



Annual report on the activities of the Aarhus Centers in 2012

The Aarhus Centers activities in 2012 have been coordinated by the "BLEJAN" environmental, social, business support NGO within the frameworks of the program "Support to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, creating and strengthening the capacity of the Aarhus centers and environmental civil society organizations".

At the beginning of the year were developed the directions of the Aarhus Centers activity by the centers coordinators as well as the list of methods to be implemented, on the basis of which the centers drew up their annual working plans. These programs were reviewed and approved by the board of experts of the centers, in compliance of which were organized the centers activities.

The Aarhus Centers activities in 2012 mainly aimed at creating awareness of public on the environmental issues and their right to live in a healthy and comfortable environment, the latter more effective involvement in the process of solving these problems, to contribute to the legality of decisions regarding the environment, ensuring public participation in those adoption and supporting to accountability of state authorities and transparency working style.

During the reporting period, the fifteen Aarhus Centers of Armenia have sent **146** information requests to state authorities and local self governmental bodies. The requests and the responses were analyzed, provided the interested organizations, published in the Aarhus Centers website, spread through the social, electronic networks, thus making those accessible to wider strata of society and contributing to the implementation of the pillars of the Aarhus Convention and the RA law on "freedom of Information".

The centers have also carried out environmental components (air, water, waste, etc.) data collection and classification activity and fed in the electronic databases, which have been updated regularly. The existing information has been provided to the public upon request. In the first half of 2012 the ACs have carried out study of the demand for environmental information among potential consumers of environmental information, which aimed at identifying the level of public awareness on environmental issues, assessing the accuracy of the gathered information, immediacy, as well as to identifying and clarifying a number of other issues related to the environmental activities. Through the inquiry made with the assistance of the expert surveys have been undertaken among different sexes and age groups and among people of different backgrounds (769 people in total, including 65.1% representatives of female sex, 30.7% of male, 4.2% of surveyed people did not indicate gender). This process contributed to

the ways of improving the services provided by the centers, facilitating access to environmental information.

From the surveys results have been also summarized the surveyed suggestions concerning to raising productivity of the centers activity, some of which were taken into consideration during the implementation of the annual program, as well as in the future the centers will follow it during their activities.

45.1% of respondents were aware of the Aarhus Convention, 36.9% have only heard of it, 17.9% were not aware, only 55.7% are well informed of the activities of the Aarhus Centers and 29.0% of only heard about it, and 14.3% were not aware at all.

[The survey details are available at the website.](#)

Aiming at providing accurate information on issues concerning the environment, making that information more accessible to the public, on the centers initiative are being prepared thematic informational materials, press releases, which are being disseminated through the website www.aarhus.am and other social-networks. In the course of 2012, the ACs have organized awareness raising events about the total number of 253, including 70 press conference. The ACs are keen to inform the interested public about the public hearings on the environmental issues, draft laws on normative legal acts and on the EIA drafts presented by the environmental expertise (ensuring opportunity to get acquainted with the drafts in advance if it possible) and support the authorized body in organization of the hearings promoting public participation in the environmental issues related decision-making process. In 2012, on the Centers initiative have been carried out **90** public discussions on various environmental issues, involving interested public, governmental, international, scientific non-governmental organizations, in the course of the reporting period the centers in cooperation with the competent authority have supported to the **20** public hearings ensuring public participation. These measures have strongly furthered ensuring public participation in the decision-making process improving the management of environmental issues promoting transparency and democracy. In their activities the ACs always highlight the issues of eco education and eco upbringing. As every year, this year also the centers are not indifferent to the eco educational events; in total were organized **212** events. The events dedicated to the access to justice as always are yielding to other ones, this year those number were only **15**. In 2012 by the 15 Armenian Aarhus Centers have been implemented in total **590** events, which were attended by **13 062** people, of which **6724** were women and **6338** were men. During the reporting period

4833 people made use of the centers services to get information and advice as well as other services. The total number of the event participants and users of services amounted to 17 895 people.

[Data on the events taken place, those orientation, number of participants, users of the services of the centers are given in the table.](#)

During the reporting period 5 working meetings of the ACs coordinators took place in Yerevan Aarhus Center, during which have been mainly determined the directions of the activities, discussed formats of the annual working plans and other organizational issues, as well as invited experts in various fields, and training courses were conducted for the Centers coordinators.

The list of the trainings conducted for the ACs coordinators and stakeholders are presented below.

	Training name	Participants	Number of participants	Trainer
1	The problems of access to information and the consumers' demands in the RA	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers	19	<i>Yuri Poghosyan –Member of the State Council of RA Statistical Service, an international environmental expert</i>
2	Protocol on pollutant emissions and Transfer Register	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers	19	<i>Naira Mandalyan- IT expert, Administrator of the Aarhus centers web site</i>
3	Creation of databases through Access program	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers	19	<i>Naira Mandalyan- IT expert, Administrator of the Aarhus centers web site</i>
4	Environmental monitoring and information management systems associated to it	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers	21	<i>Seyran Minasyan- RA Ministry of Nature Protection "Environmental Impact Monitoring Center" SNCO's deputy director, expert</i>
5	“Economic mechanisms of environmental management and the latests developments”	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers	18	<i>Erik Grigoryan-environmental and economical expert</i>
6	The activities of the Asian Development Bank in Armenia	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers	18	<i>Silva Adamyan - Environmental Public Alliance, environmental expert</i>
7	Developments of environmental policy in the	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers	19	<i>Ayser Ghazaryan, GIZ- Sustainable Management of</i>

	RA			<i>Biodiversity Expert</i>
8	Consequences of climate change, global developments after Doha	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers	19	<i>Aram Gabrielyan, National coordinator of the Climate Change Convention</i>
9	Ways of cooperation between local self-governments and the society	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers	15	<i>Ashot Giloyan, The Ministry of Territorial Administration, head of the department of local self-governments management</i>
10	“The current policy. opportunities and challenges of the environment and energy resources in Armenia	RA coordinators of Aarhus centers, NGO representatives	20	<i>Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty</i>
11-20	“The ecological rights of the civil society” and “environment management”	Beneficiaries from Goris Kapan Dilijan Alaverdi Idjevan Aparan Stepanavan Vanadzor Gyumri Yeghegnadzor centers	23 21 16 16 9 15 9 12 20 13	<i>Arthur Grigoryan- Aarhus Centres Counsel, environmental law specialist, activist</i>

The ACs are actively cooperating with the local authorities, international, governmental and non-governmental organizations dealing with environmental protection, representatives of scientific, business and media sector. Joint events are organized, coordinators of the centers are participating in

events organized by other organizations, as well as providing venues and supporting to the events organized by the other organizations in their centers. During the reporting period, the centers have provided venues **93** times and took part in **252** events organized by the other organizations. The ACs are always in constant contact with each other and the above stated organization via electronic and social networks. The sources of exchange and dissemination of information are the website www.aarhus.am and the ACs electronic networks. By these means are provided a forum for the networks users. During the reporting period users of the website www.aarhus.am amounted to over **300,000** visitors.

As in previous years, so this year the ACs the interaction with the media was very close. The centers activity has been covered by the numerous national and regional media. The Centers coordinators have been invited to the various TV and radio broadcasts related to the environment, there have been numerous interviews and press conferences. The Public radio is broadcasting the ACs announcements free of charge.

Various reports have been prepared on the environmental issues raised by the ACs and broadcasted via several national and regional TV channels, as well as covered in the press and electronic media (more than **850** articles).

Results of 2012

1. As a result of the activities of Armenian Aarhus Centers in 2012 environmental protection process included a total of **17895** people.
2. The relationships and cooperation with regional and local government bodies in the area of environment protection was activated and put on a new level:
 - The centers had immediate participation in the discussions of 2013-2016 four-year community development programs, suggestions were made on environmental and urban issues, some of which were included in the programs.
 - Memorandum of cooperation was signed between the municipality of Gyumri and Gyumri Aarhus Center.
 - Within the frames of the project "Green management" being implemented in Shirak, Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor, Lori, Syunik and Kotayk regions, the ACs provided the connection between local self governments and civil society which has served as an impetus for participatory strategic planning, political activism and advocacy.
 - This year the Environmental Council of Yerevan municipality has been established for the first time, which includes a number of NGOs, scientific and other organizations, including the Yerevan Aarhus Center. The committee works to promote the cooperation between local self governments

and public institutions. Many issues disturbing the society were submitted to the committee's discussion.

- On the initiative of Alaverdi Aarhus Centre, in participation of community residents have been discussed the environmental part of the budget for 2013, the majority of the made motions were adopted by the local self governing institutions
- Gavar AC in cooperation with the republican and regional NGOs have visited more than 40 communities, met with residents and representatives of local self government, as a result of which the complex project on the Lake Sevan was presented to the representatives of the lake's coastal communities, has been clarified the degree of public participation in the development and implementation of the programs and collecting proposals were submitted to the Standing Committee on the Lake Sevan.
- In the course of the current year organized various events by Dilijan AC have contributed to unite active citizens of the community at the end of the year, and presenting a package of common suggestions to discuss in the four year project of the city of Dilijan.

3. The complaints of the residents on environmental violations were responded to and informed about to the relevant authorities:

- As a result of Gyumri Aarhus city center applications Shirak Regional Environmental Inspectorate Division perpetrated 6 reveals of the tree cutting.
- Based on the complaints of Noragavit district residents, with the efforts of Yerevan AC and ecological public alliance the construction of stadium was suspended which was to be carried out at the expense of over 10 hectares of green area.
- As a result of work carried out by Kapan AC and Kapan NGOs, gold mine construction by "BAMO Metal" near the basin of water crake was suspended as it has the risk of contamination of drinking water in Kapan.
- The recommendations made by the Goris AC refer to the forest fire prevention measures have been adopted by the Ministry of Emergency Situations.
- The researches of the water and soil samples of Vanadzor landfill has been carried out by the Vanadzor AC, about the results were informed the public.
- The Aparan AC in collaboration with the American University of Armenia has conducted several studies: monitoring, sampling of land and water in the Reserve of expired pesticides in Quchak and in the tailings areas of Tuxhmanuk gold mine in the village of Melik.

4. ACs supported and participated in environmental civic initiatives and activities:

- The Armenian ACs have performed their active participation, support and assistance in the movement against the illegal construction in the Mashtots Avenue's nearby park. As a result of three months struggling of the civil society, the Yerevan municipality adopted decision to dismantle the kiosks.
- Hrazdan Aarhus center joint with "Healthy Hrazdan Group" civic initiative submitted a letter of recommendation to the Prime Minister, Minister of Public Counsel, which proposed to develop a concept that in line with the existing resources, environmental

problems and prospects of the developments will coordinate all the regions of Armenia. Public Council submitted a letter to the President, who approved the proposal. Public Council submitted a letter to the president, who approved the proposal.

- On the initiative of Ararat AC a number of stakeholder organizations and active citizens created the civil initiative "Together to green Ararat", which is actively operating in revealing environmental problems of the region, increasing the level of public awareness and finding ways to those solutions.

5. ACs provided public participation in a number of legal acts and planned activities at the public hearings on environmental impact assessment:

- The centers disseminated information on held hearings, workshops and planned projects among interested parties by the involvement of specialists and experts, all of the latter's suggestions, remarks, and opinions were presented to the decision-making authority and the majority were adopted.
- As a result of active civil society efforts and the awareness works implemented by the Idjevan AC , the EIA positive assessment for the construction of SHPP on Paghjur tributary of River Aghstev carried out by "Megaenergy" LLC was considered invalid, new project was put under examination. The residents of the community were unilateral against new project during the first public hearings.
- As a result of thye activity carried out by Yeghegnadzor AC public hearings on approval of "Gndevank" SHPP project documents were recognized invalid. New public hearings were appointed for not keeping the provisions of the Aarhus Convention.
- The construction of Small HPP on Dzoraget River and its negative consequences on the river has received wide publicity due to the complaints and appeals submitted to the state bodies by Stpenavan AC. A final decision has not been made yet on HPP, the issue is still under discussion.
- Hrazdan, Aparan, Gavar, Yeghegnadzor Aarhus Centers carried out awareness rising works connected with the negative consequences of the planned actions (Tezh sar, Iron mine, Meghradzor gold mines), (Tukhmanuk gold mine), (Sotq gold mine), (Jermuk 1 SHPP) etc..

6. Kapan AC joint with the Kapan NGOs appealed to the RA President with the request to suspend uranium mine reconnaissance works and to cancel legal acts related to that field.

7. With the support of ACs environmental public alliances were not only active in some communities but also were expanded.

8. The experience of the ACs of Armenia is considered as advanced in the international meetings:

- In 2012 the coordinator of Gyumri AC has taken certain steps during a number of international meetings to disseminate the results of ACs experience and activities and to establish international relations.

- The coordinator of newly opened Aarhus Center of Turkmenistan visited Armenia to examine the experience of the ACs.
- 9 The level of youth activism and civil society participation in the discussion of environmental issues has increased:
- Yeghvard and Dilijan ACs are advisory bodies for the youth of the regions in the process of implementing their programs and revealing new ideas
 - Yeghvard AC's activities resulted formation of a youth group in Yeghvard more aware of environmental issues and their rights, which number is becoming increasingly, supplemented by a more active and intelligent youth.

Summary reports on the Centers activities carried out in 2012 are available at the Centers Website (www.aarhus.am website, "Aarhus Centers", "Activity of the center").