



CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX INITIATIVE

Case Study
**Culture of
Volunteerism
in Armenia**



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CULTURE OF VOLUNTEERISM IN ARMENIA



**YEREVAN
«ANTARES»
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**Civil Society Index
National Implementation Team
at Counterpart International / Armenia**

**Mane Tadevosyan (Researcher)
Lusine Hakobyan (National Coordinator)**



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Culture of Volunteerism in Armenia

Introduction

Volunteering provokes various reactions in Armenia. For many it is a noble act. Yet others consider it a mere waste of time and energy, sometimes even attaching a stigma to volunteer work. However, volunteering empowers individuals, encourages civic participation and enhances social cohesion. It creates bonds of trust and solidarity, and thus social capital. Furthermore, volunteers ultimately expand the influence and capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs). They bring new perspectives and skills to organizations and foster greater effectiveness and efficiency of the latter.

Informal, unmanaged, volunteering¹ is the dominant form of volunteering in Armenian culture. People who volunteer informally are presumed to be excellent candidates for volunteering formally through organizations: they already seem to have the desire and motivation to donate their time and help others. Yet many informal volunteers in Armenia are not involved in more formal volunteer activities, be it due to a lack of credibility

1 Informal/unmanaged volunteering is the spontaneous and sporadic helping that takes place between friends and neighbors. Formal/managed volunteering takes place through organizations in the nonprofit, public, and private sectors, and tends to be more organized and regular (Dingle, A., Sokolowski, W., Saxon-Harold, S.K.E., Smith, J.D., & Leigh, R. (Eds.) (2001): *Measuring Volunteering: Practical Toolkit*; UNV. Retrieved September 22, 2009 from <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/toolkit/TYVToolkit.PDF>)

of candidate organizations, their poor functioning or the environment they operate in. As a result the current state of volunteerism is marked by low appreciation of and engagement with formal volunteer activities on the one hand, and heavy reliance of civil society organizations on volunteers on the other.

This case study focuses on formal volunteering in Armenia with organizations from the non-profit sector, and will suggest that Armenian CSOs do not utilize the full capacity of volunteer resources in the country. The study tries to explore three focus areas - the regulatory environment, motivations behind volunteerism and volunteer management practices - to explain the under-utilization of volunteers. The three areas were chosen due to their significance to the promotion of volunteerism in any country.

Legislation and the regulatory environment are important contributors to the extent to which volunteerism flourishes in a given country. However, it is important to not overestimate the role of legislation. Laws and statutes alone cannot fully determine the environment for volunteerism. After all, volunteerism by its very nature succeeds due to the motivations behind and the desire by which citizens choose to undertake voluntary action. Volunteer management, on the other hand, can both foster and negate such motivations. Effective management

practices enhance the value and impact of volunteering, while mismanagement hinders the continued involvement of volunteers once in place.

Within these three areas, this study briefly highlights the major challenges that prevent volunteer-dependent CSOs from realizing the full potential of volunteerism, and it identifies opportunities that can be created by policy and decision-makers as well as CSOs themselves to promote volunteer contributions.

Literature Review

Definitions and interpretations on volunteerism vary, shaped by diverse contexts and experiences. Yet, they all ultimately rest on three criteria for volunteering: 1. it is not undertaken primarily for financial gain, 2. it is undertaken of one's own free will and 3. it brings benefits to a third party as well as to the people who volunteer.²

Civic participation as an expression of voluntary action helps build cohesive communities and strengthens democratic governance. Citizen participation in development processes results in more effective and sustainable projects by engendering 'ownership' among participants and incorporating local knowledge

2 Dingle, A., Sokolowski, W., Saxon-Harold, S.K.E., Smith, J.D., & Leigh, R. (Eds.) (2001): *Measuring Volunteering: Practical Toolkit*; UNV. Retrieved September 22, 2009 from <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/toolkit/TYVToolkit.PDF>

and priorities into project identification, design and implementation.³

While usually viewed through the prism of civic activism, volunteerism is also a decisive aspect of CSO sustainability. According to the John Hopkins overview, “the inclusion of volunteers in the revenue stream of civil society organizations boosts the average philanthropic share of total revenue from 12% to 30%.⁴ This reflects the fact that contributions of time, even when valued conservatively at the average wage in the fields in which volunteering occurs, are twice as large as contributions of money or material.”⁵

With greater attention being paid to the benefits of volunteerism, the importance of the regulatory framework for volunteerism has been brought into sharper focus. An enabling legal framework is one of many factors affecting volunteerism. A supportive legal framework is even more critical in countries that lack a tradition of volunteering – or have a tradition of ‘coercive’ volunteering (i.e., government requirements that citizens provide their services free of charge to various public projects), as is the

3 CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) & United Nations Volunteers (UNV) (2008): *Volunteering and Social Activism: Pathways for Participation in Human Development*. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from <http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/img/www/Volunteerism-FINAL.pdf>

4 For purposes of the study’s calculations, volunteer time is valued at the average wage in the respective country in the fields in which volunteering takes place.

5 Lester, M., Salamon, S., Sokolowski, W., List, R. (2003): *Global Civil Society: an Overview*. The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from http://www.wingsweb.org/download/global_civil_society.pdf

case in some newly independent states.⁶

Motivations to volunteer vary from person to person, including identity development, enhancement of skills, increased self-esteem, development of empathy for others, development of significant relationships, to name a few. Fundamentally, however, most of the studies agree that irrespective of contextual influences, volunteers are likely to have the same motivations: to give help to others and at the same time to derive some personal benefits.⁷ Good volunteer management is another prerequisite for increasing the value of the volunteering experience – both for the volunteers and to strengthen the impact of volunteering on development and social change. A recent study on volunteering and social activism has demonstrated that this is important to ensure that people are engaged, feel valued for their contribution and are integrated into organizations – these are all factors that make volunteers more likely to sustain their participation over the long-term.⁸

Volunteerism is not a new, uncommon phenomenon in Armenia. The earliest written reference to volunteer work can most probably be found on the mosaic floor of

6 Moore, D. (2005): *Laws and Other Mechanisms for Promoting NGO Financial Sustainability*. Copyright by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/pubs/Financial_Sustainability.pdf

7 Guzman, M. (2007): *Youth Volunteerism: A Tool for Positive Youth Development*. UNL Community Programs. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=833>.

8 CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) & United Nations Volunteers (UNV) (2008): *Volunteering and Social Activism: Pathways for Participation in Human Development*. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from <http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/img/www/Volunteerism-FINAL.pdf>

a bath adjacent to the pagan temple of Garni dating back to the first century A.D. The inscription in Old Greek that has survived until today reads, “we worked without pay⁹.”¹⁰ During Soviet times, every year Armenian student brigades, each with around ten thousand students, worked voluntarily on big Soviet and Armenian construction projects and with companies.¹¹ This was an expression of the so-called “coercive volunteering” with the government mostly requiring that citizens provide free services to public projects. In times of crisis, particularly after the 1988 Spitak Earthquake and during the Karabakh conflict in the early 1990s, Armenian volunteers naturally responded and assisted earthquake victims, refugees and other vulnerable groups.¹² In 2003, a volunteer action organized by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems drew over 278,000 people to participate in the more than 2,900 events, encouraging young people to get involved and raising awareness about the importance of volunteerism in solving common problems.¹³

Despite a fairly established tradition of volunteerism,

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- 9 The mysterious meaning is unclear: some ascribe it to the artists who were proud to work for art's sake.
- 10 Armenia information (2009): *Sites of interest: Garni Pagan Temple*. Retrieved September 23, 2009 from http://www.armeniainfo.am/sites/?section=other_desc&page=1&site_id=13
- 11 Republican Headquarters of Student Brigades (HUI) (2009): *Historical Overview of Volunteerism in Armenia*. Retrieved October 2009 from <http://www.hui.am/>
- 12 Aslanyan, S., Adibekian, A., Ajabyan, N. and Coe, B. A. (2007): *Civil Society in Armenia: From a Theoretical Framework to a Reality*. Center for the Development of Civil Society and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.
- 13 International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2003): *Citizens' Awareness and Participation in Armenia*. Retrieved from www.ifes.org/publication

a national study that would provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state on volunteerism in Armenia has not yet been conducted. Empirical data on current practices of volunteering remain scarce and underlying motives unexplored. Still, the few studies on the area suggest that voluntary action in Armenia mostly occurs on an informal basis. The CIVICUS Civil Society Index report for 2005 in Armenia, for example, found that 80% of the country's population was involved in volunteer work. Such a high percentage of voluntary engagement was, in fact, on account of informal volunteering (assistance to neighbors, friends, co-workers, refugees, the handicapped, the disabled, etc.), which made up the vast majority of voluntary activities undertaken.¹⁴

When it comes to volunteering channeled formally through CSOs, it appears that Armenian civil society is largely staffed by volunteers. Data from the current implementation phase of the CSI project indicate that volunteers make up more than one forth of the personnel in 78.8% of Armenian CSOs.¹⁵ Despite this great dependency on volunteer inputs, however, a rather low percentage of the population is engaged in formal volunteering: only 8.2% of the CIVICUS CSI population survey's respondents do voluntary work for a social organization and 9.5% for a

14 Aslanyan, S., Adibekian, A., Ajabyan, N. and Coe, B. A. (2007): *Civil Society in Armenia: From a Theoretical Framework to a Reality*. Center for the Development of Civil Society and CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.

15 Counterpart International/Armenia National Implementation Team (2010): *The CIVICUS Civil Society Index report for Armenia: Phase 2008-2010*.

political organization.¹⁶ This present case study attempts to explore the reasons accounting for the gap between formal and informal volunteering in Armenia. It capitalizes on the impediments that formal volunteering in Armenia entails.

Methodology

The case study presents a qualitative analysis of interviews with staff from CSOs that utilize volunteers and with volunteers themselves. The universe of the case study is the list of organizational survey's¹⁷ respondents. Six CSOs were purposefully selected from the list of organizational survey respondents by choosing a proportionate number of the types of CSOs represented: the respondents of the organizational survey were originally chosen to be representative of Armenia civil society organizations and to keep a fair balance of all types of CSOs identified during the Social Force Analysis. Accordingly, the findings of the study are derived from semi-structured interviews with two Armenian NGOs, a youth group, a cultural group, a sports association and an educational group. Six volunteers identified through snowball sampling were also interviewed.

16 Counterpart International/Armenia National Implementation Team (2010): *The CIVICUS Civil Society Index report for Armenia: Phase 2008-2010*. Data retrieved from the CIVICUS CSI population survey.

17 The purpose of the CSI organisational survey is to explore the data relating to the operations and governance of CSOs, among other items. Sample organisations are selected according to the regional coverage, diversity and a range of civil society organisation types and characteristics.

A preset questionnaire was used during the interviews (a schedule of questions can be found in Annex 1). However, space was provided for additional questions when topics required further discussion. The interviews were analyzed for perspectives on the three areas – the regulatory environment, motivations behind volunteerism and volunteer management practices.

Analysis and Findings

The findings of this case study reaffirm that volunteer input is a defining factor for the Armenian nonprofit sector and that the sector relies extensively on volunteer efforts. All the interviewed CSOs appeared to have regular volunteers ranging from 30 to 60 per organization, with one of the six interviewed CSOs completely relying on its one thousand and five hundred regular volunteers. CSOs appeal to a still greater number of volunteers when organizing special events and activities. Those who do volunteer for the CSOs devote a considerable amount of time to such activities, with many committing time every day, on a full time basis. The response of an interviewed volunteer is revealing, “now, apart from volunteering, I’m also working. So I’m able to volunteer for only two or three days a week.” The scope of activities performed by volunteers is also rather broad, ranging from internal

administrative roles such as filing, printing or answering the phone, to direct service activities such as mentoring and tutoring, as well as contributing a specialized skill set such as financial or computer expertise.

Not surprisingly, all the CSOs believe that volunteers are very beneficial both to their organization and to the community at large. “Volunteers are the basis of our whole program. Without their involvement we could not implement our projects,” confesses the leader of a CSO. Volunteers provide Armenian CSOs with access to additional expertise, better networking with their beneficiaries and increased productivity in assisting their beneficiaries to name just a few benefits. Moreover, the Armenian CSOs acknowledge that without volunteer contributions they would not be able to run their organizations, or at least their capability to provide services would be largely undetermined.

However, despite a strong reliance on volunteer commitments, this study suggests that the supply of volunteers far exceeds the demand. To test this, five volunteers were randomly selected from the lists of two volunteer job portals. Prospective volunteers register their contact information and preferences on these portals, offering their volunteer services. Thus, the portals are supposed to serve as a useful tool to match the supply of volunteers and the demand of organizations. These five

prospective volunteers were contacted in an effort to find out the extent to which Armenia's volunteer resource base is being utilized by Armenian CSOs. The five volunteers were asked if they have ever been contacted regarding volunteer opportunities. "My contact information has been on the website for about five years. Your call is the first," answered a volunteer. The response of the other four volunteers did not differ much: none of them have received an offer to volunteer so far....

Thus, be it a result of the volunteer job portals not working correctly or the CSOs themselves not taking advantage of the resources out there (most probably a combination of both), one thing is obvious: the 'supply' of volunteer capital in Armenia exceeds the demand for such work, while the potential volunteer resource base remains largely underutilized.

The Regulatory Environment for Volunteering

A legal framework is essential for regulating, and in effect shaping, volunteerism in a given country. The regulatory environment in Armenia fails to support volunteerism simply because there is no clearly recognized legal status for volunteers. Although two draft laws on volunteering have been put into circulation - first by the NGO Professionals for Civil Society in 2004¹⁸ and second

18 RA Draft Law on Volunteer Activities (2004-06-08).

by the Armenian Ministry of Labor and Social Issues in 2008¹⁹ - a law dedicated to volunteerism has not yet been adopted. Consequently, volunteers and CSOs face a number of problems stemming from this current lack of regulation. These challenges include:

Lack of a legal definition and recognition: Although there is no adopted legislation regulating volunteerism, the Law on Charity reads, “volunteers are those natural persons, who gratuitously perform works for the benefit of the recipients of charity based on the goals of this law.”²⁰ It appears that volunteer work, as defined and recognized by this law, is limited to volunteerism for the purposes of charity only. Meanwhile, tax authorities are greatly suspicious of the idea of “volunteers” working for a CSO. “Our volunteers have been often perceived as a hidden workforce. Tax authorities do not believe that one can afford to or would want to work for free,” tells a CSO representative. On the other hand, the term “volunteerism” is sometimes purposely misused to cover, or rather disguise, a paid workforce. According to one concerned CSO leader who was interviewed for this study, “it is not surprising that the authorities are sometimes doubtful about our volunteers. The distrust stems from the fact that some organizations hide their paid staff under the guise of volunteers.” Thus, the lack of a legal definition and volunteering regu-

19 RA Draft Law on Volunteer Activities (2008).

20 RA Law on Charity (2002), article 9.

lation often results in the misinterpretation and treatment of volunteers as paid employees, with reported cases of consequent infringements by tax authorities or abuses by organizations, utilizing volunteers.

Undefined relationships: The very word “voluntary” suggests that contributions of time, money or anything else cannot be coerced. Meanwhile, volunteer exploitation is one of the concerns raised by the interviewed volunteers. “Abuse of volunteers is not an uncommon phenomenon – sometimes volunteers are forced to perform the tasks of regular employees and even to stay overnight,” reports one of the interviewed volunteers. The absence of a legal framework leaves the organization-volunteer relationship formally undefined. Hence, the rights, responsibilities and specifics of volunteer work remain unclear for both parties. The unspecified and often unpredicted roles often leave the volunteers disenchanted with the organizations and volunteer activity at large. “When volunteering for a CSO, I was often left with two options: I had to either perform till late at night or be dismissed as incompetent. I chose the latter...” tells a former volunteer. Thus the law does not protect either against possible exploitations by organizations or violations by volunteers. Moreover, the undefined relationship also neglects to specify what the organizations might owe to the volunteers as a reward for their work. Consequently, many volunteer involving organizations do not happen to keep up volunteer motivations.

Lack of legal mechanisms encouraging volunteerism:
The Armenian Law on Charity only provides for one mechanism to encourage volunteer activities. The law stipulates that “the Armenian President shall award the following titles: Honorable Volunteer of the Republic of Armenia and Volunteer of the Year of the Republic of Armenia.”²¹ As indicated by the interviewed volunteers, the award has turned out to be a motivational factor for volunteers. “One just had to see the excitement of my volunteer peers at the day of awards distributed,” says one of the interviewed volunteers. All the respondents noticed, however, that this mechanism does not go far enough in honoring and, hence, expanding volunteerism in the country. In the absence of a clear legal definition and the recognition of what constitutes voluntary work and a volunteer, CSOs face a number of problems in managing volunteers. Volunteers, on the other hand, feel unprotected since their rights are not guaranteed by law. And the law does not create incentives to encourage wider volunteer engagement.

Motivations to Volunteer

An analysis of the interviews completed for this study found that, altruism is the strongest motivator behind volunteering. All the volunteer respondents interviewed for this study said that the greatest impetus to volunteer

21 RA Law on Charity, 2002, article 15.

is the desire to help others. “I do not anticipate any grand show of gratitude. What I do want is simply to lend a hand to those who need,” explains a volunteer. A valuable use of time and sense of satisfaction are other motivational factors that were mentioned. Another important motive to volunteering was found to be the sense of being recognized and needed. Accordingly, the fact that “they did not feel appreciated” was reported to be the major reason for volunteers leaving a CSO. Thus, altruistic motives alone, if properly channeled and recognized, present a good opportunity to engage more Armenians in volunteer activities.

Motivating factors behind volunteerism in Armenia are above all altruistic, but they can also be practical. Many interviewed volunteers turned out to be quite pragmatic, clearly realizing the personal benefits that volunteering can bring. Increased knowledge and capabilities, improving a CV and building self-confidence and self-esteem were among other motives to volunteer. Overall, a great benefit of volunteering was reported to be increased marketability. “The emphasis should be put on employability, if one wants to guarantee the expansion of volunteerism in the country. One of the best mechanisms would be adding volunteer experience to the total work experience²² of that volunteer,” recommends an interviewed volunteer.

22 “Total work experience” here refers to the total number of officially documented years that a person has worked. In Armenia, a retiree’s pension is determined by this number.

Volunteer Management Practices – Recruitment, Recognition, Retention

There is a direct connection between volunteer management, the length a volunteer has been with an organization, and the productivity and quality of their work. The more volunteers are treated as valued, long-term assets, the more committed and creative they are in the services they provide. The examination of CSO volunteer management practices, however, identified a number of problems that prevent CSOs from making the maximum use of Armenia's potential volunteer resource base. Although all nonprofits view their volunteers as strategic assets, few of them have developed ways to take full advantage of them. The comment of one of the volunteers interviewed is particularly instructive, "I'm volunteering since the age of twelve. Now I'm twenty-four. So far, I've not come across an organization that uses volunteer resources effectively." Reports of volunteers, and sometimes of CSOs themselves, revealed a number of volunteer mismanagement practices.

Lack of information about the value of and possibilities for volunteering: Volunteerism is not publicized in Armenia. Rarely do Armenian CSOs promote a greater awareness of the value of volunteers and volunteer action to society. People do not know the importance of volunteering. On the contrary, Armenians sometimes find it absurd to devote

time to a “useless thing like volunteering.” Meanwhile, even those who are ready to volunteer often do not know what to volunteer for. The vast majority of the population is not aware of the possibilities for volunteering due to the lack of visibility and recognition of volunteer efforts. “Organizations should be more open to the public, recommends a volunteer. Hundreds of people around me are quite interested in and would gladly volunteer. Yet, the offer is late and not noticeable.”

Inadvertent volunteer recruitment: Volunteer recruitment is not a particularly demanding challenge for Armenian CSOs. All interviewed CSOs and volunteers report that many people in their community are ready to volunteer, whether as an act of kindness or in anticipation of some personal benefit. Thus, whenever CSOs need volunteer contributions, they mostly turn to their regular volunteers, who in turn, engage others. In most cases, however, volunteer recruitment is accidental and not part of strategic planning for at least two reasons: CSOs are either unfamiliar with volunteer recruiting techniques or they are unable to accommodate as many volunteers as they can recruit. Hence, CSOs mostly do not make full use of recruitment opportunities. A CSO representative confesses, “frankly speaking, we have never cared for volunteer recruitment – we have other, more challenging tasks.”

Sporadic rather than sustained volunteerism: If recruited, volunteers are mostly involved in ad-hoc projects. Organizations find it easy to recruit volunteers for special events, but difficult to retain the same volunteers in ongoing volunteer positions. This occurs mainly due to the fact that many organizations are not sustainable themselves. They do not operate constantly, but rather survive from grant to grant. “If we recruit volunteers we have to somehow entertain them, to offer them a task. So we turn to volunteer recruitment only when we have a funded project,” tells a CSO representative. CSOs taking this approach overlook the possibility of sustaining their projects with volunteer efforts even when financial resources are drying up. Moreover, they fail to recognize that a non-profit with a strong and committed volunteer base is more likely to attract new funds, as volunteer mobilization can be yet another fund-raising strategy. When a project is over the connection between volunteers and the CSO is often disrupted. Such an approach is likely to prevent CSOs from benefiting from the more meaningful effects of volunteerism. Engagement in one-time rather than long-term, regular commitments is likely to discourage volunteers since term limits, without strategic and sustained operational plans, can create an unstable and unproductive environment.

Lack of skills assessment, orientation and training for

new volunteers: Some organizations still do not recognize the need to give volunteers a comprehensive description of their role and duties, or an adequate background on the agency, its operations, mission and the specific job-related skills and behavior expected from the volunteer. What follows is a mismatch between the particular expectations and skills of the volunteers and the tasks assigned. “My first day was quite chaotic. When I arrived in the office there was no one to brief me. I felt that the organization wasn’t really expecting me. The experience has made me more skeptical about organizations that involve volunteers.” Simply because not much effort is given to discovering volunteers’ potential and assigning appropriate tasks, many volunteers are burnt-out at the end of the day. Others with professional skills are loaded with menial labor, not getting much out of the experience and not being used to their full potential. Often, volunteers quickly become disappointed with the organization and with volunteering.

Failing to Recognize Volunteers’ Contributions: Some of the volunteers interviewed also complained about the absence of a culture within CSOs that values the volunteers’ work and contributions. “I often felt underestimated, tells a volunteer, yet if CSOs expect high quality of volunteer work, they should place particular emphasis on incentive motivations.” Rewards for volunteer work are often confined to certificates. The desire of volunteers to be appreciated and recognized remains largely unsatisfied.

Discussion and Implications of the Study

Informal, less structured volunteering is the preferred form of volunteering for most Armenians. The high percentage of informal-only volunteers presents a great opportunity to the promotion of volunteerism in Armenia. Yet, few of these volunteers are channeled and attracted into formal volunteering.

The deficiency of the regulatory environment is one explanation for the problem. On the one hand, the legislation in place fails to provide potential volunteers with sufficient incentives to volunteer. On the other hand, legal uncertainties and regulatory deficiency often discourage employers from recruiting volunteers and people from engaging in volunteer activities. Thus, although it is only one part of the institutional context that shapes volunteering, the Armenian legal environment should provide an enabling and protective arena for volunteering promotion.

Volunteer mismanagement practices further refrain potential volunteers from engaging in such activity. Armenian nonprofits rely heavily on volunteers, but many of them do a poor job of managing them. As a result, many potential volunteers do not even know about volunteering opportunities. Many others who volunteer once do not

donate their time the next time. This results in not only depreciated value and reduced levels of volunteering, but also in lost CSO labor and productivity. To remedy the situation, the Armenian nonprofits should advance a more strategic approach to the management of the often overlooked resource pool. To this end, Armenian CSOs need to:

- ✓ Ensure that the value of volunteerism is widely publicized and volunteer opportunities are advertised in communities, schools, media, etc;
- ✓ Develop the capacity of and integrate volunteer recruitment into the core strategy of the organization to proactively enroll new volunteers;
- ✓ Recognize volunteers both through an organizational culture that values them and through specific appreciation ceremonies and events;
- ✓ Engage volunteers into long-term, regular commitments, rather than ad-hoc projects;
- ✓ Focus on the skills, experience, and contacts volunteers will obtain, and link them to their future career aspirations;
- ✓ Continually reinforce that the voluntary activity undertaken is contributing to the activities of the organization and the overall well-being of the society at large;
- ✓ Follow-up throughout the volunteer experience to ensure it is meeting the volunteer expectations in order to retain their involvement and commitment;

The examination of the motivational factors behind volunteerism in Armenia showed that volunteer activity attracts Armenians primarily as a ‘feel good’ exercise, as a venue to help others and gain self-fulfillment. The recognition and appreciation ceremonies then should revitalize the importance of volunteer contribution to Armenia. Self-interested motives are no less important, however. So volunteers should be alerted to the practical benefits that formal volunteering leads to. Whatever the particular motivations of volunteers, each motivation should require a different approach to volunteer engagement. Understanding and capitalizing on the motivational drivers behind volunteerism is another way to increase the number of volunteers, their morale and effectiveness.

This case study identified the potential obstacles that prevent the Armenian CSOs from attracting informal volunteers into their organizations as well as the motivational factors behind Armenian volunteers that the CSOs should hinge upon. Future research should possibly answer what stimulates informal volunteering, how to reach informal volunteers and introduce them to formal volunteering.

Conclusion

Armenians have often witnessed how valuable and irreplaceable volunteer input can be. At times of crises and day to day mutual support is a defining characteristic for Armenians. Presently, large-scale, yet scattershot and irregular volunteering is what describes volunteer contributions of Armenians. Formal organizations have not yet channeled and succeeded in taking full advantage of a wider volunteer resource base that does in fact exist in Armenia. Moreover, this resource would be even richer if 1) the value of volunteer contributions was properly promoted in Armenia, and 2) the motivations for informal volunteering were understood and introduced into formal volunteering.

The obstacles identified through this study make volunteering less attractive, narrowing down the pool of enthusiastic and willing volunteers available to Armenian CSOs. Eliminating these obstacles to formal volunteering will add value to and boost the development of volunteering culture in Armenia. This development will form a continuum of civic engagement going from informal to formal volunteering, thus creating a society of empowered and responsible citizens.

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Annex 1

Semi-structured questionnaire for “Culture of Volunteerism in Armenia” case study:

a) Questions to CSOs

- 1) How many volunteers do you have and how many hours do they volunteer a month?

- 2) What type of work do people volunteer for in your organization?

- 3) Why do you think people volunteer in Armenia?

- 4) How do you reward the volunteers at your organization?

- 5) How do you mobilize/promote voluntary action?

- 6) What are the obstacles to volunteering in Armenia?

- 7) What are the benefits your organization enjoys from having volunteers? What do they provide the organization?

- 8) In your opinion, what can organizations in Armenia do to encourage and promote more volunteerism? How can organizations better take advantage of the opportunity that volunteers provide to CSOs?

b) Questions to volunteers

- 1) When did you begin volunteering?

- 2) What experience of volunteering did you have prior to your current position?

- 3) How many hours a month do you do voluntary work?

4) What organizations do you volunteer for?

5) Why do you volunteer?

6) What made you choose this organization to volunteer for?

7) How did you learn about the possibility of volunteering for this organization?

8) What, do you think, are the obstacles to volunteering in Armenia?

9) What can CSOs do to better promote and support volunteering in Armenia? How can CSOs take better advantage of the opportunity that volunteering presents to Armenia civil society?

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary school handwriting practice paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the entire width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

