



How can young people do what they believed was not possible... How can you work with youth so that they solve a problem, they work for others not for themselves and yet, have fun and benefit immensely?



If you are driving through Dilijan and see the painted and “happy” trash-bins with ‘smile’ signs, or if you are visiting Armavir’s little zoological garden and see the space cleaned, with rocky trash-bins and painted benches, or if you notice a little nice playground in Byureghavan village of Kotayq, hidden among dusty neighbourhoods, you will know these are a few examples of hundreds of small projects that YouthBank committees have supported in the villages of Armenia with the help of thousands of volunteers.



Eurasia Partnership Foundation in Armenia works in such core competence areas as building viable civil society, confidence, and dialogue across the conflict divides; youth leadership and empowerment; independent media and freedom of expression; regional cooperation and European dimension; evidence-based research, policy recommendations, and thought leadership. EPF is both a program implementer and a grant maker, a unique ‘*think & do tank*’ with close partners operating in three countries of the South Caucasus and CIS.

EPF has been implementing a youth capacity building and leadership program called YouthBank (YB) since 2007. The program is based on a model developed in Northern Ireland to help youth overcome conflict and poverty. The YB employs a unique, participatory learning model designed to involve young people in civic and community activism. (More: www.facebook.com/YouthBankArmenia)

The YouthBank ToolBox

The YouthBank Armenia is part of YouthBank International Network (www.youthbankinternational.org) operating in 27 countries worldwide and applying similar methodology of youth-led participatory grant-making. All YouthBanks follow the *Golden Rules* of equal and inclusive participation.



The program aims at youth empowerment through a very unique and innovative methodology - participatory grant-making and community philanthropy. Participants are not required to have specific skills prior to joining YB, such as foreign languages, computer literacy, higher education, volunteer experience, project management, etc. They can belong to very diverse social, cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. By involving in



the YouthBank, youth committees, consisting of 5-7 individuals between 16-27 years old, receive intensive training from EPF, become grant-makers and promote activism by funding youth-led grants implemented by their peers (between 200 – 500 USD for each project). The YouthBank members are responsible for every stage of the grants award and implementation process: from needs assessment, announcing grant competitions, fundraising, mobilizing matching resources from communities, , working with media and informal youth groups, selecting and funding small-scale projects, working with young applicants to improve the quality of projects, organizing public events, writing reports, and making fair and responsible decisions about financial expenditures and accountability.

YouthBank promotes two types of volunteerism – among young people and among host civil society organizations that contribute space, equipment, mentoring, networks in YBs operations, without much influence on decision-making.

YB is also a personal development program that builds young people’s self-esteem and confidence, YouthBank initiates a big number of volunteer and charity actions and projects in their communities. In fact, participants have indicated that participation in the YB program has a positive impact on their employability in competitive positions.

Hundreds of 13-25 year old youth, who receive grants and implement projects also develop skills through volunteer action, take pride and credit for making real changes in communities. (More: www.youtube.com/user/YouthBankArmenia)

EPF supports ten YouthBank committees across Armenia, with more than 75 young people involved as members every year. Since 2007, during the grant-making cycles, YB committees have received and reviewed over 3000 proposals, funded and monitored 500 youth-led community projects, with more than 1200 young people involved in project implementation and other 3500 volunteers across country supporting those projects. YBs have also initiated and implemented additional volunteer projects varying between charity actions, trainings for communities, helping with environmental actions and others. YBs administer grant funds from 1500 – 3000 USD for each project cycle.

YouthBanks Promote European Values

Youth Banks play a “disseminator” role for a number of successful initiatives, e.g. disseminating the results of EPF’s Europe program. EPF has published a comprehensive book titled “Hello Europe” for ordinary Armenian readers in a user-friendly format. To popularize the EU-related information and processes among Armenia’s rural population, including librarians, school teachers, students, the YouthBanks arranged presentations and distribution of the book in the regions.

YBs implement a competition for youth-led projects to promote European values among their peers. Twenty-six small-scale projects were implemented





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during one competition. Some highlights from small projects include developing a blogpost for Assyrian minority population to preserve and promote their identity, history, culture and cuisine. Another project was implemented in remote Martuni Village of Gegharkunik region where schoolchildren organized a seven-day summer camp about Europe, concentrating on seven EU countries, their language, youth issues, games and traditions with the help of European Voluntary Service volunteers. In Armavir, around 40 schoolchildren from 5 schools participated in a contest, organized to promote EU-related knowledge in a game-contest format. About 400 youth get an opportunity to improve their knowledge and understanding about Europe's history and values and their influence on Armenia.



YouthBank Empowers Entrepreneurs



YouthBanks increase social and economic activity of rural youth. YBs organize capacity building of young entrepreneurs on basics of business model, organize mentoring and financial support to fund small-scale youth-led entrepreneurial initiatives.

improved through SME DNC's support. 74 YouthBank committee members learn and practice a ways to support youth economic activity and entrepreneurial capacity especially in rural Armenia. A module

“Youth-led Entrepreneurship” for young entrepreneurs is available and can be replicated in different forms in various programs. Just the fact alone that more than 250 young people developed business ideas for small scale funding, is a significant result. Young people's potential to start and run small business, engage in self-employment activities increases when practical mentoring is combined with small motivational monetary support. Other existing youth-led businesses receive an opportunity to expand their clients and markets, increase visibility of their products and operations, therefore - their wellbeing and self-confidence.





YouthBank in the Context of Conflict Transformation

Because EPF's operating landscape is one of political unrest, military confrontation, economic crisis and limited regional cooperation, EPF harnesses the potential of community activism to make a contribution to peace, aiming to address shared regional challenges and build confidence across borders. Young people have a unique power and untapped potential in the peace building process; they are the primary actors in grassroots community development and thus, are at the frontlines of peace building. By enabling young people to take action and assume responsibility for their future, they will begin to seek solutions rather than perpetuate the problem. Thus, involvement of youth in decision-making processes focused on conflict transformation and resolution can greatly reduce the likelihood of increased aggression with their participation.



YouthBank approach is used by many organizations in 27 countries in the World: ybinternationalnetwork.wordpress.com. The YouthBank program operates in several countries where Eurasia Foundation has offices, including in the South Caucasus by EPF, in Central Asia by EFCA and in Moldova by EEF. The program is used as a conflict transformation tool for bringing youth from different regions into dialogue and cooperation, especially from countries in conflict. The YB committee members hold joint meetings and experience exchange with their colleagues from other cultures. They develop inter-cultural skills and understand the importance of diplomacy when

working with other youth from Turkey or Azerbaijan.

YouthBank Promotes Community Participation



EPF's YouthBanks as part of "[Civic Engagement in Local Governance](#)" program, implement small-scale projects with local young people in their communities to enhance youth cooperation with local governments to solve issues of communities' concern. YB members learn how local governments operate and how youth can involve in community improvement. YBs members conduct community surveys for becoming better aware of community needs to make decisions and initiate change in their communities.



Following the workshop and community surveys, YB announce a call for small-scale funding for community participation projects, conduct a number of outreach events and activities in order to encourage more young people to think about their community problems, see themselves as change agents, and apply for YB funding. In nine regions YBs receive



more than 150 applications every year and manage 32 projects – small in scale, but big in impact. Some examples of community projects include – rebuilding recreational areas, building a bus-stop in a remote village, renovating town stairways with a support rail, organizing cultural events, installing benches in village center and many others.

YouthBanks for Equality and Non-Discrimination



YouthBank program is used to increase the level of understanding of fundamental human rights among YB members and to identify and reduce the major aspects of discriminatory behavior in their communities.

The YB members facilitate anti-discrimination workshops with focus on tolerance and the participation of the younger generation in establishing a society without discrimination, combined with viewing and discussing documentaries and talk shows on tolerance and anti-discrimination, produced by EPF. Following the methodology, YB supported small-scale youth-led projects, such a flash-mob in Goris, where T-shirts with equality mottos were hung in the center of the city, drawing attention to anti-discrimination issues that exist in society nowadays.



Ararat YB funded a basketball contest for people with disabilities. Another project was implemented in Ijevan, where in the central park a poster was prepared with information on human rights fighters, famous art and civic leaders who had been discriminated but became change-makers.

The Background Rationale

In Armenia, than 48% of youth between the ages of 16-26 are unemployed, do not have permanent employment or a cooperation which will correspond to his/her interests and abilities as indicated in annual report of Armenian National Statistics Service, 2016. Young people from rural areas identified their main problems as a lack of employment and educational (both formal and informal) opportunities, poor access to information and information technologies, and a lack of social, cultural and leisure activities in the villages. While young people in urban areas have many options for extracurricular activities, youth in the regions do not. The farming sector is the main source of employment for young people in rural areas, but the work is seasonal and leaves 8-9 free months during the year. Income from agricultural activities is low, while employment choices in non-agricultural sectors are rare. Socio-economic hardship is common, leading to increasing rates of migration to Yerevan or illegally to foreign countries in search of better employment and living conditions. These problems contribute to low levels of interest in resolving local problems, the absence of a sense of responsibility over local development processes and the self-impression that youth are incapable of making meaningful contributions to their communities. As a result, rural youth participate very little in social and political life. Most of the political activity of youth in the



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villages is limited to participation in the local election processes. According to the Association of Communities of Armenia, about 25% of the members of local Elderly Councils are young people, but less than 10% of them actually participate in decision making processes.

The YouthBank members become change-makers in their communities, learn to think critically, make fair decisions, and understand the local needs and importance of participation and initiative. All these skills help the YB'ers to get employed in highly demanded positions with NGOs, private sector, International development sector and the Government, and acquire reputation and leadership skills in their communities.

Without EPF's funding or oversight the YouthBanks continue to involve in additional charity and volunteer work: among other projects, they organize "food collection and distribution" events to help the marginalized families in extreme poverty during the major holidays, visit boarding schools and kindergartens to provide books and additional education for children.

In EPF we believe that a change in single person's life is a change in the country's future. This explains the motto of the YouthBank program: **Real Money, Real Lives, Real Change** – being the ultimate goal.

For more information please visit the [programs website](http://www.epfarmenia.am/en/current-programs/youth-bank/): <http://www.epfarmenia.am/en/current-programs/youth-bank/>. **For any information concerning YouthBank's activities in Armenia feel free to contact us at:**

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The following donors have supported various initiatives of YouthBank in Armenia since 2007:

