntary support in the construction of the playing field. An architect/designer was hired to study documents on the existing field and to incorporate the wishes of residents in the new design. This design was presented during the second community meeting, and cost estimates for the renovation were made. The upgrading project was split into feasible parts and a schedule was decided. A series of community events was organised, including sports competitions, cleaning and greening days, exhibitions of arts and craft, performance of the dance group, etc. Finally, the community council discussed and included a part for upgrading work into the budget for the following year.

PERIOD

1 June – 10 November 2015

METHODS USED

- Communication materials (leaflets and brochures)
- Community meetings
- Steering committee for the project; working groups for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and environmental education; voluntary support in the construction of the playing field
- 'Place-making'
- Community events
- Elaboration of a proposal based on the feedback from the population, and included in the next year's community budget

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

Mayor, Municipal staff and Councillors, Steering committee and Working group members, Youth, Citizens

OUTCOMES

Since the completion of the project, two community council meetings have taken place: to endorse the design of the stadium, and to distribute the 2016 budget and the earmarked funds for starting the renovation works. Urtsadzor, in consortium with partner organisations, was awarded EU funding for the implementation of a community development project as an enlarged community. The municipality staff was committed to do intensive fundraising for reviving sport traditions in Urtsadzor and nearby communities.

ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

The most important participatory methods used were 'Place-making' and Community events- sports competitions, cleaning and greening days, exhibitions of arts and crafts, performance of the dance group. The driving forces were municipal staff (mainly women) and the Mayor.

'Strengthening capacities, providing opportunities to others, directly talking with people. People felt they were respected.'(Armine Tukhikyan, National consultant).

In the framework of the project “Support to consolidating local democracy in Armenia” - Line of Action III “Strengthening local elected representatives’ leadership”, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe implemented the ‘Leadership programme’. Four participating communities (Akhtala, Artik, Urtsadzor and Vardenik) were granted financial and expert support to implement new citizen participation initiatives.

The aim of Citizens Initiative in Urtsadzor was to foster citizen participation in the community through the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. The citizen participation initiative focused on discussions related to the place-making of the stadium, with the construction to be financed from the local budget and by procuring external funding, according to priorities identified by the citizens.

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SUPPORT TO CONSOLIDATING
LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN ARMENIA
STRENGTHENING LOCAL ELECTED
REPRESENTATIVES' LEADERSHIP

ARTIK

CITIZENS INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION- MAKING PROCESS ON IMPROVEMENT OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES

1 JUNE - 15 SEPTEMBER 2015

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe

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PRESENTATION

Artik is the second largest city in the Shirak region located 27 km from the regional centre Gyumri. During the Soviet period, the city used to be an industrial centre. Currently, factories and mines either ceased to function, or operate with 10-15% of their capacity. The infrastructure of Artik is urban, with multi-apartment buildings and centralised utility services. Civil society is not well developed.

Mayor : Mkhitar Varagyan, Arsen Abrahamian (2012-2016)

Community: 21,500 inhabitants ; 15 councillors ; 38 municipal employees

EXISTING SYSTEM OF PROCESSING CITIZENS' COMPLAINTS

Weekly reception hours of the Mayor for the citizens, response to the submitted written letters and suggestions. Interactive communication with citizens using the municipal website (www.artik.am), Facebook, one-stop shop (Citizen Service Centre).

EXISTING RULES CONCERNING PARTICIPATION

Local ordinances on open public hearings and on citizen participation in local self-governance in the community of Artik. A public council operating under the authority of the Mayor.

IMPLEMENTATION/STEPS OF THE PROCESS

The first introductory meeting with the residents was the first attempt to bring all the community members together. However, the meeting was conducted in a tense atmosphere, with numerous complaints which made it impossible for the municipality to engage a constructive dialogue with the residents, mostly because of their lack of awareness of their own responsibilities. Therefore, a communication strategy was designed to understand residents' expectations and raise their awareness before convening community meetings. A particular subject was the way waste management was organised. A telephone survey method was used, the relevant software was installed on municipal computers and a questionnaire was developed. The results of the survey showed that residents of the central districts were satisfied with waste management, unlike those living in the outskirts where the service was poor.

PERIOD

1 June - 15 September 2015

METHODS USED

- Computerised telephone survey
- Door to door Information leaflets
- Interview on regional TV
- Community meetings
- Notifications through Facebook and official website
- Reporting to the residents on the progress and results of the project
- Partnership for the maintenance of multi-apartment buildings

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

Mayor, Action group members, Citizens, Condominiums, Waste management company, Habitat Armenia, Bank

OUTCOMES

The initiative had positive practical results:

- a new schedule was developed for the waste management company to provide service also to the parts of the city that had not been reachable beforehand, and to accommodate waste removal time with the convenience of the residents;
- criteria for evaluating the service, which were elaborated based on the public opinion, were taken into consideration in the agreement between the municipality and waste management service provider;
- an initial agreement was reached with Habitat Armenia to launch a loan programme for the renovation of roofs, with the participation of the residents, the municipality and the bank;
- the municipality hall was renovated thanks to an extensive contribution from the community budget;
- the community decided to use street loudspeakers installed in different parts of the town in order to inform the residents about activities of the municipality and call on them to join town events;
- The initiative motivated the municipality to apply for funding from USAID, which was received, in order to develop an on-line platform and install a live-stream device to enhance the dialogue and cooperation with the residents.

ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

The most important participatory methods used were the telephone survey, door to door information leaflets, and the partnership for the maintenance of multi-apartment buildings. The driving force in Artik was the Mayor.

In the framework of the project “Support to consolidating local democracy in Armenia” - Line of Action III “Strengthening local elected representatives’ leadership”, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe implemented the ‘Leadership programme’. Four participating communities (Akhtala, Artik, Urtsadzor and Vardenik) were granted financial and expert support to implement new citizen participation initiatives.

The aim of Citizens initiative in Artik was to raise citizens’ awareness of the competences of the community leaders in the areas of waste management and apartment building management and maintenance. The awareness-raising campaign was followed by community meetings during which citizens discussed and identified priority issues that needed to be solved in these areas.

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STRENGTHENING LOCAL ELECTED
REPRESENTATIVES' LEADERSHIP

AKHTALA INVOLVEMENT OF CITIZENS IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

1 JUNE - 15 SEPTEMBER 2015

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
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PRESENTATION

Akhtala is a small community in the north east of Loriregion in Armenia which includes 5 villages. The inhabitants are mainly employed in the mining industry. The 5 districts of the town are located on hills, which makes the connection between them very difficult. Such a detached position results in additional expenditures and represents a burden on the community budget. It also negatively impacts the cohesion and mobilisation of the community.

Mayor : Haikaz Khachikyan

Community: 2400 inhabitants ; 9 councillors ; 9 municipal employees

EXISTING SYSTEM OF PROCESSING CITIZENS' COMPLAINTS

Complaints are being received through written appeal by citizens. Complaints are reviewed and discussed during Mayor's admission dates, community meetings and council's meeting.

IMPLEMENTATION/STEPS OF THE PROCESS

A wide communication strategy was designed so as to inform the residents about this initiative. It was comprised of a short informational booklet, which aimed at informing the population about the project and inviting them to the community meetings. The relevant information was also made available on information boards in different parts of town. As a second step, a first community meeting was conducted to provide the citizens with an overview about the local government competencies in order to avoid false expectations. The objective of the project was presented and an action group was formed with those citizens who were actively engaged. Finally, the participants brainstormed on the questions to be defined in the questionnaires, which would be used to make a wide collection of the residents' opinion about their participation in local affairs and on the issues that concerned them most. Around 400 questionnaires were hand delivered to almost all households of Akhtala by the volunteers, who also helped to collect the feedback and analyse it. A shortlist was drawn from the proposals received and made public using information boards, emails, social networks as well as regional TV. The voting took place during the second community meeting and reflected the majority opinion, which was that there was a lack of cultural facilities for children, youth and adults to engage in different activities. This proposal was further discussed as the renovation of the Community center. An estimation of the cost was concluded. It was finally endorsed by the council, put on the agenda and included in the budget. The final result is a proposal based on the feedback from the population to be included in the following year's community budget (2016).

PERIOD

1 June - 15 September 2015

METHODS USED

- Informational booklet
- Information boards
- Community meeting
- Action group
- Brainstorming on the questions to be defined in the questionnaires
- Questionnaire
- Information boards, e mails, social networks, regional TV
- Voting
- Elaboration of a proposal based on feedback from population, and included in the following year's community budget

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

Mayor, Action group members, Young women association Citizens, Volunteers

OUTCOMES

This initiative was the first attempt of the community of Akhtala to engage its citizens in the decision-making process – residents were asked to come up with problems and needs, and to prioritise them. Thanks to the involvement of the young women's association, action group members and to the communication strategy, wider attendance was noted in the second community council. In December 2015, the mayor informed that they had managed to raise eight million drams, which were earmarked for the community centre's renovation and represents half of the needed funds.

The problem of the capital renovation of the Akhtala School No. 2, one of the priority problems raised by the residents, was presented to the RA President and RA Prime Minister by the Mayor. As a result, the issue was included in the Government mid-term program and in the 2016-2017 program of the Territorial Development Fund. Package of design-drawing and cost estimation documents were prepared, and on October 2016 a construction tender was conducted. Duration of the project is 7 months. The capital renovation works of the school will start within a month.

ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

The most important participatory method used was a questionnaire.

The main driving force was the young women association.

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Akhtala community’s initiative aimed to raise public awareness of the competencies of the community and then actively engage its citizens in the process of identifying community issues and budgeting process.

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