

Citizens Participation in Local Government Budget Policy Development:

A case study on involving citizens' voice into the policy making process

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In December, 2005 this instrument was piloted in a small village of Sarnaghbyur in Northern Armenia where about 100 community members got together to discuss six possible options on capital expenses within the annual budget for the next year. All the options on the table were prepared based on the preferences of the community members, which were researched prior to the THM.

This case study details out the whole process the Town Hall Meeting, as well as the follow-up activities. It describes the background of the issue and the necessity of intervention, the initial hypotheses regarding the outcomes of the intervention, the whole process of planning and implementing the project, the analyses of the results and follow-up activities.



The project is supported by Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative of the Open Society Institute

Town Hall Meeting



Yerevan - 2006



International Center for Human Development
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**International Center for Human
Development**



**Local Government and Public Service
Reform Initiative of the Open Society
Institute**

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1. *Executive Summary*

Building democracy requires both top-down and bottom-up efforts. In transitional democracies this is a number one imperative. To enhance such efforts in Armenia, a post-Soviet transitional country, a prominent Armenian think tank - International Center for Human Development (ICHD) - initiated a pilot project on citizen participation in Local Government budget policy development. To enhance public involvement in the decision making process, ICHD introduced an innovative instrument of public participation - Town Hall Meeting (THM). THM focuses on discussion and deliberation among citizens, rather than speeches, Q&A sessions or panel presentations. Diverse groups of citizens participate in round-table discussions (10-12 people per table), deliberating in depth about key policy, resource allocation or planning issues. Discussions at each table are led by a trained facilitator to ensure that participants stay on task and that each table is engaged in a democratic process. Technology transforms the individual table discussions into one large group discussion. Each table submits recommendations and ideas using wireless groupware computers. At each table there is a note-taker who records all the ideas exchanged around the table and submits to the head operator who moderates the incoming messages to display for public attention. At the end of the discussions each participant can vote on specific proposals. The entire group responds to the themes generated from table discussions and votes on their final recommendations to decision makers.

In December, 2005 this instrument was piloted in a small village of Sarnaghbyur in Northern Armenia where about 100 community members got together to discuss six possible options on capital expenses within the annual budget for the next year. All the options on the table were prepared based on the preferences of the community members, which were researched prior to the THM.

This case study details out the whole process the Town Hall Meeting, as well as the follow-up activities. It describes the background of the issue and the necessity of intervention, the initial hypotheses regarding the outcomes of the intervention, the whole process of planning and implementing the project, the analyses of the results and follow-up activities. In addition, it provides a list of recommendations and a brief conclusion developed by an independent observer. Such a careful description of the project will allow any organization targeting community development to study the successes and challenges of using Town Hall Meeting for initiating public involvement in the decision making process in a comparatively small community.

2. *Introduction*

“Democracy forever teases us with the contrast between its ideals and its realities, between its heroic possibilities and its sorry achievements”, remarks the American essayist Agnes Repplier.

People have authored both these ideals and these realities. Moreover, the key to turning possibilities into either heroic or sorry achievements is in their hands as well. Establishment of democracy is an on-going and arduous process and even more so in transitional countries. In order to ensure the success of democracy in such countries people should embrace democratic principles as values believed and practiced in their daily routine. Democracy should function from their homes to governmental institutions, and public involvement is often the cornerstone of this functionality.

The Republic of Armenia (RA) is one of the former USSR countries enjoying independence since 1991 (*see Appendix 1*). It was quite soon labeled “a transitional country” and since then has been actively involved in democracy building. There have been numerous intensive and extensive attempts aimed at the accomplishment of this goal, and this particular case is only one of such pilots. Realizing the importance of functional democracy this initiative targets public involvement in decision making processes in local governments. More specifically, the case discusses in detail how cooperation between a local administration and a public policy organization results in encouraging comprehensive and fruitful public involvement in the decision making processes of the community leaders.

Before launching on the description of the case it is worthwhile to explore the background of the need which is addressed through this initiative in order to be able to fully picture the necessity of intervention.

3. *Regulation of Budgeting Processes in the Local Governance in Armenia: Legislation and Practice Mosaic*

The need to intervene in the practice of public involvement in decision making processes has stemmed from a long-term observation and discussion of the issue. Armenian legislation appears to be rather conducive to affording a democratic practice of public involvement. The two principles underlying the Law on Local Governance are the accountability of the LG units (LGU) to their constituencies and the publicity and transparency of their activities¹. The same principles refer to the budgeting process as well. According to Article 16 of the Republic of Armenia Law on the RA Budget System, the community council is the body responsible for

¹ See RA Law on Local Governance ratified in May 7, 2002, Article 9: The Principles of Local Governance

ratifying the annual budget of the community and monitoring its implementation. Article 36 of the same Law defines the adequate procedures to ensure public involvement in the process of working out a community development plan and annual budget. It obliges the LGUs to publicize the draft of the annual budget within three days after it has been presented to the community council. However, the Law does not specifically define the mechanism of public feedback after such transparency and dissemination of information. The dissemination of all pertinent documents in the LGU premises and through the local media is simply supposed to encourage public feedback which can be channeled to the LGU leaders through the councilors or directly. In this case the communication is regulated by another law, which requires that the LG administration contact the community members within 10 days and let them know of the response to their appeal.

Direct involvement of the community can be regulated in accordance with another law as well, namely the RA Law on Local Plebiscite ratified on February 6, 2002. Article 1 of this Law defines that local plebiscite can be organized in order to vote for any issue pertinent to the local community. In order to initiate one, a citizen initiative group should turn to the local administration with such a request and the authorities have to respond to the appeal within 15 days. Thus, these laws legally ensure public involvement in the decision making process.

However, notwithstanding the apparent democracy of the legislation the practice of transparency and public involvement varies from one community to another. In general, the shift from autocratic governance to democracy takes considerable time and effort, and the change has been quite a challenge in Armenia. To address this challenge, the Armenian government and NGOs have sought external support as well, and one of the most comprehensive activities thus far in terms of focusing specifically on public involvement, has been the efforts of the Urban Institute which initiated a large-scale training of LGU staff to provide essential skills for the development of Capital Improvement Plans and to ensure public involvement in this activity. This initiative focused mostly on larger communities in urban areas, comprising 12 out of the total 931, the majority of which are small rural communities. Another significant effort was made by the Armenian Social Investment Fund (ASIF). It provided a 3-week training on budgeting, infrastructure management and working out a 3-year community development plan to all the community leaders and financial officers of the 931 communities in Armenia.

The initiative of the International Center for Human Development attempts to suggest another model that can be used by community administrations to enhance the practice of public involvement in decision making regarding local budgeting.

After 14 years of transition towards democracy, the citizens of Armenia have not obtained their rightful role in LG decision making. The dramatic growth and power of special interest groups has both constrained leaders and squeezed ordinary citizens out of the decision-making process, thus limiting even the rule of law in practice, which, as can be seen above, is quite feasible in terms of legisla-

tion. As a result, many citizens feel alienated, and decision makers have lost touch with their constituents' true concerns.

Local Government budgets represent the main policy document for the community which encompasses almost all policy aspects related to the community members. There were a number of wide scale projects implemented in Armenia for the purpose of strengthening Local Government capacities including those of preparation and implementation of budgeting. Currently budget terminology, forecasting techniques, deficit management, and other techniques and knowledge of budgeting are an overcome stage and many Local Governments have adequate capacity in dealing with budgeting issues skillfully. Interestingly, the main sources of decisions are theoretical assumptions and sole-figures which are shaped into policy by different specialists including those from international community.

The isolation of direct beneficiaries is a common practice in developing budget drafts. There are two main factors affecting these processes:

- i. the inability of presenting budgeting elements to the ordinary citizens in a simple and more understandable language and form, and
- ii. lack of capacities in organizing direct public participation into decision making processes.

There are also other factors such as lack of transparency, corrupt governments and bureaucratic interests. However, these problems are out of the scope of this project and will be touched only to the amount relevant to the particular case.

The justification of citizens' detachment from the budgeting processes is sometimes said to be the technical complexity of the budget and lack of citizens' awareness about budgeting. This concern is double-edged though: the public being detached from the decision making process regarding the LG budget becomes less aware of it as well. Such a vicious circle has a risk of deepening the gap between LG officials and ordinary citizen.

There are several stereotypes regarding the involvement of community members into the budgeting process which as a rule become obstacles on the way to do so. These are as follows:

- Budgets are documents requiring special expertise to understand and often these are extremely boring.
- Local budgeting is an internal administrative issue not to be made public.
- Community members do not see any connection between the budget and their daily lives.
- Budgeting draws on the departments of the LG administration, their functions and invested resources and not on goals and outcomes.

- After ratification it is used as a checklist to monitor functions and not one to monitor the services provided to the community.
- The community does not trust the LG administration.

To break these stereotypes and to reverse this dangerous trend, as well as to test the preliminary hypotheses suggested above, it was decided to use an instrument called “Town Hall Meeting” (THM *see Appendix 3*) to initiate large-scale citizen engagement into budget approval processes.

4. From “what there is” to “what there should and can be”

Given the legislative and practical realities of LG in Armenia, as well as the increasing demand of local leaders for more effective leadership practices, the International Center for Human Development, as a proactive supporter of public advocacy decided to initiate a long-term project which would foster effective public involvement in local decision-making, specifically regarding the budgeting process. Having quite an impressive experience in initiating public participation in a number of projects, it proposed a pilot project that would address the issue of more effective involvement of the community in the local decision-making process. Prior to the implementation of the project the Center suggested three hypotheses that would either prove correct or wrong along with the evolution of the project. The following three hypotheses were put forward:

Hypothesis 1. *Active involvement of the community in the decision-making process will make the leaders more willing to comply with the proposals that the community would put forward;*

Hypothesis 2. *Budgeting becomes more effective if the community feels ownership for the process.*

“Indoors” budgeting, i.e. the decision making regarding budgeting, which takes place by the administration alone, restricting or excluding public participation, may appear more effective and rational. However, the practice shows that rationality does not always guarantee the success of implementation. In this case only a limited group of people are the “owners” of the budget – a few managers, administrators and experts, whereas the outcomes and implementation of the budget mainly depend on the participation of the majority of tax payers, who in the case of the “indoors” scenario of budgeting have had no say in the planning process, and therefore feel less prone to its successful implementation and more critical towards faults and failures. Thus, to ensure a successful delivery of the set objectives, the community authorities may want to involve the community in the decision-making process.

Hypothesis 3. *Public involvement in the decision-making process and the sense of ownership this participation provides can serve as sound prerequisites for the establishment of trust between the leadership and constituents.*

To ensure a certain format of public involvement it was necessary to consider different factors that affect the budgeting process in any community, namely:

- *the size of the community:*

The size of the community is crucial for defining the directions of the budgeting process. For instance, generally, social capital is far more important than any other resource in smaller communities, and this fact needs due consideration. Smaller communities have another characteristic as well: kinship can play a decisive role in defining the communication patterns and decision making processes. Larger communities have a different issue: the voice of the minority, which in large communities can comprise quite a significant number, is usually ignored.

A few of the issues that community leadership or external stakeholders have to consider while initiating public involvement in decision making processes are:

- *the size of the budget:*

The larger the community, the more complicated its budget is. Usually the capital investments within a year are measured not by the money spent but by the quantity of activities realized. However, international support usually targets the effectiveness of the measure it suggests and not the comprehensiveness of the whole initiative and its sustainability. For instance, one of the approaches that is being neglected in these efforts is the *simplicity*. In order to engage the public in the decision making process it is necessary to present the budget drafts in a simple and concise format to initiate constructive feedback, but the complexity of the budget makes it difficult to do so.

- *responsible person's experience in budgeting; the LGU finance and budget section's level of expertise and training; level of expertise and training of the finance and budget section of the regional administration:*

In Armenia there have been many projects targeting the LGU staff, some regarding budgeting specifically. The professionalism and experience of the leaders is a crucial factor, largely contributing to the effectiveness of the budgeting process. However, this has a wash-back effect, as well. First, it has been recorded that the more professional the leaders and responsible people in budgeting are, less creative they tend to be in their activities. Secondly, highly professional leaders tend to trust their experience and professionalism to the extent of preferring it over the public consent and opinion. This

leads to the lack of creativity in problem solving process. Professionals tend to be less creative because of following list of obstacles¹:

Emotional obstacles

- Fear
- Need to conform
- Frustration
- Inappropriate motivation
- Tendency to judge
- Intolerance to chaos
- Ego/self satisfaction

Intellectual perceptual obstacles

- Poor problem definition
- Wrong approach
- Incorrect data
- Failure to use senses
- Inability to utilize all our abilities.

Finally, there is a direct correlation between the expertise of the local LGU staff and the staff of the regional administration. The practice shows that the lack of appropriate expertise in the local LGU creates significant dependence on the regional administration, thus reducing opportunities of independent decision making and reducing the chances of the local community affecting the decisions made.

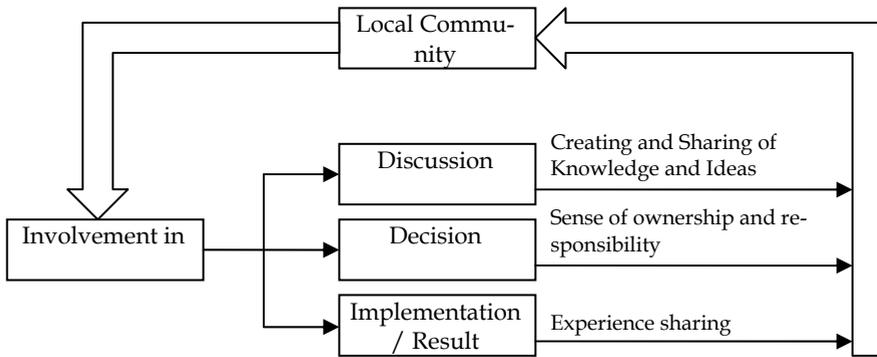
- *external support to the budgeting process at the LGU:*

As mentioned above most of the external support tends to focus on effectiveness of the budgeting process, but in communities with small budgets the effectiveness is less visible and measurable. Projects that target different goals, for instance, sustainability, provide the leaders and the community with an experience which should be the foundation of sustainable capacity building. Such projects allow the participants to make mistakes, analyze those mistakes, reflect upon the whole experience and tailor the introduced skills to the specific community. They are able to gain a long-term perspective, rather than get hooked on short-term outcomes which may not extend to further practice once the external support is removed. Often to guarantee the success of the projects external stakeholders intervene with the process of assistance and externally correct the shortcomings without giving the necessary time for reflection, adaptation and self-reliance in actions and activities.

Secondly, projects such as the one discussed below have a multiplier effect, rather than being “one-time shots”. Since they involve a significant number of community members, there is a lot of sharing happening: sharing of results, experiences and ideas. This may result in both enriching the experience of a given community and its leadership through further activities and initiation of similar projects in other communities.

¹ “An introduction to creativity”, CASIN - Centre For Applied Studies In International Negotiations

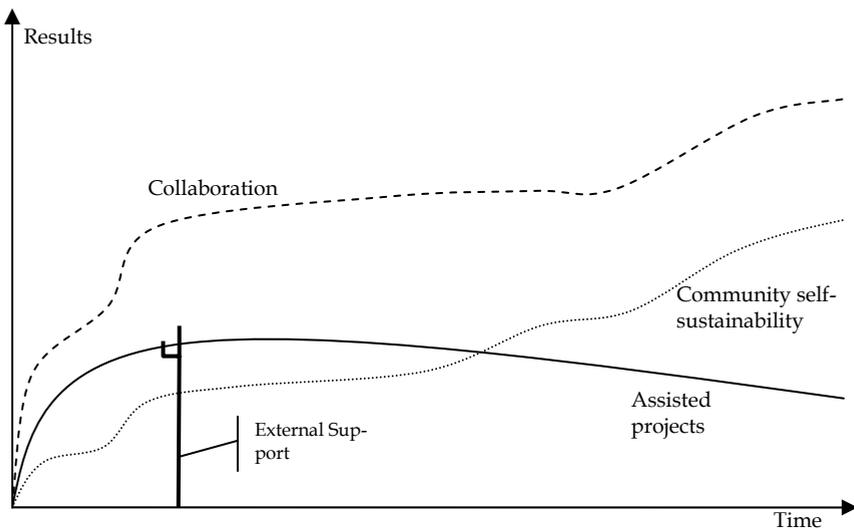
Figure 1. Multiplier effect of involving community members in decision making process.



- *existing projects financing community needs:*

This is another important factor that should be viewed in the light of short-term long-term dichotomy, since the outcomes of projects financing various community needs may differ given how they relate to this dichotomy. In general, three types of outcomes are recorded: (1) financial support results in a drastic increase of effectiveness in the implementation of the project. However, once the project is over, the effectiveness tends to steadily decrease; (2) financial assistance cultivates certain capacities that contribute to the self-sustainability of the community and (3) this assistance results not only in self-sustainable practice, but in development of collaboration (see the figure below):

Figure 2



- *level of engagement:*

In general, in small communities social capital is much higher. However, often times it is being neglected as a development resource. Community development is used to be considered mostly in the context of good governance and financial resources. One should not forget though that the largest resource underlying the foundation of prosperity is another asset: trust. Notwithstanding how effective decisions might be, if they are made behind the closed doors of professionalism, community members may not trust them, since not being involved in the decision making process, they do not manage to develop a sense of ownership for this very decisions. In this regard it is extremely important that the whole process of decision making is carried out with the participation of community members. In this case, regardless of the quality of the decision (*and it should be noted that decisions are usually being measured against certain standards and it is quite possible that in some cases drawbacks may be found*), the trust that has been build up in the process of decision making will outweigh these drawbacks since it is a newly created asset in the community and a rather valuable one. The whole process can be summarized as follows: high level of engagement → trust → long-term development resource.

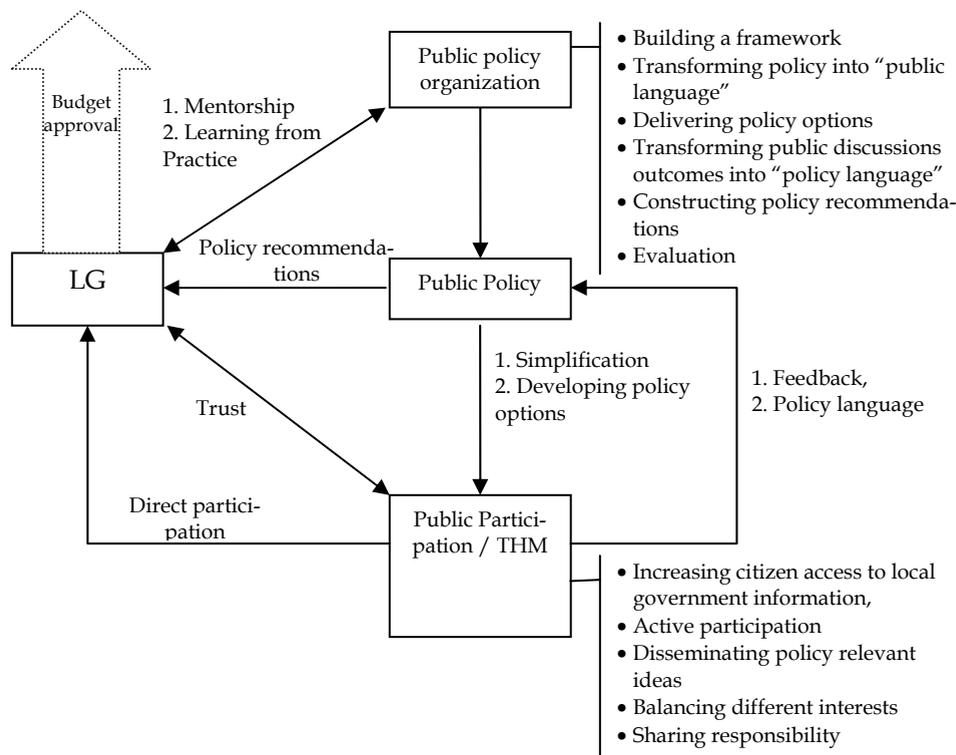
Practice shows that many international projects that have aimed at addressing issues of Local Governance tend to ignore these factors, since their major objective is usually the short-term effectiveness, rather than long-term sustainability. Thus, many mechanisms suggested externally fit the common “one size fits all” approach, which eventually hinders recording sustainable outcomes.

ICHD ventured to avoid this common practice and choose a format of public involvement in decision making processes regarding budgeting that would take into consideration the above-mentioned factors. In addition, the case has attempted to address the above-mentioned hypotheses and elaborate on activities that aimed at measuring their validity and the outcomes which were recorded having those hypotheses in mind.

5. The Scheme for Case Study

In order to introduce the case, the following chart has been developed which describes its rationale, organization and outcomes. It shows how the cooperation between the LGU and the ICHD evolves, what goals have been envisioned at each step, what activities undertaken and what outcomes anticipated.

Figure 3



The further description of the case details out the different parts of this scheme.

Goal of the Intervention.....

The goal of the initiative was to incorporate public participation into budgeting development processes with the help of a public policy organization.

Stakeholders.....

- International Center for Human Development
- Sarnaghbyur administration
- Sarnaghbyur community

Objectives.....

To reach the final goal of the initiative the following objectives were set:

1. To transfer basic knowledge about budgeting and awareness about the next year budget to the ordinary citizens;
2. To practice cooperation between Local Government and Public Policy Organization;

3. To develop several policy options for the budget of the upcoming year;
4. To organize a THM with participation of citizens and LG officials;
5. To evaluate the level and efficiency of LG budget public discussions during budget approval process;
6. Mentoring LG officials in organizing budget discussions with the public.

6. Making vox populi audible

In order to address the objectives mentioned above, the ICHD intended to initiate a public participation model in cooperation with the LG authorities. The whole initiative comprised several phases:

1. initial negotiations with community authorities;
2. preparation of the policy options to be introduced to the community members at the THM;
3. logistics of the event;
4. THM;
5. THM outcomes.

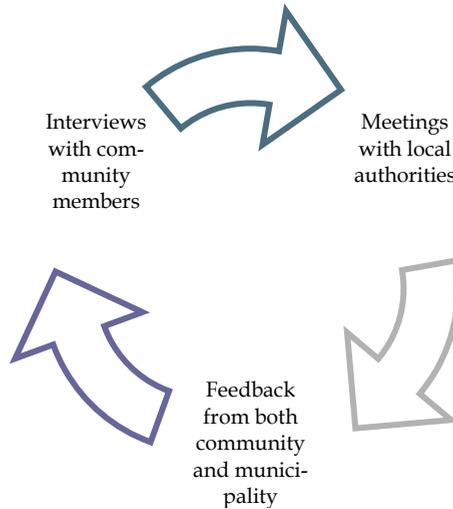
Initial negotiations and meetings.....

Given the past experience and good links with the mayors of around 400 communities, ICHD identified 3 mayors (Head of Vokhchaberd Local government (Kotayq region), Mayor of Ijevan City (Tavush region), Head of Sarnaghbyur Local government (Shirak region)), who were willing to engage the community in the decision-making process regarding the identification of the budget priorities for the year 2006. The ICHD implementation team had several meetings with all three mayors, presented the goals and objectives of the initiative and discussed the possibilities of launching the project in their communities. Eventually it was decided to start the project in Sarnaghbyur village, the reason being the fact that among the identified communities it was the one with the most challenging budgetary issues. Being a comparatively large rural community and one with a moderately large budget (the village has about 3500 residents and the main sources of income are agricultural activities (for more details on the village profile see *Appendix 2*), it had managed to record growth in budget revenues, and at that point the community leaders were not certain how the sum accumulated in the result of these revenues could be used to address the most urgent needs of the community.

Thus, having finally identified the community which according to the ICHD experts would benefit the most from public involvement, the second round of negotiations started. The ICDH team went to Sarnaghbyur to learn more of the community needs. There were actually meetings at two levels: one with the local ad-

ministration and the second, with community members in general. The goal of these stratified meetings was to find out the various perspectives regarding the urgent community needs. The whole process can be described as a cycle of meetings and interviews with community members and its leaders, as well as the feedback received from both.

Figure 4



Considering the community profile, the interviews were mostly conducted in informal settings, e.g. over a dinner at a farmer’s house or making an introductory visit to the village school or to one of the sightseeing venues where the team could meet with the community: youth, farmers, parents, village elderly, etc. When the team identified several recurring themes during these interviews which addressed issues such as gasification, water delivery, repair and/or construction of roads and public facilities, preservation of the environment, then it went back to the local administration to finally work out options which were supposed to be suggested to the community for discussion. During the discussions it was decided to leave out the options that require major expenses and are generally addressed through state financing, such as gasification and construction of a water delivery system. Thus, the remaining options were the repair of the central road connecting the village to the rest of the region and the country, the repair of the street connecting the new district with the other districts of the village, renovation of the kindergarten, construction of a sports ground, renovation of the old cemetery and the forestation of certain areas within the village.

Preparation of the policy options.....

Once several options were identified, the ICHD’s task was to conduct a feasibility study on the options and to develop these options into brief scenarios in a language easily perceived by the community. To accomplish the first objective the project implementation team comprising ICHD experts and Sarnaghbyur admini-

stration representatives met with a number of construction companies and financial officers to develop preliminary budgets for the above-mentioned options and assess the feasibility of each.

Secondly, the ICHD experts who already had enough experience in the development of scenarios for THMs, developed the six scenarios (*see Appendix 4*) for the upcoming town hall meeting. The biggest challenge here was to develop a realistic scenario that would both reflect the expert assessments and procedures underlying the budgeting process and at the same time would avoid the terminology that makes majority of communities regard budgeting as something that requires too narrow an expertise and is a purely administrative process.

Logistics.....

Thorough planning of all the activities and their timely completion were necessary to ensure an effective process. There were several aspects where logistical support was essential to the successful accomplishment of the set objectives, and these were as follows:

- Communication with Sarnaghbyur administration;
- Meetings with different experts;
- Development of the relevant computer software to accommodate the requirements of note-taking and synchronous online forum;
- Training of the facilitators and note-takers;
- Invitation to participate in the THM;
- Set-up of the THM hall.

To establish a functional partnership it was deemed necessary to ensure consistent communication routes with the administration of Sarnaghbyur village. Since Armenia is an oral culture, the best way to maintain the communication was to meet the representatives of Sarnaghbyur community face to face to present the whole project and then move on to other formats of communication. E-culture is still in its cradle in Armenia, thus the alternative milieu was telephone. However, too much reliance on this format could not yield the desirable results given the novelty of the project and the cultural characteristics. Therefore, the ICHD team had to schedule an intensive scheme of trips to the village to encourage cooperative work ethics. Once the communication channels were developed, it was much easier to plan the rest of the activities.

In between the trips from Yerevan to Sarnaghbyur several meetings were scheduled with local and Yerevan based financial officers, economists and construction companies to develop the budgets for the identified options.

Simultaneously the ICHD technical team worked with a professional software development company on creating relevant computer software which would en-

sure online synchronous exchange of the ideas and comments expressed during the discussion.

As soon as the software was ready and piloted, the ICHD team started the training of 10 facilitators and note-takers who were to assist the Town Hall Meeting on December 23rd. The training participants were introduced to the following themes:

- Town Hall Meetings: the rationale and format of the method;
- Public involvement in LG decision making processes:
 - a. the current practice in Armenia
 - b. challenges
 - c. how to address the existing challenges
- Facilitation and note-taking ground rules and tips; introduction to the computer software;
- Introduction to Sarnaghbyur and the budget options.

While the ICHD team was working in Yerevan, the Sarnaghbyur administration was making sure that the community was aware of the initiative and would participate in the THM. The representatives spread the word in the village about the upcoming event by visiting the school and kindergarten, talking to the village elderly, urging their families, relatives and friends to attend the meeting. Again given the cultural characteristics it was decided to rely on informal channels of communication, and mostly on word-of-mouth promotion of the event to ensure active participation of the community.

The final key logistical issue was the set-up of the THM venue. During the prior visits to Sarnaghbyur the ICHD team had also conducted site assessment to identify a hall that would accommodate about 100 people. However, since this was not feasible, it was decided to conduct a THM with two different groups of community members, each comprising about 50 people. Thus, the second option was to find a hall that would fit in about 70 people: 10-12 community members around each of the five tables, the head operator, the two technical experts, two issue experts (professional engineers who were present at the THM in order to answer any technical questions about each of the options), two floor managers, and media. The scheme (*see Appendix 5*) of the set up is attached.

Town Hall Meeting on local budget development.....

The THM was scheduled for December 23rd, 2005. It was planned to break it into two phases to accommodate 100 community members. There were 91 participants in total, plus 18 support staff: facilitators, note-takers, issue experts and floor managers. The participant gender profile and social profile was evenly balanced: there were 49 women and 42 men present, representing the major occupation trends in the village. There were farmers, teachers, housewives, pensioners, health workers and unemployed in the audience. The Sarnaghbyur Mayor and

the administration staff were present as well. Ten to fifteen minutes were allocated to the discussion of each scenario.

During both discussion rounds the community members started off with cautious reservation and ended up with enthusiastic and active discussions and debates. The ICHD's role as a neutral convener increased the confidence among citizens and decision-makers that the content, process and outcomes of the public dialog would be fair and balanced.

The community members were really enthusiastic to share their thoughts about the community development in the near future. After the initial ten minutes they were really into the discussions. If in the beginning the facilitators were challenged to engage the participants in a conversation, towards the end of the discussion the challenge was different: to stop the discussions. The impartial behavior of the facilitators contributed to the development of trust towards the objectives and process of the initiative. There was another factor that broke the hesitant silence at the beginning of the discussions: the transparency and equity characterizing the whole event.

Armenians are rather sensitive to status hierarchy, and communication is usually conditioned by the social status of interlocutors. Well aware of this fact, the facilitators made sure that everybody at the table was given a chance to express his/her opinion, regardless of their social status. Though the community administration was present at the event, there was no distinction in treatment and they were participating in the discussion as ordinary members of Sarnaghbyur community.

Secondly, the participants were nicely surprised to see concrete figures featuring in the scenarios. This was an unprecedented instance of transparency regarding the budgeting process of the community.

Each round ended up with a final vote for one of the proposed options. Several of the participants voted for the options they had proposed as well. The record of the THM is attached (*see Appendix 6*).

The Town Hall Meeting concluded with the Mayor's address to the participants. He specifically mentioned that while he participated at the THM as an ordinary member of Sarnaghbyur community, now when the final results are already clear, he promises, already as the Mayor of Sarnaghbyur to treat the decision of the community as equal to the decision of the Community Council. He assured Sarnaghbyur community that the construction of the sports ground can already be considered a reality. He noted that the option selected by the participants would be discussed in January 2006, during the first meeting with the Council to ratify the annual budget.

Considering the whole process, it obviously can be claimed that the THM managed to break at least several of the stereotypes about public involvement in the budgeting process mentioned above:

- Budgets are documents requiring special expertise to understand, and often these are extremely boring.

The THM participants did not feel challenged even for a second to understand the options suggested for the implementation within the community's annual budget for 2006. The fact that the budgeting document has been modified to fit the public language totally eliminated this stereotype.

- Local budgeting is an internal administrative issue not to be made public.

No law in Armenian legislation claims this and the Sarnaghbyur experience came to prove how groundless this statement is. The willingness of Sarnaghbyur administration to introduce the principle of transparency disarmed any possible counter-arguments the community could put forward.

- Community members do not see any connection between the budget and their daily lives.

A simple glance at the record of the THM will discard this stereotype as absolutely inaccurate: "Except ensuring free time activities for the young people, we will give a chance to our sports men and women to transfer their skills and knowledge to the younger generation and thus ensure their income as well if we spent that money on the construction of a sports ground", states a THM participant.

- The community does not trust the LG administration.

This is the most challenging of the stereotypes to break, since it has a serious pre-history. However, the THM planted the first seeds of trust when the community saw its leaders acting transparent and equal. Certainly, the trust level will mostly depend on the follow-up activities which may either prove that the administration will have considered the public opinion or not.

7. Vox populi heard: THM outcomes

Within a month from the Town Hall Meeting in January, 2006 Sarnaghbyur administration held a working meeting to discuss and approve the annual budget for the year. As the Mayor had promised in December, the administration unanimously voted for the construction of a sports ground in 2006. It was the major item listed under the capital expenses for the current year. As mentioned in the scenario the first thing the administration would do after the budget approval is to announce about a tender of construction companies. The construction works were due to start in late March.

Another outcome of the project that should be mentioned is the possibility of addressing one other scenario that was put forward for discussion. ICHD is one of the most prominent think tanks in the country and one that has a large network of partners and friends. As an organizer of the public discussion and one of the implementers of the whole project they were well aware of the community needs.

Having close connections with one of the environmental NGOs carrying out projects aimed at the expansion of green areas in Armenia, ICHD approached them to discuss the possibility of planting tree groves in Sarnaghbyur. Having heard about the willingness of the village population to assist such a project with all the means available, the NGO has agreed to assess the possibilities of implementation and pay a site assessment visit to the village in March. This is a rather promising initiative, and there is a high probability that the scenario on tree planting will become a reality as well. Thus, the collaboration with ICHD has proved fruitful not only within the framework of one project, but for establishing country-wide partnerships as well. Being a small community, outreach to national NGOs and other agencies has been rather challenging for Sarnaghbyur, whereas a close collaboration with an active public policy NGO has allowed extending the administration's network practice.

Referring back to the three hypotheses the project aimed at addressing, one can note that the pilot project has proved the assumption of the first hypothesis: the active, large-scale and genuine involvement of the community in the decision making process makes community leaders more prone to heeding to the needs that the community prioritizes.

To assess how the other two hypotheses have played out in reality, more time is necessary, at least a year, which is actually required to implement the project on which the community has cast its vote. It is necessary to monitor the project implementation, interview the community members to find out whether there has been any change in their attitudes towards the community leadership. In addition, there is a need to record the tax payment data to see if the practice changed at all: whether the community has felt more willing to pay taxes which would allow the village administration to implement the project that the members have chosen themselves.

8. *Implications*

This particular case has illustrated how a specific model of public discussion, namely Town Hall Meeting, can contribute to the de facto involvement of the community into the decision making process, which results in affecting the decision which is being made. THM suggests several advantages as a methodology in general and specifically when used in communities similar to Sarnaghbyur. First, unlike the other formats, such as Q-A or meetings, THM gives the participants an opportunity to visualize and record the exchange of opinions. The outputs of the discussions can always serve as a reference when the leaders or community members are in doubt on any idea expressed.

For small communities such as Sarnaghbyur it allows ensuring maximum participation of the community members.

However, the format has a disadvantage which cannot be ignored: it is rather expensive to organize Town Hall Meetings, such as the one described in the case, since the budget of a small village usually will not allow covering the costs associated with it, namely renting the necessary technical equipment, developing the adequate software, hiring the facilitators and note-takers. The format is more feasible for a larger community. However, there is an alternative which will save a small community administration from going into too many expenses in order to organize a THM. If there is willingness and readiness to involve the community into the decision making process and find out about the priorities of the community, the leaders can simply invite the community to a meeting and hold a general discussion regarding the specific topic which interests them. For such a meeting there is no need to hire facilitators and rent equipment. It is enough to find out how to facilitate the meeting, which is certainly less expensive than the first option.

How did the project address the factors affecting decision making regarding the budget?

While discussing the outcomes of the project it is worth to reflect on the several factors mentioned above which affect the budgeting decision making processes.

▪ **the size of the community:**

Before launching the project ICHD had to consider what size of a community they need to target. It was decided to work with a community of a moderate size: about 3500 residents (*see Appendix 2*) and the logic was very simple: so far most of the projects in Armenia have targeted large urban communities, whereas small and moderate rural communities, which comprise the majority, have been overlooked. The particular model of the THM made certain the issues associated with the size of the community were avoided: the community was small enough to effectively organize exchange of opinions without ignoring the perspective of the minority and was large enough to avoid the restrictions of kinship and provide an open milieu for self-expression and interactions.

▪ **the size of the budget:**

The budget of Sarnaghbyur is a moderate one, and choosing THM would have only contributed to the exercise of the principle of simplicity, since the very core of the format is presenting the public with the issues at hand in a language that it can understand without much challenge.

▪ **responsible person's experience in budgeting; the LGU finance and budget section's level of expertise and training; level of expertise and training of the finance and budget section of the regional administration:**

The Sarnaghbyur administration staff participated in several trainings provided by international and local organizations. In 2002 the staff participated in two training modules, first on organizing the budgeting process and sec-

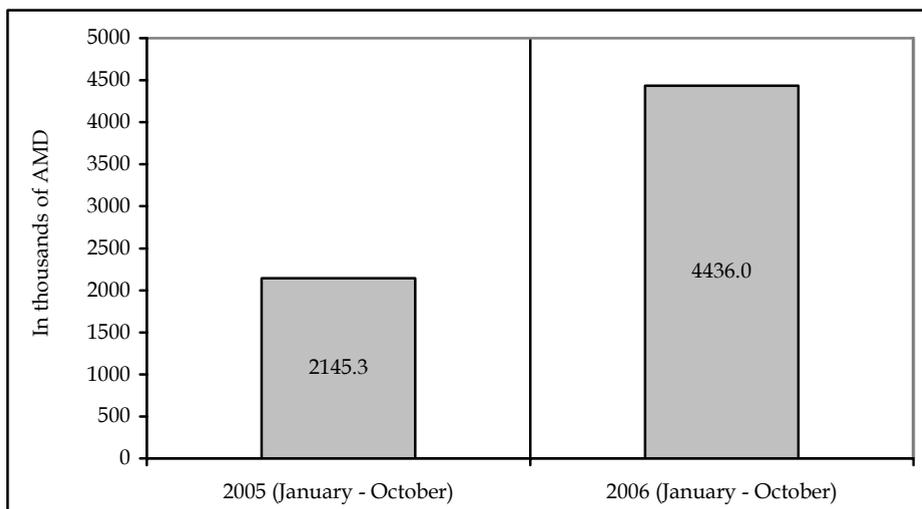
ond, developing strategic plans for community development. These trainings have provided them with relevant skills and knowledge, which reflected in the leadership’s willingness to involve the community in the decision making process. Sarnaghbyur administration can be described as skilled enough to be open, creative and independent in the decision making process.

- **level of engagement**

The participants of the THM represented 12% of the overall households of Sarnaghbyur. Considering the fact that any news tends to be vehemently discussed in a rural community, it is natural to deduce that the results of the THM have been transcended to a significantly more number of community members, than merely those who have directly participated in the discussions. These further discussions, which though tended to focus on the future construction, still covered a much larger scope than merely the decision made at the THM. It was an intensive social process of knowledge sharing in the form of providing arguments and opinions, discussing ways of implementation, figures, understanding the budget, etc.

Still, one of the most obvious results of engagement was the increased sense of responsibility among the community members who in this case were not simply decision makers who voted for the construction of sports ground, but they were also financers of this project! People paid more taxes, than was planned in the budget. Thus, the community council decided to redirect this unexpected income towards construction of new facilities for the sports ground. Moreover, the community council members made a statement about their intention to expand the construction further and add a grandstand within the next year budget.

Figure 5. Budget revenues (Sarnaghbyur community)



**9. An Independent Observer's
Recommendations and Conclusions:**

By Laura C. Hagopian¹
*BA in Human Development,
University of California, Davis*

Recommendations

The Town Hall Meeting model adopted by the International Center for Human Development and used in Sarnaghbyur can be repeated in other areas. Since this is not a “one size fits all” model, it is important to maintain an open perspective about implementation and to make adjustments according to the needs of the community in which it will be used. ICHD can make some suggestions about project implementation based on its own experience:

1. Due to the technology involved in this project and the fact that not every community has a budget the size of the one in this particular case study, it is recommended that communities wishing to implement THM avoid expensive costs by working on a smaller scale. While preferable, it is not absolutely necessary to project ideas discussed upon a large screen where everyone can see them. It might be helpful just to have an open town discussion about important issues within the community. Votes may be cast on paper for privacy or by the raising of hands, for example. It might also be helpful to seek funding from an international governmental organization or a non-governmental organization. There are a plethora of international and local organizations providing money or services for similar activities to NGOs and/or directly to communities.
2. Training neutral facilitators within the community to run the THM and to train other community members in facilitating would ensure the sustainability of the project. It would be very beneficial for communities to continue using this project after the participating policy organizations have left the community.
3. Based upon the second recommendation, another point that should be considered is that while this project was intended to involve the public in budgetary decision making, it can be used for a variety of other community issues.
4. One important aspect in the application of THM is the planning and outcomes. It is advised that those planning a THM develop a strategy for implementation and conduct a stakeholder analysis before beginning the project. Some issues that need to be considered are the size of the community and its budget, the end goals of the project, logistics, who will gain and lose,

¹ Ms Hagopian completed an internship with ICHD in summer, 2006

who might cause negative interference, etc. After finishing the project, in some cases this includes the implementation of the decisions made at the THM, a follow-up report and an impact assessment should be completed to show the real effects of the THM. Although it is the quality and effectiveness of the project that are most important rather than everything working according to "the plan," the project will be most efficient if a plan is in place beforehand.

5. Often times community development projects fail to be successful because the organizations involved in the community are unable to cooperate and sometimes even compete with one another, fighting over resources. Partnering with the organizations operating in one community could actually enhance THM and prevent the types of divisive attitudes that hinder progress.

Conclusions

Public participation in decision-making is an essential part of a growing republic. Although Armenians are still trying to make this an integral part of their government, models such as Town Hall Meeting, introduced by the International Center for Human Development, illuminate the path to a better future while improving the current situation. Having achieved all of the objectives set out from the beginning, THM has proved an effective means of integrating public participation into the budgeting process. It challenges local government leaders and their constituents to work closely together, establishing trust and helping them to better understand one another, which can lead to more efficient and transparent governance. THM facilitates this process by breaking widespread stereotypes about budgeting and public decision-making that hinder citizen-leader cooperation. It shows that the public and their leaders are ready, willing, and able to work together on important issues concerning their community. Although the Sarnaghbyur community was chosen very carefully for this project, THM is quite practical and can be adapted and extended to other parts of the country and the world. Through effective communication it encourages democratic practices that directly benefit the people as well as putting power into their hands, which is vital for all democracies striving for good governance.

10. *One Year Later*

If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself.

Mahatma Gandhi

The dualism of means and goals haunts individuals, societies, nations and civilizations, and the choices humans make as individuals, members of societies, representatives of nations and carriers of civilizations provide some relatively long-term solutions to this dualism. Transitional democracies are particularly challenged with this ambiguity, since transition implies a choice of new goals and a search for means that would provide for these goals in the possibly best way.

While the leaderships of these societies are busy with defining, re-defining and finally refining the public goals in the parliaments and governments, transition knocks on every common citizen's door, appearing on the threshold in the form of shattered infrastructures, lack of resources, mismanagement, corruption and poverty. While the first are engaged in political discourse of refining the goals, the second are striving to survive. It seems that these two simultaneous processes often lack the crossing line: the first are unaware of what the public really needs and the second are not appreciative of what the elites do. What can be done here seems rather self-evident: start a dialog.

This simple truism has not always been obvious while implementing various community development projects. Though appreciating the value of public participation, few significant efforts have been made to promote this means towards starting a dialog. The International Center for Human Development saw the huge potential of a possible initiative to encourage common citizens to take a decisive role in defining the goals for their own future. And what could have been a better place to start such an initiative, than discussions of a community budget which basically defines the social life of the community members? Thus, in December, 2005 ICHD and the leadership of a small village in Armenia, Sarnaghbyur, decided to experiment with a "gap-filler", i.e. introduce the practice of public involvement for initiating a dialog between the community members and leaders through an innovative public participation instrument - Town Hall Meeting (THM).

One cannot claim that this was an easy effort. Though potentially realizing the benefits of such an initiative, it was extremely challenging to build up trust where its level was too low. The long and disappointing practice of silence between the community and its leaders was remarkable in the expressions of Sarnaghbyur residents, when they entered the THM hall. "I'm still not sure our leaders will heed to what we say..." was written on most faces. While leaving the hall, most faces revealed: "Well, at least I've said what I've always been wanting to say".

There was satisfaction with the opportunity to speak out, but there was still uncertainty hovering around whether what they had said would be heard.

June, 2006. When you eventually make it to the center of Sarnaghbyur, somewhat exhausted of the extremely bumpy road, the only sound breaking the silent heat of the noon is the noise of construction. Sarnaghbyur is constructing a sports ground, something that in winter the community members had voted for among the six possible options within the community's annual budget.

At the THM among the 320 messages generated from the community members, there was one which stuck out with its simplicity and depth: "We are the state". Looking at the construction you come to believe that this conviction works at least one community in Armenia and you cannot but hope that it will spread in the country like epidemics.

The means provided by ICHD proved worthwhile on the way to the major goal Armenia has today: participatory democracy.

The Case in Brief

Sarnaghbyur Village, SHIRAK REGION, Armenia
December 23, 2005

Community budget discussions

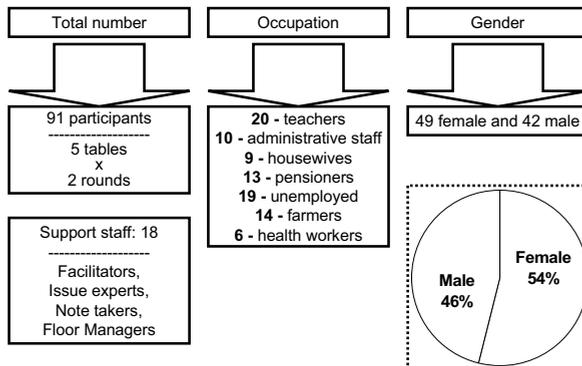


Town Hall Meeting

- Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative
- International Center for Human Development

Participant Profile

Theme of the discussion:
Community budget for 2006



Sarnaghbyur THM		
Options on the Table		
<p>1. Asphaltting the Village Road</p> <p>Laying asphalt on the village street, which connects the new district where 1/10 of the population (mostly young families) resides to the rest of the village.</p>	<p>2. Repairing the Second Building of the Kindergarten</p> <p>Repairing the second building of the village kindergarten, so it can accommodate 60 more children in nursery and pre-school groups.</p>	<p>3. Construction of a Sports Ground</p> <p>Building a sports ground which will allow children and young people of the village train at home, instead of using sports facilities in the neighboring community, and to develop the tradition of excellent achievements in sports further.</p>

Sarnaghbyur THM		continued
Options on the Table		
<p>4. Partial Repair of the Central Road</p> <p>Completing the repair of the central village road that connects the community with the rest of the country.</p>	<p>5. Forestation and Design of an Alley</p> <p>Though naturally quite a picturesque location, Sarnaghbyur lacks green areas with trees or parks where people can get together routinely or for public events. Thus, it is suggested to plant trees around the church area.</p>	<p>6. Fencing the Cemetery Area</p> <p>The village cemetery has deteriorated to the state of cattle grazing in the area. Thus, it is suggested to fence and renovate the whole area to pay the due respect to the village ancestors and deceased.</p>

Sarnaghbyur

Sarbaghbyur school, December 23, 2005



Getting ready...



The discussions have started

Sarnaghbyur

Sarbaghbyur school, December 23, 2005



Facilitators explaining the ground rules



The Table Recorder tries not to miss any important idea...

Sarnaghbyur

Sarnaghbyur school, December 23, 2005



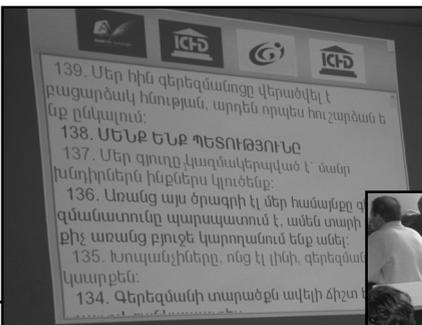
Today the Mayor (*second from the right*) is an ordinary resident of the village

Soon participants start feeling the ownership



Sarnaghbyur

Sarnaghbyur school, December 23, 2005



More than 320 messages have been displayed on 2 large screens.

Participants voting for a scenario



Sarnaghbyur

Sarnaghbyur school, December 23, 2005



Transparency ensured throughout the whole process

Voting results displayed: the majority of votes goes to the construction of a sports ground

Questions list	Answered YES
1 Գրողամիջան ճանապարհ	25
2 Մանկապարտեզ	6
3 Մարզադահլո	44
4 Կենտրոնական ճանապարհ	6
5 Անտառապատում	2
6 Գեղեզմանոց	0
7 Այլ	8
8	0
9	0
10	0

Sarnaghbyur

Sarnaghbyur school
December 23, 2005

2 x 5 tables

18 support staff:
*facilitators, note-takers,
floor managers, issue
experts, technical support*

8 computers
connected to LAN

2 multimedia projectors,
2 screens

410 messages
generated at
discussion tables

325 messages
sent to
central screens

SARNAGHBYUR Community budget:

Excerpts from the
discussion tables

Scenario 1. Asphalting the Village Road

- The kindergarten, culture house and other important buildings are in that district, so the repair of that road is a priority.
- Young people live in this unfortunate district, and that is why it is more important to spend money here, since it's the future of our village.
- We should think of the village globally. Improving the district is, of course, very important. However, today given such scarce resources, the priorities should be decided considering the village as a whole.

Scenario 2. Repairing the Second Building of the Kindergarten

- If we do not repair the second building it will deteriorate very fast and in future it will be more difficult to reconstruct
- Our kindergarten is the largest in the whole country. Our kids love attending it. If only we could take our kids there all year long...
- It would be better if the existing buildings were heated, so that the kindergarten could be open in winter as well.

SARNAGHBYUR Community budget:

Excerpts from the
discussion tables

Scenario 3. Construction of a Sports Ground

- Except ensuring free time activities for the young people, we will give a chance to our sports men and women to transfer their skills and knowledge to the younger generation and thus ensure their income as well.
- Our trainer for our kids in our sports hall...
- There is a proposal to build a sports ground. Won't there be any adjacent facilities? The project smells of incompleteness.

Scenario 4. Partial Repair of the Central Road

- It's the vein connecting our village to the world. Without any question it's a priority. We just need to end what we've started. There is no need to start any of these projects if the sustainability is not ensured.
- This will allow addressing a very important issue which touches the village as a whole. This will strengthen the community as a whole instead of dividing it into districts.
- The external road is not our concern. Eventually it will be repaired and the state budget will provide the financial resources.

SARNAGHBYUR Community budget:

Excerpts from the
discussion tables

Scenario 5. Forestation and Design of an Alley

- Taming winds, preventing erosion... isn't this important enough? Oxygen, a beautiful village, a picturesque residence... Yes, let's plant trees!
- We need to train our sight to appreciate beauty. Though living in nature, our kids are so alienated from her that it is simply inexcusable.
- Planting a forest is secondary to keeping a forest and assisting its growth.

Scenario 6. Fencing the Cemetery Area

- Whether we vote for or against this project the fence will be built, because any resident of Sarnaghbyur knows how to respect his ancestors and protect what's sacred.
- This is secondary, since we're talking about the new area. The old cemetery is fenced.
- The whole Armenian nation is building a road for Karabakh. Can't we fence a little area in the cemetery ourselves?

SARNAGHBYUR Community budget:

Excerpts from the
discussion tables

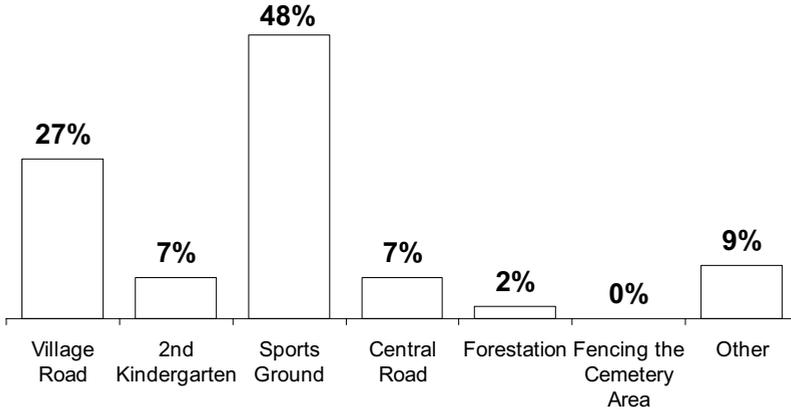
Scenarios suggested impromptu:

- This money can be used for the solution of the water problem. Naturally, this is such a serious issue that this amount is not enough for reaching a final outcome, but it's worth starting.
- It is necessary to repair the culture house. This will allow opening a library, organizing different activities and having a hall where public events can be held. Thus, we'll be able to prevent the emigration of young families.
- The existing financial resources are so scarce that it seems rather doubtful whether any serious project will be implemented. Therefore, it would be better if with this money they purchased necessary equipment, toys, and learning materials for the kindergarten.
- We lack mechanization. All the machinery is privatized and we need to think of creating a community enterprise.
- Renovation of the hospital is very important for the village.
- In Maralik they have gas and it's only a few kilometers away. Shouldn't we be thinking in this direction?

Sarnaghbyur

Sarnaghbyur school, December 23, 2005

Voting results



Sarnaghbyur

Sarnaghbyur school, December 23, 2005

Voting results

1 year later

Sarnaghbyur

September 12, 2006

Sports Ground Construction

The construction of the Sports Ground is ongoing



The local population is involved in the construction process

Sarnaghbyur

September 12, 2006

Sports Ground Construction

The construction of fence is nearly accomplished



Sarnaghbyur

September 12, 2006

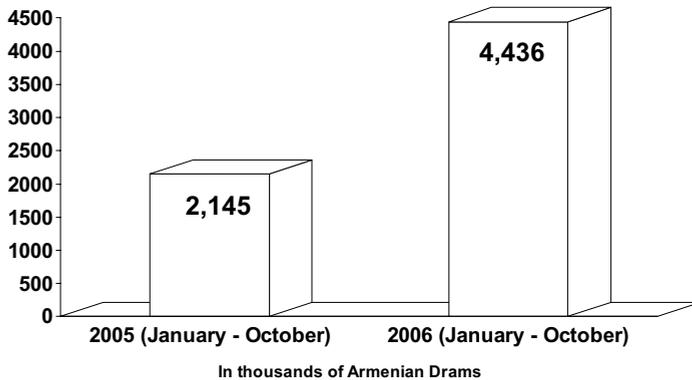
Sports Ground Construction

The Mayor of Sarnaghbyur is personally supervising the construction process on daily basis



Sarnaghbyur

Local Budget Revenues



Appendixes

Appendix 1. Armenia Country profile

A landlocked country with Turkey to the west, Georgia the north, Azerbaijan to the east and Iran (Persia) and the Nakhichevan exclave of Azerbaijan to the south, Armenia boasts striking scenery with high mountains and caves, lakes and hot springs.

Situated along the route of the Great Silk Road, it has fallen within the orbit of a number of empires and come into contact with many cultural influences throughout its history.

One of the earliest Christian civilizations, its first churches were founded in the fourth century. It later spent centuries largely under Turkic or Persian control and its rich cultural and architectural heritage combines elements from different traditions. The Armenian language is part of the Indo-European family but its alphabet is unique.

An independent Republic of Armenia was proclaimed at the end of the First World War but was short-lived, lasting only until the beginning of the 1920s when the Bolsheviks incorporated it into the Soviet Union.

When that empire in turn collapsed in 1991, Armenia regained independence but experienced political and economic trauma. In the mid-1990s the government embarked on an economic reform program which brought greater stability and some growth. The country became a member of the Council of Europe in 2001. The Government of Armenia's stated aim is to build a Western-style parliamentary democracy as the basis of its form of government.

Unemployment and poverty remain widespread. Armenia's economic problems are aggravated by a trade blockade, imposed by neighbouring Turkey and Azerbaijan since the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. The conflict over the predominantly Armenian-populated region in Azerbaijan overshadowed Armenia's return to independence in 1991.

Full-scale war broke out the same year as ethnic Armenians in Karabakh fought for independence, supported by troops and resources from Armenia proper. A ceasefire in place since 1994 has failed to deliver any lasting solution.

Armenia has a huge diaspora and has always experienced waves of emigration, but the exodus of recent years has caused real alarm. It is estimated that Armenia has lost up to a quarter of its population since independence, as young families seek what they hope will be a better life abroad.

Conversely, Armenia is richly endowed with potential as a tourist destination and recent figures indicate that some success is being achieved in attracting visitors.

- Population: 3 million (UN, 2005)

- Capital: Yerevan
- Administrative Provinces: 11-Aragatsotn, Ararat, Armavir, Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Lori, Shirak, Syunik, Tavush, Vayots Dzor, Yerevan
- Area: 29,743 sq km (11,484 sq miles)
- Major languages: Armenian, Russian
- Major religion: Christianity
- Life expectancy: 68 years (men), 75 years (women) (UN)
- Monetary unit: 1 dram = 100 lumas
- Main exports: Processed and unprocessed diamonds, machinery, metal products, foodstuffs
- GNI per capita: US \$1,120 (World Bank, 2005)
- Internet domain: .am

Adapted from the story from BBC NEWS (*published: 2006/01/22 18:15:00 GMT*):

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1108052.stm

Appendix 2. Sarnaghbyur Village profile

Sarnaghbyur village of Shirak province in the North of Armenia is situated on the western foot of Aragats Mountain, 7km south-east from the town of Maralik and 1925m from the sea level, in the ravine of the rivulet Chlkan. The location is rather picturesque. The climate is temperately continental with cold winters. Even in the hottest summer the evenings are chilly in the village.

Sarnaghbyur has the largest population in the Ani region of Shirak province. The ancestors of the current residents have immigrated to Sarnaghbyur from the villages of Alashkert, Kars, Van and Moush in Western Armenia in 1828-1829. Today there are 1072 households and 3486 people in the village. Roughness typical of highlanders is reflected in the habits and traditions of Sarnaghbyur people. They are also known for their hospitality, sense of humor, love towards arts and characteristics that enable them to survive long and cold winters. Livestock breeding and cultivation of agricultural crop are the main occupations of the villagers. Besides, they cultivate potato, cabbage and carrot to satisfy local needs. The land resources of the village mostly comprise mountainous chernozem (dark-colored zonal soils) which ensure high productivity. The majority of land resources are used as pastures - 1670 ha, plow land - 1131 ha reserve land patches - 100 ha and grassland.

Sarnaghbyur boasts with historical and architectural monuments of various centuries. In the center of the village the church of St. Tadevos stands, which is a tri-nave basilica with double apses (1883). St. Jakob's Church is a 5th century construction which was renovated in the 18-19 centuries and has still preserved a section of the north wall, façade and a column with typical medieval ornaments. The ruins come to prove that both churches were once connected with corridors.

There is also a sacred place where Grigor the Illuminator is said to seek solitude for meditation, contemplation, and prayer, and where people travel for pilgrimage. It's a large natural cave with springs, cross ornaments on the rocks, with a complex of three churches, ruins of an even more ancient church and numerous cross stones. This was once a destination of water worship.

Lmbatavant, also known in Sarnaghbyur as St. Stephen's church, was erected in the 11th century. The Hogevanq and Karmir Vanq monasteries (Dzoragyugh complex) including St. Carapet church, are among the best sights in Armenia. There are a number of other ancient monuments which make the place quite an attraction for history tourists.

Sarnaghbyur has a hospital, post office, kindergarten, and a secondary school which prides itself in rich traditions and the alumni among whom there are known scientists, politicians, poets, and journalists.

Appendix 3. Town Hall Meetings (THM)

Town Hall Meeting creates engaging, meaningful opportunities for citizens to participate in public decision making. This unique process is based on the experience of the organization “America Speaks”, which developed the methodology of town hall meetings to address the needs of citizens, decision makers and democracy.

Decision makers often find it difficult to gauge how the majority of “general interest” citizens feel about important issues. In turn, citizens feel disregarded and less inclined to participate in public life, creating a dangerous cycle.

The THM process restores the citizens’ voice in public decision making by creating an opportunity for the general public to give those in leadership positions direct, substantive feedback on key public issues. Each meeting effectively restores the balance of the “political playing field” by engaging hundreds of “general interest” citizens at a time, effectively and quickly summarizing citizen input and widely disseminating the results through media coverage.

Strengths of the Model

Scaling Up

Everyone participates; no idea is lost

Iterative discussions

Clear articulation of priorities

Critical Success Factors

Every voice is at the tables

Decision-makers involved at each step

Right content, structure, and process

Outcomes that make a difference

THM Format

Town Hall Meeting focuses on discussion and deliberation among citizens rather than speeches, Q&A sessions or panel presentations. Diverse groups of citizens participate in round-table discussions (10-12 people per table), deliberating in depth about key policy, resource allocation or planning issues. Discussions at each table are led by a trained facilitator to ensure that participants stay on task and that each table is engaged in a democratic process. Participants receive detailed and balanced background information 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 wireless groupware computers. At each table there is a note-taker who records all the ideas exchanged around the table and submits to the head operator who moderates the incoming messages to display for public attention. At the end of the discussions each participant can vote on specific proposals using polling keypads/computer program. The entire group responds to the themes generated from table discussions and votes on their final recommendations to decision makers. Before the

meeting ends, final recommendations are compiled into a report, which is distributed to participants, decision makers and the media. Decision makers actively engage in the meeting by participating in table discussions, observing the process and responding to citizen input at the end of the meeting.

In summary, to arrange a THM it is necessary to

- clarify and define the issue to be discussed;
- suggest concrete background information on the theme involving necessary expertise;
- work out the scheme of the physical settings where the discussions will be held;
- develop the necessary software;
- acquire computer hardware; install LAN;
- train facilitators and note-takers;
- promote the event and invite participants
- ensure the presence of a technical troubleshooting and logistics support staff at the discussion venue;
- report the results of the THM to all the interested stakeholders.

Appendix 4. Town Hall Meeting Scenarios

Scenario I - Asphaltting the Village Road

Except the central village road there are not other asphalted roads or streets in Sarnaghbyur.

In order to solve the housing issues of the young families, in 1975 at the village lake a new district was constructed, where currently there are 400 residents. Since 1975 the district is connected to the center of the village and the central road with an earth road extending for a kilometer, which is already half-ruined and has numerous big and small holes on it. In winter cleaning the road from snow slush and ice becomes practically impossible. The mud in spring and autumn is a real headache form the people. The building of the village administration is on the same road, thus the poor condition of the road to a certain extent affects the effective functioning of the community authorities as well.

Due to the growth in the revenues of the community budget and the increased efficiency in tax collection there is an opportunity to asphalt the above mentioned road which is 1 kilometer long and 8 meters wide. In March 2006 it is anticipated that a tender for selecting the construction company will be organized, a work contract signed and by the end of October, 2006 the asphaltting of the road complete. According to preliminary calculations investment of 3.5-4.5 million AMD is required for asphaltting the road.

The implementation of the project will give an opportunity to address a number of issues as well:

- About 100 households of the above-mentioned district which comprise the 1/10 of the village population will get a chance to connect with the village center and the Yerevan-Gyumri central highway without any challenges;
- The residents of this district will be saved from the additional expenses associated with the depreciation of their mobile and other property which results from the poor condition of the road.
- The road repair will allow developing the infrastructure around the lake and will invigorate the district.

The village administration plans to include a point in application for the construction tender which will ensure at least 10 jobs will be provided and the companies contracted will make sure to involve the local labor force during the construction works.

Scenario II - Repair of the Second Building of the Kindergarten

Sarnaghbyur kindergarten was constructed at the end of 1980s and was to accommodate about 200 children of nursery and pre-school age. In the 90s the social-economic crisis after the collapse of the Soviet system had a negative impact on both the activities of the kindergarten and its equipment. Within 1998-2000 due to the efforts of the local authorities it became possible to partly recover the activities of the kindergarten through partial repairs, which allowed increasing the number of attending children to 70. Currently there are 70 children attending kindergarten and the 12 staff members, both technical and teaching personnel.

Since 2005 in one of the two kindergarten buildings major repair works have started, which was made possible due to the support of the organization "Save the Children" and the considerable participation of the local community. This will give an opportunity to ensure the attendance of other 60 children. However, the existing and anticipated opportunities will not satisfy the real demand of our village, since as of today there are about 300 children of pre-school age in the village. The kindergarten does not have a nursery which is actually an urgent need.

Due to the growth in the revenues of the community budget and the increased efficiency in tax collection the annual budget for 2006 allows the local authorities to allocate adequate resources for the repair of the second building of the kindergarten. It is planned to announce about a tender for the selection of the contractor in the first quarter of 2006, repair the first and second floors of the building (the overall area is 600 square meters) within a possibly short period and finish all renovation works by December 2006. According to preliminary calculations the repair of the building will require 4.5 million drams.

As a result of the project it will be possible to

- increase the effectiveness of managing and exploiting the kindergarten equipment and bringing it to the level of the projected capacities;
- open additional three groups for 60 children of nursery and pre-school age, provide an appropriate bed- and play-room facilities and halls;
- provide 10-15 additional jobs for the community members;
- support young families in their development and education of young generation.

It is planned that one of the conditions for the selection of the construction company will be the point about involving the local labor force, thus providing 5-6 community members with temporary jobs.

Scenario III - Construction of a Sports Ground.....

Sport plays a special role in the social life of Sarnaghbyur. The number of young people going in for different sports is quite high. There are both beginner sportsmen and women and those who have recorded considerable achievements. The village is proud of its young people who make our country and Sarnaghbyur known to the world by achieving considerable success in different types of sports. The achievements of the members of the martial arts club of the village are of special commend since they took the third place in the World Championship held in Hungary by demonstrating the strength and flexibility of a Sarnaghbyur local. The results of the Sarnaghbyur football team are also very promising: it constantly wins prizes in the regional competitions. Sarnaghbyur has also born a Champion of Europe in boxing - lightweight ranking (2003).

Unfortunately, having such a talented pool of young people and such a rich history of achievements, Sarnaghbyur does not have a single sports club or at least a sports ground. There are about 1100 children up to the age of 15 in Sarnaghbyur and in order to train, twice or thrice a week many of them travel to the neighboring community – the town of Maralik, where there are some appropriate conditions for training.

Taking all this into account, the village administration plans to launch the implementation of a long-term project on the construction of sports complex. The complex will comprise football and volleyball fields and a tennis court, equipped with adequate sports gear. In addition, it is planned to build tribunes for the sports fans. The football field will be surrounded with a running track. Long jump facilities will be constructed as well.

Reviewing the analysis of the revenues in the annual budget of 2006, it is deemed possible to allocate adequate financial resources for the implementation of this long-term project in 2006. The first stage of the project will comprise the construction of a football pitch (120mx90m) and an iron fence of 500m. The first phase of the project is planned to start in the second quarter of 2006 and finish before the beginning of the forth quarter. According to preliminary calculations, the implementation of this phase will require investment of 4.5 million drams. The continuation of the project is envisioned for 2007-2008.

The construction of the sports complex and the sports ground in particular will allow solving not only the issues of children’s health and their active engagement in sports activities, but also other social issue of the people. In particular,

- There are four graduates of the Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture who currently reside in Sarnaghbyur and in case there is a sports ground they can organize sports activities and thus solve the issue of their employment;
- Parents will be able to avoid the additional transportation expenses associated with their children’s trip to the neighboring community in order to go in for sports.

Scenario IV - Partial Repair of the Central Road

The village of Sarnaghbyur is located on the western foot of Aragats Mountain. It was found in 1828-1829 due to the tenacious and ardent efforts of our grandparents who migrated here from the Western Armenia. Gradually settling in the site and adjusting to the geographical and climate conditions, people initiated the construction of the main route that connected the village with the world and neighboring settlements. Since then the village has a central road which in the beginning was just an uneven earth street with numerous ditches destined for carts only, but later was paved and widened in accordance with the demands of the time. It was only in 1984-85 under the auspices of the Soviet Armenia that the central road of the village took its current shape. It was asphalted and became the main route to connect both Sarnaghbyur and neighboring villages to the regional centers, the capital and other villages.

The section of the central road running through the village is about 3kms long and 8 ms wide and since 1985 no major repair work has been undertaken. At present some parts of the road are almost impassable, especially during the winter precipitation and spring thaws. The depreciation of the road directly affects the depreciation of the mobile property of the village residents and hinders the smooth functioning of the transportation.

Due to the increased effectiveness of the budgetary process of the community and the improved tax collection, the preliminary projection of the annual budget of 2006 allows the local authorities to allocate appropriate resources in order to carry out repair works of the above-mentioned road. It will be possible to repair about 2000 square meters of the road which comprises about 10% of the road. The repair works will particularly include the cleaning of and repair of the mud flow channels.

The works are to start in the second quarter and complete before the end of the quarter. The projected repair works will require about 3-4 million drams. It is planned to involve the professional and manual labor force of the community.

Scenario V - Forestation and Design of an Alley.....

Sarnaghbyur village of Shirak region is situated on the western foot of the Aragats Mountain, in the gorge of the rivulet Chlkan, 1925 meters from the sea level. The location is very picturesque. The land resources of the village mostly comprise mountainous chernozem (dark-colored zonal soils) which are used as pastures, plow land and grassland. There are a many springs of cold fresh water, caves, gorges, a small lake, historical monuments, which can become significant prerequisites for the development of tourism in the village. In addition, the village is rich in water resources and has an adequate irrigation system in order to take an appropriate care of the green areas. However, the village is almost void of any tree area, which makes this picturesque location less attractive. The only grove in the village is around the St. Tadevos church and is only a few dozen square meters with a dozen trees only. Moreover, unfortunately the difficult economic and social conditions endanger even this little area, since there is a risk of using the trees as fuel.

The preliminary analysis of the revenues of the annual budget of 2006 shows, that it is possible to allocate some money within this budget for organizing tree plantation. It is planned to design an alley bordered with decorative trees on both sides along the central village road which extends for 3km and connects the village to the Yerevan-Gyumri highway. In addition, small parks with forest, decorative and fruit trees up to 500 square meters will be planted around the area of fresh water springs. According to preliminary estimates, about 3-3.5 million drams is necessary for the implementation of this project. The plantation of trees is planned to start in early spring of 2006 and end by May. Meanwhile, the village administration will sign the necessary contracts with the organizations providing tree plants and their delivery.

The tree planting will contribute not only to the development of tourism and preservation of the population's health, but will also

- make the road to the village, which actually is the gate to the place, more attractive;
- turn the alley into a defense layer against the damaging effects of the sun and wind;
- allow the parks to protect the soil of erosion.

It will be possible to use the local labor force for the tree planting and provide temporary jobs to at least 20 people.

Scenario VI - Fencing the Cemetery Area.....

Sarnaghbyur village of Shirak region was founded in 1828-1829 at its present location of the village where judging from the outdated headstones there was a settlement already centuries ago.

The standing gravestones imply that unfortunately our grand grandparents were not overly concerned with the issue of maintaining the cemetery and transferring the impressive artifacts of culture and history to the next generation and developing an inheritance. Whereas according to some sources, Anania Shirakatsi was born in this area and is buried in that very cemetery.

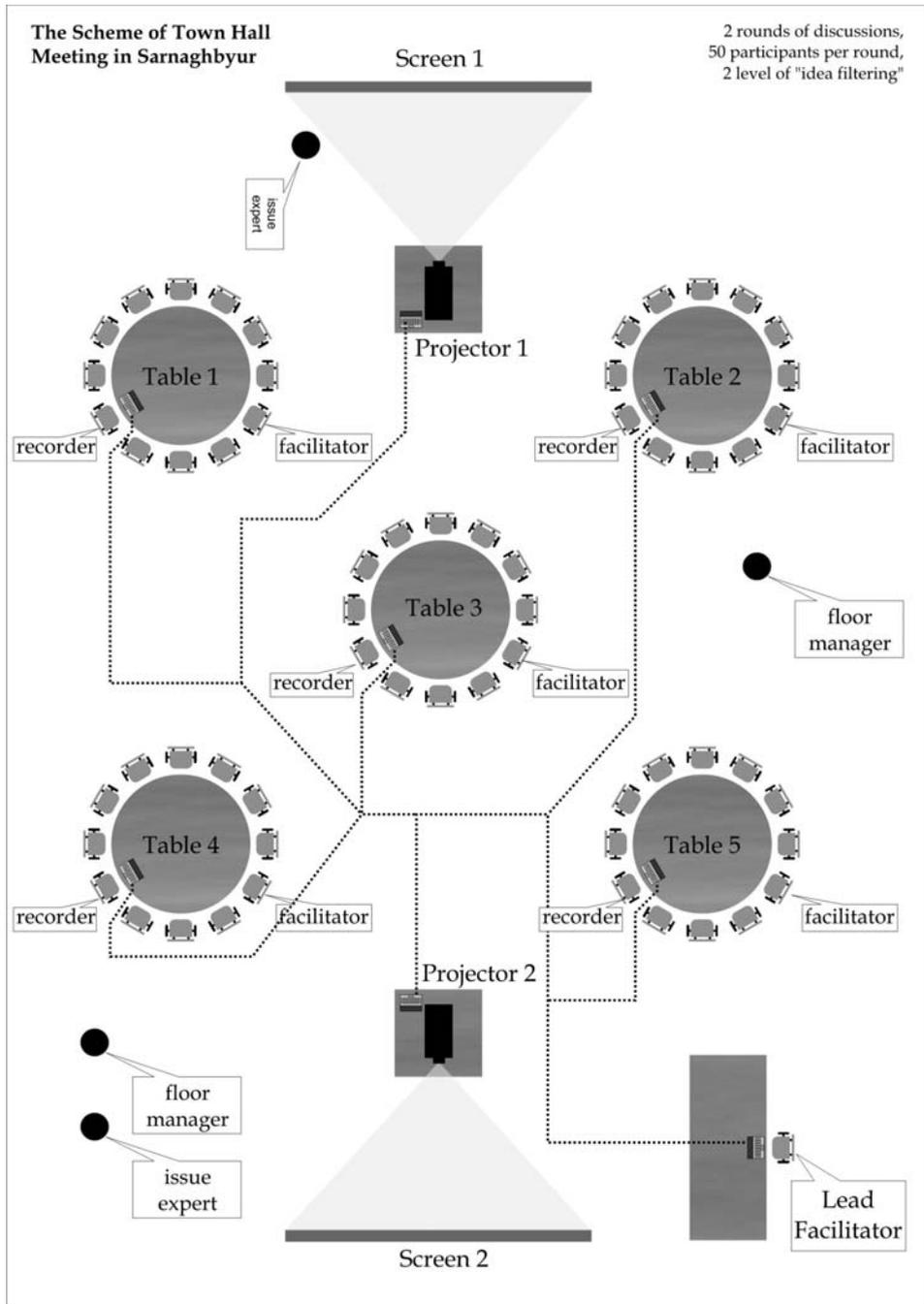
After the foundation of the present Sarnaghbyur a special area has been allocated as a cemetery where the bodies of our grandparents and people who had significant contributions to the development of the village rest. Today the village cemetery which has a history of more than 100 years is in a regrettable state. The difficult social conditions and financial constraints do not permit the residents or the local administration to take care of the cemetery. The whole area is covered with grass and from spring to autumn attracts the shepherds who bring their cattle to this area for grazing. As a result, the graves are all trodden over and ruined. The gravestones and protective side-stones are being damaged. Unfortunately, there have been even cases of tomb thefts, and the robbers are the "hunters" for nonferrous metals. Whereas, here rest not only the remains of ordinary peasants and workers, but the remains of the heroic participants of World War II and Karabakh War.

With the village administration efforts during the last years it was possible to fence about 80% of the cemetery which extends for 1200 meters. Now it is necessary to complete this work, fence the rest of the 20% and improve the cemetery area.

Due to the increased effectiveness of the budgetary process in the community and the improved tax collection, the preliminary projection of the annual budget of 2006 allows the local authorities to allocate appropriate resources for the fencing of the rest of the 300 meters of the cemetery area. It is planned to continue the construction of the 1.5m high tufa gate extending for 450 square meters, build gates at the cemetery entrance and improve cemetery pathways. The works are planned for May and the completion - in September, right before the holiday of Holy Cross. According to preliminary estimates the project will require investment of 3-4 million drams.

The works will be carried out by the manual and professional labor force of the village, which will ensure temporary jobs for 5-6 community members.

Appendix 5. The Scheme of Town Hall Meeting



Appendix 6. Messages Received during the Town-Hall Meeting

Theme of the discussion:

Possible directions of capital expenses within the 2006 annual budget of Sarnaghbyur community

Participants:

91 community members

Scenario I - Asphaltting the Village Road

Pros...

- It's indeed necessary. During rain it becomes practically impossible to go from one district to another.
- It would be great if we repair the road and in addition, purchase a microbus.
- We think this is a very important project. At the moment people carry loads manually.
- It's a new district and the communication with the school becomes very difficult in winter.
- There's not even a road as such. There's a so-called "path", and people often avoid visiting this district.
- I work at school, and every day it's a challenge to go to work. There's not public transportation and all get muddy.
- The repair of this road is a priority.
- The community members will get jobs while implementing this project and this will be a good investment for the community.
- If there is not a proper road, children won't be able to go to kindergarten, and the second scenario will be meaningless.
- Of course, we can wait for external sponsorship, but this project is so important that it becomes a priority.
- The width of the street which is currently 8 meters needs to be changed, since there is no need for such a large road. Perhaps we'll save some money as well.
- We dream of becoming a tourist attraction: we have a lake, a cave and a church. But roads are essential for the development of tourism.
- Being neat and not dirty with mud is a sign of civilization.
- Eventually, the street extending in front of the village administration building shows the face of the place. All the guests and official visitors come to the town hall and meet all these challenges.

- Repairing this road is very important for the town hall, which represents the whole community.
- streets give the picture of the village. One enters the village and sees no streets.
- Young people live in this unfortunate district, and that is why it is more important to spend money here, since it's the future of our village.
- The road reflects the level of prosperity in that district. A normal road would allow people lead a more dignified life.
- Each of us lives next to that road and the issue is relevant to all of us.
- The same road serves both for cars and people. Children leave the school and return home on that dangerous road.
- In terms of asphaltting the village roads it should be noted that some sections need this more than the others. Children get all muddy while going to school.
- The road still serves its purpose, for better or for worse, and will go on doing so for a while. There are other priorities at the moment.
- The mentioned road is a real disaster during spring and fall.
- The kindergarten, culture house and other important buildings are in that district, so the repair of that road is a priority.
- Going to school or work is extremely difficult.
- We will manage to live without a kindergarten, sports ground and a forest, but we don't want to go on walking and driving on that muddy and dusty road ever day.
- This road is not well exploited. It serves few people. On the other hand, it is an important road for the visitors. We often have guests who spend their vacation here. Thus, this is an important project.
- The development of economy happens through infrastructure.
- Our kids have already developed a habit of passing through mud even if they can avoid it. Let's repair the road and walk out of these mud waters.

Cons...

- Few people use this street and actually it cannot be considered a priority.
- Discussing the repair of this road is worthless until the central road which we all use is not repaired.
- Repair of this road is important, of course, but in the presented scenarios there are others which are more important.
- This scenario benefits fewer people. We need to implement a project which will benefit the whole village.

- We should think of the village globally. Improving the district is, of course, very important. However, today in such scarce circumstances the priorities should be decided considering the village as a whole.
- Actually repairing the road may benefit only 10-15% of the population. We need to choose a project that will benefit the majority of the village.
- We should look at all village streets and see which among those needs urgent repair.
- The road is very important for us, but it is more important to have a healthy generation. We need a forest.
- In our opinion, roads are the most important issue. However, for the sake of objectivity it should be mentioned that there are other village streets that are as important, or even more so, than the mentioned one.
- There are more urgent issues, than the road repair.
- The road repair cannot be a priority today. This is a village and we'll get used to the road as it is, but the central road is the one to connect us to the world.
- The first scenario is definitely important to us, but the main priority is the central road which we all use.
- We should take into account that in case the central road that we all use is not repaired, there might be incidents of jealousy and hot debates.
- It is more important to provide public transportation, than to repair the road, because women transport agricultural products manually. Even if the road is OK, they will continue carrying those manually, since there is no public transportation.
- Water delivery is a burning issue. We do accept that the road is important, but water is a necessity.
- It will be better if we think how we can create jobs for our children instead of thinking of the road.

Scenario II - Repair of the Second Building of the Kindergarten

Pros...

- It is true that the poor condition of the road is disturbing, but it is more important to think of the development of the young generation.
- The old kindergarten is designed for 120 children. Today it functions to half of its capacity, and the reason is not our unwillingness to exploit it to its full potential, but the existing facilities.
- We get many applications to attend kindergarten. Parents are also interested in this. We have an issue of accepting about 60 kids.

- If we do not repair the second building it will deteriorate very fast and in future it will be more difficult to reconstruct it.
- Currently we have four groups of children in the kindergarten. Once we repair the building, we can accommodate six groups.
- This option will allow creating long-term jobs.
- Our kindergarten is the largest in the whole country. Our kids love attending it. If only we could take our kids there all year long...
- The village is enlarging, more kids are born. This is a very promising investment.

Cons...

- From where shall we get that many kids? One building is quite enough.
- Since we're transferring to a 12-year system of secondary education, the kids will start attending schools earlier and the need for enlarging the kindergarten will disappear.
- The kindergarten needs to function in winter as well.
- The existing facilities are quite enough for the number of pre-school kids we have in the village. It is necessary to repair the functioning building.
- It would be better if the existing buildings were heated, so that the kindergarten could be open in winter as well.
- Parents are busy with animal farming and do not manage to take their kids to kindergarten.
- As we often do in family budget planning, we need to adjust to what we have at the moment – one kindergarten building which will function for at least another year and then we'll see what we can do about it.
- There is not a strong need for opening pre-school group, since the majority of parents prefer to keep their kids of this age at home.
- Secondary education will start from age 6, so the number of children attending kindergarten will decrease.
- The kindergarten has already been renovated. All the children attend it. Those who do not, do so because of their parents and not because there is not enough room in the kindergarten to accommodate more children.
- Today mothers are not so busy as not to be able to take care of their kids. The current facilities of the kindergarten are quite satisfactory at the moment.
- As far as we know the kindergarten is renovated. Is this an issue? We've not even regarded it as such!
- It would be better if instead of renovating the second building, we purchased some necessary equipment for the kindergarten.

- I think the conditions in kindergarten are satisfactory. The roads are a more serious priority.
- After renovation of the kindergarten the physical setting and learning facilities have considerably improved. It is not effective to invest that much money in renovation of the second building, since the kindergarten is seasonal, there is no central heating and there is not enough demand for the renovation of another building.

Scenario III - Construction of a Sports Ground.....

Pros...

- I think the construction of a sports ground has been put off for too long.
- The sports ground is very important for our village. It will make it possible to bring kids home from street and engage them in something more meaningful.
- The construction of a sports ground should be complete. The important thing is that it should not be left incomplete.
- This is a great project, since it will allow our kids to spend their time in the village, to train and stay healthy.
- It is very important to have a sports ground. Our young people have nowhere to express their talents.
- The construction of a sports ground will give an opportunity to involve children and young people of different ages in sports activities.
- Regarding sports we should say that it's also very important. We have a football team, but do not have a field.
- All the prerequisites for the development of sports are there, except a sports ground.
- The current conditions do not give anybody a chance to achieve anything in sports.
- Our kids go to Maralik in order to go in for sports. This is quite a long way and they take it after school – hungry and tired. How can we talk about training and health?
- This option will benefit all the residents of the village.
- There was a time we had many 'shevchenkos' and now we have to contribute to the development of sports here. We'll then have very good sportsmen and women who will later assist the development of the village.
- Our kids train in Maralik, so I would gladly vote for the construction of a sports ground. It will be much safer for the kid as well. We would stop worrying how and when he'll get home from Maralik.
- It is not enough to build a sports ground. It should be built normally.

- The road is more or less exploited; the kindergarten serves the local need to a certain extent, but there is not a single facility for training in sports.
- The kids do not have a chance to develop their preferences. This will be a wonderful opportunity for contributing to the organization of young people's free time.
- Sports will contribute to decreasing the cases of smoking, use of alcohol and crimes.
- Construction of a sports complex is very important for our community. Trainings in Maralik start after 3pm and before that the kids have to wander around the town. During this time it is practically impossible to look after them.
- The sports ground will solve not only the issue of football training, but also a number of other ones.
- There is not any entertainment for young people: no movie theater, no normal library, nothing.
- A sum twice larger than the mentioned one has been spent on the repair of some section of the road. Now you want to waste the mentioned sum on the repair of the whole road? Then we won't be using the money wisely.
- The village has very good sportsmen, but no training facilities.
- There are some roads; there is a kindergarten; but there is not a single training area here.
- Let our kids train where we can watch them.
- There are young people and children in the village who simply waste their talents and skills by wandering in the street and getting together here and there. We have to think of something useful they can do.
- The construction of a sports ground is important, because the location which is allotted for training is not fit for this purpose.
- A trainer from outside won't care about our kids as much as an insider would do.
- The sports ground will also address the issue of keeping our male children in the village.
- *Our* trainer for *our* kids in *our* sports hall...
- We have a Champion of Europe from the village, but the sports hall of the school does not correspond to any known standard.
- This will solve the issue of keeping our kids healthy and giving them an opportunity to go in for sports.
- The sports hall of the school is very small, that is why we need a sports ground.
- If we have a normal gym, we'll have champions as well.

- Except ensuring free time activities for the young people, we will give a chance to our sports men and women to transfer their skills and knowledge to the younger generation and thus ensure their income as well.
- This is the best way to spend free time.
- There are many talented children who cannot afford getting training in Maralik.
- Among the proposed scenarios there is none that is fast and short-term. It's OK that the construction of a sports ground may take a long time.
- Why should we exclude the chance that once we've started the construction, next year, for instance, there will be some sponsors who will invest in the project and help us continue and complete the whole construction.

Cons...

- Construction of a sports ground is a good project, but it will take too long.
- Though sports are really important, it's still not a priority.
- They can play football in an open field as well. We need a closed field, or more precisely, an area where there is a sports hall equipped with sports gear and an area where we can have other activities going.
- Well, we have "sports grounds" in our yards.
- And where shall we find trainers?
- The sports ground will become somebody's property. If it's in the school though, all can have equal access.
- OK, let's say we'll have a football field. And what shall we do in winter? Besides, almost all young people leave the village in summer, whereas in winter many return and don't know how to entertain.
- The school has sports gear. We just don't have a sports ground.
- The kid who wants to do sports will do so, and the one who doesn't will keep on smoking even while jogging.
- I need to have a place to live, and then think of going in for sports.
- Even realizing the huge importance that we have kids, we still think that the road is more important.
- There is a proposal to build a sports ground. Won't there be any adjacent facilities? The project smells of incompleteness.

Scenario 4 - Partial Repair of the Central Road.....

Pros...

- This will allow addressing a very important issue which touches the village as a whole. This will strengthen the community as a whole instead of dividing it into districts.
- The importance of repairing the central road is obvious: the whole transportation to and from the village uses this road.
- Last year we repaired a section of this road with the money from the state budget. If we add a little more on our account, we'll finish it.
- Half of the road is in a good condition, but the rest is simply awful. People who reach the good part of the road even joke, "Now we've reached the West!".
- It's the vein connecting our village to the world. Without any question it's a priority. We just need to end what we've started. There is no need to start any of these projects if the sustainability is not ensured.
- I'm a driver and I say that water is important. But if there is no road, the village will not develop.
- This year they have promised to start repair works on the central road through external financing.
- This is also an issue of honor for the village. The one entering the village judges of us in accordance to this road.
- This is the best option for our village: it is necessary to complete the repair works where they have started.
- If we build sidewalks, this will contribute to the sports activities as well. People will jog on them.
- The central road creates the image of the village.
- It would be great if the road in the village were repaired and at the same time the central road were renovated. The first impressions about our village are based on the one this road leaves.
- Can't we ride on normal roads? Why do we always have to come and go breaking this part of the body or that?
- In terms of duration the repair of the central road is more feasible.

Cons...

- The central road will be repaired by the means of the state budget. Let's spend our money on the construction of the sports ground.
- The existing amount of money won't allow solving the issue of the central road.

- For those who have cars the issue of the road is, of course, a priority. However, about 70% of the village does not have cars.
- There is no need to spend any money on the road repair, since it is being repaired anyway, from an election to another.
- If you're going to repair the road partially, next spring we'll again be left without one: let's not waste this money.
- There is no need to discuss the issue of the central road today, because even today there is somebody who takes care of the road, cleans it, and fills in the holes. So, we do not think that the road repair is very urgent.
- The state is interested in the repair of the road, so it will take care of it.
- The external road is not our concern. Eventually it will be repaired and the state budget will provide the financial resources.
- If I'm paying these many taxes, why doesn't the state repair the inter-town road?
- The state will repair this road in one way or another. Let's spend our money somewhere else.
- Can't we make some savings from our salaries and repair the road ourselves?
- I don't think the allotted money is enough for the reconstruction of the road. It's better to plant trees. It's less expensive.
- We think the central road will be repaired in one way or another. Let's not spend our community money on this.
- We have many historical monuments which can contribute to the development of tourism and let the government repair the road, so that the latter can happen.
- Once we've all got together and filled in the holes on the road and we'll do it again.
- Partial repair of the external road will be just a waste of labor.
- There is no need to spend that much money on a little repair which will require some more efforts the next year. This road is necessary only to few people who have cars.

Scenario V - Forestation and Design of an Alley.....

Pros...

- This is a very important project and will have a very positive impact on our health, since it will allow preventing winds and eliminating dust.
- We really lack trees. It would be great if in the place of cut trees we planted new ones.

- Except the two trees down there our elderly do not have anywhere else to get together and socialize.
- Last year we brought in 3500 tree plants and have distributed those to people so that they can plant them in their yards, in the streets and elsewhere.
- On Ararat Valley people were cutting apricot trees in the 90s, but we didn't touch even the decorative ones.
- We need to train our sight to appreciate beauty. Living in nature our kids are still so alienated from her that it is simply inexcusable.
- We celebrate both big and small holidays together with the whole community. Especially during Vardavar we have many tourists visiting.
- For instance, every year we plant trees next to the kindergarten with the help of the mayor.
- Taming winds, preventing erosion... aren't these important enough issues? Oxygen, embellishing the village, beautiful and picturesque residence... Yes, let's plant trees!
- No doubt, the community should assist in tree planting!

Cons...

- We can plant trees ourselves. Let's not waste the money in vain.
- Erosion is not a serious issue in our village and planting trees based on this rationale is simply irresponsible.
- Every spring we plant trees anyway.
- The scope of the project is very small. The young people in the village are quite cooperative; one day they can get together and plant trees without any extra expense. So, even if we decide to plant trees, we should think of a larger scope, of planting on larger areas.
- We plant trees now as well. Every resident of Sarnaghbyur can be said to plant a tree somewhat subconsciously.
- We will plant the trees and can do so with our money.
- We have so many things to care about that we rarely go out. The only time we do so is Vardavar and it is not an event when you sit under the trees. So, planting trees is not an urgent issue.
- We can organize a special event and plant trees in our village. Don't we have the labor force necessary for this, or are we less interested in this? We have a sense of honor: if one plants a tree, the others will definitely join.
- We can spend a lot of money on planting trees, but then fail to take care of the plants and the result will be the same as now.
- We can plant trees as a public event and use the budget of the community for more urgent issues.

- No, this is not a priority for our village. We're a green area and with time trees will appear as well.
- We need to decide on the list of urgent priorities for this year and this project is not in this list.
- The village has partially solved the issue of tree planting. We even have a small grove. Creating green areas is more urgent for urban areas.
- How shall we water the trees?
- That's right, we need to plant parks in the village, but we don't even have an appropriate area where we can simultaneously start a large-scale planting. This option refers to planting trees here and there, and this won't be effective.
- The area suggested for planting is not selected well.
- This money will not be used effectively, because there are challenges regarding watering the plants. In fact, it might happen so that we will spend this money and gain almost nothing.
- Village people will plant trees themselves.
- Trees will gradually be planted if there is asphalt...
- Do we have roads for planting trees? We should plant trees next to the road.
- The project on trees will simply be a waste of money.
- We can't even keep the existing forest. How shall we plant a new one?
- There is no need to plant trees on the roads. This won't be effective.
- Planting a forest is secondary to keeping a forest and assisting its growth.
- I think, not all kinds of trees will grow in this area. Who will take care of the plants? Who'll take the responsibility?
- We don't have water to drink. How are we going to keep a forest?
- We suggest banning this scenario and instead promise to plant trees in our yards and streets.
- We love our mountains and stones. We carry water in buckets and we don't need any forests.

Scenario VI - Fencing the Cemetery Area.....

Pros...

- I am ready to contribute the last penny I've saved for this project.
- Actually, building this fence will make the person who's tending his cattle in the cemetery stop and think for a moment on what he's really doing.
- It would be very good if it were possible to save some money from the sports ground project and finish the fencing of the cemetery.
- It is very urgent to fence the cemetery.

- Whether we vote for or against this project the fence will be built, because any resident of Sarnaghbyur knows how to respect his ancestors and protect what's sacred.
- We're human, aren't we? So our cemeteries should look human as well. It will be great if there are means to fence the area.

Cons...

- If you're not enjoying life, why would you need a luxuriously fenced cemetery?
- We have artificially made our cemeteries unnecessarily luxurious. Is this an adequate behavior for us?
- The cemetery is also important, but only after the rest of the projects.
- We cannot fence the area since we've not got the accurate measurements.
- Cemetery is not such a priority. Our grandparents won't be hurt...
- This is secondary, since we're talking about the new area. The old cemetery is fenced.
- We can take care of and improve the cemetery ourselves, with the help of our husbands. The community can improve the cemetery on its own.
- Before thinking of the cemetery let's think of the kindergarten and the roads: I'm sorry for the women in the village.
- It's just not worth spending that much money on the improvement of the cemetery.
- A part of the cemetery has been improved due to the villagers and we'll do the same with the rest. There's no need to spend the budget money on this project.
- Why did the Soviet collapse? Because the property was everybody's.
- It's better to fence the cemetery with iron grids.
- Those who make their living abroad will renovate the cemetery.
- Even without this project our community fences the cemetery, every year adding a little bit to it. We're able to do it without financing from the budget.
- Our old cemetery has turned into an ancient artifact and we treat it as a monument.
- We'll not escape death...once we die, then we'll do something about it. Now let's just live and enjoy it.
- Today everybody tries to build and keep the graves so that cattle does not bother them. Fencing it not so urgent as to be considered a priority and spend the scarce resources on it.
- We suggest that the 6th scenario be left out from the discussion. This is not the issue that the whole community should get together and discuss.

- Cemetery is sacred for all of us. There is no need to protect it.
- The whole Armenian nation is building a road for Karabakh. Can't we fence a little area in the cemetery ourselves?

Scenarios suggested impromptu.....

- We think that the water issue should be solved.
- Renovation of the hospital is very important for the village.
- The hospital is repaired, that is not the issue. The real issue is the fact that there is not an appropriate facility in the hospital for long-term treatment of children.
- This money can be used for the solution of the water problem. Naturally, this is such a serious issue that this amount is not enough for reaching a final outcome, but it's worth starting.
- Armenian Question of Irrigation! The energy used is so expensive that it does not justify the current practice when we have to pump water both for irrigation and drinking.
- It is necessary to repair the culture house. This will allow opening a library, different groups, and having a hall where public events can be held. Thus, we'll be able to prevent the emigration of young families.
- By opening the culture house we'll help the families that want to give their kids an opportunity to get diverse education and have to send them to Maralik.
- It's necessary to open a factory here so that women gossip less and engage in something useful.
- The existing financial resources are so scarce that it seems rather doubtful whether any serious project will be implemented. Therefore, it would be better if with this money they purchased necessary equipment, toys, and learning materials for the kindergarten.
- We need to open an obstetrics ward: we have pregnant women, necessary equipment, but no doctors.
- Today many books still kept in the culture house. Those could become the basis for the library. However, today these books are on the verge of destruction. Renovation of the culture house would allow touching on this issue as well.
- The issue of drinking water is getting more and more urgent. People carry water in buckets and this in the 21st century. A water pump should be installed in "Ankisur Mayla".
- I think we can solve the issue of water delivery.
- Our children are deprived of getting music education. Steps have to be undertaken to reopen the culture house.

- There are serious restrictions regarding water issue. The financial resources won't be enough.
- We have a very good student body here, but what they will do after graduation, is not clear.
- Do we need a culture house in the village? Yes, before it was ruined, it did great work.
- There is no music center, not any center for arts or crafts. Perhaps we need to think of opening one. We have many talented children.
- We lack mechanization. All the machinery is privatized and we need to think of creating a community enterprise of mechanization.
- We need a church bell. They keep promising, but never do anything about it.
- All the issues are important. It's the money that is not enough.
- By repairing the second building of the kindergarten we can solve the issue of arts center. There can be different activity groups there.
- In Maralik they have gas and it's only a few kilometers away. Shouldn't we be thinking in this direction?
- Gasification is also very important, but we need to think within the framework of our capacities.
- Let them bring gas next year, the issue of water is very important.
- Hey, listen, people, when we talk about gas or water, do we reflect on what resources we have? We should stretch within the borders of our cover.
- The most serious issue in the village is the issue of water. Water delivery is not equally organized. It is necessary to start a process that will be the beginning of the problem resolution.
- Wouldn't it be great to have a library!
- There are many springs in the mountains. We just need to have a water pump.
- The employment issue is very acute here. About 90% of the population lives on what's sent from Russia. We live due to Russia...
- Repairing the water reservoir would be just the project! Besides, it will be beautiful.
- We all want an internet club, both the young and the old!
- It is also very important to repair the library and rebuild the culture house: they look like ruins...
- WE ARE THE STATE.