

2008 Program Areas

Cross-Border



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Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia share a compact geographic area, many common cultural practices, and a long, interlinked history. Despite these deep ties, cross-border relations and collaborative efforts on a regional scale have diminished significantly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Much of this can be attributed to the lingering political impasse between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but deep-rooted socioeconomic hardships and introspective attitudes have also contributed significantly to this state of affairs. EPF's Cross-Border Program, launched in 1998, is a unique initiative designed to address shared regional challenges by developing common approaches and exchanging experiences and innovative ideas among engaged citizen groups in the South Caucasus.

Since 1998, the Program has invested over six million in grants and technical assistance to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia through more than 150 trilateral projects in such areas as independent media strengthening, economic development, environmental protection, and public policy development. In 2008, EPF will implement the following cross-border programs:

Public Policy Capacity Building

All three countries of the South Caucasus are beset by a similar set of public policy challenges. Yet the ability of government agencies and independent think tanks to design appropriate and sophisticated policies remains severely limited. For more than a decade, the donor community has recognized the lack of policy analysis capacity as a barrier to broader economic and democratic development. Although a wide range of programs were implemented in response, the lack of substantial progress to develop effective capacity for public policy and analysis suggests the need to take stock and to develop more effective methods of assistance delivery.

In 2008 EPF will conduct two activities to address these needs. A baseline assessment of local capacity for public policy analysis will identify gaps and best practices in this field, and will be used to inform the second activ-

ity – the development of a training module to provide interactive and high-quality training to disseminate policy analysis skills. The training module will identify key texts, build illustrative and instructive case studies that can be used interactively and provide online training material, specifically for easy replication within universities or in training of civil servants.

Citizen Participation in Public Policy

Inclusive and transparent decision making on major issues of public policy in the South Caucasus is a rarity. Ordinary citizens have been effectively alienated from the decision-making processes by the governing elites and powerful business interest groups. The Citizen Empowerment Initiative aims to promote wider public participation in decision-making processes and increased citizen understanding of key public policy issues in the South Caucasus.

The International Center for Human Development (ICHD) in Yerevan has developed a Town Hall Meeting (THM) system – a unique process to address the needs of ordinary citizens and decision makers based on the methodology developed by the US organization America Speaks. Diverse groups of citizens participate in round-table discussions (10-12 people per table), deliberating key policy issues in depth. Each table conversation is led by a trained facilitator to ensure that participants stay on task and that each table has a democratic process. Participants receive detailed, balanced background guidebooks to increase their knowledge of the issues under consideration. Technology transforms the individual table discussions into one large group discussion. Each table submits recommendations and ideas using groupware computers and each participant can vote on specific proposals using polling keypads.

With support from EPF, ICHD is set to finish phase I of the Initiative by May 2008, which includes adjustments to the existing THM software to introduce multi-language support, development of Azerbaijani and Georgian language packs and trainings for Azerbaijani and Georgian counterparts. ICHD will also conduct a pilot demonstration of THM for Georgian and Azerbaijani partners in Tbilisi. Phase II of the initiative will

Empowering people to effect change for social justice and economic prosperity through hands-on programs, helping them to improve their communities and their own lives.

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Engaging Citizens, Empowering Communities

build on the strengthened THM capacity in the region and will enable other THM-based projects on key public policy issues of regional import, such as environmental protection or even conflict resolution if conditions permit.

Creative Commons

The internet and new electronic technologies have enabled ideas and products to be spread quickly and widely across the globe, but these innovations have also posed new challenges to individuals who would like to simultaneously share their works and protect their ideas and creations from being stolen or abused by others. While the Internet has enabled increased sharing, it has also enabled increased violation of intellectual property rights, resulting in a negative incentive to share and create new products and ideas.

The Creative Commons licensing system offers an internationally accepted framework for intellectual property rights protection for web-based materials. It allows new ideas and products to be shared in a controlled way, and benefits both authors and users since authors get their work out to a larger audience but with tailored restrictions on its use, and users have access to more new creations, ideas and tools. The result is not only an increase in the sum of raw source material online, but also cheaper and easier access to intellectual materials. This is particularly critical in the South Caucasus where traditional licensing of intellectual property is mostly not upheld, which makes this virtually-based open source approach a newer and freer system for licensing that could unleash creative and, eventually, economic potential.

In cooperation with local partners in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, EPF will explore possibilities for adapting and implementing

the Creative Commons licensing framework to the South Caucasus. The program will engage in an extensive array of stakeholders, from legislators to user communities, and conduct a broad public awareness campaign in each country. If successful, the program will harness further intellectual activity in the South Caucasus, will potentially provide a newer mechanism for economic activity, and, at the same time, will enhance opportunities for cross-border collaboration among creative communities in the South Caucasus and beyond.

ENP Civic Dialogue

In October and November 2006, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia concluded national action plans with the European Union in the context of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The Action Plans commit all three countries to deeper integration with the EU through approximation of EU standards and increased access to the single European market. There are a host of common public policy priorities that lend themselves to a regional exchange of ideas and innovative solutions. Moreover, regional cooperation remains an emphatic priority in all three Action Plans.

Through a series of stakeholder meetings in 2006, EPF identified the subjects of waste management, food standards and safety and vocational education as the focus for cross-border work related to the ENP Action Plans. A series of policy reports on these subjects comparing legislation and opportunities for harmonization of practices were produced, and a number of television and radio shows on each topic were aired to raise public awareness. In 2008, EPF will launch three pilot projects in each field, based on recommendations made in the policy reports and through consultations with research consortiums.

EPF is a proud member of the EF Network: five local foundations supporting civil society and based in Russia, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and Washington, DC. For more information, please visit: www.eurasia.org