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USAID ARMENIA, SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING PROJECT

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SUCCESS STORY

Strengthening Community-Based Social Services

The USAID/SPSS project launched three-stage training campaign for local community social services improvement



The aim of the trainings was to help the community members to understand clearly the upcoming challenges and develop effective social service strategy.



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In order to provide assistance in developing local and community social services, three-stage training campaign was initiated by the USAID/Social Protection Systems Strengthening Project (SPSS) in March, 2008 for four pilot communities.

Improving service provision at the local front-line of social services was a priority in USAID's project design. After analyzing the situation of social services in Armenian communities, SPSS and other locally-based projects determined that communities needed new skills to develop effective models of community social needs assessment, planning, budgeting, and outsourcing.

Four communities throughout Armenia accepted a Ministry of Labor and Social Issues (MLSI)/SPSS invitation to a preliminary Bidder's Conference and Stakeholder Training in Yerevan to clarify expectations for potential projects, establish timelines, understand what is a "stakeholder", and increase understanding of the importance of stakeholder involvement. Five member teams, representing each community's social services, local government, municipalities, NGOs, and vulnerable populations, from Artik (Shirak marz), Alaverdi (Lori marz), Nor-Nork (Yerevan), and Nubarashen (Yerevan) attended the training.

Although participants in the training may have lacked prior knowledge on how to select appropriate stakeholders for community assessments, or even what a community assessment process was, the event helped them define who in their community would be affected by social services. As part of their homework, participants were to identify 15 – 30 local stakeholders to invite to the next assessment session in May.

In May 2008, Stakeholders Training on Community Assessment was held in each of the communities, walked the stakeholder groups through steps to effectively assess their current social services situation considering their assets, strengths, opportunities, possibilities, threats, weaknesses, needs, and problems. This training led to the elaboration of a concrete list of weaknesses and strengths for each community.

The results of the workshops and trainings were processed at final workshops in June. Community teams linked their assessments to social services programs they could implement in their community. The participants increased their understanding of best practices in social services programs conducted through NGOs, developed a vision statement for their community social services, identified their top issues with potential projects, began the planning for their top project and identified potential NGOs that could compete to offer the outsourced services.

Mushegh Vardanyan from Nor-Nork community noted that the trainings were a success, "as only by involving different organizations and age groups representatives we were able to assess our community social services strengths and weaknesses and identify the best outsourcing project." Mr. Vardanyan also noted that "We will be using this model in our future community works."

The next steps of each project will be the issuing of a request for proposals for each community respectively. The NGO with the winning service provision proposal in each community will receive a grant co-funded by the local government and USAID, bringing into reality the programs developed through local team efforts. The procedures undertaken by each community will have strengthened the proposals delivered, and fostered a more inclusive future decision-making process at the local level in Armenia.